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# Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it

An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present

## Final Report

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## **Abstract**

What were Soviet influence and disinformation campaigns? What did the West do about them? This study answers these questions, explaining the Cold War strategies followed by the USSR, as well as the Western response. Eleven case studies follow, each one examining a counter-disinformation tactic in depth, with comments on the relevance of that tactic today. The first seven case studies focus on defensive tactics aimed at stopping Soviet propaganda in the West, while the latter four focus on offensive tactics used to promote accurate information and democratic messages to the USSR and beyond. The conclusion features a deeper examination of the difference between modern Russian propaganda and its Soviet antecedents.

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## Executive Summary

*What were Soviet influence and disinformation campaigns? What did the West do about them? This study answers these questions, explaining the Cold War strategies followed by the USSR, as well as the Western response. The full report contains eleven case studies, each one examining a counter-disinformation and counter-propaganda tactic in depth, with comments on the relevance of that tactic today. Here is a brief precis of each one of them.*

### What Were Soviet Active Measures?

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

**Front Organisations:** These were nominally independent groups which supported Soviet policies or policies conducive to the USSR, such as unilateral nuclear disarmament. Examples included: the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Free Trade Unions, and the International Organisation of Journalists.

**Agents of Influence:** These came in three forms: full-fledged spies infiltrated into foreign organisations in order to spread messages; local recruits who were cultivated; and unwitting accomplices who had no idea that an enemy state was discreetly helping them along.

**Fake Stories in non-Soviet Media:** The KGB always preferred to place disinformation in non-Soviet media. Sometimes they used openly communist, pro-Soviet publications, but great effort was made to influence more mainstream media too.

**Forgeries:** The range of Soviet forgeries spanned the globe. Examples included a fake Embassy report about US plans to overthrow the government in Ghana, and forgeries of Embassy cables showing US involvement in attempt to murder the Pope.

## **Case Studies of Cold War Counter-Propaganda**

### **I. The Active Measures Working Group**

In the first decades of the Cold War, the CIA tracked Soviet disinformation but the White House chose not to confront it directly. The Reagan administration changed tactics and established the Active Measures Working Group, an interagency group containing members of the USIA, CIA, FBI and State Department. The Group produced major reports to Congress and briefed the press. This was the first American attempt to respond comprehensively to disinformation, to define it, to create institutions to tackle it and to draw attention to it at the highest level.

#### **Relevance Today**

The Active Measures Working Group set an interesting “interagency” precedent, bringing together a wide range of people, from the CIA to the USIA. Today’s equivalent might be a consultative body with a similarly broad range, perhaps including tech companies, academic institutions, media, civil society and policy makers. Together they could once again define the disinformation agenda, create tools and bodies able to track it empirically and transparently, and push back strategically.

### **II. Debunk and Discredit**

The Working Group put most of its efforts into debunking Soviet disinformation, with the aim of discrediting it. They made a point of making sure that any public or official complaints about Soviet disinformation were backed up with evidence – that is, that there was probable cause to believe something was actually “disinformation,” and that the Soviets were behind it.

The Working Group’s ‘expose and discredit’ tactic was not merely a defensive attempt to rebut disinformation but a positive, strategic move which sought to establish the Soviets as liars and the US as truth-tellers. This fed into the broader narrative of a cultural clash between two values systems.

#### **Relevance Today**

Debunking as a tactic faces qualitatively new challenges. Attribution has become far more difficult, since the Kremlin (and others) can outsource fakes through third

parties. Because contemporary Russia does not seek to present itself as “truthful” in any case, catching it out does little to undermine its credibility.

More importantly, many readers now choose to self-select news that confirms existing biases. Debunking needs to start with begin with a better understanding of the audiences that consume disinformation and how they receive it.

### **III. Sanctions**

The threat of sanctions can be a powerful way to retaliate against and curb disinformation. During the Cold War the US used the threat of sanctions to help stop the USSR from spreading the false story that the CIA had created the AIDS virus as a weapon.

#### **Relevance Today**

Disinformation is now financially as well as politically rewarding, and new thinking about sanctions could reflect this reality. Sanctions, or boycotts, could target (Western) companies advertising or providing content to channels or websites which propagate hate speech and hoaxes, in order to eliminate financial incentives to spread disinformation.

Sanctions can also be focused on things that matter to Kremlin elites. This might include their assets in the West, or restriction on companies or individuals who purvey disinformation and hate speech, or limiting access to software products and TV production hardware. Technology companies could also take responsibility for their role in the spread of disinformation. Google, for example, could stop facilitating advertisements for companies which are shown to be either corrupt or linked to disinformation.

### **IV. Work with International Media**

The Active Measures Working Group provided reports and information in the form of press packets, books, films, TV broadcasts, Voice of America radio broadcasts and more. Its “Soviet Propaganda Trends” service sought to identify themes that the USSR would promote, in order to better prepare responses. Local USIA officers also worked hard to develop personal relationships with media across the world.



### **Relevance Today**

Any reincarnation of USIA would be far less trusted in much of the world today; in any case, the 'mainstream press' doesn't really exist anymore in most countries, or else it reaches only a small part of the public. But technology companies could consider replicating this tactic: They have far more knowledge of disinformation on their platforms than they make public. If they began to share some of this information with the media and the general public, they might help change the disinformation dynamic.

## **V. Defectors**

Soviet defectors to the West were an important tool in the propaganda battles of the Cold War. Their testimonies made for powerful, emotional, narratives which helped undermine Soviet propaganda. Defectors sometimes also provided critical insights into how active measures worked and how to fight back. But defectors often found life in the West difficult, which undermined their effectiveness – especially when they returned to the USSR - and dissuaded new ones. The Jamestown Foundation was created to support them. It sponsored conferences and assisted 'clients' with housing, job placement, language training, driving permits and moral support. It also acted as a literary agent.

### **Relevance Today**

Whistle-blowers are today's defectors. The confessions of people who have worked in Kremlin troll factories, or who have told the truth about working in Kremlin controlled media, or who have taken part in Kremlin hacking operations, are the single most powerful source of insight on 21<sup>st</sup> century active measures.

Many whistle-blowers can never work easily in Russian media again; their safety may be threatened as well. They may also have legal problems. A legal fund to support whistle-blowers, and structured support to help them find work is something to be considered.

## **VI. BBC Monitoring: The Original Open-Source Collection**

Founded in 1939, the BBC Monitoring (BBCM) section was an early form of open source monitoring. During the Cold War, 60 to 70 people at BBCM followed Soviet radio broadcasts, TV and wire agency reports every day, including Radio Moscow's

international output, which went out in approximately 80 languages and was available to anyone who wanted it. The 'Russia Team' monitored Russian media 24 hours a day. Monitoring helped the BBC and the government both to understand Soviet messages and framing and to craft their own information and messages accordingly.

### **Relevance Today**

In 2010 BBCM's government funding was cut and it came under direct control of the BBC. Its priorities changed from monitoring details important for defence to following a news agenda which included pop music charts and pet stories. A Parliamentary committee has recommended that the UK government take over funding of BBCM once again, though there has been no action in this regard.

To fill some of the gaps, smaller, independent organisations are now experimenting with various new forms of monitoring. Such projects are unfortunately fragmented: there are no common standards and it is impossible for journalists and public diplomacy specialists to build up a full picture. A contemporary equivalent of Cold War BBC Monitoring would have to include data researchers as well as monitors, and would be closely linked with journalists, broadcasters and government officials.

## **VII. The UK's Information Research Department – Covert Research**

The bland-sounding Information Research Department (IRD) was a crucial but little-known element of Britain's Cold War response to Soviet propaganda. The centre studied Soviet tactics in the West and then circulated information covertly through a wide range of British institutions, including embassies, political parties, journalists and the BBC. Its goal was to reach Western and developing world audiences that were influenced by Soviet tactics. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the IRD researched and distributed a steady stream of facts about the reality of life in the Soviet Union in order to undermine propaganda about Soviet success.

### **Relevance Today**

Background research is even more necessary today than it was in the 1950s. Today's media have even fewer resources to pursue long-term research projects, and there is an urgent need for institutions which can provide free, accurate research on the spread of disinformation and thematic content.

## **VIII. RFE/RL: Using ‘natives’ to come closer to the audience**

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were Cold War attempts to engage Soviet Bloc populations with issues and information that often contradicted Soviet bloc propaganda. To get their message across, the US-funded stations used refugees. Often political dissidents and well-known intellectuals who had escaped their countries, the RFE/RL refugee radio personalities not only spoke the native language of the target audience, they intuitively understood their politics as well.

### **Relevance Today**

The RFE/RL experience shows the importance of putting the audience’s world-view first, and of choosing communicators who understand the audience. Most fact-checking and debunking today focuses on correcting erroneous content, the ‘supply’ side of the fake news equation. It does not consider why and how audiences consume disinformation in the first place and how one should adapt one’s own output so that they are open to consuming more accurate information. Today’s data analysis tools give ample opportunity to understand why audiences choose to hear misinformation, how they consume information, through what forms are they open to listening to new ideas. This kind of research could help identify which authority figures (or “micro-influencers”) alienated audiences might be willing to engage with.

## **IX. Chronicle of Current Events: A Home-Grown, Bottom-Up Source of Information**

The “Chronicle of Current Events” was a response to Soviet propaganda that was designed by Russian human rights activists. It sought to undermine state propaganda by offering authentic information from verified sources about arrests in the USSR. The information was gathered through networks of trusted people, and then transmitted in the form of illegal bulletins, passed through chains of trusted people. The material it provided was then amplified by Radio Liberty and other Western radio stations. The Chronicle also created a “community of trust,” a group of people who were dedicated, as a group, to the cause of accurate information.

### **Relevance Today**

In some senses, Alexei Navalny’s anti-corruption movement serves the same purpose in Russia as the old Chronicle: It too exposes “secret” information and embarrasses people in power, and it also creates a community of trust. Perhaps a

more targeted effort, for example one which gathered more personal financial information about the Russian leadership and put it very quickly online would have the same impact.

Another “lesson” from the Chronicle is how it was amplified by media and NGOs in the West. Perhaps Western agencies should think about amplifying dissenting voices from *within* Russia today as well.

## **X. Humour as Cold War “Meme Warfare”**

During the later Cold War jokes became a key element in the Reagan administration’s strategy to counter Soviet propaganda. In 1982, USIA Public Affairs Officers based at posts in the Communist bloc systematically collected political jokes from their local contacts and forwarded them to Washington, where the agency created a grand anthology. These were then distributed around the world as evidence both of popular opposition to Communist rule and of the widespread scepticism about Communism’s claims to be economically effective.

### **Relevance Today**

There has been a fundamental shift since the Cold War. During that period Communist regimes were stiff, and there was a great divide between their official statements and the Soviet reality, a gap which could be exploited through humour. Today the Kremlin is less focused on promoting itself, and more on undermining others. It is the West and ‘liberal elites’ who have a gap between rhetoric and reality: their stated beliefs do not match everyday life. In today’s environment, it is the alt-right and pro-Kremlin actors who use humour in a highly weaponised way. Still, the example of the past should provide food for thought; if nothing else, it might be worth once again collecting jokes from inside Russia to amplify abroad.

## **XI. Coherence of Policy, Values, Culture and Leadership**

During the Cold War, Western powers sought not just to produce accurate information, but to place it within a much broader set of cultural values and policies. ‘Truth’ was intimately connected to other things: ‘democracy’, ‘political freedom’, ‘human rights’, ‘prosperity’, as well as the freedom to experiment in the arts. These values were promoted together, a careful coordination of all action, from policies to culture, into a coherent whole.

## **Relevance Today**

In the Cold War, the West had a comparatively simple – and compelling - message. That message was based fundamentally around freedoms; freedom of speech, artistic (and individual) expression and democracy all went hand-in-hand. This package of rights was easy to articulate not least because it appeared to be in direct contrast with the Communist system of government which emphasised the collective over the individual, state planning over individual artistic expression, and autocracy over democracy.

At the moment, there is no comparably compelling narrative which can encompass all anti-propaganda efforts together. A new strategy is needed. Perhaps the unifying principle should be transparency, or anti-corruption, maybe with a focus on the money-laundering and hidden beneficial ownership structures that link 21<sup>st</sup> century authoritarian regimes, financial inequality, tax-evasion and the seamier sides of Western capitalism.

In a more limited way, there could be a parallel to the past in the strategic communications of tech companies, some of which could learn from the past. Social media and IT companies often promote themselves as forces for the strengthening of democracy, knowledge and transparency. Their leaders profess noble ideals. But there is a split between their PR and impact, between stated policies and reality, as well.

## **How is Soviet propaganda different from modern Russian propaganda?**

### **End of Bipolarity**

The Cold War was a struggle between two starkly different systems. These systems were also physically divided. In 2017, there is no Iron Curtain – the information flow between countries is relatively unrestricted. Russia does not represent a different socio-economic system with a powerful ideology. There is no unified front in the West which is organized to defeat Russia, not even within the United States.

This lack of clarity makes it difficult for Western powers even to define why exactly they oppose the contemporary Kremlin's active measures. There is a broad disagreement about what is 'legitimate' Kremlin influence and what constitutes

‘meddling’ or ‘interference’. In the US and the UK, for example, the charge that the Kremlin spreads ‘fake news’ lacks force, given how much fake news domestic media produce by themselves.

Instead of a clear-cut, bipolar information war there are shifting discourses in different parts of the West. At present, it doesn’t seem likely that a single strategic narrative will emerge.

### **A Diffuse, Unregulated Network of Propagandists**

Modern Russia is a loose, networked state with multiple actors allowed to conduct domestic and foreign policy, usually to benefit corrupt political groups around (and including) Putin. As a result, Russian information warfare is not consistent and strategic; its fundamental quality is tactical opportunism. The Kremlin is just one of myriad actors pumping out disinformation, alongside domestic media as well as the teenagers in Macedonia who produced anti-Clinton fake news for personal profit.

### **Online Distribution**

The most dramatic shift in the information environment is the move to digital and on-line media. Disinformation can circulate much more swiftly than was possible in the Cold War. If the Kremlin once crafted disinformation stories and forgeries with care, now cheap conspiracy theories and totally implausible fakes are thrown online constantly. Debunking them is easy, but the sheer quantity can risk making this a fruitless exercise, and indeed the aim might well be to force the West to waste time and resources on debunking

### **“Post-Factuality”**

During the Cold War the USSR needed to keep up the appearance that its lies were actually true. Both the US and USSR were committed to winning a rational debate about which system — democratic capitalism or communism — would deliver a rosier future, and each side wanted ‘proof’, that is facts, to prove that it was winning. Thus Western broadcasters could undermine the Soviet Union by broadcasting the real facts about the Soviet Union into the country. It was possible to discredit the USSR by pointing out the gap between their propaganda and reality.

Today’s Russia is not trying to prove that it is on a path to a greater future, and so it can dispense with facts too. This doesn’t mean ‘facts’ have become irrelevant in every type of discourse. Facts still matter to debates about health, social welfare, economics, corruption and money-laundering, especially if they empower action.

Twenty-first century counter-messaging needs to focus on those areas where facts still make a difference.

## **Conclusions**

In the past, the greatest informational and conventional battles were won not through an outright victory of one side, but by orienting all antagonists towards a shared greater goal. The collective embrace of the internationalism of the League of Nations by combatants following the Great War; the creation of the United Nations after the Second World War; the submergence of Franco-German hostility beneath a shared goal of European integration; these were all examples of attempts to reorient conflicts. At the end of the Cold War, Reagan and Thatcher – and the Bush and Major – along with the leaders of the European Union did sketch out a vision of an integrated Russia, a partner of Europe, which was meant to fulfil the same role. Unfortunately, that vision failed, and there is no common project today.

But this absence offers a way forward. It may be that a joint project, a link between the Russian opposition and anti-corruption activists in the West, for example, could show the way in the future. For anyone willing to think creatively, the possibilities are endless.

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# What are Propaganda and Active Measures?

## **Propaganda:**

From its origin, the term 'propaganda' has had a double life: for some it was a value-neutral term meaning mass persuasion, for others it was a value-laden term synonymous with distortion and deceit.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, propaganda, at least in Europe and North America, was understood to come in three key forms, each of which was defined not by the nature of the content but by the transparency of its origin: White, Grey and Black.

White propaganda was propaganda from a known source – for example a leaflet, dropped from an aircraft, encouraging soldiers to surrender because their cause was 'lost'. During the Cold War the Kremlin's own media networks - *Pravda*, *TASS* and *Ria Novosti* – were the main channels of white propaganda. Their familiar and easily recognized tactics included the exaggeration of genuine news stories, such as racial difficulties in the United States, as well as the promotion, or over-promotion, of Soviet achievements.

Black propaganda was propaganda from a source which had been deliberately constructed to deceive, such as a fake edition of a military newspaper altered to include news of impending disaster. Soviet black channels included, for example, radio stations purporting to belong to the anti-Soviet Hungarian resistance which tried to derail the revolutionary movement in 1956.

Grey propaganda was propaganda from an uncertain or anonymous source. During the Cold War, grey outlets included Soviet-funded front organizations, discussed below. While critical of Moscow's enemies, they were not formally linked to the Soviet state. The peace campaign at the start of the Korean War was an example of a grey campaign. It attracted some high-profile adherents, including the artist Pablo Picasso; not all of them knew that their campaign was being organized in Moscow.

## **Active Measures:**

'Active measures' can include a combination of White, Grey and Black propaganda. As described by Roy Godson, Emeritus Professor at Georgetown University and former CIA operative, the term "Active Measures" came into use in the 1950s to describe overt and covert techniques for influencing events and behavior in foreign countries, as well as government action. Active measures can try to influence the policies of another government, undermine confidence in its leaders and institutions,

disrupt relations between other nations, and discredit or weaken governmental and non-governmental opponents. Active Measures may be conducted overtly through officially-sponsored foreign propaganda channels, diplomatic relations, and cultural diplomacy. Disinformation – intentionally disseminating false information such as forgeries - is just one of the many overt and covert influence techniques used by the Soviet/Russian leadership in what they call “active measures.”

## **A Brief History of Deception in the Cold War**

Deception has a long-standing history in Russian strategic thinking. Often termed *maskirovka* (masking), Russian strategists have studied and taught the value of all kinds of deception from camouflage through to complex battlefield feints. Associated with the idea of *maskirovka* is the notion of ‘reflexive control’, which holds that a skilled strategist can manipulate his opponent through deception and force them into significant errors. Such ideas are, of course, not unique to Russia. The Russian emphasis on *maskirovka* and reflexive control may be seen as linked to a cultural tradition which enjoys the idea of being ‘canny’, but it also overlaps with an idea that while Russia faces strong external enemies, their strength can be reduced or even negated through cunning and covert tactics. *Maskirovka* is in some sense an extension of Russian exceptionalism as well as its pronounced victim narrative. Certainly, the use of disinformation by the Soviet Union was an outgrowth of established Tsarist tactics. The Tsars’ secret police had faked materials to discredit their enemies, most famously through the fabrication of the famous “manual” for Jewish world domination, ‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion’.

Immediately after the Russian Revolution, the USSR began to conduct foreign influence operations, using a variety of government organisations, in the belief that the revolution would quickly spread to other countries. At the beginning of the Cold War, Stalin consolidated what had been a wide range of Soviet propaganda and covert foreign operations into a single Department of International Information. The DII had full operational control over political intelligence operations, often going over the heads of KGB stations chiefs to work directly with spies in order both to gather information and conduct disinformation operations.

When Yuri Andropov became Head of the KGB in 1967, he greatly expanded Active Measures Service “A”, the department which conducted Active Measures, and made

disinformation operations a daily, persistent practice. Andropov had been Soviet ambassador to Hungary during the 1956 revolution, and understood the powerful appeal of Western democracy. A great lover of conspiracies and 'special operations', Andropov used disinformation campaigns to smear liberal Party reformers in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968, spreading fake stories that the CIA had been behind the pro-democracy movement. His targets included his own colleagues: he quashed even secret evidence proving the CIA innocent of interference because he wanted to Soviet elite to be hyper vigilant, even paranoid about the CIA's ability to cause another revolution in the Soviet Bloc. Disinformation campaigns were also used internally. The KGB would, for example, circulate fake versions of dissident publications in order to undermine the reputation of the real ones.

Andropov became a member of the ruling Politburo in 1973 and in that capacity directed the Soviet state to spend even more resources on Active Measures. His colleagues approved of his work, so much so that in 1982 Andropov became General Secretary of the Communist Party, the first time a KGB chief had assumed most powerful role in the USSR.

The ascent of the purveyors of Active Measures was no accident: It came at a time when Soviet leadership was having a hard time finding genuinely positive stories about Soviet life. Disinformation against the enemy became an ever more important part of internal propaganda. By the 1980s – the time when Vladimir Putin had begun making his way up the ladder of the KGB's foreign service - it had become a central component of Soviet foreign information policy.

The CIA's own troubles in the 1970s were a great boon to Soviet Active Measures operations. Leaks and Congressional investigations into botched attempts at 'regime change' around the world as well as surveillance of US citizens damaged the organization's reputation. Several disgruntled CIA operatives, including Phillip Agee, switched sides, delivering a trove of propaganda materials into Russian hands. Russian, Czech and East German operations to smear the US looked especially convincing with the CIA's stock so low. At this moment, Active Measures were particularly successful in the developing world, where journalists were easily bought, and where a history of Western imperialism meant there was more innate distrust of the US.

## Active Measures: Tactics

“Department A” was the name given to the nerve centre for the global network of disinformation run by the KGB, sympathetic foreign services of other countries and often citizens of other countries. Department A received proposals for new active measures from KGB residencies around the world, and often dictated new active measures proposals itself. It also monitored the active measures projects while they were underway and provided “technical support”, which usually meant preparing fake documents and forgeries to act as evidence for false narratives.<sup>i</sup> The centre produced a daily stream of work, and conducted constant study of the results and the reaction; the resources and time devoted to Service A illustrate its importance to the Soviet leadership.<sup>ii</sup>

Active measures included a range of tactics, among them control of the press in foreign countries; outright and partial forgery of documents; the use of rumours, insinuation, altered facts, and lies; use of international and local front organisations; clandestine operation of radio stations; and the exploitation of a nation’s academic, political, economic and media figures.<sup>iii</sup> The aim was to get all of these elements working in tandem so that they built the illusion of overwhelming evidence behind a given story.<sup>iv</sup> Once designed, the actual operations were carried out by official and quasi-official Soviet representatives - scholars, students, journalists – even if their Soviet links were not obvious.<sup>v</sup> KGB residents were personally responsible for carrying out Active Measures in their assigned countries. In practice, Active Measures were the result both of central planning and the individual initiative of KGB operatives who had a wide license to use their own networks as they saw fit.

### **Popular methods included:**

**Front Organisations:** These were nominally independent groups which supported Soviet policies or policies conducive to the USSR, such as unilateral nuclear disarmament: the World Peace Council, World Federation of Free Trade Unions, International Organisation of Journalists and so on. By the mid-1970s, the Western public was aware of their subservience to Moscow, and they struggled to recruit members outside of local communist parties. They remained useful for the purposes of disinformation campaigns, and did have some ability to influence broader movements, including the (genuine, organic) Western peace movements.

**Agents of Influence:** Agents of influence came in three forms: full-fledged spies infiltrated into foreign organizations in order to spread messages; local recruits who were cultivated; and unwitting accomplices who had no idea that an enemy state was discreetly helping them along. Striking examples of high-level agents of influence in the Cold War era were Gunther Guillaume, an East German agent who was personal assistant to the German Chancellor Willy Brandt, and Norway's Foreign Ministry Press Spokesman Arne Treholt. Guillaume and Treholt not only provided the Soviets with top secret information, they could also push policies favourable to the USSR, such as the adoption of the Nordic Nuclear Free Zone.

The French journalist Pierre-Charles Pathe, who spread subtly pro-Soviet positions in his newsletter, was a lower profile agent of influence. So was Claudia Wright, who reported for the Financial Times, New Statesman, the Atlantic Monthly and other influential, mainstream press. Over many years she repeated Soviet disinformation stories, including the fictions that the US ambassador to the UN was receiving secret gifts from the apartheid government of South Africa, and that a Korean Air passenger plane shot down by the Soviet air force was actually a spy plane.<sup>vi</sup>

**Influence/Infiltrate the Media:** The KGB always preferred to place disinformation in non-Soviet media. Sometimes they used openly communist, pro-Soviet publications, but great effort was made to influence more mainstream media too. One known example of this phenomenon was tracked by a United States Information Service Officer stationed in Lagos in the mid-1980s. After designing what was probably the first program to track disinformation using a computer, he found an intensive pattern of Soviet influence in the Nigerian press.

The computer program picked up, among other things, patterns of authorship. In Nigeria, Soviet Bloc propagandists mostly worked through local freelancers - Nigerians who allowed their names to be appended to articles that were actually written by either Soviet or Warsaw pact authors. Between 1985 and 1987, the USSR also trained at least 33 other journalists, though the number may have been higher. Many more journalists travelled to eastern bloc countries on government grants. Thanks to six grants given to journalists to write about Central Asia and Afghanistan, coverage in the Nigerian press of these Soviet Muslim and Afghan issues became more favourable to the Soviets. The same network of journalists also introduced false stories about the alleged U.S. deployment of chemical weapons. Several of the other grantees were sub-editors, who in the Nigerian media context have considerable control over what is published in their newspapers. One grantee, the president of the

Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and later the vice-president of International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), a Soviet-controlled international front, was given grants to attend meetings in Warsaw Pact countries. He was accompanied by one of the national secretaries of NUJ to Prague and Warsaw in 1986 to sign exchange/training agreements with their journalism unions too.

Aside from the paid contributors, Nigeria also had a small contingent of self-professed comrades or home-grown radicals. Many wrote regularly as freelancers, following the Soviet line on international affairs. Frequently, but not always, they used Soviet State News Agency *Novosti* releases or pamphlets as the basis for their work. These freelancers significantly complemented the Soviet active measures campaign, accounting for 20 or more published articles per month. USIA officers observed that provincial media institutions in Nigeria always had *Novosti* releases in their offices, to use as reserves if sub-editors had to fill an empty space for lack of material generated by their own employees. In addition to press releases (usually 90 percent or more without *Novosti* attribution), *Novosti* distributed magazines and booklets, using Nigerian university bookstores and trade union offices throughout the country.

**Forgeries:** In 1961, the CIA testified to Congress that 32 forgeries of official US documents had been discovered in the last four years. The number increased after the creation of Department "A". In the 1980s, the range of Soviet forgeries spanned the globe. Examples included a forged letter from Reagan to King Juan Carlos of Spain which seemed to pressure Spain over NATO; a forged letter purporting to show US repression of the Peace movement; a forged letter to a US ambassador in Pretoria allegedly showing covert, close US-South Africa ties; a fake Embassy report about US plans to overthrow the government in Ghana; and forgeries of Embassy cables which show US involvement in attempt to murder the Pope.

Forgeries could be circulated publicly, while a special strain of 'hidden forgeries' were intended to be shared among elites and act corrosively, but invisibly.

**Fake Stories:** Not all disinformation operations used forgeries. Some were stories launched simultaneously in different places, which sought to become credible through repetition and diffusion. A selection of false stories from 1981 included an alleged US plot to overthrow the Angolan government, a story first pushed in a publication close to the Angolan Socialist Party and then circulated among African newspapers; an attempt to blame the US for the attempted overthrow of the Seychelles government, a story started by Soviet media and then repeated in the

African press; a false rumour about US use of chemical weapons in Afghanistan and Central America, a story picked up by respected non-communist papers like the Times of India.

Fake stories could be highly targeted. In 1980, a pro-Soviet Indian paper successfully blocked the appointment of a career Department of State official, George Grin, to the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi. The paper wrongly accused him of being a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer. Such fake stories could also have deadly consequences. For example, the East German and Czech intelligence services collaborated to publish a book in 1968 entitled *Who's Who in the CIA*. Half of the names listed were genuine CIA agents, and the rest were not. In 1970, Daniel Mitrione, a U.S. Agency for International Development officer, was executed by Tupamaro terrorists who cited *Who's Who in the CIA* as their justification, although he had never been part of the organization.

Active measures also could lead to spectacular attacks on American interests by third parties. In November of 1979, a Muslim messianic cult attacked Mecca. Hundreds were killed in the ensuing siege. Sensing an opportunity to weaken the American position in the Middle East, Soviet diplomats spread the rumour that America and Israel were behind the attack on Mecca. The rumour sparked an attack by the student union of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. The U.S. Embassy was attacked, one American was kidnapped, two Pakistani employees died, a Marine guard was shot and killed, and an American contractor was beaten and left to burn to death.<sup>5</sup>

## **Active Measures: Strategy**

The direct link to the state meant that Soviet propaganda (of any kind) and active measures were always consistent in the basic message and different communications were highly coordinated. Propaganda and disinformation usually followed the general party line towards certain countries, political groups, regional or global trends. At times, Soviet active measures went beyond attempts to manipulate perceptions and became incitement, assassination, and even terrorism. Soviet leaders made no major distinction between overt propaganda and covert action or between diplomacy and political violence.

To illustrate the scale and strategy of active measures operations, a brief look at the

example of active measures carried out against Pakistan from 1980-81 is instructive. The intervention of the USSR in Afghanistan in December 1979 was deeply unpopular around the world. One consequence was that Afghanistan's neighbour, Pakistan, grew closer to the US. In February 1980, Andropov, then Chairman of the KGB, approved an extensive set of active measures designed to disrupt the USA's alliance with Pakistan, undermine Pakistan's credibility among its neighbours and incite popular unrest inside the country. At its most extreme, the plan even had provisions to agitate towards war between Iran and Pakistan – Pakistan being, at the time, a US ally.

Inside Pakistan, active measures included:

- Warning Pakistani diplomats in Moscow that the USSR would use the Oriental Studies Institute in Moscow to research ways of "exploiting Baluchi and Pashtun [separatist] movements in Pakistan";<sup>vii</sup>
- Distributing leaflets around Islamabad and Karachi, allegedly written by a rogue group within the Pakistani army, which sharply denounced the government's policies;
- Planting information in the local press alleging that the Pakistani government was using the Afghan conflict to further build the Pakistani army's influence in the country's politics

The KGB also sought to isolate Pakistan in the region by agitating long-standing India-Pakistan tensions and spreading doubt about Pakistan's stability among its allies. Here, again, are examples:

- Conveying information to Indian Prime Minister Gandhi that Pakistan intended to whip up regional disorder in order to secure more US backing. This information was delivered straight to Prime Minister Gandhi by a prominent journalist on the Kremlin's payroll.
- Spreading confusion among the Pakistani foreign service by giving information to Pakistani diplomats in Bangkok that the US was looking for other allies in the region, having grown weary of [President of Pakistan] Zia-ul-Huq.
- Among countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, emphasizing that Pakistan had breached the basic principles of the Movement by allowing the US and China to "turn the country into an instrument of their policy in Asia".<sup>viii</sup> A particularly effective disinformation story in this regard was the allegation that



Pakistan had allowed the US to test chemical and biological weapons on Pakistan's Shi'i population. The emphasis on Shi'i victims of US imperialism was designed to enrage Iran, even to the point that Iran might engage in open hostilities with Pakistan.

- In India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon and even in Austria, publishing material or planting material in the local press alleging the "direct involvement of Pakistani special services in organizing armed interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan".<sup>ix</sup>
- Through the UN, Iranian leaders were also warned that the US planned to establish military bases in Pakistani Baluchistan (a border territory with Iran which has historically been restive) and that the Pakistani government was prepared to accept this.

These active measures complemented one another and served wider Soviet strategic aims.<sup>x</sup> The story shows that disinformation was a specific, targeted part of the KGB's portfolio and it formed a crucial part of the USSR's foreign policy, especially in the final decades of the Cold War.

# Case Studies of Cold War Counter-Propaganda

## I: Recognise the Issue (AMWG)

### **Institutional solutions: The Active Measures Working Group**

**The creation of the Active Measures Working Group was significant because it represented the first American attempt to respond comprehensively and give importance to the problem of disinformation – that is, to define it, to create institutions to tackle it and to draw attention to it at the highest level.**

In the first decades of the Cold War the CIA tracked Soviet disinformation but the White House chose not to confront it directly, on the grounds that this supposedly minor issue was unworthy of high level attention. Officials preferred to avoid confrontation and focus on negotiations they considered more important.

This attitude began to change in the late 1970s, when Soviet bloc defectors revealed the unexpected scope of Soviet disinformation activities. In part because the CIA's reputation was at an all-time low, and in part because it was felt that this topic required broader input, the Carter administration planned, and the Reagan administration established, the Active Measures Working Group, an interagency group containing members of the USIA, CIA, FBI and State Department (as well as Defence Intelligence Agency, Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the office of the Secretary of Defense).

Officially, the Group's purpose was to coordinate responses to disinformation. But it also served to heighten awareness of the issue within government, within the scientific and academic community and within the US and foreign media (the latter effort is described in a separate case study). The Group produced major reports to Congress and regular press briefings, keeping the disinformation issue high on the agenda on Capitol Hill. It kept in touch with public affairs officers at embassies around the world. It also convened scientists and senior academics to debunk Soviet disinformation, creating a community of critical inquiry which reached out beyond government.

The fact that the Group was institutionalized – that it was not an ad hoc committee, but rather a permanent part of government - meant that the issue of disinformation was always on the agendas of busy officials. It also enabled rapid responses. Following the US invasion of Grenada, American forces found instructional how-to

films on the art of sabotage and subversion inside the Soviet embassy. The USIA's Disinformation Response Unit quickly disseminated them, using them to illustrate presentations on Soviet subversive activity and supplied videotapes to interested foreign journalists.<sup>xi</sup>

The Group was also able to coordinate with other senior US officials in order to confront Soviet officials at high-level meetings. At the December 1987 Gorbachev-Reagan summit in Washington, DC, Charles Wick, at the time the head of the US Information Agency, broached the subject of disinformation with Gorbachev and a three-man media negotiation team. Wick confronted the Soviet leader with his government's disinformation, including the allegations that the US Army had invented AIDS as a weapon and that US citizens smuggled baby parts for transplants. Responding, Gorbachev personally assured Wick that there would be "no more lying. No more disinformation."<sup>xii</sup>

Despite this language, disinformation continued. For example, throughout early 1988 the USSR kept promoting the story of the CIA's 'ethnic bomb', a weapon that could allegedly kill only Arabs and blacks. Other stories alleged that the FBI had murdered Martin Luther King and that the head of the U.S. delegation to the UN human rights conference had committed terrorist acts against Cuba. Wick complained to TASS on January 1988 and in personal letters to Gorbachev's Communication adviser Yakovlev in February and March, reminding him of the Washington pledge.<sup>xiii</sup>

From 20 to 22 April, Wick and a delegation mixing government and, for the first time, the private sector, met Soviet officials for an intensive round of bilateral information talks. Panels considered books, print journalism, broadcasting, film, and government-to-government exchanges. The print journalism panel discussed improved access (especially within the USSR) and agreed to address mutual stereotyping. In government-to-government talks Wick raised concern about Soviet disinformation. Wick suggested that U.S. spokesmen be invited to "comment, in a timely fashion, on newsworthy events". Both sides agreed about the "importance of ongoing talks raise issues of concern and to dispel misunderstanding". Wick considered the whole enterprise a resounding success.<sup>xiv</sup>

In order to understand why the US government is so unprepared for these issues now, it's important to understand what happened to the Working Group in the 1990s. In the dying days of the USSR, Soviet propaganda eagerly exaggerated the degree of 'new thinking' in the USSR, and at the same time whipped up western fears about

the coming breakup of the USSR, the fall of Gorbachev and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As late as June 1992, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) was still creating fake documents, including a letter purportedly from South African foreign minister Pik Botha to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker about extensive military cooperation between apartheid South Africa and the US. The USIA and the Working Group were still tracking stories into the mid-1990s but budget cuts eliminated them both. The Russian aspect of the disinformation issue returned to the political agenda only in 2016, by which time many of the best practices, discipline and institution building of the Cold War had been forgotten.

## Relevance Today

Now, as in the late 1970s, the debate about disinformation is largely about whether it matters, and whether high-level government officials should occupy themselves with it. Trust in security services is low, just as it was at that time.

It is true that, in Europe, the French President Macron and German Chancellor Merkel have made statements regarding Kremlin disinformation: official recognition is now, as it was then, the first step towards tackling the issue. But there are no strong government institutions to rigorously investigate the problem, which means that there are very few people in the US or European governments whose job description includes the full time study of this problem. The closest we have to the Working Group is the EU's StratCom Disinformation Review, which produces a weekly round-up of pro-Kremlin disinformation. It was pushed through by EU member states such as the UK and Denmark alarmed at the Kremlin, but is opposed by other member states. It struggles for a budget, lacks its own serious data analytical technology, and relies on outside NGOs for its content.

In the US the current government has obvious reasons not to engage with this subject. Former Director of National Intelligence Director James Clapper's testimony on Kremlin 'meddling' in the election and disinformation provided few facts publicly: the opposite of the Working Group's transparent approach. Think tanks such as the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensics Lab have done some of the best research on disinformation but these can be easily pigeon-holed as partisan.

An important lesson from the Active Measures Working Group was its interagency nature: it brought in different groups from government, from the CIA to the USIA, to work together. What would be today's equivalent? Perhaps a body including tech

companies, academic institutions, media, civil society and policy makers could define the disinformation agenda, create tools and bodies able to track it empirically and transparently, and to push back strategically against those who are behind it. We note that both Facebook and Google have started to involve themselves with the problem, which is an encouraging start.

## **II: Debunk and Discredit**

**The Active Measures Working Group was not only important for the fact that it raised and defined the issue of disinformation, but also because it experimented with different ways of undermining Soviet propaganda. In the main, it focused on debunking egregiously false information. “People don’t like to be duped”, the head of the Working Group liked to say, and his team used this feeling for full effect in the Cold War.**

The core tactic of the Working Group was to debunk Soviet disinformation and thus discredit the enemy. Dennis Kux, the Working Group’s first leader, instructed the group to concentrate on revealing egregious lies that no reasonable person would countenance as acceptable diplomatic discourse. The group did not stray into more complex areas like strategic messaging, propaganda and persuasion where wrongdoing is harder to define.

To be credible the Working Group needed an unimpeachable record of accuracy, and they made a point of making sure all public denunciations of Soviet disinformation were solid enough to get a grand jury indictment: that is, to demonstrate there was probable cause to believe something was actually ‘disinformation’, and that the Soviets were behind it.

An important activity was exposing Soviet forgeries. The Group instructed USIA overseas offices to report all disinformation media stories and forgeries that they came across. When this information arrived, in-house analysts as well as CIA disinformation experts analysed it. The Agency maintained a computerized database of forgeries and had unfettered access to KGB defectors involved in active measures who could help with analysis.

The Group developed its own “Report-Analyze-Publicize” (or RAP) methodology. The team looked first at the quality of the document, realizing that the Soviets were quite professional whereas others in the space, such as the Libyans, were not. If the

document was up to Soviet standards, they would look for tell-tale errors. For example, the forger might be working from older documents that did not reveal the most current Department of State cable numbering system or classification acronyms (“tags” in State lingo). The KGB sometimes slipped up when transliterating place names, using a non-US spelling. Finally, the team considered the message and who the target was: did the forgery fit into current Soviet propaganda campaigns? If after a thorough review of all the details, the working group thought it could make its case to an impartial panel of judges, it would expose the forgery.

Some of the disinformation cases that the working group investigated were easy, and others were complex and politically sensitive. An example of the latter was the use of Soviet forgeries to attribute blame to the United States for the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II by Mehmet Ali Ağca on May 13, 1981. Soviet forgeries of cables from the U.S. Embassy in Rome, which emerged in July 1983, were excellent. The Group had to take the fake telegram apart by pointing out the technical mistakes. One indicator was the transliteration of the word “Brasilia,” which was done in a way that suggested that it had been translated from Russian. The Embassy in Rome moved immediately to counter the damage from this case of Soviet disinformation, and the working group followed up by exposing the forgeries in a special report in September 1983.

Another example of a challenging forgery came in the run up to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984, which the Soviet Union boycotted. In the months before the games African and Asian Olympic Committees received copies, in plain white envelopes, of two leaflets supposedly by the Ku Klux Klan threatening the lives of non-white athletes with vile racist slogans. The Active Measures Working Group took up the issue. The FBI was able to advise the working group that it had information that the KGB had prepared the racist leaflets. However, details of the FBI’s information could not be publicly used for security reasons. But the Working Group could reveal that the letterhead used for the leaflets was not a known Klan letterhead. In addition the Group pointed to grammatical mistakes that would be made not by the type of ignorant American in the Klan, but by someone with Russian as a first language. The State Department issued a public statement accusing the KGB of producing the leaflets and contacted each affected Olympic committee to advise them that the leaflets were forgeries. As a result, not a single Olympic committee pulled out of the Games because of the threat.

The KGB also used forgeries to attack members of the Working Group. After the

Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the Soviet Union, the KGB forged a letter allegedly by the Working Group's Herbert Romerstein, which instructed Senator David Durenberger on how the US could make the Chernobyl disaster into an effective propaganda campaign. The forged letter had been created from a real letter Romerstein had made available to a Senate committee. The original text had been removed and a new one inserted, but the letterhead and the signature block had been retained. Romerstein had given a copy of the letter to a Czech diplomat at his request after a Senate testimony - but discreetly marked it so that it could be identified later if used for illicit purposes. When the forgery surfaced in August 1986, it carried the unique marking, which USIA quickly used to expose the forgery in a press conference. Instead of a news report on scandalous U.S. disinformation, the Soviets got a Washington Post story on Soviet forgeries. "The FBI and other organizations in the Active Measures Working Group used the forgery as an example of KGB methods" Romerstein would recall, "and we in fact got more mileage out of it than the Soviets ever could have".<sup>xv</sup>

As its evidence piled up the group developed "a road show" that it would take to US embassies, foreign governments and journalists across the world. Several members of the Active Measures Working Group, including Kux, would give presentations describing Soviet disinformation activities and point out the falsehoods or tell-tale signs of forgery in each case. One participant called these trips "truth squads".<sup>xvi</sup> Generally, these visits were well received, but some posts were leery, expecting a 'red under every bed' spin. Kux was aware of these sentiments and was effective in disarming such scepticism for two reasons. First, as he later stated, "the fact that we made a credible presentation — not an ideological show — lent a certain amount of professionalism to the whole effort." Second, as Kux also noted, people "don't like to be duped. Not only were we telling them they were being duped but we told them how."<sup>xvii</sup>

Apart from exposing forgeries, the Working Group would also present medical and scientific experts who would debunk Soviet pseudo-science conspiracies such as the accusation that the CIA had designed the AIDS virus in a laboratory as a weapon. They would also make the Soviets look ridiculous by taking Soviet stories which had worked in one arena, and place them in another where they sounded absurd. One such example was the Soviet allegation that the US had designed an 'ethnic bomb' which would only kill Arabs and Blacks when it exploded. This had been a popular

story in the Middle East and Africa, but when the Working Group showed it to Western media it caused hilarity, thus discrediting the Kremlin.

Though we do not have systematic studies of overseas public opinion before and after working group products and briefings, we do know that the group received positive feedback from U.S. Information Service posts and foreign sources. We also have some evidence that the group helped raise the awareness of journalists, not only overseas but also in the United States. Friendly foreign government sources also applauded the group's work.

Another sign of success was Soviet irritation. Soviet media called the Group "Chronic liars from the State Department apparatus" and labelled it a "Misinformation Bureau" which aimed to "besmirch critics of Washington's policy".<sup>xviii</sup>

Even though the Soviets showed no signs of reducing their disinformation efforts, the working group remained convinced that its reports were a necessary and helpful response. As one of the Working Group members Todd Leventhal put it: "If they could spread nasty lies about us in the Third World and smile at us in front of the camera, and we didn't call that incongruity into focus, they could have gotten away with it. But we didn't let them get away with it. Our strategy was to let people know the nasty things they were still doing. It hurt them in the eyes of the Western media."<sup>xix</sup>

In this sense the Working Group's 'expose and discredit' tactic can be seen as not merely a defensive attempt to rebut disinformation but as a positive, strategic move which reframed the Soviets as liars and the US as truth-tellers, thus feeding into a broader narrative of a cultural clash between two values systems.

## Relevance Today

The internet has seen both an explosion in the creation of fakes and in myth-busting sites. Today's fakes, however, have none of the rigour and dedication the KGB applied in the Cold War. The work done previously by the Working Group is now taken on by NGOs such as Ukraine's "Stop Fake". The ease with which 'fake news' can be created means, however, that they are always playing catch-up with the latest lie. As in the Cold War, perhaps the most important role debunking NGOs play is to sensitize media and the public to disinformation campaigns. More public education, and more widely available IT tools which can analyse whether a piece of news is



fake, would help strengthen this process. In the future automated debunking programs could help catch disinformation before it spreads.

Debunking as a tactic also faces qualitatively new challenges.

Attribution has become far more difficult, with the Kremlin outsourcing fakes through third parties, and enthusiasts or business people creating fakes for their own reasons. Even when one can source a fake directly to the Kremlin, Moscow seems not to care about being caught. The Kremlin does not present itself as a 'truth teller', so catching it out does little to undermine its credibility. Indeed it can help call attention to the West's own failings in this regard, thus perpetuating the Kremlin paradigm that all sides are equally loose with the truth.

Another difficulty is audience preferences. Many readers now choose to dwell in echo chambers, and to self-select the news that confirms existing biases. As researchers at the University of Venice have shown, debunking efforts can sometimes lead to a backfire effect where users double-down and defend misinformation when it is attacked.<sup>xx</sup> Debunking needs to start with a more audience driven approach, understanding more about why audiences are ready to consume disinformation and how they receive it.

### **III: Sanctions**

**Disinformation does not necessarily need to be fought purely with information tools. The threat of sanctions can be a powerful way to retaliate against and curb disinformation. During the Cold War the US used the threat of sanctions to stop one of the Soviet's most damaging disinformation campaigns. The Working Group also took part in the sanctions campaign, providing the information and materials needed to back it up.**

In October 1985, the Soviet weekly magazine *Literaturnaya Gazeta* alleged that the AIDS virus had been created by the U.S. government as a biological weapon. The story had been road tested before. Back in July 1983, *The Patriot*, an Indian newspaper with longstanding Soviet and KGB connections, printed an anonymous letter from New York claiming that AIDS, then a mysterious new disease, had actually been developed by the US government. The anonymous author blamed scientists at Fort Detrick, Maryland, home to the United States Army's germ warfare laboratory from 1943 (until 1969 when President Nixon turned it into a cancer lab). At

the time, the rumour had little impact. But by late 1985, the story took off. As AIDS spread around the world, more people wanted an explanation of the terrifying spread of the disease. The story also grew on the back of widespread anti-American sentiment under Reagan's presidency. By the end of the year versions of the AIDS libel had run in twelve other countries. Soon a major campaign was underway in the Soviet domestic media, while *TASS* and *Novosti* circulated the story around the world.<sup>xxi</sup>

The AIDS libel received a major boost in September 1986 from a 'scientific' report which appeared mysteriously at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Harare that month. The author, a retired East German professor (born in Leningrad) named Jakob Segal, along with his wife Dr. Lilli Segal, and a man named Dr. Ronald Dehmlow advanced a 'hypothesis' by which U.S. scientists could have manufactured AIDS and named Fort Detrick, Maryland as the most likely point of origin. His proof was that the first appearance of AIDS allegedly coincided with the opening of a P-4 laboratory at Fort Detrick. The report also claimed that AIDS emanated from New York, "a city not far from Fort Detrick." In fact Ft. Detrick is nearly 250 miles southwest of New York City, and far closer to Washington D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland.

The KGB picked up the Segal claim and made it the basis of a major dissemination campaign. Segal was described as a "French" expert in many Soviet versions of the story in order to boost his credibility. By the end of the year, newspapers in forty-eight countries had run the 'US made AIDS' story, with the USIA receiving near-daily reports from American embassies around the world of the disinformation appearing in local publications. Many of the stories could be traced back to KGB media placements between late-1986 and mid-1987, but reputable Western newspapers, including the London Sunday Express, also gave space to Segal and his claims. Moscow had found an ideal way to encourage mistrust of the U.S. and more especially resentment against U.S. military bases around the world.<sup>xxii</sup>

In spring 1987 the U.S. government sought to finally end the AIDS libel by tackling the problem at its source, threatening to end all AIDS research collaboration with the USSR unless the disinformation campaign stopped. At an April 1987 session of the US-USSR Joint Health Committee, Health and Human Services (HHS) Assistant Secretary Robert Windom and Surgeon General C. Everett Koop directly expressed to Soviet opposite numbers their "strong displeasure" at Moscow's attempts to "use a grave international public health problem for base propaganda purposes."<sup>xxiii</sup> In 1988

U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop advised the Soviet Union that the United States would no longer supply them with the scientific information to cope with the AIDS epidemic if they continued this disinformation campaign. “The effect was as if a faucet had been turned off” remembers the Working Group’s Herbert Romerstein. “Suddenly the stories practically disappeared.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

The sanctions threats were accompanied by a concerted information campaign. In 1987 the State Department published a fourteen page Foreign Affairs Note titled “The USSR’s AIDS Disinformation Campaign.” The report detailed the Soviet disinformation campaign and refuted the arguments. In August 1987, Working Group members directly confronted Soviet propagandists with the evidence at the Soviet-US summit in Chautauqua, NY. In the summer of 1988, the Soviet disinformation apparatus was using an alleged quotation from New York Democratic Congressman Ted Weiss. They claimed that Weiss had confirmed in 1983 that AIDS was produced as a biological weapon by the United States. The Working Group obtained a letter from Congressman Weiss repudiating the Soviet claim and presented the letter in Moscow at the U.S.-USSR Bilateral Information Talks in September 1988.

In the same year, Koop advised the Soviet Union that the United States would no longer supply them with the scientific information to cope with their own internal AIDS epidemic if they continued this disinformation campaign. Such threats were repeated at the very top: President Reagan warned Soviet leader Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze directly on the AIDS lies campaign and told Soviet leaders that the West would cease all medical and pharmacological cooperation with USSR if it continued to peddle AIDS falsehoods. “The effect”, remembers the Working Group’s Herbert Romerstein, “was as if a faucet had been turned off”.<sup>xxv</sup>

The Soviet government eventually stopped pushing the AIDS disinformation story. It became clear, as head of the Working Group Dennis Kux had predicted, that they would back off when the cost of their lies became too much for them.

In March 1992, Yevgeniy Primakov, head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (the re-named KGB First Chief Directorate), revealed at a public meeting that the KGB had indeed fabricated the AIDS disinformation story. Later that year, two former officers of the Stasi, the East German Intelligence Service, wrote a book about their work in disinformation. They wrote, “The content of our disinformation operation consisted of the following assertions: The AIDS virus had been made in the high-security virus and gene laboratory of the Military-Science Research Institute at Fort Detrick in Maryland. Roughly in 1977, it was allegedly communicated to the public

through test subjects in an entirely uncontrolled fashion and thus triggered this deadly catastrophe.” The former Stasi officers wrote in their book that they used East Berlin Professor Jakob Segal to spread this story. Then, the well-known journalist “Stefan Heym saw to it that the AIDS lie would spread all over Europe; journalists brought the story to Africa and to other regions that were heavily ravaged by the disease.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

## Relevance Today

Disinformation is now financially as well as politically rewarding, and sanctions need to target this. Sanctions have worked in the past, and they can form a part of a wider strategy in countering disinformation. Since Russia is already subject to sanctions, it may be worth expanding or finessing the sanctions regime in the three ways.

Firstly, the US and other Western powers should consider ‘toughening up’ against known Kremlin mouthpieces such as the Russia Today or Sputnik. The Voice of America or Radio Free Europe are not broadcast in Russia due to restrictions imposed by the Russian government, and there is an argument to be made in favour of a more equal relationship.

Similarly, sanctions could target (Western) companies advertising on channels or websites which propagate hate speech, as some Kremlin channels have been found to do, in order to target any financial incentive for propaganda. US content producers should be de-incentivised to have deals with Russian state-owned and controlled TV channels. Public scrutiny should be raised on sales markets such as MIPCOM where Kremlin channels – some of which have been found guilty of spreading hate speech by EU bodies - buy and sell programs.

Sanctions should be focused on things that matter to the Russians. This might include their assets in the West, or restriction on companies or individuals who purvey disinformation and hate speech, or limiting access to software products and TV production hardware.

Finally, technology companies must step up their engagement in this space. Bottom-up pressure on advertisers not to use websites which promote hate speech and disinformation has been effective but the real sea change will come only when technology companies take responsibility for their own role in the spread of disinformation. Social media companies already know that some groups on their

website are created by fake accounts, but they do not currently enforce their own rules well enough to stop this mushrooming phenomenon. Similarly, Google could stop facilitating advertisements for companies which are shown which are shown to be either corrupt or linked to disinformation. In much the same way as in the Cold War, modern-day sanctions can to raise the price of spreading disinformation.

## **IV: Work with International Media**

**One of the ways the US sought to counter disinformation was through active work with foreign media. The Working Group provided reports and information in the form of press packets, books, films, Worldnet TV broadcasts, Voice of America radio broadcasts and more. Its “Soviet Propaganda Trends” service sought to identify themes that the USSR would promote. Local USIA officers also worked hard to develop personal relationships with media across the world. Here is an example of how the Working Group worked with media in India between 1984 and 1988.**

In India, Soviet disinformation was spread through a newspaper, *The Patriot*, which was created with Soviet money especially for that purpose. Among other things, *The Patriot* was the original source of the rumour that the CIA had invented AIDS. The USSR also supplied stories to the Indian media via cut-outs and sources, and of course through official organs like the news service TASS.

The anti-disinformation strategy in India was carried out through USIA. Its representatives in India maintained regular contact with the editors and leading writers, especially from the nationally distributed, independent English-language daily newspapers which at that time had more credibility than *The Patriot*. They organized regular discussions of U.S. policies and frequent alerts concerning emerging disinformation themes. Regular U.S. policy material on issues of proven or potential interest to Soviet propaganda and disinformation were distributed to about 350 newspapers and periodicals, 10 news agencies and 145 key national and state government officials. The themes were identified by the USIA’s Soviet Propaganda Trends service, which monitored the Soviet media to identify possible topics.

Somewhat belatedly, USIA also focused on the Hindi language press, which was particularly susceptible to disinformation because its underpaid journalists and under-resourced papers often accepted money to place material. In 1983 and 1984, for example, Hindi papers carried several articles alleging CIA sponsorship of riots in

Punjab. USIA in India initiated a campaign to inform editors and owners about active Soviet sponsorship of this material. This included, again, personal contacts with many provincial newspapers on the same day an offensive story appeared, as well as written denials and clarifications. A special effort was made to contact not only the senior editor, but also the real gate keepers, the news editor and chief sub-editors. USIA believed that this effort at least led editors to double-check stories with them.

USIA claimed one major success. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Soviet officials blamed the US, citing a mysterious CIA report. USIA officials in India found the misrepresented report and gave it to editors of major newspapers and press services. As a result, the story swung into reverse: many papers criticized the crass Soviet attempt to exploit the tragedy.

In a few instances, the Indian government cooperated with USIA campaigns. One example was a case of Soviet disinformation about a US/India vaccine campaign. A joint Indo-U.S. Vaccine Action Project (VAP) aimed at developing vaccines to eradicate or control several diseases endemic in India and other Third World countries came under attack in August 1987, when a Press Trust of India (PTI) article raised security concerns over releasing sensitive epidemiological information on Indians because of its potential uses to biological warfare specialists. Indian officials decided that enough was at stake to warrant its investing its own political capital to defend the program. With the assistance of non-government scientists supportive of the research, and with some information from USIA, the Indian government turned the press and public opinion around.

## Relevance Today

This case study shows that exposure of disinformation – if it is done systematically and methodically, with responses given directly to editors and writers – can have an impact. But clearly it is not possible to copy this same system today. Any US government equivalent of USIA would be far less trusted in much of the world today; and in any case, the ‘mainstream press’ doesn’t really exist anymore in most countries, or else it reaches a small minority of the public.

There is one other analogy: technology companies presumably have far more knowledge of disinformation on their platforms than they make public. A more open relationship with media which included sharing information about disinformation would certainly be welcome. However, it is unclear how one would build a

relationship with media who happily purvey disinformation, such as InfoWars, whose audience is critical.

The Active Measures Working Group outlined in the first study also played a crucial role in this case study since local USIA staff relied on the Working Group's intelligence to build relationships with local editors and journalists. The Working Group was unique because it was an interagency group. Today, a government-only group would be unlikely to be successful due to global low levels of trust in governments. A modern day equivalent could be a new working group which brought together government officials, technology companies and journalists. This working group would bring together the technological expertise required to trace modern-day disinformation campaigns with government-level intelligence and journalists could use the knowledge in their reporting on the issue. The creation of links between government officials, technologists and journalists could help build trust between groups which have historically distrusted one another.

## **V: Defectors**

**Soviet Defectors to the West were an important tool in the propaganda battles of the Cold War. Their testimonies made particularly powerful, emotional, narratives which helped undermine Soviet propaganda. Defectors sometimes provided critical insights into how active measures worked and how to fight back. But defectors often found life in the West difficult, which undermined their effectiveness - a returned defector did not speak well of Western life - and dissuaded new ones. Eventually a special foundation was created to support them.**

In the late 1940s the US State Department determined that Soviet defectors had “done more to arouse the Western world to the realities of the nature of communist tyranny than anything else since the end of the war.” Defectors provided a “gold mine of vital information [to] be systematically exploited to the fullest possible extent.” “Unlimited and indiscriminate encouragement of defection” from the USSR became official policy in April 1951. The United States Escapee Program, launched in 1952, sought to encourage flight from Soviet states: “a bright beacon to induce large scale defections from satellite Europe,” as one State Department official put it. <sup>xxvii</sup>

‘Escapees’ was a new legal term which tried to differentiate defectors from refugees. The Escapee Program deliberately targeted important government and party officials,

military officers, the intelligentsia, the managerial class and highly qualified technicians. To help escapees in Western Europe, the US channelled funds to Western states that hosted new arrivals, and built parallel international agencies (primarily the International Committee on European Migration) wholly under its control. US international broadcasters Voice of America and Radio Free Europe devoted airtime to the heroics of escape and escapees' warm reception.

The reality for many 'escapees' was more complex. An internal USIA report noted that "the hard fact of the matter is that most escapees find it necessary to remain in reception centres for some time before the process of arranging acceptable resettlement is completed. More often than not they experience major difficulty in adjusting to and fitting themselves constructively into the life of resettlement."<sup>xxviii</sup>

The escapee policy was made more difficult by the McCarran Act (1950), a McCarthyist measure which barred former members of the Communist Party from entering the USA. At the time President Truman remarked how the Act would have a negative effect on defectors, but the CIA found a workaround. In 1949, Public Law 110 gave senior CIA staff the authority to circumnavigate normal immigration procedures to bring certain individuals into the US if they judged that it would be in the best interest of the United States. This law is widely understood to have been the basis by which high-profile defectors were brought into the country.

Several defectors were especially important in revealing Soviet Active Measures. These included the Hungarian László Szabó, whose task had been generating friction between the United States and United Kingdom, and who defected in 1965. Ladislav Bittman defected in 1968 and testified under an assumed name in 1971. He told the Senate, among other things, about Czech assistance to the KGB to smear US Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater as a racist member of the John Birch Society. Little was done with this information over the subsequent decade. This changed after October 1979, when Stanislav Levchenko, a KGB officer in charge of the active measures division of the Tokyo KGB residence, contacted Americans and asked for asylum. By this time, the KGB had greatly expanded and upgraded its active measures capabilities, and Levchenko was able to tell the CIA exactly how the expanded organization operated. Levchenko was brought in to brief government officials on the details of contemporary Soviet active measures, even while his debriefing process was ongoing and his presence in the United States was still sensitive. By 1982, the Agency believed that it was safe to have Levchenko testify publicly. He went on to assist the Active Measures Working Group.



As Levchenko recalls in his memoirs, he found it hard to adapt to life in the US. The CIA provided defectors with a stipend but little moral support or guidance as to how to fit into society. Levchenko found himself working for dubious Washington D.C.-based think tanks which tried to use his fame for raising money, but had no use or interest in his expertise.

Others had an even tougher time. After a gruelling 10-month CIA debriefing following his defection from a KGB post in Kuwait in 1971, the CIA never found Vladimir Sakharov the job they had promised him and he fell into a depression, remaining unemployed for four years. Following his debriefing, former Deputy Director of the Romanian finance ministry, Dr. Petre Nikolae, who could barely speak English, was sent to New York where he worked as an ice cream man. He later bought a laundromat but got burned by loan sharks and fell into debt.

In 1978 Anatoly Shevchenko, deputy head of the UN, defected – one of the highest ranking Soviet officials ever to do so. Later, he too had trouble adjusting and grew lonely. He asked his CIA handlers how to meet women; they gave him a telephone book and recommended that he call an escort service. He did so, resulting in an embarrassing affair with Judy Chavez who wrote her own book, *Defector's Mistress*, in which she said Shevchenko bought her companionship for \$40,000 in CIA money.

In 1984 the Jamestown Foundation was created, independent of government but with bi-partisan backing, in order to improve Western understanding of the East by providing a forum for defectors while also helping these former diplomats, intelligence officers and government officials begin new lives in America. The Jamestown Foundation also proposed reforms to government, such as making it easier for defectors to obtain citizenship and meaningful jobs.

By 1988 the Foundation had a full-time staff of seven, with an annual operating budget of about \$650,000. Funded by private contributions, the organization sponsored conferences on East-West issues and assisted 'clients' with housing, job placement, language training, driving permits and moral support. It also acted as a literary agent and helped defectors, free of charge, plan books and articles. Once a book was published, Jamestown helped coordinate publicity and book tours. In 1988 the Jamestown Foundation boasted a stable of 35 defectors who had written scores of newspaper and magazine articles, eight books and one bestseller.

## Relevance Today

Whistle-blowers are today's defectors. The confessions of people who have worked in Kremlin troll factories, or who have told the truth about working in Kremlin controlled media, or who have taken part in Kremlin hacking operations, are the single most powerful source of insight on 21<sup>st</sup> century active measures.

Many have heard of RT presenter Liz Wahl's resignation live on-air in protest of Russian coverage of the conflict in Ukraine. Sara Firth, another RT presenter, resigned in protest of their coverage of the Malaysia Airlines crash in Ukraine. Other, more vulnerable, whistle-blowers include Russian nationals who have spoken of their time working in troll farms or Kremlin media, or with direct knowledge of hacking operations.

The West's reaction to whistle-blowers needs to evolve from the current mistrust and instead focus on supporting those brave enough to break ranks. For many whistle-blowers their actions mean they can never work easily in Russian media again, and it can mean threats to their safety. It can also mean legal problems, as employees are often asked to sign NDAs. A legal fund to support whistle-blowers, and structured support to help them find work, is something to be considered. Similarly, financial support for an independent media organisation which could support whistle-blowers once they leave Kremlin-controlled media could be considered as a way to support whistle-blowers without direct cash payments.

## VI: BBC Monitoring: The Original Open-Source Collection

**During the Cold War, the monitoring of global media, and especially Soviet media, was an essential part of informing the work of broadcasters and government. Today, it is unclear whether this research should be funded by media or government, whether it is a part of journalism or security, whether it should be available to all or only intelligence agencies. But in the past, it was done by governments, for public consumption.**

Founded in 1939, the BBC Monitoring (BBCM) section was an early form of open source monitoring. Initially, its monitors followed open radio and news agency broadcasts by foreign powers. During the Cold War, monitoring helped the BBC and

the government both to understand Soviet messages and framing and to craft their own information and messages accordingly. Sitting alongside BBC Monitoring at their headquarters in Caversham was, and is, a US organization, Open Source Enterprise, which is part of US Intelligence. The arrangement and co-location with Open Source Enterprise is part of a burden-sharing arrangement. During the Cold War, Open Source Enterprise (known during that time as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS) dealt with China and BBCM kept track of the USSR, though the OSE always translated Soviet newspapers. Both OSE and BBCM have a global remit, though each still tends to focus on specific regions. But OSE's research is only available to government agencies.

During the Cold War, 60 to 70 people at BBCM followed Soviet radio broadcasts, TV and wire agency reports every day, including Radio Moscow's international output, which went out in approximately 80 languages. 'The Russia Team' monitored Soviet media 24 hours a day. The monitor's job was to listen, translate and then record on paper. Not every word of every broadcast was transcribed. Monitors were trained to note what was important, and to keep track of anomalies in order to understand when something was out of the ordinary.

Monitors were both objective recorders of information output, and at the same time experts who could understand what to look for. They kept a close eye, for example, on the Soviet figures for tractor and bread production as this could give clues to military and economic strategy, as well as to the weaponry mentioned on military parades. Any images of bridges or maps on Russian TV would be relayed to Monitoring's video unit, who would grab stills and send them to the Ministry of Defense. Anomalies, such as when news appeared and then disappeared from bulletins, would be taken down in 'Media Behaviour Notes'. Monitors would compare how local stations covered stories in comparison to national ones. Sometimes a story censored at the national level would still be covered in the provinces.

Monitors would record how the Kremlin portrayed the West domestically, and kept track of how Radio Moscow adapted its broadcasting strategy for different countries. In Africa, for example, Radio Moscow pushed an anti-imperialist narrative, claiming the US and Britain only brought conflict while the USSR brought engineers and aid; in the UK, Radio Moscow indulged British listeners in their love of science by broadcasting programs on Soviet success in technology.

Monitors could also spot cracks in the system. During the Afghan War when radio presenter Vladimir Danchev began to purposefully 'misread' newscasts and called the Soviet soldiers "occupiers" BBCM immediately understood that this was a sign of resentment against the war inside the USSR.<sup>xxix</sup> When Gorbachev began his anti-alcohol drive in the USSR, monitors picked up that Soviet international broadcasts covered this as a routine policy, while domestic ones stressed it as something exceptional. They understood this to be a sign of the desperation the Kremlin felt at Soviet domestic decline, and its desire to keep that decline hidden from foreign audiences.

BBC Monitoring published what was in effect its own daily newspaper, the Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB). The size and arrangement of the SWB varied over the years, but for much of the Cold War it had four separate editions, covering the USSR, Eastern Europe, the Far East (predominantly China) and the rest of the world (mainly the Middle East and Africa). The SWB could be up to 100,000 words in total each day at times of crisis. For the USSR, the SWB would provide the translated texts of speeches and statements by Kremlin officials, and of broadcast commentaries for domestic and foreign audiences, along with the documentation of other news, such as visits by western officials to the USSR and Soviet officials to the West.

Another printed publication was the daily Monitoring Report, in effect a summary of key points in each SWB edition, boiled down to a few thousand words at most, and sometimes offering BBCM's analytical conclusions drawn from the straight transcripts that formed the bulk of the SWB's contents.

Also printed by BBCM was the Weekly Economic Report (WER), produced along the same regional lines as the daily SWB, but focused on documenting economic-related news. Although mainly written for readers within the British government and the BBC, the SWB and WER were also sold to commercial subscribers.

Such subscribers could also take a daily teleprinted news file, in effect BBCM's wire service, whose key customers were foreign desk at BBC newsrooms in London and duty officers in government ministries.

BBC Monitoring played an especially important role during periods of crisis. During the 1956 Suez Crisis, the UK, France and Israel tried to overthrow Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser and take back the strategically important Suez Canal. The BBC Monitoring Service provided valuable intelligence during the crisis on everything from

clandestine 'black' radio stations to the daily output of, among others, Soviet, Chinese, Israeli and Egyptian broadcasters. BBC Monitoring Service built a strong partnership with the British government's chief anti-communist propaganda agency, the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (see Case Study below). The IRD deemed radio monitoring to be its main source of material for immediate use in counter propaganda in the Middle East, as well as for background information. The Foreign Office would digest Monitoring material and, in theory, adjust its propaganda output accordingly.

During the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the Soviet Union in April 1986, the Monitoring Service started running translations of reports from various Soviet republics about their agricultural harvests, and particularly the harvest of 'soft' and forest fruit during that year. That provided UK Government researchers with the first indications that the radiation damage from the disaster was far more significant and extensive than the Soviet authorities had been willing to admit. BBC Monitoring also provided information on hospital beds shortages in neighbouring Poland, yet another indication that some of the damage from Chernobyl was more widespread than the authorities envisaged.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, the most dangerous moment of the Cold War, the BBC Monitoring Service played a little known but vital role. The 13-day crisis began when the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, placed Soviet ballistic missiles on Cuba. Officially, this was a response to the deployment of US missiles in Turkey. In practice, it was perceived in the US as a threat of a first strike.

On Friday 26 October Khrushchev sent Kennedy a diplomatic message in an attempt to reach a deal. It was delivered to the American embassy in Moscow at 4.42pm (so 9.42am in Washington). The embassy staff then had to translate the letter and put it into cipher, then send it to the State Department in Washington where it was decoded and typed up. It was ready 12 hours after it had been first delivered to the US Embassy in Moscow. At 1700 on October 27 Khrushchev, having received no reply, turned to the radio instead. In a Radio Moscow broadcast addressed to the US President, Khrushchev made the startling offer to withdraw the Soviet missiles from Cuba, on the condition that the US would withdraw its their missiles from Turkey in return. The speech was immediately transcribed by BBCM and sent to Washington via FBIS. The President and his advisers were meeting in the special committee managing the crisis, as the message came through at 10.18am: the contrast between this immediacy and the length of time it had taken the Friday telegram to arrive is

stark. Kennedy replied publicly to Khrushchev and stated that he would not invade Cuba and that he would end the naval blockade if the Soviet missiles were withdrawn. On Sunday 28 October Radio Moscow broadcast that Khrushchev accepted the terms.

Since the Cold War ended, BBC Monitoring continues to play an important role. BBC Monitoring still translates and analyses news and information from media sources including TV and radio broadcasts, the press and social media, across 100 different languages and 150 countries around the world. Not only does it produce verbatim transcripts, it also generates analysis of news items, using a range of media sources reporting on the same topic. It also produces assessments of the reach and influence of different types of media in areas across the world. It currently employs 320 people, half in Caversham and the rest across the world.

During the Afghanistan War in 2007 the British Army used BBC Monitoring extensively in advance of, during and after operations in order to assess local and regional media coverage and address emerging issues quickly. Very often the trans-national Arab media, with their many correspondents on the ground, would report material of direct interest to the UK military—and coverage of this was provided exclusively by Monitoring. BBC Monitoring also provides a service, on a commercial basis, to a wide range of intergovernmental organisations including NATO, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), EU and UN; ministries and embassies of other countries; academic and research institutes; multinationals; UK and foreign media; and charities and NGOs.

In 2010, however, Monitoring's government funding was cut and it came under direct control of the BBC. Priorities changed from monitoring details important for defence to following a news agenda which included pop music charts and pet stories. The dedicated team which provided the Ministry of Defence with videos of hostilities, weapons, military and strategic infrastructure was closed due to budget cuts. The material is now sourced from across the wider group of Monitoring offices and teams and is still shared as a bespoke product for the department. The OSE continues to function, but the resulting analysis is harder for journalists and the general public to see, since OSE only supplies material to diplomats and intelligence agencies.

## Relevance Today

At a UK Parliamentary Inquiry into BBC Monitoring, the case for the organisation's ongoing relevance was made by the head of the National Union of Journalists:

“Open source sheds light on places where information is scarce or tightly controlled and where the UK has little presence. It illustrates the sometimes distorted way in which others perceive the world, themselves and us. It gives clues as to their intentions and can supplement and confirm, or query, intelligence from other sources. It gives early warning of instability and conflict.”<sup>xxx</sup>

In response, Menzies Campbell agreed that the work of BBC Monitoring was a key resource for the work of Government departments. As an example, he highlighted the value of that work in providing Government with a better intelligence picture of Russia:

“Our relationship with [ ] Russia is as poor as it has been for a long time. In those circumstances, it seems to me that the security and continuity that BBC Monitoring has been able to produce over the years is absolutely fundamental to the security of the United Kingdom.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

The Parliamentary committee recommended government take over funding of Monitoring, though there has been no action in this regard.

Smaller, independent organisations are now experimenting with various new forms of monitoring. For example the ‘Hamilton Dashboard,’ a project of the German Marshall Fund, has attempted to track which messages pro-Kremlin bots and accounts are pushing in the US. Open Source online research has become the basis for a new generation of desktop journalists, such as the ‘digital forensics’ group Bellingcat, who have made some of the most impressive research on military actions in Syria and Ukraine. Media monitoring organisations such as Memo 98 can be hired to look at patterns in legacy media or marketing companies in social media, and Countering Violent Extremism NGOs follow radical Islamist and far-right media. These projects are unfortunately fragmented: there are no common standards and it is impossible for journalists and public diplomacy specialists to build up a full picture. Perhaps the technology to do so is coming into existence, but at present there is nothing to rival the role that BBCM and OSE played in the Cold War.

In the end, BBC Monitoring mattered not just for what it did every day, but because it was linked to mainstream broadcasting and US and UK government policy. It was not a project on its own, but rather a part of a coherent system. A contemporary equivalent would have to include data researchers as well as monitors, and would have them linked with journalists, broadcasters and government officials.

## **VII: The UK's Information Research Department – Covert Research**

**Operating on the assumption that neither journalists nor diplomats would have the time to research or understand domestic Soviet reality and foreign propaganda, the British government created a secret research centre to fill the gap. The centre studied Soviet tactics in the West, including communist front organizations and political groups, and then circulated information covertly through a wide range of British institutions, including embassies, political parties, journalists and the BBC. Its goal was to reach Western and developing world audiences that were influenced by Soviet tactics.**

The bland-sounding Information Research Department (IRD) was a crucial but little-known element of Britain's Cold War response to Soviet propaganda. Founded in 1948, the IRD had a staff of several hundred writers and researchers, many of whom were veterans of Britain's wartime Political Warfare Executive. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the IRD researched and distributed a steady stream of facts about the reality of life in the Soviet Union in order to undermine propaganda about Soviet success.

To begin with, the IRD sought to establish a factual basis for undermining propaganda. In its first three months of existence, it produced briefs on the "Real Conditions in Soviet Russia"; "Conditions in Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe"; "Poland as an Example of how the Soviets Gain Control Over and Dominate a State"; "Equality and Class Distinction in the Soviet Union"; "the Communitisation of Justice in Eastern Europe"; "Communists and Freedom of the Press"; "Facts of Soviet Expansionism"; "Communists and Freedom of the Press"; and "Peasant Collectivization".<sup>xxxii</sup>

By June 1948 the IRD began to print materials: "Essence of Soviet Foreign Policy" was followed by "Christianity in the Soviet Union", "Communist Conquest of the Baltic States", "Daily Life in a Communist State", "Control of Workers in Countries Under



Communist Domination”, “Forced Labour in the USSR”. The IRD also commissioned former communists to write articles on their reasons for leaving the party, and published, through the government’s Central Information Office, memoirs of Soviet labour camps and exposes on the Russian administration of the Central Asian republics.

From mid-1948 the flow of background papers was supplemented by book extracts, including a handbook entitled “Points At Issue”, which “gave data concerning all stock lines of Communist propaganda” and a weekly digest of news items about Communist countries and Communist activities in international organisations. The aim was to supply quotable, factual material which could be used to rebut Soviet claims about their own system. Where possible, stories were attributed to a named source, and presented in a simple form so that information officers could quote them to their contacts rather than handing over printed material.

The IRD’s initial priorities were in France and Italy, where communist parties were very strong after the war. In advance of the 1948 Italian elections, the IRD delivered a slew of papers and pamphlets to anti-Communist parties and papers across the country. There was no need for recipients to acknowledge the source: the UK government did not want the public to know it had a unit dedicated to propaganda, and its leaders believed that the information would have more impact if it was not seen to emanate from official sources. The IRD’s Christopher Warner told the ambassador in Italy that embassy staff should deliver the background papers “on the quiet”, to “key men” in Rome and the provinces. The effort may have helped, since in the end the Christian Democrats won a parliamentary majority.

Similar material was also distributed through the British Labour Party’s international department, which circulated the books and pamphlets among other centre-left parties in Europe. The Dutch Labour Party, for example, printed 30,000 copies of *De Waarheid Over OostEuropa*, a translation of IRD’s first paper. The IRD also exchanged information with the US government and CIA. The two countries made an informal agreement to split their efforts: the British focused on distributing anti-Communist propaganda in the non-Communist world, while the US targeted the Soviet Bloc.

The IRD also worked to help Western officials counter the bellicose speeches of Soviet officials at the United Nations and in other international fora. The unit produced succinct talking points for them, containing documented evidence on

subjects such as human rights. It provided background material to Western officials on Soviet debating tactics as well, offering advice on how to deal with them.

In British colonies and dominions, the IRD focused on countering the myth (frequently repeated at that time) that there was no colonial or racial oppression in the Communist bloc. The unit documented the oppressive Soviet rule in the Baltic states the lack of civil rights in the USSR and the harsh treatment of minorities such as the Chechens. After the 1949 Communist uprising in Malaya, the IRD established an office in Singapore which created material in local languages. An office in Cairo produced material in Arabic. British representatives in the field were everywhere instructed to show “due regard to local political and general conditions” and to take under consideration “local interpretation of general issues”, an ideal which was not always upheld.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The British badly misunderstood their Middle Eastern audiences, for example, most of whom were unconcerned about the threat of Soviet Communism and more interested in the creation of the state of Israel and their own nationalist movements. As one historian remarks, “Western propagandists were unable to effect any significant change in Arab views without substantial shifts in Western policy towards Arab nationalism and the Arab-Israeli dispute: policy and propaganda were not in synch.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Although its main priority was its work abroad, the IRD did at times enter domestic political debates. It prepared background notes for Labour MPs who opposed “Communist inspired opposition at Labour Party and Trade Union Meetings”. The range of topics included “American Imperialism”, as well as Soviet Expansionism, Soviet Intransigence and so on. The material was very important to the leadership of the Labour party, which was at that time waging an internal party battle against Communist party members and fellow-travellers. The IRD had a similar relationship with the British Trade Union Congress, where it provided material to the anti-Communist action group, the Freedom First Committee.

The IRD provided material to the BBC as well. Although the World Service was financed by the Foreign Office and editorially independent, it readily took IRD material and consulted with it on editorial strategy. At one point the entire BBC Albanian services ran from IRD scripts. Occasionally, the IRD offered background material to the domestic BBC as well. After a BBC program on Soviet living conditions was described by the UK Ambassador to Moscow as “Communist-inspired drivel”, the IRD complained to the BBC and suggested that in future the Corporation’s Russia experts be properly vetted. After a program about the “Soviet View” also

incurred the wrath of the Foreign Office, the IRD had words with the producer who “undertook to reconsider the whole matter.”<sup>xxxv</sup> The FCO and IRD acknowledged the BBC home service was independent, but they still felt justified in intervening.

At home, the IRD also spent time in its early years to cultivating the British Left – journalists and intellectuals as well as politicians – in order to provide them with a broader understanding of the realities of life in the Eastern Bloc. The Department had a wide network of journalists who were glad to take its materials. IRD suggested useful topics to leading scholars of life in the Communist Bloc, provided them with research materials and even subsidized publications with bulk purchases and payments for translations for international distribution. It established a publishing house, Ampersand Limited, as a front for the distribution of hundreds of its anti-Communist publications both at home and abroad.

While unknown to the British people, the IRD’s existence was well known in Moscow: an early member of staff was none other than Guy Burgess, a notorious member of the Cambridge spy ring. In the end, however, the IRD was a victim of the politics of détente. In May 1977, the Labour Foreign Secretary David Owen lost patience with IRD, believing its anti-Communism and covert methods to be out of step with the times. He closed the unit. Its activities were either ended or divided between the Foreign Office’s Overseas Information Department or to MI6.

In retrospect, the IRD’s legacy is ambivalent. While the idea of providing expert research materials and support to bolster discourse on the Communist world was sound, its covert methods embarrassed those intellectuals and writers revealed to have been its customers. It may also be that it artificially sustained a political position without really convincing people that it was correct, causing many to dismiss its language as mere propaganda.

## Relevance Today

If anything, background research is even more necessary today than it was in the 1950s. Today’s media has even fewer resources to pursue long-term research projects, and there is an urgent need for institutions which can provide free, accurate research on the spread of disinformation and thematic content.

The IRD’s relationship with the British Labour Party is also instructive. The IRD approached the anti-Communist wings of left-wing institutions and provided them

with material with which they could fight their own internal battles. While the secrecy of this relationship could be more of a hindrance than help in today's environment (when "trust" is increasingly synonymous with "transparency"), supplying information to friendly groups in divided organisations, such as the US Republican Party, could be a light-touch way to fight back against disinformation.

Of course, the question is whether a presentation of "facts" would work today in the same manner that it worked, at least some of the time, during the Cold War. Russia does not try to convince other countries that its own system is better, only that democracies are just as bad. The provision of facts about Russia would not necessarily provide a counter-weight, even if a similar distribution system could be created.

## **VIII: RFE/RL: Using 'natives' to come closer to the audience**

**Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were Cold War attempts to engage Soviet Bloc populations with issues and information that contrasted to Soviet bloc propaganda. One of the tactics that the US-funded stations deployed in order to engage audiences was the use of refugees. Often political dissidents and well-known intellectuals who had escaped their countries, the RFE/RL radio personalities not only spoke the native language of the target audience, they intuitively understood their politics as well.**

The US began using non-Americans in both military and influence operations in the USSR and the eastern bloc from the end of the Second World War. From the beginning, they saw them as an asset: a "free Soviet émigré network", one official argued, could make "the Soviet people aware of a democratic alternative to their oppressive regime." <sup>xxxvi</sup> Early attempts to craft a political force failed. Operation Rollback, which parachuted men into the Soviet-occupied Baltic states and Poland ended disastrously. Inside the USSR, national émigré politics made a unified strategy impossible: the Ukrainians, for example, refused to work with Russians unless the Russians guaranteed Ukrainian independence in the event of the breakup of the USSR. By the end of the 1940s they decided that their original goal, to install a crack team of communicators all across the USSR would be impossible. Instead of military or political intervention, emphasis shifted to broadcasting, with the creation of Radio Free Europe (for occupied countries of Eastern Europe) in 1949 and Radio Liberty

(for the Soviet Union) in 1951, which relied on separate nationality desks, staffed by natives, to communicate with specific target audiences.

The radio stations were radically different from anything that had been tried before. At the time, international broadcasting sought to promote American culture through radio stations such as Voice of America, which delivered (and still delivers) a mix of news and US entertainment in many languages. As its name indicates, Voice of America and its British equivalent, the BBC World Service, were clearly positioned as American or British broadcasters, with a focus on spreading information about their own countries.

By contrast, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty took a radically different approach. While broadcasting to Russia and the occupied nations of Eastern Europe, they positioned themselves not as an 'American' voice but rather as the democratic opposition in the countries they were broadcasting to. Known as 'surrogate stations', they focused on local issues and were staffed by emigres whose emphasis was to promote local political change. They were initially supported covertly by the CIA, under the guise of private donations for a campaign called 'Crusade For Freedom'. The CIA connection was revealed in 1967. Although it did not damage the stations' audiences – most employees and listeners had long assumed they were a US government effort – the revelation did cause a furore in Washington. RFE/RL subsequently became 'grantees' overseen by a Federally-appointed governing board.

RFE/RL's original founders did see the stations as a "citizen's adventure in the field of psychological warfare", but their credibility ultimately relied on their ability to offer information which listeners knew was true, as opposed to the false information offered by the communist regimes.<sup>xxxvii</sup> As a result, over time they sounded more and more like 'normal' journalists, though broadcast from abroad. The fact that the regimes sought to block them added to their credibility: they were jammed by the Soviet and East European governments, which also conducted smear campaigns against broadcasters and even launched terrorist attacks on the headquarters in Munich.

The most important source of credibility were the broadcasters and staff of the station. Many of them were famous writers and intellectuals, exiled politicians and activists. For each language section, RFE tried to hire journalists who reflected the given country's range of political parties, from Social Democrats on the left to

'peasant parties', common in many central European countries, on the right. Communists were not hired for obvious reasons, but former party members who had left or defected were hired in order to help RFE craft its message to party members in audience countries. There was a policy against the employment of fascists or extreme nationalists, although some members of Radio Free Hungary in the 1950s were extreme rightists. Radio Liberty was riven with rivalries between Mensheviks and Monarchists, liberals and Russian imperialists.

From the 1950s the exiles wrote their own scripts, "incorporating", in the words of the first director Robert E. Lang, "their own ideas and sense of humour."<sup>xxxviii</sup> A former advertising man, Lang believed it was essential RFE project an idiomatic voice, which meant avoiding centrally written scripts of the kind that Voice of America used at the time. There was no pre-broadcast censorship at RFE, and the exiles were given more independence than at other international radio stations.

The stations gained audiences' trust and loyalty by delivering stories suppressed in the Soviet bloc, gathering information through a network of emigres and defectors, and opening bureaus in ports such as Hamburg and Stockholm where Soviet bloc ships full of refugees and tourists regularly docked. The CIA helped with intelligence gathering inside audience countries. In the cultural sphere, RFE/RL broadcast Russian and Eastern European books banned by the communist regimes, and explored parts of history suppressed by the Soviets. The stations also courted defectors: one of the most important early RFE successes was Colonel Josef Swiatlo, the head of Department 10 of the Polish Secret Police, who defected to the West in 1954. In a series of broadcasts, he told, in great detail, the inside story of the Polish secret police: torture, rigged elections and Soviet control. At the time, it was said that all Polish communists locked themselves in their offices to listen to the Swiatlo broadcasts in secret.

In addition to reliance upon their broadcasters' judgement, RFE/RL also tried to understand its 'hidden listeners' in the Soviet bloc and stay relevant to its audience. Members of the Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research Unit (SAAOR) would approach Soviet tourists at international events and interview them on their media habits. During the Brussels World Fair of 1958 over 300 Soviet citizens were contacted, of whom 65 turned out to be listeners of Radio Liberty. Ad hoc interviews continued through the 1960s. As the number of Soviet travellers increased in the 1970s a more scientific approach was developed. Research institutes created questionnaires, though because of the reluctance of Soviet travellers to submit to a

classic open interview, the questions were embedded in a more general conversation about media with the respondent. The results were uneven: Soviet travellers were often specially selected and not representative of the country as a whole, and many were under group supervision or had been briefed on how to talk with foreigners. By the late 1980s, however, respondents were more relaxed and often happy to take part in a survey for RFE/RL. Over 50,000 interviews were conducted between 1972 and 1990. (The BBC Russian Service made similar efforts to take into account the listener's world view. During Stalin's lifetime the service took care never to get between the Soviet people and their positive views of the Leader. Criticism focused on impact of policies on the Soviet people, and not on individuals.)

But careful audience analysis also produced conflicting results. The goals of the 'surrogate stations' were always under debate. Some of those employed at the stations believed they should be simply doing polemical journalism; others wanted to promote real regime change. During the East Berlin uprising in 1953, Radio Liberty called on Soviet soldiers in Berlin not to shoot at Germans protesting Soviet occupation. In the same year, Radio Free Czechoslovakia exhorted Czech pilots to follow the example of a pilot who had landed his plane in Austria some months earlier.

A real crisis hit the RFE station in Hungary during the revolution in 1956, when more than half of Hungarians began to listen to the station, including workers and peasants, as tensions grew. At first, the US embassy was happy to take credit for this upsurge, reporting that RFE represented "the active interest of the American government in Hungary", and spoke "the true language of the Hungarian people".<sup>xxxix</sup> But after the revolution was brutally put down by Soviet tanks, RFE broadcasters were blamed by their American backers for having irresponsibly encouraged a doomed revolution. Hungarian broadcasters had indeed given the freedom fighters tactical advice (for example, instructions on how to make Molotov cocktails) and false hope: Some had implied, probably thanks to wishful thinking, that Western military assistance was on its way. Confusion reigned among the US policy advisors after the revolution too. Some urged the exiles to take a more neutral tone, others exhorted them to attack Hungarian politicians who collaborated with the USSR.

Later, the consensus grew that the Hungarian exiles had been allowed to go too far. Richard Condon, the head of the Munich Operations, denounced the Hungarian station's broadcasters as right-wing zealots who "tended over the years to become ever more shrill, emotional and over-general in tone, to an extent we have for some

time felt that rather drastic measures are needed to de-emotionalise their scripts...and prevent them from antagonizing our listeners". By the time of the Prague Spring in 1968, RFE functioned within much more familiar journalistic frameworks, and there were no exhortations to greater rebellion. That was the stance it maintained through the 1980s.

In its latter years, trust in the radios grew. During the early days immediately following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, while Gorbachev's regime kept silent, Radio Liberty became a lifeline of vital information for tens of millions of Soviet citizens, offering rolling coverage of the radioactive fallout. During the 1991 attempted coup by Soviet hardliners against Gorbachev, Radio Liberty helped anti-coup, pro-democracy leaders like Boris Yeltsin speak to the nation. Nearly a third of Muscovites followed Radio Liberty throughout the crisis; the accurate information it provided helped to ensure the coup failed.

Despite jamming, it is thought that 5 to 10% of the adult population of the USSR tuned in to Radio Liberty between 1972 and 1988, peaking to 15% after jamming was removed in 1988. The figure was much higher among opinion formers and listeners with secondary education in big cities. Radio Free Europe had far higher figures, at time reaching more than half the population of Poland and Hungary, where broadcasters became household names and RFE was considered to be one of the few sources of objective information.

## Relevance Today

This RFE/RL case study shows the importance of putting the audience's world-view first, and of choosing communicators who understand the audience.

Most fact-checking and debunking today focuses on correcting erroneous content, the 'supply' side of the fake news equation. It does not consider why and how audiences consume disinformation in the first place and how one should adapt one's own output so they are open to consuming more accurate information. Today's data analysis tools give ample opportunity to understand why audiences choose to hear misinformation, how they consume information, through what forms are they open to listening to new ideas and which micro-influencers they might be ready to engage with.



The best contemporary parallel to RFE/RL is, of course the modern versions of the stations – they continue to broadcast in Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and central Asian languages. Western money is also still used to support websites and other NGOs which work on disinformation in the Baltic states or Ukraine. Some of the tensions faced by RFE in the 1950s do remain: Ukrainian NGOs like Info-Napalm have been accused of spreading their own disinformation and propaganda. It may be important to have NGOs sign up to an ethical charter in exchange for funding. The International Fact-Checking Network’s “Code of Principles” could be one example to follow.

The RFE/RL experience also shows that audiences weren’t put off by US government funding: the main damage came from the initial secrecy. RFE/RL solved its ‘independence’ problem by creating a separate board of governors and an agency which was funded by Congress, but also had editorial firewalls. Perhaps a similar body is needed to oversee CVE and Strategic Communications work today.

## **IX: Chronicle of Current Events: A Home-Grown, Bottom-Up Source of Information**

**The “Chronicle of Current Events” case is slightly different from some of the others. This was a response to Soviet propaganda that was designed not by Westerners, but by Russian human rights activists. It sought to undermine state propaganda by offering authentic information from verified sources. The information was gathered through networks of trusted people, and then transmitted in the form of illegal bulletins, passed through chains of trusted people. Although it never reached very many Russians, the Chronicle eventually had a wider echo, in both the USSR and the West, because the material it provided was amplified by Radio Liberty and other Western radio stations. The Chronicle also created a ‘community of trust’, a group of people who were dedicated, as a group, to the cause of accurate information.**

The first issue of the Chronicle appeared in April 1968. It was very modest in scope and appearance: it was typed on ordinary paper, using a personal typewriter. Usually, the original typist made multiple copies; these were then reproduced as photographs, in home-made darkrooms, so that more people could read them.<sup>xi</sup>

The content was very straightforward. Unlike the political tracts, poetry and fiction that had previously circulated in the underground press, the Chronicle sought to

collect and publish raw data related to the trials and imprisonment, in psychiatric hospitals and jails, of anyone arrested for political, ideological or religious beliefs. Stylistically, it was very different from impassioned regime propaganda: it was very sparse, filled with names, dates and facts. Opinions were not expressed. As the original editor, Natalia Gorbanevskaya, later explained, "We were educated in communist propaganda – exaggerations, lies and the like. And we felt that we had no right to either lie or exaggerate....the Chronicle had to be put together so that no personal opinions entered into the information."<sup>xli</sup> When the editors discovered that a previous issue had contained a mistake, they always drew attention to that fact.

The Chronicle editors obtained their information from a network of contacts that stretched not only across Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, but also reached the USSR's political camps and prisons in Mordovia, Siberia and elsewhere. Both the publication and its editors were the subject of heavy KGB repression. The first editor, Gorbanevskaya, was arrested in 1969, and eventually sentenced to a term in a psychiatric hospital. Others involved were arrested in due course, and at times the Chronicle went 18 months without a publication. It nevertheless survived and kept growing until the early 1980s, when Yuri Shikhanovich, the editor of the six final issues, was arrested. The December 1981 issue, which finally appeared in Moscow early in 1983, was 230 pages long.

The impact of the Chronicle can be seen in several different ways. For one, it drew together the Soviet human rights activists in a way no other project or activity had, linking people in different parts of the country who sought to understand the falsity of Soviet propaganda and to illuminate the dark side of life in the USSR. Those who worked on the Chronicle and those who read it were convinced of its accuracy.

The Chronicle also served to discredit Soviet propaganda in Western Europe and the US: the information it provided stood in stark contrast to the official version of life in the USSR, which was widely portrayed as happy and progressive. Amnesty International eventually translated and reprinted every edition. Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, the Western-funded radio stations which broadcast into the USSR and Eastern Europe, used material from the Chronicle and cited it on air.<sup>xliii</sup> The Soviet leadership was incredibly frustrated by the speed with which information could get from a Moscow apartment or even a Soviet prison camp onto the airwaves, via chains that included prison guards, family members, and sometimes strips of paper hidden in cigarettes or clothing. The arrest of one dissident was announced on the BBC within hours of its occurrence; on another occasion, Irina Ratushinskaya, a

political prisoner, sent Ronald Reagan a congratulatory message after he was elected president. Reagan received it within two days and mentioned the fact. Her prison guards, Ratushinskaya remembered, were "beside themselves."<sup>xliii</sup>

Thanks to these rapid links, the Chronicle had another kind of impact. It also angered, frustrated and flummoxed the KGB, which spent an inordinate amount of time trying to destroy the community of trust that surrounded the publication. This conviction was powerful enough (and widespread enough) for the KGB to wage a bitter and extensive war on the Chronicle. Police raided the apartments of anyone suspected of a connection to the publication, and arrested dozens of people. On one memorable occasion, an editor dumped papers into a pot of soup while the police were ransacking her apartment. In the 1970s, the editors became convinced that the KGB was also scheming to pass false information to them, in order to discredit the publication, another game that took a great deal of time and effort.

## Relevance Today

It is hard to imagine what the precise equivalent of the Chronicle would be today. Certainly the contrast between authentic information, gathered by a community of truth-tellers, and an authoritarian Russian regime would be harder to maintain. The current Russian regime does not seek to portray itself as ideal: undermining it is therefore more difficult. Nor is there a gap between information in Russia and the West which could be exploited in quite the same way.

It might be interesting, however, to imagine what an authentic community of truth-tellers would look like now, and how it could gain credibility. The Chronicle editors were credible because they were persecuted, because they earned no money or anything else from their efforts and because they produced only the most straightforward and simple information, without ideology. Is there an equivalent of that today?

It might also be interesting to imagine what kind of information-gathering effort could flummox and anger the FSB in the way that the Chronicle angered the KGB. In some senses, Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption movement serves the same purpose: It exposes 'secret' information, embarrasses people in power, and occupies the time of secret policemen. Perhaps a more targeted effort, for example one which gathered more personal financial information about the Russian leadership and put it very quickly online, would have the same impact.

Another “lesson” from the Chronicle is how it was amplified by media and NGOs in the West. How could Western agencies amplify dissenting voices from *within* Russia today? There have been some attempts at this already, such as the *The Interpreter*, which initially sought to translate everyday articles by independent Russian journalists to English to improve Western journalism about the region.

## **X: Humour as Cold War “Meme Warfare”**

The spreading of information requires a motive on the part of the spreader. A desire to appear knowledgeable, to be affirmed in one’s prejudices or demonstrate honesty are frequent drivers. But another important motive is the simple wish to entertain – the same impulse which drives the telling and re-telling of a joke. Jokes have long served as a mechanism to puncture the pomposity of an authoritarian ruler; to carve out personal space for the oppressed individual, and to point out the difference between rhetoric and reality. Jokes were part of Cold War international broadcasting. BBC coverage of the aftermath of the Hungarian Rising included a spoof job description: “Wanted: A Hungarian Prime Minister. Qualifications, a criminal record and Russian nationality. Character and backbone unnecessary.”<sup>xliv</sup>

During the later Cold War jokes became a key element in the Reagan administration’s counter Soviet propaganda strategy. President Reagan himself led the way, recognizing the value of the political critique imbedded in the jokes which Russians themselves told. He regularly shared these jokes in personal interactions and sometimes included them in speeches. The USIA director Charles Z. Wick saw the potential and began to use humour more systematically. In 1982, USIA Public Affairs Officers based at posts in the Communist bloc systematically collected political jokes from their local contacts and forwarded them to Washington, where the agency created a grand anthology of the best. These were then distributed around the world as evidence both of popular opposition to Communist rule and of the widespread scepticism about Communism’s claims to be economically effective.

Many of the jokes were wry comments on the inability of communism to deliver on its promises, and testified to the limits of that system better than rhetorical flourishes or dry statistics presented by a Western politician. Material included a story about a Muscovite who goes to buy sausages from the butcher, waits in line in vain, and in despair curses the Marxist-Leninist system. A policeman hears his oath and cautions him ‘Comrade, a few years ago you would have been shot for saying that.’ Back at

home the man confides to his wife that he now knows the depth of the economic crisis. 'No sausages in the shops?' She asks. 'Worse than that,' he replies, 'no bullets for the police.'

Other jokes turned on the political repression in the Communist world: 'Question: What is the difference between an Eastern European journalist and his Western counterpart? Answer: 'An Eastern European journalist is free to say whatever he wants, but his Western counterpart is free the next day as well.' There was also a side-line in humour about the relationship between Moscow and its allies: 'The Sofia end of the Sofia-Moscow hotline has only an earpiece.'<sup>xiv</sup>

Although more traditional diplomats were cautious about the promotion of the anthology, some posts reported considerable success in placing these jokes around the world. The post in the Seychelles considered the publication to be the "one of the best ever" put out by the agency. Journalists in Nepal, Burma and Barbados happily worked the material into their output. In Brazil the conservative Sao Paulo daily *Jornal da Tarde* translated the entire packet and agreed to publish it as a feature with specially commissioned cartoons. Many posts merely issued the anthology to staff for use in small groups and one-to-one conversation; although in Bangkok the stories found their way into print. The Brussels post noted dryly that Belgians were well aware of the Soviet Union's economic weakness and requested jokes addressing Soviet aggression. The embassy staff in Mauritania sent some jokes of their own, including: 'What is the largest country in the world? Answer: Cuba. Its capital is Moscow. Its army is in Angola and its population is in Miami.' Not all the stories proved universally suitable. One Middle Eastern post was un-amused and wired back noting that jokes about sausages were not thought funny in the Muslim world.

Wick forwarded the anthology and the traffic from posts to the president. His report did not note whether any jokes had succeeded in becoming 'viral' and gaining a life beyond their initial retelling, however the operation was considered successful enough to warrant a second edition. The second edition included a selection of the 'true' stories/urban myths then circulating about Soviet life. One of the best concerned a Soviet woman who in 1981 found a metal tube inside a frozen chicken informing her that she had purchased the ten millionth chicken exported by a French company and had won a Peugeot car and should contact the nearest French consulate. Being a good Communist she first approached the Soviet ministry of foreign trade in Moscow to ask about her prize. With some embarrassment they offered her a Soviet car (a Zhiguli). When she complained an official eventually

explained that the chicken had originally been exported to Somalia in 1975 and sold on to the USSR. The Ministry begged her not to raise the matter with the French government as it would embarrass the Soviet Union were it known that its government buying and distributing old frozen chickens. The source of the story reportedly knew that she eventually got a car but was unsure whether it was a Zhiguli or whether the Ministry of Trade bought her the promised Peugeot.<sup>xlvi</sup>

While it is impossible to prove that USIA's boost was critical to the circulation of the jokes, they certainly became part of the general popular culture of the 1980s and a persuasive counterpoint to Soviet claims of economic viability. A strategy of collecting and circulating humour from within was certainly believed, by its propagators, to have enjoyed some success.

## Relevance Today

Humour today has the same advantages as it did during the Cold War. Jokes can become part of a popular culture which disarms the propagandist. Jokes can also create a sense of shared experience which in turn helps overcome some of the dislocation and alienation created by disinformation. Support for production companies and talented people who can produce sophisticated political humour – entertainment, memes, articles, happenings - and package important ideas using jokes might be a contemporary equivalent to the USIA's joke book.

However, there has been a fundamental shift since the Cold War. During that period Communist regimes were stiff, and there was a great divide between their official statements and the Soviet reality, a gap which could be exploited through humour. Today it is the West and 'liberal elites' who have a gap between rhetoric and reality: Their stated beliefs don't match everyday life. The West is more vulnerable to memes than the Kremlin, since the West does claim that there is a real difference between Western values and Russian actions. As a result, when the West behaves in a way which is beneath these values, it is more vulnerable to humour. In today's environment, it is the alt-right and pro-Kremlin actors who are using humour in a highly weaponised way.<sup>xlvii</sup>

## **XI: Coherence of Policy, Values, Culture and Leadership**

**During the Cold War, Western powers sought not just to produce accurate information, but to place it within a much broader set of cultural values and policies. ‘Truth’ was intimately connected to other things: ‘democracy’, ‘political freedom’, ‘human rights’, ‘prosperity’, as well as the freedom to experiment in the arts. These values were promoted together, an early form of what governments sometimes now label as ‘strategic communications,’ linked to the concept of ‘soft power’. Whatever the label, we mean it here as the careful coordination of all action, from policies to culture, into a coherent whole.**

The roots of the West’s ‘freedom narrative’ can be found in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s 1941 Four Freedoms’ speech, which called for freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from fear and want, as the basis for a democratic and peaceful world. This speech contrasted sharply with the Soviet language of the time, which dismissed civil and political rights as ‘bourgeois trappings’.

With the onset of the Cold War the US administrations quietly dropped the idea of ‘freedom from want’ as a right: it was difficult to uphold while denouncing Soviet provision of social housing. Instead the US emphasised civil and political rights, prioritizing freedom of speech and expression. American prosperity was vaunted as the direct result of a qualitatively superior economic model, linked to ‘free’ markets. The American personality was a ‘free’ personality; free to enjoy popular culture, free from political oppression and free to buy consumer goods.

The US ‘freedom brand’ was supported by patronage of culture, as well as individual human rights, carried out by a wide variety of institutions. The Museum of Modern Art, for example, played an important role in the promotion of Abstract Expressionism, which was contrasted to “the regimented, traditional and narrow” nature of “socialist realism” which predominated in Eastern Europe.<sup>xlviii</sup> By sponsoring exhibitions abroad, particularly in Europe, the Museum of Modern Art also helped counter the Russian image of America as a cultural backwater. The US government, which helped take exhibitions abroad, actually preferred that MOMA do this work because the museum, as a private entity, could act with more nuance.<sup>xlix</sup> Even at the height of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, the MOMA could invite left-

leaning artists to exhibitions without Congress having to vet them. This leeway was important because much of this programme was focused in influencing intellectuals and artists in both Eastern and Western Europe. To do so, the US recognised that its message needed to be independent from the levers of government.

The US government did become more directly involved in sponsoring some of America's best-known musicians on tours of the world. The goal was to "influence the foreign...community and to present a strong propaganda image of the United States as a "free" society as opposed to the "regimented" communist bloc."<sup>i</sup> Like Abstract Expressionism, jazz music was touted as a "uniquely American art form"<sup>ii</sup> with an emphasis on individual virtuosity. The government also thought that prominent jazz artists like Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong would help "diffuse" the stereotypes of American racism.<sup>iii</sup>

The musicians themselves emphasized their own independence. On March 22, 1965, Louis Armstrong played a two-hour concert in East Berlin, just weeks after the Bloody Sunday racial attacks in Selma, Alabama. During the concert, and at every stop in his east bloc tour (this one was not sponsored by the State Department) Armstrong played the song "Black and Blue," which had not been in his repertoire for at least a decade. In East Berlin he slowed the song down so much that it took on a "mournful lament" and the lyrics, "my only sin is in my skin" were enunciated clearly. Without being forced, in other words, musicians made the point that they could express themselves as they wished; like the Abstract Expressionists they were independent, and had their own politics. The US also seemed confident enough to criticize its own politics.

The use of self-criticism to underline the difference between the USSR and the West was especially striking in international British and US broadcasters. The BBC Russian World Service, for example, prided itself on providing objective analysis of British policy, whether in its coverage of the Suez crisis or regarding unemployment and labour issues in the UK. This also made it more credible when providing news about the USSR.

The US and UK also adopted the discourse of human rights, promoting them not just as a part of the US constitutions but as a universal good, as a central tenet of free societies. This was considered so important that it affected internal US politics. In the *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) case, the US Justice Department argued that desegregation was important because it would help promote America's image



abroad. As early as 1949 ‘the “Negro question” had been highlighted by the US Embassy in Moscow as a “principal Soviet propaganda theme”, one which had to be battled at home for the sake of US foreign policy, among other things.<sup>liii</sup> US foreign policy was also altered by the need to back up human rights rhetoric. In the early 1970s, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and US intervention in the Dominican Republic, Congress held hearings on human rights issues in those countries. The resulting report re-shaped US foreign policy making it more in line with official rhetoric on human rights, and established a human rights bureau within the State Department. These concrete changes helped link official US policy to rhetoric on freedom and human rights: actions grew to match ideology.<sup>liv</sup>

The coherence of policies, values and culture was further bolstered by clear leadership under Thatcher and Reagan. Reagan especially had the gift of capturing his mission vis-à-vis the USSR in catchy phrases, most memorably when he called it “the evil empire”. Historian of the Cold War Ralph Levering writes: “The path that Reagan pursued during his first three years in office largely involved challenging Russia and its allies with outspoken rhetoric and confrontational policies. In response to a question at his first press conference as president on January 29, 1981, Reagan said that Soviet leaders, in pursuing world revolution, “have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat, in order to attain that [goal].”<sup>lv</sup>

## Relevance Today

Since the Cold War ended, the American ‘values’ mission in Russia has been superseded by the pursuit of trade and stability. The West has continued to do business with autocratic post-Soviet rulers, even in the face of evidence of corruption and worse: “As long as the west continues to welcome the flow of corrupt Russian money to the west”, argues Sergey Aleksashenko, a former Deputy Head of the Central Bank and professor at the Higher School of Economics, “then all the arguments about human rights and values are just what Kremlin apologists say, a load of hot air.”<sup>lvi</sup>

In the Cold War, the West had a comparatively simple – and compelling - message. That message was based fundamentally around freedoms; freedom of speech, artistic (and individual) expression and democracy all went hand-in-hand. This package of rights was easy to articulate not least because it seemed to be in direct

contrast with the Communist system of government which emphasised the collective over the individual, state planning over individual artistic expression, and autocracy over democracy.

There is no such compelling narrative today which could bring all of the aforementioned anti-propaganda techniques together. What is needed is a new strategy that can bring different groups together in pursuit of something positive. A unifying principle could be transparency, or anti-corruption, perhaps with a focus on the money-laundering and hidden beneficial ownership which link 21<sup>st</sup> century authoritarian regimes, financial inequality, tax-evasion, the seamier sides of Western capitalism and disinformation (many disinformation websites disguise their ownership).

There is, however, the problem of who would lead such a campaign. In the Cold War the US and the UK were sure of their position leading the so-called "Free World". In the wake of Brexit and Trump, that is no longer certain. Nowadays, any such movement would have to be international rather than led by any one nation, but even an international, diffuse and networked movement requires leadership and resources.

In a more limited way, there could be a parallel to the past in the strategic communications of tech companies, some of which could learn from the past. Social media and IT companies often promote themselves as forces for the strengthening of democracy, knowledge and transparency. Their leaders profess noble ideals. But there is a split between their PR and impact, between stated policies and reality. How can they be unified?

# How is Soviet propaganda different from modern Russian propaganda?

## End of Bipolarity

The Cold War was a struggle between two starkly different systems. They were also physically divided: their ability to impact each other's politics was limited, and could therefore be more easily monitored. Stories issued by one side could be quickly identified and debunked, or censored, by the other.

In 2017, there is no Iron Curtain – the information flow between countries is relatively unrestricted. Russia does not represent a different socio-economic system with a powerful ideology. There is no unified front in the West which is organized to defeat Russia, not even within the United States. The Kremlin shifts its alliances and priorities ceaselessly, as can be seen in its tempestuous, on-off relationship with Erdoğan's Turkey. Its information priorities change constantly too: one moment Kremlin propaganda attacks Erdoğan, the next it celebrates him. There is no coherent and open information war frontier, no single powerful subversive ideology to confront on either side. Much of the conflict happens in grey and black propaganda zones, in discreet and tactical operations such as disinformation about the Syrian war or campaigns against individual political opponents.

This lack of clarity makes it difficult for Western powers even to define why exactly they oppose the contemporary Kremlin's active measures. There is a broad disagreement about what is 'legitimate' Kremlin influence and what constitutes 'meddling' or 'interference'. In the US and the UK, for example, the charge that the Kremlin spreads 'fake news' lacks force, given how much fake news domestic media produce by themselves.

In Germany by contrast, 'fake news' and the use of social media bots to promote do enrage the public; German political parties have even vowed not to use bots in their campaigns. In the Baltic states, Russian economic influence is taken far more seriously, and is considered to be a form of warfare. In Italy and Spain, by contrast, Russian information campaigns are not seen as malevolent at all.

Instead of a clear-cut, bipolar information war, in other words, there are shifting discourses in different parts of the West. At present, it doesn't seem likely that a single strategic narrative will emerge.

## **A Diffuse, Unregulated Network of Propagandists**

In the Cold War, the Communist Party defined the USSR's information strategy from the top down. Today, Russian information warfare is waged by a variety of groups that have different interests, domestically and internationally, and different connections to the outside world. Modern Russia is a loose, networked state with multiple actors allowed to conduct domestic and foreign policy, usually to benefit corrupt political groups around (and including) Putin. These different groups influence state strategy both directly and indirectly; some have their own areas of interest, such as the oil company Rosneft's interests in Africa and Latin America.

As a result, Russian information warfare is not consistent and strategic; its fundamental quality is tactical opportunism, which of course leads to inconsistency. This inconsistency makes attribution difficult or even misleading. We still cannot be certain, for example, which particular vested interest was behind the hack of the Democratic National Committee in the US. It is possible that business groups under sanction in the US organized the hack because they believed that a President Trump would lift the sanctions; it is equally possible that the FSB organized the hack with the idea of undermining Hillary Clinton, for geopolitical reasons. Either way, it is likely that the actual hackers were criminals, hired for this particular purpose, and not state employees. The Kremlin, in other words, is just one of myriad actors pumping out disinformation, alongside domestic media as well as the teenagers in Macedonia who produced anti-Clinton fake news for personal profit.

## **Online Distribution**

The most dramatic shift in the information environment is the move to digital and online media. Disinformation can circulate much more swiftly than was possible in the Cold War. If the Kremlin once crafted disinformation stories and forgeries with care, now cheap conspiracy theories and totally implausible fakes are thrown online constantly. Debunking them is easy, but the sheer quantity can make this a fruitless exercise, and indeed the aim might well be to force the West to waste time and resources on debunking. Meanwhile the amount of disinformation can put people off the idea that they can ever establish the truth about such events as the use of chemical weapons by Russia's allies in Syria, feeding a sense of cynicism and hopelessness which allows the Kremlin to pursue its interests undisturbed.

Social networks also allow Russian actors to target audiences and diffuse disinformation in seemingly organic ways through sharing. It is very hard to stop something when much of the time one cannot see it: targeted 'dark ads' mean campaigns can slip below the radar of any fact-checking NGO. The only people who can really see the campaigns are technology companies, though it is unclear whether or not they are looking for them. Self-selection of material in online echo chambers also makes debunking much harder. In the Cold War it was enough to stop lies spreading by debunking them in media. Today one can stop lies in 'mainstream' media, but they can reach large audiences in other ways.

## **Post-Factuality**

During the Cold War the USSR needed to keep up the appearance that its lies were actually true. It thus put a lot of effort in making its disinformation seem realistic. Gorbachev was outraged when Reagan accused the USSR of spreading falsehoods. Both the US and USSR were committed to winning a rational debate about which system — democratic capitalism or communism — would deliver a rosier future, and each side wanted 'proof', that is facts, to prove that it was winning. Thus Western broadcasters could undermine the Soviet Union by broadcasting the real facts about the Soviet Union into the country. It was possible to discredit the USSR by pointing out the gap between their propaganda and reality.

Today's Russia is not trying to prove that it is on a path to a greater future, and so it can dispense with facts too. When Putin annexed Crimea, he told the international press there were no Russian soldiers there, even though he knew that everyone knew there were. When Russian warplanes bombed civilian targets in Syria, Putin claimed to be attacking ISIS. In doing so, he was not telling a truthful-seeming lie, but showing disrespect for the very idea of 'facts'. There is something alluring in this: facts, after all, are unpleasant things, reminders of limitations. The very outrageousness of the Kremlin's lies is part of their attraction. Donald Trump's appeal might be partly about this too. Neither Putin nor Trump are attempting to establish a factual, rational narrative.

This doesn't mean 'facts' have become irrelevant in every type of discourse. Facts still matter to debates about health, social welfare, economics, corruption and money-laundering, especially if they empower action. Facts can help patients suffering from illnesses due to the bad state of Russian hospitals, or close the

offshore accounts of corrupt officials. Twenty-first century counter-messaging needs to focus on those areas where facts still make a difference.

## **Case Study of Modern Techniques: Russia Today**

In 2008, Putin and the rest of the Russian elite realized how much Russia was lagging behind in international media. The Western coverage of the war in Georgia had assigned all blame to Russia and critically damaged what Putin perceived as his personal stature among Western leaders. The decision was taken to rebrand, and to repurpose, Russia Today. Originally established in the early 2000s as a 'soft power tool' that would promote modern Russia as a place to invest, RT was 'weaponized' and transformed into a strategic counter-propaganda tool. With the personal involvement of Putin in the channel's promotion, and, possibly, enhanced cooperation with SVR/GRU intelligence, RT became part of the Russian foreign policy apparatus.

Today, RT is run by a mixture of PR specialists, a few heirs to Department "A" and a team of cynical journalists as well as digital professionals who manage the social media. This team created and nurtured connections to the new "alt-right" information space in the US, the far-right in Europe, and far-left networks in Latin America. RT's digital strategy includes the following components:

- Provide broadcast options for fringe, conspiracy theory driven reporting from the USA, from the left through to the right, from Oliver Stone to Alex Jones and Julian Assange.
- Engage in the distribution of any story (real, fake or constructed) that will damage US institutions and policy (before Trump) - or (after Trump) will suggest that though 'Trump wanted to be friends with Russia, he is tied up by the DC Deep State'.
- The distribution of fakes and constructed stories, which are then regurgitated by US mass media. RT and Sputnik work as 'legitimation engines' for many alt-right fakes. Distribution networks such as the Drudge Report, Breitbart or Infowars also take original RT stories. In due course, these can make their way into the mainstream. An example: before 2012-13, there was no sign of US media interest in modern Russian military equipment. In 2013 Russian state media started to push a message about dramatic breakthroughs in Russian military industry. After RT engaged with the Breitbart/Drudge

distribution networks in 2015-2016, this communication campaign made it to US media. Today, the fear of ‘superior Russian weapons that scare the US Army’ can be found in many American outlets. This campaign accelerated with Russia’s expedition to Syria where the Russian Army produces ‘showcase videos’ that may look impressive to some audiences.

- US fringe and alt-right networks in turn act as ‘legitimate US sources’ for RT and are then passed back into Russian language media. RT routinely cites Infowars, for example, as a reliable, legitimate source on US government policies.

Some of these practices are manual and require human contacts, and some are algorithmic – that is, they are conducted by aggregation engines that repost and repurpose every item that contains certain words or tags. The distribution patterns were researched and reported by Yokai Benkler from Harvard’s Berkman Center and by David Lazer Network Lab at Northeastern University. Both studies acknowledged RT/Sputnik participation in the distribution, “verification” and expanding presence of multiple fake stories and constructed hoaxes, and how they exist in a symbiotic relationship with US alt-right sites.

## **Current 21st Century Responses**

### **Missteps to Avoid**

It is tempting – and surely some will try it – to fight the Russian information machine the same way it fights us: to match the Kremlin lie for lie. That would affirm one of the frequently repeated Kremlin lines of attack: that there is no moral difference between the West and Russia. To do would also undermine western media and institutions, just at a moment when they need to be strengthened.

Western journalists, analysts and officials should also be careful not to name as “agents of influence” anybody who seems disagreeable. A fringe anti-propaganda group with apparent ties to Ukraine – Propornot – misfired in late 2016, when it published a blacklist containing respected news sources. The Washington Post mistakenly republished the material.

It can also be counter-productive to over-estimate Russia’s talent for disinformation. Consider how US National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft suggested that

Gorbachev's interest in negotiation in the 1980s might have been part of a 'clever bear' strategy. Or consider the damage which the search for agents of influence conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy did to the credibility of American democracy in the 1950s. Today a series of conspiracy theorists about Trump-Russian collusion, most notably Louise Mensch, have undermined fact-based criticism of the Kremlin.

## **Existing Counter Disinformation Programs**

Since the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 a number of international initiatives have been launched to deal with the Kremlin's propaganda. They have been very well summarized by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office as 'Engage, Expose and Enhance'.

### **Engage:**

The 'Engage' approach responds by seeking to develop relationships between the West and the regions most directly in the Kremlin's sights – Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic states - using the conventional tools of civic engagement and cultural relations to reduce some of the tensions between minority groups and majority populations of the kind that have been exploited in Ukraine. Agencies working in this field include the British Council, US embassies and Scandinavian governments.

### **Expose:**

The 'Expose' approach is the one most obviously aimed at disinformation. It involves actively tracking this activity and publicizing it in order to make explicit the attempted manipulation of populations. Institutions which track and expose fake news and disinformation are often run by volunteers or hobbyists with backgrounds in journalism, journalism education or digital forensics. Among the best known at StopFake and Bellingcat, however these deal mostly with activity in Europe. The US government has its own site, managed by Voice of America and Radio Free Europe called Polygraph. A digital forensics project at the Atlantic Council, DFRLab, has proved more popular and user-friendly. Stories tracked and exposed by DFRLab include the attempt to subvert the French election through leaked documents and an online smear campaign directed against Polish demonstrators.

### **Enhance:**

The 'Enhance' approach is an approach which seeks to improve the quality of indigenous media in the targeted region, because populations which have trusted



media within their own communities will be less likely to believe others. External attempts to enhance the media environment in target areas include the expansion of the BBC's Russian provision through television, the upgrading of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty through the Current Time project and the creation of a content factory and news hub in line with proposals from the European Endowment for Democracy.

## **Roads Not Taken**

Propaganda seldom seeks to tell someone something new. Rather, it seeks to connect an actor in the world to something they already know, so that the associated emotions can be harnessed to political ends. Donald Trump did not teach Americans that migrants were 'bad people'; instead, he articulated a position which his audience already held in private, and linked his own candidacy to his embrace of that idea. Counter propaganda should take account of reality – and at times, it may be that reality needs to change in order to fight back against disinformation. Eisenhower's decision to undercut Soviet propaganda about US racism by targeting Federal aid at racial injustice is an example of such a strategy.

To put it differently, sometimes foreign propaganda can direct attention to genuine issues. Efforts to solve these real issues can become an important part of counter propaganda. Today, the Kremlin media frequently presents the West as being no different from Russia - just as corrupt as Russia – but more hypocritical. A policy which addressed the more egregious examples of corruption in the West could be part of a powerful attack on the Kremlin narrative

It is important to remember that in the past, the greatest informational and conventional battles were won not through an outright victory of one side, but by orienting all antagonists towards a shared greater goal. The collective embrace of the internationalism of the League of Nations by combatants following the Great War; the creation of the United Nations after the Second World War; the submergence of Franco-German hostility beneath a shared goal of European integration; these were all examples of attempts to reorient conflicts. At the end of the Cold War, Reagan and Thatcher – and Bush and Major – along with the leaders of the European Union did sketch out a vision of an integrated Russia, a partner of Europe, which was meant to fulfil the same role. Unfortunately, that vision failed, and there is no common project today.

But this absence offers a way forward. It may be that a joint project, a link between the Russian opposition and anti-corruption activists in the West, for example, could show the way in the future. For anyone willing to think creatively, the possibilities are endless.

## About the Authors

**Nicholas J. Cull** is professor of Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California (in Los Angeles) where he directs the Master's program in Public Diplomacy. Originally from the UK, he is a historian who has specialized in the role of communication and public engagement in foreign policy. He is the author of a number of books on the subject including a history of British propaganda in the USA during World War II and two volumes on US propaganda and public diplomacy in the Cold War and after. He is a regular guest speaker at foreign ministries and diplomatic academies around the world and has worked particularly closely with those of the UK, US, Canada, Switzerland and Mexico. He has given guest lectures for the EU, NATO, foreign ministries of Chile, India, South Africa and South Korea, and Sri Lankan army. He has authored reports for the British Council, Royal Dutch Foreign Ministry, Japan Foundation and Internet Corporation on Assigned Names and Numbers, among others. He is president of the International Association for Media and History. In 2016 he chaired a study of Russian language strategic communication for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

**Vasily Gatov** is a Russian media researcher and author based in Boston. He has more than 28 years of professional experience in domestic and international media. Gatov is currently working on a book tentatively titled *Life, Censored*, about the re-emergence of totalitarian censorship of the Russian media. Based on a series of interviews with politicians, government officials, corporate managers, editors, journalists, lobbyists and political consultants, Gatov's research will attempt to "define the exact logic of the 'new censorship' framework and expose its machinery." He is a regular contributor to industrial and general publications, both in Russia and globally. He is also a board member in Russian Publishers Guild (GIPP) and WAN-IFRA (world association of newspapers and news publishers).

**Anne Applebaum** is a journalist and prize-winning historian with a particular expertise in the history of communism and the experience of post-communist "democratization" in the Soviet Union and central Europe. She was recently appointed Professor of Practice at the London School of Economics Institute of Global Affairs where she co-directs ARENA, a program on disinformation and 21<sup>st</sup> century propaganda. Anne is a weekly columnist for the Washington Post and the author of several books, including *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, *Gulag: A History*, which won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction and *Iron Curtain*, which won

the 2013 Cundill Prize for Historical Literature. She has held the Phillippe Roman visiting chair in International History at the LSE, and has lectured at other universities, including Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Oxford, Cambridge, Humboldt and Heidelberg.

**Peter Pomerantsev** is an author and TV producer. He was recently appointed Senior Fellow at the Institute of Global Affairs at the London School of Economics, where he co-directs ARENA, a program on disinformation and 21<sup>st</sup> century propaganda. He specialises on propaganda and media development, and has testified on the challenges of information war to the US House Foreign Affairs Committee, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the UK Parliament Defense Select Committee. He writes for publications including the Financial Times, London Review of Books, Politico, Atlantic and many others. His book on Russian propaganda, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, won the 2016 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize, was nominated for the Samuel Johnson, Guardian First Book, Pushkin House and Gordon Burns Prizes. It is translated into over a dozen languages.

**Alistair Shawcross** is a Programme Manager at ARENA, a program on disinformation and 21<sup>st</sup> century propaganda based at the London School of Economics. He is the author of the report “Facts We Can Believe In: How to Make Fact-Checking Better” and has published book reviews covering Middle Eastern politics and the dynamics of revolutions with the International Journal of World Peace. Alistair has an MSc in Middle East Politics (Distinction) from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and a BA in History from the University of Cambridge.

## **Annex: List of Interviewees**

The following individuals were interviewed by Peter Pomerantsev, Co-Director of ARENA, a program on disinformation and 21<sup>st</sup> century propaganda at the London School of Economics, in July and August 2017.

**Frank Williams**, former head of BBC Russian Service

**Elizabeth Robson**, former head of BBC Russian Service

**Keir Giles**, Chatham House, former BBC Monitoring

**Stephen Jolly**, Saatchi Global, Former UK Cabinet Office

**Ivan Tolstoy**, Broadcaster at Radio Free Europe, Russian Service and historian of Russian Service.

**Arch Puddington**, Freedom House, former Radio Free Europe and historian of Radio Free Europe

**Sara Beck**, Director, BBC Monitoring

**Chris Greenway & Karen Tanner**, BBC Monitoring, Russian Language Desk in the Cold War

**Janet Gunn & Craig Oliver**, formerly Research Division in UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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- <sup>i</sup> “KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82”, April, 2004, History and Public Lecture Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Vasili Mitrokhin and first published in CWIHP Buletin 14/15. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013>.
- <sup>ii</sup> “KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82”, April, 2004, History and Public Lecture Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Vasili Mitrokhin and first published in CWIHP Buletin 14/15. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013>.
- <sup>iii</sup> United States Department of State, “Soviet Active Measures: Forgery, Disinformation, Political Operations”, *Bureau of Public Affairs*, October 1981, p. 1.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>vi</sup> Wright was exposed as a KGB agent in 1994 when her control officer, Yuri Shvets, wrote a book after his defection to the United States and identified a husband and wife team as KGB agents; later, Shvets identified them as Claudia Wright and her husband John Helmer. Helmer had worked in the Carter White House and written about Russian business for the *Asia Times*. Although Wright died in 2005, Helmer still lives in Moscow where he is a “freelance journalist,” allegedly writing for the Australian business press and, in his own blog, continuing to participate in Russian smear campaigns. In a very real sense, he is a link between the Soviet past and the Russian present.
- <sup>vii</sup> “KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82”, April, 2004, History and Public Lecture Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Vasili Mitrokhin and first published in CWIHP Buletin 14/15. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013>.
- <sup>viii</sup> “KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82”, April, 2004, History and Public Lecture Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Vasili Mitrokhin and first published in CWIHP Buletin 14/15. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013>.
- <sup>ix</sup> “KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82”, April, 2004, History and Public Lecture Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Vasili Mitrokhin and first published in CWIHP Buletin 14/15. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013>.
- <sup>x</sup> “KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82”, April, 2004, History and Public Lecture Program Digital Archive, Contributed to CWIHP by Vasili Mitrokhin and first published in CWIHP Buletin 14/15. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013>.
- <sup>xi</sup> Interview by Nick Cull with Herbert Romerstein, 17 November 1995. See also Michael Ledeen and Herbert Romerstein, *Grenada Documents: An Overview and Selection*. U.S. Departments of State and Defense, September 1984; Romerstein to Cull, 1 September 2004; Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, p. 80.
- <sup>xii</sup> U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, ‘Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Washington Summit’, March 1988, USIA historical collection, reports and studies 1945-1994, Box 31, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Record Group 306 A1 (1070), National Archives Building, Washington, DC. This source praises USIA’s advanced planning, the even handed treatment of foreign journalists as against the U.S. press and emphasising the need for public diplomacy planning to be an essential element of summit planning. Also see, Don Oberdorfer, ‘US, Soviets to launch “Battle of the Briefings”,’ *Washington Post*, 29 November 1987, p. A38; Eleanor Randolph, ‘Reporters follow the “yellow tape line” to summit news,’ *Washington Post*, 6 December 1987, p. A33; Don Shannon, ‘USIA chief presses drive on Soviet disinformation,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 11 December 1987, p. 28; and Wick, ‘Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost’, Report to Congress by the United States Information Agency, March 1988.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Letter, Wick to Howard H. Baker, March 22, 1988, WHORM: Subject File, FG 298, 55813 Ronald Reagan Library (hereafter RRL). See also David B. Ottaway, ‘US links to Soviet disinformation,’ *Washington Post*, 17 January 1988, p. 23; ‘Soviets said to renew 3<sup>rd</sup> world

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disinformation drive,' *Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1988, p. 18; USIA, *The Child Organ Trafficking Rumor: A Modern 'Urban Legend'*, Report to UN Special Rapporteur, December 1994. The Report to the UN Special Rapporteur noted that in May 1988 the weekly journal *Jeune Afrique* ran a hybrid story in which South Korean foetuses were being used to create a U.S. ethnic weapon.

<sup>xiv</sup> Letter, Powell to President, April 29, 1988, with attachments, WHORM: Subject File CO 165, Box 29, CO 165, 561343 SS, RRL.

<sup>xv</sup> Herbert Romerstein, "Counterpropaganda: We can't win with it", in *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda and Political Warfare*, ed. J. Michael Waller, (Institute of World Politics Press, 2009), p. 170.

<sup>xvi</sup> John Lenczowski (Reagan political appointee in State's Bureau of European Affairs), interviewed by Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb. See Schoen, Fletcher and Christopher J. Lamb, "Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference", *Strategic Perspectives*, 11, p. 42.

<sup>xvii</sup> Dennis Kux, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and former chairman of the Active Measures Working Group, interviewed by Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb. See Schoen, Fletcher and Christopher J. Lamb, "Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference", *Strategic Perspectives*, 11, p. 42.

<sup>xviii</sup> Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb. See Schoen, Fletcher and Christopher J. Lamb, "Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference", *Strategic Perspectives*, 11, p. 46; FBIS, "Pomarev Denounces New Misinformation Bureau", USSR International Affairs, United States and Canada, (Washington, DC: FBIS, October 1986).

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>xx</sup> Zollo, Fabiana and Alessandro Bessi, Michela Del Vicario, Antonio Scala, Guido Caldarelli, Louis Shekhtman, Shlomo Havlin, Walter Quattrocchi, "Debunking in a world tribes", *PLOS ONE* 12(7), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181821>, accessed August 25, 2017.

<sup>xxi</sup> 'AIDS may invade India: Mysterious disease caused by U.S. experiments,' *Patriot*, (New Delhi), 16 July 1983, p. 2, as forwarded to Herbert Romerstein by USIS New Delhi, 2 July 1987. See also United States Department of State, 'Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-7', (August 1987), pp. 33-49, which contains a history of Fort Detrick which was home to the Frederick Cancer Research Facility, the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases (AMRIID) and the headquarters of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command (USAMRDC), which researched counter measures against bio-weapons. Measures against the AIDS story included journalist visits to Fort Detrick. .

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Herbert Romerstein, "The Active Measures Working Group: Successful Template for Strategic Influence", in *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda and Political Warfare*, ed. J. Michael Waller, (Institute of World Politics Press, 2009), p. 203.

<sup>xxiv</sup> J. Michael Waller, ed., *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda and Political Warfare*, (Institute of World Politics Press, 2009), p. 164.

<sup>xxv</sup> Herbert Romerstein, "Counterpropaganda: We can't win with it", in *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda and Political Warfare*, ed. J. Michael Waller, (Institute of World Politics Press, 2009), p. 164.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Günter Bohnsack and Herbert Brehmer, *Auftrag: Irreführung, Wie die Stasi Politik im Westen machte*, (Carlsen, 1992), pp. 219-220.

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- xxxiii Hugh Wilford. "The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1998, pp. 353–369.
- xxxiv Tony Shaw, "Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1, Winter 2008.
- xxxv Ibid, p. 366.
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- xliiv Alban Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War*. (Bloomsbury: London, 2014), p. 147.
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