Russia’s Campaign
to
Influence U.S. Elections

Office of the West Virginia Secretary of State
Don’t fall for it!
Military Operations

Strategic
Operational
Tactical
Strategic Level

Employment of Russia’s National Power
Who Is Behind It?
To Putin, the end justifies the means

2016 - Russia spent $millions distributing misleading & false info on social media to:

• **Disrupt** U.S. democratic election processes
• Cause U.S. citizens to **doubt** election systems & results
• Turn U.S. citizens against government
• Create distrust, **sow discord** & generate chaos
• Pit people against one another
What is the Goal?

• Divide, Discredit, and Distract the West
  • Have us not trust our own government
  • Degrade NATO cohesiveness
  • **Turn us on ourselves**

• Themes from Russian attacks overseas:
  • Western policy failures, setbacks, incompetence
  • Russia’s successes
  • Unpredictability of U.S.
Why Are They Doing It?

Can’t compete with U.S. economically
Can’t stand toe to toe with U.S. militarily
Only hope to stay competitive is to bring U.S. down from the inside
Today’s Strategic Center of Gravity

The Internet
Transformative Commodities Throughout History

• Hunter/Gatherer: Stones
• Agricultural: Land
• Bronze Age: Copper
• Industrial Revolution: Oil/Iron/Steel

We have recently entered a new age

• Information Age: Data
Russia’s Operational Means Social Media Campaign
How? Information Operations

Information is Power

Propaganda is as old as war itself

- **Scale is new**, given the internet
- Russia has *weaponized the internet*
- Russia seeks “Information Dominance” vs US openness, security

Intensified by Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Bad actors now run *mass influence campaigns* like never before
- AI - efficient *targeting* of people most vulnerable to manipulation
The “Great Game” Cyber Style
Today’s Clash of Civilizations Takes Place on Social Media

• China’s “Art of War” – win without fighting

• Russia’s great chess tradition – win by out-smarting opponent

  Khrushchev
  You Americans are so gullible. You won't accept Communism outright; but we’ll feed you small doses of Socialism until you finally wake up & find you already have Communism. We shall conquer you without firing a shot!

• America’s “Spirit of ‘76” – win on ideas, human freedom, liberal democracy

• North Korea, Iran/Terrorist Organizations also quite active

• Groundwork laid for foreign & domestic attacks
The New “Great Game”

*Data is the new oil*

Clive Humby

- World powers now struggle for data superiority
  5G, AI, machine learning, quantum computing
- Data has economic, political, & military importance
- All data/information becomes strategic
IoT, Blockchain, Bluetooth, Artificial Intelligence (AI)

...the rising philosophy of the day, I’d say it is Dataism.

David Brooks, NY Times

- Internet of Things (IoT) – quantum leap in available data
- Bluetooth – everything connected => data exchange
- Blockchain - Unchangeable, permanent data storage
- AI - Unfathomable capacity to retrieve/process data

Enhances “Dataism”

- Big Data
- “Universe consists of data flows”
- Value determined by contribution to data processing
AI, Algorithms, Bots

AI is the new electricity

Andrew Ng

• AI turns data into actionable intelligence
  • National Security, Economic Competitiveness, Scientific Discovery
• AI allows micro-targeting to influence decision-making
• Algorithms – set rules to get directed jobs done
• Bots – “Web Robots” run tasks on internet, social media
• Data-driven social media is key to public opinion
How Does This Apply to Us?

Russia doesn’t have to break into data systems; they achieve goals on softer targets using AI, algorithms, bots, & micro-targeting
Using Our Strengths Against Us

*Freedom is the American Spirit*

2016 - Russia’s meddling in U.S. elections cost < ½ the expense of a single fighter jet.

US Strengths = Freedoms

- Freedom of press
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of assembly

Russia has leveraged all of these via social media!
The Power of Social Media

Using social media it was easy for Russia to:

- Reach **millions of voters with minimal costs**
- Exploit divisive & heated issues within U.S.
- Incite opposition, division & protests
- Focus was on whoever was in front, to sow discord
- Publically diminish front-runners, generating mistrust
Russian Social Media Efforts in 2016
Statistics of known false/misleading activity

Twitter: 10 Million Tweets
Instagram: 116,000 posts
Facebook: 61,000 posts
Additional Videos: 1,000+

That’s almost 28,000 social media actions per day!
2016: Russia Scanned **All 50 States**

*Over 20 had “extra penetrating measures”*

**States Targeted by Russian Hackers**
- 21 States Targeted According to DHS
- Every State Surrounding WV Except Kentucky

*Foreign Interference is everywhere*
Tactical Employment

Real World Examples
Why YOU?
It starts with **YOU!** You are 1 of >4 billion internet users.

- Your demographic is most likely to share posts
- Social media presence is highest among ages 18-24
- High school seniors are newest generation of voters
- First-time voters in 2020 Election – *be educated & prepared!*
Russia’s Target: the American Spirit

5 Real-World Examples
Disinformation

Altered candidate’s photo to manipulate public

Pro-Stacey Abrams

Anti-Stacey Abrams

Heads up Georgia. The Muslim Brotherhood is backing Abrams.

Communist

#MeTo

#MuslimBrotherhood
Competing Rallies
Creation & promotion of competing protests

Nov. 12, 2016
4 days after the election.
Inciting Tensions

Advertised competing protests at same location & date

Pro-Islam

Anti-Islam
Discouraging Voters

Targeting Race

All out assault on African American voters using social media!
5

**Oppression**

Social media ads that divide American society

**Anti-Law Enforcement**

**Pro-Law Enforcement**
Other Major Foreign Cyber Adversaries of U.S.
Deep Fakes

Now Extremely Hard to Spot

- Super-imposing other peoples’ faces onto real videos
- Anybody can be impersonated on social media
- Completely falsified videos, can be made to say anything
Facebook: “We don’t have a policy that stipulates the information you post on Facebook must be true.”
Misinformation vs Disinformation

- **Misinformation**: false/inaccurate info, regardless of intent
- **Disinformation**: deliberately misleading, incorrect, or biased info; manipulated narratives, facts, propaganda, spread with intent to deceive or mislead
  - Examples: deep fakes, altered or augmented videos, partial truths
The Technology 202: Notre Dame cathedral fire reveals tech companies' struggle to combat misinformation

YouTube's defenses against misinformation just backfired in a big way -- and ended up contributing to baseless speculation online that the Notre Dame cathedral fire resulted from a terrorist attack.
Anyone Can Spread Disinformation

Ian Bremmer: American Political Scientist, founder of Eurasia Group consulting firm in NY, DC, London
"Half-Truths"

Covington High School Students exploited by news & social media

There are always two sides to a story.

1st reports made student appear as aggressor; yet, full video shows man with drum purposely confronted the students.
Disinformation
Russia’s “Operation Infektion”

• Disinformation is like a virus
  • Russia plants fake news/reports in 4 corners of world
  • Then, they plant secondary reports that cite the first fake report
  • Then, they watch it spread
  • Once info circulates, it’s hard to trace origin / “ground zero”
  • Soon, the fake stories get into Western news outlets
Used by both sides. In context, she is saying this is what Republicans are doing to her; as shown, it appears she is advocating for the “wrap-up smear.”

NANCY PELOSI ON FAKE NEWS SMIER PROPAGANDA

In either event, this is exactly what the Russians are doing!
Russia Wrap-Around Smear Operation Infektion

Infiltrated far more than just Facebook & Twitter

Targeted internet platforms across the world, posting in at least 6 languages

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Impersonation of Political Figures

• Prime example of disinformation trying to divide U.S & U.K.

• Bad actors want us to turn on ourselves

• High profile figures can be impersonated as well
What Can You Do?
First: Protect

• Be proactive; learn to spot fake news
  • Question validity of social media posts
  • Verify information using reputable sources to fact-check

• Protect yourself, your devices, & internet accounts:
  • Always use multi-factor authentication & complex passwords
  • Use a different password for every account
  • Think before you link, click or share anything questionable
Protect

Examine the Web Link – red flags:
• A “5” in place of an “S”, or a “0” in place of an “o”
• An extension on a legitimate site
  • Example: sos.wv.gov vs. sos.wv.gov.co

Watch for
• Misspelled words
• Awkward/improper language
• Jokes, parodies, etc. from satire/humor sources
• Shocking, exaggerated headlines

Check sources & evidence!
Second: Detect

- Identify phishing attempts & website impersonation
- Read all unauthorized access notices or alerts (email, texts, etc.)
- Don’t ignore suspicious activity
- Ransomware – locks all data, pay $ to regain access
Detect: Some Fact-Checking Resources

- Opensecrets.org – shows who receives $ from Russia
- Realorfake.org – exposes fake news sites
- Politifact.com – fact checks US politics
- Factcheck.org – holds politicians accountable
- Stopfake.org – fact-check by Ukrainian profs & students
- Polygraph.info – fact check by Radio Free Europe, VOA
- Sunlightfoundation.com – nonprofit newsroom
- Propublica.org – nonprofit newsroom
- Bellingcat.org – distributed, collaborative investigating
- WhatsApp – new tip line for misinformation (India)
Detect: Suspicious Emails

Microsoft Office Email365

Your New Password Request

Your password reset is in process and your current password will expire shortly, the password reset link will be forwarded to the new alternative email address.

Ignore this email notification your request will take effect shortly.

If you did not request this password reset, use the Cancel Request button to cancel the password reset and keep your password unchanged.

[Image: A screenshot of a Microsoft Office email request to reset a password, marked as a phishing scam.]

Spear Phishing, Whaling
Specific Targets/Credential Harvesting

*Source: actual emails received by West Virginia officials*
Detect: Anyone Can Be Hacked

Source: Washington Post

Joe Manchin’s social media accounts hacked, the senator’s office says

By Sean Sullivan
November 1, 2018 at 6:51 PM

WV resident’s personal social media compromised by Russia

U.S. Senator’s campaign, national news
Third: Correct

If you become a victim of a cyber incident:

• Turn-off devices & disconnect from internet

• Change passwords to **ALL** accounts on a different device

• Report to internet/social media providers

• If asked for ransom ($ or other value), report to police
The Power of Fake News

Everybody Sees it, *Not Everybody Knows it*

• Pew: 23% of adults shared a made-up news story

• Youth particularly targeted as vulnerable to misinformation

• Bots & AI *micro-targeting* intensify effectiveness
American Voting Machines

IMPORTANT FACT:
NO EVIDENCE that ANY Votes Were Changed In A U.S. Election!

US voting machines are decentralized & maintained independently by each state.

In WV, voting machines:
1. Are never connected to internet
   • > 1,700 precincts managed independently by 55 counties
   • Very difficult to hack; requires physical security breach

2. Produce paper ballots that are verified by each voter

3. Pre- & post-election audits ensure security & accuracy
Media’s Vital Role: They’re a Target Too!

Today, it’s who reports the votes!

Food for thought

What if news agency is hacked & reports wrong winner?

Can we trust reported outcomes today?

Would public cry out for recount or new election?

Would public question legitimacy of results?

Former Soviet Dictator Joseph Stalin
What’s Going On?  *Marvin Gaye*

3 Dimensional Chess

1. **Body** = Equipment, Ballots, Poll Books *(no problems)*  **TRUTH**

2. **Mind** = Process, Tabulation, **Voter Registration**, Reporting *(some problems)*

3. **Spirit** = **American Psyche, Acceptance** *(real problems)*  **TRUST**
   This remains main **vector of Russian attack**

*Need both Truth AND Trust*

When we buy into

“America has never been so divided”

**Russia wins!**
IT STARTS WITH YOU
“You can’t fix stupid” Ron White

An Educated Public Protects Democracy

Be Information Literate - Rely on the Human Dimension
Check sources; use Trusted Sources for critical info (elections!)
Seek accuracy over speed
Separate fact from opinion
Verify, confirm
Validate, authenticate

Don’t depend on technology to solve fake news
There is no algorithm to eliminate misinformation

You are our first line of defense!
Conclusion

Don’t be a Russian Force Multiplier

1. Stay alert: be conscious, aware & protect against false info.

2. Anticipate Russia’s tactics; < effective by exposing antics.

3. Minds, not machines: Russia attacked minds/spirit; they had no success attacking voting machines.

4. Race with no finish line: must stay ahead of bad actors.
REMEMBER
Russia Attacked Our Minds & Spirit, Not Our Machines
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