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SUBVERSIVE INFLUENCE: VULNERABILITIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ELECTIONS TO RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE CAMPAIGNS

by

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December 2020

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The United States and its allies have been subjected to clandestine interference campaigns led by the Russian government for nearly a century. The targets and mechanisms of subversive Kremlin influence have varied over the decades, but themes such as seeking to tamper with electoral processes have seen refinement and renewed vigor in the 21st century. From the inception of the Soviet Union to the era of Vladimir Putin, this thesis investigates the targets and mechanisms of subversive Russian influence—with particular focus on election meddling—to identify the greatest U.S. vulnerabilities to such interference campaigns. We determined that the Kremlin possesses a wide variety of well-honed tools such as disinformation, cyberattacks, and forgeries that allow it to apply stress to democratic systems and exploit rival nations' internal divisions, and that it has had success in deploying such tools in a number of Western democratic elections since 2014. We find that significant damage to the credibility of elections and the U.S. government is a viable vulnerability for Russian interference campaigns, and that mounting defensive measures against and mitigation thereof must be a top priority for U.S. national and homeland security entities.

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SUBVERSIVE INFLUENCE: VULNERABILITIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ELECTIONS TO RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE CAMPAIGNS

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requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The United States and its allies have been subjected to clandestine interference campaigns led by the Russian government for nearly a century. The targets and mechanisms of subversive Kremlin influence have varied over the decades, but themes such as seeking to tamper with electoral processes have seen refinement and renewed vigor in the 21st century. From the inception of the Soviet Union to the era of Vladimir Putin, this thesis investigates the targets and mechanisms of subversive Russian influence—with particular focus on election meddling—to identify the greatest U.S. vulnerabilities to such interference campaigns. We determined that the Kremlin possesses a wide variety of well-honed tools such as disinformation, cyberattacks, and forgeries that allow it to apply stress to democratic systems and exploit rival nations' internal divisions, and that it has had success in deploying such tools in a number of Western democratic elections since 2014. We find that significant damage to the credibility of elections and the U.S. government is a viable vulnerability for Russian interference campaigns, and that mounting defensive measures against and mitigation thereof must be a top priority for U.S. national and homeland security entities.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CHDS	Center for Homeland Defense and Security
CHEKA	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption (translated from Russian)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
DDoS	distributed denial of service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DNC	Democratic National Committee
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DOJ	Department of Justice
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (translated from Russian)
G20	Group of Twenty
GRU	Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (translated from Russian)
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IRA	Internet Research Agency
JDL	Jewish Defense League
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti or Committee for State Security (translated from Russian)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSA	National Security Agency
RT	Russia Today (formerly)
WPC	World Peace Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For roughly a century, the United States and its allies have endured coordinated efforts by the Soviet, and then Russian government to interfere in the West's domestic affairs. The frequency, intensity, tactics, and targets of these clandestine attacks have varied over the years, but the Kremlin's main goals of information manipulation, societal destabilization, reputational harm, and political influence have remained largely consistent. The efficacy of Russia's influence measures has also varied over the decades, but 21st-century advances in technology and decreased Western focus on Moscow as a major threat since the end of the Cold War have allowed these insidious tactics to proliferate in new and damaging ways. Left unchecked, Russian influence campaigns could cause severe harm to the integrity of future elections and the credibility of U.S. institutions.[1]

This thesis studies the history of Soviet and Russian meddling in the domestic affairs of the United States and its Western rivals to identify trends in their efforts and successes, and examines various recent interference campaigns as a means to understand the Kremlin's subversive attempts to influence foreign elections unduly. Studying the gradual buildup of capabilities beginning with the Soviet Union through Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections, commonalities and signals can be identified that highlight the greatest vulnerabilities faced by the United States and other Western democracies. Common themes this thesis identifies in both Soviet and modern Russian interference efforts include the use of media manipulation, proxy organizations, fabricated material, and instigation of specific, opposing groups to provoke division. Other recent Western elections and referenda allegedly affected by Russian influence, including France's presidential election the following year, further highlight Kremlin attack patterns. Commonalities found in this analysis include hack-and-leak incidents, plots involving election infrastructure, and attempts to manipulate voters through disinformation. What

[1] Charles E. Ziegler, "International Dimensions of Electoral Processes: Russia, the USA, and the 2016 Elections," *International Politics; Basingstoke* 55, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 569–71, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1057/s41311-017-0113-1; Vasu Mohan and Alan Wall, "Foreign Electoral Interference: Past, Present, and Future," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs; Washington* 20 (September 1, 2019): 116.

emerges from this study is a clear signal that credibility of elections and legitimacy of government leaders and institutions are imperiled by Kremlin meddling, without a comprehensive or practical remedy.

Investigative findings by bodies including the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee demonstrate unequivocally that Russia's preferred influence operation outcomes in the 2016 U.S. presidential election came to pass, potentially along with "victories" in other elections.[2] With nearly a century of experience in covert influence techniques and plenty of practice trying to interfere in Western elections, Russia has many skills and tools, such as disinformation and cyberattacks with which to continue meddling in the democratic affairs of its rivals. The Kremlin has also clearly signaled an intention to continue stressing rival nations' democratic systems with a variety of techniques and targets, potentially including rumors of corruption and election fraud, exploitation, and exacerbation of domestic civil tensions, and even promotion of secession movements and rebellion loom as possible threats. Challenges to the legitimacy of some future elections are plausible, bolstered by a variety of well-honed Kremlin tradecraft, such as production or dissemination of genuine, doctored, or fabricated material designed to lend credence to allegations.

This thesis chronicles and draws connections between Soviet and modern Russian interference techniques to highlight the Kremlin's capacity and intention to inflict damage, such as election-related chaos and the ruination of the credibility of U.S. government institutions, leaders, and electoral systems. The examples and conclusions presented in this thesis seek to underscore the need for intelligence communities, investigative bodies, and other national and homeland security entities to prioritize efforts to identify, thwart, and deter Russian interference campaigns going forward, particularly with regard to the integrity of the electoral process.

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[2] *Select Committee on Intelligence, Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election Volume 2: Russia's Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, Rep. 116-XX, Senate, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 2018, 4–8, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For roughly a century, the United States and its allies have endured coordinated efforts by the Soviet, and then Russian government to interfere in the West's domestic affairs. The frequency, intensity, tactics, and targets of these clandestine attacks have varied over the years, but the Kremlin's main goals of information manipulation, societal destabilization, reputational harm, and political influence have remained largely consistent. The efficacy of Russia's influence measures has also varied over the decades, but 21st-century advances in technology and decreased Western focus on Moscow as a major threat since the end of the Cold War have allowed these insidious tactics to proliferate in new and damaging ways. Left unchecked, Russian influence campaigns could cause severe harm to the integrity of future elections and the credibility of U.S. institutions.[1]

Current Russian President Vladimir Putin is widely regarded as seeking to expand his nation's global influence and regional dominance, as well as to suppress any potential threat to his authoritarian grip on power in Russia.[2] While Putin may not share his Soviet predecessors' worries about imminent nuclear war with the United States, he does appear to retain their bitter mistrust and hostility toward the nation, which he accuses of fomenting and financing unrest within Russia along with revolutions in neighboring states.[3] Just as the Soviet leadership before him did, Putin appears to see weakening the U.S. government and its global influence as a key component of Russia's security and external power goals.

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[1] Charles E. Ziegler, "International Dimensions of Electoral Processes: Russia, the USA, and the 2016 Elections," *International Politics; Basingstoke* 55, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 569–71, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1057/s41311-017-0113-1; Vasu Mohan and Alan Wall, "Foreign Electoral Interference: Past, Present, and Future," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs; Washington* 20 (September 1, 2019): 116.

[2] Robert Person, "Balance of Threat: The Domestic Insecurity of Vladimir Putin," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 44–45, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2016.11.001; Kari Roberts, "Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 72, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 29–30, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702017692609.

[3] Vladimir Putin, "Predsedatel Pravitelstva Rossiyskoy Federatsiy Vladimir Putin provel zasedaniye Koordinatsionnovo soveta Obshcherossiyskovo narodnovo fronta" [Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin led the Coordination Council of the All-Russia People's Front], Pravitel'stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Office of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation news release], December 8, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20120607083034/http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/17330/.

As such, he employs the Kremlin's military and intelligence apparatus to do so.[4] Putin appears to believe that his foes engage in similar tactics, likely leading him to see Russia's influence campaigns as necessary, justified, and urgent. He has accused the U.S. government of fomenting revolutions in Eastern Europe to disrupt Russia's regional hegemony, aggressively expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to Russia's borders as a direct military provocation, and even attempting to remove him from power by leading a clandestine revolt.[5] Combined with his apparent fear that Western-style democracy could eventually lead to the end of his authoritarian reign, Putin has ample motivation to take steps to undermine and weaken the United States and its democratic allies. As such, the U.S. government must be aware of and on guard against all of Russia's destabilization efforts.

The November 2020 U.S. elections provide a case in point.[6] These elections took place in an environment in which the prospect of Russian interference was of grave concern to some voters and dismissed as a hoax by others, following years of reports and investigations about alleged Kremlin-backed election infrastructure tampering, dissemination of misinformation, and even attempts to incite violence.[7]

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the greatest U.S. vulnerabilities to Kremlin interference campaigns, particularly with regard to elections?

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[4] Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Russian Roulette: The Inside Story of Putin's War on America and The Election of Donald Trump*, 1st ed. (New York: Twelve, 2018, 49, 57–58; Malcolm W. Nance, *The Plot to Destroy Democracy: How Putin and His Spies Are Undermining America and Dismantling the West*, 1st ed. (New York: Hachette Books, 2018), loc. 3561–3571 of 5796, Kindle.

[5] Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* (Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017), 15–17, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Russia%20Military%20Power%20Report%202017.pdf?ver=2017-06-28-144235-937; Richard Sakwa, "'New Cold War' or Twenty Years' Crisis? Russia and International Politics," *International Affairs* 84, no. 2 (March 1, 2008): 257–263, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00702.x.

[6] Richard Clarke, "Counterterrorism Expert Richard Clarke on Trump's Relations with Intelligence Agencies," NPR, February 17, 2017, http://www.npr.org/2017/02/17/515728608/counterterrorism-expert-richard-clarke-on-trumps-relations-with-intelligence-age.

[7] University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, *Americans Split on Relationship with Russia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, 2020), https://apnorc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/topline_release1.pdf.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on Russia as a saboteur attacking the civil society of other nations from within through manipulation of such tools as cyber infrastructure and access to information. Because incidents, such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election interference, involve such relatively novel mechanisms as cybersecurity and the use of social media or alternative news sources, much of the available literature is very recently published.[8] A consensus apparently does not exist regarding which aspect or target of subversive Russian attacks is the most important or dangerous; as a result, the burgeoning array of recent sources lacks a cohesive narrative, theme, or focus.

1. Russia's Intent, Capability, and Mechanisms

An abundance of literature dutifully explains Vladimir Putin's belief that modern Russia deserves to be the center of the Slavic and Eurasian world and at least as strong a global power as the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia once were.[9] Many works credit Putin's adversarial attitude toward the West to a fear that expansion of the NATO military alliance is designed to weaken or threaten Russia's global prominence and its dominance of the Eastern European and Central Asian regions.[10] Among these writers, prominent Russian dissident Garry Kasparov and U.S. historian Walter Laqueur argue that the Russian president views his nation's success and security as a zero-sum game requiring the weakening of the United States and its allies, as well as a global acknowledgement that many states from the former Soviet territories must remain irrevocably within Russia's

[8] Amos C. Fox and Andrew J. Rossow, "Assessing Russian Hybrid Warfare: A Successful Tool for Limited War," *Small Wars Journal* 12, no. 1 (August 8, 2016).

[9] Peter Pomerantsev, "Yes, Russia Matters: Putin's Guerrilla Strategy," *World Affairs* 177, no. 3 (September 30, 2014): 21; Tassos E. Fakiolas and Efstathios T. Fakiolas, "Domestic Sources of Russia's Resurgence as a Global Great Power," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 16, no. 2 (December 1, 2009): 100–101.

[10] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, September 30, 2014, 77–79; Douglas Mastriano, "Putin—The Masked Nemesis of the Strategy of Ambiguity," *Defense & Security Analysis* 33, no. 1 (January 20, 2017): 69–70, https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2016.1272175.

orbit.[11] According to Laqueur, "Russian government strategy is dominated by the American shadow and the conviction that what helps the United States must be bad for Russia."[12] By extension, the Kremlin strategy also presupposes that what hurts the United States is quite likely beneficial for Russia.

Many sources emphasize that Putin's prior career as a foreign counterintelligence operative with the KGB[13] guides his alleged heavy use of clandestine or obfuscated tactics of subversion.[14] For example, Malcolm Nance warns, "For [Putin] to succeed at the mission of damaging the United States, he will use all tools of the Russian statecraft such as forging alliances, but also blackmail, propaganda, and cyberwarfare."[15] Regrettably, Nance's books and a number of other publications on the subject veer out of objective analysis and into sharply partisan political rhetoric. For example, Nance indulges his apparent distaste for Donald Trump with colorful descriptions, such as "Worse than his mouth was his fingers when connected to Twitter. In 140 characters he managed to derail his candidacy with insulting, racy, or inappropriate comments," potentially alienating some readers and blurring his analysis with his editorializing.[16] With years-long federal investigations into whether Russian interference helped Trump defeat Hillary Clinton in a polarizing 2016 election (and outsized national media coverage thereof), an influx of partisan, biased, and emotion-infused works on the topic is not particularly surprising, but must be taken with a grain of salt. Without much difficulty, recent mainstream newspaper articles and mass market books arguing for and against many Russia-based allegations can easily be found. To separate signal from noise and preserve accuracy, this thesis relies on scholarly, peer-reviewed sources where available. Study of partisan, biased, and speculative works is

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[11] Garry Kasparov and Mig Greengard, *Winter Is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must Be Stopped*, 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 253; Walter Laqueur, *Putinism: Russia and Its Future with the West*, 1st ed. (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2015), 151.

[12] Laqueur, 151.

[13] Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Byezoapasnosti [the Soviet Union's Committee for State Security].

[14] Malcolm Nance, *The Plot to Hack America: How Putin's Cyberspies and WikiLeaks Tried to Steal the 2016 Election* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 24–26; Nance, *The Plot to Destroy Democracy*, loc. 687–701.

[15] Nance, *The Plot to Hack America*, 36; Nance, *The Plot to Destroy Democracy*, loc. 687–701.

[16] Nance, *Plot to Hack America*, 13.

nevertheless insightful, as the existence of multiple popular public works espousing exaggerated dangers, misguided fears, or foolhardy dismissal of legitimate risks could work to Russia's advantage as it seeks to undermine, conceal, and obfuscate. One example is a nakedly partisan 2018 work entitled *Russia Hoax* penned by a longtime Fox News anchor, which devotes an entire chapter to downplaying or refuting risks and legal questions regarding a controversial meeting between Trump campaign representatives and Russian representatives offering "dirt" on Clinton.[17]

A study by Kevin McCauley shows how Soviet manipulation techniques have evolved into the current threat posed by Putin's Kremlin.[18] This work alleges that in addition to launching conspiracy theory-peddling media disinformation campaigns and employing online "troll armies" to disparage unfavorable information sources, Russia employs targeted destabilization campaigns in a number of NATO and European Union (EU) countries in a further effort to weaken or dismantle the alliances.[19] Citing reports from NATO and the governments of Estonia, Moldova, and the United States, McCauley asserts, "The Russian Federation is conducting sophisticated and large-scale disinformation campaigns to destabilize U.S. allies and interests" and explains, "Russia continues to employ influence methods formulated under the Soviets, as well as integrating new information age methods."[20] His conclusions support others warning that Russia uses "troll armies" and such other cyber tactics as social media.

In pursuit of destabilization, Russia has been accused of interfering with elections of friend and foe alike, including Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, the United States, Great

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[17] Gregg Jarrett, *Russia Hoax: The Illicit Scheme to Clear Hillary Clinton and Frame Donald Trump* (Northampton, MA: Broadside Books, 2018), 171–190.

[18] Kevin N. McCauley, *Russian Influence Campaigns against the West: From the Cold War to Putin* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

[19] "Russian troll armies" is a term used to describe networks of internet commentators, allegedly paid by the Kremlin and often posing as Westerners, who systematically post propagandistic comments on Western news articles and social media in support of Russia or against its foes.

[20] McCauley, *Russian Influence Campaigns*, loc. 8541–8697.

Britain (particularly regarding Brexit), and France.[21] Mikhail Myagkov, Peter Ordeshook, and Dimitry Shakin provide "evidence and eyewitness accounts that even Russian spin doctors and those who committed fraud cannot dispute" of fraudulent machinations employed to ensure favorable results in both Russian and Ukrainian elections within the 21st century.[22] The same author team reached similar conclusions through a separate analysis of the 2004 Orange Revolution in Kyiv.[23] Ominously, both the 2009 *Forensics of Election Fraud* and the 2008 *Election Fraud: Detecting and Deterring Electoral Manipulation* also devote pages to the study of the U.S. vulnerability to election fraud, with the latter detailing several mechanisms by which Americans' confidence in the legitimacy of the vote could be shaken. One warning stands out sharply, namely that "in the United States since the 2000 election there have been concerns raised regarding electoral irregularities—either intentional election fraud or unintentional problems in the election that result in an inaccurate (and thus sometimes in the eyes of the losing side, fraudulent) outcome."[24] In more detail, the authors assert:

> The ongoing debate about the security of electronic voting technologies reflects one aspect of this debate. Concerns have also been raised about fraud in absentee voting, early voting, precinct voting, and voting by military personnel and overseas civilians… that are all unrelated to the type of voting technologies used. Moreover, in the 2002 gubernatorial election

[21] Vladimir Socor, "Russia Orchestrates Gagauz Election in Moldova, Ponders the Next Steps," NGO Publication, *Jamestown Foundation* 12, no. 59 (March 15, 2015), https://jamestown.org/program/russia-orchestrates-gagauz-election-in-moldova-ponders-the-next-steps/; Luke Harding, "Barack Obama Urges Russia Not to Interfere in Neighbouring States," *The Guardian*, sec. World news, July 7, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/07/obama-russia-first-trip; Nance, *The Plot to Hack America*, 62; Isobel Thompson, "Did Russia Hack the Brexit Vote?," *Vanity Fair*, April 12, 2017, http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/04/did-russia-hack-the-brexit-vote; "France Warns Russia against Interfering in Elections," Radio France Internationale, February 16, 2017, http://en.rfi.fr/france/20170216-france-warns-russia-against-interfering-elections.

[22] Mikhail G. Myagkov, Peter C. Ordeshook, and Dimitri Shakin, *The Forensics of Election Fraud: Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 139.

[23] Mikhail Myagkov, Peter C. Ordeshook, and Dimitry Shakin, "Fraud or Fairytales: Russia and Ukraine's Electoral Experience," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 91–131, https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.21.2.91.

[24] R. Michael Alvarez, Thad E. Hall, and Susan D. Hyde, eds., *Election Fraud: Detecting and Deterring Electoral Manipulation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 71.

in New Hampshire, there were convictions related to jamming political party 'get-out-the-vote' telephone banks.[25]

Such factors point to a potentially serious security risk. Between Russia's experience, history, and motivation regarding election infrastructure tampering in foreign states, and existing latent susceptibility to shaken confidence in U.S. elections, the Kremlin has a sizable opening to exploit in its destabilization efforts, and may already be attempting to make use of it.

2. 21st Century Vulnerabilities

Covert interference can take many different forms, and democratic elections can be subverted in a variety of ways from voter suppression and election infrastructure tampering to subversive attempts to influence potential voters. Works related to Russian attacks and emerging vulnerabilities regarding elections have proliferated in recent years, though some topics have garnered considerably more attention than others have. Methods of interference Russia has been accused of using to disrupt Western states' electoral processes successfully include the following:

- hacking as a form of espionage or sabotage
- the leaking of stolen information
- propagating false news and propaganda distribution and promotion
- deployment of online troll armies
- the financing of fringe candidates
- release of *kompromat* (compromising material) to damage a government leader or political candidate
- provocation and support of secession-minded dissidents

[25] Alvarez, Hall, and Hyde, 71.

Of these tools, one with an abundance of recently produced literature is the topic of hacking. Cybersecurity sources from 2014 and earlier seem to focus on the threat to infrastructure, military, and intelligence rather than the use of stolen information to tip the balance in elections and undermine a particular candidate, party, or entity, but even on this topic, a consensus is also lacking. Marc Goodman presents dire warnings of drone and pacemaker hacking, as well as a large-scale power grid shutdown, in *Future Crimes*; likewise, Ted Koppel's *Lights Out* points out that Russia has already penetrated the United States' power grid network.[26] Both of these volumes argue that the U.S. government is not adequately equipped to deal with the large-scale disaster that a sustained cyberattack on the grid could cause, whether due to legislative inaction or practical limitations. Koppel's caution is particularly dire. He warns:

> The American public are not the only ones unwilling to contemplate, much less cope with, the eventuality of a debilitating cyberattack against our power grid. The government agencies and civic organizations charged with enabling the nation to recover from catastrophe are also woefully unprepared.[27]

Such lack of readiness could be due to any or all of the same failures (imagination, policy, capabilities, and management) identified in the 9/11 Commission Report regarding the federal government's inability to stop the novel terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; indeed, each of these are alleged to some degree in Goodman and Koppel's works.[28] Though books, reports, and studies critical of U.S. government inaction and lack of preparedness against state-sponsored hacking threats are increasingly prevalent, works analyzing existing shortfalls and capabilities are less abundant but beginning to emerge. In March 2020, a congressionally sponsored group called the U.S. Cyberspace Solarium

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[26] Marc Goodman, *Future Crimes: Inside the Digital Underground and the Battle for Our Connected World*, First Anchor Books Edition (New York: Anchor Books, 2016), 43, 338–341; Ted Koppel, *Lights Out: A Cyberattack, a Nation Unprepared, Surviving the Aftermath*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2015), 71–72.

[27] Koppel, *Lights Out*, 92.

[28] Thomas H. Kean and Lee Hamilton and U.S. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 9*/11 Commission Report: The Official Report of the 9/11 Commission and Related Publications* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), http://www.gpoaccess.gov/911/index.html.

Commission released a report detailing risks, outlining challenges, and recommending a strategy of "layered cyber deterrence" U.S. government agencies could adopt to mitigate its cyber-based vulnerabilities.[29] The report contained more than 80 recommendations for U.S. government entities on the topics of structural reform, cultivation of enforcement tools, and promotion of resilience and collaboration with the private sector, though it remains unclear how many will be adopted. A consortium of U.S. government agencies attempted to conduct a 2020 exercise of a large-scale state-sponsored cyberattack with kinetic effects and produce an interagency after-action report, but the COVID-19 pandemic scuttled these plans.[30]

Works covering the spread of false information—"fake news"—have become abundant since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, to include information deliberately spread by suspected Russian actors. A 2017 paper from Stanford University states:

> Recent evidence shows that: 1) 62 percent of U.S. adults get news on social media; 2) the most popular fake news stories were more widely shared on Facebook than the most popular mainstream news stories; 3) many people who see fake news stories report that they believe them; and 4) the most discussed fake news stories tended to favor Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton.[31]

A key challenge to such recent studies is the fact that the fake-news environment continually changes in the era of social media; as awareness of fake-news campaigns and the associated risks grow, governments and media entities adapt to contain them, while purveyors rapidly adapt to the restrictions and entrepreneurs capitalize on dissent. For example, social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and YouTube each took a number of escalating measures between 2017 and 2020 in reaction to novel fake-news tactics, but still drew criticism in the process and sometimes had to roll back certain actions

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[29] Cyberspace Solarium Commission, *Report* (Arlington, VA: Cyberspace Solarium Commission, 2020), https://www.solarium.gov/report.

[30] "National Level Exercise 2020," *Federal Emergency Management Agency* (blog), July 23, 2020, https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/planning-exercises/nle/2020.

[31] Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (February 16, 2017): 212, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211.

in response to the backlash.[32] At the same time, such rival platforms as Gab and Parler have emerged specifically as an alternative for social media users frustrated by the restrictions of the industry's titans.[33] As a result, many recent works studying the environment of fake news and social media have become quickly outdated, and exist mainly as an incomplete snapshot in time inside a rapidly changing ecosystem. As a case in point, two 2020 studies on Facebook's internal efforts to combat fake news, while insightful and not without merit, each focused on measures the company modified, improved, or replaced just months later in response to newer threat information and public feedback regarding its policies.[34]

Books, think-tank reports, and a number of government hearings and reports highlight Russia's role in disinformation campaigns, including fake news and

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[32] An example of measures rolled back due to criticism include Twitter's October 2020 decision to rescind its ban on the sharing of a controversial article about U.S. presidential candidate Joe Biden and his son. The veracity of the article's assertions had been heavily questioned and some U.S. lawmakers had warned of a high probability that its genesis had been a Russian disinformation campaign, though the official reason for Twitter's ban (and the blocking of Trump administration and congressional accounts that attempted to share it) was that the article contained private personal information and material allegedly gleaned from a hack. The reversal came after withering criticism and accusations of politically motivated censorship from President Trump and lawmakers from his party. The official reason given by Twitter was that the article had received so much attention that the information therein was no longer technically "private," and it did not publicly explain whether its stance on the allegations that it came from hacked material had changed. Paul Mena, "Cleaning up Social Media: The Effect of Warning Labels on Likelihood of Sharing False News on Facebook," *Policy & Internet* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 166, https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.214; Petros Iosifidis and Nicholas Nicoli, "The Battle to End Fake News: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Facebook Announcements on How It Combats Disinformation," *International Communication Gazette* 82, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 74, https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519880729; Catherine Sanz and Catherine Thorbecke, "What Social Media Giants Are Doing to Counter Misinformation This Election," ABC News, October 18, 2020, https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/social-media-giants-counter-misinformation-election/story?id=73563997; Kevin Roose, "Facebook and Twitter Dodge a 2016 Repeat, and Ignite a 2020 Firestorm," *New York Times*, sec. Technology, October 15, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/15/technology/facebook-twitter-nypost-hunter-biden.htm; Kate Conger and Mike Isaac, "In Reversal, Twitter Is No Longer Blocking New York Post Article," *New York Times*, sec. Technology, October 16, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/16/technology/twitter-new-york-post.html.

[33] Craig Timberg and Isaac Stanley-Becker, "QAnon Learns to Survive—And Even Thrive—After Silicon Valley's Crackdown," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/28/qanon-crackdown-election/.

[34] Mena, "Cleaning Up Social Media"; Iosifidis and Nicoli, "The Battle to End Fake News"; Conger and Isaac, "In Reversal, Twitter Is No Longer Blocking New York Post Article."

propaganda.[35] The House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services 2015 hearing *Countering Adversarial Propaganda* and the Committee on Foreign Affairs' hearing *Confronting Russia's Weaponization of Information* from later that year provide a glimpse into the U.S. acknowledgement of Russia's campaign to harm the West through targeted information.[36] In the former, a member of the U.S. government's Broadcasting Board of Governors testified:

> With Russia, much of the propaganda that surfaces is aimed at destabilizing the West, undermining the trust and credibility of journalism, of government, of NATO, of EU, and all those things…the Russian propaganda aimed at the non-Russian audiences aimed at undermining NATO, EU, government, media…is a very scary destabilizing influence if it is actually having the impact—and it is a seeping impact—onto the audience.[37]

The latter went much further, beginning with a stark warning from Russian propaganda expert Peter Pomeranstev, who explained that while Russia knew it was no match for NATO in physical combat:

> what if the Kremlin could bypass NATO militarily, make war without ever, officially at least, firing a shot? What if it could use the very openness of democracy's open markets, open culture and, very importantly, open information against us? So over the 21st century, Russian military theorists developed a theory of what they called information psychological or hybrid war—a mix of media, economic and cultural warfare with a dab of covert military action.[38]

Witnesses at the hearing also explained how such a strategy was enacted through a wide array of tools to include what Pomerantsev described as "bankrolling and lending political support to both far right and far left parties" to create instability in Western nations,

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[35] Marcel van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

[36] *House Committee on Armed Services, Countering Adversarial Propaganda: Charting an Effective Course in the Contested Information Environment: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities*, House of Representatives, Hrg. 59, serial 97-493, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015; *House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Confronting Russia's Weaponization of Information: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, House of Representatives, serial 114-37, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015.

[37] H.R., *House Committee on Armed Services, Countering Adversarial Propaganda*, 15.

[38] H.R., *House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Confronting Russia's Weaponization of Information*, 5–6.

weakening U.S. influence and NATO power, and working to "sow divisions, demoralize and disorganize—to weaponize information." Such reports illustrate that while the U.S. government may not have had remedies for Russian destabilization efforts in the mid-2010s, it was not necessarily unaware of the threat thereof.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis studies the history of Soviet and Russian meddling in the domestic affairs of the United States and its Western rivals to identify trends in their efforts and successes. My analysis requires a study of the known threats, adversarial tactics, and vulnerabilities and the Kremlin's apparent goals, to identify possible unmet needs for U.S. security and intelligence entities to use in countering Russian interference.

This thesis studies various recent interference campaigns as a means to understand the Kremlin's subversive attempts to influence foreign elections unduly. After studying the gradual buildup of capabilities beginning with Soviet Union, I explore the case of established Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections and trace Russia's actions to identify commonalities or signals to ascertain better the greatest vulnerabilities Russia has an opportunity to exploit. Common themes I identified in both Soviet and modern Russian interference efforts include the use of media manipulation, proxy organizations, fabricated material, and instigation of specific, opposing groups to provoke division. I also compare the 2016 U.S. election case to other recent Western elections and referenda allegedly affected by Russian influence, including France's presidential election the following year. Commonalities found in this analysis include hack-and-leak incidents, plots involving election infrastructure, and attempts to manipulate voters through disinformation. What emerges from this study is a clear signal that the credibility of elections and legitimacy of government leaders and institutions are imperiled by Kremlin meddling, without a comprehensive or practical remedy.

D. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter II, I outline the evolution and refinement of Russian interference campaigns from their genesis in the early days of the Soviet Union through to the era of Putin's second decade in power to highlight the scope and seriousness of the threat faced

by the United States and its Western allies. Chapter III is an in-depth look at how the Kremlin's refined disinformation system was deployed within the U.S. 2016 presidential election campaign, along with similar actions in EU member states' elections. In Chapter IV, I examine the fallout from Russia's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign to determine plausible damage scenarios the United States may encounter if it fails to deter or mitigate against ongoing and future Russian disinformation efforts effectively.

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II. A CENTURY OF KREMLIN INTERFERENCE: DIRTY TRICKS PAST AND PRESENT

Russia's present capabilities and strategies to destabilize rival governments are the product of a long history of refinement. This chapter chronicles three elements of Soviet influence campaigns: media manipulation, secret proxy organizations, forgeries and rumors, and manipulating and instigating multiple groups to distrust and attack each other. The present analysis then shows how such methods have evolved into the contemporary threat toolbox, which still features media manipulation and proxy organizations while adding novel cyberattacks as a force multiplier.

A. THE ORIGINAL THREAT

From its inception in the 1920s, the Soviet Union developed and refined a sophisticated series of subversive actions and manipulation techniques to employ against the United States and its allies. The Kremlin's main security agencies (in various incarnations including Cheka, NKVD, KGB, GRU, and FSB) have dedicated official departments to carrying out these attacks, known primarily as "active measures," for example, "dezinformatsiya"—disinformation.[39]

In a Cold War-era study of the long history of Soviet disinformation campaigns, Roy Godson and Richard Shultz defined "active measures" as:

> influencing the policies of another government, undermining confidence in its leaders and institutions, disrupting relations between other nations, and discrediting and weakening governmental and non-governmental opponents. This frequently involves attempts to deceive the target… and to distort the target's perceptions of reality.[40]

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[39] Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, all referred to herein using common anglicized transliterations of their Russian-language acronyms. "Cheka"—1917–1922, All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption; "NKVD"—1922–1943, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs; "KGB"—1954–1991, Committee for State Security; "GRU"—1991–present, Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation; "FSB"—1995–present, Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984); Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*.

[40] Shultz and Godson, 2.

"Dezinformatsiya" was one of the principal tools of a broader campaign to alter perceptions and attitudes in ways that benefited the Soviet Union, and proved to be one of its most insidious weapons. With the strategic use of this discipline, Moscow could cause covert damage in the West without drawing it into a potentially catastrophic armed conflict, and support behaviors and policy changes in rival states where threats and diplomatic entreaties could not succeed.

1. Media Manipulation

One of the earliest examples of calculated manipulation of Western audiences involved compromising a trusted source within a prominent American newspaper: *The New York Times*. In the 1930s, *Times* columnist Walter Duranty won a Pulitzer Prize for descriptions of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and conditions of life under his rule, but subsequent research reveals that his articles ranged from hagiographic to deeply disingenuous.[41] Duranty produced deliberately inaccurate dispatches from his post within the Soviet Union that aggressively contradicted reports of a brutal famine in the country's western regions (this mass starvation, known as *Holodomor*, is now widely believed to have been a purposefully created genocide conducted by Stalin against Ukrainian peasants).[42] Duranty not only presented a deceptively rosy picture of Ukrainian life in his articles during the time of mass famine, but also actively sought to discredit accurate Western reporting on it.[43] Most notably, he forcefully refuted the accurate press releases of Gareth Jones, a British reporter for prominent newspaper *The Times* whose subsequent murder was allegedly carried out by Soviet secret police ordered to put an end to his

[41] S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty, The New York Times's Man in Moscow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Askold Krushelnycky, "Ukrainians Want Pro-Stalin Writer Stripped of Pulitzer," *The Guardian*, sec. World News, May 4, 2003, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/may/04/russia.usa.

[42] Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 320.

[43] Conquest, 320.

negative reporting.[44] Duranty's attempts to destroy Jones's credibility hint that his Soviet benefactors had both the intent and the means to influence Western opinion both through false information and the suppression of factual information it found unpalatable.

By all appearances, Duranty's actions were not the work of an objective, honest journalist, working independently without bias or coercion. Duranty enjoyed a lavish lifestyle during his tenure as a journalist in Moscow, to include awards and praise bestowed on him by Joseph Stalin.[45] By all appearances, the Soviet government made concerted efforts to ensure that its relationship with Duranty was a positive one with "benefits" to both sides; in a country known for its iron grip on control of the domestic press, the fact that Stalin praised and likely courted a renowned Western reporter is a telling sign of the Kremlin's strategy of information manipulation abroad.

According to Robert Conquest, Duranty may have had other incentives to write articles in service of the Soviet Union beyond being seduced by the opportunity to boost his career with interviews and unrivaled access to Stalin; he was possibly being blackmailed as well.[46] In one of the earliest potential examples of Soviet manipulation of Western citizens through *kompromat*, it has been alleged that Stalin's secret police used knowledge of Duranty's opium abuse and participation in bisexual orgies to ensure that his journalistic missives were acceptable to, if not laudatory of, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.[47]

According to Duranty biographer S. J. Taylor, Duranty's Soviet-friendly *New York Times* articles influenced President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 decision to grant

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[44] Marco Carynnyk, "The Famine the 'Times' Couldn't Find," *Commentary Magazine*, November 1, 1983; Ray Gamache, *Gareth Jones: Eyewitness to the Holodomor* (Cardiff, Wales: Welsh Academic Press, 2016); Anne Applebaum, "How Stalin Hid Ukraine's Famine from the World," *The Atlantic*, October 13, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/red-famine-anne-applebaum-ukraine-soviet-union/542610/.

[45] Carynnyk.

[46] Krushelnycky, "Ukrainians Want Pro-Stalin Writer."

[47] *Kompromat* is a Russian-language term for a political tool attributed to the Soviet and Russian government in which negative information about an individual, usually a politician or public figure, is obtained, cultivated, or manufactured for use in discrediting, intimidating, or blackmailing the individual. Krushelnycky, "Ukrainians Want Pro-Stalin Writer."

diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union.[48] Notably, Roosevelt's recognition of the Soviet Union was contingent on a guarantee from the Soviets that they would not interfere in domestic American affairs or disseminate propaganda within U.S. territory; the U.S. government already suspected such an agenda.[49] Declassified State Department documents show that diplomatic relations between the two nations soured within months of the recognition, as "evidence emerged that the Soviet Government had violated its pledge not to interfere in American domestic affairs" along with reports of state-sponsored killings known as "The Great Purge."[50]

Manipulation of the press to benefit the Soviet Union was a feature of *dezinformatsiya* in neutral states as well. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report revealed that the Soviet Union managed to place more than 160,000 messages into India's ostensibly free press between the 1960s and 1980s by using several hundred bribed or compromised journalists across at least six English-language papers.[51] The smuggled notes of KGB dissident Vasili Mitrokhin later corroborated this report that indicated that no fewer than 10 Indian papers were under Kremlin control by 1973 and more than 5,500 KGB-tailored articles appeared in Indian papers in 1975 alone.[52] Along with allegedly outright coercing individual journalists to do their bidding, the Soviets also exercised other types of influence, both overt and clandestine, over foreign press to amplify their disinformation.[53] The CIA report describes two methods by which disinformation made its way into prestigious Indian papers that relied on credible sources. In one method, Soviet operatives debuted fraudulent articles in smaller and less-heralded publications—for

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[48] Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*.

[49] "Recognition of the Soviet Union, 1933," in *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: 1921–1936* (Department of State Office of the Historian, 2009), https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/ussr; Richard Gribble, "United States Recognition of Soviet Russia: 1917–1933—Church and State Responses," *American Catholic Studies* 119, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 21–51.

[50] "Recognition of the Soviet Union, 1933."

[51] Director of Intelligence, *The Soviets in India: Moscow's Major Penetration Program," Intelligence Assessment* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1985), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T00586R000400490007-7.pdf.

[52] Christopher M. Andrew and Vasili N. Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 324.

[53] Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 39.

example, the communist press—and then encouraged journalists at English-language publications to pen their own articles using these planted articles as sources. In the other method, the Soviets placed their articles directly into Indian press and wire services whose managers they had bribed and then used these services' bylines to add cover and legitimacy.

Such operations undoubtedly served to influence domestic Indian public perceptions, yet they carried another key benefit with even greater value for the Kremlin. These tactics gave the Soviets the ability to publish rumors, insinuation, and disinformation under respected Indian newspaper mastheads and then cite them as "neutral" international sources in disinformation campaigns throughout the globe.[54] By cloaking their damaging rumors and disinformation in the credibility of neutral foreign press, the Soviets could appear to merely amplify objective information, and thus infect Western audiences that had long since learned not to trust any accusations originating directly from Moscow. In one notable instance, a 1968 hoax—alleging that the U.S. military had been spreading weaponized epidemics in Vietnam and Thailand—was introduced by the Mumbai-based *Free Press Journal* and amplified in a weekly publication called *Blitz*.[55] This fabrication—fake news before the age of fake news—was based on a forged U.S. Office of Naval Research letter produced by the KGB active measures division known as "Service A" and gained enough traction and credibility from its coverage in the Indian press to achieve republication in the London *Times*.[56] Popular acceptance of this slanderous fabrication fueled anti-U.S. military sentiment that may still linger to this day, as persistent rumors

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[54] Director of Intelligence, "The Soviets in India"; Nicholas J. Cull et al., *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought against It: An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017), 22, 33–36, https://www.lse.ac.uk/iga/assets/documents/arena/2018/Jigsaw-Soviet-Subversion-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Final-Report.pdf.

[55] Max Holland, "The Propagation and Power of Communist Security Services Dezinformatsiya," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 12, https://doi.org/10.1080/08850600500332342; Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 318.

[56] Holland, 12; Department of State, *Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986–1987* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1987), Proquest.

about U.S. military use of biological weapons may well have roots in stories based on Soviet sources.[57]

As shown in the alleged coercion or bribery of Walter Duranty, a key component of Soviet disinformation efforts was the courting and financing of Western journalists to promote a Kremlin-approved counter-narrative. Allegations and proven cases of such attempts throughout the Cold War abound, with the case of French journalist Pierre-Charles Pathé standing out as one of the most high-profile instances.[58] French officials observed Pathé, regarded as an expert on Soviet affairs by prominent French media outlets, in 1978 conducting a clandestine meeting with a KGB agent, when he was given money and documents instructing him on points and themes he was expected to publish under his own name.[59] Upon his subsequent trial and conviction, it became known that he had spent 20 years in the service of the KGB disinformation campaign and published articles under pseudonyms as well as in his own name. His Soviet-financed publications included a journal called *Centre d'Information Scientifique, Economique et Politique* and a newsletter called *Synthesis,* described as highly influential to the French political elite.[60] An analysis of the majority of *Synthesis* editions by Godson and Shultz revealed, along with multiple articles attempting to pin the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), several key themes amplifying Soviet positions, including:

> fostering mistrust among the NATO allies and their friends, denigrating Western weaponry and defense policies, criticizing French policy vis-à-vis American and NATO political and defense arrangements, and expressing distrust of and censuring the United States.[61]

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[57] Holland, "Propagation and Power of Dezinformatsiya," 13.

[58] Sean M. Dixon, "Finding the Limit: The Strategic Potential of the Network-Based Actor" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 10–13.

[59] Christopher M. Andrew and Vasili N. Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 471; Arnaud de Borchgrave, "The KGB's Bead on the Media," *Washington Post*, April 14, 1981, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/04/14/the-kgbs-bead-on-the-media/a58625f1-6959-470b-8afe-15ed92949304/.

[60] Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 134.

[61] Shultz and Godson, 136.

The Kremlin had evidently cultivated Pathé's reputation as an expert on Soviet affairs in part by feeding him information and funding, and in part, by exploiting his status as the son of a prominent French filmmaker.[62] Once his credibility and bona fides were thus established, the subsequent propaganda and false information published under his name carried an air of legitimacy in the Western world far greater than the Soviets were able to achieve through their dissemination of overt propaganda.

2. Secret Proxy Organizations

Another early method of interference in domestic American affairs was Soviet support for such foreign communist organizations as the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). As shown by its own records (retrieved from Russia by emissaries from the U.S. Library of Congress after the fall of the Soviet Union), the CPUSA worked with its Kremlin financiers to exploit disaffected or oppressed segments of the U.S. population as early as the 1920s.[63] Such targeting included farm workers hit hard by the Great Depression and Black citizens suffering under oppressive Jim Crow discrimination. These efforts netted such victories as the recruitment of popular African American actor, singer, and sportsman Paul Robeson to promote, amid much contemporary controversy, the Soviet cause as superior to the oppressive U.S. government.[64] In the CPUSA and other ostensibly domestic organizations, the Kremlin cultivated valuable covert means to recruit spies, allies, and unwitting assistants, and to manipulate and exacerbate U.S. social unrest in support of its interference objectives.[65]

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[62] Pathé's father Charles was a famous, successful businessman known for popularizing phonograph records and essentially pioneering the film industry in early 20th century France, and he invented many popular techniques and tropes along the way. The media production and distribution conglomerate he created, Pathé Frères, has remained in operation since 1896. Shultz and Godson, 135.

[63] Deb Riechmann, "Retrieved Papers Shed Light on Communist Activities in U.S.," *The Billings Gazette*, January 30, 2001, http://billingsgazette.com/news/world/retrieved-papers-shed-light-on-communist-activities-in-u-s/article_bd5e5ca5-38b7-5dcd-b645-b203cbaa0445.html.

[64] Scott Martelle, *The Fear within: Spies, Commies, and American Democracy on Trial* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 193–196, Proquest.

[65] Notably, the CPUSA has long outlived its Soviet benefactor. Though it has not formally fielded a presidential ticket since activist Angela Davis shared the ticket with CPUSA leader Gus Hall in 1984, the party proudly claimed elected city council representatives in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania as of 2020.

After anti-communist sentiment in the United States began to crest at the onset of the Cold War, the Soviets made extensive use of international and multinational front organizations; many of them ostensibly dedicated to such laudable causes as disarmament or world peace.[66] This more subtle approach enabled the KGB to recruit potential sympathizers and unwitting allies who not only worked intentionally or directly to aid the Kremlin, but also gave the Soviet Union Trojan Horse-like propaganda dissemination and information gathering outlets within countries where overt Soviet influence would not be tolerated.[67] Perhaps the best known of these organizations is the World Peace Council (WPC), founded in 1950.[68] Along with such partners as the World Federation of Trade Unions and the dubiously named World Federation of Democratic Youth, the WPC led protests throughout Western democratic nations for several decades and published materials intended to generate mass anger against U.S. weapons development.[69] Specifically, these organizations produced inflammatory and spurious literature falsely accusing the United States of such crimes as conducting biological warfare in the Korean War.[70] These organizations were later used to foment domestic and international outrage against U.S. activity in the Vietnam War, followed by a sustained campaign to discredit and split or dissolve NATO including hosting an annual "Stockholm Conference on Vietnam" and supporting "anti–neutron-bomb" protests in European NATO member states.[71] Perhaps tipping their hand, these organizations nearly unanimously ignored the Soviet military buildup and such Soviet-dominated alliances as the Warsaw Pact. When they had to acknowledge them, these organizations defended them as Soviets' "alliances,"

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[66] William Styles, "The World Federation of Scientific Workers, A Case Study of a Soviet Front Organisation: 1946–1964," *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 116–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2017.1323479; Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 112–131.

[67] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 427; Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 112.

[68] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 324; Shultz and Godson, 112–131; Andrew and Mitrokhin, 427.

[69] Shultz and Godson, 112–131.

[70] World Council of Peace, *World Peace Movement: Resolutions and Documents* (Vienna, Austria: Secretariat of the World Council of Peace, 1955), 102–103; Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 123.

[71] Shultz and Godson, 125–127.

as well as being a necessary defensive posture, even as they called for U.S. disarmament in the interest of global peace.[72]

3. Forgeries and Rumors

Yet another method used by the Soviet Union to sway popular opinion and breed mistrust of the U.S. government among U.S. and allied citizens was through the creation and planting of forged documents and letters.[73] Soviet-made materials with meticulously mimicked Western handwriting, syntax, and signatures were disseminated both by Soviet-compromised publications, and by neutral or anti-Soviet publications duped by the fabrications; for example, the 1968 Office of Naval Research epidemic weapon forgery carried by the Indian press.[74] Contentious and painful social issues within U.S. society, such as the civil rights struggle, a rash of high-profile assassinations, and heated arguments about the U.S. military's role in the Vietnam War, were popular targets for forgery and slander attacks. Manipulation of the press to introduce or reproduce the KGB-generated allegations and false documents played a key role in helping rumors, doubt, and lies to spread throughout U.S. society.

According to Mitrokhin, the KGB launched a campaign to reduce the influence of nonviolent civil rights champion Martin Luther King, Jr. in favor of Stokely Carmichael, whom the Soviet Union saw as more radical and likely to incite violence and division.[75] KGB leaders authorized implantation of articles in English-language newspapers in African countries slandering King, ostensibly written by Black opponents of his ministry and movement.[76] Hoping these articles would be reprinted in U.S. newspapers, Soviet authors used such incendiary Western racial terms as "Uncle Tom" to describe King, and produced forged documents indicating that he was a paid mole injected into the movement

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[72] Shultz and Godson, 126.

[73] Bureau of Public Affairs, *Soviet 'Active Measures' Forgery, Disinformation, Political Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1981), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84B00049R001303150031-0.pdf; Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 151–157; Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 318; Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 245.

[74] Bureau of Public Affairs; Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 151–157.

[75] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 237.

[76] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 238.

by the Johnson administration.[77] When King's assassination the following year led to nationwide unrest and riots, the disinformation department quickly reversed course and began using its press operations to hail King as a martyr whose murder traced back to U.S. government attempts to silence him.[78]

Concurrently, the Mitrokhin archive chronicles KGB financing and assistance to publishers and authors responsible for advancing conspiracy theories that the CIA orchestrated the 1963 assassinations of Kennedy and his killer, Lee Harvey Oswald.[79] In hopes of capitalizing on popular mistrust created by President Richard Nixon's career-ending Watergate scandal a decade later, the disinformation department also created and circulated a forged request for information—ostensibly from Oswald—to disgraced Watergate operative and former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, in an effort to further imply that the CIA was behind Kennedy's murder.[80] Though the KGB's clumsy use of initials in this forgery led some readers to conclude erroneously that a right-wing oil magnate with the same surname was its ostensible recipient, the letter's subsequent publishing and "verification" by multiple handwriting experts helped accomplish the main goal of convincing some Americans that CIA operatives had killed the President.[81]

Similar forgery efforts sought to frame FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover on a variety of fronts, including that he was alternately a right-wing extremist, a corrupt abuser of the FBI office, and even a secret transvestite bent on seeding the FBI with fellow homosexual activists.[82] Though some of the more outlandish insinuations against Hoover may have failed to gain mainstream credibility initially, such allegations as unproven speculation regarding Hoover's sexual preferences gained widespread acceptance within U.S. society

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[77] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 237.

[78] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 238. Note: Mitrokhin's original files in Cyrillic are only available for viewing at the Churchill College in Cambridge, England. Manipulation regarding Dr. King can be found in *The Papers of Vasiliy Mitrokin*, volume 6, chapter 14, part 2.

[79] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 225–229.

[80] Holland, "Propagation and Power of Dezinformatsiya," 18; Andrew and Mitrokhin, 228–229.

[81] "Lawyer Says Texan Told Him Oswald Had Aid in '63 Plot," *New York Times*, sec. Archives, April 3, 1977, https://www.nytimes.com/1977/04/03/archives/lawyer-says-texan-told-him-oswald-had-aid-in-63-plot.html; Andrew and Mitrokhin, 228–229.

[82] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 235.

and have continued to resurface for decades.[83] The lack of definitive evidence regarding aspects of Hoover's personal life makes it difficult to ascertain for certain whether Soviet operatives invented such stories or simply used its disinformation techniques to capitalize on existing rumors or even facts. Regardless, such techniques amplified public awareness of controversial Hoover rumors at the very least, and demonstrate that Kremlin interference efforts included both disinformation and amplification of legitimate information it felt was advantageous yet getting insufficient attention organically.

4. Manipulating Multiple Sides, Instigating Groups against Each Other, and Inciting Violence

In some cases, Kremlin subversive measures sought to create kinetic impact and create physical casualties. Evidence of such attempts highlights the multi-faceted nature of Soviet interference techniques and the multilateral danger to U.S. interests presented therein. For example, Mitrokhin's smuggled KGB archive details a diabolical plot to exacerbate racial tensions in the 1960s, seeking not just to provoke conflicts and arguments or influence political narratives but actually to incite violence within U.S. society. One of the most alarming examples is a 1971 plot, codenamed "Operation Pandora," to detonate an explosive device at a predominantly Black college in New York and anonymously call several Black organizations attributing the explosion to the Jewish Defense League (JDL).[84] Mitrokhin's notes indicate that this idea was not an isolated one but rather one element of an elaborate campaign to incite a deadly race war between Jewish and African-American communities. To accomplish this plot, the Soviets produced insulting racist material made to look like it was written by the JDL and distributed the letters to militant black power groups. Along with these forgeries, the Soviets sent anonymous letters to African-American organizations listing made-up atrocities against the Black community committed by the JDL, and calling Black citizens to retaliate violently against the league's leadership. Whether such plots were designed to harm the future electoral prospects of presidents Lyndon Johnson or Nixon, tarnish the U.S. reputation internationally, or simply

[83] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 236.

[84] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 238.

to cause ongoing division or chaos as a more general goal is unclear, but each is plausible in the context of concurrent Soviet disinformation schemes. Whatever the aim, attempts to create tangible impacts and casualties added a dangerous new dimension to Soviet interference operations beyond propaganda, bribes, and disinformation.

5. Diminishing Returns, Lasting Impacts

Moscow's various strategies in its interference campaigns during the Cold War demonstrate the breadth and adaptability of its subversive influence arsenal, but such diversity may have been born of necessity or pragmatism as some of its most successful tools began to lose power with repeat usage. Most of the Soviet active measures and disinformation tactics achieved varying levels of success over the course of the Cold War, but many waned in effectiveness as targets began to identify them or at least grow reasonably suspicious. For example, Western observers eventually caught on to the robust forgery operations, and occasionally managed to undermine their effectiveness by shining a light on the practice. One such failed operation was a KGB attempt to deflect blame for a 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II away from itself and onto the CIA. In this incident, two forgeries purported to be cables from the U.S. embassy in Rome were published by a communist-friendly Italian newspaper, but quickly discredited due to formatting errors and correctly labeled a "Soviet active measure" by other Italian newspapers.[85] Another diabolical yet ineffective operation involved sending forged letters purportedly from the Ku Klux Klan to African and Asian nations ahead of the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles warning that Black athletes would be shot, burned, or lynched if they attempted to compete.[86] Such apparent misfires do not indicate a broader failure of Soviet influence operations, however. To the contrary, the presence of seemingly unsuccessful attempts amid a series of successes merely indicates that the Kremlin's subversion strategy involves placing a large number of low-risk bets, or lighting

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[85] Dennis Kux, "Soviet Active Measures and Disinformation: Overview and Assessment," *Parameters, Journal of the U.S. Army War College* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 1985): 24–25; "Two Diplomatic Cables Called KGB Forgeries," United Press International, July 14, 1983, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/07/14/Two-diplomatic-cables-called-KGB-forgeries/2457427003200/.

[86] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 238.

a series of small flames to see which ones ignite into destructive fires. It is also notable that some attempts, such as the Kennedy assassination forgery project, lay dormant for years before eventually bearing fruit and enduring for decades.

Despite growing Western awareness of Soviet dezinformatsiya and U.S. efforts to challenge it aggressively under Ronald Reagan's administration, many active measures plots continued to achieve some degree of success, even during the tentative thaw in U.S.-Russia relations, and even after being positively identified as disinformation. In 1983, the KGB published a fake letter in *Patriot*, an Indian newspaper formed two decades earlier with Soviet aid for the purpose of seeding disinformation.[87] The letter, ostensibly from an American scientist who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that the burgeoning human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) virus had been developed by the Pentagon as a biological-weapons experiment.[88] After the letter initially failed to gain international attention, a spurious scientific paper crafted by Kremlin loyalists in East Germany was issued to bolster it, with Soviet press deliberately misidentifying the paper's origin as French to further obscure the Kremlin connection.[89] While other Soviet proxies around the world spread stories related to and building on the Pentagon/AIDS myth, traditional Soviet media in turn amplified them, and by 1987, the story had been shared in more than 30 languages and 80 countries.[90] More than 35 years since the Soviet Union set out to convince the world that the U.S. government had created the AIDS virus, and more than 25 years after the KGB admitted the entire ploy, U.S. and global public health officials and medical workers continue to struggle against popular

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[87] Thomas Boghardt, "Soviet Bloc Intelligence and Its AIDS Disinformation Campaign," *Studies in Intelligence* 53, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 4–7.

[88] Department of State, *Soviet Influence Activities*.

[89] Department of State; Andrew and Mitrokhin, the *Sword and the Shield*, 244–245.

[90] Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, "Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference," *Institute for National Strategic Studies: Strategic Perspectives*, no. 11 (June 1, 2012): 155.

acceptance of the fabrication and the knock-on consequences of it.[91] For example, a 2005 study revealed that more than one out of every four African-Americans surveyed believed that AIDS was produced in a government laboratory, and that more than 15 percent of respondents believed the government had created the virus to control or reduce the Black population.[92] As demonstrated by political controversy that jeopardized mass acceptance of a potential COVID-19 vaccine among U.S. citizens during a global pandemic in 2020, conspiracies that undermine the credibility of government administration of health resources, or frame the government for disease outbreaks, can have significant and durable negative political and public health impacts.[93]

B. CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATIONS AND NEW THREATS

Russian active measures and disinformation against the West did not end with the demise of the Cold War. Indeed, modern Russian influence campaign methods build on Soviet active measures and exploit new technology that appears to increase their effectiveness. This section borrows the framework of the previous section to demonstrate how recent Kremlin interference operatives have adopted and adapted the techniques of their forebears, and to highlight areas in which such tools may be even more potent today.

1. Media Manipulation

Sinikukka Saari noted in 2011 that Russia's "active measures" influence strategies were evolving to include:

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[91] Jacob Heller, "Rumors and Realities: Making Sense of HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Narratives and Contemporary Legends," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 1 (November 13, 2014): e43–e50, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302284; David Robert Grimes, "Russian Fake News Is Not New: Soviet AIDS Propaganda Cost Countless Lives," *The Guardian*, sec. Science, June 14, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2017/jun/14/russian-fake-news-is-not-new-soviet-aids-propaganda-cost-countless-lives.

[92] Laura M. Bogart and Sheryl Thorburn, "Are HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs a Barrier to HIV Prevention among African Americans?," *JAIDS Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* 38, no. 2 (February 1, 2005): 213–218.

[93] Sarah Kreps et al., "Factors Associated with U.S. Adults' Likelihood of Accepting COVID-19 Vaccination," *Journal of the American Medical Association Network Open* 3, no. 10 (October 20, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.25594; Jonathan Chait, "Trump Determined to Get Vaccine before Election, Overrules FDA Guidelines," *New York Magazine: Intelligencer*, October 5, 2020, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/10/trump-vaccine-overrules-fda-election-coronavirus-science.html.

> 1) Proactive political involvement, e.g. creating links to a variety of political actors, assisting reorganisation and coordination of pro-Russian parties, export of political technologies and consultation around elections, 2) 'NGO diplomacy' e.g. creating and assisting pro-Russian youth groups, minority and separatist civil organisations and think tanks, [and] 3) Creation and management of favourable media environment, e.g. the establishment of Russian media ventures, launching media campaigns in the Russian media, or influencing the local national media.[94]

To Saari's last point, modern Russian media ventures have been used as an integral tool in its interference campaigns against Western democracies, overtly operating within the states it seeks to influence.

Since 2005, the Russian government has operated and expanded its own international media outlets, for example the television and online video enterprise RT (originally called Russia Today) and the internet-based news and commentary agency Sputnik. Both widely regarded by Western intelligence sources as mouthpieces of official Kremlin propaganda, these outlets have established multi-language ventures throughout the world and used a range of marketing strategies to build a substantial public audience. RT, Sputnik, and other government-sponsored Russian outlets with an international outreach mission provide factual coverage and interesting content on a variety of topics, yet they also clearly support agendas and messages that the Kremlin wishes to spread.[95] These outlets amplify news and opinions Russia wishes to promote, whitewash or cast doubt on the veracity of negative stories involving Russian interests, promote conspiratorial theories and interpretations, and give remarkably high amounts of coverage and airtime to representatives of political groups and parties seen as controversial or "fringe."[96] Opinions Russia wishes to promote with its news broadcast networks include

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[94] Sinikukka Saari, "Putin's Eurasian Union Initiative: Are the Premises of Russia's Post-Soviet Policy Changing?," *Swedish Institute of International Affairs UI Brief*, no. 9 (November 1, 2011): 4, https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/putins-eurasian-union-initiative-are-the-premises-of-russias-post-soviet-policy-changing-min.pdf.

[95] Galina Miazhevich, "Nation Branding in the Post-Broadcast Era: The Case of RT," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 5 (October 1, 2018): 575–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417751228; Steven Erlanger, "Russia's RT Network: Is It More BBC or KGB?," *New York Times*, sec. World, March 8, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/europe/russias-rt-network-is-it-more-bbc-or-kgb.html.

[96] "Shadow Puppets: Russian Meddling in Europe," *The Economist*, April 15, 2017.

denigration of NATO and defense of Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.[97] Examples of conspiracy promotion include attempts to portray the shootdown of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17, said to be done accidentally by Kremlin proxies in occupied east Ukraine with a Russian anti-aircraft missile, and GRU agents' alleged poisoning of a former Russian spy in Great Britain, as deliberate acts perpetrated by rivals scheming to frame and slander Moscow.[98]

At times, Russian officials have openly acknowledged these media outlets' purpose as a powerful tool or even weapon against the Western world. In explaining the importance of RT's American TV channel in 2011, editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan appeared to hint at the network's role as a strategic defense weapon:

> It's important that there is a channel that people are used to, that they like, so then when you need to, you show them what you need to show them. In a sense, not having your own "inoveshaniye" [foreign broadcasting] is the same as not having a ministry of defense. When there is no war, it seems as though it is not necessary. But damn, when there is war, it's absolutely critical. But you can't create an army a week before the war begins.[99]

In a satellite video appearance with the president of Argentina commemorating the beginning of RT's Spanish-language broadcasting in South America in 2014, Putin himself stated, "With accelerated development of electronic media, this sphere has acquired immense importance and has perhaps become a formidable weapon to potentially manipulate public consciousness."[100]

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[97] Martin Kragh and Sebastian Åsberg, "Russia's Strategy for Influence through Public Diplomacy and Active Measures: The Swedish Case," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 6 (September 19, 2017): 779–799, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1273830.

[98] Gordon Ramsay and Sam Robertshaw, *Weaponising News: RT, Sputnik and Targeted Disinformation* (London, England: King's College, 2019), 21–44, https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/weaponising-news.pdf; Adam Holland, "RT "Covers" the Shooting down of MH17," July 18, 2014, *The Interpreter*, https://www.interpretermag.com/rt-covers-the-shooting-down-of-mh17/.

[99] "Russkiye Media Iznutri: Margarita Simonyan, Glavny Redaktor Russia Today [Russian Media from within: Margarita Simonyan, Editor-in-Chief of Russia Today]" Afisha [Poster], October 18, 2011, https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/gorod/archive/ministry-of-truth-simonyan/. NOTE: The text as it appears in the thesis is the author's personal translation from the original Russian.

[100] Vladimir Putin, "Telekanal Russia Today nachal veshchaniye v Argentine [Russia Today TV channel began broadcast in Argentina]," Prezident Rossii [Office of the President of Russia], October 9, 2014, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46762.

It is no surprise, then, that an interagency report on Russian interference published in 2017 by the Director of National Intelligence concluded that RT and Sputnik are key components of "Russia's state-run propaganda machine" and a vital tool in its foreign influence campaigns.[101]

According to a 2019 study from King's College London analyzing all English-language content produced by RT and Sputnik during two four-week periods in 2017 and 2018, the Kremlin news agencies flooded the market with more than 2,100 articles highlighting political dysfunction in Western countries and Ukraine, which represented 81.7 percent of all content the agencies wrote about these nations.[102] Of the March 2018 RT and Sputnik articles studied, a staggering 138 of them sought to sow confusion and doubt about the Kremlin's recent poisoning of a former spy in the United Kingdom, in many cases by offering competing and contradictory counternarratives, such as lies that the U.S. or British government created the Novichok poison used in the attack.[103] Such misdirection and noise are hallmarks of RT and Sputnik's defense of Kremlin scandals, particularly regarding infamous large-scale incidents such as the Russian military's seizure of the Crimea peninsula and the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17.[104] The anti-Ukrainian rhetoric and dishonesty coming from Russia's English-language RT channels in London and the United States during these two events were so prolific and reprehensible that two of its anchors publicly resigned out of frustration with the network's deceptive

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[101] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections* (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017), https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf.

[102] Ramsay and Robertshaw, *Weaponising News*, 73.

[103] Ramsay and Robertshaw, 44.

[104] "MH17 Crash, 17 July 2014," Dutch Safety Board, October 13, 2015, https://www.onderzoeksraad.nl/en/page/3546/crash-mh17-17-july-2014.

reporting, while a third forcefully condemned the network's disinformation campaign on air during a live broadcast.[105]

Disturbingly, the King's College report also discovered that RT and Sputnik's English-language content infected British news sources as well; 21 different articles across five prominent British newspapers in an eight-week sample replicated at least 30 percent of the text found in articles that RT or Sputnik had published previously, including 11 directly related to political issues.[106] Only two of the 21 articles gave credit or attribution to the earlier RT or Sputnik articles, meaning British audiences had no reason to suspect a Kremlin-friendly bias. Taken alongside other studies' findings, for example a report that conspiracy-minded U.S. media outlet InfoWars had republished more than 1,000 RT articles, it appears that the old Soviet method of publishing stories with the hope that Western media outlets would later amplify their messages is now more successful than ever.[107]

Government-run propagandistic media outlets represent only the tip of the iceberg of Russia's modern-day foreign influence apparatus, however. Beneath the surface, the Kremlin also appears to continue employing such practices as co-opting journalists and covertly manipulating the foreign press, playing puppet master to proxy organizations designed to stir up social divisions, fabricating and spreading false information, and providing material and financial support to foreign political candidates and campaigns.[108]

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[105] Elizabeth Wahl, "I Was Putin's Pawn," *Politico Magazine*, March 21, 2014, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/03/liz-wahl-quit-russia-today-putins-pawn-104888.html; John Plunkett, "Russia Today Reporter Resigns in Protest at MH17 Coverage," *The Guardian*, sec. Media, July 18, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/jul/18/mh17-russia-today-reporter-resigns-sara-firth-kremlin-malaysia; Antonia Paget, "Russia Today Host Condemns Ukraine 'Occupation," *The Times*, March 4, 2014, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russia-today-host-condemns-ukraine-occupation-rgmqv036jcj.

[106] Ramsay and Robertshaw, *Weaponising News*, 85.

[107] Jane Lytvynenko, "InfoWars Has Republished More than 1,000 Articles from RT without Permission," BuzzFeed News, November 8, 2017, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/janelytvynenko/infowars-is-running-rt-content.

[108] Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2017), 2181–2768 of 9823, Kindle.

a. Co-opting Journalists and Using Outside Media to Influence News Coverage

Echoing past Soviet use of Indian, East German, and African publications to hide its authorship of disinformation, the internet is awash with obscure and low-level news portals throughout the world that fail to disclose the editorial control or influence of the Kremlin. In particular, the FSB and Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff (GRU), work with loyal supporters to enact this scheme.[109] Hungarian news media website Hídfő.net, whose content was eventually found to have been almost entirely produced by Russia's GRU, was used to dramatic effect in a Kremlin campaign to turn Ukraine's neighbors against its fledgling post-revolutionary government.[110] The site caused a massive uproar by falsely reporting that Hungarian tanks had been seen rolling across the Ukrainian border.[111] The site also published false assertions regarding such topics as Crimea-related sanctions, the 2016 U.S. presidential election, NATO aggression, and an "exposé" alleging a U.S.-run hybrid war campaign against its rivals.[112] As in Soviet times, the site's articles could be cited by the Russian media as though it were a credible foreign news source, without the stories appearing to be state-generated propaganda.

b. Inventing and Planting Stories in the Internet Age

As the hidfo.net incident illustrates, the Kremlin is able to leverage such significant technological advances as the internet to enhance the efficiency and expand the reach of Soviet disinformation tools. In a hyper-connected digital age in which much of the world receives information from sources outside traditional news networks, Russia is now able to accomplish its goals of spreading disinformation without needing to explicitly

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[109] Andrew Higgins, "Intent on Unsettling E.U., Russia Taps Foot Soldiers from the Fringe," *New York Times*, sec. Europe, December 24, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/24/world/europe/intent-on-unsettling-eu-russia-taps-foot-soldiers-from-the-fringe.html; Dezső Szabolcs and Panyi András, "Russian Diplomats Exercised with Hungarian Cop Killer's Far-Right Gang," Index, October 28, 2016, http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/28/russian_diplomats_exercised_with_hungarian_cop_killer_s_far-right_gang/

[110] Szabolcs and András.

[111] Szabolcs and András.

[112] At the time of this thesis' publication, Hidfo.net links automatically redirect to SputnikNews.com, an English-language arm of the Russian state-owned news agency, and are thus not cited directly.

compromise or exploit journalists or news publications, nor even to create its own Western-leaning information portals. The advent of social media, in particular, has helped modern Russian influence campaigns reach an exponentially wider audience than Soviet operations were able to, and with considerably less difficulty and risk.

Since at least 2013, active measures harnessing the power of the internet and social media to stoke artificial public interest in a topic, spread disinformation, and attack Russia's foes have proliferated.[113] *Novaya Gazeta*, a Moscow newspaper whose critical investigative work since Putin rose to power is believed to have prompted the assassination of several of its prominent employees, reported in August 2013 that its journalists had infiltrated a St. Petersburg "troll factory" called Internet Research Agency (IRA).[114] The IRA offered weekly salaries and free food to employees for writing blogs, article comments, and social media posts on prescribed themes.[115] According to this exposé, young Russian citizens working for the agency were given a list of topics and targets about which to produce content across Russian and Western traditional and social media.[116] These topics included praise for Putin, the Group of Twenty (G20) summit (held in St. Petersburg that year), and Russian activity in the Syrian war, along with negative content directed at Russian opposition politician Aleksei Navalny, *Forbes* magazine, and various American entities. Burnished by other media reports corroborating these findings, the *Novaya Gazeta* investigation discovered that similar operations were planned for or already working in Moscow, and also found evidence that the agency's influence campaign

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[113] Casey Michel, "America's Neo-Nazis Don't Look to Germany for Inspiration. They Look to Russia," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/08/22/americas-neo-nazis-dont-look-to-germany-for-inspiration-they-look-to-russia/.

[114] Tony Halpin, "Journalists from Novaya Gazeta Are 'Assassination Targets,'" *The Times*, January 23, 2009, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/journalists-from-novaya-gazeta-are-assassination-targets-cjbv5nzp2sg; Aleksandra Garmazhapova, "Gdye zhivut trolli. Kak rabotayut internet-provokatory v Sankt-Peterburge i kto Imi zapravlyayet [Where the trolls live: How internet provocateurs work in St. Petersburg and who leads them]," Novaya Gazeta [New Gazette], August 9, 2013, https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2013/09/09/56265-gde-zhivut-trolli-kak-rabotayut-internet-provokatory-v-sankt-peterburge-i-kto-imi-zapravlyaet.

[115] Garmazhapova.

[116] Garmazhapova.

predated its July 2013 business registration.[117] Subscribers to British newspaper *The Guardian* complained that the online comment section of articles related to Ukraine's ongoing revolution were all so inundated by a torrent of Kremlin-friendly propaganda that legitimate conversation was impossible.[118] A May 2014 column filed by *The Guardian*'s readers' editor in response recalled that the newspaper had reported two years earlier about Russian troll influence campaigns, implying that it had subsequently become a target of such attacks.[119] Indeed, a February 2012 *Guardian* report about hacked emails to and from the leader of a Russian political youth organization, many of which dated back at least to 2010, outlines a well-financed campaign to amplify pro-Russia internet content and smear a list of 168 enemies of the organization, including Navalny, journalists, and human rights activists, on social media and blog sites.[120]

A 2018 RAND Corporation analysis posits that the Kremlin's interest in social media information warfare may have stemmed from Putin believing that such mass unrest incidents as the 2011 Moscow post-election protests and various revolutions in former Soviet republics had been fomented by the United States and coordinated via Facebook and Twitter.[121] These U.S.-based social media platforms were widely reported as critical tools for the launch and coordination of revolutionary uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia that same year, which Putin decried as U.S.-orchestrated interference in his speech justifying

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[117] Andrey Soshnikov, "Stolitsa politicheskovo trollinga, [Capital of political trolling]" moy rayon [my neighborhood], March 11, 2015, https://mr-7.ru/articles/112478/; Viktor Rezunkov, "Oni lyubyat Putina 12 chasov podryad,[They love Putin 12 hours straight]" Radio Svoboda [Radio Liberty]," March 14, 2015, https://www.svoboda.org/a/26899521.html; Hannah Levintova, "Russian Journalists Just Published a Bombshell Investigation about a Kremlin-Linked "Troll Factory,"" *Mother Jones*, October 18, 2017, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/10/russian-journalists-just-published-a-bombshell-investigation-about-a-kremlin-linked-troll-factory/; Adrian Chen, "The Agency," *New York Times*, sec. Magazine, June 2, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html.

[118] Chris Elliot, "The Readers' Editor On… The Pro-Russia Trolls below the Line on Ukraine Stories," *The Guardian*, May 4, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/04/pro-russia-trolls-ukraine-guardian-online.

[119] Elliot.

[120] Miriam Elder, "Emails Give Insight into Kremlin Youth Group's Priorities, Means and Concerns," *The Guardian*, February 7, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/07/nashi-emails-insight-kremlin-groups-priorities.

[121] Todd C. Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), 1–15, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2237.html.

the annexation of Crimea.[122] This perception may have cemented Putin's resolve to build up Russia's so-called "information confrontation" capability to counter what he believed to be a grave new American threat. Though a number of studies later found that the role of social media in the Arab Spring had been somewhat overstated, the 2014 Ukrainian revolution that prompted Putin's seizure of Crimea would have nevertheless proven this hypothesis anyway.[123] The mass demonstrations in Kyiv that year began with a journalist's Facebook post and relied heavily on social media to organize protests, recruit volunteers, and capture the attention of the Western world.[124]

Following *The Guardian*'s report, and increasingly cognizant of robust pro-Russia sentiment within the comment sections of prominent news sites, the American news media gradually began to take notice of the story. News and entertainment aggregator site Buzzfeed published a lengthy exposé in June 2014 that used leaked emails from alleged troll factory financiers to describe the Russian troll operation in great detail.[125] The feature showed the troll factory to be a well-financed and sophisticated operation and revealed attempts to hire English tutors for employees, a list of such media targets as *Politico* and Fox News, and orders for employees to operate six active Facebook accounts or 10 Twitter accounts and post 50 comments to news sites per day. Yet, in response to the Buzzfeed article, a *Washington Post* column highlighting the newspaper's own interaction with suspected Kremlin trolls downplayed the impact of the alleged influence campaign and suggested that domestic commentators were clever enough to mock, refute, or ignore any

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[122] Taylor Dewey et al., *The Impact of Social Media on Social Unrest in the Arab Spring* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Public Policy Program, 2012), https://publicpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/impact-social-media-social-unrest-arab-spring; Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," President Rosiyi [President of Russia], March 18, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603.

[123] Dewey et al., *Impact of Social Media*, 49; Heather Brown, Emily Guskin, and Amy Mitchell, "Arab-American Media: Bringing News to a Diverse Community: The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings," Pew Research Center, 14–15, November 28, 2012, http://www.journalism.org/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings/.

[124] Brown, Guskin, and Mitchell; Marci Shore, *The Ukrainian Night: An Intimate History of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 1358–1386 of 3050, Kindle.

[125] Max Seddon, "Documents Show How Russia's Troll Army Hit America," Buzzfeed News, June 2, 2014, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/maxseddon/documents-show-how-russias-troll-army-hit-america.

false claims from foreign invaders.[126] Though many outlets reported on the troll campaign as a nuisance offshoot of Russia's adventurism in Crimea, none seemed at the time to recognize it as a threat to U.S. domestic affairs, and neither did prominent U.S. officials.

By April 2015, "malicious cyber activity" was well known and taken seriously enough that President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13694: Blocking the Property of Certain Persons Engaging in Significant Malicious Cyber-Enabled Activities. This order was a directive declaring a national emergency and threatening harsh sanctions on any foreign actors whose cyber activities threatened U.S. national or economic security, financial stability, or foreign policy.[127] Regrettably, in what now seems like a colossal oversight and missed opportunity, the focus around this executive order did not appear to include Russian troll activity. Rather, the text of the executive order centered on such contemporary events as financial cyber crimes, state-sponsored Chinese hacking for the purposes of espionage and intellectual property theft, ISIS propaganda and recruitment through social media, and an incident in which North Korea levied a crippling hacking operation on Sony Pictures in retaliation for its production of a film depicting the assassination of Kim Jong Un.[128] Notably, Obama attempted to correct this oversight in the waning days of his presidency by issuing Executive Order 13757: Taking Additional Steps

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[126] The *Washington Post* article focused on flagrantly absurd Russian comments, summarizing one thusly: "Halloo, egghead! Let's go! "Oink-oink-oink-oink-oink …" hahaha-haha-ha….))))))))))) [He then launches into an anti-American screed in Russian.]," as well as typical banter, such as a seemingly domestic commentator rapidly responding dismissively to a comment that Obama should avoid involvement with Ukraine-Russia conflict. It did not appear to account for the possibility of more subtle efforts to stir up division without revealing pro-Russian bias. Caitlin Dewey, "Hunting for Paid Russian Trolls in the Washington Post Comments Section," *Washington Post*, June 4, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/06/04/hunting-for-paid-russian-trolls-in-the-washington-post-comments-section/.

[127] Barack Obama, Executive Order 13694, "Blocking the Property of Certain Persons Engaging in Significant Malicious Cyber-Enabled Activities," Code of Federal Regulations, title 3 (2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/01/executive-order-blocking-property-certain-persons-engaging-significant-m.

[128] Robert Hackett, "Sanctions: America's Best New Weapon against Cyber Crime," *Fortune*, April 2, 2015, http://fortune.com/2015/04/02/us-cyber-crime-sanctions/; David E. Sanger and Katie Benner, "U.S. Accuses North Korea of Plot to Hurt Economy as Spy Is Charged in Sony Hack," *New York Times*, August 6, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/06/us/politics/north-korea-sony-hack-wannacry-indictment.html.

to Address the National Emergency with Respect to Significant Malicious Cyber-Enabled Activities to amend Executive Order 13694 after Russia's 2016 election interference.[129]

2. Proxy Organizations

Just as the Soviet Union was able to implant advocates for its causes and policies into foreign states' political and social environments via surrogates such as the CPUSA and WPC, modern Russia offers support and assistance to (and sometimes creates) proxy organizations in the West. This strategy includes support for oft-discounted political parties in other countries, including neo-Nazis and white supremacists.[130] As in the Soviet past, this support and these alliances had nothing to do with shared ideology and everything to do with perceived usefulness to national goals; especially regarding potential collaborators who could assist against a shared enemy. Just as with the leaders of Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, and such non-communist nations as Egypt and Iraq during Soviet rule, the key question was who was the enemy. The enemy of Moscow's enemy (the West and the United States) was thus the Kremlin's friend.[131]

András Rácz describes Russia's strategy as "scattershot… placing small bets, directly or through proxies, on ready-made fringe groups in an effort to destabilize or simply disorient" such rivals as the EU.[132] An Atlantic Council report titled *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses* agreed and warned that Russia was waging a subtle destabilization effort focused on:

> (1) building political alliances with ideologically friendly political group and individuals, and (2) establishing pro-Russian organizations in civil

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[129] Barack Obama, Executive Order 13757, "Taking Additional Steps to Address the National Emergency with Respect to Significant Malicious Cyber-Enabled Activities," Code of Federal Regulations, title 3 (2017), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2017-01-03/pdf/2016-31922.pdf.

[130] Marlene Laruelle, "Russia's Bedfellowing Policy and the European Far Right," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 167 (May 6, 2015): 1–12; Political Capital Institute, *The Russian Connection: The Spread of Pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right* (Budapest, Hungary: Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2014), 1–9, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf.

[131] Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Nogee, and Vidya Nadkarni, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, 5th ed. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2014); Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*.

[132] Higgins, "Intent on Unsettling E.U."

> society, which help to legitimate and diffuse the regime's point of view. The web of political networks is hidden and nontransparent by design, making it purposely difficult to expose. Traceable financial links would inevitably make Moscow's enterprise less effective: when ostensibly independent political figures call for closer relations with Russia, the removal of sanctions, or criticize the EU and NATO, it legitimizes the Kremlin's worldview. It is far less effective, from the Kremlin's point of view, to have such statements come from individuals or organizations known to be on the Kremlin's payroll.[133]

The appearance of Russia's support for fringe groups is alarming for a variety of reasons, especially its apparent effect of amplifying far right, ultranationalist, and even neo-Nazi parties and organizations in Slovakia, Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, and other Western nations.[134] Alleged beneficiaries of Russian support include members of European Parliament representing such far-right or nationalist parties as Alternative for Germany and France's National Rally (formerly National Front), as well as such agitator organizations as Austrian Technologies GmbH and Italy's Eurasia Coordination Project.[135] A common thread among the majority of these disparate fringe groups with Kremlin backing has been their assertion that Russia's annexation of Crimea was legitimate and that the sanctions levied as a result of it should be repealed.[136] Another use for this hodgepodge of policy-agnostic alliances also seems to be their members' participation as monitors, neutral observers, or official recognizers of elections in Russia or its intended sphere of influence, where they can dubiously vouch for or cast doubt on the elections' credibility and fairness.[137]

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[133] Alina Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses: Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2016), 4, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/kremlin-trojan-horses/.

[134] Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*.

[135] Shekhovtsov, loc. 1196, 4444, 5334, 6473.

[136] For example, members of the Freedom Party of Austria, Italy's Liga Nord, and France's National Front vocally supported, visited, or served as election observers for the referendum in Crimea, and recorded votes against a resolution criticizing the annexation in the European Parliament. Shekhovtsov; Laruelle, "Russia's Bedfellowing Policy."

[137] Shekhovtsov, loc. 4212–4345; Csaba Tóth, "Pro-Russian Jobbik 'Election Observers' Banned from Ukraine," *The Budapest Beacon*, November 4, 2014, https://budapestbeacon.com/pro-russian-jobbik-election-observers-banned-ukraine/.

These parties and groups can also be used to cause problems domestically, for example, sowing domestic unrest and stymieing the work of their nations' governments from within using veto power or obstructionism. Even support for less successful fringe parties has a detrimental effect on the nations in which they practice. In October 2016, septuagenarian neo-Nazi Istvan Gyorkos, leader of a small organization known as the Hungarian National Front, murdered a police officer during a raid on his illegal weapons cache in a western Hungarian village.[138] A parliamentary committee later briefed on the incident by the intelligence community was informed that Gyorkos had been under surveillance for years due in part to collaboration with extremists in Russia, and that Russian GRU military intelligence personnel posing as diplomats had regularly engaged in combat drills with him and his followers.[139]

Support for a tiny militant and antagonistic party in Hungary seems duplicitous considering the warm relations already established between the Kremlin and both Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban, and his leading challenger, the Jobbik Party.[140] Russian support for groups that glorify or co-opt the fascist ideology of the Soviet Union's bitterly hated World War II opponent seems even more jarring. These seeming contradictions, however, underscore the assertion that Russia is willing to place small bets on a plurality of parties, so long as they show signs of being able to weaken the powers that be or disrupt the European status quo. Since such support is pragmatic and sinister rather than ideological, even groups with policies and worldviews antithetical to those of the Russian government may still receive assistance. Such is the case throughout Europe; political parties strongly rumored to have Russian backing in Germany include the left-leaning Social Democratic Party, hard-left Die Linke, and far-right Alternative für

[138] Higgins, "Intent on Unsettling E.U."

[139] Higgins.

[140] Balázs Jarábik, "Putin's Budapest Bargain Is Built on Shaky Ground," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 28, 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/08/28/putin-s-budapest-bargain-is-built-on-shaky-ground-pub-72939.

Deutschland.[141] In Greece, the ruling far-left Syriza party has come under fire due to its rumored Russian financing and ties to such radical Russian nationalists as Alexander Dugin, who is also accused of supporting far-right neo-Nazi opposition party Golden Dawn.[142] The story is similar in Italy, where the resurrected center-right Forza Italia party and right-leaning nationalist Lega Nord parties are both believed to enjoy Russian backing.[143] The United Kingdom's British National Party and UK Independence Party have drawn suspicion on this subject as well due to the effusive praise heaped on Putin by some of their members and the alleged Russian interference in their favor during the Brexit referendum.[144] The evident promiscuity of Russia's foreign political support, even to multiple fringe candidates within a single country, reveals that an aspect of the Kremlin's strategy is to amass a large number of levers to pull in the name of destabilization and ability to impose its will on foreign governments; it is accumulating spoilers and trump cards wherever it can.

Alarm bells about Russian influence sounded in Spain almost immediately upon an explosion of chaos and violence centered on a secessionist movement in Catalonia in September 2017. Citing Catalonian disinformation, Russian media amplification, and Russian Twitter bots' frenzied sharing of both, Spanish media quickly speculated that a

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[141] One notable instance of Russian support for Germany's Social Democratic Party is its relationship with former German Chancellor and SDP leader Gerhard Schröder. After a setback in Germany's federal election cost him the Chancellorship, he announced his resignation and then controversially signed a deal allowing Russia to build a gas pipeline between the two nations under the Baltic Sea just before his final day in office. Russia, to which the pipeline carried enormous strategic importance, swiftly rewarded Schröder for his assistance by naming him the head of shareholders for the pipeline project and hiring him to a lucrative position as board chairman for the nation's ROSNEFT energy company. Schröder has since served as a reliable defender of controversial Russian actions in the news to include partially rationalizing the Crimea annexation. Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses*, 15; "Anger as German Ex-Chancellor Schroeder Heads up Rosneft Board," BBC News, sec. Europe, September 29, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41447603.

[142] Courtney Weaver, Kerin Hope, and Sam Jones, "Alarm Bells Ring over Syriza's Russian Links," *Financial Times*, January 28, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/a87747de-a713-11e4-b6bd-00144feab7de; Peter Foster and Matthew Holehouse, "Russia Accused of Clandestine Funding of European Parties as U.S. Conducts Major Review of Vladimir Putin's Strategy," *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 16, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/12103602/America-to-investigate-Russian-meddling-in-EU.html.

[143] Max Seddon and James Politi, "Putin's Party Signs Deal with Italy's Far-Right Lega Nord," *Financial Times*, March 6, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/0d33d22c-0280-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9; Laqueur, *Putinism*.

[144] Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses*, 18.

Kremlin hand had been stirring the pot.[145] Subsequent reports from German and Spanish intelligence agencies later found that a surge of Russian disinformation and support had indeed been a key provocation for Catalonia's illegal separatist referendum and the bloody riot that followed.[146]

The 2016 Internet Research Agency Facebook advertisements included a series of conservative-targeting posts calling for Texas's secession from the Union; a campaign that all but disappeared after the election but may have intensified had Clinton won.[147] On the other end of the political spectrum, RT reported within one month of Trump's victory that an "embassy" dedicated to California's secession from the United States had been opened in an expensive area of downtown Moscow.[148] Contemporaneous reporting from more credible news outlets revealed that the California secessionist behind this apparent stunt was a New York-born Russophile and Russian resident with a history of right-wing U.S. political activism.[149] It was soon discovered that the dubious diplomatic outpost managed to secure its improbable real estate bonanza only because the space was being provided for free by a Kremlin-financed party that was also supporting a fledgling Texas rebellion.[150]

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[145] David Alandete, "Russian Meddling Machine Sets Sights on Catalonia," *El País*, September 28, 2017, https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/09/26/inenglish/1506413477_994601.html; "Catalan Referendum Stokes Fears of Russian Influence," Politico Europe, September 29, 2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-catalonia-referendum-fake-news-misinformation/.

[146] Vidya Narayanan et al., *Russian Involvement and Junk News during Brexit*, Computational Propaganda Project (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2017); Graham Keeley, "Russia Meddled in Catalonia Independence Referendum, Says German Intelligence Boss," *The Times*, sec. World, May 15, 2018, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russia-meddled-in-catalonia-vote-p6g5nttpm; Robin Emmott, "Spain Sees Russian Interference in Catalonia Separatist Vote," *Reuters*, November 13, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-russia-idUSKBN1DD20Y.

[147] Tim Lister and Clare Sebastian, "Stoking Islamophobia and Secession in Texas—From an Office in Russia," CNN, October 6, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/05/politics/heart-of-texas-russia-event/index.html.

[148] Casey Michel, "The Kremlin's California Dream," *Slate*, May 4, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2017/05/why_russia_cultivates_fringe_groups_on_the_far_right_and_far_left.html.

[149] Lister and Sebastian, "Stoking Islamophobia and Secession in Texas"; Patrick Reevell, "Texas, California Separatists Attend Kremlin-Funded Conference," ABC News, September 27, 2016, https://abcnews.go.com/International/texas-california-separatists-attend-pro-kremlin-conference/story?id=42395066.

[150] Lister and Sebastian; Reevell, "Texas, California Separatists Attend Kremlin-Funded Conference."

The Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia, as this group is called, exists to offer support and encouragement to separatists in nations all over the world.[151]

At a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing regarding Russia's social media influence campaigns in November 2017, Russia was accused of using social media bots, state media amplification, and even clandestine financial and material aid to support and amplify recent secession movements.[152] Among these campaigns were Catalonia's contentious unauthorized referendum against Spain in 2017, a narrowly defeated 2014 referendum regarding Scotland's independence from the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom's unexpected 2016 vote to exit the European Union, illegal sham referenda in Crimea and Ukraine's Donbass region in 2014, and activity in other "frozen conflict" zones.[153] Evidence presented at this hearing suggested that Russia also attempted to provoke Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, and Native American tribal rebellion in addition to the Texas secession.[154] Russian support for secession movements serves as evidence of a broad trial-and-error strategy. That Russia appears to have directly advocated violence and fear among U.S. citizens and attempted to coordinate confrontations between rival groups in 2016, further reinforces the notion that they are experimenting with ways to stoke something akin to a civil war or unrest reminiscent of Soviet race war plots in the 1960s.[155] This notion is further bolstered by such stunts as an incendiary Internet Research Agency troll group called Black Fist funding self-defense classes for African-American activists

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[151] Not only can secession movements cause chaos and force national governments to focus attention and resources on internal matters, they also serve as a useful propaganda tool for Russia to justify and normalize its near-universally condemned takeover of Crimea. Reevell, "Texas, California Separatists Attend Kremlin-Funded Conference."

[152] Jan Martínez Ahrens, "U.S. Senate Addresses Russian Interference in Catalonia on Social Media," *El País*, November 3, 2017, https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/11/03/inenglish/1509707476_016214.html; Narayanan et al., *Russian Involvement and Junk News during Brexit*; David Leask, "SNP Claims Russia Is Likely to Have Interfered in Referendum," *The Herald*, December 14, 2017, https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15771388.yes-leaders-dont-be-naive-about-russian-online-meddling-in-independence/; Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea," *Foreign Affairs*, April 18, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/why-putin-took-crimea.

[153] Ahrens; Narayanan et al.; Leask; Treisman.

[154] Casey Michel, "Russia Wants Texas and Puerto Rico to Secede," *The Daily Beast*, sec. world, September 24, 2015, https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/24/russia-wants-texas-and-puerto-rico-to-secede.

[155] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 238.

throughout the United States ahead of the election.[156] With sometimes-violent unrest popping up in cities across the United States in 2020 over coronavirus mitigation measures, political campaigns, election results, and social justice issues—including at least one foiled plot to assassinate a state governor and provoke a rebellion—some of Russia's longshot bets have a legitimate chance of paying out to some degree.[157]

3. New Threats and Force Multipliers: Cyberattacks

In addition to the resurgence of active measures techniques that appeared dormant in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, new tactics have emerged as complements and accelerants to such measures in present-day influence campaigns. In many cases, longstanding interference methods have adapted and improved, often with the benefit of technological advances, such as the internet and social media. Espionage, reconnaissance, propaganda distribution, recruitment, and many other elements of interference tradecraft have been made much easier and more successful by the availability of data and social media on the internet. Contemporary Russia has thus been able to expand greatly the size and scope of its activities compared to Soviet influence efforts. Along with legal means of information harvesting and dissemination, Russia uses the internet as a powerful new toolset for its influence campaigns: cyberattacks, to include hacking, infrastructure disruption, and file manipulation.

Twenty-first-century Russian hacking operations have proven to be useful disruptors in their own right, as well as accelerators for other influence methods, such as

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[156] Donie O'Sullivan, Drew Griffin, and Curt Devine, "In Attempt to Sow Fear, Russian Trolls Paid for Self-Defense Classes for African Americans," CNNMoney, October 18, 2017, https://money.cnn.com/2017/10/18/media/black-fist-russia-self-defense-classes/index.html.

[157] Katie Shepherd, "Tensions over Restrictions Spark Violence and Defiance among Protesters as Trump Pushes States to Reopen," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/05/13/protest-violence-coronavirus/; Derrick Bryson Taylor, "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., July 10, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html; Susan Miller and Jordan Culver, "'It's Not Over': Trump Supporters Flock to State Capitols after Biden Victory Is Announced," USA Today, November 7, 2020, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/11/07/election-protests-updates-trump-supporters-state-capitols-biden-win/6203271002/; Robert Snell and Melissa Nann Burke, "Plans to Kidnap Whitmer, Overthrow Government Spoiled, Officials Say," *Detroit News*, October 8, 2020, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/10/08/feds-thwart-militia-plot-kidnap-michigan-gov-gretchen-whitmer/5922301002/.

slander, forgery, and political influence. The information obtained from a hack can be used to inform future influence campaigns, identify vulnerabilities and strategies that can be exploited and countered, or to embarrass or compromise the target upon public release.[158] Worse yet, the stolen material can even be doctored to create compromising material where none naturally exists.[159] The theft or even insinuation of theft of sensitive information can be used as blackmail if release is threatened. Finally, attribution of a cyberattack's origin can be difficult, so a perpetrator can avoid detection, and thus also avoid consequences. It is in this space that Russian influence campaigns have been masterful. Cyberattacks are now a staple of the Kremlin's influence campaigns, whether targeting a nation's candidates, election systems, government services, or even critical infrastructure sectors.[160]

The ways in which any hostile power could conceivably disrupt infrastructure or commerce grows with every new interconnected device and advance in networking, limited only by a potential attacker's capacity and the intended victim's ability to thwart, punish, or effectively counterattack. By this metric, the threats posed by Russian cyberattacks are among the most severe imaginable, as the GRU has spent years honing its craft. Also in the Kremlin's favor is the fact that its nuclear weapons arsenal provides the ultimate strategic defense against a physical or military counterattack to its cyber meddling; an advantage very few of the world's other hackers and groups can boast. As the full range of possible cyberattack capabilities is too broad to list, it may be more useful to analyze actions allegedly already taken by Kremlin agents.

A bellwether case study for the havoc Russian-origin cyberattacks can wreak on a society is a 2007 Estonian cyberattack. In the wake of Estonian authorities' decision to move a controversial Soviet World War II memorial from downtown Tallinn to a military cemetery, and fueled by disinformation on Russian-language media saying the monument

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[158] Joshua D. Christian, "Russian Cyber Operations to Destabilize NATO" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020); Alexander M. Perkins, "Soviet Active Measures Reborn for the 21st Century: What Is to Be Done?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018).

[159] Thomas Brewster, "Russian 'Fancy Bear' Hackers Tainted Their Huge Leaks with Fake Data," *Forbes*, May 26, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2017/05/26/russian-dnc-hackers-planted-leaks-with-fake-data/.

[160] Christian, "Russian Cyber Operations To Destabilize NATO"; Perkins, "Soviet Active Measures Reborn."

was set to be destroyed, riots among the Russian-language population ensued. The following night, Estonian network systems were beset by a weeks-long siege including computer script-driven "distributed denial of service" (DDoS) attacks that caused sporadic outages in the banking, media, and government sectors, to include failure of automated teller machines, public servant email accounts, and news broadcasts. In a taunting and unpersuasive denial, Putin wryly suggested the attack might have been the work of independent "patriotic hackers" motivated by love for Russia and incensed at the exaggerated news of the statue's removal rather than official state actors.[161] The Russian government refused to assist Estonian law enforcement's investigation of the perpetrators despite a standing treaty compelling them to do so, and significant evidence that the attack originated with Russian IP addresses.[162]

This incident, which rattled Estonian society and led the government to bolster its cybersecurity posture significantly, offered an example of the unpredictable chaos Russia could unleash on a foe under the guise of domestic tensions and difficult-to-attribute cyberattacks. The attack also put Russia's potential foes on notice that the nation is capable of inflicting substantial damage on a rival society without crossing a border or firing a shot. Perhaps most troubling to U.S. observers, the Estonian attack hinted at Russia's apparent ability and willingness to wound a NATO member state at a significant level without triggering the alliance's Article Five agreement, which states that an attack against any member is an attack against all and must be met with a unified response.[163]

Perhaps less risky for Russia though is the following option: a hybrid campaign that cripples essential services in a NATO country via a devastating yet difficult to definitively attribute cyberattack, yet does not involve physical weaponry deployment or border

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[161] Krishnadev Calamur, "Putin Says 'Patriotic Hackers' May Have Targeted U.S. Election," *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/06/putin-russia-us-election/528825/.

[162] Damien McGuinness, "How a Cyber Attack Transformed Estonia," BBC News, sec. Europe, April 27, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/39655415.

[163] "The North Atlantic Treaty," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 4, 1949, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm; Michael R. Kristek, "The Nature of Russia's Threat to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), 38; Kaspars Galkins, "NATO and Hybrid Conflict Unresolved Issues from the Past or Unresolvable Threats of the Present" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 9.

incursion. Such a "gray area" attack could trigger alliance infighting and a lack of consensus regarding a full-scale Article Five response, thus undermining the alliance's main purpose. Perhaps cognizant of such a novel scenario, NATO quickly founded the Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence in Tallinn not long after the 2007 Estonian cyberattack.[164] More than a decade after the Estonia incident, however, ambiguity continues to surround each NATO member's stance on the threshold a cyberattack must hit before signifying an act of war. Questions include whether it makes a difference if the attack is definitely state-sponsored or possibly carried out by its "patriotic" residents (as Putin has smugly suggested more than once), and whether it is definitively safe to declare a cyberattack an act of war while also engaging in offensive cyber activity, such as Stuxnet (a malicious cyber worm of alleged U.S. and Israeli origin used to damage Iran's nuclear program severely).[165] A June 2017 statement issued by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in the wake of a mysterious global cyberattack hinted that questions still remain even as the alliance seeks to harden its cyber defenses, as he warned those responsible that NATO nations had agreed that a cyberattack *could* trigger Article Five (emphasis added).[166]

Notably, the attack Stoltenberg referred to (known as "NotPetya") originated in Ukrainian tax software and wreaked havoc on the nation in a manner similar to the 2007 Estonia attack, before spreading sporadically and uncontrollably to public and private sector entities worldwide. U.S. CIA and British intelligence reports identified with high

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[164] "NATO Opens New Centre of Excellence on Cyber Defence," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 14, 2008, https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2008/05-may/e0514a.html.

[165] Kim Zetter, *Countdown to Zero Day: Stuxnet and the Launch of the World's First Digital Weapon*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2014).

[166] Roland Oliphant and Cara McGoogan, "NATO Warns Cyber Attacks 'Could Trigger Article 5' As World Reels from Ukraine Hack," *The Telegraph*, June 28, 2017, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/28/nato-assisting-ukrainian-cyber-defences-ransom-ware-attack-cripples/.

confidence the GRU as the perpetrator for this attack, which concurred with earlier Ukrainian intelligence assessments.[167]

Whereas NotPetya may have been an out-of-control juggernaut affecting as many sectors as possible, Russia has demonstrated that it can also target infrastructure and communications equipment with precision. In June 2015, 12-channel French television network TV5 Monde was hit with a devastating cyberattack that appeared to have been meticulously tailored to destroy its broadcast transmission hardware.[168] Seven different components simultaneously fell under attack, including a Netherlands-based remote-control camera company used by the network. The network website was maliciously reprogrammed to display a message indicating the Islamic State took credit for the mayhem, but French authorities quickly traced the attack to the GRU.[169] Six months later, a well-coordinated and highly sophisticated remote takeover of multiple Ukrainian power grid control center distribution systems, later attributed to the GRU by the UK Cyber Security Centre, shut off power to hundreds of thousands of residents in western Ukraine.[170] The GRU has also been blamed by Western governments for a litany of infractions to include a pre-war attack on Georgia's government agency systems in 2008, the penetration of various Eastern European countries' defense ministries in 2014, and a significant 2015 network takeover and data destruction attack against Germany's

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[167] Ellen Nakashima, "Russian Military Was behind 'NotPetya' Cyberattack in Ukraine, CIA Concludes," *Washington Post*, January 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russian-military-was-behind-notpetya-cyberattack-in-ukraine-cia-concludes/2018/01/12/048d8506-f7ca-11e7-b34a-b85626af34ef_story.html; David Meyer, "Russia Blamed for 'Costliest Cyberattack in History," *Fortune*, February 16, 2018, http://fortune.com/2018/02/16/russia-notpetya-cyberattack-damage/.

[168] "'Russian Hackers' behind TV Attack," BBC News, sec. Europe, June 9, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33072034.

[169] Gordon Corera, "How France's TV5 Was Almost Destroyed by 'Russian Hackers,'" BBC News, sec. Technology, October 10, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-37590375.

[170] Kim Zetter, "Inside the Cunning, Unprecedented Hack of Ukraine's Power Grid," Wired, March 3, 2016, https://www.wired.com/2016/03/inside-cunning-unprecedented-hack-ukraines-power-grid; Marc Bennetts, "Fancy Bear, Voodoo Bear and Sandworm: Who Are the Russian Hackers?," *The Times*, sec. News, October 4, 2018, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cybertattak-fancy-bear-voodoo-bear-and-sandworm-who-are-the-russian-hackers-g5698hrwz.

Bundestag parliamentary system.[171] In light of the broad array of cyber-based disruptions it has been practicing and refining, it is clear the Kremlin has a new toolset to deploy strategically as a means to sow division, influence, or thwart communications during a critical event or time period, and disrupt the normal functioning of a foreign government. For example, Russian operatives could unleash a precise, narrowly targeted attack against a media network during an election cycle that could materially affect voters' ability to access information about a candidate or result, or a targeted attack on critical infrastructure in a given municipality that could cause chaos and disruption at polling locations and undermine the integrity of the outcome.

4. Relative Impunity

When confronted with the fact that more than a dozen GRU operatives were under criminal indictment in the United States for cyber-based election interference, Putin denied that the suspects worked for the Russian government, demanded the United States reveal its evidence, and bluntly swore that Russia would never cooperate with other nations' attempts to prosecute its hackers: "Never. Never. Russia does not extradite its citizens to anyone."[172] By always denying responsibility for cyberattacks and refusing to extradite or cooperate with investigations, the Kremlin has mostly escaped consequences for these intrusions thus far, which has allowed them to enjoy a measure of freedom to test and refine their capabilities. Similarly, the risk of prosecution for an army of citizens paid through proxies to create and amplify disinformation on social media and hide behind fake foreign personas is low due to the high volume of content and relative anonymity of its operatives. Any rival nation's attempt at in-kind retaliation would likely be thwarted by the Russian government's strict control of the internet within its borders, which allows it to block any

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[171] Bennetts; Patrick Beuth et al., "Cyberattack on the Bundestag: Merkel and the Fancy Bear," *Die Zeit*, sec. Digital, May 12, 2017, https://www.zeit.de/digital/2017-05/cyberattack-bundestag-angela-merkel-fancy-bear-hacker-russia#fancy-bear-cyber-attacks-info-2-tab; Nicole Perlroth and David E. Sanger, "Times's Moscow Bureau Hit by Attempted Hacking," *New York Times*, sec. Technology, August 24, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/technology/new-york-timess-moscow-bureau-was-targeted-by-hackers.html.

[172] Josh Lederman, "Putin: Russia Will 'Never' Extradite Citizens Accused by U.S.," *Associated Press*, sec. United States, March 4, 2018, https://apnews.com/article/c5180bffb84d424ba11cf3384a665eb5.

content it chooses swiftly.[173] Finally, Russia's support and cultivation of fringe parties and organizations in rival states in some cases may give it allies capable of thwarting investigations into its interference, vetoing penalties such as sanctions, and sponsoring or attacking legislation to suit the Kremlin's interests.[174] Taken in aggregate, it becomes clear that in the current environment, Moscow has a large array of well-honed interference tools and little to dissuade it from using them.

[173] Justin Sherman, "Russia Is Trying Something New to Isolate Its Internet from the Rest of the World," *Slate Magazine*, September 25, 2020, https://slate.com/technology/2020/09/russia-internet-encryption-protocol-ban.html; Justin Myles-Primakoff and Justin Sherman, "Russia's Internet Freedom Shrinks as Kremlin Seizes Control of Homegrown Tech," *Foreign Policy*, October 26, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/26/russia-internet-freedom-kremlin-tech/.

[174] Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right*, loc. 8682–8756.

III. ELECTION INTERFERENCE

This chapter focuses on a Russian interference attack type that may have the greatest potential for destructive, lasting impact: meddling and manipulation in the process of electing leaders in democratic societies. Russia's methods of foreign political interference were on full display in such pivotal world events as the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the "Brexit" referendum regarding Great Britain's membership in the EU, and other elections throughout Europe. Just as in Soviet times, some of the primary goals of this interference appear to include the weakening of Western rivals and alliances such as NATO, the promotion of leaders with favorable attitudes toward Moscow, attacks smearing politicians seen as hostile toward Russia, the deflection and denial of Russia's role in nefarious events, and the stoking of mistrust and division in Western societies.[175]

To understand U.S. vulnerability to Russian election interference and establish the plausibility of the threat, this chapter first details known instances of Soviet attempts to influence U.S. politicians and tilt the scales toward a Kremlin-favored outcome. Next, it analyzes the broad range of tools that Russia used in its bid to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Finally, this chapter explores other recent instances of Russian meddling in Western elections to identify tactics and efficacy further.

A. SOVIET MEDDLING IN U.S. ELECTIONS

During the Cold War, Moscow made overt offers to potential U.S. presidential candidates on multiple occasions by offering to help them defeat anti-Kremlin rivals in exchange for the expectation of friendly treatment. For example, John Bartlow Martin reported in 1977 that Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic Party candidate whose unsuccessful 1952 and 1956 campaigns included nuclear nonproliferation rhetoric that Kremlin officials

[175] Perkins, "Soviet Active Measures Reborn," 7–9; Galkins, "NATO and Hybrid Conflict Unresolved Issues from the Past or Unresolvable Threats of the Present"; Ramsay and Robertshaw, *Weaponising News*, 69–91.

saw as beneficial, reported one such overture.[176] According to Stevenson, Soviet ambassador Mikhail Menshikov set up a one-on-one meeting ahead of the 1960 presidential election to persuade him to run against sitting Vice President Richard Nixon.[177] To Stevenson's alarm, the ambassador offered to use the Soviet press to help him win election, in part by publishing either positive or critical stories about the campaign; whichever Stevenson thought would get him the most votes.[178]

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev later acknowledged that he continued to do everything in his power to prevent Nixon from winning the 1960 election, citing as motivation animosity following an infamously tense exchange between the two at an American technology exhibition the year before.[179] Aleksandr Feklisov, a Soviet spy serving as the KGB's Washington, DC, station chief during this time, later admitted to having been "instructed… to propose measures, diplomatic, propagandist, or other, to encourage [John F.] Kennedy's victory" and revealed that an agent had attempted to offer assistance to Kennedy's campaign against Nixon through his brother Robert F. Kennedy.[180]

Upon meeting President Kennedy for the first time after his victory, Khrushchev took credit for tipping the close race by bragging that he had weakened Nixon by refusing to release American pilots from Soviet captivity until after the election.[181] When Nixon again ran for president in 1968, Soviet intervention attempts were even more direct. Anatoly Dobrynin, Moscow's ambassador to the United States at the time, admitted

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[176] John Bartlow Martin, *Adlai Stevenson and the World: The Life of Adlai E. Stevenson* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977), 472; Bruce W. Dearstyne, "The Russians Tried Once before to Meddle in a U.S. Presidential Election," History News Network: George Washington University Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, December 29, 2016, https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/164769.

[177] David Shimer, *Rigged: America, Russia and One Hundred Years of Covert Electoral* Interference (New York: Knopf, 2020), 87–88.

[178] Shimer, 87–88.

[179] William Safire, "The Cold War's Hot Kitchen," *New York Times*, sec. Opinion, July 23, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/opinion/24safire.html.

[180] Vladislav Zubok and Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[181] Adam Taylor, "This Kremlin Leader Bragged about Tipping a U.S. Presidential Election," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/01/06/this-kremlin-leader-bragged-about-tipping-a-u-s-presidential-election/.

carrying out an order to offer campaign assistance secretly to Nixon's opponent Hubert Humphrey including financial aid.[182] Mitrokhin also notes that even after Nixon's resignation due to the Watergate scandal, then-KGB chairman Yuriy Andropov ordered his bureau to make overtures to officials in Nixon's administration—including speechwriter William Safire and eventual presidential candidate Pat Buchanan—in attempts to use them for the Soviet cause. In each case, the Americans refused the offers.[183]

Though most if not all U.S. politicians appear to have known better than to accept Soviet offers for aid, the practice may have still been of value to the KGB's active measures apparatus. Directly offering assistance to potential U.S. presidential candidates could have served multiple purposes: aside from providing the offered boost to the Kremlin's desired candidates, any accepted offer could have also served as leverage for blackmail or a foolproof way to ruin the acceptor's reputation should the relationship ever sour. In addition, any evidence that an offer of assistance was made, or that contact between foreign influence agents and anyone involved in a candidate's campaign or administration had taken place, could be used by that candidate's opponents or detractors. Opponents could use evidence of a Russian attempt to render aid to smear or slander the candidate as corrupt, even if the candidate rejected the offer. Additionally, if a credible suggestion that the Kremlin might have influenced a U.S. election or compromised a lawmaker were introduced in the American press or even leaked deliberately by Soviet agents, domestic and international belief in the legitimacy of elected leaders could be undermined, which would then lead to a constitutional crisis.

According to Mitrokhin's archives, the KGB launched a concerted effort to doom hawkish anti-Soviet Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson's presidential aspirations in 1976 by forging FBI documents falsely indicating that he was a homosexual (at a time when U.S. voters were seen as likely to reject such a candidate), and distributing them to his political rivals, as well as popular magazines in hopes that the rumor would catch on.[184] Though no

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[182] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962–1986)*, 1st ed. (New York: Times Books, Random House, 1995).

[183] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*.

[184] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 240.

evidence suggests these rumors played a significant role in derailing Jackson's presidential bid, the KGB continued attacking the Senator by disseminating forged documents regarding his sexual preferences more than a year after he ended his campaign.[185]

B. MODERN MEDDLING IN U.S. ELECTIONS

The initial years after the Soviet Union's collapse marked an apparent respite in concerted Russian attempts to influence the outcome of Western elections, but by the second decade of the twenty-first century, it became increasingly clear that the lull was over. Particularly since 2014, the concept and scope of Russian interference campaigns has become extremely well known in Western nations, even as Moscow issues repeated denials. Along with U.S. elections, allegations of Russian interference have surfaced in recent British, Bulgarian, German, French, Scottish, Spanish, and Ukrainian elections and referenda within a five-year period.[186] One of the largest and arguably most consequential Kremlin attempts to tip the scales for or against political candidates in recent years is the 2016 U.S. presidential election, in which a variety of mechanisms were allegedly deployed in support of candidate Donald Trump and against Putin foe Hillary Clinton. This section attempts to analyze the various subversive avenues Russia used in its attempt to sway the election, as well as a few others occurring in the same general timeframe, to include overt Russian media, social media, hacking theft, and other cyberattacks.

1. State-Run Media

In 2017, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence (DNI) released an interagency report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, which revealed that the

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[185] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 241.

[186] Narayanan et al., *Russian Involvement and Junk News during Brexit*; "Huge Hack Attack on Bulgaria Election Authorities 'Not to Affect Vote Count," Novinite Sofia News Agency, October 27, 2015, https://www.novinite.com/articles/171533/Huge+Hack+Attack+on+Bulgaria+Election+Authorities+%27Not+to+Affect+Vote+Count%27; Constanze Stelzenmüller, "The Impact of Russian Interference on Germany's 2017 Elections," Brookings, https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/the-impact-of-russian-interference-on-germanys-2017-elections/; "The Macron Leaks: Are They Real, and Is It Russia?," Lawfare, May 8, 2017, https://www.lawfareblog.com/macron-leaks-are-they-real-and-it-russia; Keeley, "Russia Meddled in Catalonia Independence Referendum"; Katya Gorchinskaya, Olga Rudenko, and William Schreiber, "Authorities: Hackers Foiled in Bid to Rig Ukraine Presidential Election Results," *Kyiv Post*, May 25, 2014, https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/may-25-presidential-election/authorities-hackers-foiled-in-bid-to-rig-ukraine-presidential-election-results-349288.html.

nation had used both overt and covert means to affect the outcome. This document extensively referenced state-owned media outlets RT and Sputnik and highlighted their role in attempting to tilt the previous year's U.S. presidential election in favor of Trump.[187] The report cites the Kremlin-backed media companies' frequent denigration of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and the U.S. presidential election process as a calculated, years-long program aimed specifically at damaging her electability. Russia's English-language media outlets are not only used to spread negative information, to be sure. These news networks also take advantage of their apparent legitimacy as news sources to boost coverage of events and political actors not widely covered by traditional media, and thus boost the candidates' profiles and expand their audiences. Far-left U.S. Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein, derided by many Democratic Party supporters as an unserious candidate whose presence on the ballot served primarily to split the liberal vote, and thus, to benefit Republicans, received outsized support and publicity from RT and Sputnik during the 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns.[188] Such support included a number of interviews and a primetime 2016-debate broadcast that allowed her to showcase her campaign platform.[189] Stein's enthusiastic appearance at a 2015 gala celebrating RT's 10th anniversary, along with her outspoken advocacy for such Kremlin obsessions as lifting Crimea-related sanctions and criticism of Ukraine, raised alarm in light of the DNI report.[190] Evidently suspicious of RT's outsized coverage of Stein, the U.S. Senate Investigative Committee in 2017 announced a probe of her campaign to look for evidence of illegal Russian support.[191] Stein denied any improper collusion with the Kremlin but

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[187] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessing Russian Activities*.

[188] Casey Michel, "The Pro-Kremlin Talking Points of Jill Stein," *ThinkProgress* (blog), December 19, 2017, https://archive.thinkprogress.org/jill-stein-campaign-russia-ecf424ac3b7e/; "'Atone!' Democrats Blame Jill Stein Voters for Trump's Chance to Appoint a 3rd Supreme Court Justice," RT, September 26, 2020, https://www.rt.com/usa/501803-jill-stein-bill-maher-supreme-court-trump/.

[189] "Green Party Candidates to Face Off in Debate Hosted by RT (Watch Live)," RT, May 9, 2016, https://www.rt.com/usa/342395-green-party-rt-debate/; "Jill Stein Offers Third Party Perspective on Final Debate," RT, October 20, 2016, https://www.rt.com/usa/363379-jill-stein-debates-live/.

[190] Robert Windrem, "Guess Who Came to Dinner with Flynn and Putin," NBC News, April 18, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/guess-who-came-dinner-flynn-putin-n742696.

[191] Robert Windrem, "Senate Russia Investigators Are Interested in Jill Stein," NBC News, December 19, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/why-are-senate-russia-investigators-interested-jill-stein-n831261.

initially resisted cooperating with the investigations, and at least two separate reports commissioned by the U.S. Senate found strong evidence of longstanding Russian support for her campaigns beginning soon after RT's launch.[192] Such support was not unprecedented, as RT had also frequently played host to former Republican congressman Ron Paul, one of Stein's 2012 presidential election opponents.[193] For his part, Paul, who conducted three combative, nontraditional populist presidential campaigns as a Libertarian and a Republican, has been described as one of the most outspoken defenders of Putin ever to have held U.S. federal office.[194] RT also provided significant support and airtime to former Minnesota governor and professional wrestler Jesse Ventura, an avid conspiracy theorist and U.S. government critic who occasionally announces exploratory presidential campaigns.[195]

Though not a candidate himself, U.S. Lieutenant General Michael Flynn was also frequently invited to appear as a guest speaker on RT to advocate for positions supported by the Kremlin.[196] A sharp critic of U.S. foreign policy since being ousted from his role as President Obama's Defense Intelligence Agency director, Flynn found a very receptive

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[192] To clarify, Stein denied any deliberate connection with Russia to benefit Trump or financial ties to the Kremlin, but did not deny her appearances on RT. Robert Windrem, "Russians Launched Pro-Jill Stein Social Media Blitz to Help Trump, Reports Say," NBC News, December 22, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/russians-launched-pro-jill-stein-social-media-blitz-help-trump-n951166; Molly Roberts, "Jill Stein Isn't Doing the Left Any Favors," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2018/05/02/jill-steins-attitude-toward-the-russia-investigation-isnt-doing-the-left-any-favors/.

[193] Lincoln Mitchell, "Ron Paul's Appearances on Kremlin TV Could Damage His Son's Presidential Aspirations," *Observer* (blog), November 17, 2014, https://observer.com/2014/11/ron-pauls-appearances-on-kremlin-tv-could-damage-his-sons-presidential-aspirations/.

[194] Lucia Graves, "Ron Paul Is Putin's New Best Friend," *The Atlantic*, July 21, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/07/ron-paul-is-putins-new-best-friend/439533/.

[195] Katie Mettler, "Jesse Ventura's New Russian State TV Show: 'I Am Working for the Enemy of Mainstream Media Now," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/08/jesse-venturas-new-russian-state-tv-show-i-am-working-for-the-enemy-of-mainstream-media-now/; "Jesse Ventura Considering Running for President, 'Trump Will Not Have a Chance!," TMZ, November 28, 2018, https://www.tmz.com/2018/11/28/jesse-ventura-running-president-trump-wrestlemania/.

[196] Windrem, "Guess Who."

audience for his criticisms in RT.[197] Flynn's acceptance of $45,000 from the network to give a speech at the same network gala Stein attended later played a role in his forced resignation as President Trump's National Security Advisor due to improper contacts with the Russian ambassador before Obama's term ended, along with a federal indictment and trial that dragged on for the entirety of Trump's presidency.[198]

2. Social Media

On the covert side of its operation, Russia's attempts to interfere in the 2016 U.S. election made extensive use of its internet troll and bot armies on U.S.-based social media platforms. Even as Western newspapers began to grapple with the trolls' invasion of online comments sections, such social media titans as Facebook and Twitter appeared clueless or unconcerned by contrast. Just after Trump's victory in November 2016, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg publicly scoffed at accusations that fake news on social media or foreign manipulation of the platform had any noteworthy impact, and insisted, "to think it influenced the election in any way is a pretty crazy idea."[199]

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[197] Rosalind S. Helderman and Tom Hamburger, "Trump Adviser Flynn Paid by Multiple Russia-Related Entities, New Records Show," *Washington Post*, sec. Politics, March 16, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/new-details-released-on-russia-related-payments-to-flynn-before-he-joined-trump-campaign/2017/03/16/52a4205a-0a55-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html.

[198] Mark Mazzetti and Matthew Rosenberg, "Michael Flynn Misled Pentagon about Russia Ties, Letter Says," *New York Times*, May 22, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/22/us/politics/michael-flynn-fifth-amendment-russia-senate.html; Robert Windrem, "Mike Flynn's RT Headache Won't Go Away," NBC News, April 27, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/mike-flynn-s-rt-headache-won-t-go-away-n752216.

[199] Shanika Gunaratna, "With Trump's Election, Facebook Wrestles with the Power of Fake News," CBS News, November 11, 2016, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/with-trumps-election-facebook-wrestles-with-broader-impact-of-fake-news/.

At the same time, however, Facebook offered to embed staff in both the Trump and Clinton campaigns to help them use company algorithms to tailor paid content to optimal audiences; the company was clearly confident that its advertising service could be used to influence voters.[200] Additionally, the social media giant accepted Russian rubles as payment from a company buying more than $100,000 worth of divisive U.S. political ads; thus, arguably, Facebook also knew or should have known that foreign entities were using the platform to attempt to exert their own influence on the election.[201] See Figure 1. To Facebook's credit, it evidently had alerted the FBI of anomalous domestic political activity originating from Russia that it had detected on its platform in June 2016. Unfortunately, the company misidentified the nature of the abnormal activity as relating to possible espionage rather than an election influence campaign, and thus missed an important early signal of the operation.[202]

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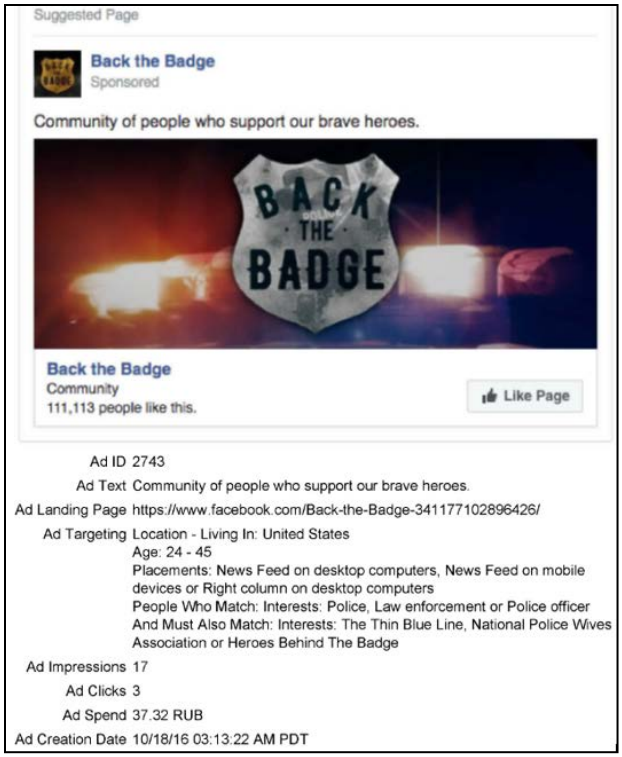
[200] Daniel Kreiss and Shannon C. McGregor, "Technology Firms Shape Political Communication: The Work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google with Campaigns during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Cycle," *Political Communication* 35, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 155–77, https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1364814.

[201] *Committee on the Judiciary, Extremist Content and Russian Disinformation Online: Working with Tech to Find Solution*, Senate, 105th Cong. 1st sess., 2017, https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/meetings/extremist-content-and-russian-disinformation-online-working-with-tech-to-find-solutions.

[202] Adam Entous, Elizabeth Dwoskin, and Craig Timberg, "Obama Tried to Give Zuckerberg a Wake-up Call over Fake News on Facebook," *Washington Post*, September 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/obama-tried-to-give-zuckerberg-a-wake-up-call-over-fake-news-on-facebook/2017/09/24/15d19b12-ddac-4ad5-ac6e-ef909e1c1284_story.html.



Targeted Facebook Advertisement identified as part of a Russian interference effort, paid for in Rubles and advertising a Russian-operated page sharing additional content.

Figure 1. Back the Badge Facebook Advertisement.[203]

Approximately one year after the election, Facebook executives were called to appear before the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding the role the platform unwittingly played in Russia's influence campaign. At this hearing, a company representative testified that internal analysis showed that Russian influence agents had reached 126 million unique users over a period of three years leading up to the 2016 election.[204] These figures included at least 3,517 advertisements purchased by the IRA as highly targeted sponsored content (e.g., paid posts seen only by a narrow audience fitting demographics specified by the advertiser). Much more of the volume came from the creation of interest-based groups and false American identities producing and sharing such free content as pop culture-based

[203] Source: Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Social Media Advertisements, 2016, Quarter 4, 2016-10: P(1)0005278," U.S. House of Representatives, accessed December 6, 2020, https://intelligence.house.gov/social-media-content/social-media-advertisements.htm.

[204] S., *Committee on the Judiciary*.

memes, however.[205] The campaign also exploited the company's subsidiary photo- and video-sharing site Instagram, which hosted at least 170 Russian interference-linked accounts and duplicated a number of the insidious ads purchased on Facebook.[206] Russia's disinformation was then amplified on both sites by unsuspecting Americans sharing and reposting the tainted content to even wider audiences.[207] See Figures 2 and 3. Content known or suspected to have come from coordinated Russian activity covered a wide range of election-adjacent topics, including but not limited to the following:

- promotion or attack of political policies
- commentary on social issues
- inflammatory religious imagery
- election logistics disinformation, such as false advertisements with phone numbers encouraging readers to text their votes rather than waiting in line at a polling location.[208]

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[205] A meme is a popular image or video, often humorous in nature, shared widely by Internet users. Nick Penzenstadler, Brad Heath, and Jessica Guynn, "We Read Every One of the 3,517 Facebook Ads Bought by Russians. Here's What We Found," *USA Today*, May 11, 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/05/11/what-we-found-facebook-ads-russians-accused-election-meddling/602319002/.

[206] Mike Isaac and Daisuke Wakabayashi, "Russian Influence Reached 126 Million through Facebook Alone," *New York Times*, sec. Technology, October 31, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/30/technology/facebook-google-russia.html.

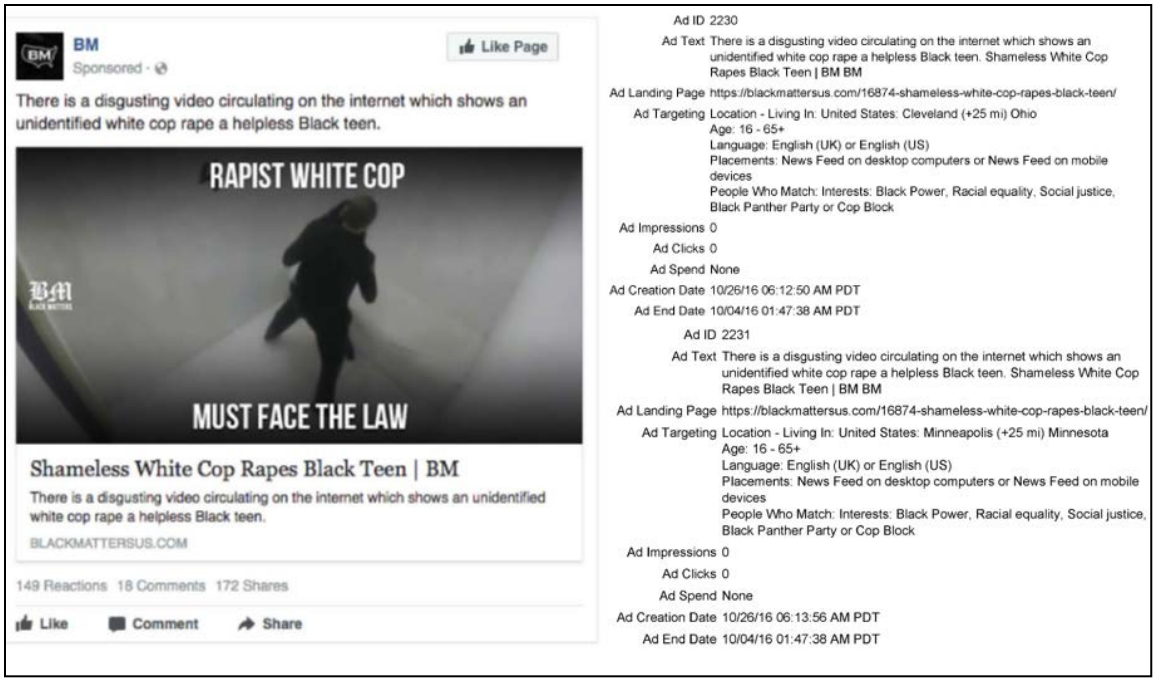
[207] Isaac and Wakabayashi.

[208] On a document for Congress showing a series of English and Spanish tweets encouraging Clinton supporters to vote via text or Twitter hashtag and/or falsely claiming that each voter would need to bring a birth certificate, "IL driving license record", naturalization certificate, social security card, government ID card AND a U.S. or foreign passport to vote, Twitter appended a disclaimer that they had not definitively attributed Russian origin to those particular ads, but attributed them to automated accounts. The House Intelligence Committee Minority subsequently released the document showing these tweets along with a comprehensive list or IRA Twitter account names and RT network's paid Twitter advertisements in a release titled: "Exposing Russia's Effort to Sow Discord Online: The Internet Research Agency and Advertisements," U.S. House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, accessed September 30, 2020, https://intelligence.house.gov/social-media-content/default.aspx; Penzenstadler, Heath, and Guynn, "Every One of the 3,517 Facebook Ads"; AnneClaire Stapleton, "No, You Can't Vote by Text Message," CNN, November 7, 2016, https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/07/politics/vote-by-text-message-fake-news/index.html.

Targeted Russian Facebook advertisement, paid in rubles, attempting to capitalize on social and political issues by promoting its "Stop All Invaders/Stop A.I." page in May 2016.

Figure 2. Stop A.I. (AKA Stop All Invaders) Facebook Advertisement.[209]

[209] Source: Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Social Media Advertisements, 2016, Quarter 2, 2016-05: P(1)0000410," U.S. House of Representatives, accessed December 6, 2020, https://intelligence.house.gov/social-media-content/social-media-advertisements.htm.



Russian Facebook advertisements using incendiary racial and social content to drive traffic to a fake Black social justice website operated by the IRA and narrowly targeted to Facebook users within 25 miles of Cleveland and Minneapolis, in the final weeks before the 2016 U.S. election. A Senate Intelligence Committee report found that "no single group of Americans was targeted by IRA information operatives more than African-Americans" and that two-thirds of IRA Facebook advertisements included words related to race; the report also illuminated efforts to dissuade African-Americans from voting in 2016, or to support Green Party candidate Jill Stein.

Figure 3. BM (AKA Black Matters) Facebook Advertisement.[210]

Exact figures on Kremlin-produced content are unattainable for a variety of reasons. Deleted or suspended accounts cannot always be recovered for review, definitively identifying the origin of every single well-produced fake profile is likely impossible, and distinguishing impersonators and amplifier accounts from authentic users is challenging. Nevertheless, a sense of the scope and breadth of Russia's operation can be gleaned from a review of statistics put forth by social media companies and investigative reports following the 2016 election.[211] At the same Senate Judiciary Committee hearing where

[210] Source: Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Social Media Advertisements, 2016, Quarter 4, 2016-10: P(1)0004496," U.S. House of Representatives, accessed December 6, 2020, https://intelligence.house.gov/social-media-content/social-media-advertisements.htm.

[211] Renee DiResta et al., *The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency* (Austin, TX: New Knowledge, 2018); Penzenstadler, Heath, and Guynn, "Every One of the 3,517 Facebook Ads"; S., *Committee on the Judiciary*.

Facebook disclosed its initial findings, Google admitted its streaming platform YouTube had been host to more than 43 hours of content across over 1,100 videos produced by suspected Russian interference agents. Google also shared that its AdSense online advertisement service had accepted more than $4,700 from the IRA to advertise on web pages and in search results.[212] In its turn at the same hearing, Twitter divulged the discovery of more than 2,700 IRA-affiliated accounts that had produced 130,000 tweets.[213]

Each of these platforms substantially raised the totals in subsequent reporting on Russian interference in the ensuing months and years as investigations continued. In October 2018, Twitter released more than nine million messages generated by 3,841 IRA-linked accounts.[214] Facebook later announced that it had deleted roughly 583 million fraudulent accounts and 837 million spam posts in the first quarter of 2018 alone, and that it believed that an additional four percent of its more than two billion active users were likely fake accounts that had gone undetected.[215] Though Russian interference was not likely responsible for every one of these fraudulent accounts, the sheer volume highlights the high degree of vulnerability of social platforms to misuse and illustrates the tremendous difficulty of detection and removal on so grand a scale.[216] Concurrently with Facebook and Twitter's announcements, such additional platforms as blog-hosting site Tumblr were found to have been exploited as well. After first reporting the suspension of 84 accounts that the company says "engaged in state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda campaigns" in March 2018 following months of media pressure, Tumblr added an additional 113 names to this list by mid-November.[217]

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[212] S.

[213] S.

[214] Twitter News Desk, "Twitter's Focus Is on a Healthy Public Conversation," *Elections Integrity* (blog), October 17, 2018, https://about.twitter.com/en_us/values/elections-integrity.html.

[215] Guy Rosen, "Facebook Publishes Enforcement Numbers for the First Time," *Facebook Newsroom* (blog), May 15, 2018, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/05/enforcement-numbers/.

[216] Rosen.

[217] Issie Lapowsky, "Tumblr IDs 84 Accounts that Spread Propaganda," Wired, March 23, 2018, https://www.wired.com/story/tumblr-russia-trolls-propaganda/; "Public Record of Usernames Linked to State-Sponsored Disinformation Campaigns," *Tumblr Help Center* (blog), November 16, 2018, http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360002280214-Public-record-of-usernames-linked-to-state-sponsored-disinformation-campaigns.

3. Microtargeting

One of the reasons Russia's 2016 social media influence campaign escaped mainstream scrutiny for as long as it did likely owed to its ability to tailor specific messages to different groups.[218] By partitioning the content, Russian actors ensured that only those likely to accept or appreciate a given message would even see it; indeed, the Senate Judiciary hearings into Russian social media influence campaigns indicated that much of the content was tailored and distributed to specific audiences.[219] While the trolls may have simply exploited publicly visible biographical and interest-based information on users' social media profile pages and user-generated content, they also may have capitalized on the availability of public records data in U.S. jurisdictions and thus extrapolated this data by using political or societal stereotypes.[220]

Worryingly, speculation abounded in the months after the 2016 election that Russia's targeted influence efforts may have also relied on criminally obtained information. One popular early theory was that Russian hackers might have stolen voter data by hacking the Democratic or Republican National Committee or even election commission offices.[221] Another incendiary accusation was that the Trump campaign might have provided information about voter rolls to the Russian operatives.[222] Though neither story was proven, the implication is terrifying; immense troves of data concerning potential voters exist in nearly all developed Western democracies. Much of this data is maintained

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[218] Filipe N. Ribeiro et al., "On Microtargeting Socially Divisive Ads: A Case Study of Russia-Linked Ad Campaigns on Facebook," in *Proceedings of the Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency—FAT* '19*, 140–49, January 29, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1145/3287560.3287580.

[219] S., *Committee on the Judiciary*.

[220] Robert E. Walker, "Combating Strategic Weapons of Influence on Social Media" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=828243.

[221] Violet Blue, "What If Russian Voter Hacks Were Just Part of Its Facebook Ad Campaign?," Engadget, October 6, 2017, https://www.engadget.com/2017-10-06-russian-voter-hacks-support-facebook-ad-campaign.html.

[222] Peter Stone and Greg Gordan, "Trump-Russia Investigators Probe Jared Kushner-Run Digital Operation," McClatchey DC Bureau, July 12, 2017, https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/article160803619.html; Issie Lapowsky, "Did Trump's Data Team Help Russians? Facebook Might Have the Answer," Wired, July 14, 2017, https://www.wired.com/story/trump-russia-data-parscale-facebook/; Martin Longman, "Did the Russians Mess with the Voter Rolls?," *Washington Monthly*, June 1, 2018, https://washingtonmonthly.com/2018/06/01/did-the-russians-mess-with-the-voter-rolls/.

by private entities outside the federal government's purview to protect or regulate.[223] Moreover, nearly all this data can be obtained through a variety of means, to include legitimate purchases, theft, espionage, or collusion with a compromised actor.

4. Hacking and Cyberattacks

One of the most widely known and consequential examples of Russia's use of cyberattacks to influence an election is the hacking, attributed to the GRU, of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Hillary Clinton campaign team members' emails around 2016. According to a July 2018 indictment filed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller against 12 GRU officers, the intelligence agency used a variety of techniques including spearfishing through spoofed Google security notification messages and Microsoft files.[224] Once inside the DNC's networks, they monitored staff activity, implanted malware, and stole additional documents. The intrusion was not wholly unnoticed, but it was not stopped. The FBI had alerted the DNC of suspicious Russian-based activity on their servers on multiple occasions beginning in September 2015, though miscommunications and insufficient technical scans within the DNC failed to act properly on these tips.[225]

In June 2016, the hackers used anonymous online personas called DCLeaks and Guccifer 2.0 to "leak" selectively and promote links to thousands of the emails and other documents to the public without revealing obvious Kremlin fingerprints. The hackers also appeared to partner with WikiLeaks, a renowned international trafficker of stolen

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[223] Stephen P. Mulligan, Wilson C. Freeman, and Chris D. Linebaugh, *Data Protection Law: An Overview*, CRS Report No. R45631 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), 79.

[224] *Department of Justice, Indictment: United States of America v. Viktor Borisovich Netyksho, Boris Alekseyevich Antonov, Dmitriy Sergeyevich Badin, Ivan Sergeyevich Yermakov, Aleksey Viktorovich Lukashev, Sergey Aleksandrovich Morganchev, Nikolay Yuryevich Kozachek, Pavel Vyacheslavovich Yershov, Artem Andreyevich Malyshev, Aleksandr Vladimirovich Osadchuk, Aleksey Aleksandrovich Potemkin, and Anatoliy Sergeyevich Kovalev, Defendants* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2018), https://www.justice.gov/file/1080281/download.

[225] Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*.

information and government secrets.[226] U.S. media outlets reported extensively on the contents of the emails each time a new batch was released, to damaging effect; a *Columbia Journalism Review* study conducted after the election argued that *The New York Times*' extreme focus on the hack and leak played an outsized role in costing Clinton the presidency.[227] Among other controversial issues, information in the emails revealed DNC chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz's apparent bias toward Clinton and disdain for her primary opponent Bernie Sanders.[228] This disclosure led to Wasserman Schultz's immediate resignation on the eve of the Democratic National Convention, as well as high tension between Sanders and Clinton supporters that overshadowed Clinton's nomination ceremony and potentially cost her some of the Sanders supporters' votes in the general election.[229]

Somewhat surprisingly, Moscow's scheme with the stolen emails was not entirely met with bipartisan condemnation, and may have even received some measure of tacit encouragement. In July 2016, Trump generated a scandal by publicly asking Russia to "find the 30,000 emails that are missing" from Clinton's server during a televised campaign speech, saying Moscow's hackers would "probably be rewarded mightily by our press" for doing so.[230] Occurring soon after public reports that intelligence officials believed Russia was behind the DNC server hack emerged, Trump's request was criticized by some as a literal entreaty to an adversarial foreign state to intervene on his behalf in the election via

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[226] *Committee on Intelligence, Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election Volume 5: Counterintelligence Threats and Vulnerabilities*, S. Rep. 116-XX, Senate, 116th Cong. 1st sess., 2020, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/report_volume5.pdf; Isikoff and Corn, 66.

[227] Duncan J. Watts and David M. Rothschild, "Don't Blame the Election on Fake News. Blame It on the Media," *Columbia Journalism Review*, December 5, 2017, https://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-media-election-trump.php.

[228] Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*, 130–131, 164–175; Alana Abramson and Shushannah Walshe, "The 4 Most Damaging Emails from the DNC WikiLeaks Dump," ABC News, July 25, 2016, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/damaging-emails-dnc-wikileaks-dump/story?id=40852448.

[229] Sean Illing, "Division and Tension at the DNC: The Democrats' Night of Unity Is Marred by Dissent," Salon, July 26, 2016, https://www.salon.com/2016/07/26/division_and_tension_at_the_dnc_the_democrats_night_of_unity_is_marred_by_dissent/.

[230] Ashley Parker and David E. Sanger, "Donald Trump Calls on Russia to Find Hillary Clinton's Missing Emails," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., July 27, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/28/us/politics/donald-trump-russia-clinton-emails.html.

illegal activity.[231] In 2017, reports emerged that Trump's son Donald Jr. and son-in-law Jared Kushner, along with Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort, had met with a Kremlin-linked Russian attorney offering damaging information about the Clintons the same week that documents stolen from the email hack were released.[232] To Trump's rage and dismay, his opponents seized on this meeting, along with inconsistent explanations of it from Trump and his legal advisors, to accuse his campaign of collusion with Russia in the hacking and influence campaign or at least inappropriate behavior in the face of improper offers of assistance from a top U.S. foe.[233]

Moscow's hacking efforts targeted not just communications and documents from political campaigns, but also attacked U.S. election infrastructure; a chilling escalation that has the potential to cause longer-term damage to democratic societies than the defeat of a single candidate. Two months before the 2016 election, U.S. voters were alarmed by reports that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had detected hacking attempts on the election systems of 21 states, with Russia as the likely culprit.[234] A month before that disclosure, the Illinois Board of Elections had already confirmed that its database of registered voters had been breached in what the FBI considered a sophisticated foreign

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[231] Parker and Sanger.

[232] Phillip Bump, "What We Know about the Trump Tower Meeting," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/08/07/what-we-know-about-the-trump-tower-meeting/; Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*.

[233] Further fanning the flames of collusion accusations was the revelation that major Trump campaign supporter Roger Stone had been in contact with WikiLeaks and seemed familiar with the contents of stolen emails before their release. Stone was later convicted on seven felony counts related to his obstruction of a Congressional inquiry into Russia's attempts to influence the election in favor of Trump, including lying under oath and attempting to block the testimony of other witnesses. Even if no actual coordination occurred between the Trump campaign and Russia with regard to stolen and leaked emails, these incidents at the very least illustrate how the DNC and the Clinton campaign hacking operation managed to cause problems for both candidates at different times, and contribute more generally to exacerbating mistrust and division among American voters. Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*, 74; Parker and Sanger, "Donald Trump Calls on Russia"; Sara Murray and Kate Sullivan, "Text Messages Show Roger Stone Discussing WikiLeaks Plans Days before Hack," CNN, November 26, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/14/politics/text-messages-roger-stone-wikileaks-hack/index.html; Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*; Sharon LaFraniere and Zach Montague, "Roger Stone Is Convicted of Impeding Investigators in a Bid to Protect Trump," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., November 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/15/us/politics/roger-stone-trial-guilty.html.

[234] Cynthia McFadden et al., "Red Alert? Hackers Target Election Systems in 20 States," NBC News, September 29, 2016, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/red-alert-election-systems-20-states-targeted-hackers-n657036.

attack.[235] In July 2018, the office of Special Counsel Mueller took action on these claims and announced an indictment charging that two GRU operatives probed websites and networks of counties in Georgia, Florida, and Iowa for back-end server vulnerabilities one week before the 2016 election.[236] In 2019, reports from the Senate Intelligence Committee, DHS, and FBI eventually acknowledged that Russia had actually attacked the election infrastructure of all 50 U.S. states in 2016, with a possible intent to use the fruits of these attacks at a later time.[237]

C. OTHER MODERN RUSSIAN EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE FOREIGN ELECTIONS

Such a multi-faceted and sophisticated blitz (e.g., support for preferred candidates, slander against opponents, media manipulation, internet trolls, cyberattacks, and other interference tactics) has troubled democratic elections across the world. In fact, the United States could have looked toward NATO partner Bulgaria's elections in 2015 and 2016 as a warning of the potential danger to come in its own election cycle. On the day of its local elections and referendum on future electronic voting in 2015, the networks of Bulgaria's Central Elections Commission and various government ministries were besieged by a DDoS attack.[238] Such assaults are commonly used to overwhelm sites and servers with automated connection requests to the point of a catastrophic crash. The Central Election Commission announced that it was confident that the integrity of the results remained intact despite the attack, but subsequent U.S. government and private sector analysis of the attack

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[235] Cynthia McFadden, William Arkin, and Kevin Monahan, "Russians Penetrated U.S. Voter Systems, Top Official Says," NBC News, February 7, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/russians-penetrated-u-s-voter-systems-says-top-u-s-n845721; Ellen Nakashima, "Russian Hackers Targeted Arizona Election System," *Washington Post*, July 29, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fbi-is-investigating-foreign-hacks-of-state-election-systems/2016/08/29/6e758ff4-6e00-11e6-8365-b19e428a975e_story.html.

[236] Department of Justice, Indictment: United States of America v. Viktor Borisovich Netyksho.

[237] *Select Committee on Intelligence, Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election Volume 1: Russian Efforts against Election Infrastructure with Additional Views*, S. Rep. 116-XX, Senate, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 2018, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume1.pdf.

[238] Novinite Sofia News Agency, "Huge Hack Attack on Bulgaria Election Authorities 'Not to Affect Vote Count.'"

accusing GRU as the culprit raised alarms about the extent of Russian influence campaigns.[239]

Ahead of the country's 2016 presidential election, multiple Bulgarian government officials reported that its national security service had intercepted an election strategy dossier produced by a Kremlin-linked Russian think tank and prepared for Bulgaria's Socialist Party.[240] Delivered by a Russian official sanctioned by the United States for spying, the document proposed the distribution of false polling data favoring the party's candidate and anti-NATO position to help the party win.[241] Polls predicting the Socialist Party candidate's victory and alleging that a majority of Bulgarians trusted Russia more than NATO had indeed mysteriously surfaced during the election campaign season.[242] The poll had been conducted by a mysterious Bulgarian company called Gallup International, which bore no relation to and was the target of a name-infringement lawsuit from renowned U.S.-based polling company Gallup Incorporated.[243] Per former Bulgarian ambassador to Russia, Ilian Vassilev, regarding the anti-NATO Gallup International report:

> This wrapped-in-secrecy poll had no details on methodology nor funding sources. Russian media strategists and their Bulgarian proxies used the Western name to fool people about its credibility and spread their message.[244]

Along with this assessment, Vassilev published a warning about Russia's use of RT, Sputnik, and various proxies to sway the Bulgarian vote and ultimately drive the nation out

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[239] Gordon Corera, "Bulgaria Warns of Russian Attempts to Divide Europe," BBC News, sec. Europe, November 4, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37867591.

[240] Joe Parkinson and Georgi Kantchev, "Document: Russia Uses Rigged Polls, Fake News to Sway Foreign Elections," *Wall Street Journal*, sec. World, March 23, 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-does-russia-meddle-in-elections-look-at-bulgaria-1490282352.

[241] Parkinson and Kantchev.

[242] Parkinson and Kantchev.

[243] Parkinson and Kantchev.

[244] Ilian Vassilev, "Thinking the Unthinkable—Bulgaria's Silent Exit from NATO and the EU," *Bulgaria Analytica* (blog), February 28, 2017, https://bulgariaanalytica.org/en/2017/02/28/thinking-the-unthinkable-bulgarias-silent-exit-from-nato-and-the-eu/.

of NATO.[245] In the end, the Socialist Party's preferred candidate, Rumen Radev, won the election and became president.[246]

The attack on Bulgaria's elections system was not unprecedented, as Russia had allegedly attempted the same in Ukraine one year prior during its 2014 presidential and parliamentary elections. Days before the election, self-proclaimed Russian "hacktivists" hacked the Central Election Commission's website in an effort to publish false information declaring a well-known far-right extremist as the election winner.[247] Not long after this came to light, the head of Ukraine's SBU security service announced two days before the election that a virus meant to destroy election results had been detected and removed from its Central Election Center services.[248]

At the same time Bulgaria and the United States endured Russian election interference campaigns, yet another NATO country found itself in the Kremlin's crosshairs. French National Rally candidate Marine Le Pen's 2016–2017 presidential campaign benefited from $13 million in loans from a Moscow bank, likely approved and quite possibly directed by the Kremlin.[249] This substantial funding was seen as vital to keeping the once-fringe candidate's campaign afloat, and helped her achieve a shocking second-place finish. During a highly publicized meeting between Le Pen and Putin ahead of the election, the Russian leader appeared to be trying hard not to smile as he ominously stated that "of course" Russia did not want to meddle in the French election.[250] Such outside support has been critical to National Rally's survival as French and other Western banks

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[245] Vassilev.

[246] Reuters Staff, "Socialist Ally Rumen Radev Wins Bulgaria Presidency: Exit Polls," *Reuters*, November 13, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-election-exitpoll-idUSKBN1380Q7.

[247] Andy Greenberg, "Russia's Cyberwar on Ukraine Is a Blueprint for What's to Come," Wired, June 20, 2017, https://www.wired.com/story/russian-hackers-attack-ukraine/.

[248] "SBU likviduvala virus, shcho mav znyshchyty rezul'taty vyboriv [SBU eliminates virus that was meant to destroy election results]," Ukrayins'ka Pravda [Ukrainian Truth], May 23, 2014, https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/05/23/7026217/; Gorchinskaya, Rudenko and Schreiber, "Authorities: Hackers Foiled."

[249] At the time of the 2016–2017 election, National Rally was called "National Front." Henry Samuel, "Marine Le Pen's Links to Russia under U.S. Scrutiny," *The Telegraph*, December 21, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/21/marine-le-pens-russian-links-us-scrutiny/.

[250] Gabriel Gatehouse, "Who's Funding France's Far Right?," BBC News, sec. Europe, April 3, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39478066.

had refused to finance a party seen by many as racist and xenophobic.[251] A BBC report citing hacked emails and conversations with multiple Le Pen associates heavily suggested prior clandestine meetings between Le Pen and Putin and detailed her intended role in legitimizing Russia's Crimea annexation.[252] It should be noted that financial support offered by Russia is often obscured through intermediaries for plausible deniability, and that support need not be explicitly monetary.[253] Hungary's Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute opined in 2014 that in exchange for fealty to the Kremlin, parties are given "valuable professional, organizational and media assistance, i.e., access to networks and political know-how."[254]

During France's 2017 presidential election, Russia's state-run Sputnik news agency published false reports that François Fillon had overtaken Emmanuel Macron as Le Pen's strongest challenger.[255] At minimum, the ploy seemed geared to ensure that her opponent in a potential runoff round would be Filion—another Russia-friendly, NATO-criticizing candidate—rather than Kremlin skeptic Macron.[256] Russian foreign media relentlessly attacked and smeared Macron throughout France's election season with a wide variety of topics and tactics.[257] Sputnik and other Russian media outlets published baseless

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[251] Paul Sonne, "A Russian Bank Gave Marine Le Pen's Party a Loan. Then Weird Things Began Happening," *Washington Post*, December 27, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-russian-bank-gave-marine-le-pens-party-a-loan-then-weird-things-began-happening/2018/12/27/960c7906-d320-11e8-a275-81c671a50422_story.html.

[252] Gatehouse, "Who's Funding France's Far Right?"

[253] Political Capital Institute, *The Russian Connection*.

[254] Political Capital Institute.

[255] Richard Balmforth and Michael Rose, "French Polling Watchdog Warns over Russian News Agency's Election Report," *Reuters*, April 3, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-russia-idUSKBN1740JG.

[256] "France Warns Russia against Meddling in Presidential Election," Deutsche Welle, February 16, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/france-warns-russia-against-meddling-in-presidential-election/a-37572358.

[257] Adam Plowright, "France and Macron Have Buried Allegations of Russian Meddling," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/05/23/france-and-macron-have-buried-allegations-of-russian-meddling/.

accusations that Macron was homosexual, mentally ill, and financially supported by a mysterious and powerful "gay lobby."[258]

The Kremlin also repeated the hack-and-leak stunt it used against the Clinton campaign during its interference in France's presidential election, albeit with diminished success. Two days before the 2017 presidential election runoff between Le Pen and Macron, nine gigabytes of data stolen from the Macron campaign including 21,075 emails were posted to the internet and promoted on social media by a large network of automated accounts, as well as WikiLeaks.[259] Disturbingly, the stolen Macron emails were purportedly mixed with falsified documents attempting to frame him for fraud; a trick that seems difficult for readers to discern or investigators to prove, given the illicit nature of the genuine documents' theft and release.[260] Bolstering the theory that Russia had altered the emails, a report from the University of Toronto released that same month revealed similar tactics used by the GRU against journalist and Putin critic David Satter, whose stolen emails were deliberately modified in an effort to smear Putin critic Aleksei Navalny.[261] Such tactics represent a perhaps overlooked element of danger to hacked and stolen documents; they can be used as cover to add legitimacy to forgeries that thus put a digital twist on an age-old KGB dezinformatsiya trick.

Possibly due to its mistimed release within the mandatory media blackout period of French eve-of-voting "election silence" laws, or perhaps because voters had already made

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[258] "Ex-French Economy Minister Macron Could Be 'U.S. Agent' Lobbying Banks' Interests," *Sputnik International*, February 4, 2017, https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201702041050340451-macron-us-agent-dhuicq/; Darya Aslamova, "Vybory vo Franci: Oni zasluzhili Macrona [Elections in France: They deserve Macron]," Komsomolskaya Pravda [Komsomol Truth], May 7, 2017, https://www.kp.ru/daily/26676.7/3698458/.

[259] Eric Auchard and Bate Felix, "French Candidate Macron Claims Massive Hack as Emails Leaked," *Reuters*, May 6, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-macron-leaks-idUSKBN1812AZ; Richard Lough, Eric Auchard, and Ingrid Melander, "WikiLeaks Publishes Searchable Archive of Macron Campaign Emails," *Reuters*, July 31, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-politics-wikileaks-idUSKBN1AG1TZ.

[260] Rachel Donadio, "Why the Macron Hacking Attack Landed with a Thud in France," *New York Times*, sec. World, December 22, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/08/world/europe/macron-hacking-attack-france.html; Andy Greenberg, "Hacked Macron Emails Leak Online Ahead of French Presidential Runoff Election," Wired, May 5, 2017, https://www.wired.com/2017/05/macron-email-hack-french-election/.

[261] Brewster, "Russian 'Fancy Bear' Hackers Tainted Their Huge Leaks with Fake Data."

up their minds or were wary of email leaks after the recent Clinton hacking debacle, the episode seemingly had no major effect on the election result.[262] Though Russia denied responsibility, an analysis conducted by cybersecurity company Flashpoint attributed the attack to the GRU.[263] This finding supported an earlier Trend Micro report warning of Russian phishing attempts against Macron and his campaign.[264] On October 19, 2020, the U.S. Justice Department unsealed indictments against six GRU officers for their roles in "spearphishing" hacks against Macron and his party, along with other cyberattacks including NotPetya, the Ukraine cyber grid disruption, and a 2018 Winter Olympic Games cyberintrusion.[265]

These European countries' recent experiences with Russian election interference contain many of the same elements the United States was subjected to in 2014: disinformation, media manipulation, leak of stolen documents, forgeries, support for fringe candidates, and even attacks on election infrastructure. The diversity, frequency, and broad range of Kremlin efforts to intervene in its rivals' electoral affairs, along with the obvious harm manipulating the outcome of a country's democratic process can cause in the short and long term, illustrate that election interference may be the most potent and dangerous of Russia's covert influence tactics.

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[262] Michelle Caruso-Cabrera, "France's Election Laws Mean near Silence on Massive Campaign Hack," CNBC News, May 6, 2017, https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/06/frances-election-laws-mean-near-silence-on-massive-campaign-hack.html.

[263] Patrick Howell O'Neill, "Researchers Link Macron Hack to APT28 with 'Moderate Confidence," Cyberscoop, May 11, 2017, https://www.cyberscoop.com/researchers-link-macron-hack-to-apt28-with-moderate-confidence/.

[264] Felix Hacquebord, "Two Years of Pawn Storm: Examining an Increasingly Relevant Threat," Trend Micro TrendLabs, April 25, 2017, https://www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/us/security/news/cyber-attacks/espionage-cyber-propaganda-two-years-of-pawn-storm.

[265] *Department of Justice, Indictment: United States of America v. Yuriy Sergeyevich Andrienko, Sergey Vladimirovich Detistov, Pavel Valeryevich Frolov, Anatoliy Sergeyevich Kovalev, Artem Valaryevich Ochichenko, and Petr Nikolayevich Pliskin, Defendants* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2020), https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/russian-cyberattacks-indictments/144ea8fe6680730c/full.pdf.

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IV. FALLOUT AND VULNERABILITIES

This chapter explores a range of vulnerabilities and possible consequences faced by the U.S. should such attacks on elections succeed. To do so, this chapter explores several examples of fallout from Russia's efforts against the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Though the Special Counsel finding and myriad intelligence reports definitively point to deliberate Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election in support of a Trump victory, assessing the operation's effect on the outcome is necessarily an inexact science. While it is impossible to know, for example, how many voters would have chosen Clinton rather than Trump, Stein, or another option had it not been for encounters with Russian disinformation or the leaked email controversy specifically, it is not difficult to trace clear examples of damage to the Kremlin plot.

One obvious consequence of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election was reputational harm for candidates and their surrogates. For one, the email leaks had a demonstrable effect on the DNC when Wasserman Schultz resigned as chairwoman due to the content of her exposed conversations.[266] Media coverage and public perception in light of the strategically damaging leaks was undeniably negative for Clinton as she sought to win over undecided and reluctant voters. Trump, his family, and his campaign team all clearly viewed coverage of the Trump Tower meeting and other allegations of the campaign's ties to Russia as unpalatable, given their efforts to deny accusations and shut down the Special Counsel investigation. Jill Stein, too, bristled at accusations that her campaign had been supported by Russia once the investigations of interference triggered additional scrutiny of her warm relationship with RT.[267] It is clear, however, that reputational harm from the fallout of Moscow's meddling extended far beyond that of

[266] Anne Gearan, Philip Rucker, and Abby Phillip, "DNC Chairwoman Will Resign in Aftermath of Committee Email Controversy," *Washington Post*, sec. Politics, July 24, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hacked-emails-cast-doubt-on-hopes-for-party-unity-at-democratic-convention/2016/07/24/a446c260-51a9-11e6-b7de-dfe509430c39_story.html.

[267] Martin Johnson, "Jill Stein: 'I Am Not a Russian Spy," The Hill, October 19, 2019, https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/466594-jill-stein-i-am-not-a-russian-spy.

political candidates and their campaign associates, likely to an extent that surprised even the leaders of the malign influence operations.

Another example of how the ever-present possibility of Moscow meddling can lead to confusion and controversy occurred in October 2019, when a quote by Hillary Clinton warning that Russia was likely "grooming" a third-party disrupter like Stein to help defeat the 2020 Democratic candidate made waves in the media.[268] Many U.S. news outlets reported that Clinton had accused 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard of being a Russian asset, which then prompted a public feud between the two that led other 2020 Democratic candidates to take sides amid a small rift within the party.[269] Such organizations as the Alliance for Securing Democracy reported that Gabbard received outsized coverage on RT and that "bot-like activity" periodically boosts her profile on social media.[270] This finding raised several alarming possibilities, including that Russia could have either been boosting Gabbard as Clinton insinuated, or that it could be framing her as a distraction or a form of campaign-sinking slander. Even if the accusation could be proved false, this incident could nevertheless illustrate how the specter of Russian interference can be weaponized against a candidate and contribute to division without Russia even having to take action. This incident—and its knock-on effects—were only possible because of successful Russian influence operations and the effect it had on U.S. voters' perceptions.

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[268] Glenn Kessler, "Tulsi Gabbard Misquotes Hillary Clinton's Jab at Her," *Washington Post*, October 31, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/10/31/tulsi-gabbard-misquotes-hillary-clintons-jab-her/.

[269] Nicholas Wu, "What's the Dispute between Hillary Clinton and Tulsi Gabbard about?," *USA Today*, October 24, 2019, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2019/10/24/what-feud-between-tulsi-gabbard-and-hillary-clinton-about/4082268002/; Benjamin Fearnow, "Timeline of the Tulsi Gabbard, Hillary Clinton Spat: Why the Two Democrats Fought," *Newsweek*, November 20, 2019, https://www.newsweek.com/timeline-tulsi-gabbard-hillary-clinton-russian-asset-spat-why-two-democrats-fought-1473084.

[270] Lisa Lerer, "What, Exactly, Is Tulsi Gabbard up to?," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., October 12, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/12/us/politics/tulsi-gabbard.html.

Notably, Gabbard, Stein, and Trump have all publicly labeled criticism of their seemingly pro-Russia policies and associations as "McCarthyist."[271] McCarthyism describes a period of time in which the U.S. government subjected thousands of its own citizens to loyalty tests, harsh investigations, and accusations of treason in service of the Soviet Union.[272] Though Soviet espionage undeniably posed a threat at the time, this period is generally regarded negatively due to government overreach, baseless political persecutions, and exaggerated fears of communist influence.[273] Today, RT journalists repeatedly publish articles decrying "McCarthyism's return" in an effort to protest mounting restrictions against their operation in Western countries.[274] Such disingenuous protests are reminiscent of Kim Philby, the notorious London *Times* journalist and Soviet double agent within British intelligence services who provided Moscow with top-secret communications between U.S. and British operatives in the CIA and MI6. Philby claimed to be an innocent victim of McCarthyist slander when his cover began to be blown, and used the success of his disingenuous protest to prolong his espionage for a time.[275] Though erroneously exonerated of the accusations, Philby did resign from his position at MI6 amid ongoing speculation; though he continued work as a journalist, his value to the Kremlin

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[271] Jill Stein, "Hillary Clinton Called Me a 'Russian Asset.' The Establishment Is Losing Its Grip," *The Guardian*, sec. Opinion, October 24, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/24/hillary-clinton-called-me-a-russian-asset-the-establishment-is-losing-their-grip; Tulsi Gabbard, "Stand with Tulsi against Clinton's new McCarthyism and warmongering," Facebook, October 21, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/TulsiGabbard/posts/2622169801172756; David Jackson and Kevin Johnson, "President Trump Accuses Special Counsel Robert Mueller of McCarthyism, Trying to Coerce Witnesses," *USA Today*, November 28, 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/11/28/donald-trump-robert-mueller-mccarthy/2135863002/.

[272] Ellen Schrecker, "McCarthyism: Political Repression and the Fear of Communism," *Social Research* 71, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 1041–86.

[273] Schrecker.

[274] Bryan McDonald, "McCarthyism 2.0: Real Skill of U.S. 'Disinformation Experts' Is Spreading Disinformation," RT International, August 1, 2018, https://www.rt.com/op-ed/434846-twitter-russia-disinformation-mccarthyism/; Earl Rasmussen, "How the U.S. Stifles Free Speech: Reviving McCarthyism & Nurturing Orwellian Society," RT International, May 10, 2018, https://www.rt.com/op-ed/426351-us-free-speech-mccarthyism/.

[275] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 160.

was greatly diminished. Eventually outed by a Soviet defector, Philby ultimately defected himself, but received a cooler-than-anticipated reception in the Soviet Union.[276]

Ultimately, the 2016 U.S. election influence campaign paid more dividends than even Russia likely expected. One likely unplanned windfall of the DNC and Clinton campaign hacking operation for Moscow is that the U.S. response to the attack managed to entangle the FBI, long a target of Soviet *dezinformatsiya* smear campaigns, in extreme controversy that tarnished its reputation among a significant portion of the U.S. population. The Clinton email leaks added fuel to an ongoing, unrelated scandal regarding her improper use of a private email server for official business during her tenure as Secretary of State, as it hinted the possibility of security breaches with classified information.[277] This development put FBI director James Comey in a bind as he struggled to decide what the bureau should and should not disclose to the public about both the private server investigation and the DNC hack investigation, because he feared any disclosures could imply or reveal improper conduct by a presidential candidate and thus potentially impact voters' choices.[278] Comey's decisions on these matters led many Democrats to accuse him

[276] Andrew and Mitrokhin, 415.

[277] Washington Post Staff, "Read the Full Testimony of FBI Director James Comey in Which He Discusses Clinton Email Investigation," *Washington Post*, May 3, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/03/read-the-full-testimony-of-fbi-director-james-comey-in-which-he-discusses-clinton-email-investigation/; Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*.

[278] Washington Post Staff.

of demonstrating undue bias against Clinton and deliberately swinging the election for Trump.[279]

Notably, Comey's decisions were said to have been influenced by another facet of Russian interference and disinformation: the FBI's discovery of a suspicious Russian intelligence document alleging that Attorney General Loretta Lynch had pre-emptively reassured Clinton's team that the server investigation would tread softly.[280] This document involved purported but possibly fabricated emails involving Lynch and Wasserman Schultz.[281] Though the bureau's own analysis concluded that the report was unreliable and possibly deliberately manufactured to fluster U.S. intelligence agencies, its existence helped persuade Comey that a public explanation was needed as a defensive measure against future accusations of corruption.[282]

Unfortunately, for the FBI, Trump, along with many of his supporters, came to view Comey as biased against *him* due to the bureau's further investigation into Russian interference after the election, as it implied that Trump's narrow victory might have been

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[279] James B. Comey, "Statement by FBI Director James B. Comey on the Investigation of Secretary Hillary Clinton's Use of a Personal E-Mail System," Press Release, Federal Bureau of Investigation, July 5, 2016, https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/statement-by-fbi-director-james-b-comey-on-the-investigation-of-secretary-hillary-clinton2019s-use-of-a-personal-e-mail-system; Eamon Javers, "FBI's Comey Opposed Naming Russians, Citing Election Timing: Source," CNBC News, October 31, 2016, https://www.cnbc.com/2016/10/31/fbis-comey-opposed-naming-russians-citing-election-timing-source.html; James B. Comey, *A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies, and Leadership*, 1st ed. (New York: Flatiron Books, 2018); Joseph Tanfani, "Comey Strongly Defends Decision to Reopen FBI Probe into Clinton Emails 11 Days before the Election," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/politics/washington/la-na-essential-washington-updates-comey-says-the-late-disclosure-of-1493824301-htmlstory.html; Adrienne Shih, "FBI Director James Comey: 'You Can Call Us Wrong, But Don't Call Us Weasels," CNN, September 26, 2016, https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/28/politics/james-comey-congress-hearing-weasel/index.html; Eric Tucker and Chad Day, "Watchdog Finds Comey 'Insubordinate,' Not Biased in Clinton Email Investigation," *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 2018, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-clinton-email-case-20180613-story.html.

[280] Karoun Demirjian and Devlin Barrett, "How a Dubious Russian Document Influenced the FBI's Handling of the Clinton Probe," *Washington Post*, May 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-a-dubious-russian-document-influenced-the-fbis-handling-of-the-clinton-probe/2017/05/24/f375c07c-3a95-11e7-9e48-c4f199710b69_story.html.

[281] Demirjian and Barrett.

[282] Demirjian and Barrett.

assisted by a top rival state.[283] Trump also complained throughout his presidency that Comey and a cabal of "deep state" actors within the DOJ and FBI had engaged in illegal spying activity against his campaign to prevent or end his presidency.[284] Post-election polling indicates that the bureau experienced a loss of trust from both Congress and a significant portion of the U.S. population immediately following these episodes.[285] A 2018 poll conducted by Penn State University found that since this episode, voters who lean Republican or independent trusted the FBI less than half the time, and that less than half of Americans believed that "most FBI agents enforce the law fairly."[286]

Other U.S. government intelligence agencies suffered from the fallout from Russia's election interference as well. The DNI released a declassified joint CIA, National Security Agency (NSA), and FBI report two months after the 2016 election, which unequivocally accused the Kremlin of meddling in the election to Trump's benefit:

> Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. 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… Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him…Moscow's influence campaign followed a Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by

[283] Eric Tucker, "The Comey Firing, As Retold by the Mueller Report," *Associated Press*, sec. Criminal investigations, April 23, 2019, https://apnews.com/article/4ff1ecb621884a728b25e62661257ef0; Mary Claire Jalonick, "Comey Faces off with GOP over Clinton Emails, Alleged Bias," *Associated Press*, December 7, 2018, https://apnews.com/article/734284dd1aa746c19bf209770ae1ce54.

[284] Eric Tucker and Jonathan Lemire, "Trump, GOP Launch Broad Attack on Russia Probe Foundations," *Associated Press*, May 13, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/ebcd45c5d89ac3cf8cc61ed3d6e1ac1a; Patricia Zengerle and Warren Strobel, "FBI Head Denies Trump Wiretap Claim, Confirms Russia Election Probe," *Reuters*, March 20, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-trump-russia-idUSL2N1GX1L8.

[285] Douglas M. Charles, "Trump and Nunes Torch Tradition of Trust between Congress and FBI," The Conversation, February 3, 2018, http://theconversation.com/trump-and-nunes-torch-tradition-of-trust-between-congress-and-fbi-91140; Kyle Cheney, "Comey Offers to Testify in Public about GOP's FBI Bias Claims," *Politico*, October 1, 2018, https://politi.co/2DK4Aj9.

[286] Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer, "Mood of the Nation Poll: Republicans No Longer Trust the FBI," *The McCourtney Institute for Democracy*, February 20, 2018, 8.

> Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third party intermediaries, and paid social media users or "trolls."[287]

Upset that it undermined the degree or legitimacy of his victory, Trump forcefully rejected the report's finding even before it was published.[288] In December 2016, he issued a derisive rebuttal to the CIA's reported findings that starkly undermined his own intelligence agency's credibility, "These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction."[289]

Siding with a principal U.S. adversary over his own intelligence community, Trump repeatedly insisted that he believed Putin's denials about responsibility for the hack.[290] On multiple occasions, Trump also suggested that the operation could have been the work of China, other countries, a morbidly obese domestic hacker, or even the DNC itself as a distraction from Clinton's private server scandal.[291] The public spat touched off lasting friction between Trump and the intelligence agencies, particularly once Trump expressed public disdain for the Special Counsel investigation and sought a one-on-one meeting with Putin without alerting or consulting the DNI.[292]

The outgoing administration struggled to respond appropriately to the Clinton email release operation as it unfolded. President Obama initially chose to tread lightly and sought

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[287] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessing Russian Activities*.

[288] David Nakamura and Greg Miller, "Trump, CIA on Collision Course over Russia's Role in U.S. Election," *Washington Post*, December 10, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-cia-on-collision-course-over-russias-role-in-us-election/2016/12/10/ad01556c-bf01-11e6-91ee-1adddfe36cbe_story.html.

[289] Nakamura and Miller.

[290] Erica R. Hendry, "The Many Different Ways Trump Has Described Putin and Russian Election Interference," PBS NewsHour, July 16, 2018, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-many-different-ways-trump-has-described-putin-and-russian-election-interference.

[291] Krishnadev Calamur, "Some of the People Trump Has Blamed for Russia's 2016 Election Hack," *The Atlantic*, July 18, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/07/trump-russia-hack/565445/.

[292] Matthew Rosenberg, "U.S. Intelligence Community Reacts with Fury to Trump's Rebuke," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., July 17, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/16/us/politics/us-intel-community-reacts-with-fury-to-trumps-rebuke.html; David Priess, "The 'Time of Troubles' Is Back for America's Spies," *Foreign Policy*, July 26, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/26/the-time-of-troubles-is-back-for-americas-intelligence-community/.

to avoid appearing to aid Clinton's chances of victory.[293] Later deciding to alert the public of Russia's hand in election manipulation, Obama found himself thwarted by Mitch McConnell, the Republican Senate Majority Leader.[294] McConnell espoused skepticism of the available intelligence and refused to cooperate in a joint warning about election interference.[295] DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson's offer to provide state election officials with federal cybersecurity assistance was similarly thwarted by incidents such as Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp accusing the Obama administration of "a politically calculated move" and refusing to cooperate lest the Democratic administration seek to use the situation to aid its party's candidates in some way.[296]

The Obama administration's eventual punitive response—the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats and the closure of two Russian embassy compounds—resulted in further collateral damage to the credibility of certain U.S. government officials when curiosity regarding Russia's uncharacteristic restraint from retaliation later ensnared two members of Trump's cabinet in scandals.[297] Mike Flynn, Trump's National Security Advisor, was found to have engaged in, and lied to the FBI and administration officials about, undisclosed conversations with Russia's ambassador to the United States before Trump took office, along with other omissions such as failing to report a $45,000 payment for his speech at the RT gala referenced earlier.[298] These findings led to Flynn's swift departure from Trump's cabinet, which sparked investigations surrounding his alleged service as an

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[293] Greg Miller, Ellen Nakashima, and Adam Entous, "Obama's Secret Struggle to Punish Russia for Putin's Election Assault," *Washington Post*, June 23, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/world/national-security/obama-putin-election-hacking/; Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*.

[294] Miller, Nakashima, and Entous.

[295] Miller, Nakashima, and Entous.

[296] Miller, Nakashima, and Entous.

[297] Devlin Barrett and Greg Miller, "Transcripts of Calls between Flynn, Russian Diplomat Show They Discussed Sanctions," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/transcripts-of-calls-between-flynn-russian-diplomat-show-they-discussed-sanctions/2020/05/29/cc3d29c6-a1f0-11ea-b5c9-570a91917d8d_story.html.

[298] Barrett and Miller.

undisclosed foreign agent and potential violations of the U.S. Constitution's Foreign Emoluments Clause, and eventually drew indictments and a guilty plea from Flynn.[299]

Attorney General Jeff Sessions was also embroiled in controversy over his own initially undisclosed contacts with the Russian ambassador prior to Trump's inauguration, when Sessions was a U.S. senator.[300] Amid calls for his resignation from Senate Democrats who felt he had misled them by failing to inform them of these contacts, Sessions swiftly recused himself from any DOJ investigations regarding Russian election interference.[301] Sessions' recusal led to the appointment of a Special Counsel investigation led by former FBI Director Robert Mueller, which infuriated Trump and ultimately led to Sessions's forced departure.[302]

Furious at accusations that his campaign had colluded with Russia, Trump sought to discredit the Special Counsel investigation throughout its duration by decrying it as a witch hunt and accusing Mueller and his team of being "angry Democrats" and "Trump haters" with a partisan agenda to sabotage him.[303] The investigation ultimately led to, among other things, 14 referrals of criminal matters to the DOJ, 37 indictments, and a report finding "numerous links between the Russian government and the Trump campaign"

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[299] "Cummings Releases New Documents Confirming That Flynn Received Funds from Instrument of Russian Government," House Committee on Oversight and Reform, March 16, 2017, https://oversight.house.gov/news/press-releases/cummings-releases-new-documents-confirming-that-flynn-received-funds-from; *Indictment: United States of America v. Michael T. Flynn, Defendant*, Case 1:17-cr-00232-RC 1 (D.D.C. 2017), https://www.justice.gov/file/1015126/download.

[300] Isikoff and Corn, *Russian Roulette*; Michael A. Memoli, "Trump National Security Advisor Michael Flynn Resigns over Contacts with Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-flynn-20170213-story.html.

[301] Mark Landler and Eric Lichtblau, "Jeff Sessions Recuses Himself from Russia Inquiry," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., March 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/02/us/politics/jeff-sessions-russia-trump-investigation-democrats.html.

[302] Office of Public Affairs, "Appointment of Special Counsel," Department of Justice, May 17, 2017, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/appointment-special-counsel; Peter Baker, Katie Benner, and Michael D. Shear, "Jeff Sessions Is Forced Out as Attorney General as Trump Installs Loyalist," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., November 7, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/07/us/politics/sessions-resigns.html.

[303] Rachel Frazin, "Trump Knocks Mueller over Russia Probe: '18 Angry Democrats' and '0 Collusion," The Hill, April 19, 2019, https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/439855-trump-knocks-mueller-over-russia-probe-18-angry-democrats-and-0.

along with evidence of "sweeping and systemic" Kremlin election interference.[304] William Barr, Sessions' eventual successor as Attorney General, generated controversy and questions of credibility by issuing a summary letter of the Special Counsel report to the congressional Judiciary Committees in March 2019 that appeared to gloss over some of the report's findings.[305] This report was assailed by many legal analysts, journalists, and Special Counsel members, including Mueller himself, as an inadequate or even deliberately misleading portrayal of the investigation's findings. The ensuing controversy resulted in further accusations of DOJ partisan corruption, and led to more than 2,000 former DOJ employees publicly calling for Barr's resignation, as well as 27 members of the DC Bar requesting sanctions against him in a formal disciplinary complaint.[306] In aggregate, the nation's top law enforcement, justice administration, and intelligence bodies weathered a torrent of attacks on their credibility in the course of investigating Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Historically low faith in the DOJ, FBI, and intelligence community is an indisputable boon for future Russian election interference attempts.

As with the AIDS and Kennedy assassination *dezinformatsiya* episodes, Russia could not have predicted or controlled the aftermath and consequences of their initial cyberattack against the DNC and social media trolling campaign, but can only be delighted by the outsized and lingering results. As it stands, the fallout of a hacking and

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[304] Robert S. Mueller, III, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Election Vol. I* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2019), 1–5.

[305] Mark Mazzetti and Michael S. Schmidt, "Mueller Objected to Barr's Description of Russia Investigation's Findings on Trump," *New York Times*, sec. U.S., April 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/us/politics/mueller-barr.html.

[306] Gershon (Gary) Ratner et al., "Ethics Complaint Re: Professional Responsibility Investigation of William P. Barr," Lawyers Defending American Democracy, July 23, 2020, https://lawyersdefendingdemocracy.org/reprofessional-responsibility-investigation-of-william-p-barr/; "Open Letter Supporting the 100,000 Lawyers, Agents, and Staff Members of the U. S. Department of Justice," *Lawyers Defending American Democracy* (blog), accessed October 19, 2020, https://lawyersdefendingdemocracy.org/open-letter-supporting-the-us-doj/; Savannah Behrmann and Kristine Phillips, "More than 2,000 Ex-DOJ Employees Call for Attorney General Barr's Resignation," *USA Today*, February 17, 2020, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/02/16/william-barr-doj-alumnus-call-ag-resign/4779721002/; Dartunorro Clark et al., "All Four Roger Stone Prosecutors Resign from Case after DOJ Backpedals on Sentencing Recommendation," NBC News, February 11, 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/doj-backpedalling-sentencing-recommendation-trump-ally-roger-stone-n1134961; Erik Larson, "Flynn Prosecutor Steps Down as Case Is Reportedly Being Dropped," *Bloomberg*, May 7, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-07/flynn-prosecutor-van-grack-steps-down-from-criminal-case.

disinformation operation perpetrated by the Russian government helped induce a staggering amount of damage to a variety of targets. These include but are not limited to the following:

- undermining Clinton's election campaign and damaging her prospects of victory
- sowing lasting discord within the DNC
- alienating and enraging potential left-leaning voters who had favored Sanders
- setting in motion multiple events resulting in distrust for the FBI and DOJ and the ruination of prominent officials' careers
- provoking lasting animosity between Trump and the U.S. intelligence community
- creating legal and political headaches along with embarrassing distractions for Trump, his children, and associates
- spurring the firing and criminal prosecution of the National Security Advisor
- leaving a large number of U.S. citizens believing their leader conspired with a major U.S. foe to take power

The degree of damage to the credibility of U.S. government leaders and institutions affected by Russia's 2016 interference campaign is varied and difficult to quantify, but it is undeniable that some harm was sustained; and worryingly, could occur again. Even where evidence of Kremlin interference is elusive, the specter of such attacks hangs over subsequent elections and stokes long-term damage in voters' faith that elections are secure and free of outside tampering.

To wit, a minor incident in the 2020 U.S. presidential election offered a warning that the specter of Russian interference remains, and is still capable of inflicting damage

on the nation and its leaders. With early voting already underway, *The New York Post* controversially published a trove of emails allegedly sent to and from the son of Democratic candidate Joe Biden.[307] Many media outlets and analysts investigating the story identified significant questions about its veracity, including speculation that suspected and indicted Russian influence agents had provided the material to a U.S. intermediary.[308] Within days, reports emerged that an FBI investigation had been launched regarding whether the emails were hacked and doctored as part of a foreign disinformation campaign.[309] Soon after, the DNI, John Ratcliffe, publicly denied the ongoing investigation and declared the story "not part of some Russian disinformation campaign" and excoriated House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence chairman Adam Schiff for publicly linking the story to a Russian disinformation plot.[310] Notably, Facebook and Twitter both took immediate steps to limit posts linking to the *Post* article due to its questionable veracity, its use of possibly stolen private personal information, and its status as possible election-related disinformation; decisions that Trump campaign officials immediately decried as undue election interference by the social media titans.[311] While this incident does not appear to have had a major impact on the election results, it illustrates the fact that either Russian interference or accusations thereof may be an ever-present facet of future elections and has the capacity to provoke questions of credibility for U.S. government officials tasked with securing elections and national interests.

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[307] Emma-Jo Morris and Gabrielle Fonrouge, "Smoking-Gun Email Reveals How Hunter Biden Introduced Ukrainian Businessman to VP Dad," *New York Post*, October 14, 2020, https://nypost.com/2020/10/14/email-reveals-how-hunter-biden-introduced-ukrainian-biz-man-to-dad/.

[308] Katie Robertson, "New York Post Published Hunter Biden Report Amid Newsroom Doubts," *The New York Times*, sec. Business, October 18, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/18/business/media/new-york-post-hunter-biden.html; Shane Harris et al., "White House Was Warned Giuliani Was Target of Russian Intelligence Operation to Feed Misinformation to Trump," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/giuliani-biden-ukraine-russian-disinformation/2020/10/15/43158900-0ef5-11eb-b1e8-16b59b92b36d_story.html.

[309] Ken Dilanian, "Feds Examining Whether Alleged Hunter Biden Emails Are Linked to a Foreign Intel Operation," NBC News, October 15, 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/feds-examining-if-alleged-hunter-biden-emails-are-linked-foreign-n1243620.

[310] Olivia Beavers and Joe Concha, "Ratcliffe, Schiff Battle over Biden Emails, Politicized Intelligence," TheHill, October 19, 2020, https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/521712-ratcliffe-schiff-battle-over-biden-emails-politicized-intelligence.

[311] Roose, "Facebook and Twitter Dodge a 2016 Repeat, and Ignite a 2020 Firestorm."

V. CONCLUSION

Investigative findings by bodies including the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee demonstrate unequivocally that Russia's preferred influence operation outcomes in the 2016 U.S. presidential election came to pass, potentially along with "victories" in other elections.[312] Much argument and investigation has ensued over the degree to which Kremlin meddling influenced such outcomes, but its presence and potential is virtually undeniable. With nearly a century of experience in covert influence techniques and plenty of practice trying to interfere in Western elections, Russia has many skills and tools, such as disinformation and cyberattacks with which to continue meddling in the democratic affairs of its rivals. The persistence of such decades-old Soviet-made myths as the Pentagon AIDS connection and Kennedy assassination conspiracies point to a sobering truth regarding Russia's modern disinformation campaigns: it is impossible to forecast the long-term effect a given Kremlin fabrication may have, but history strongly suggests that at least a few may potentially cause damage even after discovery and attribution. Unfortunately, Russia appears all too willing to continue stressing the system with a variety of techniques and targets.

Covert Kremlin operations may be capable of corrupting a political candidate, framing one to make it appear that they had, or reaping the paranoia-inducing fruits of prior influence campaigns even when not directly intervening in an incident. Examinations of Soviet precedent and recent Kremlin tactics in democratic campaigns reveal that true or fabricated rumors of corruption and election fraud, exploitation, and exacerbation of domestic civil tensions, and even promotion of secession movements and rebellion, loom as possible threats. Challenges to the legitimacy of some future elections are plausible, whether because of successful Russian interference or even a good faith or disingenuous inaccurate accusation of such. These accusations could even be bolstered by a variety of

[312] *Select Committee on Intelligence, Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election Volume 2: Russia's Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, S. Rep. 116-XX, Senate, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 2018, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf.

well-honed Kremlin tradecraft, such as the production or dissemination of genuine, doctored, or fabricated material designed to lend credence to allegations.

It is therefore critically important for intelligence communities, investigative bodies, and other experts to evaluate the Kremlin's capacity for future operations, as well as their possible response to less favorable outcomes in future campaigns. Russia has the motivation, the capability, and a century of experience preparing it for future interference in U.S. affairs, and denying them the prize of election-related chaos and ruination of the U.S. government and electoral systems' credibility should be a top priority for national and homeland security entities.

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