Active Measures Working Group: What's Past is Prologue

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Abstract

From 1981 to 1992 the Active Measures Working Group (AMWG) was an interagency group focused on combating Soviet propaganda and disinformation campaigns. The working group successfully executed many counterpropaganda and counter-disinformation campaigns, to include a campaign launched by the Soviets claiming the US Military created the AIDS virus. However, after the Cold War ended the working group was disbanded. Today, the US is seeing a resurgence in Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns, yet the current efforts to combat these campaigns have not been effective. This paper will establish a baseline for the critical definitions needed to understand the topic, examine how the AMWG was structured in the 1980s, what they were able to accomplish and what made the working group successful. The paper will also examine whether the AMWG structure and functions, updated for today's environment, provides the right capabilities the U.S. needs to counter disinformation campaigns. Finally, the paper will highlight current challenges facing the US and provide some recommendations for a modern day AMWG.

Active Measures Working Group: What's Past is Prologue

On July 16, 1983, a pro-Soviet Indian newspaper, *Patriot*, ran the headline "AIDS may invade India: Mystery disease caused by US experiments," based on a letter to the editor it received from an anonymous American scientist.[1] The letter, planted in the newspaper by the Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti (KGB), was the beginning of a large Soviet disinformation campaign claiming the US Military created the AIDS virus and released it as a weapon.[2] The story did not get much attention until October 1985 when the official Soviet cultural weekly, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, quoted the *Patriot* article, lending more credence to the story.[3] The disinformation campaign gathered momentum. By the end of 1985, similar articles were published in 13 countries. In 1986 it reached 50 countries, including many in the West. By July 1987, the story had been published over 40 times in official Soviet press and was reprinted or rebroadcast in 80 countries in over 30 different languages.[4] Only after the U.S. government's Interagency Active Measures Working Group (AMWG) published factual evidence countering the Soviet disinformation did the Soviets finally agree to stop promoting these falsehoods in October 1987.[5]

Although the idea of AIDS being weaponized seems ridiculous now, it serves as an example of the ability of unchecked disinformation to spread. In the AIDS disinformation campaign highlighted above it took a little over two years for the disinformation to "go viral." In todays' media environment it typically takes less than 24 hours. This makes disinformation a very attractive low-risk strategy for adversaries.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union successfully employed against its foes what it called *active measures*, the integration of disinformation, propaganda, assassinations, political repression and other activities to undermine popular support for

governments.[6] The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not mean the end of active measures. For example, the United States is investigating Russian disinformation efforts in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. Shortly after the election, various news outlets highlighted allegations by several groups that "a Russian propaganda effort had helped spread these 'fake news' stories to hurt Democrat Hillary Clinton's chances in the 2016 presidential election."[7] Commentators have argued over whether Putin's "aim [was] to discredit the U.S. election process,"[8] or merely "sowing distrust" of all media in the U.S.[9]

But where is the AMWG now? It was disbanded in 1992 and never replaced. Herbert Romerstein, the working group's longest serving member, summed up the dismantling of the AWMG best by stating "without counterpropaganda, we've unilaterally disarmed."[10] Consequently, the U.S. presently lacks the capability to counter active measures and sustain trust in media sources. This paper will examine whether the AMWG structure and functions, updated for today's environment, provides the right capabilities the U.S. needs to counter disinformation campaigns. Over the following pages, the author will establish a baseline for the critical definitions needed to understand the topic. With that basic understanding of the definitions, the paper will then focus on how the AMWG was structured in the 1980s and what they were able to accomplish. Finally, the paper will transition to current challenges facing the U.S. and provide some recommendations for a modern day AMWG.

What are Active Measures?

In order to understand what the AMWG accomplished, one must understand what active measures are. The following paragraphs will cover the basic definitions of the terms *active measures*, *propaganda*, *disinformation*, *counterpropaganda* to provide

a common framework for the reader. Some of these terms are often used interchangeably without realizing the nuances of the terms which can lead to confusion or misunderstandings within the organizations responsible for executing these operations.

The term *active measures* is a direct translation of a Russian expression used by the KGB to describe a wide variety of influence activities including: simple propaganda, disinformation, kidnapping, murder, drug trafficking, and the illicit support of terrorism.[11] According to a report on Soviet active measures published by the U.S. Department of State (DoS) in 1987, "[T]he goal of active measures is to influence opinions and/or actions of individuals, governments and/or publics."[12] Interestingly, at the time, the DoS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) did not include propaganda as part of their definitions of active measures. However, both recognized that "propaganda and other efforts by the Soviets to influence public perceptions…may not be active measures in themselves, but may be the vehicles used to promote active measures."[13] Schoen and Lamb, members of the Center for Strategic Research at the National Defense University's Institute for National Security Studies, argue that using this narrow definition of active measures was not appropriate as the Soviet Union did not differentiate between "overt propaganda, covert action or between diplomacy and political violence."[14] Based on Schoen and Lamb's logic, this paper will use this broader definition of the term active measures that includes propaganda.

Another area of potential confusion is the difference between the terms propaganda and disinformation. These terms are used interchangeably in some sources and exclusively in others. Disinformation can be a component of propaganda, but there

is also propaganda that could be entirely true. Propaganda can be broken down into three categories: 100% factual information, partially factual information, or completely untrue information or disinformation.

Disinformation can be used in propaganda or it can also stand alone. An example of the latter would be if an intelligence asset provided deliberately false information to his/her handler. The disinformation could affect the decisions of a rival government, but the disinformation might never make it out of classified channels and thus was not propaganda. Although propaganda is dangerous, discrediting it is difficult, because it often contains a grain of truth. Understanding the subtleties of these terms is important, as the remainder of this paper will primarily focus on countering propaganda by focusing on the disinformation it contains. Romerstein stated this well by defining counterpropaganda as "carefully prepared answers to false propaganda with the purpose of refuting disinformation and undermining the propagandist."[15]

Reading through the literature, it is difficult to find a specific formula or process for countering propaganda. However, Romerstein in his 2008 essay, *Counterpropaganda: Why We Can't Win Without it*, highlights several intuitive qualities: truth, clarity, trust and speed.[16] While serving as the Commander of International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan, General Petraeus implored the military to be the "first with the truth."[17] This idea encapsulates both the principles of speed and truth. The quicker one can respond to propaganda, the less time the story has to circulate and become entrenched. As RAND researchers Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews point out, the psychology indicates that people are more likely to believe the first thing they hear or see regarding a particular issue.[18] However, critical to countering

propaganda is the fact that it needs to be the truth. If the information is not communicated clearly, then even if the information meets the other three criteria it is still not effective. Clear communication requires understanding the culture and environment. Finally, the source of the information has to be trusted. This is not something that happens overnight; trust must be built over time.

In summary, active measures are challenging to counter. However, by focusing on disinformation and the elements of propaganda that contain disinformation certain categories of active measures can be effectively countered using the qualities of truth, clarity, speed and trust. The following case study from the Cold War suggests that this is possible.

The Case of the Cold War Soviet Union and AMWG

Formed in 1981 to counter soviet disinformation, the AMWG was an interagency activity that included members of the DoS, Department of Defense (DOD), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Department of Justice, (FBI), U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and the Arms, Control and Disarmament Agency (now part of the Department of State).[19] The DoS was the lead agency for the working group and a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State served as its Chair.[20] This gave the group diplomatic credibility and helped ensure the group's efforts were managed with political sensitivity.[21] Its mission was to identify and expose Soviet disinformation.[22]

The working group operated using a *report - analyze - publicize* methodology.[23] They "received and combined reports from USIA posts around the world, the CIA, and FBI investigations."[24] After receiving the reports, analysts from the respective agencies analyzed the information in Washington, D.C.[25] Armed with this initial analysis, the group members "came from across the Interagency" to meet and conduct additional

analysis as to what they could and could not effectively counter.[26] These working group generally met weekly.[27] Finally, the group produced reports on Soviet disinformation.[28] The reports were unclassified and circulated throughout the Interagency and to the press. It was one of these reports in 1987 that forced the Soviet Union disavow the allegations against the U.S. inventing the AIDS virus.[29]

The success of the AMWG in the 1980s provides some important lessons for the modern-day context. After all, interagency working groups fail more often than they succeed. One of the keys to AMWG's success was its commitment to a very narrow mission—exposing "disinformation (outright lies) rather than propaganda (persuasion)."[30] Additionally, the AMWG focused on countering disinformation campaigns that could be "exposed in a compelling way with unclassified or declassified information."[31] This was not always easy because the FBI, CIA and DIA had a responsibility to protect their sources and methods.[32]

Another important component of the AMWG's success was its approach to countering active measures through persistent and continuing exposure of disinformation. This allowed them to maintain an "unimpeachable record of accuracy and trustworthiness," thereby remaining credible and establishing trust critical in counterpropaganda campaigns.[33] Additionally, the working group held their products to high internal standards to ensure their reports on Soviet disinformation were air-tight and impossible to pick apart.[34] The working group recognized that using arguments focused on countering Soviet ideology could hinge on an individual's personal beliefs, therefore they worked to expose Soviet lies and not the ideology.

Senior leader support and protection were necessary for the working group's continued existence and success.[35] The group had supporters at all levels of the executive branch and within Congress. Congressional leaders generated requirements, "and lobbied for institutionalized capability to produce the reports."[36] The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State led the group and was able to effectively and provide top cover along with other political appointees.[37] Naturally, "the declassification of interagency reporting and other evidence was essential to the group's success, providing the solid 'proof' they needed to support their 'cases.'"[38]

Well respected by both Congress and the executive branch, the group was recognized as the experts on Soviet disinformation.[39] Ultimately, the group's work made the "Soviet Union pay a price for disinformation" that reached the highest levels of its government.[40] In order to get their message out, the working group published reports and conducted "road shows" to educate personnel at the Embassies" as well as foreign and domestic audiences on how the Soviets were trying to trick them into believing propaganda and disinformation.[41]

Essentially, the working group was successful because it raised the awareness of the seriousness of the problem and its effects through a sustained effort to expose disinformation. Schoen and Lamb summed this up in a 2012 paper as follows:

> The working group also changed the way the United States and Soviet Union viewed disinformation. With constant prodding from the group, the majority position in the U.S. national security bureaucracy moved from believing that Soviet disinformation was inconsequential to believing it was deleterious to U.S. interests—and on occasion could mean the difference in which side prevailed in closely contested foreign policy issues. The working group pursued a sustained campaign to expose Soviet disinformation and helped convince Mikhail Gorbachev that such operations against the United States were counterproductive.[42]

The Present Challenge

Among the elements of national power (Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic) the U.S. is relatively weakest in informational power. Russia, China, Iran and even terrorist organizations are executing robust information campaigns, beating the U.S. to the punch and influencing others to their side. Given the efforts by Russia to spread disinformation and propaganda in the U.S., this section will look at the current challenges facing the U.S. created by a media/informational environment that is more developed, more dynamic and faster than ever before.

<u>The Russian Threat</u>

The Russians have key advantages over the U.S. with respect to exercising the informational element of national power. There are several reasons for this. The first being that in today's information environment it is cheap for Russia to develop information capabilities and use them against the U.S. Additionally, as an open society that embraces the free flow of information and exchange of ideas, the U.S. is particularly vulnerable to the spread of any sort of disinformation or propaganda. United States culture views that open sharing of information and ideas allows truth to come to light, and the population will coalesce around the truth. However, Russia is easily able to exploit this same openness to polarize populations rather than bring them together.

It is a common refrain in U.S. society today that the news media is biased and traditional media outlets such as *Fox News*, *CNN*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, etc. cannot be trusted because they have a biased slant to their news. This has caused media consumers to seek information elsewhere, ironically to even more biased/slanted news sources with less rigorous editorial standards than any of the traditional media sources listed above. Paradoxically,

in the search for the truth people are going to more and more dubious sources for news. As British author Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, editor-in-chief of *The Interpreter*, adroitly pointed out in 2014, "[T]he Kremlin successfully erodes the integrity of investigative and political journalism, producing a lack of faith in traditional media."[43]

The *RT*, formerly *Russia Today*, is a news channel funded by the Russian government. The *RT* uses the motto "Question More," which appeals to the savvy media consumer who is always looking for multiple sources of information. However, researchers showed that some of *RT*'s stories are coordinated with gray and black disinformation campaigns being run out of the Kremlin.[44] But, *RT*'s content is not purely disinformation. It contains mostly factual reporting, thus making it challenging for U.S. analysis to separate the truth from the fiction among *RT* stories.[45] Essentially, after gaining the reader's trust, *RT* will occasionally throw in completely fabricated stories that advance Russian interests. The natural counter argument to this is that the U.S. operates *Voice of America* which, similar to *RT*, is funded by the U.S. government and presents stories that advance U.S. interests. However, the U.S. government does not exercise control over the stories that are published and is even prohibited by law from doing so overtly, covertly or clandestinely.[46]

Therefore, although the U.S. attitude and culture is that the truth will win out and the U.S. can rely on informational messaging through soft power, this does not occur. Romerstein warned, "[D]isinformation and propaganda campaigns threaten the image and effectiveness of the United States abroad in peacetime and in war, and are among the most important weapons in the arsenals of our militarily weaker adversaries."[47]

Although the Cold War was over twenty-five years ago, many of the Russian

themes for disinformation campaigns have not changed. Russian information operations

today primarily focus on "undermining the West," by discrediting Western democracy, its

institutions and the international system.[48] According to Shultz and Godson's 1984

book, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*, the primary themes for

Soviet disinformation, propaganda and active measures were as follows:

   - To influence American, European and world opinion to believe that
     American military and political policies are the major cause of
     international conflict and crisis;

   - To demonstrate that the United States is an aggressive, militaristic, and
     imperialistic power;

   - To isolate the United States from its friends and allies (especially those
     in NATO) and to discredit those countries that cooperated with America;

   - To discredit the American and NATO military-intelligence establishments;

   - To demonstrate that U.S. Policies and objectives are incompatible with
     the interests of Third World countries;

   - To confuse and mislead world opinion about the objectives of Soviet
     foreign policy and to create a favorable environment in the West for the
     projection of Soviet interests.[49]

The parallels of the Cold War-era themes above and current Russian actions and

rhetoric are strikingly similar.

Finally, as Pomerantsev and Weis point out "a fluid approach to ideology allows

the Kremlin to simultaneously back far-left and far-right movements, greens, anti-

globalists and financial elites. The aim is to exacerbate divides and create an echo

chamber of Kremlin support."[50] By focusing its influence efforts on what divides the

American public the Russians are able to further polarize viewpoints on both sides of

the political spectrum in an attempt to create chaos and have the U.S. tear itself apart from the inside.

The Current Environment

Today's environment differs from that of the 1980s and 1990s in two important ways: (1) the size of the current media environment, and (2) the speed at which information is distributed. In the 1980s, the Internet did not exist in its current form and the worldwide web had yet to be invented. As a result, the Soviets relied on broadcast media, print media, and hard copies of forged documents to get their disinformation campaigns across. This was relatively expensive because it required having an agent on the ground in the target country to spread the disinformation. Contrasting this with today, these operations can be conducted without even leaving the country making them cheaper and less risky. After all, there is no need to send an agent to the other country to spread propaganda and disinformation, when they can do if from their living rooms. In the 1980s much of these disinformation campaigns did not reach the general U.S. public, because getting any sort of disinformation story into print media or broadcast media took considerable effort.

Typically, an editorial staff would catch these falsehoods in the fact checking stage of the publication process. However, through the use of fringe media, Communist parties, or Soviet controlled front groups in the 1980s the Soviets were able spread their disinformation, albeit to a relatively small number of people.[51] Many, if not all, of these obstacles have been eliminated with the propagation of the internet. Now, anyone with a smart phone or an internet connection can get their ideas out to millions of people in a matter of minutes.

The internet also allows the government of one country to directly communicate with the people/population of another country. Prior to the internet this was not easy to do. In the past communications were mostly State-to-State, meaning that the Soviet Government primarily communicated directly with the U.S. Government. However, "[T]he Russian government today employs the state-to-people and people-to-people approaches on social media and the internet, directly engaging U.S. and European audiences ripe for an anti-American message."[52]

Finally, the internet allows for what Paul and Matthews identify as a greater volume and "variety of sources" than in the past.[53] They use the term *information volume* to describe the quantity of a particular message or theme, while variety of sources focuses on different sources with the same message or theme. Russia has adeptly used paid online hecklers, commonly referred to as Internet "trolls," and bots to increase the volume and variety of sources.[54] These trolls and bots repeat and reinforce positive messages about Russia and negative stories about the West, while at the same time attacking anyone who opposes their efforts through a variety of means, including denial of service attacks and threats of violence.[55] Paul and Matthews sum up the impact of this volume and variety best by highlighting that "[t]he experimental psychology literature suggests that, all other things being equal, messages received in greater volume and from more sources will be more persuasive."[56] Furthermore, once the Russian trolls and bots have successfully planted a story, many unwitting Americans pick up that story and share it on social media, thus advancing the Russian narrative and lending more credibility to it.

In studying active measures in Russia, U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer Steve

Abrams appropriately identifies this method as "*plant, incubate, propagate.*"[57] Using the

example of the AIDS disinformation campaign, the Soviets initially *planted* the

information in 1983 and waited for it to spread, or *incubate*. It was not until 1985 that the

story had developed enough momentum outside of the Soviet Union that they

propagated it through publication in the Soviet press, thus lending the story credibility.

The Soviet Press later cited the articles published outside the Soviet Union, making the

story seem to be more credible because it appeared to have been published by multiple

sources.

Although there are many differences between today's environment and the

environment of the 1980s, the ends and ways essentially have remained the same over

the years. The only significant difference, as Abrams aptly points out, is the means

which Russia is using in today.[58]

Lack of US Response

Currently there is no credible whole-of-government approach to solving this

problem. The U.S. Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC), especially U.S.

European Command, are working to combat Russian disinformation and propaganda

campaigns focused on our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies.[59] However,

this highlights one of the principle problems of the U.S. government in tackling this

problem—the lack of a global approach. Instead, the U.S. government is currently

fighting this problem one GCC at a time.

Using Romerstein's principles of counterpropaganda of truth, clarity, trust, and

speed, the U.S.'s effort to counter Russian propaganda appears incoherent. Regarding

the first principle of *truth,* the U.S. Government (USG) does a good job of disseminating

truthful stories, however, it is often times too slow and typically not directed as a response to propaganda or disinformation. Much of the time, the USG does not believe that disinformation or propaganda justifies a response. The second principle, *clarity*, is a constant problem for the U.S. Although the U.S. is made up of a nation of immigrants it is difficult for the USG to communicate to a particular population in a clear and concise way to ensure the message it intended to send is the message received. This will always be a problem, but that should not discourage the USG from striving to constantly improve this capability. The third principle, *speed*, the U.S. can never be as fast as its adversaries in today's environment, especially when their propaganda and disinformation is not based on fact or concerned with the truth.[60] When the facts do not get in the way propaganda can be generated and distributed in a matter of minutes. The final principle is *trust*, compared to the 1980s the level of trust in the USG at home and abroad is very low, therefore, anything that the USG says is questioned.

Based on the Russian threat, the current environment and the lack of adequate U.S. response something needs to be done to turn the tide and reinvigorate U.S. counterpropaganda and counter disinformation efforts. This is critical to restoring parity to competing with Russia, other countries and terrorist organizations in the informational element of national power.

<div align="center">A New Active Measures Working Group?</div>

In order to compete in the information environment outlined above, this paper recommends the U.S. create a new AMWG or other equivalent counter-active measures capability. This capability would help the U.S. expose active measures being taken by other countries and deliver a coordinated U.S. response. Simply put, this capability is needed because the U.S.' current efforts are not working.

This is evidenced by the firestorm of accusations from both sides of the political spectrum after the 2016 election. There are many experts who contend that Russia successfully created doubt in the democratic process during the 2016 election campaign. Now, several months on, there is rarely a day that passes where the issues of electoral fraud and Russian meddling in the election process are not in the news. Whether or not Russian disinformation and propaganda are completely responsible for this is debatable, as other factors affected the eventual outcome of the election. However, even if it is difficult to pinpoint the exact impact Russian disinformation had, the fact of the matter is that Russia at a minimum helped sow discord within the process and any meddling from outside should be countered in the future. Politicians on both sides of the isle have accurately assessed this attack for what it is and have begun to focus on the core of the issue—how to prevent this from happening again.[61] The crux of the matter lies deeper with the disinformation and propaganda campaigns that Russia ran in an effort to sow discord within the U.S. system of government. The U.S. would not be in the position it is today if the current system in place was up to the task.

The USG must develop a capability that prevents such propaganda and disinformation attacks from slipping under the radar and going unnoticed or un-responded to. The U.S. was founded on the principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and prides itself on the freedom of speech. However, it is this freedom of speech that the Russians and other adversaries of the U.S. are exploiting. Once again, Herbert Romerstein succinctly summed up this point by stating that the U.S. "democracy need not let its institutions serve as delivery systems for enemy

propaganda. As it has in the past, the U.S. and its allies can neutralize the threat through counterpropaganda."[62]

Finally, the U.S. has no response when adversaries direct active measures against the U.S. population. Russia is able to exploit seams and gaps in the U.S. bureaucracy to prevent the U.S. from properly identifying and exposing disinformation and propaganda. After all, no specific agency has the responsibility of leading the national response. Is it the FBI, U.S. Northern Command, DoS, the CIA, Department of Homeland Security or some other federal agency? The answer right now is "it depends." It depends on a myriad of circumstances: was a law broken, was someone slandered, was the information sent over a computer network, was a foreign agent directly involved, etc.? However, active measures are continuous and do not always spur identifiable crises that prod the U.S. bureaucracy into action.

Although Americans on both sides of the political spectrum are probably sick of hearing about "fake news" and "Russian hacking" after the 2016 election. This was quite possibly the best thing that could have happened regarding U.S. efforts to counter Russian disinformation campaigns. Prior to this seminal event, the American public and many members of the government were oblivious to its existence. It harkens back to the line from the 1995 movie *The Usual Suspects*, ""[T]he greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."[63] Prior to this, Russia was a relative afterthought in the consciousness of the American people. The perception of political success has brought Russia back to being the center of U.S. attention. Essentially the two things the U.S. is missing in combating disinformation is the awareness it is happening and the strategic guidance to combat it. The U.S. is combating

disinformation in a piecemeal fashion, we need a better coordinated and focused campaign to be effective in the future.

Concerns about Bringing Back a New Active Measures Working Group

Simply recreating the old AMWG would not necessarily work, however. There are three primary concerns. First, the U.S. public has a strong distaste toward propaganda and counterpropaganda in general. The term propaganda has a negative connotation for Americans, creating an almost visceral response. Therefore, anything that mentions propaganda and counterpropaganda will meet with resistance. In order to counter this concern, the USG needs to demonstrate the need for such a group to the U.S. public. The recent allegations of Russia meddling/influencing in the U.S. election serve as a means to highlight how propaganda campaigns directed at the U.S. can potentially damage national security, while arguing that the best way to combat propaganda campaigns is through counterpropaganda.

Second, there is a bureaucratic fear that the working group would become a bottleneck. Although completely understandable, this fear does not accurately account for the current environment regarding information operations in the USG. Currently, in order to execute any significant information operations (IO) campaign, IO planners are required to get approval at the Undersecretary of Defense level or even higher in cases regarding counter-terrorism. By putting the working group in place, they will be able to approve broad themes and messages in order to let elements at the lower levels execute. This would be more in tune with the U.S. Army's concept of mission command. However, as with anything, this is more a function of the leader put in place rather than the working group itself. What the USG is currently experiencing is a combination of both the concerns outlined above; the U.S. does not want to engage in propaganda and

counterpropaganda, but when it decides it is necessary to launch a counterpropaganda effort the USG has set the approval process at such a high level, that it is almost impossible to execute a counterpropaganda campaign in a timely fashion.

Finally, there are concerns that the new working group will violate the first amendment of the Constitution regarding freedom of speech. The new AMWG might prevent ordinary people from sharing their views when those views are deemed to be propaganda or disinformation. Although a reasonable concern, the focus of this capability will be on exposing foreign disinformation campaigns. This does not imply limiting free speech. Just as a person cannot slander people or yell "fire" in a crowded theater, there should be limits to foreign governments using false information to influence and undermine U.S. institutions and U.S. national security.

The First Step

The U.S. Congress and the President took the first step in establishing a new working group in December 2016 when President Obama signed the Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) into law. The FY17 NDAA included the bipartisan Portman-Murphy Counter-propaganda bill, which calls for the establishment of an interagency center "to coordinate and synchronize counter-propaganda efforts throughout the U.S. government."[64] This interagency center located in the DoS will "lead and coordinate efforts to track foreign propaganda and disinformation efforts intended to undermine U.S. national security interests, and to develop strategies for countering such campaigns."[65] According to Senator Portman (Republican-Ohio), a co-sponsor of the bill, it "will improve the ability of the United States to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation by establishing an interagency

center housed at the State Department to coordinate and synchronize counterpropaganda efforts throughout the U.S. government."[66]

Based on this, a newer, updated version of the AMWG needs to do five things:

1. Identify propaganda and disinformation campaigns directed at the U.S.

2. Identify global trends in propaganda and disinformation to anticipate emerging challenges.

3. Conduct counterpropaganda and counter-disinformation campaigns.

4. Advise USG leaders on matters of propaganda and disinformation.

5. Provide strategic guidance/direction to the remainder of the USG regarding propaganda and disinformation.

The focus of this paper has been on the problem with Russian active measures, specifically their disinformation and propaganda campaigns, however, it is important to note that this is not just a problem with Russia. Although the Russians are the best at this and have the most developed systems in place, it will be necessary to combat these efforts from other countries and terrorist groups across the globe. The new working group should tackle disinformation and propaganda from all foreign sources, or maybe a separate working group should be set up for each threat.

Once appropriated for, the new version of the AMWG needs to study and focus on three additional areas in order to establish itself in a manner that will ensure its success in the future: (1) determining exactly who participates, (2) terms of reference with the rest of the USG, and (3) how to roll it out so it does nott raise the hackles of the U.S. public. Although the three tasks above may be considered common sense, they are extremely complicated to resolve and merit close attention, as they will serve as the

foundation for creating a working group with the potential to be as effective as its eponymous predecessor.

Conclusion

Bringing back the AMWG will not resolve all of the U.S.' issues regarding information operations. It is just one component of a greater overall global strategic influence architecture. Knowing is half the battle. An AMWG or similar counter-active measures capability can provide that knowledge. However, what the U.S. does with that knowledge is what really counts.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the merits of bringing back a capability that was successful twenty-five years ago. However, any new organization would require support from further reforms in the U.S. strategic influence structure, along with support from Congress and the Executive Branch. Otherwise, this initiative is likely to fail. The current approval for the creation of an office similar to the AMWG in the Fiscal Year 2017 NDAA is a good first step in this direction. Regardless if the overall strategic influence structure exists, the creation of such a working group will allow for the knowledge to be collected and distributed to interested parties and quite possibly the lack of action will serve as the next impetus for change. After all, the U.S. has become the strongest military and economy in the world. Now it is time to put an equal amount of effort into its informational element of national power.

Endnotes

[1] "AIDS May Invade India: Mystery Disease Caused by US Experiments," *New Delhi (India) Patriot*, July 16, 1983, quoted in Ehard Geissler and Robert Hunt Sprinkle, "Disinformation Squared: Was the HIV from Fort Detrick a Myth or a Stasi Success?" *Politics and the Life Sciences* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 6-7.

[2] United States Information Agency, *Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost*: *Report presented to the US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, 100th Cong., 2nd sess.,* March 8, 1988, 73.

[3] Ibid.

[4] U.S. Department of State, *Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Disinformation in 1986-1987 (*Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, August 1987), 46-47; Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation and Strategic Communications: How one Interagency Group Made a Major Difference,* Strategic Perspectives No. 11 (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies Press, June 2012), 6.

[5] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation*, 6.

[6] Steve Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 11.

[7] Adam Taylor, "Before 'Fake News.' There Was Soviet 'Disinformation'," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2016.

[8] Peter Pomerantsev and Arkady Ostrovsky, "What Vladimir Putin Wants from America's Elections," *The Atlantic Online*, November 6, 2016, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/russia-putin-elections/506663/ (accessed November 8, 2016).

[9] Craig Timberg, "Russian Propaganda Effort Help Spread 'Fake News' During Election, Experts Say," *Washington Post*, November 24, 2016.

[10] Herbert Romerstein, "Counterpropaganda: We Can't Win Without It," in *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counter Propaganda, and Political Warfare*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, DC: The Institute of World Politics Press, 2009), 174; Herbert Romerstein was the head of the Office of Counter Soviet Disinformation at the United States Information Agency (USIA) from 1983-1989. In this role, he also served as a member of the Active Measures Working Group. Prior to his assignment at USIA, Romerstein was a professional staff member on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence where he played an instrumental role in the creation of the AMWG. Prior to his death, Romerstein was widely recognized as an expert on Soviet disinformation campaigns; the literature uses both spellings of "counter-propaganda" and "counterpropaganda" the author has elected to use the counterpropaganda for this paper and will do so except when using direct quotations or titles where "counter-propaganda" is used by the original source.

[11] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation*, 8; Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 11.

[12] U.S. Department of State, *Soviet Influence Activities*, viii.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation*, 8.

[15] Romerstein, "Counterpropaganda," 137.

[16] Romerstein does not explicitly name these four qualities of counterpropaganda in his chapter on countering propaganda. The author distilled the ideas put forth Romerstein's chapter on counterpropaganda into the qualities of truth, clarity, trust and speed.

[17] Commander International Security Assistance Force/United States Forces-Afghanistan David H. Petraeus, "COMISAF Counterinsurgency Guidance," memorandum for The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians of NATO/ISAF and US Forces-Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan, August 1, 2010, 3, linked from *Small Wars Journal Blog* at "COMISAF COIN Guidance dtd 01 Aug 2010," http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/comisaf-coin-guidance-dtd-1-august-2010 (accessed March 9, 2017).

[18] Christopher Paul and Mariam Matthews, *The Russian 'Firehouse of Falsehood' Propaganda Model: Why it Might Work and Opinions to Counter It* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 4, http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html (accessed October 10, 2016).

[19] Herbert Romerstein, "The Interagency Active Measures Working Group: Successful Template for Strategic Influence," in *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counter Propaganda, and Political Warfare*, 199.

[20] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation*, 5.

[21] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 31.

[22] They met weekly. Interestingly and most importantly, the group had no specific budget, but they did use their own agency's resources for travel, when required. "It drew only on the part-time contributions of existing experts and in-place State Intelligence analysts to cover manpower costs." Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 31.

[23] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation,* 49.

[24] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 30.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation*, 35.

[28] Romerstein, "The Interagency," 202.

[29] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation,* 63.

[30] Ibid., 47.

[31] Ibid., 4.

[32] Ibid., 70.

[33] Ibid., 43.

[34] Ibid., 74.

[35] Ibid., 107.

[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] Romerstein, "The Interagency," 199.

[38] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 31.

[39] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation,* 3.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 30.

[42] Schoen and Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation,* 3.

[43] Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Wiess, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes, Information, Culture and Money* (New York: Institute of Modern Russia, November 22, 2014), 6, http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf (accessed December 2, 2016).

[44] Andrew Weisburd, Clint Watts, and JM Beger, "Trolling for Trump: How Russia is Trying to Destroy our Democracy," *War on the Rocks,* November 6, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/trolling-for-trump-how-russia-is-trying-to-destroy-our-democracy/ (accessed November 10, 2016); The terms "grey" and "black" refer to the ability to attribute a particular message to a source. "Black" disinformation comes from outwardly un-attributable sources, while "grey" disinformation is propagated by sources with suspect or non-existent sourcing.

[45] Ibid.

[46] USCODE Title 22 – Foreign Relations and Intercourse (1982), section 4331 et seq., https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title22/pdf/USCODE-2011-title22-chap71-sec6202.pdf (accessed January 20, 2017).

[47] Romerstein, "Counter Propaganda," 137.

[48] Pomerantsev and Ostrovsky, "What Vladimir Putin Wants."

[49] Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1984) quoted in Paul Anastasi, "Soviet Disinformation in Greece," in *The New Image-Makers: Soviet Propaganda & Disinformation Today*, ed. Ladisav Bittman (McLean, VA: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988), 233-234.

[50] Pomerantsev and Wiess, "The Menace of Unreality," 6.

[51] Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Soviet Active Measures in the United States, 1986-87," *Congressional Record* (December 9, 1987): E4718, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP11M01338R000400470089-2.pdf (accessed January 10, 2016).

[52] Weisburd, Watts, and Berger, "Trolling for Trump."

[53] Paul and Matthews, "The Russian," 3.

[54] Weisburd, Watts, and Berger, "Trolling for Trump"; Paul and Matthews, "The Russian," 2.

[55] Weisburd, Watts, and Berger, "Trolling for Trump."

[56] Paul and Matthews, "The Russian," 3.

[57] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 19.

[58] Ibid., 9.

[59] According to the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2017 Budget dated February 2016, the FY 2017 ERI allocates approximately $5 million USD towards Information Operations in countering Russian aggression in Europe. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *European Reassurance Initiative Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2017 Budget* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2016), 11, http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017_ERI_J-Book.pdf (accessed January 13, 2017).

[60] Paul and Matthews, "The Russian," 5.

[61] Many of the debates on this revolve around the hacking of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the release of Secretary Clinton's emails. Although important, this is a red herring. Ms. Clinton's and the DNC's emails that were released were confirmed to be unaltered and authentic-therefore they were not disinformation nor propaganda. They were simply embarrassing. This is not about hacking.

[62] Romerstein, "Counter Propaganda," 137.

[63] Bryan Singer, dir., *The Usual Suspects* (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, 1995).

[64] Rob Portman, "President Signs Portman-Murphy Counter-Propaganda Bill into Law," December 23, 2016, http://www.portman.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/12/president-signs-portman-murphy-counter-propaganda-bill-into-law (accessed January 15, 2017)

[65] *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017.* Public Law 328, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (December 23, 2016), 547, https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2943 (accessed January 15, 2017).

[66] Portman, "President Signs Portman-Murphy Counter-Propaganda Bill into Law."