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## **The Intelligence Studies Essay: "Hybrid Warfare" at Home: Asymmetric Tactics Are Not Just Used in Ukraine, They Are Employed against the United States, and Have Been for Quite Some Time**

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### **Executive Summary**

The hacking and release of Democratic National Committee emails is a recent example of "hybrid warfare" likely directed against the United States by foreign entities. The term "hybrid warfare" which has been in particular vogue since Russia's destabilization of Ukraine is a vague and much-debated concept. However, it often seems to be applied in situations in which a foreign power endeavors to undermine another's ability to govern by fomenting or exploiting domestic unrest (rather than engage in coercion using military force). The resultant vacuum of power gives the sponsor plausible deniability and an opportunity to enhance its own influence by filling that vacuum. It also forces the victimized

government to focus on internal problems, making it more difficult for that government to pursue objectives internationally (and, therefore, diminishing its role as a competitor on the global stage.)

The United States has long been a target of hybrid warfare by states seeking to disrupt or influence U.S. decision-making. Hostile activities can be categorized under four paradigms: *nullification of political actors* – creating discord within a constituency so that it cannot effectively unify around a policy, or undercutting the credibility of a prominent policymaker who champions unwanted outcomes; *assistance to anti-government movements* – identifying elements in society which are willing to attack (rather than participate in) the policymaking process with vitriol or violence; *fomenting distrust of the U.S. policymaking process*, in order to sap its legitimacy; and *appearing to fill needs / wants that the U.S. government cannot* and thereby supplanting the U.S. government in a specific area. (Of course the countries that have been most active in this area – Cuba and Venezuela – have been unable to sustain their own states.)

## Introduction

“Hybrid warfare” is no longer simply a term to describe Russian aggression in Ukraine and actions in the former Soviet space. With the hack and subsequent leak of the Democratic National Committee’s emails – activities that a number of credible voices have attributed to Moscow – the threat that tactics of “hybrid warfare” pose to the United States is clear. What they are not, is **new**. Foreign governments have targeted the United States through “hybrid warfare” even before the term came into vogue. Throughout the Cold War – and even before – the Soviet Union (which established the intelligence apparatus that Russia inherited) and China as well as smaller states such as Cuba all skirted direct conflict and instead employed covert attacks on U.S. sovereignty.

Although “hybrid warfare” is a widely used characterization of non-traditional hostilities it remains an ambiguous concept. Scholars, such as the Rand Corporation’s Christopher Paul and the National Defense University’s Frank Hoffman have argued that as often understood, the term fails to capture the essence of anything truly unique. However, the phenomenon that academics and practitioners are struggling to characterize is unique and does play out in a distinct, shadowy kind of conflict. “Hybrid war” is directed at undermining a state’s sovereignty, rather than coercing a government to act in a desired way. Degrading sovereignty requires creating internal dissension, either by leading a population to believe that a government cannot fulfill its obligations toward its people, or by leading a population to view itself as disenfranchised and, consequently, regard its government as illegitimate.

Given the likelihood that foreign efforts to disrupt U.S. political discourse – in furtherance of stymying decisiveness about developments beyond its borders - will continue, it is worth

examining the paradigms that a foreign government endeavoring to manipulate U.S. policy might attempt to create. First, a foreign power may seek to nullify the voices of constituencies or officials that it perceives as hostile to its interests. Reducing the impact of U.S. constituencies undercuts policymakers' by giving them a seemingly diminished mandate to justify difficult decisions. While working to nullify certain voices that would empower policymaking, foreign governments attempt to unleash others that seek to undercut the legitimacy of the U.S. government. Of interest to foreign governments seeking to chip away at the U.S. government's ability to act are voices which contribute to three broad categories of activity: lawlessness (i.e. those individuals and organizations that are an active affront to authorities); militant and extremist movements (e.g. Cuban collusion with leftist radicals during the 1960s and 1970s); fomenting distrust of the U.S. government (e.g. Soviet encouragement of conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy and more recently, the likely Russian government-sponsored release of emails that suggest political machinations within the DNC); and portraying the U.S. government as indifferent and weak when it comes to the needs of its population – a theme usually accompanied by the token gesture of a foreign government, such as Venezuela in its subsidized heating oil program.

### **Attempts to Nullify Political Actors' Influence on Policymaking**

Multiple foreign governments (e.g. China, Russia, Iran etc.) have attempted to silence dissent emanating from abroad. Of particular relevance to understanding the impacts of hybrid warfare on the United States are those actions that are meant to prevent robust U.S. policymaking. This can be done either by causing divisions within an otherwise-united political constituency or by discrediting policymakers whose diminished stature might make it more difficult for them to champion bold proposals. A related but conceptually different category of activity is foreign governments' efforts to silence dissidents who direct their efforts at attacking the regimes from which they have fled.

Cuba is one example of a state that has engaged in efforts to disrupt the anti-Castro, Cuban lobby in the United States. Intelligence collection against a group is a decent indicator that there will be future steps to influence or compete with a group. Cuba has thrown resources at identifying groups and individuals, within the United States, who it believes to be enemies of the Castro revolution. The La Red Avispa network was a Cuban-sponsored intelligence apparatus that operated in Florida from 1992 until 1998, which, among other things, monitored Cuban exile organizations. Cuba's foreign intelligence service (the DGI) not only hoped to gather information but also sought to foment conflict and sow distrust within the émigré population.<sup>[1]</sup> Cuba had previously demonstrated its desire to neutralize the influence of US-based Cubans, when, in the late 1970s, the DGI developed "Plan Alpha", which envisioned splitting the Cuban-American community, as part of a push for normalized relations between Washington and Havana.<sup>[2]</sup>

Foreign governments may also attempt to degrade the effectiveness of U.S. policymaking by undermining proponents of policies which these governments oppose. One clear example of this activity was the Soviet Union's (unsuccessful) search for compromising information about

Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, who was known for his opposition to Moscow.[3] The KGB attempted to find information indicating that Jackson was a homosexual and, failing to identify anything factual, resorted to a forgery campaign directed at painting him as gay.[4] In today’s political environment, a foreign power could easily conduct similar smear campaigns, using “K Street” opposition researchers-for hire and exploiting the liberal and conservative media echo chambers that amplify candidates’ smallest peccadillos.

### **Sponsorship and Exploitation of US Criminal Elements**

Multiple countries and non-state actors have attempted to leverage U.S. criminal groups to their advantage. Often this represents an effort to expand control, as in the case of narcotics cartels that endeavor to develop a foothold in the United States through collusion with gangs. Similarly, terrorist groups may attempt to develop adherents to their ideology who will ultimately engage in destructive acts on behalf of the organization. Both of these are threats to sovereignty, as they create groups that not only owe their allegiance to foreign, non-state actors but will also engage in violence against U.S. society in furtherance of those entities. Several foreign governments have pursued similar links with criminals as a means of destabilizing American society by sowing chaos.

Not surprisingly, the country guilty of seeking to sow destabilization through inspiring criminal activity is Cuba, a state that from the outset has relied on guerilla tactics and the associated chaos to obtain power. According to a Cuban defector, operatives of the Cuban government engaged in narcotics trafficking between 1980-1981 in New York, New Jersey, and Florida, with the intention of creating social unrest.[5] Substances of which Cuba facilitated distribution included cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine. Compounding this onslaught, Cuba, during the 1980 Mariel boatlift, which permitted mass immigration to the United States, seeded approximately 8,000 criminals into the tide of emigrants. Fidel Castro, apparently recognizing the impact of this event, threatened, in 1994, to permit a similar mass exodus if the United States did not take more stringent measures to guard its coasts. The most explicit linkage of criminal behavior to political objectives was Cuba’s “Plan Bravo”. According to Cuban defector Genaro Perez, the DGI would implement Plan Bravo – which consisted of inciting Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans - if relations between the United States and Cuba were not normalized.[6] In 1981, during a meeting in Nicaragua, Fidel Castro claimed his operatives in the United States were so well-positioned that he could instigate a race riot at any time of his choosing.[7] Whether Castro’s resources were as efficacious as he believed (or bragged), his statement makes clear that he considered the instigation of violence to be a useful tactic against the United States.

Cuba, although a lengthy perpetrator of criminal activity, is not the only country which has used such individuals or activities to its advantage. In 1971, the KGB forged communications ostensibly from the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a fringe militant group, and arranged for their delivery to various African-American organizations. These communications called for a campaign against African-Americans in response to their supposed violence against Jews. Apparently, to bolster the impression of an ongoing assault on African-Americans, the KGB

arranged for letters, detailing supposed JDL atrocities and directed these to African-American groups.<sup>[8]</sup>

In another instance of a foreign government seeking to instigate violent criminal behavior, Libya struck an agreement, in 1985, with a group called Al Rukn – which was founded by a Chicago gang member – to engage in mayhem on Libya’s behalf. For USD 2.5 million and asylum in Tripoli, Al Rukn would carry out attacks on U.S. police stations, government facilities, military bases, and passenger airplanes.<sup>[9]</sup> (Several decades later a member of an al-Qaida related conspiracy cited the leader of Al Rukn as an inspiration.<sup>[10]</sup>) Approximately a decade after its dalliance with Al Rukn, Libya’s Moammar Qaddafi connected with another US malcontent – the Nation of Islam’s Louis Farrakhan – and supposedly provided Farrakhan with USD 1 billion for political activities within the United States.<sup>[11]</sup> Finally, shortly after the Iranian revolution, Iran reportedly sent money and other aid to U.S.-based supporters of the Ayatollah Khomeini to help foment civil unrest.<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Assistance to Anti-Government Militant Movements**

One step removed from incitement of criminal activities as an end in themselves, foreign governments and non-state entities have latched on to elements within or originating from U.S. society who have become violently disaffected with America. Countries which have tended to pursue this approach – the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba – have a national identity that features a prominent ideological element. Arguably the clearly formulated articulation of a state’s supposedly monolithic worldview facilitates the attraction of adherents – albeit rigid, unquestioning ones – who would rather not waste their limited mental capacity on critical thinking. Furthermore, these countries have also relied on the idea of communism as creating a worldwide movement into which they could tap for resources capable of conducting destabilization or espionage. (China and the Russian Federation – successor to the Soviet Union – have more recently applied this perspective to their diaspora populations, viewing them as “overseas Chinese” and “compatriots”, respectively.)

The first variant of foreign-sponsored militancy is propagandistic and involves providing anti-US government voices with platforms from which to spout vitriol and potentially incite violence. Robert F. Williams, who advocated violence in lieu of a more pacifist civil rights movement, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and ultimately authored *Negroes with Guns*, fled the United States, in 1961, for Cuba and then China. In China and Cuba, Williams reportedly worked with guerilla warfare specialists.<sup>[13]</sup> The Revolutionary Action Movement in the United States looked to Williams, who was abroad and meeting at various times with Mao Tse-tung, Chou En Lai and Lin Piao, for guidance.<sup>[14]</sup>

Cuba and China provided Williams, the violent dissident, with platforms to purvey his anti-Americanism to broader audiences. In China he wrote propaganda for Beijing; produced a publication titled *The Crusader*, which attacked the United States; and made anti-American broadcasts from Beijing.<sup>[15]</sup> In Cuba, before decamping to China, Fidel Castro had provided

Williams with the resources to conduct broadcasts, called Radio Free Dixie, into Southern states.[\[16\]](#)

Foreign governments have also provided dissident elements with resources that would allow them to engage in asymmetric conflict on U.S. soil. Cuba, for instance, provided the fifth Venceremos Brigade (VB) with training in journalism, film, and radio.[\[17\]](#) The activities were meant to provide members of the VB with resources which they could use to promote the Cuban revolution and communism writ large within the United States.[\[18\]](#) China similarly supported subversive organizations by funneling money into the U.S. via the Tanzanian Mission to the United Nations.[\[19\]](#)

Of course, foreign governments likely expected assistance from these radicals once they returned to the United States. According to Congressional testimony on the Theory and Practice of Communism, the Cuban Mission to the United Nations maintained a close association with the leaders of the Venceremos Brigades.[\[20\]](#) A defector from the Cuban DGI described how VB members were tasked to provide telephone books of the United States with the objective of identifying and verifying the identity of certain people. VB members furnished these, including U.S. Senate directories.[\[21\]](#)

Foreign governments have also provided support and benefited from individuals who have attacked the U.S. government through disclosures of information that they have attempted to portray as acts of altruism (rather than misguided ideology, arrogance, narcissism, or sheer stupidity). Until the era of *Wikileaks*, the most notorious turncoat was Philip Agee, a former CIA officer whose book *Inside the Company* named approximately 250 CIA officers. (This egregious act would inspire the passage of a law criminalizing such disclosures.) Both the Cuban DGI and the KGB provided guidance to Agee's writing.[\[22\]](#) Subsequently, the KGB was behind the founding of the *Covert Action Information Bulletin* (CAIB) by Agee and his associates.[\[23\]](#) The KGB used this periodical as a vehicle for disseminating information intended to embarrass the CIA.[\[24\]](#) Agee eventually died, still harbored by Cuba, in 2008.

The Agee story has parallels with the more recent Edward Snowden debacle. An anonymous contractor who nonetheless managed to do incalculable damage through his disclosure of National Security Agency information, Snowden, after making public the information that he had stolen, took up refuge in Russia. Moscow's repeated attempts to undermine and embarrass the United States in multiple venues provides context for its harboring of Snowden (i.e. Snowden is just one more jab that Moscow can take at Washington). Even Agee's *Covert Action Information Bulletin* has a modern corollary in Glenn Greenwald's publication, *The Intercept*, which was arguably enabled by the notoriety that Greenwald earned as the journalist to whom Snowden made disclosures. *The Intercept* has sought to maintain the drumbeat against the U.S. intelligence community that was set by the breaking of story after story timed with the release of new documents. However, it has become increasingly vacuous in its offerings – betraying its purpose as a cudgel to be wielded against the U.S. government.



## *Foreign Governments' Use of Militant Groups to Perpetrate Physical Violence in the United States*

The interest which foreign governments demonstrated in U.S. radical groups suggests that their objective was not limited to the warfare of propaganda. For instance, the Weatherman faction of Students for a Democratic Society – which engaged in attacks on U.S. soil - was a key constituency in the creation of the pro-Cuban Venceremos Brigades (founded in 1969 by a coalition of New Left groups) which illicitly traveled back and forth between the United States and Cuba.[\[25\]](#) The Weatherman faction maintained its own contacts with Cuban officials.[\[26\]](#) The infamous Bernadine Dohrn led a Students for a Democratic Society on an extended trip to Cuba.[\[27\]](#) Similarly, China, in 1971, hosted a lengthy visit by the Revolutionary Union, another militant organization.[\[28\]](#)

Cuba's willingness not only to coddle groups prone to violence but to assist and incite violence within the United States was indicated by multiple pronouncements and actions. For instance, in the mid-1960s, an individual at the Cuban embassy in Montreal, Canada (Cuba did not have representation vis-à-vis the U.S. government until the late 1970s) planned to provide a U.S. national with materials to conduct an attack in New York.[\[29\]](#) Furthermore, members of the Venceremos Brigade, while visiting Cuba, were told that it was their job to bring about revolution in the United States and that it was up to them to determine whether this would occur peacefully or through violent means. The Cuban government contacts with the Brigade members seemed inclined toward the latter route, by suggesting that no empire would willingly relinquish its power.[\[30\]](#)

Perhaps Cuba's most sustained effort at instigating revolution in the United States was its support for and possible creation of the violent Puerto Rico independence movement. The FALN was created in 1974 and was publicly endorsed by Fidel Castro, who proclaimed his government's willingness to provide any assistance necessary. The group was reportedly organized by Cuba's DGI, which used the Cuban Mission to the United Nations as a platform for operation.[\[31\]](#) A intelligence officer posted to the Cuban mission provided training on aspects of explosives and urban guerilla warfare.[\[32\]](#) Prior to its creation of the FALN, Cuba had provided assistance, in the form of arms and training, to a FALN predecessor, the Puerto Rican Independent Armed Revolutionary Movement (MIRA) which launched its first attack in 1969.[\[33\]](#) MIRA's leader, Ojeda Rios – who later founded the FALN with MIRA sympathizers - received Cuban instruction in sabotage and spycraft before receiving Fidel Castro's approval to form a group that would engage in mayhem directed at targets in Puerto Rico as well as the U.S. mainland.[\[34\]](#) Cuba also provided public praise for violent Puerto Rican separatists. When two leaders of the independence movement who had attempted to assassinate President Harry S. Truman were released from prison in 1979, they were feted in Cuba by the Cuban Communist Party.[\[35\]](#)

## **Creating Distrust of the US Government**

It is more difficult for the United States government to act decisively on the international front if it is beset by internal unrest. The threats of violence by criminal and militant elements are the most extreme forms of such unrest. However, foreign governments have and will likely continue to sow subversion meant to cast doubt on Washington's trustworthiness and competency. According to a 1987 FBI assessment of Soviet "active measures" (i.e. covert actions meant to bring about political consequences) Moscow sought to "undermine public confidence in U.S. leaders and institutions."[\[36\]](#) The Soviet Union and its Russian successor have a lengthy history in this area – spreading conspiracy theories about everything from the assassination of John F. Kennedy to U.S. government responsibility for AIDS. But, other foreign entities have also sought to create doubts in the minds of the American public about its government's ability and willingness to meet its needs. Prominent among these have been Venezuela and Cuba, which have gone so far as to offer services to supposedly overlooked sectors of the U.S. population, likely in an effort to cast Washington as either ineffective or callous. (One need only to look at the state of both Havana and Caracas to recognize that their charity would be put to better use at home.)

The Soviet Union, almost from its outset, engaged in deception and disinformation using operations such as the "Trust" - an operation in the 1920s that was directed at identifying dissidents using a fake opposition movement - to create false impressions and gain the confidence of skeptical audiences. On several occasions, Moscow applied these skills to casting the U.S. government as a nefarious actor seeking to stymie political discourse, even to the point of assassinating its own elected leader. Following the Kennedy assassination in 1963, the Soviet Union began to capitalize on a public demand for answers, by subsidizing the works of conspiracy theorists. Carl Aldo Marzani, a publisher, received Soviet funds and brought out the book, *Oswald: Assassin or Fall Guy*, in 1964.[\[37\]](#) Mark Lane, author of *Rush to Judgment*, which was published in 1966 received indirectly (and apparently unknown to him) KGB funds, due to his development of an argument that would support the narrative that the Soviet Union was attempting to develop.[\[38\]](#) Moscow's handling of the Kennedy assassination also calls attention to its use of forgeries as a tool of disinformation campaigns. In this case, the KGB forged a letter appearing to come from Lee Harvey Oswald to E. Howard Hunt (later implicated in Watergate), apparently seeking guidance prior to the assassination.[\[39\]](#) (Soviet-instigated disruption, using forgeries, has been an ongoing problem and one which has been facilitated by collection activities. In a 1987 assessment, the FBI noted that KGB operatives collected documents and information which subsequently surfaced in forgery and disinformation operations.[\[40\]](#))

The most recent example of attempts to discredit the U.S. political process is the release – believed by experts to be the work of Moscow – of a tranche of emails from the DNC, via *Wikileaks*. On the Friday before the start of the Democratic convention, *Wikileaks* suddenly spilled 20,000 emails that threw the party into an uproar and resulted in a high-profile resignation by Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz from her position as head of the DNC.[\[41\]](#) Russia, in addition to casting doubt on the integrity of U.S. politics (pouring gasoline the already existent proclivity toward Hofstadter's "paranoid style in American politics") would conceivably benefit from any uptick in support for Republican nominee Donald Trump (whose affinity for Moscow is no secret). Trump even seems to be inviting further Moscow-driven disruptions. As quoted by the *New York Times*, he suggested that "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able



to find the 30,000 emails that are missing,” and further opined that he believed such efforts would “probably be rewarded mightily by our press.”[\[42\]](#) (So, to be clear: a candidate for the U.S. presidency called on a hostile foreign government to engage in cyber-espionage against the United States.) That the release of the DNC emails was an act of aggression – an element of “hybrid warfare” – is borne out by credible media reports that Russia’s military intelligence service, the GRU, played a significant role in the disclosure.[\[43\]](#)

### *Creating a Perception of Disenfranchisement*

While the activities discussed above are directed at creating a general distrust of the political process, foreign powers also seek to exacerbate constituencies’ perceptions of disenfranchisement. By sowing – or exploiting existing – grievances foreign powers weaken the United States in several ways. Groups that opt out of the political process and resort to perpetual protest (e.g. “Occupy Wall Street”) and even violence contribute to a diminished mandate for policies developed by elected officials. Internationally, these movements become fodder for hostile propaganda that can degrade the United States’ ability to protect and promote its interests.

The Soviet Union historically attempted to create the impression among elements of U.S. society that their civil rights and civil liberties were being violated by the government. According to Vasili Mitrokhin and Christopher Andrew, the KGB, following the death of Martin Luther King Jr., propagated conspiracy theories that King’s death had been orchestrated by white supremacists, with the connivance of authorities.[\[44\]](#) Then, in 1980, the Soviets introduced a forged Presidential review memorandum that attempted to show that the U.S. government was using the CIA against the African-American population in the United States and that the government was attempting to sabotage relationships between Black groups in the United States and nationalist movements in Africa.[\[45\]](#) The Soviets also endeavored to portray Leonard Peltier, who killed two FBI agents, as a political prisoner.[\[46\]](#) This approach served double-duty in attacking the United States, since it not only was intended to discredit the U.S. government but also, tacitly, to encourage the use of violence.

Soviet officials’ interest in fanning controversy within American society is further indicated by collection activities that seemed to focus on finding exploitable fractures. During a 1967 meeting between a Capitol Hill staffer and a Soviet First Secretary, the First Secretary inquired about the controversy surrounding the concept of a ballistic missile system.[\[47\]](#) As indicated above, the Soviet Union saw the civil rights movement – particularly the turmoil which surrounded it – as a phenomena that could be exploited to sow confusion and distrust. Consistent with this is a 1966 episode during which a Soviet official approached a House of Representatives’ Judiciary Committee staffer claiming that his primary interest was the civil rights movement. Under this heading the Soviet official was particularly interested in the identities of the civil rights leaders who had attended a recent conference at the White House, as well as the identities of those who were not invited to the conference and the reason why they were not invited.[\[48\]](#) This type of information could certainly be exploited to exacerbate rifts in the civil rights movement which, by the mid-1960s, was torn between peaceful protest and a more militant approach. The KGB

was active in trying to discredit the former – notably in its efforts to marginalize Martin Luther King Jr. - and inciting the latter.

It appears that Russia has, following the Soviet Union’s lead, engaged in activities intended to exacerbate tensions and anxieties within various U.S. constituencies. The Russian Internet Agency, which reportedly has close ties to the Kremlin, created online posts intended to fuel outrage about a recent (but fictional) shooting of an African-American woman in Atlanta, GA.[49] This disinformation capitalized on the scrutiny of police departments and the emergence of activist groups (e.g. Black Lives Matter) which could often be counted on to put an outraged narrative before the facts. The same Russian outfit also exploited uneasiness about homeland security to create concern. Operatives employed sophisticated social media campaigns to stir panic about nonexistent chemical plants and the Ebola crises.[50] These are not isolated instances. The Russian government paid millions of dollars for the services of English-speaking Russians to post pro-Putin content on the sites of U.S. media outlets including *Fox News*, the *Huffington Post*, and *Politico*. [51] Moscow is not alone in using Internet “trolls” to sway social media trends.[52]

### **Sating Demands Unfulfilled by the U.S. Government**

Much of “hybrid warfare”, as discussed in this essay, relies on the covert nature of foreign powers’ relationships with U.S. proxies. To effectively portray a state as dysfunctional it is counterproductive to provide an external explanation. However, in certain cases, foreign governments and non-state actors seek to present themselves as offering an alternative to what the U.S. government can provide. This goes beyond the vague concepts of a “worker’s paradise” or an “Islamic state” and, instead, confronts the U.S. government by seeming to resolve issues that Washington appears unable to address. Although these foreign-sponsored initiatives are unsustainable – as in Venezuela’s doling out of low-cost heating oil – they do, for a short time, give the appearance of U.S. constituencies’ reliance on an external and often hostile actor, thereby weakening U.S. sovereignty.

Cuba, which spent the Cold War under Soviet tutelage, endeavored to embarrass the United States in the post-Cold War era by offering to provide services that highlighted perceived inequities in U.S. society. In 2000, Fidel Castro offered to provide medical scholarships for U.S. students at the Latin American Medical School (ELAM) following a dinner with members of the Congressional Black Caucus who were visiting Cuba.[53] Castro stipulated that he would offer as many as 500 scholarships for U.S. students who agreed to serve impoverished U.S. communities but were unable to afford medical school.[54] Cuba’s ELAM has been assisted by a U.S. activist group, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), which selects students and coordinates the program in the United States.[55] IFCO’s leader, Lucius Walker, attempted to evade U.S. sanctions on Cuba and was arrested in 1996, for seeking to transport computers to the country without a license from the U.S. Treasury Department.[56] Additionally, Cuba has a long track record of using its medical professionals for propaganda purposes. In 2005, following Hurricane Katrina, Castro’s offer to send 1,100 doctors to assist Gulf Coast residents was a disingenuous jab at Washington.

Apart from the cheap political points that Havana has attempted to score against Washington, Cuba may also be attempting to secure longer-term benefits through its influence activities. First, broaching the topic of medical training with the Congressional Black Caucus was likely a bid for additional political support that could lead to the change in U.S.-Cuban relations. The extent of the Congressional Black Caucus's involvement is indicated by the role of its members, in processing early ELAM applicants.<sup>[57]</sup> Additionally, the Caucus successfully protested the U.S. administration's demand, in 2005, that the American ELAM students return to the United States.<sup>[58]</sup> Previous to the ELAM episode, the Black Caucus was identified as an entity with which Ramon Sanchez Parodi, the head of DGI operations in Washington, D.C., worked.<sup>[59]</sup> Furthermore, students in ELAM are a modern parallel to the Venceremos Brigades and, consequently, pose similar intelligence concerns. The DGI viewed the Venceremos Brigades, which were ideologically sympathetic to Cuba, as a venue to recruit individuals who might obtain elected or appointed office and would be able to provide the Cuban government with political, economic, or military intelligence.<sup>[60]</sup> Students studying at ELAM may not initially be ideologically beholden to the Cuban Revolution but after a mandatory year spent learning non-medical subjects including Cuban history and culture, which, especially in Cuba's oppressive political environment, may inculcate sympathy for the regime. Just as an alumnus of the Venceremos Brigades – former Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who served from 2005 to 2013 – reached a position of influence, it is possible that U.S. alumni of ELAM could attain similar positions of power and act based on comprised ideological allegiances.

Venezuela, another country which has explicitly sought to embarrass the U.S. government at home, derives much of its inspiration from Cuba. While president, Hugo Chavez drew on the iconography of the Cuban revolution to bolster his own image. For instance, in 2007, Chavez delivered one of his weekly broadcasts from Santa Clara, Cuba, where the remains of Che Guevara are kept.<sup>[61]</sup> This followed a 2005 episode, during the Summit of the Americas, during which Chavez led a protest rally in Argentina using a portrait of Che Guevara as the backdrop for his demagoguery.<sup>[62]</sup> More tangible Cuban inspiration has come in the form of assistance from Havana's intelligence apparatus. Since at least 1999, the Cuban DGI had been attempting to infiltrate Venezuelan intelligence – then known as DISIP (it was renamed SEBIN in 2009). Cuban operatives gained direct access to Chavez, influenced training, helped to develop a national ID program, and assumed control of various border and immigration posts.<sup>[63]</sup>

Under Chavez, Citgo, a subsidiary of Venezuela's state-run PDVSA, ran a pointed, politicized, and very public program of distributing subsidized heating oil to low-income American communities. In September 2005, Chavez visited the Bronx borough of New York City and met with 17 community groups. During this visit, he proposed selling heating oil at below-market rates as well as investing some of Venezuela's oil revenue in health and environmental programs.<sup>[64]</sup> In 2007, Citgo made a commitment to donate USD 3.6 million to nine Bronx initiatives –under the umbrella of Petro Bronx - that would create jobs, foster community empowerment, promote environmentalism.<sup>[65]</sup> This brought the rampant populist pandering for which Chavez was infamous to U.S. soil. After it provided 12 million gallons of low-priced heating fuel to 40,000 Massachusetts households, it took the opportunity to take out full page newspaper ads touting Venezuela as “keeping the home fires burning” in the United States.<sup>[66]</sup> Furthermore, 62 beneficiaries of the program traveled to Venezuela and several appeared as guests on Chavez's weekly broadcast.

The subsidized fuel program was certainly a Chavez bid to win points with U.S. politicians. In 2005, Representative Jose Serrano joined Chavez during his Bronx visit. Serrano had been responsible for reaching an agreement with Chavez which stipulated that Citgo would provide eight million gallons of heating oil, at a 40 percent discount, to thousands of low-income, South Bronx residents.[\[67\]](#) In a similar deal, Representative Bill Delahunt brokered a deal whereby Massachusetts' Citizens Energy Corporation and the Mass Energy Alliance would become distributors of Chavez's malignant magnanimity.[\[68\]](#) Delahunt's ties to Chavez reportedly date to at least 1999, the year that Chavez became Venezuela's president.[\[69\]](#)

However, while Venezuela might have curried favor with a couple of politicians, its overarching strategy was one of embarrassing the U.S. government, rather than developing support within it for preferred policies. In 2005, Chavez, while at the United Nations, explicitly attacked the U.S. government for not doing enough for impoverished residents of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.[\[70\]](#) Subsequently, in 2006, the Venezuela Information Office, a propaganda apparatus for the Venezuelan government, claimed that the Chavez government was offering fuel to the United States for "humanitarian" reasons.[\[71\]](#) (Such rhetoric implies that the measure was meant to remedy a shortcoming which the United States government was unable to address.)

Venezuela's intent to undermine the U.S. government's efficacy was apparent in its fostering of movements toward autonomy and even separatism. During a 2014 speech at the United Nations, Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro expressed support for Puerto Rican independence.[\[72\]](#) Previously, Caracas' efforts to appeal directly to autonomous groups were apparent in its provision of heating fuel to Native American communities.[\[73\]](#) Even in Alaska, where Citgo could not provide fuel since it did not operate in the state, it nonetheless provided financial assistance to approximately 150 villages of indigenous inhabitants.[\[74\]](#) Venezuela has also linked aid to the development of cooperatives, a step toward self-sustaining entities that have little need or reason to respond to the U.S. government. Venezuela's projects in the Bronx included multiple cooperative ventures.[\[75\]](#) The non-profit, CASA of Maryland, implemented a Citgo-funded program to encourage the formation of worker-owned cooperatives.[\[76\]](#) Alarming, in 2007, CASA's then-executive director, Gustavo Torres expressed his hope that Venezuela's then-ambassador to the United States, Bernardo Alvarez, would encourage the Venezuelan government to do more in assisting local social programs.[\[77\]](#)

In the context of Venezuela's attempts to exploit autonomy as a means to undercut the U.S. government, it is not surprising that Caracas would target its aid and interest toward specific, seemingly disenfranchised segments of society that likely feel little connection with Washington. In the National Capital Region, Venezuela provided free heating oil to various homeless shelters[\[78\]](#); in Maryland (through CASA) it funded programs for immigrant workers[\[79\]](#) and a representative from the Venezuelan embassy actually attended a Washington, DC, rally for domestic workers.[\[80\]](#) As energy analyst David Goldwyn pointed out to Congress, "On the days when U.S. oil companies are here testifying about how Congress needs to deal with low income heating assistance programs, what does President Chavez do? He decides to provide heating oil to Northeast communities. It's clever."[\[81\]](#)

Venezuela's exploitation of marginalized populations includes its attempts to coopt the advocacy groups which represent them. During Chavez's visit to the Bronx in 2005, he was accompanied

not only be Serrano, but by Jesse Jackson, who had also appeared on Chavez's weekly television and radio broadcast.<sup>[82]</sup> The handling of the Citgo allotments to the Bronx was done via three housing non-profits.<sup>[83]</sup> Citizens Energy – which produced the infamous 1-877-JOE-4-OIL commercials – was initially responsible for distributing Citgo fuel in Massachusetts but, as of 2006, had taken on duties for 16 states. (That same year brought controversy to Citizens, when reporting became public that Citgo had underwritten the group's overtly pro-Venezuelan advertisements.<sup>[84]</sup>) As noted, CASA of Maryland collaborated with Venezuela on programs in the National Capital Region. It also assumed an overtly political role when Torres, in 2007, expressed his eagerness to introduce Bernardo Alvarez to the local immigrant community.<sup>[85]</sup>

Venezuela's broader international strategy provides the context for concern about its efforts to establish relationships with certain self-contained elements of American society. In 2005, Venezuela launched PetroCaribe, an energy assistance program for Caribbean and Central American countries.<sup>[86]</sup> Petrosur, a similar program, with Brazil and Argentina as partners, also began operating in 2005.<sup>[87]</sup> All of these programs were bilateral arrangements between Venezuela and other sovereign governments. However, in the United States, Venezuela attempted to apply the same model except that arrangements were not with other governments but with non-state actors. Venezuela was, therefore, treating various organizations as sovereign states and tacitly rejecting Washington's authority to govern.

A byproduct of Venezuela's campaign against the U.S. government is the emergence of a dedicated activist movement espousing support for Caracas. These have organized under the framework of Bolivarian Circles, which Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez hoped would help to counteract negative perceptions about Venezuela.<sup>[88]</sup> The U.S. groups were modeled on the Bolivarian Circle concept that Chavez unveiled in 2001. In Venezuela, these entities were supposed to appeal directly to Chavez for help with financing various community programs.<sup>[89]</sup> Aside from consolidating Chavez's autocracy via supplication, Bolivarian Circles were also a means to implement ideological and political indoctrination – further entrenching Chavez's centralized power.<sup>[90]</sup>

Venezuela, like other countries attempting to sow division within the United States, would not be nearly as effective without proxies on the ground. The most prominent of these was Citizens Energy Corporation which, as of 2014, according to the Congressional Research Service provided vouchers for up to 100 gallons of heating oil to half a million residents in 25 states and the District of Columbia and gave more than USD 20 million in heating grants to 60 Native American tribes and multiple homeless shelters. These efforts were supported by the PDVSA subsidiary, Citgo.<sup>[91]</sup> Like the recipients of heating fuel, the Bolivarian Circles and others sympathetic to Venezuela have tacitly rejected – and perhaps even challenged – the sovereignty of the U.S. government, by seeking leadership from and propagandizing on behalf of a foreign demagogue. They have been seen as pawns by the Chavez regime, indicated not only by Alvarez's statement but by the appearance of an Oregon Bolivarian Circle member on one of Chavez's weekly broadcasts.<sup>[92]</sup> Venezuela, under Chavez, also became a stop on the ideologically-propelled tourism circuit. While the Venceremos Brigades went to Cuba to engage in manual labor, Global Exchange, which considers itself a human-rights group, organized trips to Venezuela that included visits to workshops and protest centers.<sup>[93]</sup> This section would not complete without a mention of the "radical chic" celebrity visits by the likes of Sean Penn (who



seems to have never met a dictator – not to mention the odd narcocriminal – that he didn't like) and Danny Glover.[\[94\]](#)

### **Amplification**

Most foreign governments have well-developed apparatuses to disseminate information and shape perceptions both domestically and outside the state's borders. In the context of hybrid warfare, these tools are used to broadcast and amplify messages that support the various paradigms for degrading another state's sovereignty from within. As noted, foreign governments have already used U.S. media platforms to advance specific themes (e.g. conspiracy-mongering about the Kennedy assassination). They have added to the cacophony with the establishment their own U.S.-focused media outlets – specifically Russia's *RT* and China's *China Central Television*.

Furthermore, multiple countries have used the concept of think-tank-based public intellectuals to advance themes of interest. For instance, in 2014, the *New York Times* provided extensive coverage of U.S. think tanks' acceptance of funds from foreign donors. Similar to their approach to using media, several states have established their own think-tanks with a U.S. footprint. Russia has the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation and China has its Institute for China-America Studies. (Things can get incestuous when a purported media organization such as *RT* begins citing a source at the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation.) Should they choose to do so, foreign government sponsors could easily employ these platforms not only to foment dissent but also to exacerbate existing tensions through biased coverage.

### **Outlook**

Foreign government identification and exploitation of political and social fractures in the United States will certainly persist. The millennials' attitude of indifference and, at times hostility, toward the U.S. government's efforts to ensure national security makes the generation susceptible to entreaties from foreign governments promising alternatives. (Indeed, offering ready alternatives was a tactic that the Soviet Union and Cuba employed – the latter went so far as to screen propaganda for the VBs that denigrated life in the United States and promoted life in socialist countries.[\[95\]](#)) Furthermore, the “sharing economy” of Uber, urban community gardens, and other solutions that increasingly operate apart from traditional views of society may lessen the sense of belonging to a specific country and create greater susceptibility to foreign interference. The emergence of activist groups unwilling to engage in political discourse and that stand in defiance of the government – e.g. the now-defunct Occupy and Black Lives Matter (which was



chastised for its “yelling” by President Barack Obama in April 2016), as well as even more militant groups such as “sovereign citizens” – may be useful accomplices for a foreign state seeking proxies to exacerbate distrust of U.S. government activities, similar to the Soviet Union’s co-opting of the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theory cottage industry.

Arrogance has always been a problem for U.S. national security, as it prompts individuals to take policy into their own hands (e.g. cases of ideologically-driven espionage) and undercut U.S. government capabilities. In addition to the examples of individuals who have acted on behalf of foreign governments, there is also the holier-than-thou, self-proclaimed “whistleblowing” variation of activities that harm U.S. interests. The most prominent, current examples are Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning who released classified national defense information claiming that the public had a right to know it. (Of course, they brush over that the “public” audience in this case includes U.S. adversaries who could benefit from this windfall of knowledge.) However, these two malignancies were not the first examples of such damaging disclosures on a global scale. Philip Agee, a former CIA officer who released a tranche of data about the Agency preceded Snowden and Manning by four decades. Foreign governments’ perception of value in the information provided (as well as the public relations value of a defection from the United States) is indicated by the Eastern Bloc’s treatment of Agee and Russia’s current harboring of Snowden.

One need not look all the way to Ukraine for examples of “hybrid warfare” directed at weakening a state’s ability to govern. There is a lengthy and persistent history of hybrid warfare tactics to asymmetrically target and undercut Washington’s ability to govern. To amplify preferred voices and drown out problematic ones, foreign governments have used a variety of vectors including activist, media, and academic institutions (all of which may be utterly unwitting). Minimizing supporters and highlighting detractors helps foreign governments to keep the U.S. policymaking process off-balance, requiring the government to address internal unrest and diverting its attention from the U.S. role in the world. In the current era of flaring geopolitical competition in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the South China Sea, domestic distractions are a dangerous thing.

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