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INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

[redacted] Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections

ICA 2017-01 | 5 January 2017

CL BY: [redacted] | DRV FRM: [redacted] | DECL ON: [redacted]

[redacted]

This report responds to the President's request for a comprehensive assessment of the Russian Government's intentions and actions with respect to recent US elections. The main body of the report was drafted by CIA, FBI, and NSA, and draws on intelligence information collected and disseminated by those three agencies. It covers Moscow's use of cyber tools and media campaigns and its motivation and intention to influence US public opinion.

This report is a downgraded version of a more sensitive assessment that has been provided to recipients approved by the President, including House and Senate leadership and the leadership of the intelligence oversight committees. The conclusions in this document are all reflected in the more sensitive assessment, but this document does not include the full supporting information, including specific intelligence on key elements of the influence campaign.

(U) Scope and Sourcing

(U) Information available as of 29 December 2016 was used in the preparation of this product.

(U) Scope

This report includes an analytic assessment drafted and coordinated among CIA, FBI, and NSA, which draws on intelligence information collected and disseminated by those three agencies. It covers the motivation and scope of Moscow's intentions regarding US elections and Moscow's use of cyber tools and media campaigns to influence US public opinion. The assessment focuses on activities aimed at the 2016 US presidential election and draws on our understanding of previous Russian influence operations. When we use the term "we," it refers to an assessment by all three agencies.

This report does not include an assessment of the impact that the full scope of Russian activities had on the actual outcome of the 2016 election. The US Intelligence Community is charged with monitoring and assessing the intentions, capabilities, and actions of foreign actors; it does not analyze US political processes or US public opinion. We also do not include information from ongoing investigations.

- Additional information about Russian cyber activity or supply chain targeting would prompt us to reconsider our assessment about the scope of Russian intelligence and influence efforts during the election.

- (U//) For the purposes of this assessment we use DHS's definition of electoral infrastructure that refers to the information, capabilities, physical assets, and technologies that enable the registration and validation of voters; the casting, transmission, tabulation, and reporting of votes; and the certification, auditing, and verification of elections.

(U) Sourcing

Many of the key judgments in this assessment rely on a body of reporting from multiple sources that are consistent with our understanding of Russian behavior. Insights into Russian efforts—including specific cyber operations—and Kremlin views of key US players like President-elect Trump and Secretary Clinton derive from multiple corroborating sources.

Some of our judgments about Kremlin preferences and intent are drawn from the behavior of Kremlin-loyal political figures, state media, and pro-Kremlin social media actors, all of whom the Kremlin either directly uses to convey messages or who are answerable to the Kremlin. The Russian leadership invests significant resources in both foreign and domestic propaganda and places a premium on transmitting what it views as consistent, self-reinforcing narratives regarding its desires and redlines, whether on Ukraine, Syria, or relations with the United States.

Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections

ICA 2017-01
5 January 2017

(U) Key Judgments

Russian efforts to influence the 2016 US presidential election represent the most recent expression of Moscow's longstanding desire to undermine the US-led liberal democratic order, but these activities demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations.

We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in the summer of 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. We have high confidence in these judgments based on a body of intelligence reporting and the public behavior of senior Russian officials and state-controlled media. **We also assess Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him.** CIA and FBI have high confidence in this judgment based on sensitive information not included in this version of the assessment; NSA has moderate confidence in this judgment based on the same sensitive information. NSA's confidence in this judgment would be elevated to high with additional corroborating sources.

- Moscow's approach evolved over the course of the campaign based on Russia's understanding of the electoral prospects of the two main candidates. When Moscow assessed that Secretary Clinton was likely to win the election, the Russian influence campaign began to focus more on undermining her future presidency.

- We assess that Moscow refrained from the full spectrum of actions it could have taken to influence the US election. We judge that the Kremlin could have disclosed additional material and could have conducted attacks on electoral infrastructure in the runup to and on Election Day.

- Further intelligence has come to light since Election Day that, when combined with Russian behavior since early November 2016, increase our confidence in our assessments of Russian motivations and goals.

Moscow's influence campaign followed a Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or "trolls." Russia and the Soviet Union have a history of conducting covert influence campaigns focused on US presidential elections, which has used intelligence officers and agents and press placements to disparage candidates perceived as hostile to the Kremlin.

- [redacted] The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) both conducted cyber operations against targets associated with the 2016 US presidential election, including targets associated with both major US political parties. We have high confidence in this judgment.

- [redacted] We assess with high confidence that the GRU used the Guccifer 2.0 persona and DCLeaks.com to release US victim data obtained in cyber operations publicly and in exclusives to media outlets, and that the GRU was directed to pass material it collected to WikiLeaks.

- [redacted] The GRU obtained and maintained access to elements of several confirmed and possibly as many as 20 state or local electoral boards, [redacted] **A DHS assessment indicates the GRU probably was in a position to tamper with some voter registration databases, but that the types of systems Russian actors targeted or compromised were not involved in vote tallying.** It is unclear what the Russian Government intended to accomplish with these intrusions, but they may have been exploratory efforts to determine how vulnerable US electoral systems were to electronic manipulation or preparatory steps to undermine confidence in the election by creating the impression that results had been altered.

- [redacted] Russia's state-run propaganda machine contributed to the influence campaign by serving as a platform for Kremlin messaging to Russian and international audiences.

[redacted] **We assess Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the US presidential election to future influence efforts.** Moscow would have seen its election influence campaign as at least a qualified success regardless of the outcome of the election because of its perceived ability to impact public discussion in the United States.

- [redacted] **We assess** [redacted] **will be the next major focus of Russian influence operations,** [redacted]

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[redacted] Russia's Influence Campaign Targeting the 2016 US Presidential Election

(U) Produced jointly under the auspices of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Security Agency.

[redacted]

Russia's Influence Campaign Targeting the 2016 US Presidential Election

Putin Ordered Campaign To Influence US Election

We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign by summer 2016 aimed at the US presidential election, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. When Moscow assessed later in the year that Secretary Clinton was likely to win the election, its influence campaign then focused on undermining her expected presidency.

- We also assess Putin and the Russian Government aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him. CIA and FBI have high confidence in this judgment based on sensitive information not included in this version of the assessment; NSA has moderate confidence in this judgment based on the same sensitive information. NSA's confidence would be elevated to high with additional corroborating sources.
- In trying to influence the US election, we assess the Kremlin sought to advance its longstanding desire to undermine the US-led liberal democratic order, the promotion of which Putin and other senior Russian leaders view as a threat to Russia and Putin's regime.
- Putin believed the Panama Papers disclosure and the Olympic doping scandal were US-directed efforts to defame Russia, judging from and his public comments, suggesting he sought to use disclosures to discredit the image of the United States and cast it as hypocritical.

Putin most likely wanted his intelligence services to discredit Secretary Clinton because he has blamed her since 2011 for inciting mass protests against his regime in late 2011 and early 2012 and holds a grudge for comments he almost certainly saw as disparaging him, judging from press reporting. Given this, we assess with high confidence that the GRU was directed to pass material it collected to WikiLeaks and other intermediaries.

We assess Putin, his advisers, and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump over Secretary Clinton. We base this assessment on and Russian state media indicating that Russian officials saw President-elect Trump as more favorable to key Russian interests and more in line with Putin's preference for leaders he views as dealmakers. Throughout the election, Russian Government officials characterized Secretary Clinton and Democratic politicians as particularly unfriendly to Russian interests,

[redacted]

- [redacted] Beginning in June, Putin's public comments about the US presidential race avoided directly praising President-elect Trump, probably because Kremlin officials thought that any praise from Putin personally would backfire in the United States. Nonetheless, Putin publicly indicated a preference for the President-elect's stated policy to work with Russia, and pro-Kremlin figures spoke highly about what they saw as his Russia-friendly positions on Syria and Ukraine. Putin contrasted President-elect Trump's approach to Russia with Secretary Clinton's "aggressive rhetoric," according to Russian press reporting.
- [redacted] Moscow also saw the election of President-elect Trump as a way to achieve an international counterterrorism coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), according to diplomatic reporting. The Kremlin has historically preferred Republican over Democratic candidates, judging that Republicans had been less focused on democracy and human rights and were therefore easier to deal with, [redacted]
- [redacted] Putin has had many positive experiences working with Western political leaders whose business interests, Moscow assessed, made them more disposed to deal with Russia, such as former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, judging from [redacted] and press reporting [redacted]
- [redacted] Putin, Russian officials, and other pro-Kremlin pundits stopped publicly criticizing the US election process as unfair almost immediately after the election because Moscow probably assessed it would be counterproductive to building positive relations.

[redacted] We assess the influence campaign aspired to help President-elect Trump's chances of victory when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to the President-elect. Later in the summer, senior Russian diplomats and intelligence officers assessed Secretary Clinton was likely to win the presidency, judging from [redacted] and Russian press reporting. As a result, we assess the Russian Government began to focus more on undercutting Secretary Clinton's legitimacy and crippling her presidency from its start, including by impugning the fairness of the election. Moscow therefore held back some pre-election influence efforts for potential later use.

- [redacted] Before the election, Russian diplomats had both publicly denounced the US electoral process and privately developed plans to publicly call into question the validity of the results, [redacted] Pro-Kremlin bloggers had prepared a Twitter campaign, #DemocracyRIP, on election night in anticipation of Secretary Clinton's victory, according to well-informed Russian journalists.
- [redacted] Moscow had additional information it obtained from cyber collection against US government and non-government targets that it could have used against a Clinton Administration's policies and nominees, based on [redacted] Russian intelligence collection efforts.

[redacted] Russian Campaign Was Multifaceted

[redacted]) Moscow's use of disclosures during the US election was unprecedented, but its influence campaign otherwise followed a longstanding Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or "trolls."

- Putin approves influence campaigns—particularly those that would be politically sensitive—gives strategic guidance, and delegates tactical moves to Russian agencies and their officers to pursue independently,
- Moscow's campaign aimed at the US election reflected years of investment in its capabilities, which Moscow has honed in the former Soviet states,
- By their nature, Russian influence campaigns are multifaceted and difficult to attribute to a given decisionmaking center or individual because they use a mix of agents of influence, cutouts, front organizations, and false-flag operations designed to create deniability. Moscow demonstrated this during the Ukraine crisis in 2014, when Putin, we judged, had authorized Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine, denied it publicly, and delegated aspects of implementation to Kremlin advisers, military officers, and separatist leaders.

The Kremlin's campaign aimed at the US election featured disclosures of data obtained through Russian cyber operations via WikiLeaks, as well as via the Guccifer 2.0 persona[a] and DCLeaks.com, which are both likely GRU operations; GRU intrusions into US state electoral infrastructure; and overt propaganda. Russian foreign intelligence collection both informed and enabled the influence campaign,

Cyber Espionage Against US Political Organizations. We assess that the SVR and GRU both conducted cyber operations against targets associated with the 2016 US presidential election, including targets associated with both major US political parties. We have high confidence in this assessment because it is based on a body of intelligence reporting that reinforces and elaborates on publicly available commercial cyber analyses.

-) Despite the Russian intelligence services' generally sophisticated cyber operations, their large-scale approach and human error in execution created opportunities to gain insight into their efforts through intelligence collection.

( ) We assess the SVR conducted foreign intelligence collection against the US primary campaigns and on think tanks and lobbying groups likely to shape future US policies. In July 2015, the SVR gained access to Democratic National Committee (DNC) networks and maintained that access until at least June 2016, Separate intelligence indicates that the SVR by late 2015 had gained and maintained access to think tanks and political groups from which they collected intelligence on the election campaign.

- SVR collected material was provided as foreign intelligence reports to senior Russian officials,

The GRU probably began cyber operations aimed at the US election by March 2016, The GRU was preparing a spearphishing operation to target Secretary Clinton's staff and the Democratic Party, other political targets, foreign governments, and NGO employees.

- We assess that the campaign, which ran from March through July 2016, resulted in the compromise of the personal

[a] (U) The persona referring to itself as "Guccifer 2.0" claims it chose its name in homage to Guccifer, an imprisoned Romanian hacker named Marcel Lazar, who hacked and publicly disclosed information from the email accounts of an adviser to Secretary Clinton and others. The communications revealed the existence of Secretary Clinton's personal email server. Guccifer also claimed to have hacked Secretary Clinton's personal email server, but later admitted he invented the claim.

e-mail accounts of Democratic Party officials and political figures, [redacted]. By May, GRU cyber infrastructure had connected to the DNC and exfiltrated large volumes of data, [redacted]

- [redacted] GRU actors in early July used known GRU infrastructure to log in to e-mail accounts belonging to state- and federal-level Republican campaigns and several Political Action Committees (PACs) supporting that party, according to CIA analysis of [redacted] technical data. We assess with high confidence that the GRU targeted a company that managed domains for Republican campaigns and PACs and a domain that the Republican National Committee (RNC) had previously used. GRU efforts compromised entire e-mail accounts, [redacted] RNC officials told the FBI that the domain had not been used for at least six years.
- [redacted]

[redacted] ***Public Disclosures of Russian-Collected Data.*** We assess the GRU used both the Guccifer 2.0 persona and DCLeaks.com operationally to release US data obtained in GRU cyber operations publicly and in exclusives to media outlets. We have high confidence that Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks.com published GRU-hacked data, but moderate confidence that they were under direct GRU control [redacted]. We base our judgments on several factors: the information that was disclosed was information we assess the GRU accessed as part of its operations against US political targets; the initial data leak occurred the day after the US cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike publicized Russia's intrusion into the DNC; and signals intelligence placed the operators of Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks.com in Russia.

- [redacted] Guccifer 2.0, who claimed to be an independent Romanian hacker, made multiple contradictory statements and false claims about his identity throughout the election; [redacted] intelligence indicated the persona was controlled from Russia, and press reporting suggests more than one person claiming to be Guccifer 2.0 interacted with journalists, based on [redacted] and interactions with the press.
- [redacted]) Content that we assess was taken from [redacted] e-mail accounts targeted in March 2016 by a GRU cyber espionage unit subsequently appeared on DCLeaks.com in June.
- [redacted] On several occasions, the administrators of Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks.com logged in to accounts associated with those personas using a Russia-based mobile broadband provider [redacted] although they generally attempted to obscure the source of their Internet traffic.

[redacted] We assess that the GRU was directed to pass material it acquired from the DNC to WikiLeaks. We have high confidence in this judgment. We assess that the Russian Government also passed to WikiLeaks material collected on a senior Democratic Party official. We lack insight into whether WikiLeaks was witting of Russian involvement in either case and whether the Russian Government controlled the timing and content of releases. [redacted]

- [redacted] In early September, Putin deflected a reporter's question about Russian Government involvement in the disclosure of DNC data to WikiLeaks, saying publicly it was important the data was exposed, calling the search for the

source of the leaks a distraction, and denying Russian "state-level" involvement.

- [redacted]) Moscow most likely chose WikiLeaks because of its self-proclaimed reputation for authenticity. Disclosures through WikiLeaks did not contain any evident forgeries. As part of its disclosures related to a senior Democratic Party official, WikiLeaks released the original spearphishing e-mail that we assess GRU cyber actors created.
- [redacted] The Kremlin's principal international propaganda outlet RT (formerly Russia Today) has actively collaborated with WikiLeaks. RT's editor-in-chief visited WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in August 2013, where they discussed renewing his broadcast contract with RT, according to Russian and Western media. Russian media subsequently announced that RT had become "the only Russian media company" to partner with WikiLeaks and had received access to "new leaks of secret information." RT routinely gives Assange sympathetic coverage and provides him a platform to denounce the United States.

[redacted] These election-related disclosures reflect a pattern since 2014 of the GRU using hacked information in targeted influence efforts against targets such as Olympic athletes and other foreign governments. Such efforts have included releasing or altering personal data, defacing websites, or releasing e-mails.

- [redacted] A prominent target since the 2016 Summer Olympics has been the World Anti-Doping Agency, with leaks that we assess to have originated with the GRU and that have involved data on US athletes.

[redacted] Although we saw Russian collection on some Republican-affiliated targets, [redacted]

[redacted] ***Russian Cyber Intrusions Into State Electoral Infrastructure.*** The GRU accessed elements of several confirmed and possibly as many as 20 state or local electoral boards, [redacted] and it was probably in a position to tamper with at least some voter registration databases, according to a DHS assessment. It is unclear what the Russian Government intended to accomplish with these intrusions, but they may have been exploratory efforts to determine how vulnerable US electoral systems were to electronic manipulation or preparatory steps to undermine confidence in the election by creating the impression that results had been altered.

- [redacted] In late June and early July 2016, probable GRU cyber actors compromised a California voter registration organization's e-mail account, [redacted]
- [redacted] Unidentified actors using GRU infrastructure on 12 July compromised the Illinois State Voter Information Center using seven Internet Protocol (IP) addresses registered to King Servers, a Russian company that provides virtual private network (VPN) services that obscure the source of Internet traffic, [redacted]
- [redacted] Since early 2014, US-based Russian intelligence officers have collected on US electoral processes and related technology and equipment, [redacted]; such collection probably fed GRU targeting efforts.

[redacted] Unidentified actors operating from leased commercial infrastructure commonly used in GRU operations also targeted US state and local voter registration systems. We have low confidence in attributing these reports to the GRU because such services are commonly used by cybercriminals, who probably conducted at least some of the intrusion attempts to collect personally identifiable information on US victims.

- State governments, using DHS-provided sensors, detected Internet traffic between the King Servers IP addresses and 18 states from June to early November 2016, and 13 of those states reported malicious activity related to one of the reported IP addresses.
- As of January 2016, an e-mail address associated with a suspected GRU actor made connections to the King Servers domain. The suspected GRU actor had leased VPN services from King Servers through December 2009, a gap of several years,

The types of systems we observed Russian actors targeting or compromising are not involved in vote tallying. We have not detected the sorts of Russian Government cyber accesses that would have allowed Moscow to alter vote tabulations. Additional intelligence information on Russian cyber activity or supply chain targeting of election-related hardware or software would prompt us to reconsider our assessment about the scope of Russian intelligence efforts during the election.

-) Between December 2015 and June 2016, GRU cyber actors scanned an identified US-based third-party vendor of electronic voting equipment and services, .

Russian Propaganda Efforts. Russia's state-run propaganda machine—comprised of its domestic media apparatus, outlets targeting global audiences such as RT and Sputnik, and a network of quasi-government trolls—contributed to the influence campaign by serving as a platform for Kremlin messaging to Russian and international audiences. State-owned Russian media made increasingly favorable comments about President-elect Trump as the 2016 US general and primary election campaigns progressed while consistently offering negative coverage of Secretary Clinton.

- Russian state-owned media coverage of President-elect Trump early in the primaries characterized him as just one of several "fringe" figures who had a minimal chance to win but high potential to disrupt the US political system. English-language RT Online featured an editorial on 7 February 2016 on the Republican primaries in which it called President-elect Trump part of the "Republican radical fringe," and a pro-Kremlin expert wrote the same week that his victory would be a "fundamental disruption" of the US political system.
- Starting in March 2016, Russian Government–linked actors began openly supporting President-elect Trump's candidacy in media aimed at English-speaking audiences. RT and Sputnik—another government-funded outlet producing pro-Kremlin radio and online content in a variety of languages for international audiences—consistently cast President-elect Trump as the target of unfair coverage from traditional US media outlets that they claimed were subservient to a corrupt political establishment.
- Russian media hailed President-elect Trump's victory as a vindication of Putin's advocacy of global populist movements—the theme of Putin's annual conference for Western academics in October 2016—and the latest example of Western liberalism's collapse, according to Russian and Western press reporting.

As the US presidential campaign progressed, Kremlin support for President-elect Trump was evident in domestic media coverage, coincident with the broader influence campaign. Putin's chief propagandist Dmitriy Kiselev used his flagship weekly newsmagazine program this fall to cast President-elect Trump as an outsider victimized by a corrupt political establishment and faulty democratic election process that aimed to prevent his election because of his desire to work with Moscow, judging from Russian state media and international press reporting.

- [redacted] Pro-Kremlin proxy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, proclaimed just before the election that if President-elect Trump won, Russia would "drink Champagne" in anticipation of being able to advance its positions on Syria and Ukraine. The head of Russia's most prestigious public polling center told a Washington audience later in November that Russians regarded the election results as another in what they see as a series of Putin's successes.
- [redacted] Kremlin-controlled media sometimes communicated support for the President-elect by attacking Secretary Clinton for her positions on the Middle East and then citing President-elect Trump's position on the same issues.

[redacted] RT's coverage of Secretary Clinton throughout the US presidential campaign was consistently negative and focused on her leaked e-mails; alleged corruption, poor physical and mental health, and ties to Islamic extremism. Some Russian officials echoed Russian influence campaign talking points that Secretary Clinton's election could lead to a war between the United States and Russia.

- [redacted]) In August, a think tank the Kremlin uses to privately channel pro-regime messaging to Russian domestic and international media suggested avenging Western reports on Putin's health by airing segments devoted to Secretary Clinton's alleged health problems, [redacted]
- ([redacted]) On 6 August, RT published an English-language video called "Julian Assange Special: Do WikiLeaks Have the E-mail That'll Put Clinton in Prison?" and an exclusive interview with Assange entitled "Clinton and ISIS Funded by the Same Money." RT's most popular video on Secretary Clinton, "How 100% of the Clintons' 'Charity' Went to...Themselves," had more than 9 million views on social media platforms. RT's most popular English language video about the President-elect, called "Trump Will Not Be Permitted To Win," featured Assange and had 2.2 million views.
- ([redacted]) For more on Russia's past media efforts, please see Annex A: Russia—Kremlin's TV Seeks To Influence Politics, Fuel Discontent in US.

([redacted]) Other Russian Influence Efforts

([redacted]) Some Russian influence efforts appeared to be short lived or have little traction, [redacted]

- ([redacted]) [redacted] indicates Russian officials were unable to conduct their desired election monitoring plan because US officials denied their access.
- ([redacted]) [redacted] indicates plans for a Russian-language newspaper supportive of President-elect Trump to be published in the United States were scaled back in late October after Moscow deemed the President-elect's chances for victory to be unlikely.

[redacted]

([redacted]) [redacted] using trolls as well as RT as part of its influence efforts to denigrate Secretary Clinton. [redacted] amplified stories on scandals about Secretary Clinton and the role of WikiLeaks in the election campaign, including an article claiming that she allegedly considered killing Assange.

- [redacted] indicates the likely financier of the so-called Internet Research Agency of professional trolls located in Saint Petersburg, close Putin ally Yevgeniy Prigozhin,

has confirmed ties to the GRU. We are working to determine the further extent of ties between the Internet Research Agency and the Russian intelligence services.

- [redacted] A journalist who is a leading expert on the Internet Research Agency claimed that some social media accounts that appear to be tied to Russia's professional trolls—because they previously were devoted to supporting Russian actions in Ukraine—started to advocate for the President-elect as early as December 2015.

[redacted] Influence Effort Was Boldest Yet in the US

[redacted] Russia's effort to influence the 2016 US presidential election represented a significant escalation in directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations aimed at US elections. We assess the 2016 influence campaign reflected the Kremlin's recognition of the worldwide effects that mass disclosures of US Government and other private data—such as those conducted by WikiLeaks and others—have achieved in recent years, and their understanding of the value of orchestrating such disclosures to maximize the impact of compromising information. [redacted] reporting and [redacted] indicate that since the collapse of the Soviet Union Moscow had crafted plans to influence previous US presidential elections, but we cannot confirm they were executed.

- [redacted] In 2011, US-based Russian officials had a draft plan to influence the 2012 US presidential election, [redacted] The plan advocated exploiting the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling to fund candidates supporting Russian interests, eventually creating a pro-Russia PAC to openly advance Moscow's agenda. SVR officers in San Francisco were tasked to compile information on US firms with ties to Russia, [redacted], possibly in support of this plan; we have no information to indicate the plan was implemented.
- [redacted] In 1999, the SVR's San Francisco base developed a plan to use a contact to promulgate Russian views in US political parties' campaign platforms and among candidates for the presidential election in 2000, [redacted]
- (U) During the Cold War, the Soviet Union used intelligence officers, influence agents, forgeries, and press placements to disparage candidates perceived as hostile to the Kremlin, according to former KGB archivist Vasiliy Mitrokhin.

[redacted] Past Russian intelligence efforts related to US elections have primarily focused on foreign intelligence collection. For decades, Russian and Soviet intelligence services have sought to collect insider information from US political parties that could help Russian leaders understand a new US administration's plans and priorities.

- [redacted] In 2008, all Russian consular offices were required to report any information about the likely outcome of the US presidential election, potential cabinet members of the new administration, the impact of the US economy on the election, and the new administration's policies toward Russia, [redacted] The SVR Directorate S (Illegals) officers arrested in the United States in 2010 also reported to Moscow about the 2008 election.
- (U) In the 1970s, the KGB recruited a Democratic Party activist who reported information about then-presidential hopeful Jimmy Carter's campaign and foreign policy plans, according to Mitrokhin.

[redacted]) 2016 Influence Campaign Could Have Been More Extensive

[redacted] We assess that Moscow refrained from the full spectrum of actions it could have taken to affect the US election. We judge that the Kremlin could have disclosed additional material and could have conducted attacks on

electoral infrastructure in the runup to and on Election Day.

- [redacted] The GRU may have compromised additional personal e-mail accounts of leading US political figures from both parties, judging from [redacted] reporting on the extent of its spearphishing campaign from March through June. The contents of any additional compromised email accounts have yet to be disclosed.
- [redacted] We did not detect extensive [redacted] influence operations as part of the Kremlin's campaign. The [redacted] may not have released additional materials, fearing loss of accesses that would have endangered continued collection on US decisionmaking in a Clinton administration, [redacted]
- [redacted] We did not see any forgeries disclosed during the Russian influence campaign. Russian intelligence services have used fabricated information for active measures in numerous past campaigns, according to [redacted] press reporting, and probably could have done so on this occasion.
- [redacted] We assess the GRU refrained from conducting attacks against the electoral infrastructure to which it had access. It is unclear why the GRU did not conduct attacks; it may have refrained from doing so because it lacked the technical capabilities, did not have what it judged to be sufficient access to create desired disruptive effects, or lacked approval for disruption operations.

[redacted] Election Operation Signals "New Normal" in Russian Influence Efforts

[redacted] We assess Moscow will apply lessons learned from its campaign aimed at the US presidential election to future influence efforts in the United States and worldwide. We assess the Russian intelligence services would have seen their election influence campaign as at least a qualified success regardless of the outcome of the election because of their perceived ability to impact public discussion in the United States.

- [redacted] Putin's [redacted] views of the disclosures suggest the Kremlin and the intelligence services will continue to consider using cyber-enabled disclosure operations because of their belief that these can accomplish Russian goals relatively easily without significant damage to Russian interests. We have not yet seen signs that US actions announced in late December 2016 have changed this belief.
- [redacted] Putin's satisfaction at the public attention paid to the influence effort, [redacted] underlines the value he assigns to these sorts of efforts.

[redacted] We assess Germany's federal elections in September 2017 will be the next major focus of Russian influence operations. [redacted]

- [redacted]) Russian intelligence has conducted cyber espionage operations against German think tanks and politicians, giving Russia material it could leak in a similar manner to the US influence campaign, judging from a body of intelligence reporting. [redacted]

[redacted]

- [redacted]) Russia has influenced or sought to influence election campaigns in France, Montenegro, and Moldova, [redacted]
- [redacted]) For more on Russian activities in Europe, please see Annex B: Moscow's Efforts to Manipulate Foreign Elections, 2000-16.

[redacted]) We assess Russian intelligence services will continue to develop capabilities to provide Putin with options to use against the United States, judging from past practice and current efforts. Immediately after Election Day, the SVR probably began a spearphishing campaign targeting US Government employees and individuals associated with US think tanks and NGOs in national security, defense, and foreign policy fields, [redacted] This campaign could provide material for future influence efforts as well as foreign intelligence collection on the incoming administration's goals and plans.

- [redacted]) Russia's demonstrated ability to gain access to at least some US electoral infrastructure, [redacted] suggests that enhanced efforts by the services could threaten the integrity of future votes.
- [redacted] The Kremlin's financial and material support to actors advancing its interests within the United States can be covertly supplied online, through cutouts, or during meetings in Russia or other countries. [redacted]

(U) Annex A

***(U) Russia* -- Kremlin's TV Seeks To Influence Politics, Fuel Discontent in US, 11 December 2012**

(U) RT America TV, a Kremlin-financed channel operated from within the United States, has substantially expanded its repertoire of programming that highlights criticism of alleged US shortcomings in democracy and civil liberties. The rapid expansion of RT's operations and budget and recent candid statements by RT's leadership point to the channel's importance to the Kremlin as a messaging tool and indicate a Kremlin-directed campaign to undermine faith in the US Government and fuel political protest. The Kremlin has committed significant resources to expanding the channel's reach, particularly its social media footprint. A reliable UK report states that RT recently was the most-watched foreign news channel in the UK. RT America has positioned itself as a domestic US channel and has deliberately sought to obscure any legal ties to the Russian Government.

(U) In the runup to the 2012 US presidential election in November, English-language channel RT America -- created and financed by the Russian Government and part of Russian Government-sponsored RT TV (see textbox 1) -- intensified its usually critical coverage of the United States. The channel portrayed the US electoral process as undemocratic and featured calls by US protesters for the public to rise up and "take this government back."

- (U) RT introduced two new shows -- "Breaking the Set" on 4 September and "Truthseeker" on 2 November -- both overwhelmingly focused on criticism of US and Western governments as well as the promotion of radical discontent.

- (U) From August to November 2012, RT ran numerous reports on alleged US election fraud and voting machine vulnerabilities, contending that US election results cannot be trusted and do not reflect the popular will.
- (U) In an effort to highlight the alleged "lack of democracy" in the United States, RT broadcast, hosted, and advertised third-party candidate debates and ran reporting supportive of the political agenda of these candidates. The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a "sham."

(U) *Messaging on RT prior to the US presidential election (RT, 3 November)*

- (U) RT aired a documentary about the Occupy Wall Street movement on 1, 2, and 4 November. RT framed the movement as a fight against "the ruling class" and described the current US political system as corrupt and dominated by corporations. RT advertising for the documentary featured Occupy movement calls to "take back" the government. The documentary claimed that the US system cannot be changed democratically, but only through "revolution." After the 6 November US presidential election, RT aired a documentary called "Cultures of Protest," about active and often violent political resistance (RT, 1-10 November).

(U) *RT new show "Truthseeker" (RT, 11 November)*

(U) RT Conducts Strategic Messaging for Russian Government

(U) RT's criticism of the US election was the latest facet of its broader and longer-standing anti-US messaging likely aimed at undermining viewers' trust in US democratic procedures and undercutting US criticism of Russia's political system. RT Editor in Chief Margarita Simonyan recently declared that the United States itself lacks democracy and that it has "no moral right to teach the rest of the world" (*Kommersant*, 6 November).

- (U) Simonyan has characterized RT's coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement as "information warfare" that is aimed at promoting popular dissatisfaction with the US Government. RT created a *Facebook* app to connect Occupy Wall Street protesters via social media. In addition, RT featured its own hosts in Occupy rallies ("Minaev Live," 10 April; RT, 2, 12 June).
- (U) RT's reports often characterize the United States as a "surveillance state" and allege widespread infringements of civil liberties, police brutality, and drone use (RT, 24, 28 October, 1-10 November).
- (U) RT has also focused on criticism of the US economic system, US currency policy, alleged Wall Street greed, and the US national debt. Some of RT's hosts have compared the United States to Imperial Rome and have predicted that government corruption and "corporate greed" will lead to US financial collapse (RT, 31 October, 4 November).

(*U) Simonyan steps over the White House in the introduction from her short-lived domestic show on REN TV (REN TV, 26 December 2011)*

(U) RT broadcasts support for other Russian interests in areas such as foreign and energy policy.

- (U) RT runs anti-fracking programming, highlighting environmental issues and the impacts on public health. This is likely reflective of the Russian Government's concern about the impact of fracking and US natural gas production on the global energy market and the potential challenges to Gazprom's profitability (5 October).
- (U) RT is a leading media voice opposing Western intervention in the Syrian conflict and blaming the West for waging "information wars" against the Syrian Government (RT, 10 October-9 November).

(U) RT anti-fracking reporting (RT, 5 October)

- (U) In an earlier example of RT's messaging in support of the Russian Government, during the Georgia-Russia military conflict the channel accused Georgians of killing civilians and organizing a genocide of the Ossetian people. According to Simonyan, when "the Ministry of Defense was at war with Georgia," RT was "waging an information war against the entire Western world" (*Kommersant*, 11 July).

(U) In recent interviews, RT's leadership has candidly acknowledged its mission to expand its US audience and to expose it to Kremlin messaging. However, the leadership rejected claims that RT interferes in US domestic affairs.

- (U) Simonyan claimed in popular arts magazine *Afisha* on 3 October: "It is important to have a channel that people get used to, and then, when needed, you show them what you need to show. In some sense, not having our own foreign broadcasting is the same as not having a ministry of defense. When there is no war, it looks like we don't need it. However, when there is a war, it is critical."
- (U) According to Simonyan, "the word 'propaganda' has a very negative connotation, but indeed, there is not a single international foreign TV channel that is doing something other than promotion of the values of the country that it is broadcasting from." She added that "when Russia is at war, we are, of course, on Russia's side" (*Afisha*, 3 October; *Kommersant*, 4 July).
- (U) TV-Novosti director Nikolov said on 4 October to the Association of Cable Television that RT builds on worldwide demand for "an alternative view of the entire world." Simonyan asserted on 3 October in *Afisha* that RT's goal is "to make an alternative channel that shares information unavailable elsewhere" in order to "conquer the audience" and expose it to Russian state messaging (*Afisha*, 3 October; *Kommersant*, 4 July).
- (U) On 26 May, Simonyan tweeted with irony: "Ambassador McFaul hints that our channel is interference with US domestic affairs. And we, sinful souls, were thinking that it is freedom of speech."

(U) RT Leadership Closely Tied to, Controlled by Kremlin

(U) RT Editor in Chief Margarita Simonyan has close ties to top Russian Government officials, especially Presidential Administration Deputy Chief of Staff Aleksey Gromov, who reportedly manages political TV coverage in Russia and is one of the founders of RT.

- (U) Simonyan has claimed that Gromov shielded her from other officials and their requests to air certain reports. Russian media consider Simonyan to be Gromov's protege (*Kommersant*, 4 July; Dozhd TV, 11 July).

- (U) Simonyan replaced Gromov on state-owned Channel One's Board of Directors. Government officials, including Gromov and Putin's Press Secretary Peskov were involved in creating RT and appointing Simonyan (*Afisha*, 3 October).

- (U) According to Simonyan, Gromov oversees political coverage on TV, and he has periodic meetings with media managers where he shares classified information and discusses their coverage plans. Some opposition journalists, including Andrey Loshak, claim that he also ordered media attacks on opposition figures (*Kommersant*, 11 July).

(U) *Simonyan shows RT facilities to then Prime Minister Putin. Simonyan was on Putin's 2012 presidential election campaign staff in Moscow (*Rospress*, 22 September 2010,* Ria Novosti*, 25 October 2012).*

(U) The Kremlin staffs RT and closely supervises RT's coverage, recruiting people who can convey Russian strategic messaging because of their ideological beliefs.

- (U) The head of RT's Arabic-language service, Aydar Aganin, was rotated from the diplomatic service to manage RT's Arabic-language expansion, suggesting a close relationship between RT and Russia's foreign policy apparatus. RT's London Bureau is managed by Darya Pushkova, the daughter of Aleksey Pushkov, the current chair of the Duma Russian Foreign Affairs Committee and a former Gorbachev speechwriter (*DXB*, 26 March 2009; *MK.ru*, 13 March 2006).
- (U) According to Simonyan, the Russian Government sets rating and viewership requirements for RT and, "since RT receives budget from the state, it must complete tasks given by the state." According to Nikolov, RT news stories are written and edited "to become news" exclusively in RT's Moscow office (Dozhd TV, 11 July; *AKT*, 4 October).
- (U) In her interview with pro-Kremlin journalist Sergey Minaev, Simonyan complimented RT staff in the United States for passionately defending Russian positions on the air and in social media.

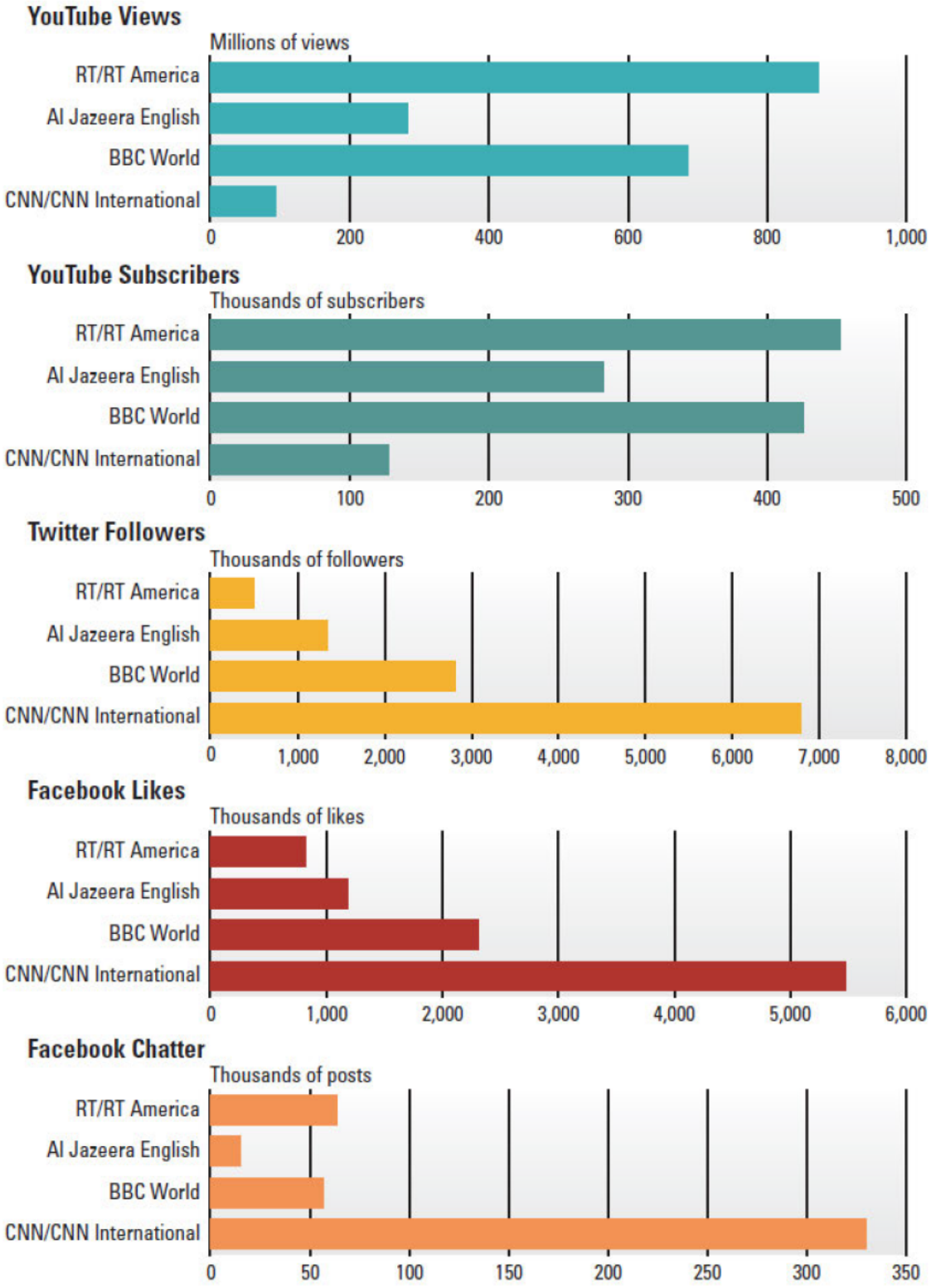
Simonyan said: "I wish you could see…how these guys, not just on air, but on their own social networks, *Twitter*, and when giving interviews, how they defend the positions that we stand on!" ("Minaev Live," 10 April).

(U) RT Focuses on Social Media, Building Audience

(U) RT aggressively advertises its social media accounts and has a significant and fast-growing social media footprint. In line with its efforts to present itself as anti-mainstream and to provide viewers alternative news content, RT is making its social media operations a top priority, both to avoid broadcast TV regulations and to expand its overall audience.

- (U) According to RT management, RT's website receives at least 500,000 unique viewers every day. Since its inception in 2005, RT videos received more than 800 million views on *YouTube* (1 million views per day), which is the highest among news outlets (see graphics for comparison with other news channels) (*AKT*, 4 October).
- (U) According to Simonyan, the TV audience worldwide is losing trust in traditional TV broadcasts and stations, while the popularity of "alternative channels" like RT or Al Jazeera grows. RT markets itself as an "alternative channel" that is available via the Internet everywhere in the world, and it encourages interaction and social networking (*Kommersant*, 29 September).
- (U) According to Simonyan, RT uses social media to expand the reach of its political reporting and uses well-trained people to monitor public opinion in social media commentaries (*Kommersant*, 29 September).
- (U) According to Nikolov, RT requires its hosts to have social media accounts, in part because social media allows the distribution of content that would not be allowed on television (*Newreporter.org*, 11 October).
- (U) Simonyan claimed in her 3 October interview to independent TV channel Dozhd that Occupy Wall Street coverage gave RT a significant audience boost.

TV News Broadcasters: Comparative Social Media Footprint



(U) The Kremlin spends $190 million a year on the distribution and dissemination of RT programming, focusing on hotels and satellite, terrestrial, and cable broadcasting. The Kremlin is rapidly expanding RT's availability around the world and giving it a reach comparable to channels such as Al Jazeera English. According to Simonyan, the United Kingdom and the United States are RT's most successful markets. RT does not, however, publish audience information.

- (U) According to market research company Nielsen, RT had the most rapid growth (40 percent) among all international news channels in the United States over the past year (2012). Its audience in New York tripled and in Washington DC grew by 60% (*Kommersant*, 4 July).
- (U) RT claims that it is surpassing Al Jazeera in viewership in New York and Washington DC (*BARB*, 20 November; RT, 21 November).
- (U) RT states on its website that it can reach more than 550 million people worldwide and 85 million people in the United States; however, it does not publicize its actual US audience numbers (RT, 10 December).

(U) Formal Disassociation From Kremlin Facilitates RT US Messaging

(U) RT America formally disassociates itself from the Russian Government by using a Moscow-based autonomous nonprofit organization to finance its US operations. According to RT's leadership, this structure was set up to avoid the Foreign Agents Registration Act and to facilitate licensing abroad. In addition, RT rebranded itself in 2008 to deemphasize its Russian origin.

- (U) According to Simonyan, RT America differs from other Russian state institutions in terms of ownership, but not in terms of financing. To disassociate RT from the Russian Government, the federal news agency RIA Novosti established a subsidiary autonomous nonprofit organization, TV-Novosti, using the formal independence of this company to establish and finance RT worldwide (Dozhd TV, 11 July).
- (U) Nikolov claimed that RT is an "autonomous noncommercial entity," which is "well received by foreign regulators" and "simplifies getting a license." Simonyan said that RT America is not a "foreign agent" according to US law because it uses a US commercial organization for its broadcasts (*AKT,* 4 October; Dozhd TV, 11 July).
- (U) Simonyan observed that RT's original Russia-centric news reporting did not generate sufficient audience, so RT switched to covering international and US domestic affairs and removed the words "Russia Today" from the logo "to stop scaring away the audience" (*Afisha*, 18 October; *Kommersant*, 4 July).
- (U) RT hires or makes contractual agreements with Westerners with views that fit its agenda and airs them on RT. Simonyan said on the pro-Kremlin show "Minaev Live" on 10 April that RT has enough audience and money to be able to choose its hosts, and it chooses the hosts that "think like us," "are interested in working in the anti-mainstream," and defend RT's beliefs on social media. Some hosts and journalists do not present themselves as associated with RT when interviewing people, and many of them have affiliations to other media and activist organizations in the United States ("Minaev Live," 10 April).

(U) Annex B

Moscow's Efforts To Manipulate Foreign Elections, 2000-16

Moscow uses a diverse toolkit of overt and covert measures to try to influence elections abroad by denigrating opponents and manipulating the election process. Moscow since at least 2000 has tried to influence elections in what it views as its sphere of influence, more recently broadening its efforts to include Europe. This chart and map below highlight examples of election manipulation with evidence of a direct link to Moscow.

(U) RUSSIA'S TOOLBOX

We have identified six primary tools that Moscow uses to manipulate foreign elections; Russian officials base tool use on a variety of factors, including geographic distance and Russia's levers of influence in the region.

LOCATION OF INFLUENCE

Eurasia

West-Central Europe

MEASURE

Advisers
Providing advisers to assist in campaigning

Cyber
Deploying technical cyber capabilities to influence an election

Economic levers
Using import/export restrictions, worker visas, or energy resources to influence an election

Funding
Providing money to campaigns or candidates

Messaging
Using media to promote a candidate, spreading disinformation, or releasing compromising information

Public backing
Sponsoring candidates' travel to Moscow or expressing public support for candidates

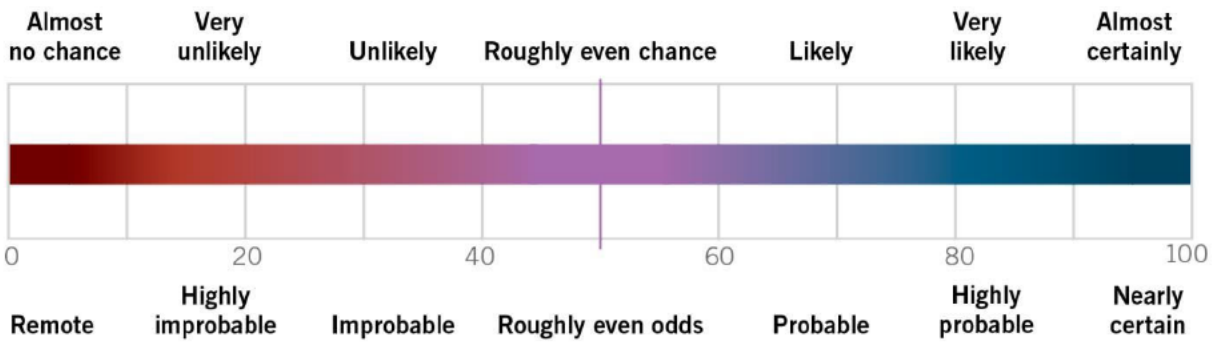
(U) Annex C

(U) ESTIMATIVE LANGUAGE

(U) Estimative language consists of two elements: judgments about the likelihood of developments or events occurring and levels of confidence in the sources and analytic reasoning supporting the judgments. Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact. Assessments are based on collected information, which is often incomplete or fragmentary, as well as logic, argumentation, and precedents.

(U) **Judgments of Likelihood.** The chart below approximates how judgments of likelihood correlate with percentages. Unless otherwise stated, the Intelligence Community's judgments are not derived via statistical analysis. Phrases such as "we judge" and "we assess"—and terms such as "probable" and "likely"—convey analytical assessments.

Percent



(U) **Confidence in the Sources Supporting Judgments.** Confidence levels provide assessments of the quality and quantity of the source information that supports judgments. Consequently, we ascribe high, moderate, or low levels of confidence to assessments:

- (U) **High confidence** generally indicates that judgments are based on high-quality information from multiple sources. High confidence in a judgment does not imply that the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong.
- (U) **Moderate confidence** generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence.
- (U) **Low confidence** generally means that the information's credibility and/or plausibility is uncertain, that the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytic inferences, or that reliability of the sources is questionable.

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