

**The Internet Research Agency  
thanks you for your support**



Russian Active  
Measures in the 2016  
U.S. Election

Photo: PBS

# **What you need to know before we start**

**The following presentation is based on analysis of many reliable and credible sources**

- U.S. Government documents (all UNCLASSIFIED)
- Documented analysis by academics, think tanks, independent researchers
- Multiple U.S., European, and Russian media sources
- References are included on most slides
- A reference list is available on request

**The presentation is told from a Russian point of view**

- This part is based on “informed speculation”
- Translation: A lot of guesswork

# April 2016

# The Kremlin

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*Our Plan for the U.S. Presidential Election*

## Speakers:

- Sergei Ivanov, Chief of Staff to President Putin
- “Tom”

# Operation Lakhta

СОВЕРШЕННО  
СЕКРЕТНО

## Computer Network Operations

- Use military and security agency hackers to penetrate DNC and DNCC
- Use Bitcoin to establish virtual private networks and data storage in U.S.
- Establish distribution channels for material collected by hackers
- Hack state election systems
- Create bots to help promote content on social media
- Develop a plausible deniability plan if our hackers are caught

## Social Media Operations

- Task IRA with developing social media attack plan
- Create Facebook and Twitter accounts using stolen IDs and SSNs
- Register accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with fake names
- Buy ads on Facebook, taking advantage of lack of regulation and control
- Coordinate a disinformation campaign to include social media and print and TV to promote Donald Trump and disparage Hillary Clinton

Source: Mueller Report



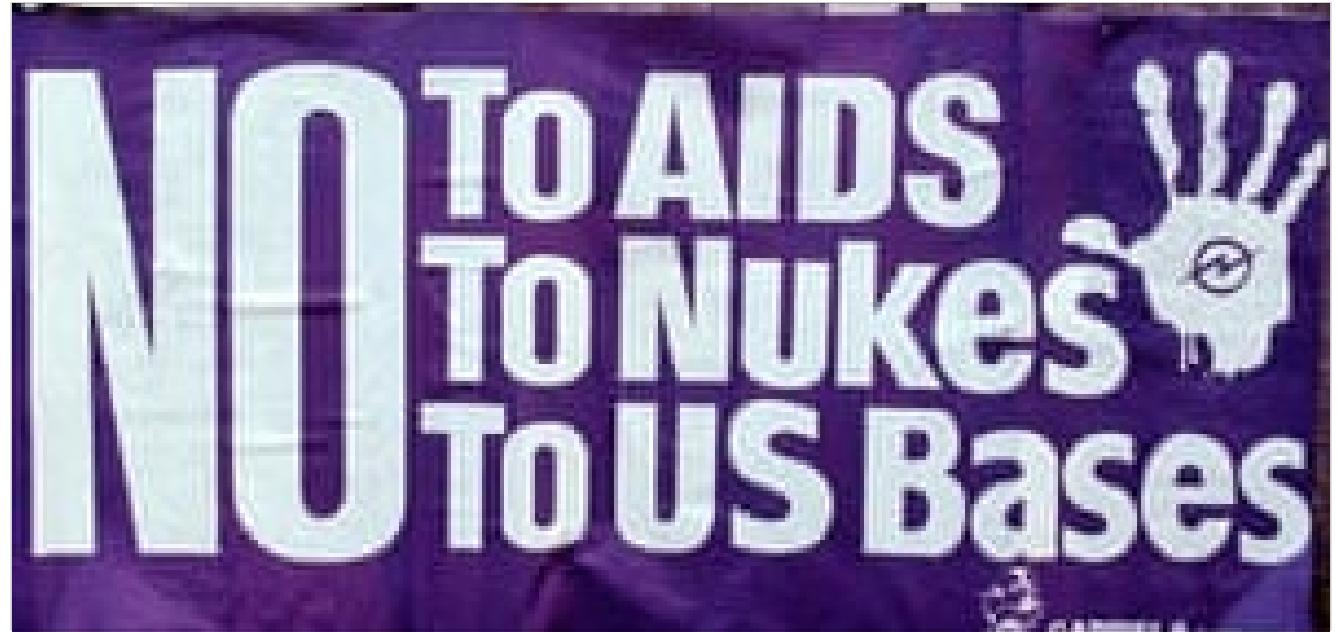
April 2016

- Putin's involvement exposed by Russian reporters working with an international team
- Investigation exposed millions of dollars in offshore accounts of Sergei Roldugin, musician and Putin friend
- Putin already worried that Hillary would win the election and isdetermined to stop her

The Panama Papers may have triggered the Russian cyber attack on the 2016 election

Source: *The Red Web*  
Photo: *Christian Science Monitor*

The Soviet Union used overt and covert disinformation during the Cold War



- Part of broader campaign of “active measures”
- Focus on NATO and discrediting U.S.
- Goal was to mislead policymakers and public
- Trust was the main casualty

1986 poster from Philippines,  
Source: *The Guardian*, June 14, 2017



## Ivan Rybkin – Candidate for President (2004)

- Chairman, Duma (1994-96)
- Secretary, Security Council (1996-98)
- Opposition candidate in presidential election
- Criticized Putin's United Russia party after 2011 parliamentary elections
- Criticized Putin for staging terrorist attacks in Moscow
- Drops out of election after being victimized by “kompromat”

Source: Russian, UK, and U.S. media

Russia's online media environment was quite open in the early 2000s



President Dmitry Medvedev in Silicon Valley, 2010

Photo: en.kremlin.ru



## Russian Presidents

- **Boris Yeltsin (1991-99)**
- **Vladimir Putin (2000-2008)**
- **Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012)**
- **Vladimir Putin – Since 2012**



## 2011-13 protests target Putin and the fraudulent election process

- Massive protests against Putin's reelection
- Putin blamed the Internet and uncontrolled information
- Response included more surveillance, additional regulations, and take-over of Russian Internet companies

Photo: Reuters/Sergei Karpukhin  
via *The Atlantic*



# Russian disinformation efforts targeted Maidan Square protests (2013-14)

Photo: Brendan Hoffman Getty Images via Wired.com



## Snowden revelations reinforced Russian thinking about the Internet

- Russian security services distrusted the Internet because of its U.S. origins
- Viewed the Internet as a “battleground for information warfare”
- Early efforts focused on UN treaty
- Later efforts used ITU to promulgate Russian ideas about “digital sovereignty”
- Putin declares the Internet a “CIA project” in February 2014

Source: Multiple



**General Valery Gerasimov**  
**Chief, Russian General Staff**

# Russia's strategic thinkers focus on the “information space”

## “Gerasimov Doctrine”

- Lines between “war” and “peace” are blurred
- Non-military means of achieving goals more important
- *Information conflict* and special operations are key
- “Long distance actions” can defeat the enemy
- *Information space* creates asymmetrical options

Source: "Getting Gerasimov Right"

# Russia's Military Doctrine includes “information” and “popular opposition” as components of modern conflict

## 15. Characteristic features and attributes of modern military conflicts:

- a. The coordinated application of military force and political, economic, *information* and other non-military measures, *achieved with the broad utilization of popular opposition* and special operations forces. (Emphasis added)
- 

## 15. Характерные черты и особенности современных военных конфликтов:

- а) комплексное применение военной силы, политических, экономических, информационных и иных мер невоенного характера, реализуемых с широким использованием протестного потенциала населения и сил специальных операций.



Source: *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2014)*

# Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 relied heavily on information operations

- Russian justification based on fear of “de-Russification” of Crimea
  - “Banderisty could storm into Crimea”
  - “Black Sea bases could be taken by NATO”
- All government media used to spread disinformation
  - Politicians and diplomats engaged in the campaign
- Information “spetsnaz” groups used “swarm technology” to reinforce Moscow’s messages
  - Supplemented by other active measures including the “Little Green Men”



Source: “Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare”  
Graphic: economist.com



Alexei Navalny



French TV5

And so, the stage  
was set for 2016



Anna Russel  
@AnnRussela

Follow

Chemical plant exploded in Centerville,  
Louisiana #ColumbianChemicals



RETWEETS  
376

FAVORITES  
2



8:29 AM - 11 Sep 2014

Louisiana Chemical Plant

Russian joint operations involving hacking and  
disinformation increased in 2014-2015

# Operation Lakhta

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СЕКРЕТНО

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Source: Mueller Report



## Russian military intelligence hacked the DNC and DNCC

- Units 26165 and 74455 engaged in hacking and distributing stolen material
- Unit 26165 primarily involved in hacking
- Unit 74455 assisted in development of distribution channels
  - Guccifer 2.0
  - DCLeaks
- Unit 74455 also hacked computers in several states

Source: *Mueller Report*  
Photo: *Stars and Stripes*

# Russian intelligence developed an operational infrastructure to gain access and implant remote access tools

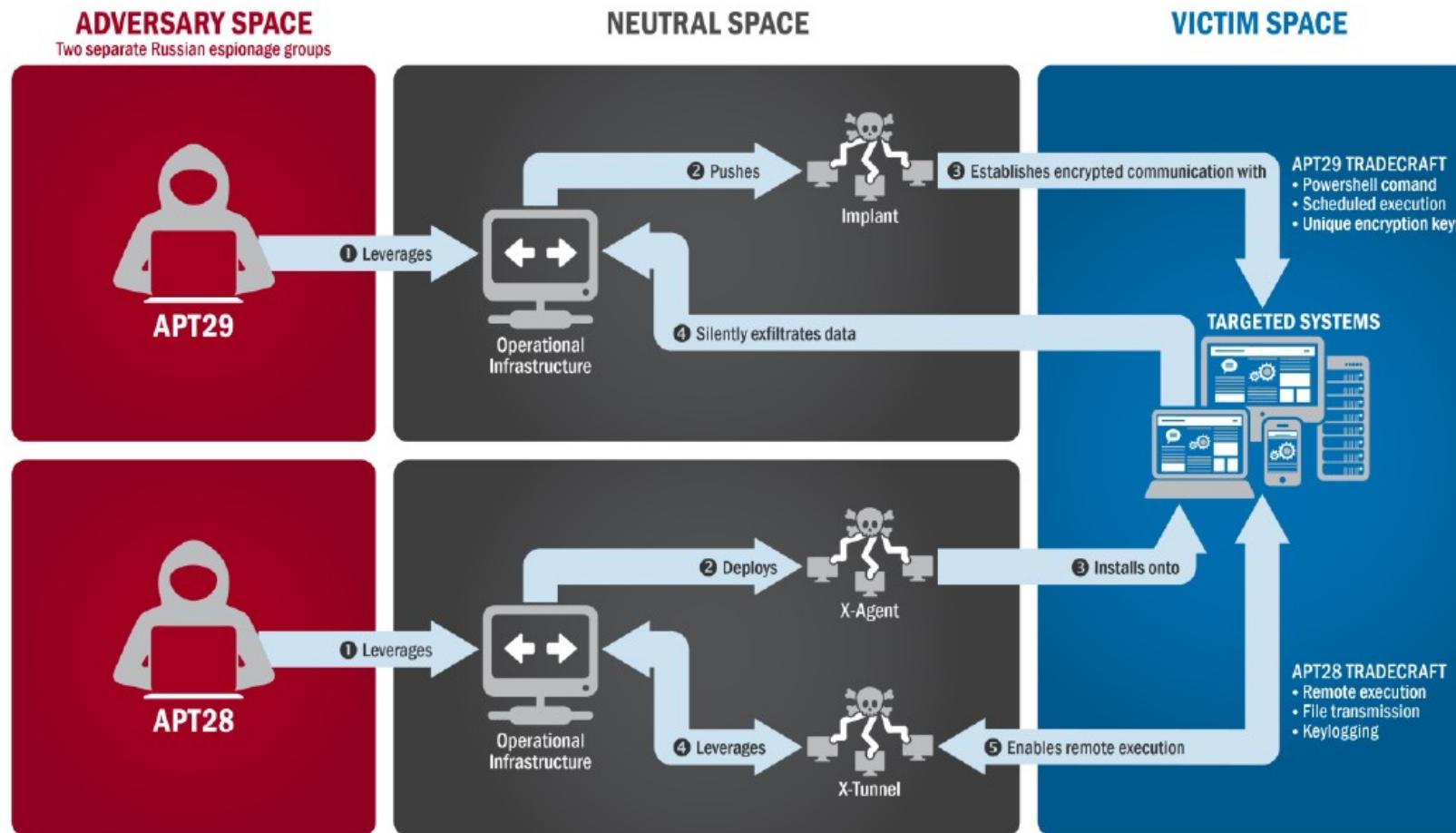


Figure 1: The tactics and techniques used by APT29 and APT 28 to conduct cyber intrusions against target systems

- 2015 - APT29 entered DNC and DNCC
- 2016 - APT28 entered those systems

Source: - DHS "Grizzly Steppe" Report  
- Mueller Report

# The Russians used multiple social media platforms, and several methods to get their message across

## Platforms

- Facebook



- YouTube



- Twitter



- Instagram



- Tumbler



- Reddit



## Tactics, Techniques, Procedures

- Sending operatives to the U.S. to obtain first-hand knowledge of key issues
- Registering accounts with fictitious U.S. persons and groups (e.g. "@jenn\_abrams")
- Purchasing over 3,500 ads on Facebook
- Creating Facebook groups favorable to Trump campaign, e.g.
  - "Being Patriotic"
  - "Stop All Invaders"
  - "Secured Borders"

Source: *Mueller Report*



## The Internet Research Agency in St. Petersburg

- Troll farm identified by Russian newspaper as early as 2013
- Staff paid \$900 monthly to post comments on blogs and news articles
- Affiliated with pro-government youth groups
- New IRA HQ near St Petersburg established in 2014

# The Internet Research Agency is close to the Kremlin and may take direction from there



**Yevgeny Prigozhin**

- Confidante of Vladimir Putin (“Putin’s Chef”)
- Owner of IRA
- Indicted for funding and organizing operations for the purpose of interfering with the 2016 U.S. presidential election

Source: *Red Web; Mueller Report*  
Photo: Moscow Times



# This is Sasha

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- 20 years old
- “Commenter”
- High-school education
- Needs Russian language help
- Enters comments in online versions of local/regional newspapers in Russia
- Provided guidance on which opposition figures to attack

Source: *This is Not Propaganda; Like War*



# This is Lena

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- 24 years old
- College degree, philosophy major
- Excellent English
- “Blogger” focused on liberal causes
- Targets American social media
- Creates and manages multiple Facebook accounts
- Specializes in social issues

Source: *This is Not Propaganda; Like War*

# We know something about the interworkings of the IRA thanks to this person



Lyudmila Savchuk

- TV reporter recruited by the IRA to join a project “for the good of the Motherland”
- Two Russian newspapers helped her with technology and a place to publish
- Lyudmila became “Cantadora,” a mystic blogger
- Political themes provided daily by her editors
- Documented IRA organizational structure

Source: *This is Not Propaganda*

Photo: Charles Maynes/The World via Public Radio International

# Russian youth learn social media skills at summer camp

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Camp Seliger, 2011



Source: *Like War*  
Photo: RT



# Russian disinformation used in European elections

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- RT and Sputnik launch in France and Germany in 2014-15, including social media accounts
- Russian trolls (“sock puppets”) provide stories on several themes via Facebook
  - Western military aggression
  - Social unrest in EU countries
  - Western media hypocrisy
  - Merits of populism
  - Praise of Russia
  - Migrant or Muslim chaos
- All of these topics received multiple “likes,” “shares,” and “comments”

Source: *The Economist*, April 15, 2017

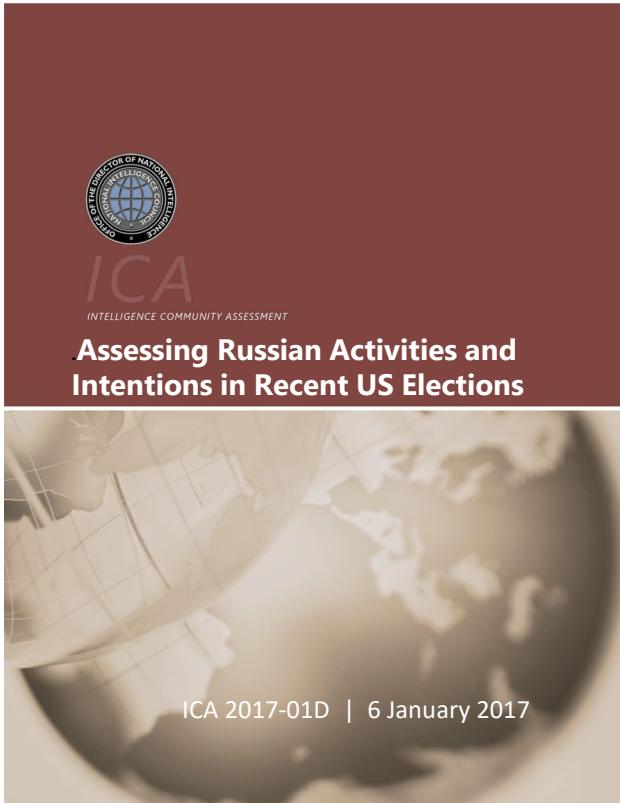
# April 2017

# The Kremlin

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*Looking Back at the Results*

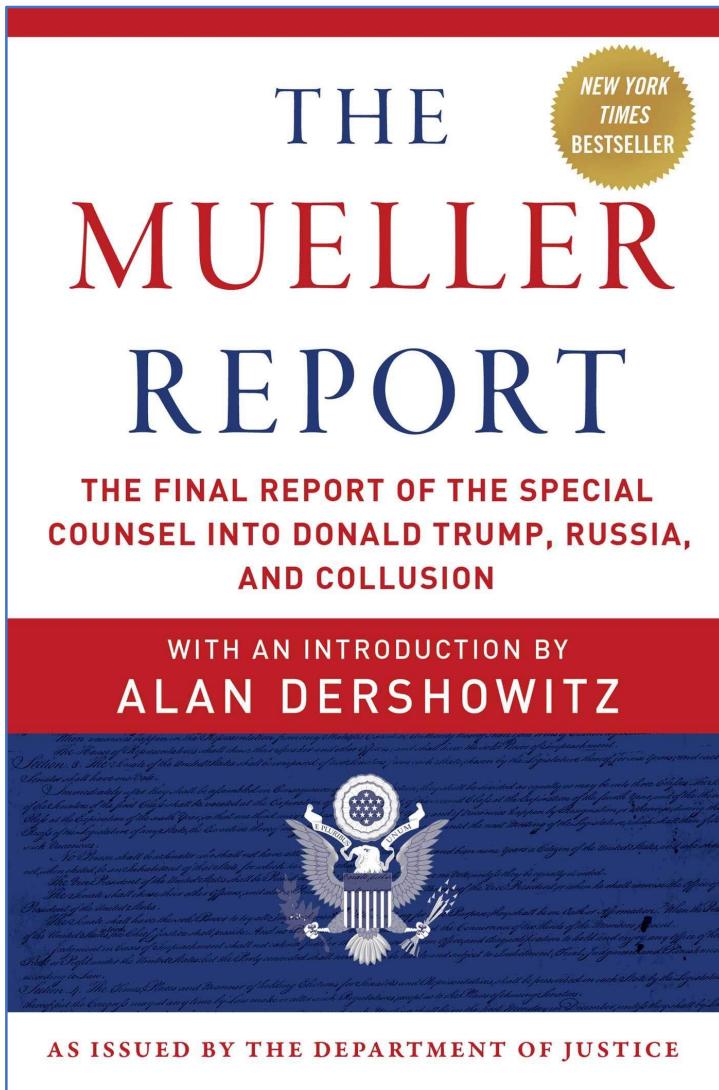
# Russian cyber espionage and related activities against the U.S. election process, 2015-16



- Russia conducted cyber espionage against both political parties by Russian intelligence organizations
  - Cozy Bear (APT29) since mid-2015
  - Fancy Bear (APT28) since early 2016
- DLC material leaked to WikiLeaks via Guccifer 2.0
  - No disclosures of Republican information
- Cyber espionage as an “influence operation”
  - Cyber operations augmented by social media trolls and reporting from RT America

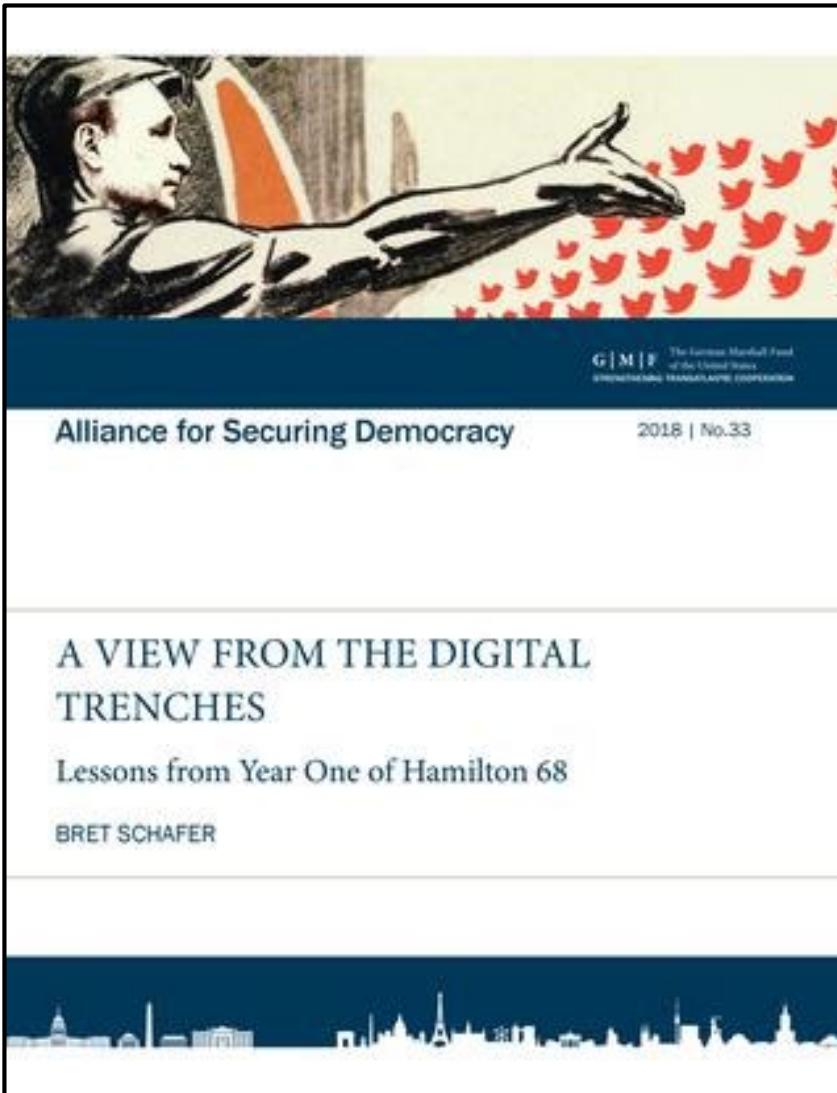
***We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump.***

# We know many details about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election



- “Multiple IRA Facebook groups and Instagram accounts had hundreds of thousands of U.S. participants. IRA-controlled Twitter accounts separately had tens of thousands of followers, including U.S. political figures who re-tweeted IRA content.”
- **470 Facebook accounts**
  - 80,000 posts
  - 125,000 Americans
- **3,800+ IRA-controlled Twitter accounts**
  - 1,400,000 Americans may have seen
- **All social media operations were “highly organized” and “well-funded”**

# **“Information manipulation” and themes in American social media**



- **Social and political topics of interest to U.S. audiences**
  - Gun control, LGBT issues, Women's march, NFL anthem issue
- **Geopolitical topics of interest to the Kremlin**
  - NATO, U.S. aggression in Syria, Support for Russian policies in Ukraine
- **Apolitical topics used to attract and engage followers**
  - Halloween costumes, recipes, pop culture
- **Goal is to amplify the most corrosive voices and create bonds with “like-minded” groups to build trust**
- **Social media operations are not done in a vacuum, but part of a broader active-measures strategy involving many tools**

# Russian disinformation employed several tactics, techniques, and procedures

- Dismiss the critic
  - Distort the facts
  - Distract from the main issue
  - Dismay the audience
- 
- “The problem is ‘narrative warfare,’ not disinformation warfare. We have the facts, but they have the stories”

-- Ben Nimmo

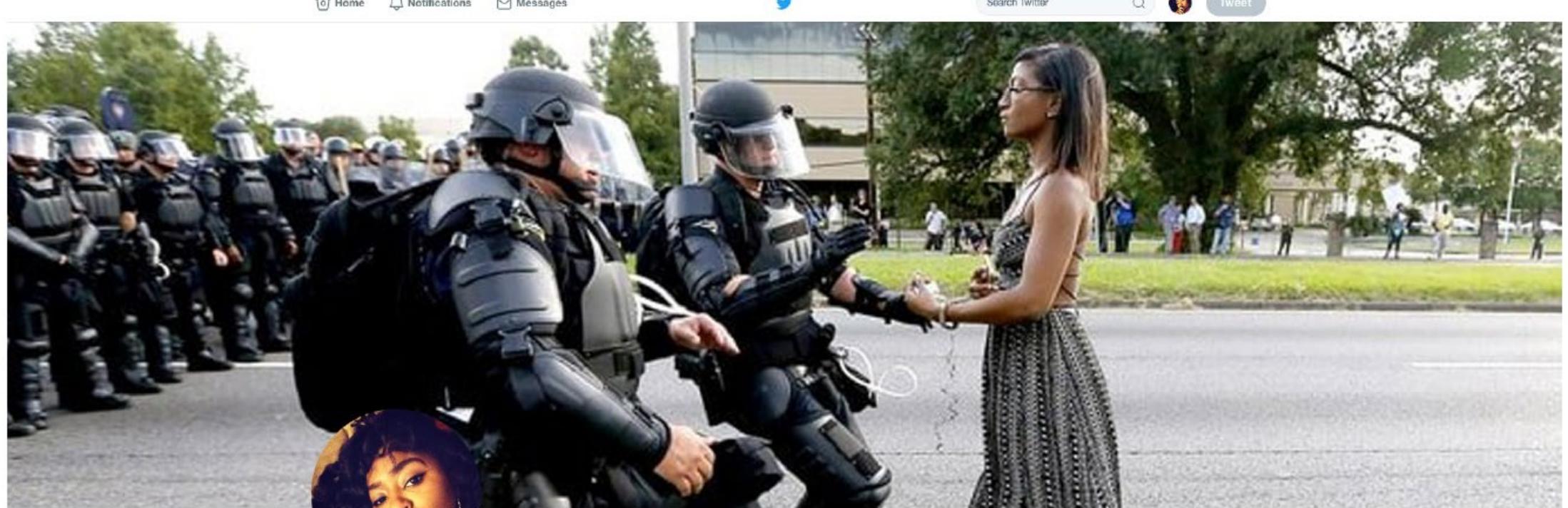




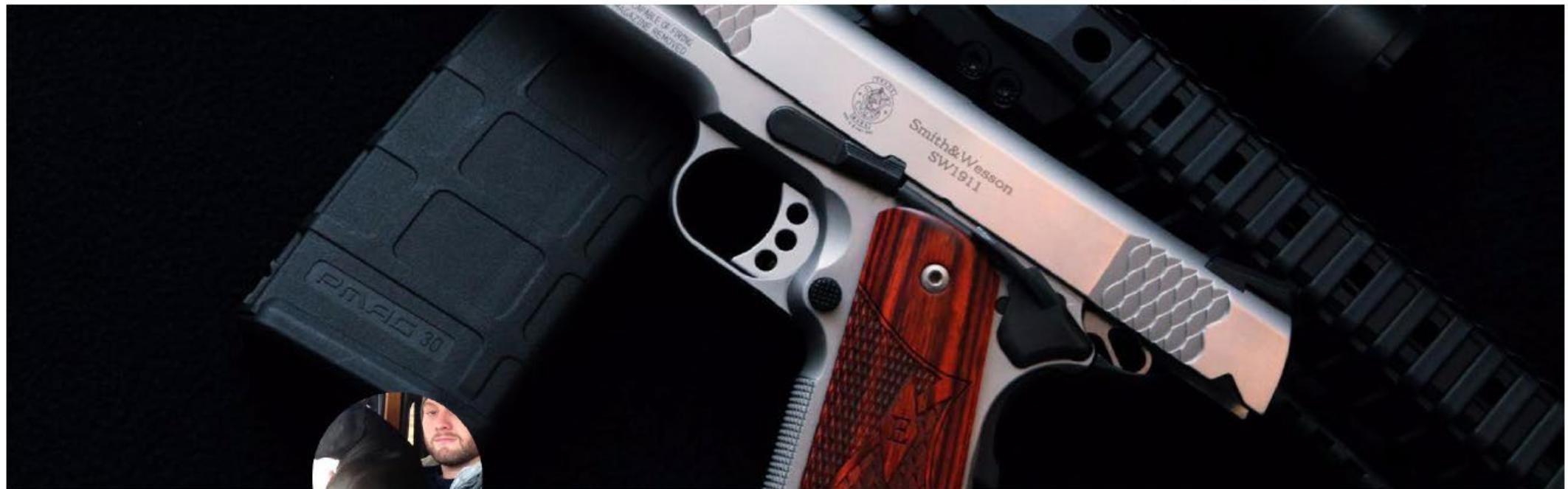
“Sockpuppets” were very effective in social media accounts

- Pose as actual people with various functions
- Organizer of a trusted group (e.g. “@TEN\_GOP”)
- Trusted news source (e.g. “@tpartynews”)
- Trustworthy individuals (e.g. grandmother or vet)
- Target extremes in U.S. politics

Source: *Like War*  
Image: Sophos



Source: “View from the Digital Trenches”



Source: “View from the Digital Trenches”

**SATAN: IF I WIN CLINTON WINS!  
JESUS: NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!**





**Being Patriotic** shared their event.

Sponsored ·

America has always been hinged on hard-working people. If you remove jobs, you'll remove our country from the world map. The state of Pennsylvania rose owing to multiple enterprises mining coal, producing steel, and creating the need for other jobs, groceries, doctors, dentists, insurance, gas, vehicles, mechanics and the list goes on. As far as Mr. Trump pursues the goal of creating more jobs and supports the working class. He said he would put miners back to work. We could ... See More



OCT  
2

**Miners for Trump: Unity day in Pennsyl...**

Sun 2 PM EDT · Pennsylvania

77 people interested · 16 people going

★ Interested

260 Reactions 27 Comments

Like

Comment



**Heart of Texas** shared their event.

Sponsored ·

It's been 15 years since the 9/11 and it became clear that extremist terror groups are bein



SEP  
10

**Stop Radical Islam**

Sat 12 AM · Houston, Texas mosque on 3110 Ea...

337 people interested · 50 people going

★ Interested

1.3K Reactions 77 Comments

Like

Comment

Source: HPSCI Minority Report, "Exploring Russia's Effort to Sow Discord"

**NEW MODERN WARFARE BY BIRTH RATE  
TAKING OVER THE COUNTRIES WITHOUT SINGLE BULLET**



**BUT THEY WON'T TAKE OVER OUR COUNTRY  
IF WE DON'T LET THEM IN**



**PRESIDENT TRUMP ENDS LONG TRADITION  
OF CELEBRATING END OF RAMADAN IN WHITE HOUSE  
LIKE IF YOU AGREE**

# Oxford's Internet Research Institute analyzed data provided to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

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**Table 1: The Volume of IRA Facebook Ads, Facebook Posts, Instagram Posts, and Tweets, Monthly Average**

Year	Facebook Ads	Facebook Posts	Instagram Posts	Twitter Posts
2015	207	360	2,110	59,126
2016	564	2,442	2,611	57,247
2017	541	4,234	5,956	59,634

*Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.*

*Source: The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018*

**Most IRA social media messaging targeted divisive topics or specific affinity groups**

**Table 5: The Top 20 IRA Facebook Pages, Sorted by Number of Likes**

Facebook Pages Managed by the IRA (Top 20 Liked)	Number of Likes	Number of Shares	Number of Reactions	Number of Comments
Being Patriotic	6,431,507	4,429,880	399,542	393,179
Stop A.I. (Stop All Immigrants)	6,050,989	5,202,716	552,684	778,924
Heart of Texas	5,489,337	4,986,384	590,664	414,599
Blacktivist	4,642,946	4,843,595	1,411,605	509,882
United Muslims of America	2,479,294	1,268,022	265,716	175,976
Army of Jesus	2,359,018	651,106	262,113	387,765
Brown Power	2,098,769	1,300,998	373,643	128,795
LGBT United	1,974,368	930,199	396,257	87,500
South United	1,419,503	2,263,031	101,931	72,461
BM (Black Matters)	1,333,173	1,797,479	325,864	146,254
Secured Borders	1,220,079	713,905	121,553	117,824
Defend the 2nd	986,969	551,847	90,228	39,530
Williams&Kalvin	569,627	541,436	138,078	39,960
Woke Blacks	454,151	490,623	127,179	37,876
Back the Badge	410,364	155,524	63,765	26,274
Veterans Come First	330,662	307,021	45,057	33,302
Memopolis	135,704	78,996	21,061	13,002
Pan-African roots MOVE	124,938	152,931	44,929	15,655
Born Liberal	104,314	79,938	22,933	5,749
Black Matters	59,032	97,516	14,620	9,350
<i>Total</i>	38,674,744	30,843,147	5,369,422	3,433,857

Source: *The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018*

# Facebook posts received high levels of audience engagement

**Table 2: The Total Audience Engagement with Facebook Posts, by Year**

Year	Shares	Likes	Emoji Reactions	Comments
2015	1,388,390	2,104,487	478	131,082
2016	12,861,314	15,077,235	1,698,646	1,322,342
2017	16,714,594	21,644,714	3,695,278	2,001,882
Total	30,964,298	38,826,436	5,394,402	3,455,306

*Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.*

*Source: The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018*

# There are good reasons to believe that Russian disinformation impacted the election



- Russian disinformation most likely affected late deciders
- Voters in key states who decided in the week before the election voted for Trump over Clinton by significant margins
  - 14% more for Trump in Wisconsin
  - 17 points more for Trump in Pennsylvania
  - 11 points more for Trump in Michigan
- Nationally, late deciders favored Trump 47% to 42%
- And 22% of the electorate with unfavorable views of both candidates broke for Trump 60% to 23%
- Disinformation helped suppress minority participation

Source: - “Late Deciders Loomed Large”  
- *Cyber War*

# **Unwitting Americans also contributed to spreading Russian disinformation**

*“Some IRA employees, posing as U.S. persons and without revealing their Russian association, communicated electronically with individuals associated with the Trump Campaign and with other political activists to seek to coordinate political activities, including the staging of political rallies. **The investigation did not identify evidence that any U.S. persons knowingly or intentionally coordinated with the IRA’s interference operation.”***

Source: Mueller Report, p. 53, emphasis added

# Why is Russian disinformation so effective?

- **Western hubris and mirror imaging**
  - “The Russians wouldn’t do that to us because we wouldn’t do it to them.”
- **Psychological aspects helped spread disinformation**
  - *Homophily* (“Love of the same”) – People share posts with the like-minded
  - *Confirmation bias* – People believe what they want to believe or what they expect to be true
- **Intense human and computer-based effort**
  - “Computational propaganda” – algorithms ensure people and their friends see like-minded posts

*“Once, every village had an idiot. It took the Internet to bring them all together.”*

-- Robert Bateman

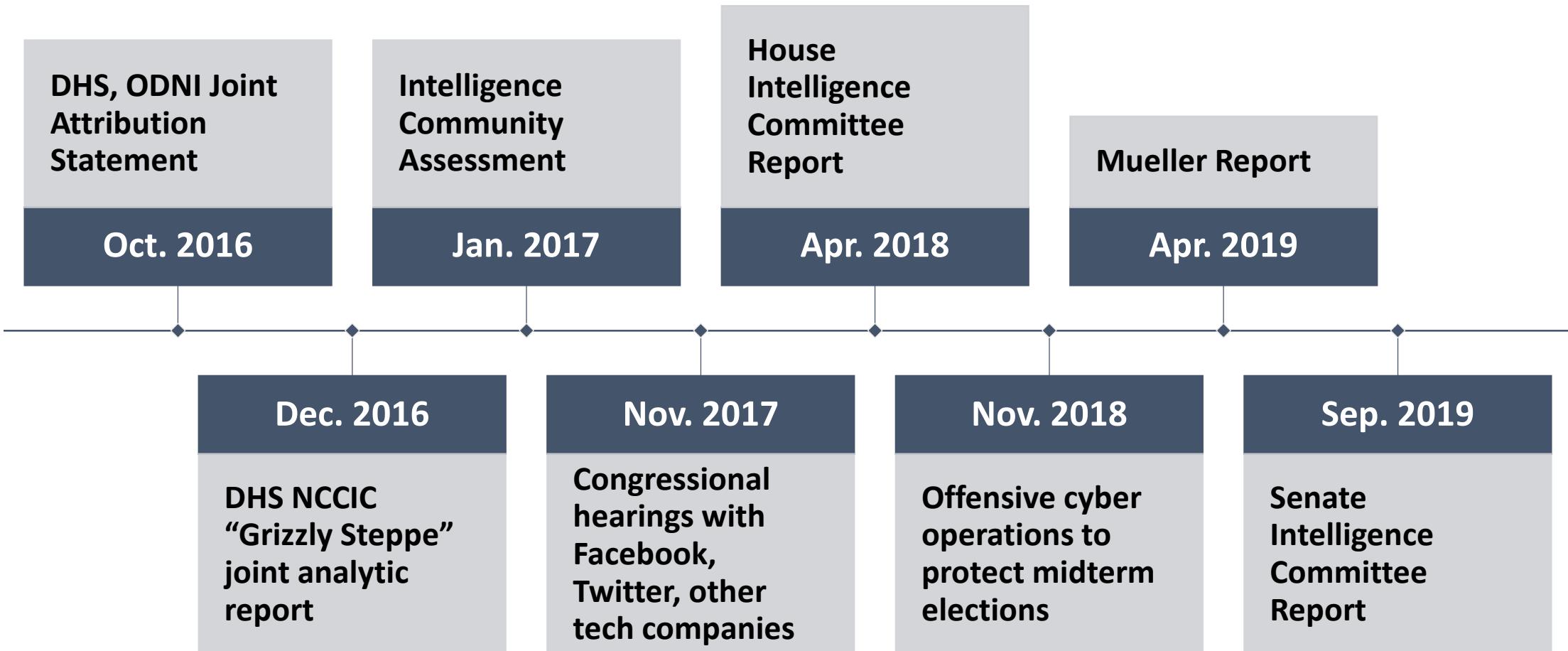
October 2019

The Kremlin

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Can We Do It Again?

# U.S. Government response (partial)



# There is concern about hacking state and local election systems

(U) While the Committee does not know with confidence what Moscow's intentions were, **Russia may have been probing vulnerabilities in voting systems to exploit later.** Alternatively, Moscow may have sought to undermine confidence in the 2016 U.S. elections simply through the discovery of their activity.



“CISA is committed to working collaboratively with those on the front lines of elections—state and local governments, election officials, federal partners, and vendors—to manage risks to the Nation’s election infrastructure. CISA will remain transparent and agile in its vigorous efforts to secure America’s election infrastructure from new and evolving threats.”

Source: - Senate Intelligence Committee Report  
- DHS/CISA website on election security



# **What to do about it? Ways to deal with disinformation or “information manipulation”**

- **Create organizations to look for and respond to disinformation**
  - Cyber Defense League (Estonia)
  - NATO’s Strategic Communications Center of Excellence (Latvia)
- **Study, analyze, communicate**
  - NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (Estonia)
  - Oxford University Computational Propaganda Project
  - “Hamilton 68” (German Marshall Fund, Alliance for Securing Democracy)
- **Increase monitoring of social media platforms**
  - Improved Code of Practice and Duty of Care policies
  - “Naming and shaming” perpetrators through indictments and publicity
- **Expand the regulatory environment for social media companies**
- **Develop and use cybersecurity exercises to prepare for attacks**

# In 2018, the U.S. began a new form of deterrence against Russian information operations

- Offensive cyber operations consistent with new U.S. cyber strategy and presidential executive order
- USCYBERCOM targeted Russian information operations personnel in run-up to 2018 midterms
- Possible actions against Russian hackers and trolls:
  - Texts, emails, pop-up warnings
  - Note: specifics not confirmed by U.S. Government
- Actions “below the level of armed conflict” necessary to protect integrity of U.S. elections and theft of U.S. intellectual property



**Gen Paul Nakasone**

**Director, National Security Agency  
Commander U.S. Cyber Command**

At least 70 countries now use “computational propaganda” for domestic political purposes

FIGURE 2 - COMPUTATIONAL PROPAGANDA AS A TOOL OF INFORMATION CONTROL  
AUTHORITARIAN COUNTRIES DEPLOYING COMPUTATIONAL PROPAGANDA



SUPPRESS



DISCREDIT



DROWN OUT



Source: “The Global Disinformation Order”

And some countries also use computational propaganda in foreign policy

**FIGURE 3 - FOREIGN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA  
COUNTRIES ATTRIBUTED BY FACEBOOK AND TWITTER FOR ENGAGING IN FOREIGN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS**



Source: "The Global Disinformation Order"

# Back to the future? July-August 2019 Moscow protests about local elections



Source: <https://globalnews.ca/news/5775688/moscow-local-election-shakes-russia-heres-why/>  
[https://www.democracynow.org/2019/8/12/the next step is the kremlin](https://www.democracynow.org/2019/8/12/the_next_step_is_the_kremlin)

# Election 2020

## Stay Tuned

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Thanks for your attention!