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Influence Operations of China, Russia, and the Soviet Union: A Comparison

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Russia, and the Soviet Union:
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Executive Summary

Intelligence services long have tried to influence important foreign audiences. They have had different targets and goals, used different methods, and experienced different degrees of success. Communist countries have been especially prominent users of such methods. Soviet intelligence services for many years conducted “disinformation” and “active measures” campaigns that largely were information-oriented. These efforts continue to affect targeted groups and countries, long after the demise of the USSR. More recently, information operations have attracted significant popular attention as the efforts of Russian intelligence services to influence elections in Western countries became clear and the “hybrid warfare” campaigns Russia waged in Ukraine in 2014 and elsewhere had appreciable information components. Also recently, large-scale Chinese “influence” operations have generated increased scholarly and government attention globally. This *Occasional Paper* describes and compares these activities, identifies similarities and differences among them, and suggests ways to counter them.

The influence operations of all three countries are large in scale, expensive, and are designed to work over extended periods of time. The Soviet effort to destabilize the United States was expected to take “decades” to accomplish. China’s program initially had an even longer time horizon – to 2049 – although, in recent years, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has shown impatience and seems to want to achieve major strategic goals more quickly. Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to have the shortest time horizon of the three, but one that is considerably longer than those of most Western politicians.

While the three programs share some characteristics, they have appreciably different strategies, tactics, and key targets. The Soviets aimed to defeat and destroy their

capitalist adversaries, uniting the world under Moscow-led socialism. Russia has more modest but still substantial goals, mainly in Europe. In contrast, the Chinese campaign aims to remake world institutions in China's image. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks to co-opt the world rather than defeat enemies. All three countries have focused their influence campaigns on foreign actors that can influence large numbers of other people—especially the press and educational institutions. Each has sought to manipulate foreign elections, albeit in different ways. Consistent with their grand ambitions, the Chinese broadly target a wide range of institutions, including businesses and even think tanks in the West.

China has a special advantage in its influence campaign—a large Chinese diaspora. The CCP believes ethnic Chinese, wherever they may be and whatever their current citizenship, owe allegiance to the CCP as the legitimate ruler of China. The CCP actively works to entrench and exploit this loyalty.

We know little about how the three countries measure the performance of their influence operations, but it is clear that each believes its activities have been successful in aggregate. Some specific programs clearly have failed, but most appear to have achieved what they were designed to do. Moreover, most specific efforts complement other operations, generating complex webs of influence. The countries would not have devoted the massive resources they have committed, over long periods of time, unless they felt the efforts were achieving their strategic objectives.

All three influence campaigns have indeed been successful in many ways. The Soviet effort to destabilize the United States is nearing strategic success, although long after it would help the USSR. Russia's program, rejuvenated about a decade ago, has been damaged by recent Russian aggression, especially against Ukraine since 2022. Chinese influence operations appear to be both the most ambitious

and to have had the greatest success to date, although President Xi's recent aggressiveness has damaged its credibility and begun to produce widespread skepticism about China's "peaceful rise" meme. China's influence operations still pose the greatest contemporary threat to the world at large, but Western countries have just begun to respond to them. Large and well-considered responses are long overdue.

Introduction

Intelligence services long have tried to influence important foreign audiences. They have had different targets and goals, used different methods, and experienced different degrees of success. Communist countries have been especially prominent users of such methods. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union) for many years conducted “disinformation” and “active measures” campaigns that largely were information-oriented. More recently, information operations have attracted significant popular attention as Russian efforts to influence elections in Western countries became clear and the “hybrid warfare” campaigns Russia waged in Ukraine in 2014 and elsewhere had appreciable information components.¹ Also recently, a growing group of scholars and journalists have examined “influence” operations of the People’s Republic of China (PRC or China) globally. Most of these studies have concentrated on single countries and typically used somewhat different terminology, although some studies rightly see Russian activities as partly following Soviet precedents.² This paper partially unifies this literature by comparing the three countries’ influence operations, mainly from the standpoint of the activities of intelligence services. Because many of the techniques of Soviet influence operations remain viable, the Russian Federation continues to employ Soviet methods, and many Soviet operations continue to influence world affairs long after the Soviet

¹ For example, Mark Galeotti, “Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia’s ‘new way of war’?,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27:2 (2016): 282-301; Bettina Renz, “Russia and ‘hybrid warfare,’” *Comparative Politics* 22:3 (2016): 283-300.

² David V. Gioe, Richard Lovering, and Tyler Pachesny, “The Soviet Legacy of Russian Active Measures: New Vodka from Old Stills?,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 33:3 (2020): 514-539.

Union collapsed in 1991, this paper refers frequently to all three countries in the present tense.

The three countries long have had large, powerful, and active intelligence services. All of them have directly served the interests of ruling communist parties (USSR and China) or powerful leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, who was a Soviet intelligence officer and who headed one of Russia's major intelligence agencies, the Federal Security Service (FSB), for about a year in 1998-1999. While each country's intelligence services have many functions including traditional espionage, a priority mission for each, tasked at the highest levels, has been to influence foreign audiences. This paper proceeds by introducing the services that conduct influence operations. It assesses the countries' influence efforts along several dimensions, comparing each analytically. It then compares the campaigns in their entirety, offers lessons from successful and unsuccessful programs, and identifies needed defenses.

In sum, the countries' intelligence-related programs share many similarities but have some important differences. Each has been ambitious, played major roles in their states' overall influence campaigns, and been largely successful at tactical and operational levels, at least. Their success in achieving ambitious strategic goals is less clear. The Chinese program, which Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg characterize as an effort at "global thought management," is the most ambitious and the most successful to date.³ It has helped China develop "sharp power" – not hard or soft power as traditionally defined, but a new variety of influence that is often coercive and

³ Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World* (London: Oneworld, 2021), 5.

intimidating.⁴ China thereby poses a major threat to Western ideals and institutions in ways that warrant substantial and sophisticated responses. Summary points are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Influence Operational Goals, Techniques, and Effectiveness

	 Soviet Union	 Russia	 China
Major intelligence services involved	KGB (Committee for State Security)	FSB (Federal Security Service) and GRU (military intelligence)	MSS (Ministry of State Security)
Primary strategic goals of influence operations	Defeat capitalist countries, conquer the world	Push NATO westward, restore Soviet imperial glory	Remake the world with Chinese characteristics
Clear strategy exists	Yes	Less certain	Yes
Time horizons of strategies	Long	Shorter	Very long, until recently
Financial and resources committed	Substantial	More substantial	Even larger
Possess sophisticated influence techniques	Yes, including disinformation	Yes, including “reflexive control”	Yes, including many overt techniques
Key targets	Government officials and citizens with left-wing political views, the press, universities	Anti-NATO and anti-EU elements	Broad range, including businesses and think tanks
Influence elections?	Yes, especially in the United States	Yes, in NATO countries	Yes, globally
Are diasporas important?	Not much	Somewhat important	Very important
Use of violence as influence tool	Murder and kidnapping common	Murders frequent	Low-level street violence, demonstrations, break-ins, cyber intrusions
Do performance measures exist?	Yes, some are known	Not clear, probably old Soviet measures	Yes, publicly unavailable
Conclusion: are influence operations successful?	Yes, perhaps even more so in the United States in coming years	Yes, but Putin’s aggression has damaged them	Yes. Despite Xi’s recent aggressiveness, the Chinese campaign remains effective

Source: Author’s analysis.

⁴ Joshua Kurlantzick, *Beijing’s Global Media Offensive: China’s Uneven Campaign to Influence Asia and the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 23-27.

Background and Structures

The three countries have had large and powerful intelligence agencies from their early years. The original Soviet intelligence service, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage, or Cheka, established in December 1917, initially focused on combating internal threats to communist rule and anti-Soviet Russian émigrés.⁵ The Cheka used information operations in the form of “disinformation” (*dezinformatsia*), or lies designed to achieve specific purposes, which in the Soviet context were largely products of intelligence bureaucracies and were designed to weaken adversaries in strategically significant ways.⁶ Individual disinformation operations generally had one of two goals: damaging foreign or domestic enemies or weakening the credibility of accurate reports of events unfavorable to the Soviets, both of which helped the USSR.⁷ These in turn were part of a general activity the Soviets later called “active measures” (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*). While definitions vary, active measures normally are seen as consisting of activities that sometimes involve physical actions such as sabotage but usually deceive or manipulate targets through use of disinformation, are largely products of intelligence bureaucracies, and are designed to weaken adversaries in strategically significant ways.⁸ Reversing Clausewitz, Lenin

⁵ George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (Oxford UK: Clarendon, 1981); Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 313-317; Natalie Grant, *Disinformation: Soviet Political Warfare 1917-1992* (Washington: Leopolis, 2020), 35-36.

⁶ Rid, *Active Measures*, 9; Andrzej Krzak, “Operational Disinformation of Soviet Counterintelligence during the Cold War,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 35:2 (2022): 265-278.

⁷ Grant, *Disinformation*, 20, 149.

⁸ Rid, *Active Measures*, 9.

saw political conflict as war by other means.⁹ Stanislav Levchenko, who defected from the Committee for State Security (KGB) in 1979, called active measures “the most powerful weapon in Soviet hands.”¹⁰ And Oleg Kalugin, who retired from the KGB as a major general in 1990, said in 1998 that subversion via active measures was “the heart and soul of Soviet intelligence.”¹¹ He said separately that the main focus of Soviet intelligence activities was:

... not intelligence collection, but subversion: active measures to weaken the west, to drive wedges in the western community alliances of all sorts, particularly NATO, to sow discord among allies, to weaken the United States in the eyes of the people of Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and thus to prepare ground in case the war really occurs.¹²

Soviet civilian intelligence organizations evolved over the years, terminating in the KGB, which had sole intelligence-related responsibility for information operations.¹³ Although it formally was a government agency, the KGB worked directly for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Its information operations were

⁹ Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984), 1, 7-9; Rid, *Active Measures*, 317.

¹⁰ Stanislav Levchenko, *On the Wrong Side: My Life in the KGB* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), 34, 200.

¹¹ CNN Cold War Production Team, “Inside the KGB,” interview of Oleg Kalugin, January 1998, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070206020316/http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/21/interviews/kalugin/>.

¹² David Robert Grimes, “Russian fake news is not new: Soviet Aids propaganda cost countless lives,” *The Guardian*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2017/jun/14/russian-fake-news-is-not-new-soviet-aids-propaganda-cost-countless-lives>.

¹³ Oleg Gordievsky, “The KGB after the coup,” *Intelligence and National Security* 8:3 (1993): 68-71.

overseen by the International Department of the CPSU's Central Committee (CC), which added detail to the general guidance it received from the CPSU Politburo. The International Department and other CC departments supervised implementing actions by many government and party elements, including: the CPSU newspaper *Pravda*, press agencies such as Tass and Novosti, foreign-focused literary outlets such as the English-language *New Times* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, elements of the Academy of Sciences, front organizations abroad, and the KGB.¹⁴ Loyalty to the party was a requirement of all KGB officers, although disillusionment with the claims of the CPSU, the realities of life in the USSR, and the KGB's sometimes distasteful operational activities abroad were major causes of defections during the Cold War.¹⁵

The entire KGB, including its massive domestic surveillance elements and the KGB border guards, had around 700,000 employees when the KGB was abolished in 1991.¹⁶ The foreign operations element of the KGB, the First Chief Directorate (FCD), which conducted influence operations abroad, reportedly had around 12,000 intelligence officers in 1991, some 1,500 to 2,000 of whom were stationed abroad at any one time.¹⁷ Influence operations and espionage for the KGB were highly complementary because intelligence officers who collected

¹⁴ Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 23-27; Levchenko, *On the Wrong Side*, 34; Oleg Kalugin, *Spymaster: My Thirty-two Years in Intelligence and Espionage against the West* (New York: Basic, 2009), 178; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 502.

¹⁵ For example, defector Vasili Mitrokhin was appalled by many Soviet practices, which led to his decision to purloin KGB documents and eventually give them to British intelligence. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic, 2005), xxvi-xxx.

¹⁶ Gordievsky, "The KGB after the coup," 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

human intelligence (HUMINT) had skills useful for influence operations. They identified valuable individual and group targets, learned how to exploit their vulnerabilities, and knew how to distribute disinformation to both targeted victims and their foreign collaborators clandestinely.

Unlike the other two countries, the Soviet Union via the KGB enjoyed control over the intelligence services of several communist countries – its external empire and close allies. These included the six non-Soviet Warsaw Pact states of Eastern Europe, Cuba, and Vietnam. Soviet military intelligence, which from the late 1930s was called the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the armed forces (GRU), collected and analyzed military-related information but conducted few, if any, influence operations.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia inherited the KGB. But new Russian President Boris Yeltsin soon broke it into pieces, reflecting his unhappiness with its power and the KGB's role in a failed coup attempt in 1991. In December 1991, the FCD became Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), which continued foreign information operations without change.¹⁸ The KGB's Second Chief Directorate, which was responsible for counterintelligence and internal security, became the core of the FSB. Russian leaders gradually reassembled parts of the KGB, primarily into the FSB, and eventually gave the FSB major foreign roles, including influence operations. In 2010, the FSB reportedly had around 200,000 staff employees.¹⁹

¹⁸ Pete Earley, *Comrade J: The Untold Secrets of Russia's Master Spy in America After the End of the Cold War* (New York: Berkley, 2007), 8, 195, 331; Robert Baer, *The Fourth Man: The Hunt for a Spy at the Top of the CIA and the Rise of Putin* (New York: Hachette, 2022), 1, 27-28, 36.

¹⁹ Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 3.

Russia's GRU, still subordinate to the military General Staff, became much more active in foreign influence operations than its Soviet predecessor, particularly in conducting cyber and social media operations. For example, in the wake of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the formal U.S. government investigation into the meddling found that GRU unit 74455 conducted disinformation and influence operations while GRU unit 26165 mainly conducted cyber intrusions.²⁰ Cyberattacks that shut down utilities in Ukraine in recent years, for example, also carried political messages. Russian intelligence does not clearly work for any party or the state, has close ties to Russian legitimate businesses and organized crime entities, and appears to be largely controlled by President Putin personally, with help from his close security-focused allies, the *siloviki*.²¹ These unusual institutional arrangements both add to Russia's intelligence capacities and complicate identification of Russian intelligence activities which, among another things, help enable plausible deniability of state-sponsored influence operations.

China has appreciated the importance of influence operations, especially those that deceive enemies, for centuries.²² Sun Tzu famously argued some 2,500 years ago that the mark of a good general was to use deception to win battles without fighting.²³ Chinese communists developed

²⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, *The Nuclear Report: Final Report of the Special Counsel into Donald Trump, Russia, and Collusion*, (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019).

²¹ Soldatov and Borogan, *The New Nobility*, 4; Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 16.

²² Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2016), 10-12.

²³ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (Leicester: Allendale Online Publishing, 2000), 9ff.

intelligence arms early in the party's fight for power, and the PRC had intelligence services from its beginning in 1949 which, like Soviet and Russian intelligence services, conducted both espionage and influence operations.²⁴ These services work directly for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in fact, if not formally. Key intelligence agencies in recent years have been the Ministry of State Security (MSS), founded in 1983 after a reorganization of Chinese intelligence as a unit of the government, not the CCP, and elements of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which formally works for the party, not the government. But regardless of their official organizational affiliations, Chinese intelligence officers, like Soviet officers, are first and foremost loyal to their communist party. They work with a wide variety of CCP organs, especially including three Central Committee departments: (1) the United Front Work Department (UFWD); (2) the Liaison Department; and (3) the Propaganda Department.²⁵ These elements, in turn, interact with government agencies, think tanks, businesses, and with each other—all with the goal of supporting CCP objectives by conducting influence and other operations.²⁶ This hierarchical structure resembles that which the CPSU used to coordinate and conduct active measures campaigns but is bigger and more complicated in structure.

The UFWD works with the large ethnic Chinese diaspora. The CCP believes these people have, or should have, residual loyalty to China whatever their current

²⁴ Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Foreign Intelligence Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988), 273-305; Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping* (London: Hurst, 2015).

²⁵ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 122.

²⁶ For a diagram of influence-related Chinese organizations, see Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, ed., *China's Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2019), 152-153. See also Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 18.

citizenship, and it works to foster and exploit these ties. Some China watchers argue that the CCP now encourages emigration as a way to exploit that loyalty to infiltrate foreign political and economic targets.²⁷ The UFWD therefore works with a wide variety of institutions, including the MSS, think tanks, and universities that deal with Chinese residing abroad. This sense of possession resembles slightly the early Soviet Marxian notion that the proletariat of the world belonged to the CPSU as a vanguard party, which was reflected in the operations of the Communist International, or Comintern, which was the early CPSU's primary external subversion tool. Although the Comintern was formally abolished in 1943 as a sop to Moscow's Western wartime allies, Stalin simply reassigned its functions to intelligence. The increased independence of foreign communist parties, such as those of Yugoslavia and China, eventually disabused the Soviets of this notion. Chinese claims on the loyalty of overseas Chinese is based on ethnicity, not ideology. The former seems to be stronger.

The Liaison Department is an integral part of the Chinese intelligence community but, according to China specialist Geoff Wade:

... its functions are broader, as it develops links with global elites and aims at influencing the policies and behavior of countries, institutions and groups beyond China. It engages in a broad range of activities including propaganda, liaison, influence peddling, information gathering, and perception management.²⁸

In addition, according to a Liaison Department document seen by John Garnaut, it specializes in "carrying out our work of disintegrating the enemy and uniting with friendly

²⁷ Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia* (Richmond, Victoria, Australia: Hardie Grant, 2018), 26, 29.

²⁸ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 41.

military elements.”²⁹ This role seems close to that of the Soviet CPSU CC’s International Department, which oversaw the KGB’s active measures operations.

The Propaganda Department conducts information operations within several media, including print, radio, television, and social media. It reports to the seven-member Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo, the party’s highest officials other than the CCP leader, and reportedly had a budget of the equivalent of \$12 billion in 2003.³⁰ In 2015, Reuters reported that it owned radio stations in 14 foreign countries.³¹

The MSS is the primary intelligence-enabled implementer of the CCP’s foreign influence operations. Its foreign operations were thought to have over 100,000 employees in 2020, organized into 18 numbered bureaus and a series of regional organizations that have specialized duties.³² The MSS’s 10th Bureau (Foreign Security and Reconnaissance) manages Chinese students abroad.³³ The 11th Bureau consists largely of one of China’s most well-respected think tanks, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), which in 2011 had about 400 staffers, including PLA and MSS officers.³⁴ The 12th Bureau is also called the Social Investigation Bureau, which actively works influence operations abroad.³⁵ These bureaus also spot potential recruits for regionally focused HUMINT collection bureaus. The 18th Bureau, for example,

²⁹ As cited in Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 42.

³⁰ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 120.

³¹ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 41.

³² Peter Mattis and Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Intelligence: An Intelligence Primer* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 55-56; Alex Joske, *Spies and Lies: How China’s Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World* (Richmond, Victoria, Australia: Hardie Grant, 2022), 3.

³³ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 142.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁵ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 7, 28, 42, 63, 117, 122-125, 199.

handles clandestine operations in the United States, many of which are run by the Shanghai State Security Bureau.³⁶ The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reportedly believed in 2005 that the MSS operated some 3,000 front companies, in addition to other fronts as scholarly and social entities, to help conduct economic espionage.³⁷ Intelligence officers assigned to other MSS departments also conduct influence operations. All government entities, research institutes, and businesses are obligated to help the MSS by a Chinese law passed in 2017 that requires Chinese citizens to work for the intelligence services when directed to do so.³⁸ Thus, the intelligence apparatus in practice is massive.

As with the KGB, the MSS's collection and influence operations are inextricably linked because the activities require similar access and skills.³⁹ For example, Katrina Leung, an MSS double agent working for the FBI, both collected information on the FBI and fed Bureau personnel misleading information, thereby acting as an agent of influence.⁴⁰ Larry Wu-tai Chin, an MSS agent who retired from CIA before being exposed by an MSS defector, reportedly also performed these functions.⁴¹ An MSS element based in California was formally assigned both espionage and influence operations.⁴²

In recent decades, China established or extended the use of "think tanks" as agents of influence, dwarfing their use by Soviet and Russian Academy of Sciences personnel, for example, for similar purposes. These all are affiliated with one or more CCP organs or intelligence organizations; they

³⁶ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 142.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

³⁹ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 50; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 140.

⁴⁰ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 51.

⁴¹ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 53.

⁴² Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 55-56; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 144.

collect intelligence, sometimes make policy recommendations, and conduct influence operations abroad.⁴³ Easy and effective means of influence include publishing, academic interaction with foreign scholars and journalists, and talking the CCP's line to other foreign contacts.⁴⁴ While occasionally, perhaps, Westerners derive genuine insights from talking with these "think tank" scholars, some Western observers now believe that almost all ostensibly reputable Chinese scholars and officials have actually in recent years been instruments of party influence operations by talking the party line or withholding sensitive information under CCP orders.⁴⁵

The PLA has major HUMINT and electronic collection elements. Its signals intelligence (SIGINT) element also conducts cyber operations, reflecting the similar skills needed for each mission.⁴⁶ The PLA, like Russia's GRU, uses energetic volunteers as "patriotic hackers." In 2014, China was said to have over 200,000 members in its cyber "militia," who sometimes also comment online on political issues of salience to the CCP, thereby performing influence operations.⁴⁷ The PLA has had a political warfare department, which conducts influence operations, although it seems to have been eclipsed by the MSS after the

⁴³ David Shambaugh, "China's International Relations Think Tanks: Evolving Structure and Process," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 575-596; Murray Scot Tanner, "Changing Windows on a Changing China: The Evolving 'Think Tank' System and the Case of the Public Security Sector," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 559-574.

⁴⁴ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 3, 6-7.

⁴⁵ For example, Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 16, 32, 44, 179-181, 211; Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 92, 110-111, 130-133.

⁴⁶ Elsa B. Kania and John Costello, "Seizing the commanding heights: The PLA Strategic Support Force in Chinese military power," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44:2 (2021): 218-264.

⁴⁷ P.W. Singer and Allan Friedman, *Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 114.

“Chinagate” scandal of 1996, discussed below.⁴⁸ The PLA’s new Strategic Support Force also has psychological warfare units designed to especially attack Taiwanese persons in the event of a war to unite the island with the PRC.⁴⁹

Paranoia and Victimization Complexes

As communist countries and/or insecure regimes, all three countries display both legitimate security-related fears at times and significant paranoia, which partly shape the goals of influence operations and their targets. Each country’s leaders fancy themselves (at times) to be victims of nefarious Western intrigue that needs to be reversed and/or punished. The Soviets initially worried about capitalists trying to undo the Soviet revolution and later claimed to be concerned about NATO’s alleged aggressiveness, even though the KGB and its East European surrogates penetrated the defense ministries of every NATO country, meaning they knew NATO did not have offensive operational plans.⁵⁰ Russian leader Putin evidently believes that NATO expansion in the 1990s was designed to constrain Russia and that NATO continues to be an obstacle to Russian aspirations to restore the Soviet imperial glories of old.⁵¹ And, the CCP reportedly worries about many perceived threats, including: internal enemies; being encircled by enemies including the United States, Japan, Australia, and India; psychological attacks in forms such as American cultural and political “soft power;” and “five poisons” that trouble the CCP, i.e., independence-minded

⁴⁸ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 149.

⁴⁹ Kania and Costello, “Seizing the commanding heights,” 246, 256, 261.

⁵⁰ Benjamin B. Fischer, “CANOPY WING: The U.S. War Plan That Gave the East Germans Goose Bumps,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 27:3 (2014): 432, 436, 439.

⁵¹ For example, Luke Harding, *Shadow State: Murder, Mayhem, and Russia’s Remaking of the West* (New York: Harper, 2020), 26.

Uighurs; similarly rebellious Tibetans; a Taiwan that refuses to submit to rule from Beijing; democracy advocates; and Falun Gong adherents.⁵² The unrest that culminated with the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989 was nearly a political catastrophe for the CCP and was the result, some CCP people think, of an American attempt to overthrow the party via psychological operations.⁵³ Even more obviously a symptom of paranoia, all members of the CCP Politburo reportedly viewed the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, which the United States believably said was an operational mistake and for which it apologized, was actually an intentional American military attack on the CCP.⁵⁴

Hence, all three countries see a need for substantial use of intelligence to deceive, and ultimately to defeat or peacefully overthrow, adversary powers that self-evidently are trying to harm them. They therefore also claim the influence operations they conduct are defensive in nature, a form of ideational orthodoxy that also produces internally focused, ideology-driven information operations that reflect no small amount of self-delusion.

Goals of Influence Operations

Consistent with their situations and fears, all three countries have significant ambitions for their influence operations. Each seeks to advance and/or defend national interests, but specifics of campaigns vary appreciably, reflecting each country's circumstances and goals.

After vanquishing émigré groups and becoming so strong that they did not have to feign benevolence toward capitalist countries and hide their actual weaknesses in the

⁵² Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 143-146.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

1920s, the Soviets in the Cold War era used information operations in an attempt to defeat their capitalist enemies, destroy NATO, and establish Moscow as the center of global socialism. Anatoliy Golitsyn was well-placed in Moscow before his defection from the KGB in 1961 to see the emergence of the near-final version of the Soviet political warfare strategy against the West, which he and others believe was formed in the late 1950s.⁵⁵ Golitsyn argued that Soviet foreign policy was in flux from March 1953, when long-time leader Josef Stalin died, until June 1957, when Nikita Khrushchev emerged as the dominant power on the CPSU Politburo, enabling new foreign policy initiatives. A reorganization of the Soviet government, including appointment of “reformers” such as Aleksandr Shelepin, accompanied expansion of active measures as tools of political warfare. Drawing on lessons of a major study of active measures conducted in the late 1950s, Shelepin proposed a more sophisticated approach to subverting the West, which would resurrect some of the techniques the Cheka used in the 1920s, and extensively employ Soviet intelligence services. Khrushchev and the CPSU Politburo accepted Shelepin’s ideas, and he became chief of the KGB in December 1958.⁵⁶ In 1959, at Shelepin’s direction, the FCD created a unit dedicated to disinformation operations called Directorate D (for *Dezinformatsia*), which in 1962 was upgraded in status and resources and renamed Service A (for *Aktivnye meropriyatiya*).⁵⁷ In 1961-1964, under Soviet orders, six East European intelligence services established similar units that worked directly for their KGB “advisors.”⁵⁸ The FCD soon

⁵⁵ Anatoliy Golitsyn, *New Lies for Old* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1984), 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁷ Rid, *Active Measures*, 128; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 462-464.

⁵⁸ Ladislav Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation: An Insider’s View* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1985), 1-2, 46; Max Holland, “The

thereafter enlisted the foreign intelligence service of Cuba, the Directorate General of Intelligence (DGI), in the effort.⁵⁹ The long-term goal, consistent with Lenin's guidance, was strategic, political, and aggressive: to identify and exploit fissures in targeted groups, countries, and alliances, leading to their disintegration (or what the East Germans called *Zersetzung*), and thus to conquest of the West by "peaceful" means.⁶⁰

The Soviets' "main enemy" during the Cold War, and therefore the main target of its influence campaigns, was the United States. Yuri Bezmenov, who defected while working for the KGB as a Novosti news agency representative in New Delhi in 1970, stated that Yuri Andropov, then chief of the KGB (1967-1982), declared the Soviet Union's political war against the United States was "the final struggle for the *minds* and hearts of the people" (emphasis in original).⁶¹ In 1984, Bezmenov provided details of the war plan. He explained that the Soviets foresaw eventual triumph over the United States as the culmination of four sequential stages of a long process: (1) demoralization; (2) destabilization; (3) crisis; and (4) restoration of stability under a communist regime.⁶² Stage one featured overt and covert propaganda; use of agents of influence; use of front organizations created by the KGB or other organs of the Soviet government to bring appearances of respectability to the Soviet Union and to finance subversives and other left-

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Dezinformatsia," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 19:1 (2006): 6-8.

⁵⁹ Levchenko, *On the Wrong Side*, 204-205.

⁶⁰ Rid, *Active Measures*, 316; Ion Mihai Pacepa and Ronald J. Rychlak, *Disinformation* (Washington: WND, 2013), 96.

⁶¹ Yuri Bezmenov, *Love Letter to America*, <https://ia800602.us.archive.org/11/items/love-letter-america/love-letter-america.pdf>, 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

wing radicals “legally;” provoking and manipulating mass demonstrations and assemblies; spreading rumors; forging U.S. government documents that allegedly confirmed nefarious American actions, plans, and intentions; planting phony stories in local media; and subsidizing hundreds of newspapers globally, knowing some of their stories would get picked up by American media.⁶³ KGB stations abroad, or what the Soviets called residencies, mainly used Line PR (political intelligence) officers to conduct active measures in the field.⁶⁴ Line KR (counterintelligence) and Line N (illegals) officers also did such work.

Russian intelligence inherited Soviet goals. Still calling themselves Chekists in honor of the Cheka, the SVR retained Service A and its goals but gave it a new name—Department MS.⁶⁵ But Russian goals changed over the years. Putin is widely reported to believe the greatest calamity of the 20th century was the collapse of the Soviet empire. To restore Soviet imperial glory, the West and NATO need to be defeated in the sense that NATO’s expansion eastward after 1991 is reversed and Russia reabsorbs lost Soviet territory. The early Soviet objective of global conquest evidently has been abandoned, however. And given the well-known weaknesses of communism and their role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, the disintegration of the United States need not be followed by a new socialist regime. Internal collapse of the United States sufficient to eliminate American ability to thwart its plans and to seriously damage or destroy NATO are enough for Russia’s new leaders. Hence, Russia seems to be pursuing a

⁶³ Ibid., 30; Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation*, 77, 81; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 503.

⁶⁴ Herbert Romerstein and Stanislav Levchenko, *The KGB against the “Main Enemy:” How the Soviet Intelligence Service Operates against the United States* (Lexington MA: Lexington, 1989), 277-278.

⁶⁵ Earley, *Comrade J*, 195.

modified version of the last stage of the Soviet plan that Bezmenov reported.

Goals of Chinese information operations are different. Generally labeled influence operations, not disinformation or active measures, they have been designed to shape the perceptions of China globally in ways favorable to China – to coopt the world rather than to defeat or conquer or subvert it. While Western specialists on China differ on the ultimate goals of the ruling CCP, many believe the CCP aspires to change the entire global order in ways favorable to China, to “harmonize” the world in ways compatible with CCP interests and values.⁶⁶ Much of the existing set of global institutions would remain in place, but would be modified to have Chinese characteristics. This would be done quietly, peacefully, and deceptively for many years with a wide range of influence tools and operations. The CCP would convince the West that China intends to rise peacefully in ways consistent with the post-World War II liberal global order while simultaneously convincing African and other less developed states that China is a better friend than America or Europe and the Chinese political/economic model is superior to Western capitalism. Revenge for China’s perceived humiliation at the hands of Westerners in the 19th century is another major goal. As former CCP leader Deng Xiaoping reportedly advised his staff in April 1992, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, “Only when we keep hiding strength and biding time for a few more years can we really form a larger political force, and the weight of China’s speech on the international stage will be different.”⁶⁷ What has become known as the “hide and bide” strategy associated with China’s “peaceful rise” meme is not far from what the

⁶⁶ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 259-260; Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 29.

⁶⁷ As cited in Susan L. Shirk, *Overreach: How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 53.

Soviets practiced in the 1920s, albeit using different terminology.⁶⁸ The eventual goal of the strategy, like that of the Soviets, appears to be to replace the United States as global hegemon, albeit in different ways. Weakening the United States and damaging its friends and alliances are essential intermediate goals. According to Australian professor Clive Hamilton, a core CCP aim concerning Australia is to break the longstanding U.S.-Australia alliance.⁶⁹

Recognition of this set of goals has become increasingly common in the West in recent years, as CCP leader and President Xi Jinping (2012-present) has become more candid about Chinese ambitions.⁷⁰ While China had become more aggressive late in the tenure of party leader Hu Jintao (2002-2012), especially after the 2008 financial crisis in the West led to heightened convictions that China's socialist system was superior to Western capitalism, Xi announced even more aggressive goals of "China's dream" and acted belligerently, sometimes in military ways consistent with his rhetoric.⁷¹ A prominent analyst of this new thinking about China is Michael Pillsbury, a long-time China specialist who believes the CCP seeks to alter the world in ways that will make China the globe's dominant country by 2049, the centennial of the CCP's victory in the most recent Chinese civil war.⁷² Hence the title of Pillsbury's book: *The Hundred-Year Marathon*. Dominance does not mean military conquest or communist party control of the world, as the Soviets wanted, but rather a world in which Chinese views

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷⁰ Shirk, *Overreach*.

⁷¹ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 28; Bradley A. Thayer, "The PRC's New Strategic Narrative as Political Warfare: Causes and Implications for the United States," National Institute for Public Policy, *Occasional Paper*, Vol. 1, No. 3, March 2021; Shirk, *Overreach*, 36-43.

⁷² Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 195.

and methods strongly influence global practices in a fairly comprehensive fashion. Pillsbury notes that the late Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew, who was an astute observer of international affairs and an ethnic Chinese, similarly believed the CCP seeks such world domination.⁷³

Pillsbury argues that the Chinese, drawing on lessons from the Warring States period of Chinese history, roughly between 475 BCE and 221 BCE, aim to figure ways to (mainly) use deceit and subterfuge to replace the current *ba*, or tyrant—the United States—and have built lessons of the history of the Warring States period into their campaign plans.⁷⁴ This means a variety of efforts will be utilized, only some done by intelligence personnel, to convince people globally to support China's alleged "peaceful rise." Pillsbury argues that the prominent book *Unrestricted Warfare*, by two PLA then-senior colonels, published in English in 2002, reflected this "hardline" attitude and the power of this group to make its goals more explicit than wanted by the "hide and bide" faction of the CCP.⁷⁵ Its publication in English was not an accident and reflected, Pillsbury wrote, the views of the many in the CCP. Xi Jinping appears to support such views. Alex Joske, an Australian specialist on the CCP, also believes the CCP's primary external disinformation theme is that China intends to rise peacefully within the current liberal world order and gradually liberalize.⁷⁶ Moreover, it is allegedly the West's responsibility to make sure that China's rise is successful; any Western criticism of China allegedly would

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59, 117.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 117; Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* (Los Angeles: Pan American Publishing, 2002).

⁷⁶ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 7, 110. See also Shirk, *Overreach*.

cause “hardliners” within the CCP to win control, thereby derailing liberalizing reform efforts.⁷⁷

For the CCP, people come in varieties: a small number of evil Westerners must be defeated, but the much larger number of ignorant or politically neutral people can be persuaded to accept China’s ambitions.⁷⁸ Influence operations are designed mainly to do the latter. This concept is similar to the Soviets’ efforts to infiltrate and influence opinion-setting Western institutions such as the press and universities.⁷⁹ Russia seems to have a narrower set of target priorities.

The CCP closely studied the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist party, assessed that Western ideational attacks via forms of “soft power” played an appreciable role in causing the collapse, and concluded that liberalization is not a viable option for the CCP.⁸⁰ Xi spoke publicly in January 2013 about lessons he learned from the CPSU’s demise: the Soviets ignored the history of the USSR, negated Lenin and Stalin, engaged in “historical nihilism,” defined as criticizing the CPSU’s past, and thereby brought chaos to the Soviet Union.⁸¹ Xi’s speech was soon followed by written instructions to CCP members in “Notice on the Current State of the Ideological Struggle” – the party’s ninth policy document of the year, which therefore is now commonly known as “Document No. 9,” and which is widely seen as important doctrinal guidance.⁸² Hence, the CCP aims to mislead gullible Westerners about Chinese intentions while secretly maintaining its firm commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology. Neither Russia nor the USSR

⁷⁷ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 160.

⁷⁸ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 25.

⁷⁹ Louis Francis Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), 208-249.

⁸⁰ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 40-41; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 227.

⁸¹ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9.

are nearly as secretive about their strategic objectives, although it is certain that they also target gullible Westerners, who they believe exist in large numbers.

Pillsbury believes the CCP has a nine-part strategy, drawn heavily from perceived lessons of the Warring States period, most of which rely at least in part on influence operations:

1. Induce complacency in opponents.
2. Manipulate your opponents' advisers.
3. Be patient, for decades if necessary.
4. Steal opponents' ideas and technologies for strategic purposes.
5. Recognize that military might is NOT critical for winning a long-term competition.
6. Recognize that dominant opponents, or hegemons, will take reckless actions to preserve their dominant position.
7. Never lose sight of the concept of *shi*, which is an ancient Chinese concept that involves deceiving opponents into doing work for you and waiting for situations of maximum opportunity to strike enemies.⁸³ The Chinese have clearly done this in the realm of technology transfers, a topic beyond the scope of this study.⁸⁴
8. Employ metrics to measure your status relative to other potential challengers.
9. Always be vigilant to avoid being encircled or deceived by others.⁸⁵

⁸³ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 42-51.

⁸⁴ William C. Hannas, James Mulvenon, and Anna B. Puglisi, *Chinese Industrial Espionage: Technology acquisition and military modernization* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2013).

⁸⁵ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 35-36.

Time Horizons

The Soviets and Chinese for many years displayed a willingness to achieve their political goals over very long time periods, but Russia under Putin and China under Xi seem to be less patient, making underlying national goals more apparent and deception thereby more difficult. But all three have far longer horizons than Western states, academics, and businesses typically display. As outlined by several Soviet defectors, the CPSU plan to engineer the collapse of the United States was to play out over an extended period of time. Yuri Bezmenov thought a generation, and Ladislav Bittman, a Czechoslovak active measures specialist who defected in 1968, expected the program to work over a period of “several decades.”⁸⁶ Reflecting its patience, within the intelligence realm the Soviets relied extensively on “illegals,” or persons who were dispatched (potentially) permanently to target countries and who were expected to develop contacts over many years that *might* eventually be useful. Some illegals, operating for years as “sleepers,” also were to be Soviet eyes and ears in the event that overt military conflict closed Soviet and friendly diplomatic missions in target countries.

In contrast, Russia under Putin seems to want to defeat its enemies more quickly—and soon. Russia employed information operations appreciably during its brief war with Georgia in 2008, and it employed influence operations to try to shape the willingness of some East European NATO countries to host American anti-missile radars in the 2000s.⁸⁷ Catherine Belton and others argue that the Russians

⁸⁶ Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation*, 2; Rid, *Active Measures*, 160.

⁸⁷ Stéphane Lefebvre and Roger N. McDermott, “Intelligence Aspects of the 2008 Conflict between Russia and Georgia,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22:1 (2009): 4-19; Michaela Dodge, “Russia’s influence operations

resumed using Soviet-style “active measures” on a *large* scale in 2014 in forms such as use of proxies, agents of influence, front organizations, propaganda and outright lies (disinformation).⁸⁸ Western observers differ somewhat about whether Russian influence operations increased in recent years, evidently reflecting different assessments of the magnitude of recent Russian efforts. Significant influence operations surely were conducted in recent years against Ukraine and Eastern Europe, parts of the Soviet empire that Putin covets, and on Western Europe and the United States.⁸⁹ But Putin ruined much of what may have been achieved in Europe by his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which alienated much of the world and convinced Finland and Sweden to ask to join NATO.

The strategy behind the Chinese “hundred-year marathon” and the “hide and bide” approach expects to yield success by the year 2049—a long-term goal indeed.⁹⁰ But Xi’s articulation of “China’s dream,” published writings of “hardliners,” and aggressive political, economic, and military actions in recent years against its neighbors that have sparked the term “sharp power,” suggest an appreciable shift in approach that, as with Putin’s aggressive actions, seems to be making subtle influence operations more challenging.

in the Czech Republic during the radar debate,” *Comparative Strategy* 39:2 (2020).

⁸⁸ Belton, *Putin’s People*, 428; Dodge, “Russia’s influence operations in the Czech Republic during the radar debate,” 162-170; Harding, *Shadow State*, 61, 167, 125.

⁸⁹ Nina Jankowicz, *How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020).

⁹⁰ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*; Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 81.

Money and Influence

Money, of course, funds intelligence and influence operations but the magnitude, uses, and control of money vary dramatically in the three countries. All have spent lavishly by their own standards to achieve their goals.

The KGB was well funded by Soviet standards, but the Soviet Union and its East European empire were largely autarchic and “hard currency” was scarce. Still, the KGB’s active measures program was large. The CIA reportedly estimated that the Soviets spent the equivalent of \$3 billion on active measures in 1978 and \$4 billion in 1982.⁹¹ Thomas Rid estimated peak Soviet spending on active measures at \$3-4 billion in 1985.⁹² In 1981, KGB documents show, global active measures campaigns produced 70 books or monographs, 60 films, 4,865 news articles, 1,500 radio and television programs, and 3,000 conferences and exhibitions.⁹³ By several accounts, the KGB poured growing quantities of resources into Service A and related field operations in the 1960s and later. The KGB also regularly sent funds to loyal communist parties in Western states, which conducted their own influence operations. The Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) received on average a few million dollars per year from Moscow until 1991.⁹⁴ Larger communist parties in Europe received bigger subsidies.

Russian influence operations seem to be better financed. The KGB started to foresee the eventual demise of the USSR as early as 1982, when it began to hide funds abroad that

⁹¹ Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 31.

⁹² Rid, *Active Measures*, 313.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁹⁴ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic, 1999), 287-288.

could survive an existential crisis of the Soviet Union.⁹⁵ The KGB also began to go into business for itself, accumulating more funds. After the collapse of the USSR, Chekists in the FSB, especially, collaborated extensively with newly emerged “oligarchs” and organized criminals, enhancing available funds and creating new operating methods. By one estimate, Russian intelligence may have controlled some \$800 billion around 2010, hidden in a wide variety of places globally, presumably invested and generating income.⁹⁶ Some of this intelligence “black cash” was used to finance operations designed to foster dissension in the West, including the operation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).⁹⁷ Black cash also funded operations against Ukraine in recent years.⁹⁸

The Russians bribe or otherwise influence politicians by contributing to their parties or campaigns, often through cut-outs, probably more than the Soviets did, although the relative and absolute magnitudes of such efforts are not clear. Prominent examples include the flood of money that Russian oligarchs rained on London in the early 2000s. According to British journalist Luke Harding, who was posted to Moscow in 2007-2011, the United Kingdom offers Russians many advantages: it is comfortable with many amenities; has favorable laws related to taxation, investment, and money laundering; is relatively uncorrupt; has favorable immigration rules; and is fairly close to Russia.⁹⁹ London, especially, therefore attracts dissidents as well as the “business” people the Putin regime works with closely.

⁹⁵ Belton, *Putin's People*, 62.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 444.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 417-418, 421.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 421-425.

⁹⁹ Harding, *Shadow State*, 179-180.

The cash flow is also generous elsewhere. For example, in 2004, Lithuanian President Roland Paksas was removed from office after having accepted \$400,000 from Yurii Borisov, a Russian businessman who reportedly was linked to Russian security services.¹⁰⁰ President Miloš Zeman of the Czech Republic received money for his 2013 presidential campaign from the Russian firm Lukoil which, like most large Russian firms, maintains close ties to the Kremlin.¹⁰¹ In November 2014, *Bild* reported a suspicious business transaction: the Eurosceptic German party *Allianz für Deutschland* (AfD) apparently bought cheap gold from Russia, which the party later resold at market prices. Some observers suspected that the deal involved an exchange of political favors.¹⁰²

Chinese influence operations are still better financed. China uses some of its massive foreign exchange earnings to finance influence operations. These funds enable focused coddling of foreign politicians, journalists, and scholars. In about 2003, the CCP's overall propaganda budget was the equivalent of about \$12 billion annually.¹⁰³ In 2009, the CCP launched an "overseas propaganda" campaign with a budget of the equivalent of \$6.58 billion designed to portray China favorably abroad.¹⁰⁴ The money enables Chinese intelligence to implement a 4-part strategy of both collection and influence that minimizes vulnerabilities to counterintelligence services and to unfavorable publicity. Joske's summary follows:

1. Be overt. Wear cover stories "like skin" as foreign policy scholars, cultural exchange officials, poets,

¹⁰⁰ Marcel H. Van Herpen, "The Many Faces of the New Information Warfare," in Olga Bertelsen, ed., *Russian Active Measures: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 51.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 117-120.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 179, 181.

filmmakers, businessmen, and publishers. Do little that is illegal.

2. Give front organizations considerable latitude and make sure plenty of informants interact with Westerners.
3. Recruit Chinese intellectuals who are seen in the West, inaccurately, as liberal reformers.
4. Exploit Westerners' chronically misplaced dream that a free and liberal China is about to emerge by pandering to and encouraging false hopes.¹⁰⁵

Key Strategies, Tactics, and Targets

Because their goals differ, the targets and techniques of countries' influence attacks have varied. Technology has made a significant difference in the practice of information operations. Social media and the Internet are Russian and Chinese tools that were not available to the Soviets. Forging documents, once a favorite KGB activity, has become much less common and less important, replaced by cyber operations including social media posts that reach more people, faster and more economically. In addition, Soviet forgeries always relied on fooling Western journalists, a chancy proposition even with gullible reporters and editors, despite the fact that the KGB's forgeries eventually got more sophisticated.

The Soviets aimed to defeat class enemies, meaning they aimed eventually to destroy capitalist ruling classes globally. But to do that without military violence meant they needed allies in target countries. Hence, influence operations had both negative and positive aspects. Enemy states and institutions such as NATO were targeted for literal destruction. Attacks on political enemies such as

¹⁰⁵ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 188-190.

Ukrainian nationalists, Trotskyites, and the Roman Catholic Church also were belligerently intended to destroy the reputations of targets. Such enemies were depicted as “fascists” or spies or American stooges – epithets that often bore no relationship to targets’ actual activities or political affiliations.

But because the Soviets also needed compliant friends who would back the revolution led by themselves as communist vanguards, they also targeted left-of-center persons who already were sympathetic to Soviet interests and asked few questions about the sources and accuracy of the bogus stories the Soviets disseminated. The Soviets aimed to encourage these people to believe Soviet propaganda themes and to act in ways consistent with Soviet interests. They exploited the ideological biases of targets and associated confirmation biases, and they used sophisticated persuasion techniques to help recruits further spread Marxian ideals to others who were even more vulnerable, such as students. These methods typically are long term in nature and exploit cognitive biases in ways that make Marxian goals emotionally attractive, thereby converting some targets into committed, or even more devoted, Soviet allies. Fact-based counter-arguments typically are ineffective against these techniques.

The KGB developed such influence using techniques the Russians would later call “reflexive control.”¹⁰⁶ According to several defectors, Soviet bloc intelligence officers consistently misled targets with even crude forgeries and disinformation messages that did not withstand even rudimentary scrutiny.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, defectors often marveled

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Thomas, “Russia’s Reflexive Control Theory and the Military,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17:2 (2004): 237-256; Daniel P. Bagge, *Unmasking Maskirovka: Russia’s Cyber Influence Operations* (New York: Defense Press, 2019), 49-72, 140-173.

¹⁰⁷ John A. Gentry, “Belated Success: Soviet Active Measures against the United States,” *American Intelligence Journal* 39:2 (2022): 158.

at how easy it was to deceive such victims. They concluded, in essence, that it was easy to fool people who wanted to be fooled. Making a similar point from a very different perspective, Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky lamented that very large numbers of Westerners chronically believed, or went along with, Soviet propaganda themes.¹⁰⁸

Lenin famously called foreign sympathizers with the Soviet cause “useful idiots.”¹⁰⁹ Josef Stalin called them “naïve dupes.” Wilhelm “Willi” Münzenberg, a successful Comintern propagandist of the 1920s, established “Innocents’ Clubs” for gullible Europeans who could be talked into supporting “voguish causes” consistent with Soviet interests.¹¹⁰ The Soviets aimed to use such people to influence both societies and national leaders.

A key part of the active measures program was recruiting “agents of influence” – people who spread Soviet messages consistent with Soviet interests and may or may not have also been intelligence collectors. The Soviets identified three types of agents of influence:

1. Trusted relationships between a Soviet intelligence officer and a senior foreigner in which the foreigner – called a “*trusted contact*” – cooperated voluntarily with the Soviets to varying degrees, as the contact wished.
2. A *controlled agent of influence* was formally recruited by the KGB, took orders and was paid, generating receipts that could be used for blackmail purposes, if necessary.

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Bukovsky, *Judgment in Moscow: Soviet Crimes and Western Complicity* (California: Ninth of November Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁹ This quote has been attributed to Angelica Balabanova, who knew Lenin and who reportedly said Lenin used the words. See Gary Kern, *A Death in Washington: Walter G. Krivitsky and the Stalin Terror* (New York: Enigma, 2003), 321.

¹¹⁰ Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 112; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 187, 242.

3. A *special contact* had a relationship with the KGB in a country with close ties to the USSR, where formal recruitment was constrained by political concerns. These people were not paid salaries but usually received periodic gifts from their appreciative Soviet “friends.”

Examples include Harry Hopkins, a close aide of President Franklin Roosevelt, who evidently was a communist fellow traveler and a *trusted contact*, not a recruited asset, and Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Harry Dexter White, a close advisor to Secretary Hans Morgenthau who was a spy as well as a *controlled agent of influence*.¹¹¹ Lauchlin Currie, another Roosevelt White House aide, evidently also was both a spy and an agent of influence. Hopkins and White are widely believed to have influenced American policy in ways favorable to Moscow by, for example, helping to convince the Roosevelt Administration to take a hard line vis-à-vis Japan in 1941 by curtailing exports of critical natural resources, thereby encouraging the Japanese to attack Malaya and the Dutch East Indies to acquire replacement resources, not Soviet Siberia; later they influenced American policy on the construction of post-war Europe, which gave up Eastern Europe to the Soviets, angering and disappointing many people.¹¹² Alger Hiss, a State Department officer who also was both a spy and an agent of influence, influenced American policy concerning the political shape of post-war Eastern Europe at the Yalta conference of February 1945,

¹¹¹ Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 280-282.

¹¹² M. Stanton Evans and Herbert Romerstein, *Stalin's Secret Agents: The Subversion of Roosevelt's Government* (New York: Threshold, 2012), 92-98; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 332-333, 348-350; Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, “Harry Hopkins and Soviet Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security* 29:6 (2014): 864-879.

which accepted Soviet rule over the region.¹¹³ And Soviet sympathizers allegedly took control of the editorial policies of the Institute of Pacific Relations, a prominent think tank, which allegedly influenced U.S. government officials about communist activities in China in the late 1940s.¹¹⁴

The CPSU in its early years identified the demographic diversity of the United States as its most significant political vulnerability, leading the KGB to make heightening black-white racial tensions and perceived anti-Semitism complementary disinformation themes designed to foster societal divisions in America.¹¹⁵ To do this, the Soviets emphasized and exaggerated actual episodes of discrimination, and they manufactured many more, building on the fraught history of race relations in the United States. Their powers of persuasion may have contributed to the conviction of many contemporary American liberals that demographic “diversity” is an American strength—a perception that directly serves Soviet and Russian interests. Former KGB General Oleg Kalugin, as a young KGB officer working under the cover of a Radio Moscow correspondent based in New York City in the early 1960s, described how he both exaggerated perceived racism in America and tried to stoke it by cultivating black leaders in the Harlem section of New York City.¹¹⁶ Kalugin also hired local people to paint swastikas on synagogues in

¹¹³ John E. Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 77-88; Evans and Romerstein, *Stalin's Secret Agents*, 40-53; Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 280-282.

¹¹⁴ Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 282-186.

¹¹⁵ David Shimer, *Rigged: America, Russia, and One Hundred Years of Covert Electoral Interference* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 84, 92; Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 35, 53-55, 103-104, 117, 297-298; Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 254-261.

¹¹⁶ Oleg Kalugin with Fen Montaigne, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martins, 1994), 52-53.

Washington and New York City and to desecrate several Jewish cemeteries. He then wrote stories condemning anti-Semitism and racism in America—small parts of a much larger and enduring influence campaign. Americans in large numbers bought the meme. According to former Soviet intelligence agent and CPUSA member Louis Budenz, who renounced communism in 1945, the Soviets and the CPUSA even then had two related aims for black Americans: 1) promote racial tensions to the point of generating race-based civil war; and/or (2) promoting creation of a geographically large black separatist state in what is now the American south as a way to literally fragment the United States.¹¹⁷

One of the KGB's easiest and most effective disinformation campaigns was Operation DENVER—exploitation of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic in the early 1980s. Former senior KGB officer Oleg Gordievsky believed DENVER was the KGB's most successful active measures campaign.¹¹⁸ Originally a conspiracy theory of Charles Shively, a Boston-based gay anarchist and editor of *Fag Rag*, who hypothesized that AIDS might be a U.S. Government effort to kill blacks and gays, the story was revised by the *Patriot*, a small KGB-supported newspaper in India, which asserted that AIDS was a Defense Department biological weapon designed to kill Africans and Asians.¹¹⁹ After the story gained local adherents, the KGB recruited an ostensibly credible East German scientist to add authority to the conspiracy theory and then spread the disinformation globally. Long after the natural origin of AIDS was firmly established, many African-Americans continue to believe that AIDS is a

¹¹⁷ Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 254-261.

¹¹⁸ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 630.

¹¹⁹ Rid, *Active Measures*, 302-311.

genocidal attack on blacks by the U.S. Government.¹²⁰ Consistent with many KGB successes at stimulating paranoia in African-Americans,¹²¹ U.S. Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) often repeats an American reporter's inaccurate story that the CIA disseminated hard drugs domestically as part of a master plot to destroy inner-city black America.¹²² In these and many other cases disinformation entered popular culture and even textbooks, perpetuating misunderstanding that has long-lasting political significance.¹²³

The Soviets specially targeted American universities, knowing that they were key to producing believers of the divisive messages they sponsored and that many professors and administrators sympathized with the Soviets.¹²⁴ These leftists were not all enthusiasts for Soviet-style communism, but could be counted upon to advocate utopian socialism in general terms and to denigrate the leadership and institutions of their own country, helping achieve the goal of "disintegrating" the United States. As part of their "long march through the institutions," a splendidly descriptive phrase of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, Marxists developed what CPUSA defector Louis Budenz called "transmission belts" to spread the word, including the press and education.¹²⁵ Marxists created "critical pedagogy," or

¹²⁰ Darryl Fears, "Many blacks cite AIDS conspiracy," *NBC News*, January 25, 2005, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna6867177>.

¹²¹ For similar usage of this word and context, see Jason L. Riley, "The Racial Progress Democrats Won't Admit," *Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 2022, A17.

¹²² Craig Delaval, "Cocaine, Conspiracy Theories & the C.I.A. in Central America," *Frontline*, n.d., <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/special/cia.html>; Anonymous, "CIA Public Affairs and the Drug Conspiracy Story," *Studies in Intelligence*, n.d, n.v, 9-14.

¹²³ For others, see Gentry, "Belated Success," 160-162.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*; Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 208-249.

¹²⁵ Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 129-139, 298-300.

doctrine about how to teach teachers to indoctrinate their students.¹²⁶ As the Soviets planned, universities became hotbeds of Marxian thinking and of authors who wrote helpful Marxian teaching and more overtly propaganda materials.¹²⁷ A relatively recent example is *A People's History of the United States*, published in 1980 by Howard Zinn, an overtly Marxian re-framing of American history that is still popular with left-leaning high school and college teachers in the United States. Many others, sometimes more subtle, were written many decades ago.¹²⁸

The Soviets also targeted the press, especially newspapers. Arguably the Soviets' favorite American newspaper was the *New York Times*. The *Times'* close relationship with Soviet Russia began when Walter Duranty was its Moscow bureau chief in 1922-1936. Duranty became, by many accounts, a confidant of Soviet leader Stalin. His stories praised Soviet communism despite obvious troubles such as industrial problems in the 1920s and the famine of 1932-1933, caused largely by Stalin's confiscation of food supplies in Ukraine, especially, which killed several million Soviet citizens.¹²⁹ Duranty reportedly told a British diplomat that he knew the famine had killed as many as 10 million people but he had to lie about it to maintain his access to Soviet officials – an ethical dilemma for journalists that the CCP makes very clear today. He also justified the show trials of the 1930s that repulsed many observers.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (New York: Encounter, 2000); Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 153.

¹²⁷ For example, Antonia Darder et al., ed. *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, 3rd ed. (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2017).

¹²⁸ Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 208-249.

¹²⁹ Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (New York: Anchor, 2017), 333-334.

¹³⁰ Grant, *Disinformation*, 247-248; Evans and Romerstein, *Stalin's Secret Agents*, 73-75; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 126, 147.

Disinformation of the sort Duranty reported surely helped deceive many Americans about the true nature of Soviet communism. Later, the *Times* accepted many forgeries and got other stories partially right.¹³¹ For example, the KGB made and mailed racist flyers to African and Asian diplomats at the United Nations that claimed to have been produced by the Ku Klux Klan. The diplomats unsurprisingly were outraged. But because the flyers contained basic grammatical and other errors that no native English speaker would make, the FBI immediately investigated them as likely forgeries. The *New York Times* helpfully did not report the forgery part of the story.¹³² The *Times* continued to be helpful long after the demise of the USSR by, for example, sponsoring in 2019 the specious “1619 Project,” which alleges that America’s sole purpose is the persecution of people of sub-Saharan African origins. The project’s publications are universally criticized as, in essence, junk history by reputable historians. Elsewhere, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* was another especially useful, cooperative outlet for disinformation.¹³³

The KGB and the International Department of the CPSU CC created and largely funded a dozen or so major front groups that formed and supported West European and American “peace movements” designed to pressure Western governments to unilaterally disarm, which would have given Warsaw Pact countries a strategically useful military advantage.¹³⁴ Unlike modern Russian fronts, these mainly existed abroad. Local personages ostensibly led the organizations but were surreptitiously controlled by KGB officers. The most prominent and arguably the most

¹³¹ Grant, *Disinformation*, 157-161.

¹³² Rid, *Active Measures*, 134-141.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 151-156, 190-191, 209-210, 341-344.

¹³⁴ For example, William Styles, “The World Federation of Scientific Workers, a case study of a Soviet Front Organisation: 1946-1964,” *Intelligence and National Security* 33:1 (2018): 116-129.

effective Soviet front organization was the World Peace Council (WPC), which was established in Paris in 1949, the year the Soviet Union first exploded a nuclear device. The WPC sponsored and supported groups in NATO countries dedicated to the unilateral disarmament of their own countries, but not of the Soviet Union.¹³⁵ One prominently successful such effort derailed the planned U.S. deployment of enhanced radiation weapons, or “neutron bombs,” in Europe in the late 1970s.¹³⁶ The American war in Vietnam also was a major WPC focus, helping damage the U.S. Government globally as well as in the United States.¹³⁷ The KGB called its long-running support for Western “peace movements” Operation MARS and the East German intelligence service oxymoronically, but appropriately, named its closely aligned effort Operation “PEACEWAR.”¹³⁸ The CPUSA formed its affiliate of the WPC, the United States Peace Council, in 1979.¹³⁹ The WPC still exists, is still run by communists, now from headquarters in Athens, Greece, and still bashes NATO, for which Putin undoubtedly is grateful.

Russian targets are politically broader than Soviet ones and Russian influence means have expanded. Because Russian political goals largely focus on the delegitimization of democratic institutions in target countries rather than promoting the development of socialism, targets include persons from across the political spectrum.¹⁴⁰ While traditional European critics of the United States and NATO come from the political Left, some right-of-center politicians

¹³⁵ Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation*, 64.

¹³⁶ Rid, *Active Measures*, 255-262.

¹³⁷ Shultz and Godson, *Dezinformatsia*, 124-126; J.A. Emerson Vermaat, “Moscow Fronts and the European Peace Movement,” *Problems in Communism* 31:6 (1982): 43-56.

¹³⁸ Rid, *Active Measures*, 262, 265.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁴⁰ Belton, *Putin’s People*, 430-431, 433-440.

and political parties oppose NATO and the European Union, making them appealing targets. As technology changed, the Russians eventually put much emphasis on social media, focusing on groups with grievances, enemies, and vulnerabilities to conspiracy theories. The search for exploitable vulnerabilities has been easy in the open societies of the West. We know now that the GRU sent a team of two women to the United States before beginning its 2016 presidential influence campaign to identify vulnerable groups and disinformation themes that would be effective against them. They did so simply by talking with Americans.

The Russian propaganda effort includes variants of Soviet and Chinese soft power initiatives. The Russians also use front companies to spread Russia's messages.¹⁴¹ Created after the collapse of the USSR, these mainly are based in Russia, not abroad as most Soviet fronts were, and engage foreigners fairly overtly as Russian organizations. In the latter respect, they are closer to many Chinese influence peddlers than Soviet organizations.

For example, in 2007 Putin established the Russian World Foundation (*Russkii Mir*), an agency led by Vyacheslav Nikonov, a grandson of one-time senior CPSU leader Vyacheslav Molotov.¹⁴² The stated goal of this agency is to defend the interests of Russian speakers outside Russia and to promote Russian culture and language abroad. Initially, the agency focused on former Soviet republics, but its strategic scope is now global. Pretending to be a cultural organization, similar to the British Council or the Alliance Française, its clear political task is to mobilize Russian speakers all over the world to support the Kremlin's policies. Together with the Russian aid fund

¹⁴¹ Olga Bertelsen, "Russian Front Organizations and Western Academia," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 2023, DOI: 10.1080/08850607.2022.2147807.

¹⁴² Van Herpen, "The Many Faces of the New Information Warfare," 50.

Rosstrudnichestvo, founded in 2008, the agency opened Russian Centers at foreign universities. In 2015, there were approximately 70 such centers in the United States, 14 in France, 11 in Germany, and 13 in Britain. Branches of the Chinese Confucius Institutes, established on university campuses world-wide and discussed below, served as a model for the Russians. Like the Confucius Institutes, the Russian Centers are more than simply culture centers.

But the Russians continue to use two old Soviet practices—deployment of illegal operatives and stimulating revolutionary action among left-wing black nationalist groups in the United States, which the KGB worked hard for decades to radicalize.¹⁴³ In 2010, the FBI arrested ten illegal officers in the United States. They were sleeper agents who were tasked with long-term penetrations of important American institutions. In 2018 Maria Butina, ostensibly a graduate student at American University in Washington, D.C., pleaded guilty to being a Russian agent who worked with various American political groups, including the National Rifle Association, to influence American policy in ways favorable to Russia.¹⁴⁴ She spent 15 months in American prisons. And in July 2022, the U.S. Department of Justice charged Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov with working with at least three other (unnamed) FSB officers from December 2014 to March 2022 to orchestrate “a years-long foreign malign influence campaign that used three U.S. political groups to sow discord, spread pro-Russian propaganda, and interfere in elections within the United States.”¹⁴⁵ Ionov evidently was an illegal officer, and

¹⁴³ Gentry, “Belated Success,” 155, 160, 165-166.

¹⁴⁴ No byline, “Marian Butina: the Russian gun activist who was jailed in the US,” *BBC News*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44885633>.

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, “Russian National Charged with Conspiring to have U.S. Citizens Act as Illegal Agents of the Russian Government,” July 29, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/russian->

presumably the other three persons were, too. According to Justice, "Ionov provided financial support to the groups, directed them to publish pro-Russian propaganda, coordinated and funded direct action by these groups within the United States intended to further Russian interests, and coordinated coverage of this activity in Russian media outlets."¹⁴⁶ After arranging a Russian-paid trip to Moscow in May 2015 for leaders of a Florida group, Ionov "exercised direction and control over senior members" of the group from 2015 to 2022.

Journalists have identified the three groups, which nicely display the characteristics of American separatist groups attractive to the Soviets and American communists, which Louis Budenz identified in 1953.¹⁴⁷ The Florida group reportedly is the Uhuru Movement, a St. Petersburg-based arm of the revolutionary, left-wing African People's Socialist Party.¹⁴⁸ Another organization reportedly is the Atlanta-based, radical separatist Black Hammer Party.¹⁴⁹ The third reportedly was a now-defunct, right-wing group

national-charged-conspiring-have-us-citizens-act-illegal-agents-russian-government.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Budenz, *The Techniques of Communism*, 254-261.

¹⁴⁸ Devlin Barrett, "Russian national charged with U.S. political influence operation," *Washington Post*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/07/29/russia-influence-ionov-florida-uhuru/>; No byline, "Russian man spent years as puppeteer behind U.S. political groups, officials say," *The Guardian*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/29/aleksandr-viktorovich-ionov-russia-us-politics-division-propaganda-elections>.

¹⁴⁹ Chris Joyner, "Atlanta group implicated in Russian influence scheme," *The Eagle-Tribune*, July 29, 2022, https://www.eagletribune.com/region/atlanta-group-implicated-in-russian-influence-scheme/article_ed6fa1a1-d931-5cf5-9a44-85a6c9376732.html.

that wanted California to secede from the union.¹⁵⁰ Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen summarized, “Ionov allegedly orchestrated a brazen influence campaign, turning U.S. political groups and U.S. citizens into instruments of the Russian government.”¹⁵¹

Russia has developed some new techniques of influence. Technology has changed since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, giving Russian intelligence services valuable information warfare-related tools the KGB did not have. Russia employs social media, cyber-enabled information operations, and cyberattacks to complement traditional disinformation operations and conventional warfare.¹⁵² While paid employees seem to do the most important work, Russia also uses energized volunteers as “patriotic hackers.”¹⁵³ And military-focused bloggers, or “milbloggers,” some of whom seem to be connected to the Kremlin informally, at least, comment regularly on Russia’s war on Ukraine, thereby helping shape perceptions of the war at home and abroad.

In addition, in the 1990s Russian military theorists refined old Soviet techniques of manipulation, used

¹⁵⁰ Charles R. Davis, “A leading California secession advocate got funding and direction from Russian intelligence agents, US government alleges,” *Businessinsider.com*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/california-secession-movement-was-backed-by-russia-us-alleges-2022-7>.

¹⁵¹ Hannah Farrow, “DOJ accuses Russian operative of conspiring with U.S. groups to push propaganda,” *Politico*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/29/doj-russian-u-s-groups-propaganda-00048783>.

¹⁵² Chad W. Fitzgerald and Aaron F. Brantly, “Subverting Reality: The Role of Propaganda in 21st Century Intelligence,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 30:2 (2017): 215-240.

¹⁵³ Jason Healey and Leendert van Bochovan, “Strategic Cyber Early Warning: A Phased Adaptive Approach for NATO,” Atlantic Council, 2012, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155419/NATO%20Cyber%20Warning%202012.pdf>, 5-6.

extensively for many years to produce and disseminate disinformation and thereby also to indoctrinate new generations of sympathizers, into a doctrine they called “reflexive control,” which is designed to aid both military and political warfare specialists.¹⁵⁴ The doctrine works by providing selectively chosen information that induces targets to act, in the view of targeted victims, independently but in ways consistent with Russian interests. New variants are applied via electronic means such as social media. Adversary decision-makers are targeted narrowly to make specific decisions favorable to the Russians even as these techniques continue to be applied effectively to educators and journalists, who pass their views to students and readers, making the effects of such operations very long-lasting as they enter popular culture and political traditions.¹⁵⁵ The Russians include influence operations in the concept of information warfare they embed in what is often called “hybrid warfare” (and other terms) in the West, which integrates violent and non-violent techniques including cyber operations into means the Russians hope will win wars with less but more effective fighting than would occur otherwise.¹⁵⁶ In Russian parlance, “cyber” refers to information content as well as the electrons and hardware of computer network operations—the typical Western definition of “cyber.” The latter doctrine is commonly associated with a paper that chief of the General

¹⁵⁴ Thomas, “Russia’s Reflexive Control Theory and the Military.” The American social psychologist Stanley Milgram similarly found that it is possible to induce people to do extreme things and to induce substantial degrees of social conformity. See Kara Rogers, “Stanley Milgram: American Social Psychologist,” *Britannica*, n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/St Stanley-Milgram>.

¹⁵⁵ Bagge, *Unmasking Maskirovka*: 132-133.

¹⁵⁶ Galeotti, “Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear?”; Renz, “Russia and ‘hybrid warfare.’”

Staff General Valery Gerasimov published in 2013, which also is known as the “Gerasimov Doctrine.”¹⁵⁷

While the CCP seems not to have formally published a definition of influence operations, writings of prominent Chinese suggest that China conceives of influence operations as ways to cause a change in behaviors, beliefs, or actions of many foreign targets ranging from individuals to national governments in pursuit of their goal of global domination.¹⁵⁸ The Chinese do not rely as much on psychological tricks as the Soviets or Russians, but they do exploit cognitive biases, especially confirmation bias, and they use old-fashioned propaganda, pressure tactics, and low-level de facto, but usually legal, forms of bribery to sway opinions—as in the form of campaign contributions. Chinese influence operations have many elements, but intelligence normally plays a big role. As with the KGB and FSB, this makes sense given the similarity of tasks and the skills needed to perform them.

The Chinese have an extensive program of influencing foreigners overtly. One uniquely Chinese technique involves the development of personal connections, or meaningful relationships, known as *guanxi*.¹⁵⁹ These are common in China and link, for example, the offspring of senior CCP officials—the “princelings”—who are prominent in politics at lower levels and in state-owned businesses.¹⁶⁰ But they also help spur corruption, which has become a serious problem in China. In addition, *guanxi* refers to political and business relationships with foreigners, perhaps including those with Hunter Biden, son of President Joe Biden, who reportedly received lucrative

¹⁵⁷ For the article, plus comments by Mark Galeotti, see <https://founderscode.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Gerasimov-Doctrine-and-Russian-Non-Linear-War-In-Moscow-s-Shadows.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 67.

¹⁵⁹ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 37.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

contracts for minimal work from Chinese state-owned firms of the sort the princelings often get.¹⁶¹ The MSS developed a formal plan for influence operations in the United States in 1997 that obviously included the liberal spreading of funds to establish useful personal and institutional relationships.¹⁶²

American presidents and the U.S. Congress are priority Chinese targets of influence operations because they make the American policies that the CCP wants to change. Efforts that target politicians, the media, and academics also involve a “legal” strategy that does not entail as many of the risks of covertly inserted Soviet- and Russian-style disinformation or illegal campaign contributions. The MSS identified six ways to influence Congress that are tightly linked to CCP goals and involve CCP elements, the PRC government, and Chinese society:

1. Invite congresspeople to China. Have English-speaking Chinese accompany them.
2. Expand engagement with congresspeople “on the ground” in the United States by having visiting Chinese delegations interact with Congress.
3. Lobby congresspeople through reputable American lobbying firms, public relations firms, and Chinese front organizations in the United States.
4. Work on political and business elites and interest groups in congressional districts.
5. Leverage Chinese ties with the American business community to get firms to lobby Congress.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹⁶² Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 57.

6. Continue united front work with Chinese communities, which eventually will have clout with congresspeople.¹⁶³

The Chinese do not rely entirely on legal means, however. Chinese intelligence recruits many persons through offers of money and via entrapment, as the Soviets and Russians have done, and they place clandestine intelligence officers among the many government officials and ostensibly private Chinese citizens resident in Western countries and in key Western institutions, including universities, research institutes, and businesses. While most intelligence activities evidently involve ethnic Chinese, the MSS placed a Caucasian asset, Russell Lowe, in the office of Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA), who evidently worked as both a collector of sensitive information and as an agent of influence.¹⁶⁴

Being a Marxist party, the CCP wants to shift “narratives” and “discourse,” which are said to be ways of thinking, speaking, and writing that are used to institutionalize and define reality, and thus to control societies—their own and others. This can be done by speaking in ideologically proper ways—that is, by using good Marxist-Leninist lingo—and avoiding discussion of out-of-favor topics. Marxists, therefore, often refer to the importance of shaping discourse about social phenomena in ideologically desirable ways—often by using ostensibly valuable alternative Marxian “ontologies and epistemologies.” The CCP recognizes this value by referring to “discourse warfare” and “discourse power.”¹⁶⁵ While the MSS does not seem to use the term “framing”—efforts to

¹⁶³ Ibid., 68-70.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 55-56; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 144.

¹⁶⁵ Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, ed., *China's Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2019), ix; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 117, 250, 274; Kurlantzick, *Beijing's Global Media Offensive*, 16.

misrepresent enemies and strengthen friends and supportive ideas – as much as the Soviets did, they use the concept in many ways that also have significant propaganda value. The CCP, like the Ministry of Truth of the mythical country of Oceania in George Orwell’s novel *1984*, might adopt the slogan: “Who controls the past controls the future: Who controls the present controls the past.”¹⁶⁶

A key theme of Chinese history re-writers is the evil of the United States and how, in contrast to the actual history of strong U.S. efforts to help China, American officials allegedly have tried long and hard to harm China in many ways.¹⁶⁷ For example, perhaps spurred by the success of the Soviets’ Operation DENVER of the 1980s, a PLA colonel in 2013 argued that the United States targeted China with biological weapons, including the bird influenza cases that had then-recently occurred in Shanghai.¹⁶⁸ And, like its selective use of maps to assert suzerainty over the South China Sea, the CCP asserts that Chinese were the first foreigners to visit Australia, potentially a prelude to claiming Australia as its own.¹⁶⁹

China uses a wider range of tools to exploit a broader set of targets than either the USSR or Russia. Its goals are more extensive and, until recently, less confrontational, enabled by careful orchestration of external messages soothing to Western ears and appealing on ideological and pecuniary grounds to countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. By many accounts, the Chinese carefully study targets, aided by insights of the large Chinese diaspora, academics who perceptively study the open societies of the West, and connections with foreign business people and politicians who are happy to provide useful technologies

¹⁶⁶ George Orwell, *1984* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1949), 33.

¹⁶⁷ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 106-107.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶⁹ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 246-248.

and political support, respectively, in response to financial incentives. The Chinese, therefore, are able to rely mainly on legal means of target data acquisition and then means of influence, reducing their operational risks and making China more attractive to targets.

The Chinese also have a political advantage that the USSR and Russia do not have but which the Soviets helped create—a ready ability to play to Western racial politics by blaming any criticism of Chinese persons or activities, no matter how outrageous or illegal, as “racist.”¹⁷⁰ For the CCP, it is a wonderful defense that both gives its operatives some protection and vilifies its major international opponents. In fact, as noted, the CCP believes it effectively owns the allegiance of all ethnic Chinese wherever they may be and whatever their citizenship is, meaning it expects to be able to differentially call upon ethnic Chinese to do its bidding. Hence, while Chinese intelligence and the CCP enlist many agents of various sorts who are not Chinese, there are good reasons for Western counterintelligence specialists to recognize the CCP’s expectations of ethnic Chinese around the world, and their significance.

Institutional Targets

Soviet and Chinese influence campaigns ambitiously target major Western institutions; Russia’s less so. Given that the Soviet aim was conquest via internal disintegration, to be conducted largely by ideological allies in target states, its major targets were institutions that were themselves influence generators, especially the press and universities, which the Soviets relied upon to generate new recruits who knowingly, and not, supported Soviet aims. Disinformation was the major mechanism, conducted mainly with persuasive techniques and written materials prepared by

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xi; Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 5.

the KGB or in newspapers and publishing houses globally run by Soviet sympathizers and supported by the KGB. In the 1930s and 1940s, Soviet communism seemed attractive and wartime alliances made helping Moscow as part of the anti-fascist alliance appealing to many Westerners. The (in)famous “Cambridge Five” of British spies were recruited this way in the 1930s. Hundreds of Americans became Soviet agents and large rings worked in the U.S. Government during World War II. As noted, some also became agents of influence. This “golden era” of espionage ended in 1956 as revelations about Stalin’s crimes and then the Warsaw Pact’s bloody invasion of Hungary dampened ideological enthusiasm for Soviet communism, leading the KGB to more extensively use disinformation to win converts deceptively. People like Harry Hopkins were fewer in number and in lesser positions. But the Soviets could still rely on the dedicated Marxists of captive communist parties and fellow travelers abroad to conduct information operations. The Soviets had few overt ties with Western businesses or universities.

No reputable former senior Western political leader endorsed the Cold War-era Soviet Union, although the KGB managed to recruit plenty of covert agents of influence in less developed countries. For example, KGB *special contacts* included people such as Chile’s President Salvador Allende and President José Figueres Ferrer of Costa Rica.¹⁷¹ As a young man, eventual West German Chancellor Willy Brandt ran a news agency and offered to pass Soviet-written stories to “Soviet comrades” in the United States.¹⁷² The Soviets always liked Brandt.

Russia, like the USSR, has perceived enemies and uses influence operations to try to defeat them. Russians do not use the term “active measures” as often as the Soviets did,

¹⁷¹ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 29-30, 67-88.

¹⁷² Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 441.

but Russia's intelligence services also employ disinformation designed to confuse enemies and cause dissension in enemy states. Like the Soviet Union, Russia uses information operations to target adversaries that are politically or militarily significant, especially NATO and the United States. The latter enemies were responsible, in many accounts of Putin's view, for the demise of the USSR, the collapse of its empire, and the eastward march of NATO. Putin also targets the European Union, which has backed the independence and prosperity of Ukraine and other former Soviet republics that Russia wants to influence or re-absorb.¹⁷³ As Lenin taught, no adversary weakness is too small to ignore. Hence, all measures that weaken NATO and the EU are valuable—even against small states such as the Czech Republic.¹⁷⁴ Small states, like large ones, have veto power over collective decisions given the unanimity rules of both alliances. The Russians have special advantages in Eastern Europe given the relationships they developed there during the post-World War II Soviet era.¹⁷⁵ And like the Soviets, Russians tend to see such conflict in zero sum terms—our gain is the enemy's loss. Russian information operations after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine seem to focus heavily on trying to discourage continued Western support for Ukraine. Russia also maintains traditional Soviet-like ties with countries such as Syria, Venezuela, and in parts of Africa, which do not much involve influence operations, per se.

¹⁷³ Belton, *Putin's People*, 430-431.

¹⁷⁴ Dodge, "Russia's influence operations in the Czech Republic during the radar debate." See also Michaela Dodge, "Russia's Influence Operations in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania," National Institute for Public Policy, *Occasional Paper* series, Vol. 2, No. 4, April 2022.

¹⁷⁵ Dodge, "Russia's influence operations in the Czech Republic during the radar debate," 164-165.

Russia has been less sophisticated than the USSR but perhaps more successful in generating obvious influence. Russian money surely has been spent to buy influence. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, a Social Democrat, has been widely criticized in the West, and especially in Germany, for accepting lucrative business deals with Russian companies with ties to the Kremlin. Former KGB officer Alexander Lebedev's *London Evening Standard* newspaper supported Prime Minister Boris Johnson politically.¹⁷⁶ Johnson was a leader of the so-called Brexit movement in Britain who thereby aided Putin's efforts to damage the EU. There does not seem to have been a systematic Russian effort to re-shape the ideological orientation of Western universities, as the Soviets did, or to court major Western institutions as broadly as China does, although pro-Russian persons surely appear overtly at Western academic conferences. But the Russians are widely believed to have achieved appreciable inroads in some EU countries through Putin's personal connections, mainly with right-of-center leaders such as Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán,¹⁷⁷ former Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi,¹⁷⁸ and Marine Le Pen,¹⁷⁹ leader of France's Rassemblement National party. And in times past, even U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Donald Trump have

¹⁷⁶ Harding, *Shadow State*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Andreas Rasz, "Authoritarian Ties: The Case of Russia and Hungary," The Wilson Center, Washington, D.C., October 22, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/authoritarian-ties-case-russia-and-hungary>.

¹⁷⁸ Mark Lowen, "Silvio Berlusconi boasts of closeness to Vladimir Putin," *BBC News*, October 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63315546>.

¹⁷⁹ Romain Geoffroy and Maxine Vaudano, "What are Marine Le Pen's Ties to Vladimir Putin's Russia?" *Le Monde*, February 5, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/04/21/what-are-marine-le-pen-s-ties-to-vladimir-putin-s-russia_5981192_8.html.

spoken highly of their personal relationships with Putin, whose personal conduct of foreign influence operations is something that senior Soviet and Chinese leaders have not done.

Putin's personal involvement in influence operations has a religious tone in the form of his close ties with Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church, who backs Putin politically and whose church has ties with other orthodox Christian churches, including one in Ukraine. As communists, and therefore officially atheists, neither CCP nor CPSU leaders have had such ties. The KGB, however, worked closely with the Russian church to advance Soviet interests.¹⁸⁰ The KGB also created the Christian Peace Conference,¹⁸¹ a front organization designed, like several others, to help convince Westerners to unilaterally disarm, and it reportedly decided around 1960 to support creation of the still influential "liberation theology" as part of its general effort to destabilize the world and to damage the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸² As in other areas, China works differently. MSS officers reportedly try to encourage Buddhist groups to support China and its policies.¹⁸³

Chinese influence activities, if not the CCP's ambitions, have been substantially greater than those of either the USSR or Russia. Western research institutions have been major targets. The MSS reportedly has targeted the

¹⁸⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 486-507.

¹⁸¹ CIA memo on the CPC, July 19, 1982,
<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83M00914R001200110031-7.pdf>.

¹⁸² No byline, "Former Soviet spy: We created Liberation Theology," Catholic News Agency, May 1, 2015,
<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/31919/former-soviet-spy-we-created-liberation-theology#:~:text=The%20birth%20of%20Liberation%20Theology%20was%20the%20intent,Kirichenko%2C%20who%20coordinated%20the%20Communist%20Party%27s%20international%20policies.>

¹⁸³ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 179-185.

Brookings Institution, a moderately left-leaning, widely respected think tank in Washington.¹⁸⁴ The MSS apparently even targeted the RAND Corporation, which does contract research mainly for the U.S. Government as a Federally Funded Research and Development Center, much of which is classified.¹⁸⁵ The CCP and the Chinese government have created many seemingly independent research institutions and NGOs that have senior MSS officers on their boards of directors—dead giveaways about their de facto subordination to the CCP.¹⁸⁶

The veritable who's who of former senior political leaders who are now "dear friends" of the PRC is long indeed. Most, but not all, are from left-of-center political parties. Motives seem to be ideological, financial, and intellectual—to cultivate the strongly-held notion in the West, even among conservatives, that more Western engagement with China will help the PRC liberalize. Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush, who was once ambassador to China, remained a fan of China, but not of the CCP, after he retired from public life.¹⁸⁷ Former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke traveled more than 100 times to China after leaving office and is widely viewed as a hugely effective CCP agent of influence.¹⁸⁸ Journalist Jonathan Manthorpe has described in detail the very significant apparent Chinese penetration of the political leadership of Canada, which involves several former prime ministers and current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.¹⁸⁹ In the United Kingdom, the "48 Group Club" is a large group

¹⁸⁴ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 206-207.

¹⁸⁵ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 133-137.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁸⁷ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 228.

¹⁸⁸ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 152.

¹⁸⁹ Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing's Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* (Toronto: Cormorant, 2019). See also Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 45-50.

of prominent people from political, journalistic, and business backgrounds that lobbies on behalf of improved UK-China ties.¹⁹⁰ Similar groups exist in France, Italy, and Germany.¹⁹¹ And, no small number of observers believe that New Zealand has been very effectively influenced by China in politically significant ways.¹⁹² These recruits dwarf in number and significance the apparent, de facto recruitment by Russia of former German Chancellor Schröder.

The earnings of Western businessmen with access to Chinese markets have generated very influential agents of influence for China for non-ideological reasons. These “friends of China” especially include financial firms. In the United States, Goldman Sachs, BlackRock, Blackstone, and Morgan Stanley are prominent supporters of China.¹⁹³ J.P. Morgan Chase had a “Sons and Daughters” program designed to hire princelings—and princesslings—of the CCP’s elite, evidently to gain better access to Chinese markets. J.P. Morgan paid a \$264 million fine for “systemic bribery” of these people to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in 2016.¹⁹⁴ European banks also buy access to China by hiring princelings, and thereby also becoming de facto Chinese agents of influence.¹⁹⁵

Western universities have been especially vulnerable to Chinese influence operations. This Chinese push has been global in nature, seriously affecting universities in North America, Europe, and Australia. Indeed, Chinese influence

¹⁹⁰ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 60-67.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 67-82.

¹⁹² For example, Austin Gee and Robert G. Patman, “Small state or minor power? New Zealand’s Five Eyes membership, intelligence reforms, and Wellington’s response to China’s growing Pacific role,” *Intelligence and National Security* 36:1 (2021): 40-42; Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 46-47; Kurlantzick, *Beijing’s Global Media Offensive*, 177-178.

¹⁹³ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 100, 103-106, 110.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106-110.

operations aimed at scholars may be more intense and effective than on any other major group.¹⁹⁶ Hamilton and Ohlberg describe many academics as displaying “extraordinary naivety” about China, but their actions are easily explained.¹⁹⁷ Virtually all major Western universities are collectively leftist in political orientation and sympathetic to the CCP’s “liberal” facade. Professors and university administrators want to believe the CCP’s “peaceful rise” meme, displaying often severe cases of confirmation bias. And many are motivated transparently by money, which China dispenses with abandon in many ways. They are able easily to rationalize compromising principles of academic integrity and freedom of expression with actions that avoid offending China – like denying talks by the Dalai Lama on campuses. And, while generating cash by paying full tuition and promoting politically correct variants of demographic “diversity” on campus, students from China are especially welcome!

As with its policy toward journalists, the CCP makes clear that failure to toe its political lines means bans for visiting China via visa controls, potentially a career-killer for academic China specialists, and therefore a moral dilemma. And, the MSS appears to have placed “scholar-spies” at Stanford and Harvard Universities, at least, exploiting American universities’ normal quest for exchanges of faculty and researchers and their blatant quest for funding.¹⁹⁸ These efforts exploit scholars’ roles as influence-originators given the obvious sympathy that many hold for China. Hence, universities’ obvious collusion

¹⁹⁶ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 130; Kurlantzick, *Beijing’s Global Media Offensive*, 117-124.

¹⁹⁷ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 157-158; Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 199, 229; Diamond and Schell, *China’s Influence & American Interests*, 51-70.

¹⁹⁸ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 122.

with the CCP is not only naïve, it is mercenary and hypocritical, not to mention dangerous to Western interests.

The CCP exploits the openness of Western societies generally. By keeping much of its collection legal and shielding its influence operations by claiming they are protected expressions of free speech, the PRC avoids being held accountable for its real purpose—subversion. In this way, the legacy of Soviet spy activities is important. Western law enforcement agencies like the FBI are legally charged with, and used to, stopping Soviet theft of secrets protected by espionage and theft laws. But Western societies have been unable to find ways to address the threat posed by overt connections with Westerners and their voluntary passage of information, and even key strategic technologies, without compromising core liberal principles of free speech and freedom from unwarranted surveillance.

Media Operations

State-owned media have been key tools of all three regimes. The Soviets used Radio Moscow, press agencies like Tass and Novosti, publications such as the English-language *New Times*, and party and government journals such as *Pravda* and *Izvestia* to disseminate information and disinformation. Soviet bloc countries used their media similarly, in coordination with the Soviets. Most of these institutions also provided cover for KGB and satellite intelligence officers who conducted influence operations in the field. KGB officers using such cover provided funding and messages to sympathetic foreign journalists. The KGB even bought a few newspapers, especially in India, which they used to promote disinformation, some of which they expected would be picked up eventually by Western media—their primary targets. Service A provided fully written documents and talking points that friendly foreigners re-wrote into their own styles for local

publication. Funding included payments to authors, publishers, and bookstores that sold material congruent with Soviet interests.¹⁹⁹ In addition, Service A forged documents purporting to show nefarious activities and intentions of U.S. Government personnel and agencies, especially. These were designed mainly for consumption by journalists, who were relied upon to disseminate the disinformation as credible because it was reported by ostensibly reputable newspapers.

Russian print operations seem to be similar but lesser in magnitude and impact, but the Russians have moved to new venues. While the Soviets recruited and influenced individual journalists, sometimes giving tips, whole stories, and forgeries to print journalists, the Russians started an electronic “news” network known initially as Russia Today, later simply as RT, a television network that disseminates Russian versions of world events and was designed to compete with global news entities such as the BBC World, CNN, and Deutsche Welle.²⁰⁰ RT legally owns outlets in many countries globally, including in Western countries where the Soviets did not overtly own media. By one report, RT’s budget was \$70 million in 2005, \$80 million in 2008, \$380 million in 2011, and \$330 million in 2015.²⁰¹ In 2018, the U.S. intelligence community reported that RT’s budget was \$190 million per year.²⁰²

The Russian state also operates Sputnik, a news agency and radio broadcast operation started in 2014. It formerly was known as RIA Novosti, which dates to the Novosti news agency of Soviet days. Sputnik’s radio operation dates

¹⁹⁹ Gentry, “Belated Success,” 158.

²⁰⁰ Heidi Blake, *From Russia with Blood: The Kremlin’s Ruthless Assassination Program and Vladimir Putin’s Secret War on the West* (New York: Mulholland, 2019), 289; Belton, *Putin’s People*, 432.

²⁰¹ Van Herpen, “The Many Faces of the New Information Warfare,” 41.

²⁰² Intelligence Community Assessment, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, ICA 2017-010, January 6, 2017.

to Radio Moscow, started in 1929. RT reportedly helped fund Sputnik. Like RT, it has offices in major capitals globally, including in Washington D.C., and broadcasts in many languages. It is widely seen as a Kremlin propaganda outlet. The European Union banned the operations of both RT and Sputnik in EU member states after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

Kremlin allies own foreign newspapers. For example, former KGB officer Alexander Lebedev bought British newspapers, including the *London Evening Standard* newspaper, run by his son Evgeny, giving him opportunities to influence British readers; the *Evening Standard* supported former Prime Minister Boris Johnson politically.²⁰³ And oligarch Sergei Pugachev and his son Aleksandr bought the French newspaper *France-Soir*.²⁰⁴ Run by Aleksandr, the paper backs right-wing politicians.

Putin crony Yevgeny Prigozhin owns the Federal News Agency, which critics argue specializes in “fake news.”²⁰⁵ Prigozhin also owns the infamous Internet Research Agency (IRA), based in St. Petersburg, which conducted “troll” operations against the United States, starting in 2014, with the aim of using the 2016 presidential election campaign to sow dissension in the United States. The IRA called the effort Project Lakhta.²⁰⁶ The IRA was a small operation. Some 80 employees were given general themes to push on American social media websites such as Facebook. The operation’s monthly budget was 73 million rubles, or about \$1.25 million. It therefore seems to have been very cost-effective. In November 2022, Prigozhin

²⁰³ Harding, *Shadow State*, 65.

²⁰⁴ Van Herpen, “The Many Faces of the New Information Warfare,” 46.

²⁰⁵ Harding, *Shadow State*, 159-164.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 163-168.

admitted that he had tried to influence U.S. elections, was then doing so, and would continue to do so in the future.²⁰⁷

Prigozhin has been “influential” in other ways. His Wagner Group of Kremlin-allied “mercenaries” have played prominent roles in Russian military activities in Syria and parts of Africa in recent years, and in Ukraine since 2022. He also is a frequent public commentator on Russia’s “special military operation” in Ukraine and became involved in a very public dispute with Russia’s Defense Ministry in early 2023 over war policy.

Russia, like the Soviet Union, sometimes combines the fruits of intelligence collection with influence operations. For example, after hacking the Democratic National Committee and thereby the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign in 2016, the GRU shared stolen emails with Wikileaks, which disseminated them broadly. RT then further publicized the Wikileaks releases.²⁰⁸ Sputnik and bloggers spread the word further. In such ways, the Russians create multi-faceted influence operations designed to reach larger audiences and, presumably, to generate greater credibility by seeming to come from independent sources.

Western social media operations such as Twitter and Facebook offer opportunities for influencing foreign audiences cheaply and often anonymously. The Russian social media firm Telegram also provides opportunities for targeting both Russians and foreigners. But the early Soviet specialty of forgery seems to have become less useful, likely because forensic detection methods have improved and, probably more importantly, disinformation can be

²⁰⁷ No byline, “Russia’s Prigozhin admits interference in U.S. elections,” *Reuters*, November 7, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/russias-prigozhin-admits-interfering-us-elections-2022-11-07/>.

²⁰⁸ Intelligence Community Assessment, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, 3.

delivered more reliably, inexpensively, and faster by other means to larger numbers of people.

China does most of the things both the USSR did and Russia does, only more so.²⁰⁹ The CCP's official mouthpiece is *People's Daily*—delivered online in Chinese, English, Japanese, French, Spanish, and Russian—which is a source of news and ideological orthodoxy. The China Media Group, also known as the Voice of China, was created in 2018 from previously independent radio and television operations. It broadcasts in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian, and has production offices in London, Nairobi, and Washington.²¹⁰ While nominally a state-run operation, the Voice of China apparently takes orders from the CCP's Propaganda Department. Xinhua, or the New China News Agency has 180 bureaus globally, including a major complex in New York City.²¹¹ In 2009, China reportedly spent \$6.6 billion on global media operations.²¹² Journalists are especially well-suited to be both intelligence collectors and agents of influence, as the Soviets knew well and demonstrated over many decades. And, like the Soviets and Russians—but to a much greater extent—the Chinese have purchased print and electronic media in many countries around the world, producing news in both local languages and in Chinese for the Chinese diaspora. The latter provide de facto instructions to ethnic Chinese about proper actions and political views as well as messaging themes to present to their national hosts. Much of this “reporting” is in fact disinformation, just like the Soviets and Russians produce.²¹³ And, of course, newspapers endorse political candidates, sometimes generating appreciable political effects.

²⁰⁹ Diamond and Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests*, 99-122.

²¹⁰ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 167.

²¹¹ Diamond and Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests*, 99.

²¹² Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 162.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 172-174.

Given its largely overt nature, Pillsbury suggests the Chinese effort to control the content of foreign media reporting has four elements:

1. “Direct action” to obstruct, prevent, or punish journalists who publicize unfavorable information, especially about the “five poisons” – Uighurs, Tibetans, Taiwanese, democracy advocates, and members of Falun Gong. These may be threatening in nature.
2. “Carrots and sticks” designed to induce self-censorship. Chief among the inducements is access (or not) to CCP and other Chinese leaders, often via visa controls and appointment scheduling. Politically astute editorial self-censorship about sensitive issues – what to cover and how to assess such issues – helps keep media in good graces with the CCP.²¹⁴ For example, Bloomberg has been assessed to self-censor by avoiding all criticism of Xi Jinping and the CCP.²¹⁵ Over the years, the CCP built a powerful propaganda network that vigorously punishes employers of journalists who step out of line even as individuals.²¹⁶
3. Indirect pressure via proxies such as advertisers. Firms are to withhold advertising from offending media or risk loss of valuable access to Chinese markets or supply chains.
4. Cyberattacks and physical assaults on offending persons and organizations. Victims have included the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and Twitter.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Diamond and Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests*, 99-122.

²¹⁵ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 181.

²¹⁶ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 112.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 112, 129-130.

China clearly also conducts operations of the sort Russia does in foreign countries' social media but usually without generating the kinds of negative reactions that Russian social media operations have caused in recent years. The "Great Firewall" designed to shield Chinese citizens from ideological contamination by foreigners' Internet activities also limits the CCP's ability to influence foreigners through domestic media such as Weibo, a Twitter-like platform that has more users than Twitter. But authorized hackers operate beyond the Great Firewall, using social media to influence global audiences.²¹⁸

Influencing Elections

All three countries try to influence foreign elections. The Soviets mainly focused on the United States. Russia concentrates on NATO and European Union countries. The Chinese effort is global in approach. They have approached election interference in different ways and with different goals.

The Soviets never supported a Republican, consistent with their goal of turning the United States into a communist state. The Comintern told the CPUSA to support U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt in 1936. Later, CPSU leaders directed the KGB to support most Democratic presidential candidates, whose policies apparently were deemed more conducive to Soviet interests than those of Republicans, despite occasionally productive working relationships such as that with President Richard Nixon in the détente era of the early 1970s.²¹⁹ At the beginning of the USSR's long active measures campaign against the United States, at Khrushchev's direction, the Soviet ambassador in Washington in January 1960 offered to help Democrat Adlai

²¹⁸ Ibid., 180.

²¹⁹ Gentry, "Belated Success," 162.

Stevenson, who had lost elections in 1952 and 1956 running on platforms the Soviets liked, mount another campaign.²²⁰ Stevenson declined the offer and told James Reston, Washington bureau chief of the *New York Times*, about the meeting.²²¹ Reston sat on the story for months, more de facto *New York Times* support for the Soviets. KGB records indicate that Khrushchev then told the KGB's residency in Washington to develop diplomatic, propaganda, or other ways to help Senator John Kennedy's presidential campaign.²²² During the 1964 campaign, Czechoslovakia's intelligence service printed thousands of pamphlets depicting Republican candidate Barry Goldwater as racist and disseminated them in the United States, Africa, and Asia.²²³ In 1968, the Kremlin offered to subsidize financially the campaign of Democrat Hubert Humphrey, to which Humphrey's campaign did not respond.²²⁴ In 1972, North Vietnam worked to elect Democrat George McGovern, who promised to promptly withdraw American troops from Vietnam; Soviet active measures evidently supported

²²⁰ Rid, *Active Measures*, 407-408; Stephen McCombie, Allon J. Uhlmann, and Sarah Morrison, "The US 2016 presidential election & Russia's troll farms," *Intelligence and National Security* 35:1 (2020): 96, 101-108, 315; David Shimer, *Rigged: America, Russia, and One Hundred Years of Covert Electoral Interference* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 86-88; Bruce W. Dearstyne, "The Russians Tried Once Before to Meddle in a U.S. Presidential Election," December 29, 2016, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/164769>.

²²¹ Jason Daley, "How Adlai Stevenson Stopped Russian Interference in the 1960 Election," *Smithsonian*, January 4, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-adlai-stevenson-stopped-russian-interference-1960-election-180961681/>.

²²² Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 180.

²²³ John Barron, *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Agents* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1974), 143-144.

²²⁴ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, 180, 239.

Hanoi's unsuccessful efforts to defeat President Nixon.²²⁵ Moscow appears to have done little in 1976 and 1980, disliking Democrat Jimmy Carter's criticism of the Soviet human rights record. But in 1983, the CPSU Politburo decreed that the primary mission of Service A and KGB residencies in the United States was to develop ways to defeat President Ronald Reagan's 1984 re-election bid.²²⁶ The CPUSA, which by many accounts remained a Stalinist party after the collapse of the USSR, reportedly was delighted by the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States in 2008 and supported Joe Biden in 2020.²²⁷

With the possible exception of the 1960 campaign, none of these efforts came close to altering an electoral outcome, but they repeated themes that Russia still uses: prominent Americans and American society in general are aggressively imperialistic, racist, and are the source of most of the world's ills. The Soviets also backed left-of-center Social Democrats in Germany.

In contrast, Russia under Putin, no longer communist but as anti-American as the CPSU, worked to sow deep divisions in the United States by supporting and attacking both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in 2016. The point was to make the election result look less credible – and its winner a less legitimate president. Because they initially expected Clinton to win, they sought to damage the credibility of her expected victory. But they also attacked Trump, evidently feeding salacious material about him that found its way into the “Steele Dossier” – a collection of unsubstantiated stories assembled by former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele, who has publicly

²²⁵ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 264-268, 271.

²²⁶ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 243, 589-590.

²²⁷ Daniel Rosenberg, "From Crisis to Split: The Communist Party USA, 1989-1991," *American Communist History* 39 (2019): 54.

acknowledged that he despised Trump. The Clinton campaign paid Steele for this “opposition research.” Despite the surprise election result, Russian efforts paid off nicely when Clinton, despite little evidence, claimed that she lost only because Russia supported Trump, fragmenting the already polarized American citizenry still more.

Russia also supported the pro-Brexit position in 2016, possibly by funding the “Leave” campaign and perhaps influencing the referendum’s result – another of its anti-EU operations. Russia meddled in the French presidential election in 2017 without apparent consequence, supported Scottish independence, and supported the electoral campaigns of far-right political parties in Germany, Hungary, and Italy that dislike and distrust the European Union.²²⁸ As in the United States, such efforts were designed to sow domestic dissension in target states and/or damage Western unity, not win friends for Russia.

China, like Russia, has been working to influence U.S. elections in recent years and has played many angles, but mainly aims to win friends the CCP can derive benefits from, or generally co-opt, in the future. This goal is markedly different than both the Soviet and Russian approaches. PLA intelligence was caught providing illegal contributions to President Bill Clinton’s reelection campaign in 1996, generating unwelcome publicity amid a scandal known as “Chinagate,” which led to some convictions in American courts and deemphasis of influence operations run by the PLA.²²⁹ The MSS generally, in recent years, has been more sophisticated and has conducted mostly legal political influence operations through financial and media support for candidates they think can help them both immediately and in the future. For example, in 1990 MSS double agent Katrina Leung and her

²²⁸ Harding, *Shadow State*, 193, 195.

²²⁹ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 34, 46, 140.

handler discussed ways to help Republican candidates in California.²³⁰ The Chinese, like the Soviets at times in the 1930s, were willing to support promising young candidates for even fairly junior offices if they thought the candidates had the potential to move into more senior positions later.²³¹

Some ethnic Chinese with clear continuing links to the PRC have been blatant in trying to influence Australian elections.²³² They contributed significantly to Labor candidates in the 2017 parliamentary elections, sometimes generating controversy.²³³ Recent immigrants from China also have stood for parliament in Australia and New Zealand. Because the CCP wants to increase its influence generally, it backed many varieties of candidates and voters, a much more politically balanced perspective than either the Soviets or Russians display.

Diasporas as Agents of Influence

Countries have major advantages if they can rely, voluntarily or via coercion, on ethnic diasporas to assist them. Israel's leaders have such advantages, for example, when they call on the global Jewish diaspora to support Israel financially and politically. The young USSR was able to count on left-leaning Jewish emigres from the pogroms of Czarist Russia to become communist party activists in the 1920s and 1930s in Western Europe and North America. Soviet emigres included anti-Soviet Jews in the 1970s and 1980s, but few Slavs were allowed to leave during the Cold War. The Soviets used the estimated 3,000 intelligence personnel Cuba infiltrated into the United States among the

²³⁰ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 52.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²³² Kurlantzick, *Beijing's Global Media Offensive*, 124-132.

²³³ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 53-54.

periodic migrations of persons fleeing Castro's Cuba.²³⁴ In 1970, the DGI established an "Illegals Center" to train people it inserted into refugee flows into the United States in espionage and subversion skills.²³⁵ The Soviets also benefited from East German intelligence officers who posed as refugees to West Germany, but these people were few in number and the Soviets evidently wanted them to focus mainly on espionage. One such agent who managed to infiltrate the highest levels of the West German government was Günter Guillaume, who became a trusted aide to Chancellor Willy Brandt and thereby an agent of influence. Discovery of his espionage activities in 1973 generated much negative publicity and forced the resignation of Brandt, who later lamented, "In hindsight, I accepted advice that I certainly should not have accepted."²³⁶

Russian intelligence uses the growing but still small Russian Slavic diaspora, which expanded after the demise of the Soviet Union. While appealing to such persons, the Russians are not nearly as active, or successful, as China has been with its much larger diaspora.²³⁷ And like China, the USSR, and Cuba, Russia uses émigré flows to hide illegal intelligence operatives, many of whom may only reach senior and thus valuable positions as both collectors and agents of influence after many years.

In contrast, some 50 million to 60 million persons of Chinese extraction live outside the PRC.²³⁸ As noted, CCP personnel believe these people owe allegiance to the CCP as the legitimate ruler of China, and they have found many ways to use this diaspora as both intelligence collectors and as agents of influence. While China once hoped that more

²³⁴ Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation*, 164-167.

²³⁵ Barron, *KGB*, 152.

²³⁶ Willy Brandt, *Begegnungen und Einsichten: Die Jahre 1960-1975* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1976), 586.

²³⁷ Belton, *Putin's People*, 457.

²³⁸ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 15.

of the students it sent abroad would return home, it now seems to be able to exploit many of the fruits of their education from a distance while also using some as agents of influence abroad. They are business people, academics, students, and people in many other walks of life. Some of them are politically active in their new countries. They own newspapers. The MSS supports bookstores run by ethnic Chinese in America that sell publications favorable to the PRC.²³⁹ Many apparently take instructions from Chinese embassies and consulates about politically sensitive issues and can be mobilized to demonstrate against policies and people the CCP does not like, including recalcitrant ethnic Chinese.

In 2015, Xi Jinping pointedly identified Chinese students studying abroad as valuable agents of influence.²⁴⁰ While China had sent students abroad for many years to learn new skills, students studying abroad in the 21st century are products of a domestic educational system, which was created in 1991 under the label “Patriotic Education Campaign” and which features strong doses of revisionist history and ideological orthodoxy; it is a legacy of the trauma of the large-scale student unrest that culminated with the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989.²⁴¹ The party soon thereafter decided to make sure that students receive proper indoctrination early.²⁴² Although the indoctrination primarily serves domestic purposes, it seeks to fortify students studying abroad who interact with students from host countries, quietly convey CCP messages, and demonstrate when embassies and consulates call upon them to rally against evils such as visits to campus by Taiwanese officials. They lobby weak-kneed university

²³⁹ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 55.

²⁴⁰ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 119.

²⁴¹ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 9-11, 38; Kurlantzick, *Beijing's Global Media Offensive*, 92.

²⁴² Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 121.

administrators to keep undesirables off campus, particularly representatives of the “five poisons.” And they report background information on faculty members and fellow students—people who may have influential positions in the future and who might have vulnerabilities that make them susceptible to recruitment pitches by espionage units or influence themes.²⁴³

In an imaginative move, facilitated by its wealth and the receptivity it enjoyed in the West, beginning in 2004 the PRC established “Confucius Institutes” at over 500 universities globally. The institutes teach Chinese language and culture, but they also dispense revisionist history of the PRC and its goals to Westerners, and they are sites of espionage. The Institutes suggest that Confucius is central to Chinese culture when in fact the CCP is trying to radically change that culture internally; the party is an orthodox, Leninist communist party—a supposed vanguard of the people.²⁴⁴

There were, at one point, well over 100 Confucius Institutes in the United States, some 30 in the United Kingdom, 13 in Canada, and others elsewhere. But the nature of the Confucius Institutes as blatant influence mechanisms and instruments of spying has led to many closures at American universities, largely as a result of publicity produced by the National Association of Scholars, a group that advocates traditional principles of open-minded scholarship and pedagogy.²⁴⁵ But the program continues in the United States at lower levels and elsewhere. Some of the institutes have tried to survive by rebranding

²⁴³ John Poreba, “Neutralizing China’s Student-Spy Network,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 25:2 (2012): 260-291; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 233-234.

²⁴⁴ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 123-126.

²⁴⁵ See, for example, Rachelle Peterson, Ian Oxnevad, and Flora Yan, “After Confucius Institutes,” June 15, 2022, <https://www.nas.org/reports/after-confucius-institutes/full-report>.

themselves. The Chinese similarly fund “Confucius Classrooms,” which are smaller in scale but are similarly focused institutions located in foreign high schools.²⁴⁶ The PRC also has given money to establish other varieties of institutes and programs at foreign universities including, for example, \$10 million to Georgetown University for an Initiative for China-U.S. Dialogue on Global Issues.²⁴⁷

The issue of Chinese funding of American universities became more politically salient in the United States when Republicans, mainly but not exclusively, expressed concerns that some of the substantial contributions to the University of Pennsylvania by Chinese entities may have gone to the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, where now-President Joe Biden ostensibly worked in 2018-2019. The concern initially was that the gifts involved a form of bribe. In 2023, concerns mounted in the aftermath of President Biden’s classified documents scandal, which included classified documents found at his Penn Biden Center office. The University of Pennsylvania reportedly received \$54.6 million from Chinese sources between 2014 and June 2019, including \$23.1 million in anonymous gifts from 2016.²⁴⁸ It remains unclear just how much Chinese money eventually went to the Center and what influence, if any, the money bought.

The Belt and Road Initiative

In an imaginative blending of fostering Chinese material interests and exploiting foreign vulnerabilities of many sorts—especially desires for political support and

²⁴⁶ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 219-220.

²⁴⁷ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 62.

²⁴⁸ Isabel Vincent and Melissa Klein, “\$54M in Chinese gifts donated to UPenn, home of Biden Center,” *New York Post*, April 9, 2022, <https://nypost.com/2022/04/09/54m-in-chinese-gifts-donated-to-upenn-home-of-biden-center/>.

financing— Xi Jinping announced in 2013 China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, which provides massive Chinese investment in infrastructure to help better link China to the rest of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.²⁴⁹ It is an extremely ambitious program that mainly provides loans to other countries to develop infrastructure such as ports, communications, mines, and even security systems in their own countries.²⁵⁰ As of 2021, some 140 countries had signed memoranda to join the initiative.²⁵¹ While it helps other countries with their development programs, it also has a wide range of implications that are useful for Chinese trade, military, and political ambitions while also giving business to major Chinese firms such as Huawei and reshaping the world order in ways conducive to broader CCP strategic ambitions. In some countries, the initiative bought or built infrastructure that Chinese firms own.

While the initiative evidently remains broadly popular in poorer countries, it has drawn increased criticism in Europe and some other places over loan terms and the strategic implications of Chinese investments.²⁵² Some countries have fallen into a “debt trap” in which they forfeited critical infrastructure when they could not repay loans; Chinese actions in such cases sometimes have been perceived as heavy-handed.²⁵³ Both positive and negative aspects of the initiative naturally also have implications in the realm of influence operations. Xi’s more aggressive military and diplomatic actions in recent years are heightening skepticism of the initiative in some quarters, but it remains a massive and generally successful effort. Neither the Soviets nor the Russians have done anything

²⁴⁹ Elizabeth C. Economy, *The World According to China* (Cambridge UK: Polity: 2022), 92-95; Shirk, *Overreach*, 227-232.

²⁵⁰ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 3-4.

²⁵¹ Shirk, *Overreach*, 228.

²⁵² Economy, *The World According to China*, 120-121.

²⁵³ Shirk, *Overreach*, 231-232.

nearly so ambitious and costly. The Soviets generally exploited rather gracelessly their East European “allies.”

Use of Violence

Violence in various forms has played different roles in the three countries’ influence operations. The Soviet Union employed lethal force against enemies frequently in its early years, especially against émigré royalist groups and Trotsky and his supporters. While the well-known violence presumably had some deterrent effects, given Stalin’s temperament, these killings were arguably combat activities more than influence operations. Soviet intelligence services always willingly used violence against defectors – kidnappings leading to brief “trials” and then swift executions or assassinations in the field. The latter, especially, clearly warned serving officers about the consequences of defection and, hence, served as deterrents. In its last decades, however, the KGB’s use of force seems to have diminished somewhat, and Mikhail Gorbachev, the last CPSU general secretary (1985-1991), reportedly ordered the KGB to halt assassinations.

Russian influence operations also include violence in the form of assassinations evidently designed mainly to curb anti-Putin activism. A steadily growing number of “oligarchs” who broke with Putin, and even allied businessmen and their family members, have died under mysterious circumstances in recent years; these deaths seem to be growing even faster after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In this respect, Russian activities resemble those the Soviets employed against dissidents in the 1920s and 1930s. But some recent Russian assassination attempts have been unusual in that they used sophisticated poisons publicly known to be possessed only by the Russian Federation. For example, an FSB team in 2006 poisoned dissident FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko with highly radioactive polonium-

210, leading to his death after three weeks of agony.²⁵⁴ And, in 2018, a GRU team poisoned GRU defector Sergei Skripal with Novichok, a high-grade military nerve agent.²⁵⁵ Skripal barely survived. These “covert” actions were not very covert, evidently purposefully, presumably to again send messages to current and former Russian and Soviet intelligence officers as well as to intimidate countries that harbor defectors. Both attacks occurred in the United Kingdom. Other targets have been Chechen rebels resident abroad and probably internal dissidents such as journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered in Moscow in 2006.

Putin uses both the FSB and GRU to kill his enemies. The GRU is said to have established unit 29155 as its dedicated assassination, subversion, and sabotage unit in around 2009 or 2010.²⁵⁶ It reportedly has about 20 operators and roughly 200 support staff and is based in eastern Moscow. This unit attacked Skripal and many others in recent years.²⁵⁷ The FSB’s hit squad is known as URPO.²⁵⁸ While the killings may intimidate some potential enemies, such publicity cannot but have significant influence costs, offsetting at least part of the intimidation value Putin evidently especially appreciates.

Abroad, China uses lower levels of violence more selectively and less lethally, primarily against partisans of the five “poisons,” or domestic enemy groups that also operate externally and are perceived to be ideological threats.²⁵⁹ The violence mainly involves tussles at

²⁵⁴ Blake, *From Russia with Blood*, 15-16, 99, 184, 195.

²⁵⁵ Harding, *Shadow State*, 143; Blake, *From Russia with Blood*, 6-8, 304.

²⁵⁶ Mark Galeotti, *Putin’s Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine* (Oxford UK: Osprey, 2022), 314.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 314-315.

²⁵⁸ Blake, *From Russia with Blood*, 13-14, 18, 54-57, 75, 93, 105.

²⁵⁹ Joske, *Spies and Lies*, 191; Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 183-184.

demonstrations, vandalism and break-ins at homes of perceived offenders, cyber intrusions, minor street violence, and death threats, but not usually assassinations. These targets resemble the targets of the early Soviet years in the sense that they mainly focus on émigré groups. The Chinese even have at least 54 “overseas police service stations” in other countries, including the United States, Canada, and several European countries, that allegedly help Chinese citizens but undoubtedly also monitor domestic enemies operating abroad.²⁶⁰ They were established without coordination with local governments. Since the mid-2010s, China has also been a major supplier of drug precursor chemicals to Mexican drug cartels, which convert them into lethal fentanyl, much of which ends up in the United States. The CCP thereby has knowingly, if indirectly, participated in the deaths of many thousands of Americans and other Westerners. This variety of influence operation helps destabilize target countries and generates substantial income.²⁶¹ At home, the CCP is even more ruthless; domestic security forces normally take care of “problems” within China quietly. Like Soviet and Russian assassinations abroad, this violence evidently is designed in substantial part to have deterrent effects.

²⁶⁰ Masood Farivar, “FBI Investigating Chinese ‘Police Station’ in New York City,” *VOA*, November 18, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/fbi-investigating-chinese-police-station-in-new-york/6839791.html>.

²⁶¹ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Financial Services, “Hearing: Follow the Money: The CCP’s Business Model Fueling the Fentanyl Crisis,” March 23, 2023, <https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=115542>.

Measuring Success

Leaders of all three countries clearly believe they did achieve, or are achieving, considerable success. They surely do not throw massive resources into programs they do not believe are working. But we know little about indicators of success they identified and how they measure success. The Soviets knew some of their active measures campaigns would fail, but they expected the preponderance of individual efforts and the program in total to be successful eventually. KGB measures of effectiveness included numbers of disinformation stories published outside of the Soviet bloc and the amount of discussion generated, including the political tone of such discussion.²⁶² The KGB and its East German partners assessed their multi-year campaigns to support anti-NATO “peace” groups in Western Europe as having made “important contributions for the deepening and widening of the peace movement” in the West.²⁶³ The intelligence services sometimes knew how they infiltrated and influenced targeted groups, and how the perceptions they managed supported Soviet interests. The Soviets also could rely, in some cases, on Western polling data, such as those on Americans’ beliefs about the people ultimately responsible for President John Kennedy’s assassination—a subject the Soviets clearly influenced with considerable success.²⁶⁴ Elsewhere, success could be measured more indirectly, such as assessments of motives for votes in favor of Soviet positions at the United Nations.²⁶⁵

The effort clearly did not succeed for the Soviets in the sense that the USSR collapsed in 1991, not the United States.

²⁶² Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation*, 56.

²⁶³ Rid, *Active Measures*, 284, 286.

²⁶⁴ Gentry, “Belated Success,” 161-162.

²⁶⁵ Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation*, 57.

But the program Khrushchev started in the late 1950s developed self-sustaining momentum, and the “disintegration” the KGB hoped to achieve seems to be emerging in 2023. Hence, this effort may rightly be called a prospective, “belated success.”²⁶⁶

There are no obvious formal, rigorous Russian efforts to measure the performance of their influence operations, but Russian Chekists surely remember KGB methods and performance standards. More modern possibilities include downloads and “likes” of social media postings, but the political significance of such measures is questionable. Indeed, some of these measures are more akin to summations of resource inputs than measures of political output. While the Russians are widely seen to have been able to meddle in Western elections they, like the Soviets, do not seem to have been able to determine major Western electoral outcomes, with the UK’s Brexit vote of 2016 a possible exception to this generalization. Putin seems not to have appreciated, or simply has been unwilling to wait, the length of time the Soviet active measures program needed to achieve its strategic political success. Putin’s overt belligerence surely has generated negative reactions abroad. The incursion into Ukraine in 2014, and even more so the full-scale invasion of February 2022, alienated key targets, probably destroying most, if not all, of the successes of earlier influence campaigns.

Many in the West had begun to respond tangibly to Russian influence operations before February 2022. For example, in 2015 NATO developed a strategy to respond to Russian “hybrid warfare” which, as noted, contains information elements. In January 2022, Sweden created its Psychological Defence Agency, which has the dual mission of monitoring Russian influence operations aimed at Sweden and informing and educating Swedes about

²⁶⁶ Gentry, “Belated Success.”

Russian activities in an effort to sensitize citizens and make them less vulnerable to influence campaigns. And, in February 2022, the United Kingdom established a “Government Information Cell” which was designed to counter Russian narratives and expose Russian fabrications; it was designed especially in the context of an anticipated Russian war against Ukraine.²⁶⁷ Hence, Russia’s influence activities seem not to have helped Putin achieve his strategic goals, at least not by early 2023.

In contrast, while the CCP reportedly has rigorous measures of effectiveness for its influence operations, its measures and actual measurements unsurprisingly are closely held. But it must be happy with the assessment by Clive Hamilton of the impact of Chinese influence operations on Australia:

Here in Australia we walk on eggshells, terrified of doing anything to upset China, allowing ourselves to be bullied by the politics of denunciation, and sacrificing our self-respect as a result.²⁶⁸

While money and sympathy for fellow leftists surely play significant parts in the success of China’s “peaceful rise” meme, it could not have succeeded without the strong, enduring belief throughout the West that Chinese liberalization is nearly at hand and that only a bit more “engagement” is all that is necessary to complete the liberalization. It reflects massive misjudgment and frequently a stubborn ideology-driven resistance to evidence that only began to crumble when, in Xi Jinping’s second term as party leader, he and CCP officials became much more vocal about the inevitability of China’s rise against a declining West, blatantly aggressive military

²⁶⁷ Huw Dylan and Thomas J. Maguire, “Secret Intelligence and Public Diplomacy in the Ukraine War,” *Survival* 64:4 (2022): 55.

²⁶⁸ Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, 199.

moves in the South China Sea, and more abuses of Uighurs and other Chinese minorities. Michael Pillsbury describes at length how he himself only very slowly recognized the CCP's real goals, why he persisted for so long in being a "panda hugger," and the many factors that led him finally to change his mind in 2013.²⁶⁹ Indeed, his book is largely a description of that process.

Despite the damage Xi has done to their positions, some "panda huggers" evidently remain confident in the CCP and consider most of the analysts cited in this paper to be throwbacks to the "Red Scare" days of the 1950s in the United States, when anti-communists allegedly made up stories about a wholly imaginary Soviet threat. In fact, we know from defectors in the 1930s and 1940s, decrypts of nearly 3,000 Soviet intelligence communications of the 1940s by the Venona signals intelligence program, and study of the KGB files that the Russian government opened briefly in the early 1990s, that such concerns (although not the more sensational charges of Senator Joseph McCarthy) were wholly justified. In this respect, the CCP has an abundant stock of its own version of Lenin's "useful idiots" or, better put by Stalin, "naïve dupes."²⁷⁰ The continued refusal of many American liberals to accept such well-established facts suggests that similar *intellectual* conservatism is likely to continue to characterize the Western political Left concerning China. These seem likely to especially affect persons for whom obsequious praise of the CCP is needed to maintain funding and access to Chinese officials. A prominent professor seemingly of the latter sort once was Susan Shirk of the University of California, San Diego, who was a Clinton Administration official.²⁷¹ But by 2022, even Shirk had become much more

²⁶⁹ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 13, 85.

²⁷⁰ Hamilton and Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*, 86.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8; Diamond and Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests*, 217.

skeptical of the benevolence of the intentions of Xi's China.²⁷²

As a former intelligence officer and senior official in several American administrations, Pillsbury argues that many senior American officials and even intelligence officers were fooled by China's "peaceful rise" rhetoric until well into the 21st century.²⁷³ He cites several examples over the years in which CIA analysts refused, like himself for many years, to see that Chinese actions belied their rhetoric. For example, he claims that senior CIA officials told the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which monitored open source information globally for many years, not to translate and publish extreme, nationalist pronouncements by Chinese officials or academics.²⁷⁴ If true, the latter would be a rare form of the politicization of intelligence before 2016.²⁷⁵ In any case, Pillsbury asserts plausibly that U.S. intelligence officers, including himself, were slow learners. That seems to have finally changed, as CIA directors Gina Haspel (2018-2021) and William Burns (2021-present) have publicly called China the CIA's most pressing intelligence challenge.

Comparing the Three Approaches

The three countries have run very large influence programs, used different techniques, and have had varying degrees of success. Of the three, Russia's appears to be weakest.²⁷⁶ The Soviet effort against the United States is still unfolding more

²⁷² Shirk, *Overreach*.

²⁷³ Pillsbury, *Hundred-Year Marathon*, 162-163, 165.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 85, 208-209.

²⁷⁵ John A. Gentry, *Neutering the CIA: Why US Intelligence versus Trump Has Long-Term Consequences* (Estes Park, CO: Armin Lear, 2023).

²⁷⁶ Kevin P. Riehle, "Winners and losers in Russia's information war," *Intelligence and National Security* 36:7 (2021): 1057-1064.

than three decades after the collapse of the USSR and may yet be very successful. China appears to have been most strategically successful to date and to have the greatest global promise.

The time horizons of influence campaigns make a big difference. The Soviet effort, though not useful to the Soviet Union, appears near to achieving its goal of “disintegrating” the United States over six decades after it began; talk of civil war in the United States is now common. The Soviets’ “long march through the institutions,” led to self-sustaining processes of Marxian indoctrination of large numbers of people, especially by universities and the “liberal” press. While surely some independent American characteristics are at work, a former KGB active measures specialist could reasonably be proud in 2023 that his work appears to be nearing success.²⁷⁷ Many Westerners do not realize how extensively they have been indoctrinated. In contrast, Putin’s stronger emphasis on active measures, evidently begun in 2014, apparently had some initial success but has been crushed by the negative publicity derived from his blatant aggression against Ukraine in 2022. And the CCP’s influence campaign, enormously effective in the “hide and bide” years, is under much greater strain as President Xi makes China’s now more aggressive, “sharp” program and seemingly shorter-term ambitions tangibly clear. Indeed, it is now often seen as heavy-handed and unattractive.²⁷⁸ But China retains much intellectual support in the West, a legacy of ideology and the enduring fantasy that China is on the verge of liberalizing, lucrative financial incentives, effective propaganda, and powerful tools of non-violent coercion against scholars and journalists, especially.

The three countries target people and groups differently. While each has long-term goals of influencing

²⁷⁷ Gentry, “Belated Success.”

²⁷⁸ Shirk, *Overreach*, 232-236.

strategically important policies, the focus of efforts differs dramatically along the axis of trying to win friends or to damage enemies. The Soviets had a relatively balanced program; they needed friends in order to defeat their enemies, and used information to achieve each goal. Russia has been much more aggressive on sowing dissension in targets, a form of belligerence. The Chinese, in contrast, mainly aim to win friends, reserving negative influence operations mainly for the “five poisons” and people who the CCP believes cannot be persuaded of the virtues of its ambitions. For years, there was little need to attack the latter, who were few in number and politically inconsequential. Their “friends” would help China achieve global dominance.

Some have argued that the Chinese approach to espionage is unique and different from other states’ approaches to intelligence. The “thousand grains of sand” approach has been said to be the dominant Chinese approach. Peter Mattis prominently has taken exception to this view, arguing that the Chinese employ methods of espionage similar to those of other countries.²⁷⁹ But the Chinese, in fact, do conduct some intelligence activities in uniquely Chinese ways, as this study shows. This study also documents that the Chinese use some of the influence techniques of the Soviets and Russians while doing other things that are uniquely Chinese in nature and magnitude.

Ideology-driven international sentiments matter. The Soviets enjoyed massive success with their early overt information operations, buoyed by tight security in the Soviet Union, by convincing much of the world that Soviet communism was wonderful and that they were leaders in the global anti-fascist movement. That sympathy largely evaporated in 1956 after Khrushchev’s revelations and the

²⁷⁹ Peter L. Mattis, “Assessing Western Perspectives on Chinese Intelligence,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 25:4 (2012): 678-699.

invasion of Hungary. Thereafter, they had to rely on disinformation spread mostly by KGB officers and their hard leftist allies abroad. They enjoyed eventual success, but the process was slower. Russia has largely destroyed the sympathy it once had due to its aggression against Ukraine, assassinations, and crude election interventions. China was even more successful than the early Soviets were when their “hide and bide” strategy helped enable the “peaceful rise” of the USSR. Xi recently has damaged his image by, like Putin, regressing to obvious, crude aggression.

These influence campaigns continue to affect the world. While Russian efforts have already stimulated a substantial backlash, the Soviet campaign against the United States is still unfolding.²⁸⁰ The Chinese effort is massive, sophisticated, and ongoing. It poses a major, continuing threat to the liberal, Western way of life that is only slowly being recognized; responses to date have been modest and inadequate. That needs to change.

Countering Influence Operations

The first step in countering malign foreign influence operations is recognition of the problem, a process now underway that this paper hopefully will accelerate, at least modestly. But more direct action is necessary. Sweden’s Psychological Defence Agency offers a model for an excellent first step for countries sufficiently coherent that citizens trust their government to do the right thing for them. Not all people are so fortunate. Soviet and Russian information operations remain potent influences on the United States and much of the world. But the CCP’s influence campaign is more massively global in scope and potential impact. At some point the Chinese will have to be confronted, a major step that should be the result of much

²⁸⁰ Gentry, “Belated Success.”

internal government and international deliberation and planning. The confrontation is likely to be difficult even if war is avoided, but it will be less bad than the alternative of letting the Chinese win their hundred-year marathon. Other steps that make much sense are:

- Exposing adversaries' influence operations – one of the Swedish agency's tasks – thereby enabling better understanding of the threat and better enabling the development of defensive and counter measures.
- Educating electorates about the techniques and aims of malign foreign influence operations.
- Prohibiting institutions like the Confucius Institutes that clearly are not what they claim to be.
- Strengthening foreign investment laws to prohibit known information manipulators from owning domestic media.
- Drastically tightening campaign financing laws to prohibit contributions by all foreigners.
- Improving public communications, or public diplomacy, capabilities. This has been a long-time U.S. weakness, and other democracies have also had a hard time developing coherent, consistent national messages.
- Building capacities to directly attack adversary information operations and go on the offensive where useful. NATO countries surprisingly effectively attacked Russian information operations at the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine – a model that may provide useful lessons more generally.
- Supporting independent journalists in adversary countries, where they exist, to provide domestic alternatives to influence themes. While this is not

likely to be possible in China, it may well be effective in third countries against the Chinese diaspora the CCP has largely, but not completely, harnessed to its will.

These are first steps.²⁸¹ Western states have a long way to go to both defend themselves and to make the predatory influence operations of the Soviet Union, Russia, and China transparent globally.

²⁸¹ For other ideas, see Van Herpen, "The Many Faces of the New Information Warfare," 55-56; Dodge, "Russia's Influence Operations in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania," 127-133; Thayer, "The PRC's New Strategic Narrative as Political Warfare," 21-29.

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