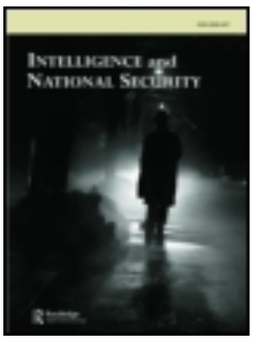

Intelligence and National Security

ISSN: 0268-4527 (Print) 1743-9019 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fint20

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To cite this article: David V. Gioe (2018): Cyber operations and useful fools: the approach of Russian hybrid intelligence, Intelligence and National Security, DOI: 10.1080/02684527.2018.1479345

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2018.1479345

Published online: 28 May 2018.

INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY, 2018
https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2018.1479345

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that Russian intelligence has achieved recent success in influencing democratic elections and referenda by combining the traditional Human Intelligence (HUMINT) discipline of manipulating useful fools with cutting edge cyber tactics, including hacking, phishing, social engineering, and weaponizing purloined information. This essay further argues that this synthesis yields greater effects than the sum of its parts. Given its potency, democracies and NATO members should expect to confront this type of threat more often. The 2016 American presidential election is used as a case study to conceptualize Russian hybrid intelligence, a new term reminiscent of Soviet 'complex active measures' and updated for the twenty-first century.

Introduction: past as prologue – a historically contextual basis for Russian election meddling

As the leaves began to turn in the October chill, the Kremlin's electoral rhetoric was heating up in the final weeks leading to the American presidential election. With an economic recession eight years in the rearview mirror, America's economy was now booming, even if its ill-conceived overseas military efforts were going badly in the face of a determined insurgent force hiding among a sympathetic populace. It seemed an open question whether America could really protect its allies, and alarmingly, as though American credibility itself was on the line. As the generals were complaining about being stretched too thin, politicians were again debating the proper scope of national health insurance legislation. From his office overlooking the brilliant autumnal foliage, a worried senior CIA official decided to inform the Director, a registered Republican, 'In the last few months…new elements in [Moscow's] attitude have become evident'. Specifically, since the nomination convention, Moscow's leaders 'have taken up a harsher propaganda line'. Speaking for the Board of National Estimates, its Chairman observed that this 'propaganda line reflects some genuine concern' along the Moskva river. Indeed, something was different this time around. 'This year', wrote the Chairman, Moscow has 'made it plain that there are sharp distinctions between the contending parties and policies' and that the Kremlin has made 'their preference' known.[1] It was 1964.

If Director of Central Intelligence John McCone was alarmed upon receipt of the Board's assessment, he need not have been. The election of 1964 proceeded as both National Estimates Board Chairman Sherman Kent and the Soviets predicted, and Lyndon Johnson certainly did not need Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's assistance to secure his crushing victory over Barry Goldwater in any case. This was not the last time, however, that the Director of Central Intelligence would receive an October memo

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warning about Soviet meddling in a presidential election. Nearly twenty years later, the Politburo would again discern marked policy differences between the White House incumbent and his challenger.

A politically attuned lawyer, Bill Casey served as Ronald Reagan's campaign manager before being named Director of Central Intelligence. Less than two years into the job, he received a memo proposing a 'study to determine the evidence, if any, of Soviet efforts to influence previous US elections… and to judge the prospects for such activity in 1984'. The memo argued that, 'After years of intense efforts… the Soviet grasp of the US political system is better than ever. Hence, the Soviet capacity for influencing votes is higher'. The memo's authorship remains redacted, but its drafter may have calculated that tickling Casey's nose for political intrigue would be the best way to secure his approval for such a study, noting, 'It won't be long before various Soviet activities and proposals are regarded, at least by some, as part of a scheme to tip the 1984 US elections'.[2] It is unknown whether Casey assented to the proposed study, but in the event, the KGB ordered a full court press, instructing its officers in America to penetrate the campaign staffs of both political parties. Further, it unleashed the KGB's propaganda arm to paint Reagan as a militarist and warmonger, popularizing the slogan, 'Reagan Means War!'[3] as ostensible help for the hapless Walter Mondale. It was an ineffectual influence campaign and the Gipper handily secured another term. Mondale was creamed even worse than Goldwater, winning just his home state of Minnesota and the District of Columbia.

Taking the long-term historical view, it is clear that the Soviets and subsequently the Russians have expressed preferences for candidates of both US political parties since at least 1964, and have used propaganda to manifest their preferences. But, if history is any guide, it would seem that Moscow's efforts to influence elections would be feckless at best, and counterproductive at worst. Yet, former CIA and National Security Agency director General Michael Hayden described Russian meddling in the 2016 US Presidential election as 'the most successful covert influence campaign in recorded history'.[4] In the words of James Clapper, former Director of National Intelligence, 'They must be congratulating themselves for having exceeded their wildest expectations with a minimal expenditure of resources'.[5] Could it be that over the last 32 years the Russians have incorporated cyber and digital efforts to perfect the art of electoral interference? Mark Warner, Vice-Chair of the Senate Select Committee on intelligence noted the power of information operations in a networked world:

> Russians have been conducting information warfare for decades, but what is new is the advent of social-media tools with the power to magnify propaganda and fake news on a scale that was unimaginable back in the days of the Berlin Wall. Today's tools seem almost purpose-built for Russian disinformation techniques.[6]

As Herbert Romerstein observed, disinformation was a seminal weapon in the KGB's Cold War arsenal.[7] Chad Fitzgerald and Aaron Brantly have further argued, 'the goals and objectives of classic propaganda have remained largely consistent'.[8] Indeed, the Russian intent to meddle via disinformation and propaganda is enduring, but what makes the effort both potent and unprecedented was the medium through which disinformation and propaganda has been weaponized, to which Brantly and Fitzgerald would reasonably add, 'the most substantial change is the increased volume of information being disseminated'.[9] To be sure, networks, phishing, hacking, and social engineering are a new dimension to an age-old game.

Russian meddling in the 2016 US Presidential election has been described as 'hacking' too many times to count, but the role of WikiLeaks, Guccifer 2.0, and the Democratic email hack are but one side of a much more complex and nuanced prism of Russian approaches to influencing American democracy – efforts that date back to at least the mid-1960s. Further, Russian digital influence campaigns were more ambitious in scope than the US election alone: Russian cyber operations and information warfare were conducted with varying degrees of success in the 2017 French Presidential election, the Spanish Catalan Independence Referendum, and the United Kingdom's so-called 'Brexit' referendum on leaving the European Union, just to name a few. Yet, an overemphasis on the technical network operations can obscure the dynamic and cross-domain aspect of the Russian effort. As Clapper testified, the Russian effort was a 'multifaceted influence campaign, including aggressive use of cyber capabilities', adding,

'Hacking was only one part of it… [the influence campaign] also entailed classical propaganda [and] disinformation'[10]

As a counterfactual, it is impossible to know if Russian efforts actually changed how or why voters cast their ballots, and despite the vulnerability of several state-based voting systems to Russian access attacks, no allegations of altered vote tallies have surfaced, suggesting that the American people did get their intended result. However, the social and political fallout from the election meddling does seem to have fractured an already highly polarized American society, created a crisis of confidence in the legitimacy of outcomes and the electoral process, and exacerbated social fissures – all worthy Russian goals even if the Kremlin did not have a direct electoral impact.

But if Russian efforts to express a preference in American elections date back to the mid-Cold War, and yet only in 2016 have they been acknowledged more openly by officials, felt more acutely in American society, and thereby reflected in its politics, does it suggest that more aggressive use of the cyber domain in particular is the missing element? Given apparent Russian success in cyberspace, the question arises: Does Russian investment in – and aggressive deployment of – cyber operations and digital warfare signal a move away from their traditional intelligence modus operandi? Or have they learned to secure synergistic effects through combined and varied intelligence approaches?

A theory of hybrid intelligence

To more fully understand the approach of Russian intelligence, it is useful to marry an understanding of cyber operations and information warfare with a historically informed perspective on Russian intelligence operations, especially 'active measures'[11] and their cultivation of agents of influence. The much-observed combination of Russian military special operations with non-kinetic instruments of state power, such as information warfare, propaganda, and disinformation, based largely on the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine[12], has been termed 'hybrid warfare'[13] and its success can be seen in the 2014 annexation of Crimea and ongoing violence in eastern Ukraine. But what America experienced in the election, and what NATO members saw across a spectrum of political activity, is not hybrid warfare; it is something else.

Given that there is no covert military or guerilla element to Russian electoral meddling in the US and NATO countries, a new conceptual star must emerge in the intelligence constellation. Likewise, a new term is needed to characterize the combination of information warfare with hacking and traditional use of agents of influence. This article offers Hybrid Intelligence as a way to analyze and describe the potent admixture of classic Russian human intelligence (HUMINT) tradecraft with cyber operations and information warfare.

Many intelligence services have sought to effectively synergize cyber and HUMINT operations, and dramatic Russian influence in the 2016 election underscores why this is the case. Russian perspectives and preferences can impact major events for relatively little cost[14] and hybrid intelligence, like covert action, offers some level of deniability for sub rosa activity. Several experts have written about cyber-enabled Human intelligence (online espionage), or HUMINT-enabled cyber operations (consider the Stuxnet virus deployed against the Iranian nuclear program), but the Russian electoral effort is distinct in that it engages two distinct intelligence disciplines that are pursued in tandem (not sequentially nor independently), but which also intersect at key points for synergistic effects on outcomes.

Complementing their cyber efforts, the Russian government systematically sought out agents of influence to manipulate the Donald Trump campaign. As defined by KGB defector Vasili Mitrokhin, an agent of influence (*agent vliyaniya*) is 'an agent operating under intelligence instructions who uses his official or public position, and other means, to exert influence on policy, public opinion, the course of particular events, the activity of political organizations and state agencies in target countries.'[15] The level of intelligence service control over an agent of influence that Mitrokhin's definition requires may overstate the circumstances of the Trump campaign, since it is not proven that anyone associated with the campaign was wittingly 'operating under intelligence instructions'. More likely, these staffers

more closely resembled Vladimir Lenin's oft-attributed term 'useful fools' (*polezni durak*), although other non-US citizen key players may have been witting from whence their direction came.

Manipulating useful fools is a time honored Russian craft, wielded with mixed success during the Cold War and indeed continuing to the present day.[16] The terminology has changed, with the term 'manipulation' supplanted by the more technologically connotative 'social engineering'.[17] This updating may be apt, however, since it also characterizes, as will be shown, how various Russian-associated cyber actors were able to manipulate their targets into revealing their email passwords as well as manipulating leaking outlets to do their bidding in the run-up to the 2016 election.

This article will therefore examine the theoretical construct of Russian hybrid intelligence by applying it to the 2016 US election. It will analyze cyber operations (hacking, phishing, leaking and weaponizing information), and the manipulation of naïve intermediaries, and demonstrate that cyber operations – when joined with manipulation of agents of influence – have a force multiplication effect that likely surprised even the Russian perpetrators themselves. Finally, it will conclude that, based on the apparent vulnerability of western target audiences to hybrid intelligence approaches – especially when applied within the Zeitgeist of potent populism – this tool set will be repeatedly deployed in the West for the foreseeable future. The Russian actions were not a one off, nor an experiment; they represent a continuing threat vector to both American and European security. Douglas E. Lute, the former U.S. ambassador to NATO, has warned that Western elections – not just in the United States – remain a key target.

> We should have every expectation that what we witnessed last year is not a one-shot deal… The Russians are onto something. They found a weakness, and they will be back in 2018 and 2020 with a more sophisticated and targeted approach.[18]

Likewise, the US intelligence community "assess[ed] Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the US presidential election to future influence efforts worldwide, including against US allies and their election processes."[19] Indeed, future political interference can be expected. One cybersecurity researcher has noted that Pawn Storm, 'an extremely active espionage actor group' (more commonly known as Fancy Bear or APT 28, a group associated with the GRU) has targeted the US Senate's email system to harvest government email credentials since June 2017.[20]

But the 2016 US presidential election is not the correct starting point for analysis. The approach of hybrid intelligence begins at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation in New York City, two years before and twelve city blocks away from where a celebrity real estate mogul descending the golden marble escalators in Trump Tower would declare his candidacy for President of the United States of America.

Russian intelligence gangs of New York

In 2013, 27-year-old Victor Podobnyy was still in the first year of his posting in the United States – the 'Main Enemy' – ostensibly assigned an Attaché to the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. Podobnyy was underwhelmed by his New York assignment, still seeking some of the adrenaline that comes standard with Jason Bourne movies, or at least having seen one too many episodes of the gripping television series 'The Americans'. He confided his professional frustrations to Igor, his colleague: 'Of course, I wouldn't fly helicopters, but pretend to be someone else at a minimum'. Igor knew the feeling: 'I also thought that at least I would go abroad with a different passport'.[21]

Even seeming perks of the job weren't bearing fruit. The FBI observed that Podobnyy attempted to recruit 'several young women with ties to a major university located in New York as intelligence sources for the SVR'.[22] Igor, 13 years Victor's senior, threw cold water on his younger colleague's efforts on the university scene:

> I have lots of ideas about such girls but these ideas are not actionable because they don't allow [you] to get close enough…And in order to be close you either need to [expletive] them or use other levers to influence them to execute my requests. So when you tell me about girls, in my experience, it's very rare that something workable will come of it.[23]

If Podobnyy's fellow Russian, 40-year-old Igor Sporyshev, was striking out as a Romeo spy, at least he had a prestigious cover position. He was listed as a Trade Representative of the Russian Federation in New York. In reality, argued the FBI, both Podobnyy and Sporyshev were undercover officers of Russia's foreign intelligence service, the SVR[24], working in Directorate ER, which focused on economic issues.[25] The US Department of Justice identified their primary tasking as recruiting residents of the Big Apple to spy for Russia and to be the 'cut outs' or 'go-betweens' for SVR 'illegal'[26] Evgeny Buryakov, who was posing as a Russian banker in New York. They sought to conceal both their own association with each other as well as their work with Buryakov, while they used classic human intelligence tradecraft to task him with requirements and then pass his intelligence back to SVR headquarters in Moscow, colloquially known as 'the Center'.

A declassified CIA study noted Russian intelligence 'cover slots are usually selected so that cover duties complement intelligence tasks to a substantial degree'.[27] As such, one expected to see Russian intelligence operative Victor Podobnyy trolling around New York City for those who might have information on the topic of energy as it related to Russia, and in the winter of 2013 it looked like the restless SVR officer's luck was beginning to change. In January 2013, noted the FBI, Podobnyy attended an energy conference in New York where he spotted Naval Academy graduate Carter Page, who, after a stint in the Navy and then investment banking, founded Global Energy Capital, 'an investment management and advisory firm focused on the energy sector primarily in emerging markets', according to its abecedarian website.[28] If Podobnyy, as the FBI alleged, was seeking information on alternative energy technologies and US sanctions on Russia, he was in the right place and found a tempting target. The FBI alleged, 'on or about April 8, 2013, Igor Sporyshev and Victor Podobnyy…discussed Podobnyy's efforts to recruit a male working as a consultant in New York City [Page] as an intelligence source'.[29] Two months later the FBI was knocking on Page's door, and it appears that Page was forthcoming.[30]

According to the court filing, '[Page] stated that he first met Victor Podobnyy in January 2013 at an energy symposium in New York City. During this initial meeting, Podobnyy gave [Page] Podobnyy's business card and two email addresses'. Podobnyy had a fish on the line, and started to reel him in slowly:

> Over the following months, [Page] and Podobnyy exchanged emails about the energy business and met in person on occasion, with [Page] providing Podobnyy with [Page's] outlook on the current and future of the energy industry. [Page] also provided documents to Podobnyy about the energy business.[31]

Podobnyy and his superiors at SVR headquarters would have felt their cultivation of Page was moving in the right direction.[32]

During the Podobnyy's assessment of Page as a recruitment target[33], Podobnyy told Sporyshev, 'I like that he takes on everything. For now his enthusiasm works for me'. Podobnyy also reported that he found the right levers to manipulate his target.[34] During his cultivation of Page, Podobnyy identified money and business connections as his target's primary motivation: 'I also promised him a lot: that I have connections in the Trade Representation, meaning that you can push empty contracts [laughs]. I will feed him empty promises'. The Russian case officers had no respect for their target. In an FBI transcript of Podobnyy speaking with Sporyshev, Podobnyy asks rhetorically,

> How else to work with foreigners? You promise a favor for a favor. You get the documents from him and tell him to go fuck himself. But not to upset you, I will take you to a restaurant and give you an expensive gift. You just have to sign for it. This is [an] ideal working method.[35]

Where exactly Page would get valuable information on Russian energy issues that Russian intelligence didn't already know is an open question, but it might not have mattered. Podobnyy still got what he wanted – the provision of documents from Page, who stated that his interactions with the Russians 'did not include anything sensitive'.[36] As a professional case officer, Podobnyy likely cared little about the content of the documents during the early stages of the relationship. Rather, his goal was to have Page start sharing information with him and develop the habit of passing along non-public information.[37] In that sense, he was succeeding, but what recruiting Page would have done for the SVR in 2013 is far from clear. At that time he had no influence with any US policymakers and no access to classified

information. It is therefore uncertain why Podobnyy would have wanted to recruit him in the first place, except perhaps to please his bosses or, potentially, keep Page on the proverbial shelf for future use.

Podobnyy's approach to Page might have been a slippery slope, in which a target is asked to provide some non-sensitive information, perhaps under the guise of a potentially lucrative consulting contract – in Podobnyy's assessment, this would have gotten Page's attention. The target might even receive some verbal praise and some financial remuneration, and again, Podobnyy asserted that Page's primary motivation was to 'make a lot of money'. Had he not been arrested, Podobnyy might have asked Page for something more sensitive with more specific sourcing, slowly turning up the heat and the reward with each iteration. In this approach, before the target realizes it, he has crossed the line.

Podobnyy was trying to reel in Page, but it wasn't going perfectly. An inexperienced operative, Podobnyy's assessment skills were probably not as sophisticated as the SVR *Rezident*[38] in New York would have liked. Podobnyy told Sporyshev, '[Page] wrote that he is sorry, he went to Moscow and forgot to check his inbox, but he wants to meet when he gets back. I think he is an idiot and forgot who I am'.[39] The conclusion on how this redounds to Page can be interpreted as exculpatory in his favor, depending on one's view of Page's intent in his aloof reply. For instance, it beggars belief that an international energy consultant simply forgot to check his email before an international trip. Further, a man who fancied himself upwardly mobile and looking for lucrative Russian deals simply doesn't forget the name of a contact that might open some doors for him in Russia. A more plausible explanation is that Page was putting off Podobnyy. It is thus perhaps Podobnyy's ego speaking when he claims that Page must be 'an idiot' for 'forgetting' who he is. Podobnyy's ego is a particularly curious aspect of this saga, given perhaps his apparent personality mixture of fantasist Walter Mitty and aspiring James Bond. Podobnyy complained to Sporyshev, 'The fact that I'm sitting with a cookie right now at the … chief enemy spot [the USA]. Fuck! Not one point of what I thought then, not even close'.[40] Much intelligence work is mundane and this did not sit well with the two Russian operatives.

The FBI transcript paints a picture of a pair of SVR officers who were alternatingly bored by and conflicted about their work. Podobnyy was recorded telling Sporyshev, 'Directorate S [the illegals program] is the only intelligence that is real intelligence… In the States even the S couldn't do anything'. Podobnyy seems to feel that the illegal (non-official cover) officers were the best hope of Russian intelligence, but even the FBI shut them down when they arrested 10 illegals in 2010, including the provocative Anna Chapman.[41] Podobnyy was disappointed in their results: 'They weren't doing shit here'. He was right, and SVR leadership knew it too. At the same time, however, Podobnyy's role was to support another Directorate S officer, Buryakov, and he found that task too mundane for his liking.

The Russian approach to Page never came to fruition, either because after a visit from the FBI, Page wisely kept his distance from Podobnyy, or because in January 2015, the FBI arrested Podobnyy along with Sporyshev and Buryakov. The U.S. Department of Justice charged the three men with 'acting as unregistered agents of a foreign government'.[42] Two enjoyed diplomatic immunity, but, according to the FBI, Buryakov 'was working within the United States as an SVR agent under 'non-official cover', meaning he entered and has remained in the United States as a private citizen'. As is usually the case, Buryakov pled guilty to a minor part of the indictment and in May 2016 was sentenced to 30 months in prison.[43] He was then deported to Russia, concluding a rather unproductive tour for himself and his diplomatically accredited comrades. There was one bright spot, however. The SVR had identified Carter Page as someone who wished to deepen his financial relationship with Russian firms, had international outlooks that dovetailed with Russian foreign policy narratives, and wasn't going to ask too many uncomfortable questions about the real occupations and intents of his Russian interlocutors. A useful fool had been discovered, but the Russians needed more.

George, Olga, and the professor make history

Rome was enjoying a sunny spell in the spring of 2016 and twenty-nine-year-old George Papadopoulos probably needed his trademark aviator sunglasses when touching down in Italy, shortly after being named a foreign policy advisor for the Trump campaign. On March 14, it was still 60 degrees as the

sun set over the Eternal City. Over dinner that night, Papadopoulos met a London-based Maltese academic, Professor Joseph Mifsud, known more for his connections to Russia than academic scholarship. Papadopoulos' relationship with Mifsud, while perhaps merely a happy dinner coincidence, was a match made in Heaven, more perfect than gaunt Jack Sprat and his portly wife. The inexperienced Papadopoulos had zero Russia connections, and the Russia-focused Mifsud knew nobody on the Trump campaign. Yet together they intended to 'make history' and change the tenor of post-Cold War East-West relations. By late March 2016, Hillary Clinton was leading then-Candidate Trump by 12 points in electoral polls, and from the Russian perspective, there was not a moment to lose. But how to get started?

Back under London's overcast skies later that month, the same week that 53% of eligible voters stated that they would vote for Mrs. Clinton, Mifsud brought a 'very good looking' companion to meet Papadopoulos for dinner. Olga Polonskaya, a thirty-one year-old Russian national, was introduced by Mifsud as Putin's 'niece',[44] with 'connections to senior Russian government officials', according to the FBI. Mifsud subsequently attempted to elide any rationale for setting up the meeting other than playing Cupid, noting Papadopoulos' 'interest in her [was] very different from an academic one… That girl, she has nothing to do with the Kremlin or with Secret Service'.[45] As Cristina Maza correctly observed,

> This is not an unusual tactic for Russian spy agencies, which often rely on third-party agents with hidden ties to the Kremlin, such as academics, businessmen and attractive women, to lure their targets into situations that are perfect for blackmail.[46]

Yet there is no evidence that Papadopoulos was interested in anything other than Polonskaya's Kremlin connections. The FBI alleged that Papadopoulos sought to use her Russian connections over a period of months in an effort to arrange a meeting between the campaign and Russian government officials. According to the FBI, Polonskaya subsequently told Papadopoulos:

> I have already alerted my personal links to our conversation and your request [for a foreign policy trip to Russia]… As mentioned we are all very excited by the possibility of a good relationship with Mr. Trump. The Russian Federation would love to welcome him once his candidature would be officially announced.[47]

Even if he didn't know it, Papadopoulos was playing with fire – and playing into their hands. Stating, as he did, a willingness for an 'off the record' meeting in Russia[48] would be a signal that the target was willing to hide something important, a positive indicator for continued cultivation. According to former FBI double agent Naveed Jamali, the Russians were trying to turn Papadopoulos into 'an operational asset' via 'straight-up manipulation'.[49]

Mifsud did not simply pass Papadopoulos over to Polonskaya and exit the scene. He remained involved an access broker to other well-connected Russians, introducing Papadopoulos to Ivan Timofeev, a director at the Valdai Discussion Club, an influential Moscow think tank, who attempted to work with Papadopoulos to set up a meetings between campaign staffers and Russian officials. Many intelligence services like to use academics as cut-outs or intermediaries when approaching foreign targets. Academics bring a degree of credibility, a perhaps unwarranted reputation for apolitical independent thought, and a welcome level of deniability and distance from governments in case things go sour. Mifsud knew this, and sought to use his academic robes to drape over the campaign. According to the *New York Times,* Mifsud emailed Papadopoulos, suggesting that 'he, too, serve as a campaign surrogate. He could write op-eds under the guise of a 'neutral' observer'.[50]

In late April, Mifsud returned to London from another Moscow jaunt, where he learned that the Russians had obtained 'dirt' on Hillary Clinton. During his FBI interview, Papadopoulos admitted that, at a breakfast meeting at a London hotel, Mifsud informed him, 'they have thousands of emails'. Mifsud was right. While Papadopoulos was trying to arrange meetings with the Russian MFA intermediary Ivan Timofeev in Moscow, someone paid $37 worth of crypto-currency Bitcoin to a Romanian web hosting company to create DCLeaks.com, a harbinger of the deluge to come.

It is not illegal to be cultivated or manipulated by Russian intelligence, but it is illegal to lie to the FBI when asked about it. On October 5, 2017 Papadopoulos pleaded guilty to lying to FBI Agents during a January 2017 interview about meetings he had with Mifsud that spring. Papadopoulos initially

characterized those meeting with Mifsud as 'a nothing… just a guy talk[ing] up connections'. He is cooperating with Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

Julian, Fancy Bear and Guccifer2.0

In March 2016, while Papadopoulos and Mifsud were comparing rolodexes over Italian food, Clinton campaign manager John Podesta was the target of a 'spear-phishing campaign' seeking his email credentials. He received an email that looked as thought it came from Google requiring him to change his password. He clicked a link in the fraudulent email and gave GRU-associated hackers, Fancy Bear,[51] his password and had not set up two-factor authentication. The next month, while Mifsud was in Moscow, Fancy Bear penetrated the Democratic National Committee's server. Soon they would know the network well, but they were not alone; their Russian intelligence colleagues Cozy Bear[52] had been there for year already. In fact, just as SVR officers Victor Podobnyy and Igor Sporyshev were leaving the United States in early 2015, their cyber colleagues were just about to enter the US – this time from a network.

Once they finally understood the scope of their cyber breach, the DNC hired cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike to investigate and remediate the damage. CrowdStrike had met the Russian intelligence 'Bears' before, noting,

> We've had lots of experience with both of these actors attempting to target our customers in the past and know them well. In fact, our team considers them some of the best adversaries out of all the numerous nation-state, criminal and hacktivist/terrorist groups we encounter on a daily basis. Their tradecraft is superb, operational security second to none…[53]

Indeed, the forensic linkage between the Bears and Russian intelligence services requires sophisticated analysis for attribution. CrowdStrike, among other firms, has made the link: 'Both adversaries engage in extensive political and economic espionage for the benefit of the government of the Russian Federation and are believed to be closely linked to the Russian government's powerful and highly capable intelligence services'.[54]

Like a mousetrap without cheese, Fancy Bear having 'dirt' and 'thousands of emails' was only half of the plan. They would need to be operationalized, again, deniably – without obvious Russian fingerprints. In the same way that Mifsud and Timofeev could play the role of intermediaries in the influence campaign, Russian intelligence needed cooperative and willing outlets to publish their stolen emails. They had already prepared the DCLeaks website for this purpose and WikiLeaks needed no preparation thanks to its always accommodating founder Julian Assange. They just needed a way to get the material from Fancy Bear to the waiting leak websites. To bridge this gap, the Russians created an online persona called 'Guccifer2.0'[55], implausibly claiming to be a Romanian hacker behind the DNC hack. The creation of Guccifer2.0 was done with less finesse and the backstopping tradecraft appeared rushed. For instance, the person claiming to be a Romanian hacker did not speak Romanian, and the document metadata edited on Guccifer2.0's leak was edited on a machine set up for a Russian language user, among other indicators.

Unlike the original Guccifer, Guccifer2.0 is only as real as Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa personal assistants, but he served an important purpose. His creation enabled Julian Assange to claim that Russia was not the source of the DNC material, stating, 'Our source is not the Russian government. It is not state parties'.[56] While Assange was denying that the Russians were the source of the DNC documents, on July 22, 2016, Guccifer2.0's GRU puppeteer tweeted: '@wikileaks published #DNCHack docs I'd given them!!!'[57] Julian Assange implausibly maintained that he was not the stooge of the Russian government, and that Russian-affiliated hackers were not the source of the DNC emails, but this is contradicted by the US Intelligence Community assessment as well.

The USIC agreed with CrowdStrike's analysis and attribution, publicly fingering Moscow in an unclassified October 2016 report, stating,

> The U.S. Intelligence Community is confident that the Russian Government directed the recent compromises of e-mails from US persons and institutions, including from US political organizations. The recent disclosures of alleged hacked e-mails on sites like DCLeaks.com and WikiLeaks and by the Guccifer 2.0 online persona are consistent with

> the methods and motivations of Russian-directed efforts. These thefts and disclosures are intended to interfere with the US election process.[58]

In January 2017, the US intelligence community increased its certainty, assessing

> with high confidence that Russian military intelligence (General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate or GRU) used the Guccifer2.0 persona and DCLeaks.com to release US victim data obtained in cyber operations publicly and in exclusives to media outlets and relayed material to WikiLeaks.[59]

In May 2016, a long way from his native Chicago, but less than a golf ball's drive from the Russian Embassy in London, Papadopoulos met Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Alexander Downer, at the Kensington Wine Rooms. During their discussion, Papadopoulos couldn't contain his scoop about 'dirt' on the Clinton campaign. Although the Wine Rooms' motto is 'good friends and good conversation', the conversation about thousands of potentially 'embarrassing' emails about Hillary Clinton in Russian hands likely triggered Downer's counterintelligence antennae and led Australian intelligence to report the conversation with Papadopoulos to their actual 'good friends', the FBI.[60]

Beginning the month after Papadopoulos relayed his guilty knowledge to Downer, DCLeaks.com started to publish DNC emails and working documents. By the end of the following month, July 2016, WikiLeaks joined in and leaked 19,252 emails and 8,034 attachments from the DNC. The FBI officially launched its investigation into the hacking, but the deluge of leaks continued unabated. Months later, on October 9, WikiLeaks published thousands more of Podesta's emails. Then on November 6, 2016, WikiLeaks released a second batch of DNC emails, adding 8,263 emails to its collection. All told, Guccifer2.0, WikiLeaks and DCLeaks ultimately published more than 150,000 emails stolen from more than a dozen Democrats.[61]

Assange's statements defy credulity and paint him as a denialist in the Russia hacking operation. Assange's campaign for total transparency was hijacked by the Russians with nary a shot fired in self-defense. As former CIA Director Mike Pompeo averred, WikiLeaks is 'a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia'.[62] In a sense, Assange is the most willing Russian vessel of all, Putin's useful fool without whom the GRU's purloined emails might not have attracted such widespread attention, thus underscoring the hybrid intelligence emphasis on the synergistic effects when marrying useful fools with cyber operations. Other players, such as Trump-associated political operative Roger Stone, appeared to know well in advance what dirt Assange was going to release, and magnified the impact of the Democratic leaks by suggesting on Twitter that people visit WikiLeaks. Such transitive manipulation by proxy of proxies was likely met with deep satisfaction in the Kremlin. While some vessels cooperate with Russian intelligence with a blind eye or their heads in the sand, others have done so for profit.

The 'translator project' and Silicon Valley: a willing vessel for sale

Malicious conspiracy might be one way to describe how Russian intelligence partnered with Julian Assange and WikiLeaks for propaganda purposes, yet they found willing US corporate partners, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well. But, like in the case of Guccifer2.0, Russian intelligence needed a front organization to do its bidding, so one was conjured for the task. At 55 Savushkina Street, in Olgino, in the historic heart of St. Petersburg, Russia, a non-descript four-story office building houses the efforts of the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA), a 'Russian organization engaged in operations to interfere with elections and political processes' according to the February 2018 US Department of Justice indictment.[63]

A Kremlin-linked army of 'professional trolls',[64] it engages in online influence operations using bots as well as real people with fake social media accounts.[65] The DOJ charged that, with an annual budget of millions of dollars, their purpose and method was 'to conduct what it called 'information warfare against the United States of America' through fictitious U.S. personas on social media platforms and other Internet-based media'.[66] Colloquially known as the 'Trolls from Olgino', the IRA tripled in size in three years, employing over 1,000 paid trolls and working in day and night shifts to match appropriate American targets.

Oligarch Yevgeniy Viktorovich Prigozhin, the financier of this troll farm, is 'a close Putin ally with ties to Russian intelligence', according to the office of the Director of National Intelligence, and is named personally in the Mueller indictment.[67] Originally intended to support Russian disinformation efforts in Ukraine and the near abroad, by 2014 these 'kremlebots' had their sights set on American quarry and a point of entry in Silicon Valley, 11 time zones away. Specifically, the IRA 'formed a department…referred to as the "translator project." This project focused on the U.S. population and conducted operations on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter…more than eighty [IRA] employees were assigned to the translator project.' By 2017, however, the FBI was closing in on the translator project. One IRA employee sent an email to a family member:

> We had a slight crisis here at work: the FBI busted our activity (not a joke). So, I got preoccupied with covering tracks together with the colleagues… I created all these pictures and posts, and the Americans believed that it was written by their people.[68]

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Americans or US-based social media giants wished to become a part of the Kremlin's cyber influence campaign, Twitter and Facebook were willing vessels for a price. After initial public foot-dragging, and under public pressure from American lawmakers, the Russian social media influence campaign is beginning to come into view. Two days after Donald Trump won the Oval Office, on November 10, 2016, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg opined, 'Personally I think the idea that fake news on Facebook ... influenced the election in any way is a pretty crazy idea'.[69] As evidence to the contrary mounted, Facebook continued to issue corporate denials as late as July of 2017, in which Facebook officials maintained that they had found no evidence that Russian-linked entities purchased ads, claiming 'we have seen no evidence that Russian actors bought ads on Facebook in connection with the election'[70]

In September 2017, Facebook started to come clean and offered to assist Robert Mueller's investigation, handing over receipts for Russia-linked financial transactions. Between June 2015 and May 2017, Facebook earned about $100,000 from about 3,000 ads purchased by 470 IRA-linked accounts, and Facebook estimated that 80,000 pieces of online content reached between 126 and 150 million users. Facebook pocketed an additional $50,000 from 2,200 additional ads purchased by Russian linked groups separate from the IRA. While $150,000 may be a rounding error to a social media behemoth like Facebook, the Russians were able to micro-target specific groups that they wished to influence by using Facebook's 'Custom Audience' feature to identify susceptible voters to ensure that their financial investment had the maximum impact. Further, figures for ad buys do not capture tailored content that was posted by Russian trolls using fake accounts or the activity of bots that manipulated trending algorithms to amplify the IRA's volume.

Chastened by a public relations nightmare, Facebook has slowly come to understand how its platform could be used for fake news and disinformation purposes intended to influence elections, but early foot-dragging on the threat earned public reproach from lawmakers. Virginia Senator Mark Warner, Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, pulled no punches with Silicon Valley representatives testifying before his committee: 'Many of us on this committee have been raising these issues since the beginning of this year… Our claims were frankly blown off by the leadership of your companies'.[71] Perhaps counter-intuitively, academics studying social media have tended to agree more with politicians than Silicon Valley on where the blame lies. 'There's been a systematic failure of responsibility [at Facebook]', according to Professor Zeynep Tufekci, a media studies expert, who attributed Facebook's sluggishness to 'their overconfidence that they know best, their naiveté about how the world works, their extensive effort to avoid oversight, and their business model of having very few employees so that no one is minding the store'.[72]

By November 2017, however, Facebook's top lawyer told lawmakers that Zuckerberg was 'dead serious' about Russian meddling. The next month, Facebook's Vice President of Social Good, contended, 'We take this really seriously…This is a new kind of threat to national security, that's why we need to work with the US government…and we're making a huge investment on this'.[73] Indeed, this is dramatic U-turn. In November 2016, Zuckerberg defended Facebook's *laissez faire* approach to disinformation

on his platform by declaring that he did not want Facebook to be the 'arbiters of truth'.[74] A year later, Facebook's own help center site assures users, 'We're committed to preventing the spread of false news'.[75]

Finally recognizing its unwitting but real role in Russian disinformation campaigns, and fighting against potential future attempts at increased government regulation, Facebook has taken several steps to guard against future such attempts, including increased ad transparency, artificial intelligence engineering, applying machine learning, and hiring a thousand new employees to tackle this challenge. The result of this investment, for instance, was that during the May 2017 French Presidential elections Facebook deleted 30,000 fake accounts.[76]

Like fellow tech giant Facebook, Twitter also profited handsomely from Russian trolls at the IRA and media propaganda outlets, where credulous Americans could 'Like' or retweet Russian propaganda. Television station RT (formerly known as Russia Today), characterized by the US intelligence community as 'the Kremlin's principal international propaganda outlet',[77] purchased ads on Twitter for $274,100 in 2016. By November 2017, Twitter identified 2,752 accounts linked to the IRA and Google identified 18 such YouTube channels.[78] Twitter announced on January 19, 2018, that 677,775 people in the US followed, retweeted or liked a tweet from IRA accounts during the 2016 election. Moreover, the social media giant admitted that it had discovered 50,258 Russian bot accounts that were tweeting during this timeframe. Unlike Facebook, however, Twitter opted to proactively inform users if they had interacted with Russian trolls or bots on its platform, whereas Facebook has set up a method for curious users to learn if they interacted with Russian IRA content. However, a social media user in 2016 who did not Like or Share or retweet IRA content does not mean that all of their online clicks were free of fake news.

A key point in the murky realm of social media propagation of disinformation is that ascribing the totality of Internet contamination to the IRA overstates their role. Russian actors did not have nearly a monopoly on fake news and disinformation. They phished and hacked for it and they weaponized it effectively, but there were many other actors in this space that may have unwittingly, and uncaringly, amplified the Russian efforts. For instance, in the industrial and largely forgotten city of Veles, Macedonia, teenagers are able to earn nearly ten times the average monthly wage for the area by cutting and pasting far-right fake news onto their own web platforms, earning advertising revenue with each click from Americans wantonly sharing ideologically driven fake news. Clicks from American Internet visitors earn these youngsters more than triple what other clicks yield. In the words of one Macedonian teenager: 'The Americans loved our stories and we make money from them. Who cares if they are true or false?'[79] These young Macedonians did not set out to weaponize disinformation to achieve a strategic effect in an adversary's election. Rather, they found a way through manipulating and propagating web content to earn a lot of money to purchase copious amounts of expensive champagne and luxury goods. As one Veles-based plagiarizer of fake news commented, 'Teenagers in our city don't care how Americans vote. They are only satisfied that they make money and can buy expensive clothes and drinks!'[80]

Distinguishing foreign meddling activities from protected free speech in a borderless platform with over a billion international users is surely a daunting task. Adding online actors like those in Macedonia seeking spending money instead of strategic messaging complicates things further. Ascertaining which social media users are legitimate, which are illegitimate, and which are simply legitimate crackpots entitled to their own views will take all of the human and technical prowess that Silicon Valley can muster. Disinformation, especially via cutouts and fake accounts, is much more challenging than weeding out terrorist content in which the users proclaim their views without veneer. Complicating matters, discussion of abuse of social media entwines narratives of privacy, disclosure, profit, transparency, and free speech, all hot button topics in a highly polarized society. The challenge, however, seems to be one of manpower and resources, but as Senator Warner noted, also one of disposition and a willingness to understand the magnitude of the threat. The good news is that, if the first step to change is admitting there is a problem, Silicon Valley is ready for step two.

The re-emergence of Carter Page, the Steele Dossier, and the FISA warrant

While WikiLeaks was publishing thousands of hacked DNC documents and social media companies were vessels for disinformation, the FBI's interest in the Russia-linked activities of Carter Page resurfaced with a vengeance. As noted, Russian intelligence operatives attempted to cultivate him in 2013, but this was years before Donald Trump emerged as a potential White House contender. Certainly the SVR could not have foreseen that Page would emerge as a touted foreign policy advisor for the campaign. However, it may be the case that Page's name remained on the SVR's radar screen and a new purpose was identified for him as the 2016 election approached. This time, however, the SVR did not want information on Russian energy deals from him. They wanted to influence and amplify the Trump campaign's conciliatory approach toward Russia generally and Putin specifically, and Page was the ideal vessel. But how to get him to Moscow?

Back in 2013, the SVR officers who engaged with Page played on his ambition and ego. His SVR file would have noted this and they returned to this well by inviting Page to Moscow in July 2016 ostensibly to deliver the commencement address at the New Economic School. Such an address at a Moscow university would have been irresistible to Page's ego, feeding a sense of perhaps finally becoming a known player in Russia. Conveniently, it also provided a perfect pretext to cover for meetings while in Moscow. Additionally, a legitimate commencement address would have been a plausible way for the Kremlin to indirectly pay for Page's travel to Moscow for ancillary purposes. As former CIA senior officer Joe Wippl observed, a talented case officer would generate 'some concoction of events seemingly plausible to the target'.[81]

Former British Secret Intelligence Service (also known as MI6) officer Christopher Steele reportedly alleged in his now infamous dossier that the Kremlin wished to cultivate positive relations with certain Americans, and had also indirectly funded some of their visits to Russia. Page's trip to Moscow would fit this description. Notably, Page stated that he had the Trump campaign's approval to travel to Moscow to give his speech, although he did provide the standard disclaimer that he was speaking in his personal capacity as a private citizen, which Page confirmed that the Trump campaign requested of him.[82] Page was the tip of the iceberg according to the Steele dossier:

> There was a well-developed conspiracy of cooperation between [the Trump campaign] and the Russian leadership. This was managed on the Trump side by the Republican candidate's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, who was using foreign policy advisor, Carter Page, and others as intermediaries.[83]

The ostensible commencement invitation seemed to have its intended purpose. According to Steele's information, during Page's July 2016 trip to Moscow he held a 'secret meeting' with Rosneft President and close Putin consigliore, Igor Sechin. Additionally, according to a separate source in the Steele dossier, Page met with a Kremlin advisor, Igor Divyekin, who allegedly offered him 'a dossier of *Kompromat* [compromising information] that the Kremlin possessed on…Hillary Clinton and its possible release to the Republican campaign team', again, like the 'dirt' made known to Papadopoulos, underscoring the nexus between hacking and weaponizing its fruit via useful fools.

The Steele dossier further asserts that Sechin offered Page and/or Trump associates a lucrative stake in Rosneft in exchange for lifting corporate and personal sanctions on Sechin. Steele: 'Page expressed interest and confirmed that were Trump elected US President, then sanctions on Russia would be lifted'.[84] Notably, Steele included a source comment:

> Sechin's associate opined that although Page had not stated it explicitly to Sechin, he had clearly implied that in terms of his comment on Trump's intention to lift Russian sanctions if elected president, he was speaking with the Republican candidate's authority.[85]

Although claiming to act in a private capacity, Page then wrote to campaign staff:

> In a private conversation, Dvorkovich expressed strong support for Mr. Trump and a desire to work together toward devising better solutions in response to the vast range of current international problems… On a related front, I'll send you guys a readout soon regarding some incredible insights and outreach I've received from a few Russian legislators and senior members of the Presidential administration here.

Indeed, Page's Moscow itinerary packed more than just a commencement address, a fact not lost on American investigators. By November 2017 Page was called to testify in front of Congress. Page denied that he ever held a secret meeting with Sechin, but during his testimony on 2 November 2017, Page revised his account of his July 2016 trip to Russia, claiming

> the only brief interaction I had with any Russian government official is after this commencement program or after the—after my commencement speech on that Friday in July—I believe it was July 8th—I briefly said hello to [Deputy Prime Minister of Russia] Arkadiy Dvorkovich.[86]

Responding to Congressional questions about a separate trip to Hungary, Page replied, 'I have an interest in foreign policy, and I have an interest in energy markets, right?' Lawmakers then asked him if he had lingering connections from his time in Budapest. Page: 'I believe it was just [the ambassador], and there was one other person who was also a foreign-policy person who I stayed in touch with. I cannot remember his name'. On the possibility that the 'one other person' might be an intelligence officer, Page dissembled: 'People don't wear badges'.[87] If, in his many connections and trips to Russia and Eastern Europe he were only able to identify an intelligence officer by way of an identification badge, his willful blindness would have been lip smacking to the SVR and FSB. Private citizen or no, if the SVR's interest in Page was piqued, so was the FBI's. The Department of Justice petitioned the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court for a FISA warrant to enable the FBI to monitor Page's communications to ascertain whether he was in fact a Russian agent or acting on behalf of a foreign power.[88] Presumably the FISA warrant was yielding a stream of counterintelligence information because it was renewed on three occasions across two administrations.

Not all agents are witting of their use by Russian intelligence and are thus not recruited in a formal sense.[89] It is possible that Page was simply an 'unwitting' agent or useful fool. Page maintained he was not a spy, but perhaps a recruited spy was not what Moscow needed. Given the SVR's professional emphasis on influence and shaping narratives, Page was a good mouthpiece for them, given his consistently reliable pro-Kremlin positions. For a short time Page worked for the Eurasia Group, an international strategy consulting firm, and president Ian Bremmer observed that Page's outlook was 'strongly pro-Kremlin'.[90] Bremmer tweeted that Page was the 'most whackadoodle'[91] former Eurasia Group employee. According to a US official formerly posted in Moscow, Page 'was pretty much a brazen apologist for anything Moscow did'.[92]

For instance, during his invited commencement address, Page proclaimed, 'Washington and other Western capitals have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption and regime change'.[93] To be sure, there is plenty of hypocrisy in US foreign policy and America often falls short of its ideals, but to loudly complain about it in Russia serves less to help America correct its missteps and more to normalize Putin's autocratic regime through equivalency. Indeed, the SVR was prescient to cultivate a potentially useful contact back in 2013. It is of limited propaganda value for Russians to criticize American hypocrisy in its foreign policy, but quite another thing to have an all-American Naval Academy graduate do it on Moscow's behalf. Even if Page was not recruited or directly compensated to publicly state such views, the SVR would have been grinning like the Cheshire cat. Page was of supreme propaganda value and it would have been minimal effort on the SVR's part to continue that trajectory with Page as an unwitting agent of influence. Simply feeding his ego, such as in the role of invited academic at a Russian university, and arranging for some beak wetting in Russian energy deals would have been enough to keep that going.

As a former Naval officer Page would have had a security clearance and endless counterintelligence briefings dealing with the threat of foreign intelligence services, especially when traveling abroad. Like any member of the US military, he would have been warned specifically about some typical intelligence recruitment methods and even got a visit from the FBI after his 2013 encounters with Russian intelligence officers. Did he forget these warnings? Did he feel that since he no longer had a security clearance he would not be useful to a foreign intelligence service? His close call with an SVR recruitment attempt did not seem to have opened his eyes to the danger of throwing in his lot with the Kremlin. In fact,

while SVR officer Podobnyy was cultivating him in 2013, Page was also trying to publish his doctoral dissertation, telling an academic editor he

> had the privilege to serve as an informal advisor to the staff of the Kremlin in preparation for their Presidency of the G-20 Summit next month, where energy issues will be a prominent point on the agenda.[94]

While Carter Page was holding meetings in Russia and George Papadopoulos was gossiping about 'dirt' on Hillary Clinton, then-CIA director John Brennan became increasingly concerned, testifying before the HPSCI:

> I encountered and am aware of information and intelligence that revealed contacts and interactions between Russian officials and U.S. persons involved in the Trump campaign that I was concerned about because of known Russian efforts to suborn such individuals. It raised questions in my mind about whether Russia was able to gain the cooperation of those individuals.[95]

It seems clear that Carter Page was a naïf in over his head in pursuit of lucrative Russian energy deals. While maintaining he did nothing inappropriate, his role – even if unwitting – in the mosaic of Russian hybrid intelligence was significant and earns him the characterization of useful fool for Russian intelligence. Like Page, Papadopoulos tried to style himself as an international energy consultant. The pair were both under-qualified and overmatched quarry for the Russian intelligence service. Resisting intelligence exploitation of such a tempting target would be like asking a Great White shark to pass on an injured seal pup.

Have the Russians, therefore, perfected the art of manipulating useful fools? The ideal agents of influence are those with credibility and stature in the target population. It is hard to see what stature and credibility Carter Page, George Papadopoulos, Joseph Mifsud, and Julian Assange ever held. Internationally, Mifsud's academic career has not marked him as an intellectual heavyweight, and Julian Assange's repeated dubious denials that Russia was not his source of purloined information hurt his credibility. His stature further waned since its heyday in 2012 owing to his hiding from Swedish rape charges in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. On the domestic side, the Trump campaign had very few internationally recognized foreign policy experts on staff during the election, so perhaps pickings were slim for the Russians and they did their best with what was available.

Although people with marginal credentials were the focus of this article, it bears noting that the Kremlin did enjoy propaganda success at the expense of individuals of higher stature and reputation. For instance, retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, earned tens of thousands of dollars in speaking fees from Russian entities after his retirement.[96] He also courted controversy when he helped legitimize the cable broadcast network RT (formerly Russia Today), a Kremlin bullhorn, by attending its 10th anniversary gala dinner in Moscow and sitting next to Putin, which was conveniently caught on camera.[97] 'It is not coincidence that Flynn was placed next to President Putin,' commented former U.S. ambassador to Russia Mike McFaul, 'Flynn was considered a close Trump adviser. Why else would they want him there?'[98] Like Papadopoulos, Flynn has pled guilty to lying to the FBI about his meetings with Russian interlocutors and is cooperating with the Mueller investigation. The inescapable conclusion is history reveals that it is far too easy to find useful fools, and that even intelligent people can be manipulated with a compelling enough ideological narrative or financially lucrative result.

Conclusion

Despite much ahistorical outcry, this is not the first time Moscow has meddled in US elections. James Clapper, properly taking the long term historical view, appropriately characterized recent Russian efforts to shape American political discourse as a durable Russian effort that spanned both the Cold War and post-Cold war East-West relations: 'Russia's influence activities in the run up to the 2016 election constituted the high water mark of their long-running efforts since the 1960s to disrupt and influence our elections'.[99] Surely the American electorate has changed since the Cold War, but so has Moscow's approach. What is significant in 2016, and worthy of analysis, are the methods and tactics that yielded

a much more substantial degree of influence, although it is impossible to quantify in terms of actual electoral outcomes. Most monocausal explanations for events fall short because they often miss the input of many other factors, and this article does not argue that the outcome of the 2016 election was determined or orchestrated solely by clever Russian hybrid intelligence. At the same time, however, this article is hardly a retrospective, and similar hybrid intelligence approaches should be anticipated by western democracies.

This article does not condemn nor vilify the Russian government for harnessing its intelligence and cyber power to pursue its international interests. All countries with sophisticated and capable intelligence services look to them to give their country an edge, be it in the run up to international negotiations, on the battlefield, or to pursue deniable statecraft via covert action. Indeed, the CIA has meddled in other countries elections since working against the Italian communists in 1948 and continuing through Guatemala and Iran in 1953, Cuba in 1961, Chile in 1970, Angola in 1975, and some claim that Americans actively supported Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 Russian elections through the timely backing of an International Monetary Fund loan.[100] The truism that turnabout is fair play is as valid for the anarchic international system as it is for the schoolyard.

As has been shown, leading up to 2016, the Russians pursued a suite of what they refer to as complex active measures, (*Kompleksnoye aktivnoye meropriyatiye*), which, in Russian intelligence parlance, are

> the totality of the active measures serving to achieve a single aim, while varying in form, methods and areas of application, which Intelligence carries out simultaneously within a particular period, when each of the measures complements the others, and helps to increase the effectiveness of the operation as a whole.[101]

These complex active measures, taken together, are not so different from what is often fetishized by American strategists as the acme of strategy: the 'whole of government approach', in which all levers of national power are working in harmony across bureaucratic boundaries toward a common goal. Indeed, the bureaucratic parallels between the whole of government concept and complex active measures may be a useful framework to understand the dynamism and cross-domain efforts of Russian intelligence.

The purpose here has been to highlight the synergistic effects of a subset within the overall context of complex active measures; specifically, cyber operations and human manipulation, the combination of which can be referred to as hybrid intelligence. Still, Russian intelligence efforts aren't as synchronized as they could be. Although they did an admirable job synchronizing HUMINT cultivation and cyber means, the cyber attacks themselves were occasionally not well coordinated. In fact, it is likely that Fancy Bear was unaware that Cozy Bear has already penetrated the DNC networks. Likewise, the premature exposure of DCLeaks as a Russian front and the mismanagement of Guccifer2.0's messaging were clumsy. If the Russian intelligence apparatus refines its coordination process for maximum effect, their influence and impact could be even greater in the future.

To be sure, the Russian intelligence and security services utilize more tools than cultivating useful fools and hacking for the purpose of well-timed leaks. The Russian services maintain their practiced edge in dark arts from political intimidation and assassination to buying ads on social media like Facebook as well unleashing armies of trolls and bots to sow confusion and discord. The way in which Russian government harnessed the great operational range of their tools for singular purpose is impressive from a disinterested perspective, but disconcerting from a western one. Observers such as General Michael Hayden can have 'a little professional respect'[102] for the Russian covert influence campaign and at the same time worry about the integrity of their democratic society without contradiction or cognitive dissonance.

Indeed, the Kremlin deserves some measure of credit for playing the game well and even professional intelligence officers in the west would tip their hat in this case. Credit goes to Putin and his intelligence apparatus for a successful intelligence operation. They correctly identified several weak but influential and malleable people who would legitimize and amplify their message, as well as online platforms that would cooperate for ideological or pecuniary reasons. They further found the most divisive issues in American society and devised ways to exacerbate these extant raw fissures. As one American lawmaker noted, 'Their strategy is to take a crack in our society and turn it into a chasm'.[103] How they achieved

as much as they did is something to studied and understood. To that end, the focus of this article has been to analyze the synergistic joining of classic Russian intelligence manipulation of willing vessels, both naïve and malevolent, with targeted cyber operations to identify and describe the approach of hybrid intelligence.

Notes

1. Sherman Kent Memorandum to the Director of Central Intelligence, "Khrushchev and the American Election."
2. Memorandum for DCI [sender redacted], "The Soviets and the 1984 US Elections."
3. Christopher Andrew, *The Sword and the Shield*.
4. *Cyberwar*, "Who hacked the DNC?"
5. Statement of James R. Clapper, former Director of National Intelligence, concerning Russian interference in the 2016 United States election before the Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism United States Senate, May 8, 2017, available at https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/05-08-17%20Clapper%20Testimony.pdf
6. As quoted in Bob Abeshouse, "Facebook, Russian Trolls and the New Era of Information Warfare," *Al-Jazeera Blog*, 1 February 2018.
7. Herbert Romerstein, "Disinformation as a KGB Weapon in the Cold War."
8. Chad Fitzgerald and Aaron Brantly, "Subverting Reality."
9. Ibid.
10. United States Senate Committee on Armed Services hearing on Foreign Cyber Threats to the United States, 5 January 2017.
11. According to Christopher Andrew and his co-author, KGB defector Vasili Mitrokhin, active measures (*aktivinyye meropriatia*) ranged from media operations to varying levels of violence. 'Throughout the Cold War the United States was the main target for KGB active measures as well as for intelligence collection. Most were at the non-violent end of the active measures spectrum—'influence operations' designed to discredit the Main Adversary', as quoted in Andrew, *The Sword and the Shield*.
12. Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight." Originally published in *Military-Industrial Kurier,* 27 February 2013. Translated from Russian by Robert Coalson on 21 June 2014.
13. Chivvis, "Understanding Russian 'Hybrid Warfare' and What Can Be Done About It."
14. Very little cost in terms of direct financial investment. Russian associated entities spent about $300,000 in social media advertising on Twitter and Facebook during the 2016 campaign. Given that the US responded with economic sanctions on Russia, the true comprehensive cost to Russia may be higher.
15. Mitrokhin, *KGB Lexicon*.
16. The Soviet intelligence services had some success exploiting useful fools in the West. Notable examples include the many Americans who parroted KGB conspiracy theories that AIDS was developed by the US military at Fort Detrick, Maryland, and that Americans were traveling to South America not to adopt children, but to harvest their body parts.
17. On the development of the technical understanding of social engineering, see Hatfield, "Social Engineering in Cybersecurity."
18. As quoted in Adam Entous, Ellen Nakashima and Greg Jaffe, "Kremlin Trolls Burned Across the Internet as Washington Debated Options," *Washington Post*, 25 December 2017
19. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections."
20. Hacquebord, "Update on Pawn Storm."
21. Statement from the Department of Justice U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, "Russian Banker Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 30 Months in Prison for Conspiring to Work for Russian Intelligence", 25 May 2016, available at https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/russian-banker-sentenced-manhattan-federal-court-30-months-prison-conspiring-work
22. Statement by the Department of Justice U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, "Attorney General, Manhattan U.S. Attorney, and FBI Announce Charges Against Russian Spy Ring in New York City," 26 January 2015, available at https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/newyork/news/press-releases/attorney-general-manhattan-u.s.-attorney-and-fbi-announce-charges-against-russian-spy-ring-in-new-york-city
23. Department of Justice sealed criminal complaint, United States of America v. Evgeny Buryakov, et.al, Southern District of New York, 23 January 2015, available at https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/01/26/buryakov-complaint.pdf
24. *Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki,* the Russian external intelligence successor to the Soviet KGB.
25. Some terminology here is important; specifically, the critical difference between case officers and sources, agents, or assets – the latter three terms are basically interchangeable. Case officers are the ones calling the shots. They are the ones working overseas, often under cover, to locate and handle new sources of secret information. They

have authorization and resources from their governments to make secret offers to potential intelligence assets. On this agent and case officer relationship, see Wippl, "The Qualities That Make a Great Case Officer."

26. An "illegal" is an experienced SVR or Soviet Military Intelligence (GRU) officer who is living and working abroad without diplomatic status, sometimes under a false identity. As the Department of Justice charged: "Buryakov operated under 'non-official cover', meaning he entered and remained in the United States as a private citizen, posing as an employee in the Manhattan office of a Russian bank." See Buryakov complaint.
27. Lambridge, "A Note on KGB Style."
28. Global Energy Partners website is http://globalenergycap.com/index.php, accessed 12 January 2018.
29. Buryakov complaint.
30. Carter Page confirmed he was the FBI's 'Male 1' to journalist Ali Watkins in April 2017.
31. See note 29 above.
32. In American construction, if the target accepts the recruitment pitch, the terminology changes. His status is now that of 'agent', 'source', or 'asset'. The CIA has a binary approach to recruitment: An agent is either a fully recruited agent or he isn't. Russian understanding of the term agent encompasses a spectrum of case officer and agent relationships. In the Russian view, as long as the agent is providing the material, documents or operational support that his case officer requires, the semantics of agent recruitment matter rather less. Russian intelligence may therefore have relationships with cooperative contacts who don't necessarily need to be fully recruited in order to serve their purpose.
33. Given the diplomatic sensitivity of international espionage, it is conducted by a specifically trained subset of intelligence officers called 'operations officers' in the US intelligence community vernacular and 'case officers' more universally. Most people in most countries are loyal to their own governments, so the task of the case officer is to find someone with 'placement and access' to information that the case officer is seeking and then manipulate that person to betray their compatriots, company, or country, to work as an asset or agent. There are plenty of people (usually civil servants or military personnel) who have access to secrets; the trick is to figure out which one of them might betray their country, for what reasons, and under what circumstances. This takes extensive training, years of experience, and a high degree of emotional intelligence with a manipulative personality. At the same time, however, it's also a numbers game. Case officers often lament that they need to 'kiss a lot of frogs to find the prince'.
34. Traditional recruitment factors play on personal motivations such as Money, Ideology, Coercion, and Ego ('MICE'), although there are mnemonics with more nuances, and it's usually a combination of all of these factors. Like any recipe, it's vitally important to understand the right ingredients and in the right proportions. Also part of understanding that person is assessing their suitability for the high stress game of espionage. Will the person crack under the pressure of a double life? Are they discreet? Do they show good judgment and follow directions? If so, the case officer will attempt to develop a cooperative relationship with that person. If the case officer can identify a target's 'motivation' or 'vulnerability' (a reason to spy), he will craft a recruitment 'pitch', as individually tailored as a bespoke suit, in which the case officer secures the target's assent to the recruitment.
35. Buryakov complaint. Some intelligence services, notably the Russians, use various forms of coercion, such as blackmail, usually based on compromising material. This may work for a time, but ultimately leads to an adversarial relationship with a recruited agent, who might either seek his revenge at some point or perhaps confess his unenviable situation to his own counterintelligence or security service, who may run him back as a double agent against his erstwhile handlers. The optimal case officer and agent relationships are therefore based in genuine rapport and a shared sense of a common goal.
36. Watkins, "A Former Trump Adviser Met With A Russian Spy".
37. It is important to emphasize that not all agents provide classified information in the classical sense of the term. Many companies would surely understand privileged information might not carry governmental classification markings, but they would certainly consider their intellectual property, trade secrets, future negotiating positions, and contract tenders to be information that should not be shared with foreign intelligence services.
38. Head of the SVR station. Equivalent to a Head of Station in UK parlance or Chief of Station in American parlance.
39. See note 29 above.
40. See note 29 above.
41. Lefebvre and Porteous, "The Russian 10…11: An Inconsequential Adventure?"
42. See note 29 above.
43. US District Attorney Statement, 25 May 2016.
44. Vladimir Putin has no biological niece.
45. Zavadski, "'Putin's Niece', Olga Polonskaya, Disappears From the Internet."
46. Maza, "Who is Putin's mysterious 'niece' who met with Papadopoulos?"
47. US Department of Justice, United States v. George Papadopoulos, US District Court for the District of Columbia. Case 1:17-cr-00182-RDM *SEALED* Filed 5 October 2017, accessed at https://www.justice.gov/file/1007346/download
48. Ibid.
49. Kutner, "Who is Joseph Mifsud, The Professor in the George Papadopoulos Russia Investigation?"
50. Lafraniere, Mazzetti and Apuzzo, "How the Russia Inquiry Began."

51. "Fancy Bear" is a moniker given to a cyber threat actor that cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike has linked with Russian Federation military intelligence service, the GRU (*Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye*). This threat actor has been termed "Pawn Storm" by cybersecurity firm Trend Micro, and Advanced Persistent Threat 28 (APT28) by FireEye.
52. "Cozy Bear" is the CrowdStrike nomenclature for a cyber threat actor associated with the Russian SVR or the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). FireEye refers to this group at Advanced Persistent Threat 29 (APT 29). The US Government refers to malicious Russian intelligence cyber activity as GRIZZLY STEPPE. See US Department of Homeland Security, "GRIZZLY STEPPE – Russian Malicious Cyber Activity", *Joint Analysis Report*, 29 December 2016, accessed https://www.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/JAR_16-20296A_GRIZZLY%20STEPPE-2016-1229.pdf
53. Alperovitch, "Bears in the Midst: Intrusion into the Democratic National Committee."
54. Ibid.
55. The original "Guccifer" was the online handle of Romanian hacker Marcel Lehel Lazar, who is serving a prison term in the United States.
56. McKirdy, "WikiLeaks' Assange: Russia didn't Give Us Emails."
57. https://twitter.com/guccifer_2/status/756530278982684672?lang=en
58. Joint Statement from the Department Of Homeland Security and Office of the Director of National Intelligence on Election Security, October 7, 2016.
59. DNI, "Assessment", 6 January 2017.
60. Lafraniere, Mazzetti and Apuzzo, "How the Russia Inquiry Began."
61. DHS, *Joint Analysis Report*.
62. Central Intelligence Agency, "Director Pompeo Delivers Remarks at CSIS."
63. See DOJ *Indictment*, United States of America v. Internet Research Agency, et al., filed February 16, 2018, in the US District Court for the District of Columbia. Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF, available at https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download
64. DNI, *Assessment,* 7 January 2017.
65. DOJ *Indictment* of IRA.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. As quoted in Kurt Wagner, "Mark Zuckerberg Says It's 'Crazy' to Think Fake News Stories Got Donald Trump Elected," *Recode.net*, 11 November 2016.
70. As quoted in Tom LoBianco, "Hill Investigators, Trump Staff Look to Facebook for Critical Answers in Russia Probe," *CNN.com*, 20 July 2017.
71. As quoted in Issie Lapowsky, "Eight Revealing Moments from the Second Day of Russia Hearings," *Wired*, 11 January 2017.
72. Entous, Dwoskin and Timberg, "Obama Tried to Give Zuckerberg a Wake-up Call over Fake News on Facebook."
73. Draznin, "Facebook exec on Russian Election Meddling."
74. Liptak, "Mark Zuckerberg warns about Facebook 'becoming arbiters of truth.'"
75. https://www.facebook.com/help/1991443604424859
76. Lapowsky, "Eight Revealing Moments".
77. DNI *Assessment.*
78. See note 76 above.
79. Kirby, "The City Getting Rich from Fake News."
80. Ibid.
81. Wippl, "The Qualities That Make a Great Case Officer."
82. Reilly, "Trump Campaign Gave Page Permission for Moscow Trip."
83. GPS Fusion "Company Intelligence Report" 2016/080, hereafter "Steele Dossier"
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Carter Page testimony to U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.
87. Ibid.
88. The Republican majority on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has declassified a highly partisan memo that alleges that the FBI and DOJ acted improperly when petitioning the court for the FISA warrant. The FBI had 'grave concerns' about its release and the Democratic minority on the committee argued it was highly selective and therefore the memo's primary conclusions were erroneous. The memo can be read at https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/read-the-full-text-of-the-nunes-memo/552191/
89. It is important to understand what 'recruitment' means in the intelligence world. In short, it means that there is a formal agreed to enter into a clandestine relationship with a foreign intelligence service. It means switching allegiance, crossing the line. It is characterized by provision of information sought by another intelligence service. It is not a back channel dialogue and it is not consulting.

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91. https://twitter.com/ianbremmer/status/852480972637347840?lang=en
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93. As quoted in Steven Mufson and Tom Hamburger, "Trump Adviser's Public Comments, Ties to Moscow Stir Unease in Both Parties," *Washington Post*, 5 August 2016.
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95. Testimony of former CIA Director John Brennan before the U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, 23 May 2017.
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97. As quoted in Damien Sharkov, "Flynn-Putin Dinner: Russian Leader Had No Idea Who U.S. General Was, Says RT Chief," *Newsweek*, 4 December 2017.
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99. Congressional Testimony of James Clapper, 8 May 2017.
100. Jones, "Americans Can Spot Election Meddling Because They've Been Doing It for Years."
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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