Center for Strategic and International Studies

CSIS-TCU Schieffer Series

“Russian Active Measures: Past, Present, and Future”

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CSIS

Featuring:
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JOHN J. HAMRE: (In progress) – made possible by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, which makes a dedicated effort to bring thoughtful public discourse in Washington. And we’re so grateful for their support, and I want to say thank you to them for that.

This is going to be an interesting session. And I’m very – I’m just so pleased that General Hayden would join us, and I welcome my colleagues Seth Jones and Heather Conley. Each of them have written interesting books in the last, well, half-year, recent months. They’ve been just out in the last couple of months.

Mike Hayden’s book is “The Assault on Intelligence.”

And what I’d like each of you to do – Seth’s book was “A Covert Action.” It was a fascinating history of how we used covert activities to communicate to the Polish people during the occupation and to create the antibodies to occupation. It was a very interesting book.

And Heather wrote about a year and a half ago the most popular publication CSIS has ever had, called “The Kremlin Playbook.” And she is now working on “The Kremlin Playbook II,” which is another Schwarzenegger kind of series I guess, or something. (Laughter.)

HEATHER A. CONLEY: I’m Bach. (Laughter.)

MR. HAMRE: But I’d like to ask each of you just to kind of briefly reflect on your books just to get the audience together in a common space of thinking here. Mike, let’s start with you.

GENERAL MICHAEL V. HAYDEN (RET.): Sure. So I describe mine – I didn’t use this extended metaphor in the book, but I have for book discussions afterwards, and I wish I had thought about it earlier. It’s kind of describing a three-layer cake, all right? And this is all – it’s all about an age of lies, a post-truth world, all right?

And so layer one is broadly our society, American society, and some other elements of the West but not all. We have drifted in the direction of a post-truth culture. “Post-truth” was the Oxford Dictionary word of the year for 2016, OK? And it’s broadly described as decision-making based less on fact, data, and evidence; and more on feeling, preference, emotion, loyalty, tribe, grievance. And I’m seeing some folks nod, and you know, I think we see good evidence of that around the United States.

I spend a lot of time talking to folks like yourselves in the national capital area, so for research of the book I had my brother fill the backend of a sports bar in Pittsburgh last August with people who think about things differently than I do. He overachieved, all right? (Laughter.) And we just had a candid conversation. I grew up with many. Some were relatives. All had the same life experience as young people. And it’s just different. Now, there are, you know, a whole bunch of globalization, winds in your face, winds at your back, economic dislocation, macro effects and micro – I mean, I get all of that. But you still had an awful lot of the foundations of the arguments coming at me were less data-derived and more on feeling, emotion, preference, tribe, loyalty, grievance.

The second layer of the cake is, frankly, a candidate and a president who brilliantly recognized the first layer, all right? And by the way, the first layer gets almost all of its news through social media. The candidate recognized that, campaigned via social media, exploited the drift towards post-
truthism, and frankly, as president, I think by a lot of what he does and a whole bunch of what he says drives us further in the direction of non-evidence-based decision-making; simply using the power of the bully pulpit to drive wedges, again, non-fact-based, whether you want to talk about Mexican migration rates or the safety of Syrian refugees or whether or not Barack Obama wiretapped Trump Tower. He exploits the reality in layer one.

Layer three are the Russians, coming in over the top, recognizing – really quite insightfully recognizing layers one and layer two, and then using their power within social media and other tactics, techniques, and procedures to worsen the things we have here in order to disable, divide, divert American power, American influence, and American attention. When I scale it, all right, the Russians are the top 20 percent. The base 80 percent of this issue, this problem, is homegrown. They try the same techniques against the Norwegians, it doesn’t work because the Norwegians don’t have layer one and layer two.

Now, there’s a lot more to be said, but that’s fundamentally the issue. And then, John, I drive home the point, then: How do fact-based institutions – and look at the high friction points of the current administration, intelligence, law enforcement, the courts, science, scholarship, and journalism. Those are all the flashpoints. And why are they the flashpoints? Well, they can all be imperfect. Sometimes some of them can be corrupt. But they’re all fact-based institutions, and their only safe haven for their long-term survival is a commitment to the truth. And now game on in the three-layer universe that I just described.

MR. HAMRE: Fascinating.

It’s a very good introduction, actually, for you, Seth, because we – the shoe was on the other foot. We were trying to bring truth. Why don’t you share with us just a brief precis of your book?

SETH G. JONES: Sure. I’ll take the third layer of what Mike talked about and bring us back to the 1980s.

What my book – and it’s due out in September of 2018 – looks at is the period when President Ronald Reagan comes into office. And his team looks across the globe and sees what is a very aggressive offensive element of Russian/Soviet activity, what is called certainly at that time – although in many ways is called today as well – active measures. And the initial part of the – of the Reagan administration’s efforts are to diagnose the problem, understand what the Russians are trying to do to us globally, what they’re trying to do to us in our homeland, because they were involved in a pretty offensive program to provide assistance to political parties in the U.S. – Communist Party, nuclear freeze movements in the United States – and then to put together everything from a strategy down to tactics in how to deal with it. So this is a case where we have an administration that comes in and designs a series of national security decision directives – 75, 32, and others – that are designed to create an offensive strategy – series of strategies against the Soviets globally, particularly on the information campaign.

And one of the things that’s interesting when you look at Reagan administration national security strategy is how much information warfare becomes a key element of military, diplomatic, development, and other types of instruments of power, hard and soft power. And so what I look at is one component of that, and this is a covert action program that is designed to assist Solidarity in Poland, which was struggling in 1982 just to survive because the Poles had declared martial law. And what the agency does here is conduct an offensive program to make sure that they have the capabilities
not with weapons, but with information. So they’ve got duplicator machines, they have ink for ink cartridges, paper, so they can conduct an information campaign inside of Poland to get information out about what is going on inside the country, in the broader Soviet bloc, and then in the Soviet Union itself.

So what’s interesting is here we have a case, maybe unlike today, where we have an administration diagnose the problem – the Russian problem and then establish an offensive, aggressive, proactive information campaign to deal with it. And again, looking specifically at the Polish program, but it’s kind of the – it’s one case in a broader – I think a broader campaign that’s of – that’s of interest.

MR. HAMRE: Heather, tell us a bit about “Kremlin Playbook.”

MS. CONLEY: Well, thank you. And I know many of you have heard this, so I’ll be very short.

So, in 2015, we took a statement that a group of Central European leaders had written in a letter to President Obama in the first few months of his administration. They warned the president in an open letter that Russia was using overt and covert economic means, as well as disinformation, to change the transatlantic orientation of NATO members. And I wanted to prove that hypothesis: Could, in fact, economics change the political orientation of a NATO or an EU country?

And so our partners – we have a wonderful Bulgarian think tank called the Center for the Study of Democracy. We did two things. We took five case-study countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and we tried as best we could with open-source information to sort of crunch the numbers and see how much Russian economic influence existed in their countries over a 10-year period, and then we tried to diagnose exactly what were the shifts and the changes in their political orientation. Were they due to that economic influence? Were they not? What we found in our conclusions was if a country had over 12 percent of gross domestic product that could be traced to Russian economic influence, you – that country had a substantial challenge of being greatly influenced by Russia.

So, in the case of Bulgaria, one of our case-study countries, over 22 percent of their GDP is Russian-sourced. Now, if you look at Bulgaria and you look at their foreign direct investment, you see the Netherlands is the number-one foreign direct investor, and that’s fantastic. Who could – who could be – have a problem with that? The problem is it’s because Lukoil is incorporated in the Netherlands and it appears on the books as Dutch investment, but it’s actually not.

And then what we saw, how those investment patterns looked, of course, energy, which one would know because of Russia’s strong energy influence across Europe, but we also noticed in media, media companies. We noticed real estate, big infrastructure projects. That was where Russian economic influence concentrated itself. And then, as we watched, the economic influence started to purchase the political influence: key legislators, funding NGOs that were very sympathetic to the Kremlin’s interests. And then we started, over that 10-year period, seeing where very pro-Russian politicians started becoming the minister of interiors of the head of the anti-corruption bureaus, which would prevent any examination of perhaps sole-source deals or lack of transparency of those deals.

And we watched this happen in five case-study countries: Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and then a non-NATO but an aspiring EU country Serbia. And we released this a month before the U.S. presidential election, and what it looked like was sort of a template, if you will, of how economic influence can gain political influence. We didn’t know we’d be a bestseller at the time. But you know,
for me, I direct our European analysis. It’s like having a front-row seat of watching Russia’s laboratory of active measures within Europe.

So we’re so successful we’ve decided to do “The Kremlin Playbook II.” We’re calling it “The Enablers Edition.” (Laughter.) We’re now – we’re looking at six countries: the Czech Republic, Romania, and Montenegro, our newest NATO member. And that’s very similar to the work we did under the first “Kremlin Playbook.” But we’re also dedicating ourselves to three case-study countries that kept appearing in the first “Kremlin Playbook”: The Netherlands, Austria, and Italy. And what we’re seeing is what our British colleagues are also discovering: There is now an entire industry around supporting Russian economic influence. And they may not be the target of the influence themselves, but they further that.


MR. HAMRE: Could I – I think it was Mark Twain that once said something like, you know, truth can get halfway around the world before – or, I mean, a lie can get halfway around the world before truth can put on its shoes. And we seem to be struggling with a problem where a propagandist has only the test of did it work, was it efficacious, did it create confusion; whereas governments have to respond by validating the truth. And, Mike, you’ve talked about how the foundations of American society are built on that.

GEN. HAYDEN: Right.

MR. HAMRE: So what do we do? Because, as you said, 80 percent of the problem is us, and we seem now no longer to be preoccupied with truthfulness in our own domestic discourse. How is that playing out here? How did – and then how did we use that?

GEN. HAYDEN: So, when I gave the three-layer cake here, you realize that layer one and two – layers one and two are actually a rejection of Enlightenment values. You know, since the 17th century most of Western – you know, we’ve had our dark moments, but most of Western civilization is evidence-based theory, hypothesis, test, observation, adjustment, humility in the face of complexity, all right? And this flies in the face of it.

Now, what’s really telling – and I try to – I try to point it out in the book – you know, that’s should be troubling for everyone in the Western cultural tradition. It should be really troubling for the United States, because our foundation documents are written by Enlightenment scholars. The ideals of the Enlightenment – you know, the reality that truth matters and we instinctively pursue truth – is imbued throughout the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. And so, if that’s eroding, it has a greater, more immediate, faster effect on the United States than it does – than it does others. So it’s a particularly difficult problem.

So what you’ve got that makes it easier for those who want to manipulate us is – again, back to the, you know, not evidence but grievance and emotion and so on – all three layers can reflect the reality that if I can make it trending, if I can make it popular, it is an adequate departure point, as if it were reality, for what I say and for what I do. And without – you know, the president plays a big role in the book, but I – but I do talk about him as effect, not cause.
But I tell one anecdote where John Dickerson is interviewing him for CBS on “Face the Nation.” And it’s a routine interview in the Oval, chair versus chair here, and then Dickerson begins to press on wiretapping Trump Tower. And the president gets uncomfortable with it, kind of gets up and walks and plants himself behind the Resolute desk, and then clearly the body language is we’re done. But Dickerson stalks and pursues him, and says: What evidence do you have? What evidence do you have? And the president responds with a lot of people agree with me, people were saying, a lot of people were saying.

And, Dr. Hamre, that’s what sets us up so that a foreign power, if it wants to manipulate us, all right, creates things that are – number one – number one, they don’t have to create the issue, OK? The issue is homemade in the United States. So they pick up issues, generally from the alt-right but it doesn’t have to be. They take up issues already written in the American patois, all right? And then they multiply the issue through social media and botnets to excite the discussion, and then they drive the discussion to both ends of the extremes.

If you recall the NFL, take a knee? Before the president got back from Huntsville on Air Force One, Russian bots were alive with three hashtags: #NFLTakeAKnee and (#NFL)TakeTheKnee, trouble with translation on the last one. And they were playing both ends. They were playing the patriotic end and the – and the free speech end.

And so the long-term healing is down here, OK, to get our act together with regard to civil political discourse and fact-based discussion, all right? There are short-term things we can do, however, to kind of kill the pain for a while, reduce the effect. And we can get into that, I think, as we discuss things.

MR. HAMRE: Yeah. Well, let’s – well, let’s come back to it.

Seth, please.

MR. JONES: Yeah, two issues.

One is, to pick up on one of Mike’s points, you know, if we go back to the 1980s, where, you know, the situation was slightly different, but I wanted to read part of what – this is a declassified U.S. assessment that’s available online now, which – I’m going to replace the word “Soviet,” which is in here, with “Russian” and you’ll see interesting similarities here. “Russian active measures are poorly understood and infrequently countered systematically by Western or other governments. As a result, the Soviets have been able” – “the Russians have been able to go about their large-scale active measures quite freely, to the detriment of Western foreign policy interests and generally without a response. The Russians are willing to accept the risk of considerable political embarrassment as a consequence of active-measures operations.” They apparently believe that controversy caused by the exposure of active measures in the past didn’t have a significant adverse impact, so they’re willing to be caught on various occasions. But what they’d like to do is do things like, quote, “discredit and weaken U.S. intelligence efforts, discredit and weaken U.S. allies and alliances.” I mean, we see similar intentions.

One of the things that I have found quite interesting, at least in the past, is how historical U.S. governments in the face of these kinds of efforts have done a range of activities to push back and highlight that information publicly. So if we look at Reagan, for example, what Reagan did, among other things, is establish an interagency active-measures working group. That working group was
designed specifically to bring all sorts of intelligence together to identify what the Soviets were doing across the globe and push out publicly an explanation of what they were doing and an explanation of why they were doing it. They also have – I’ve got – you know, if you look in 1982-1983, large volumes of congressional testimony that administration officials went to the Hill, including CIA case officers operating or testifying under cover names because they were still undercover, but testifying about what active measures were, what they were designed to do, and then identifying very specific cases of what forgeries were, what examples. So an active effort by the U.S. to identify and unpack what we were up against.

And then, at the same time, to create and devise a strategy that was also offensive and that was also on the information side. And one of the things that – you know, when you’re dealing with authoritarian regimes, whether it was the Soviets at that point, whether it’s with the Russians today, is they are clearly vulnerable. Societies that try to keep information from their populations, to control the internet, are vulnerable in many instances to techniques that open up that information, that are designed to give populations from those countries access to technical means to see internet sites that generally are shut down. So there are opportunities in a – I mean, this is – this is one of the issues.

So Reagan is committed to taking the democratic values that Mike is talking about and exposing our adversaries and their populations to what it means to live in a democratic society and access to the free press. I mean, I don’t think we’re there yet in creating that kind of offensive capability, partly because we haven’t done it internally right now.

MS. CONLEY: Well, Dr. Hamre, you challenged me after “The Kremlin Playbook” came out. You said, OK, well, write “The Transatlantic Playbook.” Tell me how we’re going to counter this. And so we came up with sort of three ideas, and I think they pull the threads all together, three steps: identify, stabilize, and mobilize.

Identify. Exactly what – to your research and your book, Seth, you have to identify it. You have to explain over and over again to the American people this is what’s happening, this is what you need to understand. We need to enhance your news literacy. You need to treat things that come in social media with some skepticism. Is this a site that I trust? How do I read this? How do I understand this? So the identify is so critical.

For me, “The Kremlin Playbook” is the stabilize. And what I mean – when we talk about truth, I translate truth into transparency. And this is where we have to be very transparent about financing, how it comes into our country, how – whether it’s Russia or China or other economic adversaries, potentially, they know our system. It can buy – things can be bought. Things can be understood and influenced, whether through PR firms, legal firms, what have you. We have to insist on the transparency of our own institutions. This is on us. This isn’t Russia; this is our own institutions and our own laws and heightening our transparency. That’s what democracies do. The best authoritarians hide. Democracies are open and transparent. We have to insist on that.

And, finally, mobilize. Again, we’ll come back to Reagan. That’s the offensive capability. We don’t have an offensive plan because we’re having a crisis of confidence in our own politics, our own economic opportunities. This is what’s missing, and this is what made Reagan and Solidarity – remember when we prayed in our schools for those captive nations? We held them high. We focused like a laser beam. We were the good guys, and this was our system and our truth. We had an offense. And that’s what’s been sorely lacking here as we face this great challenge. It’s not going to end. It’s exploiting the divisions and the weaknesses that we present to it every day.
MR. HAMRE: Mike, you said that you thought there were some things we could do in the short term.

GEN. HAYDEN: Yeah.

MR. HAMRE: That’s not – we can’t repair American society overnight, but what can we do in the short term?

GEN. HAYDEN: So let me – let me do the one big idea first and I’ll jump onto it.

And so the problem we have right now, all right, is that an awful lot of American society does not believe we are the good guys. And that’s the vulnerability that we have in the – in the first and second layer, the accusation of corrupt institutions, corrupt people, corrupt processes, and so on.

So, while we fix the macro issue, what are some micro things? So, in essence, you know, I’m the intel guy, so I’m working up here on the third layer, OK? Number one, there’s no earthly reason why political advertisements in the digital world should not be as controlled as they are in broadcast media. Number one.

Number two, it is within our ability to a degree of certainty that’s sufficient, all right, to have our social media platforms identify when we’re being tickled by a human being and when we’re being tickled by a botnet, all right? I mean, there are patterns that can be detected. You’ll probably, you know, get to the 95, 98 percent confidence level. But shut off the botnets so that the ability of others to manipulate us is reduced – not eliminated, but reduced.

A third, since, you know, one of the core problems down here in the base level is how you get your news, all right, we are trained as a society to deal with news based on our life experience, to deal with news coming at us in a digestible stream from curated sources. None of us are living in that world anymore. But all of our habits of accepting our news are based on that world, and so they are inadequate for uncurated news coming at us in an overwhelming volume.

So I suggest in the book something like Rotten Tomatoes ratings for news sites, all right? And I make the point, you know, a movie gets 30 on Rotten Tomatoes, I may still go see it, but I know what I’m getting into, all right? So we’re not suppressing movies or news sites, but you can evaluate the news site. Not the news story. It’s not about suppression. It’s not about free speech. But you can, with a generally agreed approach by people who would have some authenticity and some legitimacy, rate the news sites on a variety – on a variety of characteristics, like how long have they been there, do we know who owns it, do we know who funds it, do they generally report original work or just retreaded stories and so on.

So I did a version of this on Bill Maher about a month ago. And as I’m getting offstage, my iPhone’s lighting up from emails from Steve Brill, who already has a project underway called NewsGuard – that he hopes to have up and functioning before the next midterm elections – that does exactly that. Very simple: 9-10 categories, red/yellow/green. And so you have a place to which you can refer to give you some sense as to the authenticity of the crazy story coming at you.

So those are all within reach.
More broadly – and this was suggested earlier about President Reagan saying, all right, everybody, we got to go do something. We have not had that dynamic with regard to the Russians. Remember Dan Coats up there about two months ago in the worldwide threat briefing with all the three-letters behind him? Have you been directed by the president to da-da-da-da? No, I have not. No, no, no, no, no, all right? And so every one of those guys up there – Paul Nakasone up there, Gina over at Langley – they will tell you, oh no, we’re playing our position, we’re working on this hard, all right? But I compare what the Russians did in 2016 – I get all the differences, but bear with me – I compare it a bit to 9/11, all right, an attack from an unexpected source against a previously unappreciated weakness.

And that – in order to fix that, you don’t fix it by everybody playing position, because everybody was playing position and this hit a seam. And so you’ve got to go extraordinary. And that requires the president – in our system, trust me, it requires the president to go extraordinary, so you then develop extraordinary statutes, extraordinary policy, extraordinary organizations, extraordinary resources in order to defend us against this. We have not done that, all right? And so I do fear, not for the vote count, all right, which we’ve probably done enough and I don’t think they’d mess with, because that’s a nuclear weapon and I think we’d respond in a way that they wouldn’t appreciate. But I do not think we have a whole-of-government and certainly not a whole-of-society response to what the Russians did in ’15 and ’16, and so I fear it going forward.

So that’s what I would do. I would go extraordinary. We went extraordinary to count 3 million ghost voters who weren’t ghost voters, and put the vice president in charge of it before it was dissolved. But we have not gone extraordinary for something that really did happen.

MR. HAMRE: Mike, I’m going to – I strongly agree with everything you’ve just said. But I do want to press something to bring out an important dimension and then get my colleagues to react, because you very quickly said this website would be done by someone that had authenticity and credibility.

GEN. HAYDEN: Yeah.

MR. HAMRE: And we’re in a time right now when Americans fundamentally are questioning the traditional structures of authenticity and legitimacy. Who’s going to do this rating? And how do we think about –

GEN. HAYDEN: Yeah, I – NewsGuard, a couple clicks, you can read all the background, you can see the categories, you can see the spotlights for some sample. They picked RT just out of the air, for example, as one they wanted to evaluate, all right? Mostly red, OK? (Laughter.) All right.

These are seasoned journalists, all right, who have life experience in this. And, Dr. Hamre, I get it. You know, the issue here is distrust of the institutions of government. But you’ve got to start somewhere, all right?

MR. HAMRE: Yeah.

GEN. HAYDEN: And so you do this and let it over time prove its worth. There is probably somebody out there complaining about somebody trying to guide me to the right movies when Rotten Tomatoes started, but I actually think it’s pretty good and I refer to it.
MR. HAMRE: Yep.

Heather, you’ve looked at this from a European standpoint.

MS. CONLEY: Yeah. And just to follow on General Hayden’s comments, I mean, in some ways what we missed after the 2016 election, we missed our own 9/11 commission. And in absence of presidential leadership, what would have been great is a very high bipartisan congressional mandate to change the structure of how we go about doing this. And in the hopes of – an absence, again, of presidential leadership for the foreseeable future on this, how do we restructure ourselves to get a hold of this?

And it’s an – it’s an inside game and then it’s outside. It’s inside – and this is where, again, the exploitation of the weaknesses, a lot of this is domestic where CIA and our foreign agencies cannot go into, so they can’t adequately warn. And our domestic agencies have real important barriers for what they can do, which is why we need new structures to either – address those seams that Russia and other adversaries are trying to get in the middle of.

So, again, it is about rebuilding trust and credibility in institutions. And I think that can only happen on three – based on three.

It has to be bipartisan. Our partisanship now is a weakness that our adversaries are exploiting beautifully. It has to be bipartisan.

It has to be transparent. No more backroom deals. We have to expose the changes to our institution(s), what has prevented them from doing this.

And then it has to be rebuilding trust at the community level. It’s no longer sufficient to send, heaven forbid, an expert – that’s one strike – from the swamp, from Washington – second strike – to go out and tell someone this is really important, you have to pay attention to this. This is going to have to be a conversation of trust with community leaders, church leaders, again, the moral authority. Who do you listen to? Who do you trust? And let’s have a conversation with that person to regrow that. It’s going to take a – it took us a long time to get where we are today in the distrust department. We’re going to have to rebuild that. It’s a national conversation, but it will take a new structure, new leadership.

And as I – I’m going to turn to Seth – it is that moral leadership and that clarity that, again, Ronald Reagan did personify in this challenge. He declared the challenge, the moral response to it, and then the relentless pursuit by all government agencies to address it.

MR. JONES: Yeah, just one quick issue on this. And this goes back to your point about 9/11.

I mean, one of the things when you look at how the government reorganized itself after 9/11 was it created a range of bodies, including the National Counterterrorism Center. It put up the issue of counterterrorism on a major level and then partially organized itself to deal with that.

I mean, we – the administration, and I think fairly, argued in the most recent National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy that in addition to counterterrorism, we have to face the threat from interstate adversaries like the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians, North Koreans. I think what we’re missing right now is organizing ourselves around that threat right now, including across the
interagency, to deal with that, creating some of the bodies that we did to pull us together after 9/11 to deal with it. And I – you know, this may take some time, but I think that is – if we – if we’re to take this threat seriously we have to treat it, I think, at the same level that we did post-9/11.

GEN. HAYDEN: I tell one story in the book. So I’m down in Texas in the ’90s, take over the Air Intelligence Agency, all right, come out of Europe where the war was in the Balkans. It was purely medieval. So I get – I get to Texas and the Air Force is – my unit, my command, is cutting-edge on the cyber thing, all right? And an awful lot of the things we thought there are now American doctrine, all right? So the folks did well and they educated me.

I describe, Dr. Hamre, in the book this argument we had down there of whether we were in the cyber business or whether we were in the information-dominance business. And since we have a Cyber Command now you know how this works out, right? But we had – we had this great debate. And we finally decided that we were in the cyber business, which is a subset of the information-dominance business, because this was hard enough, all right, and really in our political culture you really can’t play much over here without pretty early on hitting your shins on the First Amendment and the Fourth Amendment and a whole bunch of political/cultural questions. So we stayed over here.

The Russians, under General Gerasimov, went to door number two. And so one of our challenges is to doctrinally reconceive what it is the Russians are doing, because the lenses we have and use are insufficient and incomplete for the Russian effort. Back to you have to go extraordinary.

MR. HAMRE: OK. Let me open this up. I think we have microphones. Do we have people with microphones? OK. Let’s get – we’ve got a question right over here in the – yeah, right halfway down on your left. Thank you. Identify yourself, please. No lectures. I’m going to cut you off if I get a lecture. (Laughter.)

Q: It’s not that much.

So this is more directed at General Hayden. In your first book you discuss a lot about saying how we needed – we did a lot to counter the things that happened. We made some very extraordinary (hedges ?) and played to the edge. Do you think to a degree our level of secrecy and the things that we did so far are now coming back to bite us? A lot of what’s happened, a lot of what’s come out in the various commissions’ reports, the politicization of the measures we use, do you think that helped sort of foment that distrust in our institutions? And –

MR. HAMRE: OK, we got the question. Yeah.

GEN. HAYDEN: Yeah, it’s part of the broader pattern of distrust in institutions, all right? And, you know, I think the record shows that certainly the way intelligence has been perceived may have added to it.

Maybe it’s just my own lens, right; I generally think the problem intelligence has is a subset of the larger societal problem, that we were swept along. OK, we probably contributed. But we were swept along by the broader distrust. So even when we went out there and tried to explain some things there was, again, this residual distrust of all things from the government, and intelligence was part of it.

I say in the first book that the antidote to this is more transparency, all right, and tell people earlier on what it is you’re doing more robustly, more richly. And then I quickly add: And don’t kid
yourself; that’s going to shave points off of effectiveness. But we’re not going to be able to get to do it – you’re not going to give us the license, the validity to do it unless you’re more comfortable with it than you were.

So both things are working.

MR. HAMRE: Right down here. Yeah, please. And please identify yourself.

Q: Hi. So this this question is more directed for Ms. Conley. In regards to your Kremlin game plan, I’m just wondering, how much of the responsibility is on private companies such as Facebook and other social media platforms to filter the disinformation? And how much of the responsibility is on the government to combat what is being posted on these sites?

MS. CONLEY: Thank you. Maybe I’ll share that answer with General Hayden.

So what we studied in our research was how actually in Europe, Russian economic influence was purchasing the media outlets, which were then producing the messaging that was very supportive to the Kremlin. So we looked at it as a commercial transaction. So when there’s transparency on beneficial ownership, who owns what, shareholders, who was controlling that, that’s that important transparency. And then I’ll take the same example to Facebook. There needed to be a lot more transparency of how Facebook shares its data, who was providing the sites, and now, because of exposure to the problem, we are slowly and a congressional pushing, getting to that transparency.

That’s what – and sort of, again, General Hayden, to your point – it may reduce market share or effectiveness of intelligence agencies, but if we are not transparent, we cannot have trust. And we have to educate based on that transparency. There is so much distrust and conspiracy-minded theories. We have to open ourselves up to that transparency. There is so much distrust and conspiracy-minded theories. We have to open ourselves up to that transparency. So for social media, it is – and they would need to do it for their own shareholders, to rebuild trust that their data is well-managed and that people that are using these wonderful tools – and they are wonderful tools – but to understand they come with responsibility, and that we all have to be good stewards of responsibility, whether we share our data on these platforms and how the companies manage those – that data.

GEN. HAYDEN: Yeah, it’s probably worse than that. This is— all correct. And that’s the protection of privacy and data and following the rules, and we’re all aware of what it is we signed up for. OK, but beyond that it may be the basic business model and the basic algorithm of social media sites. And I did a—I did a lot of work on this. And I’m not the expert, but I talk to a lot of people who are. The fundamental business model of Facebook and similar social media sites is to keep you on the site, all right? I mean, the return on investment is the number of clicks, all right? And so the site knows you at least as well as you know yourself.

And so it will present to you things when you go in there to make the original query, things that it knows by and large agree with your tendencies. Otherwise, you go away. The longer you stay, the more the algorithm drives you to more—to articles that more dramatically agree with your original premises. The algorithm actually drives you away from the center and into the darker corners of your own self-created ghetto. Zeynep Tufekci is a wonderful scholar. I met her and talked with her at a meeting in Sweden. Turkish by birth, North Carolinian by choice. She says the basic business model of social media sites is the same one as Doritos, OK? (Laughter.) You can’t eat just one, because when you eat one it gives you salt and fat, which creates a craving for salt and fat. And it drives us this way.
Roger McNamee was an original and early investor and certainly an early mentor of Mark Zuckerberg. He has been prolific in the last six months, writing about it’s the basic algorithm. It’s not—it’s not just the other stuff.

MR. JONES: So, yeah, if I can just add one related issue. You know, we’ve seen some of these sites, including Facebook and YouTube, make progress. And they did it a few years ago on child pornography, where they went offensive in taking down – it violated their terms of service – they went offensive in taking down sites, identifying them, devising algorithms that identified many of them before they even went live. And then they were taken down. You know, with a lot of government push, there’s been some – there’s been some progress on the counter-terrorism front.

There’s been more sites taken down on Facebook, more YouTube videos taken down, algorithms that have been put together. Jigsaw, for example, which has done a pretty good job combining several different private sector companies of establishing methods like the redirect method which, when individuals go in and try to go to Syria, for example, they’re redirected toward nonviolent means. So these are algorithms that have been – and very smart people on the tech side that have spent time trying.

But it took a lot of government push, including at the White House level, to do this. You’d need a lot of government push that doesn’t exist right now, I think, along some of these lines to do it. And I think that’s where we’re sort of breaking down, is without that, as we’ve seen on some of the other issues, it’s probably not going to happen.

MR. HAMRE: And if I could humbly suggest, it would be helpful if the news industry wouldn’t treat a tweet as news. (Laughter.) I’m so sick and tired of somebody tweets something – who gives a rooty-toot? (Laughter.) You know? OK.

Yeah, right back here. Yeah, stand up there. You with the tan coat, please.

Q: Alec Birkoff (ph), media group – business multimedia group from Riga, Latvia.

So, Ms. Conley, you mentioned Latvia, it’s interesting. So the question is what is the influence of Russia on Latvian mass media? And maybe you can compare it with American interest on Latvian mass media. And I have to tell you, I write article for Russian language media in Latvia. And none of my articles were ever distorted or edited. It was 100 percent printed. Thank you.

MS. CONLEY: Thank you. Well, just very quickly – and in fact, of the five case study questions, Latvia actually demonstrated a lot of good resistance and resilience to Russian influence, particularly because on the – they had an independent anticorruption prosecutor. It didn’t – actually, it was very usual. Usually anticorruption prosecutors fall under the purview of parliament for oversight. This individual was actually separated, which meant that the parliamentarians weren’t unduly influencing these individual. And it actually helped Latvia’s resilience.

The concern about Latvia’s media, it’s a very small media market as you can imagine, and it is very much the Baltic, the three states together, a lot of Russian-purchased media space, which in a very small media market, when there is a lot of dominance of Russian ownership of that media market, it is very difficult for other news to come in. And what we’ve found with Russia information, it’s really cleverly done. Music, wonderful music, wonderful culture, slip in history story that skews that Latvia
was not occupied, Latvia had a different skew. So it’s very subtle. It’s very powerful. I’m glad you’ve had a very positive experience, that there’s been no altering of your – of your articles. But it is – it’s certainly something very worrisome.

We have less of a concern about, obviously, Russian ownership in our media market, but the transparency of who owns what media – at the local level, at the state level, national level – that’s important for us too, to understand the ownership restrictions of that media market as well. So some of that’s good work for us as well on transparency.

MR. HAMRE: There’s a lady in the back, right in the last row.

Q: Cathy Cosman.

I was wondering how any of you would react to two trends in Russian disinformation, or propaganda, whatever you want to call it. One is saying: Things are not perfect in Russia, but they’re worse or just as bad everywhere else. That’s one trend. And the other is somewhat in an opposite direction, in favor of traditional values. Not only espousing the Moscow Patriarchate, obviously, but also being against abortion and against gay rights. Thank you.

MS. CONLEY: I can take a swing at that too. So you’re absolutely right. These are two very predominant trends. Let me talk about the second one, then I’ll just mention the first one. We see this playing extremely well across Europe in very conservative parties, and I think we’re seeing it play very well here, that the Kremlin is the defender of conservative values. They’re the only ones that defend against the decadence of the West, whether that’s a social agenda or vast change. The use of the Russian Orthodox Church is a very powerful tool that is also used predominantly, depending on the market.

You have some nationalists like Dugin and others who say, you know, Moscow is the third Rome, this revitalization of the defender. And it can be very seductive for those who feel that their values and their traditions are being assaulted by globalization or by social agendas. And it’s very powerful. So people may not know that this is Kremlin-influenced. They think they’re supporting that view. And as I have warned in congressional testimony that I have given, Russian malign influence is going to start looking more European and more American, because they simply agree with the agenda.

The first statement about moral equivalence – and I will say, for me one of the most devastating statements that President Trump made some time ago was when he was interviewed, and the questioner said about the Kremlin kills opposition people, like Boris Nemtsov and others. And the president said, well, we’re killers too. That moral equivalence – this gets back to Seth’s book – that moral equivalence – we’re no longer the good guys; we’re just – like you are no better than us, and if you are no better than we are, then we can sit at the table, and we can come to some accommodation that’s going to look a lot like Yalta. I’ll take this, you take that, this is how we divide the world. It’s that moral equivalency, to me, that is the complete erosion of American exceptionalism, and that is the point.

MR. JONES: One thing to add to that, too, I think to understand what one of the strategic approaches has been, and it’s been – I think it has been fairly consistent in many ways since – even since Cold War days, is to sow discord. And so what it means in practical terms is – today is they’ll be on all sides of the argument. When it comes to the Parkland shootings on gun rights, they are just as likely to be pushing – whether it’s bots or trolls – pro-gun rights as they are anti-gun rights.
Part of the objective here is to identify scenes and vulnerabilities in the American discourse and to exploit them, and to exploit major divisions we have, in dialogue. So part of the issue is to understand that in a sense it doesn’t necessarily matter what Russian leaders believe; it’s what they’re trying to do in exploiting seams. So we’ve seen them on social media support, through proxy organizations, multiple sides of a debate, and the goal is to sow discord. And I think until we recognize that publicly, at sort of your first and second levels, I think we’re at a disadvantage.

MR. HAMRE: Yes, ma’am. I’ll let – yeah, you.

Q: Hello, my name is Christina Pendergrast (sp).

And I was wondering, to what extent could Russia affect us by proxy using nations they’ve already exerted economic and some political control over, especially nations like Venezuela, where there are a lot of resources, where they have a lot of control and that we get a lot of those resources from those local allies – or not necessarily allies, but partners in trade? Thank you.

MS. CONLEY: General Hayden, do you want to that, or?

GEN. HAYDEN: No, I –

MS. CONLEY: (Laughs.) We’re passing up. Who wants it? Who wants it?

GEN. HAYDEN: I’d say it’s more of an economic –

MS. CONLEY: Thank you.

Well, certainly Russian malign influence uses proxy groups extremely effectively. They – certainly over the last four years – have worked to revitalize their former Cold War relationships – whether that’s in the Middle East, whether that’s in Latin America – and certainly providing very generous – as much as they can with their somewhat limited financial resources to keep regimes alive, and if they can be disruptive to U.S. interests.

I think you just really see where Russian policy right now is it can disrupt, and it can make sure that nothing can happen without Russia, and Syria is the perfect example. But they cannot create, they cannot sustain a foreign policy approach, so it’s designed to distract, keep us off balance, we’ll need them for something, and again, it’s a global – it is a global approach – increasingly more regional activism in the Middle East, somewhat in Asia, a little bit in Latin America, but this is not – they are not able to reconstitute what they had during the Soviet Union.

GEN. HAYDEN: In the informational space, all right, the Russians are Americans, all right? The identity they assume is you and me, and they frankly don’t need to outsource that to anywhere else to make that more effective.

And something mentioned earlier – I think, Seth, you may have mentioned it – they only want plausible deniability, all right? In fact, the fact that we know that they know that we know actually plays in our mental processes as well, and so the identity they want over there – I mean, they don’t – it doesn’t have to be a carom shot, OK? They pop up in our social media as if – we believe they are Americans, all right, and a lot of that is fed by – they just grab American themes and names, created by
our own discourse, and then just ride them to the extremes to make us more divided that even we would otherwise be.

MR. JONES: Right, I think it is interesting to look at along these lines. Russians have reached out to proxy organizations in North Africa, in Libya. They’ve reached out to – you know, one can overstate it, but they’ve reached out to the Taliban in Afghanistan. This is an organization the U.S. continues to fight. They’ve done a pretty good job of establishing power projection in Syria, supporting the regime there. They’ve – so, I mean, we can see the Russians also increasing their footprint in multiple locations on multiple – you mentioned Venezuela. We could talk about the Middle East, we could talk about North Africa, among other locations.

I do think it’s worth, before we get too far down this road – and General Hayden, you noted this in your book, too – that one can overstate the power, including the economic power, of the Russians, too. They are not a particularly strong power. When we dealt with them in the Cold War, we were dealing with – I mean, we realized by the end of the 1980s it was weaker than we had anticipated, but the Russia of today is nothing like the Soviet Union –

GEN. HAYDEN: Right.

MR. JONES: – of the 1980s.

GEN. HAYDEN: And even – my props to them for the informational campaign. It’s not rocket science. I mean, we’re teeing this up for them. One of the things I got to do in the book was to actually talk to a lot of people I wouldn’t otherwise have talked to, so I talked to Garry Kasparov – former Soviet chess champion; now Russian dissident – and Garry points out this isn’t chess; it isn’t even checkers, all right? (Laughter.) It’s blackjack, and we fundamentally aren’t playing.

MR. HAMRE: We’ve only got a minute left, so I’m going to ask you to reflect on this last issue, which has been running throughout this whole conversation, and that is, you know, it’s really not about the Russians; it’s about us.

GEN. HAYDEN: Right.

MR. HAMRE: I mean, we are so much struggling as a nation. We don’t seem to have institutions that command the credibility they did once.

What is the one thing that we should be doing as we’re thinking about elections this fall and elections in two years?

Mike, do you –

GEN. HAYDEN: Yeah, very briefly – and I apologize, it’s very long term – it’s back to civic education, it’s back to fundamentally understanding how democracies work and what values are required for any democracy to function, and I fear we’ve lost that.

MR. JONES: One positive note that I’ve heard from some school systems, including elementary school systems, is an increasing push to get their students to footnote when they write papers for schools – where they are getting their information from. I mean, getting back to an education component to our youth that, as they think through making arguments – in elementary
school, in middle school, and in high school – that what are the sources they are looking at, what is the plausibility of those sources, so that we are educating ourselves that we need to get back to the basics I think of where we should be.

MS. CONLEY: So I’m going to thank Vladimir Putin. I’m going to thank him. In one way, he has revitalized NATO, he has returned us to our founding purposes. I’m going to thank him for giving us quite a jolt in 2016 for us to understand how precious the practice of our democracy is, but it is not an election; it is every day – and how we comport ourselves and our institutions.

He has given us the wakeup call. Let us not hit the snooze button; let us take this opportunity for democratic renewal, institutional renewal, and we can get back on our feet and go offense in the great spirit of Ronald Reagan.

MR. HAMRE: I want to say thank you – yeah, so we’re out of time, I’m sorry. We’re at the end, and I want to say thank you to the three of you.

It has been a fascinating conversation. We’ve had three very different cuts but on a common theme about where are we heading as a nation. I think we’re all very proud of the history America has presented to the world; that it provided a beacon of optimism and promise for people. And I think that’s still with us, but we have to stop fighting ourselves and, you know, we’re all in one boat. We ought to be rowing in the same direction rather than hitting each other on the head with the oars.

Would you all say thank you, please, with your applause? (Applause.)

(END)