

China and Russia deploy active measures in effort to weaken us

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‘New normal’: Soviet tanks help crush the Prague Spring reforms in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

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This pandemic is proving to be one of the best examples of disinformation warfare, or active measures, ever witnessed. Active measures, or psychological warfare, are used to stoke discord within your opponent’s system so they undermine themselves. Active measures then take a life of their own. The trick is feeding the population just the right mix of truth and lies, forming a catastrophic narrative to amplify their emotions. Make no mistake, we are in a new cold war. For now it is about information in a battle of reality for control of the global system.

The KGB was notorious for active measures. Retired KGB major general Oleg Kalugin described active measures as “the heart and soul of Soviet intelligence”. According to KGB defector Yuri Brezmenov, it spent 85 per cent of its time on active measures and 15 per cent on espionage. One of the classic examples of KGB active measures was Operation Plan 10-1. This outlined US plans for guerrilla warfare in Europe should the Cold War turn hot. As described by Thomas Rid, the professor of strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, the KGB obtained the plans and

inserted a fake page. The page outlined how the US would use nuclear weapons against European cities. In 1968 the KGB leaked the amended document to Italian and German newspapers and, curiously, some soft porn magazines. Then they were passed to more reputable publications such as Der Spiegel. Before long even London's The Times published reports declaring, "US to hand out H-bombs". Despite media outlets later acknowledging the forgery, it no longer mattered.



Retired KGB major general Oleg Kalugin.

In his 1984 interview and warning to America, Brezhnev explained the goal was to demoralise an opponent's system from within. Only then could the "new normal" be established. When in 1968 the Soviets sent tanks into Czechoslovakia crushing the Prague Spring, Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev declared the "situation in Czechoslovakia is now normalised". Made even easier when the state's jackboot is enforcing the new normal.

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Once our emotional buttons are pushed and we connect with others who share those emotions then the presentation of facts to the contrary has little result.

Today, almost every waking moment is consumed with catastrophic messaging, daily disease and death counts, images of people in hazmat suits, endless expert reports, and false imagery — like the drone pictures of what were claimed to

be mass burials on New York's Hart Island, where the city's unclaimed dead have long been interred. This influences our emotion of fear (preservation of health is one of our strongest motivators). Even mainstream television networks have had a sinister virus image floating across their screens. Meanwhile those presenting critical positions, such as Stanford University's John Ioannidis and Michael Levitt, who insist the coronavirus is not that big a threat, are too often ignored. As soon as one phase of disinformation runs its course the next is rolled out. Now it's the second wave and organ failure. In an era of the endless social media news cycle and the scale of human connectivity, the use of active measures is one of the most influential tools of warfare. Our enemy knows too well that we are a highly risk-averse societies.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Exposure to honest information hardly gains traction when people are demoralised through fear. Our perception of reality is changed. Despite the abundance of information too few are often unable to come to sensible conclusions. And an internal struggle ensues within the target country's political leadership, media and population. Take the active measures used against US President Donald Trump. Since 2016 many in the media, and a conga-line of elected representatives including former senior Obama administration officials, parroted the theory that Trump was colluding with the Russians. Former CIA director John Brennan labelled Trump a traitor, declaring him to be in Russian President Vladimir Putin's pocket. Yet when testifying before the US House Intelligence Committee inquiry, not even the biggest promoters of this theory had any proof. The Mueller investigation found nothing. FBI analysts said there was nothing. The Steele dossier was shown to be "bar talk". The entire US system was the target of this massive active measures campaign.

Another example is the misdirection of the source of the coronavirus. By pointing to the wet markets as the origins of virus, China for a time directed Western investigators, media and political leaders away from the most likely source — the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The international inquiry into COVID-19, headed by former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark will also be stymied by these tactics.

COVID-19 presents strategic opportunities for China. Western countries are destroying their economies and fragmenting their social systems. The longer this goes on the deeper the demoralisation. China hardly needed to act. In little over five months Western countries have been ravaged by a self-inflicted social, psychological and economic

contagion that risks our national security as effectively as any outright military invasion. It is war without firing a shot. For Sun Tzu, not firing a shot in war is the highest form of warfare. For China and Russia active measures are the preferred weapons of choice.

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