

**Written Testimony of ROY GODSON to the
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Open Hearing, March 30, 2017
“Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence
Campaigns.”**

Thank you Chairman Burr and Vice Chairman Warner for the opportunity to testify today on Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns.

My name is Roy Godson, and I am Emeritus Professor of Government at Georgetown University.

Active Measures (AM) have been a significant weapon in the Russian and Soviet arsenal for over 100 years. By active measures is meant the coordinated direction by the centralized authoritarian hierarchy of a combination of overt and covert techniques that propagate Russian, (formerly Soviet) ideas, political/military preferences and undermine those of their democratic adversaries. Disinformation – intentionally disseminating false information such as forgeries - is just one of the many overt and covert influence techniques used by the Russian/Soviet leadership in what they call “active measures.”¹ A more comprehensive definition is offered at the end of this statement.

There is little new in the basic mindset of successive generations of Russian leadership. These influence techniques provide their relatively weak economy and insecure political institutions with a strategic and tactical advantage to affect significant political outcomes abroad. ***They say so. They do it.*** But they are not ten feet tall. They build up skilled, experienced, and tenacious teams at home in their government and quasi-government agencies. They maintain and develop both an overt and covert apparatus of well-trained personnel to continue their manipulation of foreign agents of influence, and use new geotechnologies that come online as force enhancers. Some of it is effective, some just a nuisance.

¹ For a brief listing of major active measures techniques, See, Richard Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*, Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1984.

In the final years of the Soviet Union there was enough information on their active measures systems to conclude that approximately 15,000 personnel and several billions of hard currency annually were being spent on these activities— aimed mostly at the U.S. and its allies.

Yet even with knowledge of these activities and their long-term training of personnel, as well as studies by Western scholars, information from former Soviet defectors in the active measures “industry,” the attentive public and most elected officials still continue to be surprised by Russia’s operational behavior.

Recent events are not the first time we have been SURPRISED.

Punching Above Their Weight

After World War I, a few Americans and others had warned about these “below the radar” threats. Some were veterans of the internecine wars during and after the Bolshevik Revolution and were aware of the Communist “ways” of politics. They also reported that Lenin and Stalin had already started to build up the capability—since encompassed by the term “Active Measures”—in the Twenties to defend the Revolution and to influence world politics. The Soviet Politburo and the Party departments directed, controlled, and financed active measures and serviced them through the Soviet intelligence system and Soviet diplomacy. These instruments and capability provided influence throughout the world to the economically weak Soviet regime along with its faithful allies inside most of the democratic (and illiberal) societies—from the 1930s to the early 1990s.

Moscow reinforced its sway by creating and controlling an apparently independent mostly overt grouping of the Communist parties known as the Communist International. This International, in turn, was bolstered by another set of organized national and international Front groups, again apparently independent of Soviet control. These “nongovernmental” Fronts were designed to appeal to non-communists and political activists who were attracted or amenable to Soviet views in specific sectors such as “labor,” “youth,” “peace,” “religion,” and “culture.” The Parties and Fronts changed their views and their tactics in response to Moscow’s direction, working, for example, against the Nazi and Fascist rise to power in Europe in the 1930s until 1939.

Then, after the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact in 1939, which divided Poland in two and enabled Moscow to consolidate control the Baltic States, Stalin switched policies. No longer did Communists parties and fronts work against the Nazis. Instead they condemned “capitalist liberals” and sought to influence and undermine the political system in the West. Stalinist policy flipped again when Germany attacked Russia in 1941, and for the rest of the war the Russians mobilized the Communist parties and the Fronts to support the Soviet Union in the war effort and take over the then anti-Nazi Resistance in Europe.

They used this Resistance role to gain spectacular influence in postwar European politics, particularly in France and Italy, and almost in West Germany as well as in Britain and other countries. The Communist Parties and fronts also helped – overtly and covertly- in recruiting agents of influence, and some Western leaders and voters, who had become sympathetic to the anti-Nazi and Fascist positions of the Soviet Union, and the peace movements and other issue organizations that the Soviets significantly influenced. An extensive academic, journalistic, and biographic literature is now available on these efforts.²

Little evidence has come to the fore of Soviet direct meddling in the actual mechanical election processes of major countries; but they did try to influence the outcomes of the elections and the behavior of foreign leaders in parties, trade unions, the media, and culture. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes less so. While leaders of democratic governments came to be generally aware of Soviet influence attempts, they rarely attracted the ire and response of the United States until later. Nevertheless, using their broad active measures capability, in the post WWII context, the Soviets almost succeeded in shifting the entire postwar political balance of power in Western Europe.

A Closely Fought Battle

This strategic capability went almost unnoticed during WWII and the first years afterwards. But gradually, the scope of long-term Soviet penetration and active measures in Europe, and the United States, came into focus – and to public attention. The battle for political power in post-

² See for example, Haynes, John Earl, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev. 2010. *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America*. Yale University Press. See also, Godson, Roy, *American Labor and European Politics, The AFL as Transnational Force*, Crane, Russak, 1976. Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*.

war Western Europe – then the pivot of world politics – galvanized U.S. action at home and abroad. It was a formidable response.

The Truman and Eisenhower administrations developed a national “whole of government” and “whole of society” political strategy to neutralize Soviet active measures from the late 1940s on. This was a calculation to partially complement both U.S. foreign economic policy (e.g. The Marshall Plan) and its military strategy (e.g. NATO). Initially, there was a good deal of improvisation. Gradually, however the bipartisan political leadership, the Executive Branch, and Congress, together with the support of the private sector, labor, and philanthropy, and education were awakened to the threat and mobilized in support. There were, of course, American mistakes, and some demagoguery – especially in the early 1950s from Senator Joseph McCarthy and his team who exploited public concern, exaggerated the danger, and overreacted.

Yes, from the late 1940s forward the U.S. and other liberal democracies did use overt and covert measures to defend and assist democratic elements abroad—labor, media, intellectuals, and parties—that were under direct attack abroad by well-trained and financed political forces from the Soviet Bloc.

By the late 1960s the political consensus in the U.S. and to some extent among democratic allies abroad began to fray, particularly during the Vietnam War. The coalition of American liberals and conservatives against Soviet active measures came apart. Congressional criticism of the intelligence community and the dismantling of much of the U.S. capability to counter Active Measures abroad also contributed.

Also in the 1970s, the Nixon Administration began to seek “Détente” with the USSR and that too diminished government support for exposing and criticizing Soviet active measures abroad. By the advent of the Carter Administration in the mid-1970s, interest in and the ability to counter Soviet influence operations abroad had waned substantially.

That changed when we were “surprised” again —this time by the Soviet invasion of its neighbor Afghanistan, Soviet support for Cuban expeditions in Africa, the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua and the threat to El Salvador. This was intensified by the Soviet build-up of warfighting capabilities aimed at Western Europe and vigorous Soviet active measures

campaigns there – with the goal of minimizing the NATO response.³ Even before Reagan took office in 1981 awareness of the importance of a response was growing in Washington.

Fortunately, U.S. government capabilities had not been entirely dismantled in the 1970s. There were still a few veteran specialists in the USG – State, CIA, DOD, DIA, and the then USIA, as well as some in Congress – who had maintained a watching brief on the issues. They were complemented by American NGOs such as the mainstream of organized labor and key philanthropic and human rights organizations who had sustained attention and enquiry on Soviet active measures. Once again, plans to counter Soviet Active Measures were reprised, first with educational campaigns and then with significant tangible support to democratic elements at home and abroad.

After a brief interlude in the Yeltsin years of the 1990s and the demise of both the Soviet Communist Party and its ideology of Marxism Leninism, the regime regrouped this time under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. He came to power together with a coterie of former colleagues, many also trained in the Soviet security and intelligence system. They no longer had a competitive global ideology, and much of their widespread apparatus such as Communist Parties and Front groups was not particularly useful. What they did share with their predecessors was an animosity toward liberal democracy.

They were and are determined to achieve most of the same objectives as the Soviet Communist Party leadership had had before them. As determined Russian nationalists they sought power and influence, and, of course, discrediting the U.S. and democratic society in general. Their focus is almost completely negative, zeroing in on creating chaos and division in what has been called an “age of anger” in many parts of the world.⁴ This opens up many opportunities for influence.

Their active measures apparatus appears to still recruit and train operatives for the global context. They identify and pursue opportunities as they see them. They still use a combination (Kombinatsia) of overt and covert techniques that date back to Czarist days to reinforce their medium to long-term objectives. Of course, they have taken advantage of the new advances in

³ Godson Roy, *Dirty Tricks or Trump Cards: U.S. Covert Action and Counterintelligence*, Transaction, 2000.

⁴ Mishra, Pankaj. *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017. See also Friedman Thomas L. *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016

global technologies, most notably the Internet and new media⁵ – and are also likely pursuing other geotechnologies coming on stream soon.⁶

As one student of the subject has put it, “they are mixing old and new wine in new bottles — but the distributor is basically the same.”

The U.S. Response in the 1980s

The U.S. government began to develop a strategic approach to the problem by mobilizing an interagency effort in the early Reagan years. This difficult and complex task took time and effort. The various departments and agencies concerned with national security slowly began to pull together to provide details to the American people about Soviet activities designed to influence American and allied politics.

Achieving this synergy required that the President request and receive support from the Congress to authorize and fund more gathering of information from overt and intelligence sources about the specifics of Soviet AM, and to analyze and even to anticipate their likely future operations. It was reinforced by the creation of what came to be known as the interagency “Active Measures Working Group,” based first in the State Department and later in the U.S. information Agency.⁷ Some of the findings were used to educate Americans, Europeans, and others that Moscow was conducting major campaigns to discredit democracy in general, and the U.S. in particular,

As a result, countering Soviet active measures became a government concern and an issue in Washington and then in U.S. Embassies abroad. This also coincided with both Congressional and educational, and media interest in the subject. Newspapers, journals, books, and television reported on the subject. Although at first disparaged, *Dezinformatsia* —Disinformation, and *Aktivniye meropriyatiya*—Active Measures, and *Kombinatzia* — employing both overt and

⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections,” ICA 2017-01D, 6 January 2017.

⁶ There is however, a dearth of public information of this subject.

⁷ Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made A Major Difference*, Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2012.

covert techniques—entered into the lexicon in policy and academic circles,⁸ much as *Kompromat* or compromising material has today.

The second result of the Soviet active measures in this period was to help stimulate the Administration and the Congress to actively promote abroad positive liberal principles and institutions, particularly electoral democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Active involvement by the U.S. in the positive promotion of liberal principles had waxed and waned throughout the 20th Century. It now blossomed again. The U.S. did this unilaterally as well as in partnership with Allies and global and regional organizations. In part this was because the principles were considered part of the American heritage. But it was also because the U.S. had security interests in supporting democratic forces abroad who were competing with communism and Soviet influence, as well as with other illiberal actors such as organized crime and kleptocracy.

An outstanding example was the creation and continuation of bipartisan support and funding of what became the National Endowment for Democracy in 1984. It was focused on helping to support electoral democratic principles abroad. There were many other “whole of government” efforts to entertain smaller but sometimes effective projects, on religious freedom and toleration, and human rights.

It is difficult to assess the overall effectiveness of these efforts. There has been some evaluation of the U.S. performance. Some well-informed practitioners maintain that they were a major cause of the demise of the USSR – that it stimulated the final collapse of the Soviet system in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe.⁹ Academics in particular tend to believe that there were multiple long and short-term causes of how and why the Soviet Union disintegrated.

But it happened, and as Americans have been wont to do after other successes abroad, interest in the competition between liberal and illiberal actors in world politics waned – as it had after World War I and World War II. After a few years at the turn of the 20th Century, illiberal actors in Russia regained control of the country with much of its active measures apparatus intact. In the main, we were again surprised.

⁸ Richard Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*.

⁹ See for example, Kraemer, Sven F, *Inside the Cold War from Marx to Reagan: An Unprecedented Guide to the Roots, History, Strategies, and Key Documents of the Cold War*, UPA, 2015.

As far as we can see, the Putin regime, while not claiming a universal ideological solution to the world's problems as its predecessors did, nonetheless is working assiduously to gain and wield power and influence world-wide. The rise in oil prices, foreign investment, and advances in technology all fueled these efforts. More recently their economic and social position has weakened. But their continued propensity to use active measures so far has not diminished. Rather, it allows them once again to punch above their weight on the world scene and help shift the correlation of forces further in their favor without escalation to major war. They can do so because they never abandoned their playbook and many of their players.

What is to be Done

So what is to be done by the U.S. in the short and longer-term?

I hope that this Open Hearing in the Committee will contribute to a much enhanced U.S. diagnostic and prescriptive policy effort that will further cauterize an ongoing problem and perhaps avoid its escalation in the future. While we seek to understand the specifics and implications of contemporary Russian behavior we can also begin to peer over the horizon. The attentive U.S. public and elected officials really ought not to be surprised again – strategically or tactically.

To help understand future Russian thinking and capabilities the following initiatives are offered that may assist in doing so.

1. Identifying in Real Time and Anticipating Russian Active Measures.
2. Reducing Russian Effectiveness.
3. Developing a strategic approach to countering Russian Active Measures.

1. Identifying and anticipating Russian Active Measures

We need enhanced warning of real-time Russian planning and their development of active measures capabilities. The U.S. National Counterintelligence Strategy of 2016 does call for the collection and analysis of the threats from foreign intelligence. We also need to anticipate—not predict—Russia's likely future operations. This will not always be possible but we should at least try. These “warnings,” in whole or in part, would be disseminated inside the U.S.

government, to selected allies, and some in the media and public so that there would be little surprise. The USG does this now with counterterrorism warnings.

2. Reducing Russian effectiveness.

We should develop and implement techniques to reduce the damage caused by the Russian active measures apparatus. To some extent this can be done by the careful dissemination and follow up of the warnings. But there are a variety of additional techniques we can use regularly that would appear to mitigate or reduce the damage. One is exposure of Russian plans and operations before or after the Active Measures play out in the U.S. and abroad. Again, this was done in the 1980s, under the auspices of the State Department and the interagency group.

Another is to disseminate a positive narrative to refute specific Russian attempts to undermine the democratic narrative. This has worked previously through the “whole of government” approach, but it needs to be reinstated and enhanced.

3. Developing a strategic approach to countering Russian Active Measures. This is a policy as well as an intelligence issue. What should the U.S. expect and tolerate from Russia. Are there ‘red lines’ that should not be crossed? For example, should we tolerate Russian (and other) efforts to influence the mechanisms of our election process and its outcomes, now or in the future. As the FBI Director maintained recently,¹⁰ we can expect them to be back—not necessarily using the same tactics – although past history suggests they tend to reuse successful ones.

How do we counter their techniques without escalating our national security problems? As one former practitioner-scholar put it, we have been able to learn how to do this with regard to nuclear weapons. There are “rules of the road” that both sides follow to avoid the catastrophe neither wants. Is there thought and research that needs to be devoted to active measures and new technologies, in addition to the Internet, that are already on the world stage with more to come?

¹⁰ Comey, James B., Testimony Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), Hearing, *Russian Active Measures Investigation*, March 20, 2017.

Should we confine ourselves to defensive, punitive methods such as sanctions? How do we respond to techniques such as “doxing” or stealing personal or government information and disclosing it at strategic moments such as elections or crises?

And should we be more politically assertive, for example, stepping up our support to elements of emerging liberal societies who are asking for our help to compete effectively against illiberal adversaries—through genuine education and advisory methods? ¹¹

Again, thank you for initiating this opportunity to address an issue of such great public concern today and for the foreseeable future.

¹¹ Phillips, Rufus, “*Breathing Life into Expeditionary Diplomacy: A Missing Dimension of U.S. Security Capabilities*,” National Strategy Information Center, 2014.

ACTIVE MEASURES

“Active Measures is a term that came into use in the 1950s to describe certain overt and covert techniques for influencing events and behavior in, and the action of, foreign countries. Active measures may entail 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 (foreign governmental and non-governmental elites or mass audiences), and to distort the target’s perception of reality.

Active Measures may be conducted overtly through officially-sponsored foreign propaganda channels, diplomatic relations, and cultural diplomacy. Covert political techniques include the use of covert propaganda, oral and written disinformation, agents of influence, clandestine radios, and international front organizations. Although active measures are principally political in nature, military maneuvers and paramilitary assistance to insurgent and terrorists may also be involved.”

Extracted from Richard Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*, Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1984.