

ACTIVE MEASURES COUNTERINTELLIGENCE RECONFIGURATION ELEMENTS

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Abstract:

In general, counterintelligence is a process of detecting, preventing, exploiting and manipulating the intelligence activities of opposing/external entities (groups, organizations, states), and is usually explained as protection of secrets against espionage (counterintelligence). In particular, in some states, in addition to the classic intelligence activities, clandestine/covert operations (in Western terminology) or active measures (in Soviet/Russian terminology) are conducted. By means of such operations the decisions or events, the political, military or social circumstances in another state are influenced in order to promote own foreign policy objectives. Such operations are conducted by intelligence structures, as they have available specialized personnel and specific skills, necessary for the complex integration of various resources and techniques to exercise influence. Taking this aspect into account, it should come as no surprise that the approaches used in order to identify and neutralize such operations get materialized in the area of counterintelligence. The paper is aimed at exploring some active measures which could be used to reconfigure counterintelligence, becoming then relevant for an effective national security policy. A comparative analysis between the two former Cold War superpowers – the USSR and the US – is performed in order to exemplify and support the arguments presented while also underlining the peculiarity of Soviet (present day Russian) conducts. In the first instance, the historical perspective/lens is used to account for the patterns developed during the Cold War, and then, shifting to the current status-quo, their relevance is explained in the present-day context.

Keywords: *intelligence, counterintelligence, espionage, counterespionage, active measures.*

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Introduction

The fear of invaders present in the Russian mentality has resulted in generating the feeling of insecurity and inferiority to the “outside world”, which has influenced their behaviour throughout history. Successive generations have had to adapt to the vicissitudes of time, using all possible means to protect and resist. The gap between the Russians and the other peoples, more advanced in terms of social, political, economic, military or cultural aspects, has been bridged through the “loans” the Russians have got to resist. Such “loans” have materialized, at the level of security and intelligence services, in active measures, a natural evolutionary process, based on fear and inferiority.

The activity of security and intelligence services is not limited to the field of intelligence/counterintelligence. Each state seeks to gain benefits by conducting clandestine/covert actions (Tucker, 2014, p. 73)¹. The case of the Soviets is distinct because they have employed active measures. Due to opening several archives, today we know that other states have also used such methods, but the Soviets have perfected and transformed them into the foundation of their intelligence activity.

All the elements included in the active measures program (persuasion, influence, manipulation, disinformation, propaganda, subversion, – intoxication, deception, *maskirovka*² – rumours, reflexive control, fakes, sabotage, provocation, penetration, fabrication, compromise, conspiracy, combination) are considered (by the democratic world) morally reprehensible. To this extent, they are further perceived as diachronic, time-consuming, long-lasting, psychosocial processes and also as elastic, unpredictable concepts which cannot be studied according to a certain pattern. All are intended for permeable targets which include a set of peculiar characteristics: inconsistency, a certain degree of flexibility that allows them to adapt to

¹ Both types of actions are secret. The difference is that in the case of clandestine actions the act as such and those who perform it (agents – A.N.) are not known, while in the case of covert actions the entity that orders them (state – A.N.) is not known.

² In general the meaning is the same, the differences pertaining to semantics. In Romanian, the terms correspond to: *l'intoxication* (French), *deception* (English), *maskirovka* (Russian).

changing trends in the context. The origin of such active measures is also unusual as they emerge from certain vulnerabilities, low legitimacy or even illegitimacy while they seek to identify the primary impulses that influence the human psyche by penetrating its intimacy. The excessive employment of an active measures program can result in the initiator losing credibility; they create a linear process that generates certain situations that determine an attitude that, in turn, produces certain behaviour.

Consequently, there are no unanimously accepted definition, which makes it difficult to establish a scientific framework to highlight their implementation mechanisms, action forms, methods of counteracting etc. The attempt to define them rather leads to eclectic panoply of definitions.

Conceptual Distinction between Active Measures and Clandestine/Covert Actions

Without claiming to conduct an exhaustive analysis and starting from one of the classical definitions of espionage "(...) clandestine collection of intelligence" (Bennet, 2002, p. 8), from the Soviet perspective, active measures are often identical to espionage. There are many definitions of active measures that come to support the mentioned idea, one of them being provided in *Spy Book. The Encyclopaedia of Espionage*: "Russian term for intelligence operations that will affect another nation's policies or actions. These can be either covert or open and can entail a wide variety of activities, including assassination." (Polmar, Allen, and Thomas, 2004, p. 5)

Considering their cultural and operational specifics, the activities related to "clandestine collection of intelligence" (espionage-A.N.) conducted by the Russian specialized structures are subsumed under active measures, thus being outlined the idea of an "ideological/political warfare, having an extremely clandestine aspect" *grafted onto the "predestination"* for the employment of active measures. A possible explanation is that the "predestination" stems from the feelings of insecurity of the Russian Federation in relation to the West, such circumstances determining the perfection and

transformation of active measures into the foundation of Russian intelligence activity.

Considering the context in which the Russian Federation perceives the West (defined not geographically, but politically and culturally-A.N.) as a real threat, the intelligence services function in the paradigm of an existing war, applying the following principles: any decrease in the power status of the West/ any sign of instability becomes an implicit advantage for the Russian Federation; not only intelligence is collected but also active measures are usually employed; it is more appropriate for some events to be approached and exploited as opportunities than abandoned as possible failures (in comparison, in peacetime, Western institutions have a risk aversion due to potentially negative political or other effects). An integrated correlation of these principles explains the fast pace and current visibility of Russian active measures, reflected in aggressive actions in self-declared areas of influence (former Soviet states-A.N.) and visible in the West (interference in elections and disinformation-A.N.). (Galeotti, May 2017)

From a Western perspective (mostly American-A.N.), an equivalent concept for active measures is that of clandestine/covert operations, an aspect that also results from Soviet terminology, namely that the term “active operations (*aktivnyye operatsii*) is synonymous with «active measures», but indicates operations on a somewhat larger scale.” (Mitrokhin, 2004, p. 13) Clandestine/covert actions represent that type of operational actions conducted to influence the course of international events or decision-makers, be they persons or organizations.

Covert actions are defined by Abram N. Shulsky and Gary J. Schmitt as follows:

“In the US intelligence lexicon, refers to the attempt by one government to pursue its foreign policy objectives by conducting some secret activity to influence the behaviour of a foreign government or political, military, economic, or societal events and circumstances in a foreign country. As the term implies, the defining characteristic of covert actions is that government conducting the activity conduct it in a secret or covert manner.

However, what secrecy means precisely can vary according to the particular circumstances.” (Shulsky and Schmitt, 2002, p. 75)

In fact, covert operations are introduced in the US legislation, resulting that they are different in terms of content and means of action from the intelligence/counterintelligence activity – their purpose is not to obtain information, but to promote certain national interests abroad:

“(…) the term «covert action» means an activity or activities of the United States Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly, but does not include:

(1) activities the primary purpose of which is to acquire intelligence, traditional counterintelligence activities, traditional activities to improve or maintain the operational security of the United States Government programs, or administrative activities (…).” (*Intelligence Authorization Act*, 1991, p. 443-444)

Given that each state attempts, depending on its resources, to create advantages by conducting clandestine/covert actions, it results that the activity of special services is not limited to the field of intelligence/counterintelligence. In this regard, some authors, such as Eric Rosenbach and Aki J. Peritz, appreciate that the activities of the services are reflected in: a) collection, analysis and production of relevant information to support the decisions of political factors in the field of security, defence and public order – information activity; b) protection of activities and results through counterintelligence activity; c) execution of clandestine/covert operations. (Rosenbach and Peritz, 2009, p. 10) Arthur S. Hulnick argues that the involvement of such structures in conducting clandestine/covert operations is justified as they have the necessary capabilities and specialized personnel. (Hulnick, 2006, p. 976) However, in the USA, there are also theoretical approaches that question this aspect, according to Shulsky and Schmitt (2002, p. 95-97).

Clandestine/covert actions as well as active measures can be treated as instruments of foreign policy or components of security and

intelligence services. The major difference between clandestine/covert actions and active measures is given by the leadership models: a totalitarian regime will easily employ human and material resources in conducting active measures, without considering legal or ethical aspects, while in democratic regimes the law is obeyed and security and intelligence services are under strict control. For example, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) concentrated all the state power and had no difficulty in giving directives for the implementation of the active measures program. On the other hand, democratic governments, especially the US one, would have encountered obstacles in centralizing the necessary decisions for the implementation of some clandestine/covert actions. (Godson and Shultz, 1985, p. 101-110)

Another difference in terms of doctrine refers to the fact that while in the USA the foundation of the intelligence services activity is the collection and capitalization on the data from covert sources (Shulsky and Schmitt, 2002, p. 126), in the USSR active measures used to be the foundation of the services activity, entailing both covert and public/overt modes of action, "(...) certain overt and covert techniques for influencing events and behaviour in, and the actions of, foreign countries". (Shultz and Godson, 1984, p. 193) Clandestine/covert actions are instruments that support the US foreign policy, namely an aggregate of military actions and diplomacy (the CIA is the government institution legally authorized to conduct such actions, the goal being to make impossible the identification of the initiator). (Daugherty, 2010, p. 623 and 2004, p. 25; Macgaffin, 2005, p. 83; Bennet, 2002, p. 54)

In the USSR, the KGB-GRU conducted clandestine/covert actions outside the country, which were aimed at three general areas: political, economic, and scientific. Where technology theft was unsuccessful, sabotage was practiced to delay as much as possible the achievement of a patent for a product or invention before it appeared in the USSR. The Kremlin also capitalized on the agitation potential of left-wing movements, where they existed and could overthrow the constitutional order.

The USSR was unequalled in terms of the diversity and refinement of its covert efforts to undermine the credibility of the US government domestically, to discredit it, to disrupt its foreign policy, to

generate and amplify the dissent between allies, thus transcending the traditional limits of diplomacy and of diplomatic and intelligence activities. The panoply of activities – based on KGB-related operations and connected to the party foreign policy departments – includes media manipulation, influencers, associations and groups of protestants/influencers/activists, propaganda and disinformation, subsumed under the name of “active measures”, a major instrument of Soviet foreign policy. In this context, counterintelligence plays a significant part in countering this type of threats. However, it is not the only one involved as the actions meant to raise the awareness of the officials, of the mass media, of the domestic public, public diplomacy, covert activities and counterintelligence (by identifying and neutralizing the activities and the internally involved people – A.N.) provide an effective multiple response. (CIA document, May 1, 1986, p. 1-7)

The Connection between Active Measures and Counterintelligence

Richard A. Posner (2009, p. 261) sees counterintelligence in a classical way, as representing the efforts to prevent any covert activity directed against national security, from counterespionage to the identification of the dormant networks that could be activated for acts of sabotage or terrorist attacks.

A. C. Wasemiller introduces an extensive approach to counterintelligence, translated into “protecting a legally established government against covert attacks/ clandestine activities”, as the state has different protection mechanisms and structures in case of overt aggression. The label of clandestine refers to the fact that the opponent tries to hide own activities such as espionage, subversion, sabotage or to camouflage its involvement as a “sponsor” of some covert actions. Consequently, the counterintelligence responsibility is to identify and transmit to decision-makers comprehensive information about foreign entities, the essential condition being for the data to be collected and transmitted in a secret manner, namely protected. (Wasemiller, 1994) In this context, intelligence and counterintelligence activities generate an intelligence product that is “almost a by-product of a governance

concept that often entails and relies on a secret support infrastructure”. (Davies and Gustafson, 2013, p. 291)

A current imperative in terms of counterintelligence is to overcome the classical limitation to the protection of government secrets and corporate intellectual property (by neutralizing the recruitment of targets) and to focus on the efforts meant to divide the society and make it vulnerable. Soviet active measures were aimed at dividing the society and undermining the citizens’ trust in their own institutions, as relevance being subsumed under the classical process of recruiting and exploiting secret human sources. Currently, they have been supplemented with an ingredient such as social networks, amid the “online tribalism” the possibility of expanding the fissures of society by disseminating fake news being amplified. (Costa and Geltzer, 2019)

The active measures employed by the USSR were mainly intended against the USA and, under those circumstances; they stimulated the development of American counterintelligence. (Sudoplatov et. al., 1994, p. 5; McNamara, 2010, p. 2) Thus, in order to monitor active measures, in 1981, it was established in the USA an interagency cooperation structure – Active Measures Working Group – which consisted of representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Defence (DoD), the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Department of Justice and the United States Information Agency. The mentioned structure (disbanded following the dissolution of the USSR-A.N.) made public different materials, namely: “Forgery, disinformation and influence operations of the USSR in US documents (1981),” “Active Measures: A Report on the Substance and Process of Anti-U.S. Disinformation and Propaganda Campaigns (1986),” “Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986–1987 (1987),” ‘Disinformation, The Media, and Foreign Policy (1987),’ “Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost (1988),” “Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986–1987 (1989),” “Soviet Active Measures in the ‘Post-Cold War’ Era 1988-1991 (1992).”

The study of active measures is a topical theme. For example, the “Institute of World Politics’ publishes the academic journal “Active

Measures” (<https://www.iwp.edu/category/active-measures/>); the “Centre for Eastern Studies” in Poland published, in 2017, “Active measures. Russia’s Key Export” (2017); under the aegis of the “European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats/Hybrid COE Strategic Analysis,” in 2018, it appeared the study “The resurrection of «active measures»: Intelligence services as a part of Russia’s influencing toolbox.” (<https://www.hybridcoe.fi/>)

Foreign/External Influence Operations – Means of Action of Current Active Measures

Relating to active measures, from the perspective of counterintelligence, the term foreign/ external influence is used, which is why we appreciate that it is an approach that correctly reflects an effect-means relationship: influence is a result of various activities/means employed by adverse foreign entities, regardless of the degree of topicality and upgrade, using social and technological elements. In fact, traditionally, in addition to the collection of open source information (and the use of technology to collect secret information – A.N.), security and intelligence services conduct recruitment activities (subsumed under “classical espionage”) to access information of interest – the aim is to obtain information on political decision-making and sometimes to influence decision-making processes. (<https://www.supo.fi/vastatiedustelu>)

Influence operations – including covert actions conducted by foreign governments to influence the public or political arena – are not new, but the interconnection of modern society coupled with the resources of the Internet has amplified the impact of this threat. (<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/foreign-influence>) Foreign influence, positioned as influencing a state’s domestic policy (and possibly associated with information warfare), is a threat to the constitutional order and it can be achieved directly by various foreign state entities, including security and intelligence services or indirectly by using “compatriots/ethnic groups” as a political pretext. In this regard, the normal interest of a foreign state in providing linguistic and cultural support differs visibly from the objective of influencing the decision-making process of another state through financial

interventions and the rhetoric of official and unofficial declarations. (<https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/influence-activities.html>)

Counterintelligence identifies the activities initiated by foreign authorities and by natural or legal persons (mainly intelligence services) acting in the interests of foreign authorities. From this perspective, counterintelligence has the following major functions: a) informative – information is collected, records are made and information about the activities, interests and intentions of foreign authorities is sent to legal beneficiaries; b) preventive – measures are recommended or adopted to prevent or disrupt foreign intelligence activities. The preventive function is aimed at: avoiding the leakage of classified information; obstructing openly or discreetly the activities of foreign intelligence services; detecting and disrupting the operations through which the influence of foreign authorities is achieved and extended through disinformation, manipulation, deception, propaganda etc. (<https://www.bis.cz/counterintelligence/>)

From the FBI's perspective, foreign influence operations refer to: the classical targeting of officials and other persons through the classical methods of intelligence activities; the use of fake identities and narrative elements fabricated on social platforms to discredit individuals and institutions (there is an increased diffusion of disinformation, contradictions/tensions are generated to undermine trust); illegal actions affecting the voting process and financing the campaigns; cyber-attacks on voting infrastructure, along with computer-type intrusions targeting elected officials and other people. (<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/foreign-influence>) In 2017, within the FBI it was established the "Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF)", which is aimed at identifying and countering the foreign influence operations targeting democratic institutions.

The FBI has also developed the "Protected Voices project", which provides tools and resources (including from the Department of Homeland Security and the Director of National Intelligence) for protection against online influence operations. Threats include cyber-attacks on political campaigns and government infrastructure (hacking and extracting sensitive information from computers, databases, networks, telephones and e-mails); secret funding or influence

operations to support or denigrate a person or cause (political publicity by foreign groups declaring themselves US citizens, illegal campaign contributions); disinformation on social media platforms (e.g., intentionally disseminating fake or incoherent information about a social issue to provoke all parties and stimulate conflict, see: <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/foreign-influence/protected-voices>).

Related to foreign influence, it is necessary to present counterintelligence functions³: a) collection of data regarding foreign intelligence entities and their activities using open or clandestine sources; b) study and analysis of their structure, personnel, activities and operations; c) operations meant to disturb and neutralize the adversaries activities (Moravej and Díaz, 2007), and Jeffrey Richelson (2016, p. 544) adds d) investigation of involved people, and e) support for operations. Michelle K. Van Cleave (2013, p. 60-64) invokes some specific sequences – identification, assessment, neutralization and exploitation of the adversary activities (neutralization also includes the categories established by Arthur S. Hulnick (2006, p. 14) as well as informative penetration and success publicity-A.N.).

Conclusions

Counterintelligence should consider covert activities (usually to promote subversion) a significant threat, derived from the Cold War period. It is more important in the context in which adverse entities, regardless of ideology, use the same underground tactics in their invisible attempt to influence and force “gaining loyalty” to a democratic society. Given that the central bureaucratic systems are inadequate in relation to the threats posed by “agile transnational networks” the effective protection is achieved through education at national level as the “best defence of a nation is an informed citizen”.

One of the ways to detect/identify subversive activities (aimed at discrediting and undermining the power, regime or a social situation in a given territory – A.N.) – and by extension active measures/

³ One of the functions is “defectors assessment”, but we consider it is not independent, being included in the area of foreign services study and analysis.

influence operations – is awareness, through which citizens are cognizant of the threats posed by subversive activities and assimilate the ways to recognize them, while the competent structures communicate the contact details for the reported cases. Logically, if the inquiries/investigations and assessments of threats are conducted by experts, the specific means of detection/identification – surveillance and cooperation between state or private structures – are supplemented with awareness, where the citizen becomes an active part. Related to the idea of awareness, in an asymmetrical threat environment, the effectiveness of counterintelligence derives not only from external partnerships but also from internal practices.

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