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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:
PRACTICAL TRAPS AND ETHICAL PUZZLES

'HACKING' INTO THE WEST: RUSSIA'S 'ANTI-HEGEMONIC' DRIVE
AND THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE OFFENSIVE

THE RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE ON INFORMATION WARFARE: CONCEPTUAL ROOTS
AND POLITICISATION IN RUSSIAN ACADEMIC, POLITICAL, AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

EXAMINING THE USE OF BOTNETS AND THEIR EVOLUTION IN PROPAGANDA DISSEMINATION

PUTIN, XI, AND HITLER—PROPAGANDA AND THE PATERNITY OF PSEUDO DEMOCRACY

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF EMPATHY IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

BRITAIN'S PUBLIC WAR STORIES: PUNCHING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT OR VANISHING FORCE?

A CLOSER LOOK AT YEMEN

WEAPONISED HONESTY: COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND NATO VALUES

PUTIN, XI, AND HITLER— PROPAGANDA AND THE PATERNITY OF PSEUDO DEMOCRACY

Nicholas O'Shaughnessy

Abstract

This article poses an unsettling question. Was Hitler's regime not so much a historical accident as a prototype—a creation of modernity and a response to the conditions precipitated by modernity? It constructs an answer via the exploration of the interdependency of a number of constructs. Through the building blocks of symbolism the propagandist constructs an imaginary world that is neither true nor false, but a pseudo-reality energised by the emotion of fear and both defined and constricted by ideology and beliefs. The article highlights significant differences between this Nazi prototype and modern practice to be taken into account. For example the Nazis had no theory of soft power; however, they were much more aware of the value of entertainment as propaganda than contemporary populist autocracies. The article promotes a rigorous examination of the evidence for the 'impact' of propaganda—How effective is it really?—and the need for a more sophisticated understanding of its effects and purpose.

Keywords: propaganda, coercion, soft power, Hitler, China, Putin, pseudo-democracy, pseudo-reality

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Introduction: A Nazi Prototype?

Pseudo-democracy: The world seems to be embracing not democracy but a kind of propaganda-augmented neo-democracy, as China will surely become and Russia is now. This was not of course supposed to be the script outlined in *The End of History*.¹ One comparator is Mussolini's Italy, i.e. a facsimile of democracy surrounded by a nimbus of nationalistic propaganda. But another is Nazi Germany.

Was Hitler's regime not so much a historical accident as a prototype: a creation of modernity and a response to the conditions precipitated by modernity? A society of rootless, atomised individuals, produced by the modern workplace's need for mobility of labour and micro-specification of task, is a fearful society, and out of that fear emerges the need for solidarity. The 'modern' era of mass electorates was vulnerable to vividly dramatized messages that evoke a binary world good and evil, and the corruption of political discourse by 'terrible simplifiers'. One might term such appeals regressive, yet they were sold with the latest techniques and both embrace and excoriate modernity, as Paxton describes in *The Anatomy of Fascism*.² I have elsewhere argued: *There was the influence of Americanisation, for the Reich played with and structurally incorporated its antithesis. It was a series of contradictions—progressive and reactionary, modern and anti-modern, American and anti-American.*³

But an apparatus of authoritarian control legitimated by a massive propaganda apparatus is ostensibly the direction some countries have gone and some are trending. Mussolini observed 'the fascist state organises the nation, but leaves a sufficient margin of liberty to the individual'; 'sovereign democracy' was the exquisite phrase chosen to evoke the Putin Raj: 'They are taking Russia to task for failing to implement the Western model of democracy: but the point of sovereign democracy is to deny the relevance of that model'.⁴ So our assumptions about Russia were wrong; it was not going to be a democracy but rather a plebiscitary autocracy based on opinion management. All of these regimes seek to manipulate; they offer no unvarnished truth, and any notion of objectivity is missing. The purpose of government is to tell people that they live in a Panglossian best in the best of all possible worlds. So, a great edifice of perception is constructed that is ultimately neither truly true nor fully false, but hangs somewhere in the no man's land between truth and falsehood. The public cannot be exposed to too much truth; and no truth fully exists in the sense in which the objectivist would claim. Moreover, the lie, or duplicitous statement, serves the elevated purpose, the goal of national solidarity and national greatness: they see virtue in what they do. The lower lie serves the higher truth. The West in contrast had simply forgotten (or never absorbed) the idea of propaganda, the lessons of the Nazi and Soviet eras and what a powerful tool it could be in terms of disrupting global politics and sabotaging the civic order.

¹ Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History And The Last Man*, (New York: The Free Press 1992).

² Paxton, Robert O., *The Anatomy of Fascism*, (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

³ O'Shaughnessy, Nicholas, *Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand*, (London: Hurst, 2016).

⁴ Cottrell, Robert, 'Death Under The Tsar' (review of Anna Politkovyaska, *A Russian Diary*), *New York Review of Books*, 14 June 2007.

1. Pseudo-Reality: External

The article first looks at persuasion directed to the outer world, a kind of propaganda -augmented foreign policy.

But the pseudo-democratic authoritarian state is all about the creation of parallel reality. The pseudo-real therefore is consciously produced, it is manufactured using the expertise of those experienced in the area. Goebbels hired the American publications guru Ivy Lee in the 1930s,⁵ the Putin regime has used the resources of Ketchum, an American public relations firm, as well as various other Western firms. The appearance of Putin as Times Person of the year in 2007 was the result of Ketchum lobbying.⁶ But for such an investment to be made there has to be a deeply held conviction that it is in fact effective: ‘Dmitry Kiselyov is quite open about the Russian media strategy for the millenium: to “apply the correct political technology”, then ‘bring it to the point of overheating’ and bring to bear ‘the magnifying glass of TV and the Internet’.’⁷

Under these propaganda regimes events often do not exist in their own right but rather they are faked. One famous example of this is a Nazi fabrication during the Saar referendum (1935) where Goebbels broadcast the lie that Max Braun, the leader of the anti-German unity faction, had in fact fled the country (Goebbels had freely distributed radio transmitters which broadcast this message).⁸ Realities do not arise naturally in the pseudo democratic entity. Events do not occur, they must be manufactured. This is the essence of the KGB ethos, the milieu from which Putin and his henchmen emerged: ‘It is not by accident that Putin and his colleagues all share the KGB’s belief in the power of the state to control the life of the nation [...] In the course of their training, they learned that events cannot be allowed to just happen, they must be controlled and manipulated; that markets cannot be genuinely open, they must be managed from behind the scenes; that elections cannot be unpredictable, they must be planned in advance—as, indeed, Russia’s now are.’⁹ But the director of the Isvetsia publishing house once suggested ‘image is not reality, but, rather, its reflection, which can be made positive’.¹⁰

Disinformation: The Nazis of course were experts at disinformation and the creative use of communication to disseminate it. They had groups to spread rumours,¹¹ fake horoscopes,¹² and groups to spread graffiti.¹³ The role of organised lying is important because, paradoxically, it indicates what the regime is really thinking.

⁵ Manvell, Roger and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Doctor Goebbels: His Life And Death*, (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010).

⁶ Institute of Modern Russia, ‘The Propaganda Of The Putin Era (Part Two): The Kremlin’s Tentacles’, 5 Dec 2012.

⁷ Snyder, Timothy, ‘Fascism, Russia, and Ukraine’, *New York Review of Books*, 20 March 2014.

⁸ Wiskemann, Elizabeth, *Europe Of The Dictators 1919-1945*, (London: Fontana, 1975).

⁹ Applebaum, Anne, ‘Vladimir’s Tale’, *New York Review of Books*, 29 March 2012.

¹⁰ Institute of Modern Russia, ‘The Propaganda Of The Putin Era’.

¹¹ Herzstein, Robert Edwin, *The War That Hitler Won*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979).

¹² Speer, Albert, *Inside The Third Reich*, (London: Macmillan, 1970).

¹³ Beevor, Anthony, *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*, (London: Penguin, 2003).

So, lying becomes a form of truth, or at least a truth about the regime. The forms of disinformation embraced by the Nazis were extensive—for example the clandestine radio stations targeted at the British such as the Christian People's Station or the Workers Challenge Station or Radio Caledonia or Radio Cymru.¹⁴

Russian disinformation, or *dezinformatsiya*, is designed to sabotage the notion of objective truth and paralyse action.¹⁵ After the destruction of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine, Russia 'pumped out a dizzying array of theories' about the shooting down of Flight 17 and blame was at various stages placed on the CIA and Ukrainian fighter pilots, etc.¹⁶ When Swedes debated a NATO affiliation, there was a sudden barrage of claims, for example, that NATO would locate nuclear missiles in Sweden or independently attack Russia or that its soldiers could rape Swedish women without criminal sanction; thus 'The flow of misleading and inaccurate stories is so strong that both NATO and the European Union have established special offices to identify and refute disinformation, particularly claims emanating from Russia'.¹⁷

Russian lies included claims such as the story about a Colombian chemicals factory in Louisiana that was blown up by ISIS terrorists in 2014 on September 11, later revealed in the *New York Times*.¹⁸ Such stories appear in social media and they are planted by a Russian propaganda organisation named the Internet Research Agency and created by Putin. They create hoaxes via Twitter accounts and Arabic commentary—for example the fake Louisiana television images that appeared on You Tube.¹⁹ The employees of these so-called troll farms compose imaginary stories and propaganda against America and the Ukraine, and also engage in online harassment and protracted argumentation in the comment sections of websites. A British journalist 'described Russia's actions as an attempt to undermine the concept of objective reality itself' before the US House Foreign Affairs Committee in April 2015.²⁰ Other examples of Russian disinformation include for example the assertion that Ebola is the fault of the US government.

Current propaganda practices represent the heritage of the Soviet Union, a lineal continuity adjusted to cyberspace. In the old days, the Kremlin also engaged in disinformation, e.g. its claim that AIDS was an invention of the CIA.²¹ During the cold war the Soviets injected disinformation via stories placed in Indian newspapers. Subsidy of antagonistic groups was another Soviet trick, of anti-nuclear groups for example; and this continues: in 2014 the Kremlin offered an \$11.7 million loan to the French National Front.²² A disinformation campaign was also synchronised with the

¹⁴ West, W. J., *Truth Betrayed*, (London: Duckworth and Co., 1987).

¹⁵ MacFarquhar, Neil, 'Russia's Powerful Weapon To Weaken Rivals: Spread Of False Stories', *New York Times*, 29 August 2016.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dale, Helle, 'Putin's Propaganda Machine Pumps Out Lies', *Newsweek*, 13 June 2015.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² MacFarquhar, Neil, 'How Russians Pay To Play In Other Countries', *New York Times*, 31 December 2016.

Ukraine attack, according to Tim Snyder: ‘the Russian media continually make the claim that the Ukrainians protesting are Nazis’.²³ Claims included the one that gay marriage will be forced on Ukraine as the price of a closer relationship with Europe.

Information: There is disinformation and then there is information—the ‘true’ facts gained from hacking and used/abused propagandistically. But this is conceptually distinct from disinformation even if it comes from the same stable. The truths emerging may well be correct and that is why they are also very damaging. Thus ‘Fancy Bears’, a Russian cyberspace proxy, persuaded the German newspaper Spiegel to reveal that US athletes had been gaining medical permissions to take restricted substances;²⁴ this was revenge for the stories about Russian athletics doping.²⁵ Analysts believe that it was Fancy Bears that hacked the Democratic National Committee accounts revealing the Clinton emails.²⁶ One reporter claimed that Fancy Bears apparently operated ‘almost more like a PR firm’ and were ‘very business-like’.²⁷ Moreover, the distinction between information and disinformation is not clear-cut. The agenda to sabotage the 2016 US Presidential election was implemented by the GRU, Russian military intelligence, via front organisations.²⁸ Fronts had, of course, been a favourite resource of the old USSR, but this time they tenanted cyberspace: specifically two that appeared in the summer of 2016, Guccifer 2.0 and the DC leaks. The latter claimed to be ‘launched by American hacktivists who respect and appreciate freedom of speech’²⁹ and lubricated the social media attacks on Hilary Clinton, sometimes via Russian websites such as the Putin-aligned Katehon (e.g. ‘Bloody Hilary: mysterious murders linked to Clinton’).³⁰

Sow Confusion: The aim is not so much to create belief as to sow confusion and doubt. One is reminded of Mark Twain’s aphorism, that a lie can travel halfway round the world while truth is still tying up its shoes. This creation of confusion, this sowing of doubt, is matched on the internal domestic front by the seeking of a passive and compliant public. But this is not the same as a believing public: ‘By eroding the very idea of a shared reality, and by spreading apathy and confusion among a public that learns to distrust leaders and institutions alike, *kompromat* undermines society’s ability to hold the powerful to account and ensure the proper functioning of government’.³¹

All of them of course seek to generate division among their antagonists—to disunite their enemies, and this is a very tangible achievement of their propaganda, Putin

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²³ Snyder, ‘Fascism, Russia, and Ukraine’

²⁴ Fischer, Max, ‘Prizing Speed and Scoops, Media Became Ready Bullhorns For Russian Hackers’, *New York Times*, 9 January 2017.

²⁵ Kramer, Andrew E., ‘How The Kremlin Recruited An Army Of Specialists To Wage Its Cyber War’, *New York Times*, 30 December 2016.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Fischer, ‘Prizing Speed and Scoops’.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ McIntire, Mike, ‘How A Putin Fan Overseas Pushed Pro-Trump Propaganda To Americans’, *New York Times*, 18 December 2016.

³¹ Taub, Amanda, ‘Kompromat And The Danger Of Doubt And Confusion In A Democracy’, *New York Times*, 16 January 2017.

alternately threatening Europeans and speaking softly to them, and seeking internal discord as well by attempting to find favour with political groupings within those societies—from Donald Trump in America to Nigel Farage, former leader of the UK Independence party, Beppe Grillo in Italy, to Victor Orban in Hungary. The Czech President Milos Zeman has been a consistent friend, defending Russian engagement in Syria for example. Bulgaria now has a new pro-Russian Prime Minister;³² the leader of a pro-Russian party has been nominated as Estonian Prime Minister;³³ and Angela Merkel has voiced fears of a Russian cyber-attack during the German elections.³⁴ Interventions on behalf of sympathetic politicians or public actors is part of the Russian propaganda manual: ‘useful idiots’ were prized also by the Soviets and the Bolsheviks before them.

Plausibility: There is of course a tendency to represent these public fictions as testament to the credulity of its targets, the people. We believe that it is more accurately characterised as a co-production rather than a naive or hypodermic stimulus-response model. The target is invited to share a fantasy; the fiction is co-created rather than imposed. So, this model is a participative one.

And furthermore, it does not rest on fiction alone, or even primarily fiction, but on effective advocacy whose premises can be made to seem rational even if they are not. The arguments advanced are given an objective veneer. Thus, the Third Reich was adept at producing a rationale for invasion at every turn: for example that the Poles were preparing for war against Germany, that Russia was plotting to attack Germany; so that all violence became pre-emptive. And this is pre-eminently true of Russia today. It has constructed an elaborate edifice of public self-defence both for internal and for international consumption. The representation of NATO and the EU as aggressive and expansionary powers that threaten Russia destroy the former implicit and explicit understandings of Russia’s ‘legitimate’ sphere of influence. Believable as an argument: but it denies to other much smaller nations those very rights, the right to choose which, if any, power block they might elect to belong to. Plausibility is also enhanced by scattering truths amid falsehoods, a Goebbels technique, and similarly Russian disinformation campaigns have ‘often deliberately blended accurate and forged details’.³⁵

2. Pseudo-Reality: Internal and External

Here we further look at how symbol manipulation is used both externally and internally to construct pseudo-realities

Foreign Policy as Symbolism: Foreign policy objectives are also propaganda ones. Under the Nazis foreign policy events, everything from the re-militarisation

³² Oliphant, Roland, ‘Pro-Russian candidates win presidential votes in Bulgaria and Moldova’, *Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 2016.

³³ Mardiste, David, ‘Centre-left leader nominated as Estonia’s next PM’, *Reuters*, 20 November 2016.

³⁴ ‘Russian cyber-attacks could influence German election, says Merkel’, *Guardian*, 8 November 2016.

³⁵ Thomas Read, cited in Taub, ‘Kompromat And The Danger Of Doubt’.

of the Rhine (1936) to the Sudeten crisis (1938) to the Anschluss (1938) etc., all of these were international crises which Hitler managed to perfection and set out as a theatre producer would.³⁶ Putin is an effective manager of such tensions at the symbolic level. His wars, in Chechnya, in Georgia, in Ukraine, and in Syria are carefully calibrated so as not to force the West into fighting Russia while at the same time representing the West as weak and Russia as strong. There have been the set piece essays in symbolic theatre such as the Winter Olympics at Sochi (2014). And again with China, foreign policy serves the need of national self-assertion and the mobilisation of public opinion and more generally national solidarity. In other words, it serves a propagandist imperative. And similarly, with the symbolism of Chinese resolution: its refusal to allow any compromise on Tibet and its continued insistence that Taiwan is part of the China mainland.

One language used by the Russian government is the international language of propaganda as articulated through symbols. Putin's presentation of an Alsatian puppy dog to French security forces after one of their own was killed in a shootout with terrorists is one example.³⁷ This one gesture reveals all we need to know about the Russian understanding of symbolism. In China, by contrast, symbolism would appear more muted: every international act of Chinese gift-giving, an airport here, a highway there, and so forth is a symbol. And that symbol is of a China that is friendly. Soft power is moreover the official doctrine of China and it is therefore a doctrine governed by symbolism and a recognition of the power of symbolic strategies; and these have included 24-hour global television channels, the opening of Confucius Institutes across the globe and the Olympic Games (2008) and the Expo (2010).

Then we examine internally directed persuasion strategies, towards the domestic constituency.

Management of the symbolic realm: Symbols and the construction of the symbolic realm was of course the supreme feature of the Third Reich itself. The Nazis embodied in this everything from public art, to the theatre of foreign policy, to the ritual performances of the auditorium,³⁸ even to the conduct of warfare itself. Thus, symbolism can be included among the reasons behind the battle of Stalingrad. Less universally understood perhaps is the extent of the recourse to symbolism of the Russian and Chinese governments. The importance of symbolism can be succinctly stated: a way of reaching the non-political nation and those who would not be prepared to follow a complex argument. Symbols are multi-valent. Symbols condense meaning, they resonate, offering multiple possibilities of interpretation; there is a body of literature which suggests that the mind itself works by hosting symbolic representations.³⁹ In other words, symbols represent a language that lies deeper than language, they are an independent linguistic form more powerful than mere words.

³⁶ Hoffman, Heinrich, *Hitler In Seiner Heimat* [photo-journal], (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte-Verlag, 1938).

³⁷ Lomas, Claire, 'Russia gives France puppy to replace dog killed in St Denis Raid', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 2015.

³⁸ Spotts, Frederic, *Hitler And The Power Of Aesthetics*, (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2004).

³⁹ Geertz, Clifford, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays In Interpretative Anthropology*, (Basic Books, 1984).

The regime of Vladimir Putin is intensely invested in symbols and symbolic strategies. Putin himself as a symbol embodies the persona of the state and the idea of the state. He is certainly a charismatic leader in the Weberian sense and he deploys charismatic authority in many different ways, as manifest in serial role-play he is a judo champion, a country and western singer, a musclemen fly-fishing half-naked, and much else. But he is also well capable of suggesting a soft side, a more nuanced portrait, as with his 'Blueberry Hills' manoeuvre where he sang the well-known US country song before amazed onlookers (it went viral over social media).⁴⁰ Before her murder, the journalist Anna Politkovskaya described Putin's shameless role playing and in particular his ability to symbolise values that were exactly the reverse of those which actually animated his Russian state. Mimicry, she thought, is the essence of the facsimile: 'on cattle breeders day [Putin] is our most illustrious cattle breeder; on Builder's day he is our foremost brickie. It is bizarre, of course, but Stalin played the same game. 'Today, as luck would have it, is International Human Rights Day, so Putin summoned our foremost champions of human rights [...] For the most part, Putin listened to what was being said and, when he did speak, presented himself as being on their side. He mimicked being a human rights champion [...]. He is an excellent imitator. When need be, he is one of you; when that is not necessary, he is your enemy'.⁴¹ And the connection with the serial role enactments by Hitler himself needs no comment, for the essence of the Hitler act is that he was many things, statesman, frontline soldier, street fighter, and folk comrade.⁴²

Perception Management: History and Myth: In all these cases—China, Russia, Nazi Germany, and other cases as well—we see the invention of the past. The past is there to sustain the present and to sustain the political regime which exists in this present. History, or at least publicly narrated history, in other words is exclusively a theatre of propaganda and nothing else. Likewise, with Russia, it does not so much forget as never remember or selectively remember so that perception is manipulated via the misrepresentation of the past in order to promulgate a distorted idea of the present. There is thus the retro-configuring of history—and in the Nazi case the posthumous 'baptising' of so many of the great figures in German culture and history like Nietzsche or Frederick Schiller as proto-Nazis.⁴³ And they 'sold' their confections via their great film industry centred on Babelsberg, with costume drama films like *The Great King*, *The Dismissal*, *Kolberg*, *Rite of Sacrifice*.⁴⁴ We do, in other words, retrieve figures from the past to fit the new narrative, as China does in continuing to represent Chairman Mao as the icon of the state even though the practice of the state is the opposite of everything Mao ever believed in.

For Russia and for Putin however there is a problem since the Russian past is two regimes, the Tsarist, and the Bolshevik, the one being the enemy of the other. It has been an achievement of political imagination on Putin's part to reconcile this primordial antagonism embossed on Russia's history: to take both the symbols of

⁴⁰ 'Sing-along-Vlad: now Putin is Blueberry Hill crooner of the Kremlin', 12 December 2010.

⁴¹ Cottrell, 'Death Under The Tsar'.

⁴² Kershaw, Ian, *The Hitler Myth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁴³ Gitlis, Baruch, and Norman Berdichevsky, *Cinema of Hate*, (Bnei Brak, Israel: Alpha Communication, 1996).

⁴⁴ Renstshler, Eric, *The Ministry of Illusion*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Sovietism and the symbols of Tsarism and shamelessly use both to perpetuate his regime, creating a kind of unitary past, or reconciled narrative, out of the murderous chaos of Russia's 20th century. Thus, while retaining Bolshevik symbols and signs, such as the retro-Soviet celebration of the anniversary of the end of World War Two on 9 May 2015, May Day parades, and so forth, and the rituals, some Tsarist symbols have also been disinterred. In 1998 Tsar Nicholas had been re-entombed under Boris Yeltsin; but General Denikin, the most prominent of the white Russian military leaders, who died in exile in Michigan in 1947, was reburied in Moscow by a fond Putin.⁴⁵ And Admiral Kolchak, the leader of the White Russians in the East, has been elevated now to the pantheon of Russian heroes and placed within the grand narrative by a movie honouring his achievements.⁴⁶

Celestial Pseudo-Mysticism: Another feature is pseudo-mysticism. The Nazis preserved the form of religion and politicised it into a civic religion, while rejecting its existential content. Putin's Russia has not needed to do this, the Orthodox Church, rejected and then rehabilitated by Stalin, has always been a devout ancillary of the Russian leadership. God, therefore, is on the side of Russia: and he is moreover the Christian God rather than the abstract Providence or pagan ersatz Valhalla evoked by the Nazis. This servicing of the existential needs of a dictatorship must be regarded as one of the great achievements of the pseudo-democracy. If the state possesses this aura, if it has divine sanction, then that exists independently of democratically derived authority as an alternative source of authority. Little Father Tsar, there by divine right, has transformed into Vladimir Putin, a Tsar for our times. In this the Russian regime has an advantage over China. This lack of an existential claim is a real problem for the Chinese regime since people suffer from a spiritual deficit.

In China, this is more problematic since, far from a clean break and repudiation of the Communist regime, the current government is the continuity of that regime. Therefore its symbolic and ritual heritage cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, this is still a remarkable act of symbolism and political prestidigitation. For the continuity regime is in economic terms the antithesis of the founder regime even though it is paradoxically the same regime. While this contradiction is apparent to every Chinese person it cannot be publicly admitted and the political uses of the past in this case are to sustain a bizarre and gigantic public falsehood. So Chairman Mao remains honoured, not merely in a political sense but in a neo-mystical sense as well, as the father of the nation and founder of the Communist state.

The Material—Consumption: Consumption is another component of the symbolic realm and the symbols of consumerism are propaganda, even though they do not overtly articulate a political meaning, for that meaning is implicit—symbols of consumerism are symbols of affluence and plenty. The world of goods on offer proclaims the regime's identity as a benevolent provider. China has sought to solve many of the problems of internal discontent by the energising of a consumer economy. In other words, consumerism is being used to solve political problems and also symbolises the competence and efficiency of the Chinese regime—the

⁴⁵ Robinson, Paul, 'The Return of White Russia', *The Spectator*, 29 October 2005.

⁴⁶ *The Admiral*, 2008, Russia, directed by Andrei Kravchuk

Communist Party—in delivering on its promises. The poetry of consumption, this evangelical materialism, characterises modern China: the regime is unthinkable without the consumerist cornucopia that it has engendered. This was also true of the Nazis who sought to blind people to the deficiencies of the regime by offering them the glories of consumption.⁴⁷ The Strength-Through-Joy car (transformed post-war into the volkswagen Beetle), although no one ever received one under the Reich, is a case in point: it is a symbol of consumer promise, the promise of enhanced mobility.

Pseudo-Democracy: Democracy itself becomes part of this pseudo-reality. If other aspects of reality can be invented, so can the idea of democracy. Pseudo-democracy is a facsimile of democracy which both adopts some of its rhetoric and some of its accountability procedures at the purely symbolic level. Pseudo-democracies may even have some basis in real democracy in that there are ostensibly genuine ‘elections’, but in these elections, the opposition is intimidated and denied publicity opportunities and air-time. It is constrained by violence and this is as true of Putin’s Russia as it is true of contemporary Venezuela under the Chavistas. The creation of alternative reality is a common property of such regimes, who find a formula for self-perpetuity embodied in the notion of pseudo-democracy.

And so, all of them create a pastiche of democratic process, and pay homage to the idea. The Chinese probably least of all, as they publicly invest truth in the idea of the party and the party as all-knowing, but even the Chinese have to entertain some elements of pseudo-democracy. For example, there does in fact exist a right-wing in China which is ultranationalist and for the Communist Party is both a resource and an embarrassment: they don’t want it to get out of hand. And yet this right-wing is authentic, the party neither created it nor controls it entirely. Thus, one aspect of pseudo-democratic states is that they are not really totalitarian and engage residual aspects of democratic practice. In a recent incident, a prominent group of chauvinist cyber-activists spammed the Facebook page of Taiwan’s new president.⁴⁸ Pseudo-democracy in China therefore allows a certain amount of dissent, unlicensed contrariness. The expression of grievance is protected at the individual level but prevented from merging with other critical voices into a movement or coalition of criticism.⁴⁹

The Nazis were keen to continue with the democratic pretence that the press was in fact free: as in permitting the so-called bourgeois press to continue its existence.⁵⁰ And the Nazis were very concerned to make it look as if they had a popular mandate as expressed through the five pre-war ‘referenda’ and through an alternative paradigm of democracy—the concept of Hitler as, in some way, diviner of the public will, a kind of seer able to read the public mood and respond—so that he was not in fact a dictator at all but a kind of maven or mystic with an intuitive understanding of what

⁴⁷ Ross, Corey, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany*, (Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁸ Sonnad, Nikhil, ‘China’s Internet Propaganda Is More Subtle And Sophisticated Than It Has Ever Been’, *Quartz*, 23 May 2016.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Hale, Orin, *The Captive Press In The Third Reich*, (Princeton University Press, 1964).

people sought.⁵¹ So mass rallies were presented as a form of acclamatory democracy where the speeches of the leadership cadre, and particularly of Hitler, were endorsed by the masses in auditoria throughout the nation.

3. Coercion

At this stage the article turns from persuasion to look at coercion and coercive strategies employed in several formats—emotional (mobilisation of fear), physical, and ideological.

Fear: Propaganda seeks out and exploits the most powerful emotions, and these almost invariably relate to questions of our own survival. There are of course many other kinds of appeal. But it is primarily in the negative emotions that propaganda activities reside. In psychological terms, we understand what we hate better than what we like.⁵² Because the fear appeal is supercharged with emotion and easy to dramatise, easy to rhetoricise, easy to symbolise, and easy to mythologise, it is the one which dominates. Fear is a very effective appeal because public opinion is often tentative. Where there is ambiguity, a rhetorical assertion of the possibility of threat can clarify opinion. Moreover the psychology of this is well attested, the thesis of Tversky and Kahneman suggests that the anguish of loss is greater than an equivocancy of gain.⁵³

Existential Threat: Then there is the existential threat. For Putin the external threat lies in the West with its armies on the border of Russia, while the internal threat emanates from fanatical Islamists thirsting to destroy Christendom and the Russian state. And this is very convenient as a source of authority. To Hitler, of course, this threat was embodied in the English and later the Americans; international plutocracy and, more specifically, the Jews who were the enemy behind all enemies so that in a very real sense the Nazis saw all of their enemies as part of the Jewish conspiracy and, for them, all in fact became Jews, e.g. propaganda referring to Roosevelt as ‘the Grand Rabbi’.⁵⁴ Similarly today, migration creates the existential threat—crises Putin needs to legitimate his regime/coercive methods, e.g. the Russian state TV story about how the daughter of a Russian resident of Germany was raped by a migrant. This was, in fact, a complete fabrication, but no matter, it gained traction and currency.⁵⁵ But propaganda as we have said works because it does not commit the error of asking for belief: it wears a sly smile. It is perhaps really a case of lies being a deeper form of ‘truth’. Propaganda is, in fact, primarily a solidarity-enhancing vehicle and once that solidarity is established much else follows. The ability to sustain war, for example.

There is also a vast ecology of right-wing websites that pose as truth-tellers with the explicit message that they are revealing what the conventional media are concealing.

⁵¹ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*; Schulze Wechsungen, Walther, ‘Political Propaganda’, *Unser Wille und Weg* 4, 1934; Calvin College German Propaganda Archive.

⁵² Douglas, Mary, *Natural Symbols*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

⁵³ Tversky, Amos and Daniel Kahneman, ‘Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Making Under Risk’, *Econometrica* 47 (2), 1978.

⁵⁴ Herf, Geoffrey, *Nazi Propaganda For The Arab World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ MacFarquhar, ‘Russia’s Powerful Weapon’.

Such highly partisan websites are used to publish stories that may or may not be true; they are hostile to the liberal west and favour a very right wing and also a Russian narrative.⁵⁶ Thus, about forty pro-Russian websites operate in the Czech Republic and foment an anti-EU climate, such that less than one third of Czechs view the EU positively.⁵⁷ Their claims carry sufficient credibility to be listened to because of their resonance, in Schwartz's terms, that effective political persuasion should surface feelings already latent within the minds of the target.⁵⁸

There is another improbable comparison between Goebbels and Putin where both specifically posed as the defenders of European civilisation: simultaneously threatening/executing the scourge of invasion while also posing as the saviour of Europe. Thus, Goebbels's great mid-war campaign, Fortress Europe or Festung Europa – Germany as the shield against the mongrelised Bolshevik hordes.⁵⁹ And Putin simultaneously is exploiting the West's, specifically Europe's, new-found sense of extreme vulnerability. He could pose as defender of Christendom against Islamism as with his mention of the rape of a child by a migrant in Austria (the case is set for re-trial) and the perversity of the West: 'a society that can't defend its children has no to-morrow'.⁶⁰ Imagery of vengeful Russian jets contrasted with the remembrance of Isis atrocities, and the Isis theatre of sadism made it easier to accept Russian bombing of civilians. In doing this Putin creates many admirers, part of a peculiar inclusion now of Russia into the Western rightist's narrative. Trump, notoriously, invited the Russian government to hack into Hilary Clinton's emails.⁶¹ Kremlin techniques are seeking to divide eastern Europe between those with a deep hostility to Russia (Ukraine and Poland) and those with a greater fear of immigration/militant Islam (Hungary, etc). The Russians have created a luminous narrative, powerful, comprehensive, and bitterly partisan, that helps trigger a polarisation effect in public opinion, exaggerating existing political division.

Physical coercion: There is a calculus as to how much force to use in relation to alternative methods of influence, so what we see is the parallel functioning of both coercion and persuasion as indeed in all authoritarian societies. There is no real rule of law as such, but rather the operation of power unconstrained by either law or the traditions of a civic state. The use of murder in Russia to silence public critics, China's stifling and imprisonment of dissidents, or the true homicidal nihilism of Russia's foreign engagements—everything from the desolation of Chechnya to the bombing of Aleppo—are only points on a continuum and do moreover offer legitimate comparison to Germany *before* the Second World War and the start of the genocide. The deaths of critical journalists are consistent with the nature of fascism, i.e. organised violence either foregrounded or at the margin; for example the

⁵⁶ McIntire, 'How A Putin Fan'.

⁵⁷ MaxFarquhar, 'How Russians Pay To Play'.

⁵⁸ Schwartz, Tony, *Media the Second God*, (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

⁵⁹ Klemperer, Victor, *The Language of the Third Reich* (London: Athlone, 2000).

⁶⁰ Newton, Jennifer, 'A society that cannot defend its children has no to-morrow..?', *Daily Mail*, 3 November 2016.

⁶¹ Ackerman, Spencer and Sam Thielman, 'Trump's comments on Russia denounced as 'shocking and dangerous'', *Guardian*, 27 July 2016.

murder of Anna Politkovskaya on 7 October 2006.⁶² This both restricts the supply of hostile information by eliminating its sources, and deters others. The dark side of the regime is so very public, as with the plutonium-facilitated murder of the ex-KGB critic Litvinenko in London. Such extrajudicial killings were characteristic of the Third Reich where the SS was the bearer of sovereignty and existed beyond the legal state.⁶³ Propaganda, in other words, is an agent of repression. Its aim is to cast light elsewhere, away from the dark side.

Ideology: It is difficult to imagine a propaganda actually devoid of ideology. Ideology is a way of answering all questions from a state's own internal resources; propaganda imposes a coherent meaning, resolves all uncertainty. One cannot of course have pseudo-democracy without an ideology, since coercion needs the legitimation which a set of didactic principles can bestow. Schulze-Wechsungen had claimed that: 'Our propaganda had to shake the foundations of the core of the Marxist idea in the minds and hearts of the masses, the theory of class struggle. Then we had to replace it with a new theory [...]'.⁶⁴ Hence Putinism found a new ideology to give it a fig leaf of dignity, i.e. National Bolshevism, and the Eurasianism of the political scientist Alexander Dugin, which is a direct derivative of fascism: 'it proposes the realisation of National Bolshevism. Rather than rejecting totalitarian ideologies, Eurasianism calls upon the politicians of the 21st century to draw what is useful from both Fascism and Stalinism. Julian's major work, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, published in 1997, follows closely the ideas of Carl Schmitt, the leading Nazi political theorist'.⁶⁵ So a function of propaganda is to create and sell this ideology, i.e. the aim is self-legitimation since no appeal can be based on the supremacy of might alone: 'The ethnic purification of the Communist legacy is precisely the logic of National Bolshevism, which is the foundation ideology of Eurasianism to-day. Putin himself is an admirer of the philosopher Ivan Ilin, who wanted Russia to be a nationalist dictatorship'.⁶⁶

Chauvinism: The stress on patriotism, its symbols and rituals, are another feature these regimes share. Cottrell remarked after re-reading Anna Polytskova's diary that our assumption had been that 'its imperial ambitions were spent. It could be trusted to keep its problems to itself. Now, politically if not yet militarily, the Russian state is moving in a direction which is terrifying for its neighbours and dismaying for its friends—much as if Putin were preparing the ground for a crisis or a confrontation which would justify staying in power beyond the end of his second presidential term next year'.⁶⁷ Russia wants to regain what it has lost, power over its neighbourhood. The retrieval of a lost pride also explains much of what China does and much of their propaganda is directed to that end. But manifestly they are playing a different kind of power game to other states, not seeking global military projection/involvement in world conflicts. While the nature of Chinese engagement overseas is transactional, it ostensibly carries no baggage of cultural dominance or militaristic hegemony.

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⁶² Cottrell, 'Death Under The Tsar'.

⁶³ Gellately Robert, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, (Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁶⁴ Schulze Wechsungen, Walther, 'Political Propaganda'.

⁶⁵ Snyder, 'Fascism, Russia, and Ukraine'.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Cottrell, 'Death Under The Tsar'.

Anti-West: In fact, such regimes exist in a curious and contradictory relationship to capitalism and plutocracy, simultaneously exploiting anti-plutocratic rhetoric as a public language that defines them, that evokes a sense of cause and mission and a differentiation from the capitalist West, while also being essentially plutocracies themselves with tiny elites. There is a cultivated paranoia which chooses to see all criticism as malign and externally imposed. Thus Putin declared (2007) ‘there are still those people in our country who act like jackals of foreign embassies’.⁶⁸ Russia sees a Manichean world of friends and enemies and those enemies are the liberal politicians and parties and international institutions hostile to Russia such as the EU and NATO. America and Europe are portrayed in Russian media such as RT and Sputnik in hyperbolic terms; the United States is a crime-ridden dystopia and Europe is collapsing under the weight of terrorism and mass migration.

The new trends in Chinese propaganda have been an intensification of that paranoid anti-Western rhetoric, such as a video warning of the West’s ‘devilish claws’.⁶⁹ One recent video was described as a ‘seven-and-a-half-minute phantasmagoria of the Communist Party’s nightmares of western subversion’.⁷⁰ The Party apparently really believes that it confronts not fragmented foes but a Washington-led international conspiracy to subvert it: ‘this conspiratorial worldview is more than bombast’; another film, ‘Silent Contest’, made by China’s National Defence University in 2014, ‘was even more breathless in its depiction of Western threats’.⁷¹

4. Soft Power

Next, the article reviews crucial differences in the ethos and conduct of propaganda then and now.

A Theory of Evangelism: These then were all states in which propaganda was the operational doctrine—in the case of China and Russia in fact an inherited one, since this tool was a paradigm mechanism of the states which preceded them and to which they are the legatees. But what they did was ad hoc. It was guided by a tradition of persuasion and less so by a coherent ideology and theory of persuasion, whatever the language they choose to dress it up in e.g. ‘public diplomacy’.⁷² Only the Nazis really possessed a more fully developed theory of propaganda to understand and explain and direct what they did. So, there is a distinction:

‘What made the Nazis special was their pursuit of propaganda not just as a tool, an instrument of government—which had in fact often been the case in history before—but as the totality, the idea through which government itself governed. They saw public opinion as something that could be created, commodified and re-made. Nor was there really a distinction between policy and propaganda[...].’⁷³

⁶⁸ Applebaum, ‘Vladimir’s Tale’.

⁶⁹ Hernandez, Javier, ‘Propaganda With a Millennial Twist Pops Up in China’, *New York Times*, 1 January 2017.

⁷⁰ Buckley, Chris, ‘Chinese Propaganda Video Warns of West’s ‘Devilish Claws’’, *New York Times*, 23 December 2016.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Link, Perry, ‘China: Capitulate Or Things Will Get Worse’, *New York Review of Books*, 24 October 2013.

⁷³ O’Shaughnessy, *Selling Hitler*.

But this is changing. Propaganda is now a major part of Russia's strategic arsenal and an instrument of war by other means. General Valery V. Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed forces, published:

‘what became known as the Gerasimov doctrine. It posits that in the world today, the lines between war and peace are blurred and that covert tactics, such as working through proxies or otherwise in the shadows, would rise in importance’.⁷⁴

He called it non-linear warfare. His critics call it ‘guerilla geopolitics’.⁷⁵ Gerasimov has explained that ‘the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness’ (2013).⁷⁶

A Philosophy of Soft Power: There is also the relationship between hard and what today we call soft power. It is more difficult to see the Nazis as embracing soft power, but in certain ways they did in relation to those states they wanted on their side or whose neutrality they sought, such as Finland or Spain. Where necessary, Hitler would indeed swallow his pride if an alliance was sought or an emollient or submissive posture was the necessity of the moment. So, the Nazis did fitfully practice this, as with the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the 1938 Paris Expo.⁷⁷

For China, their exercises in hard power, such as their territorial claims to the Spratly Islands in the China Sea, are thought through in relation to the broader context of soft power. Indeed, they use the methods of soft power to pursue them. Thus, a film articulating the Chinese case in a South China Sea conflict was showing 120 times a day in Times Square; it was a propaganda response to the judicial ruling of the Hague Tribunal.⁷⁸ Increasingly, their propaganda speaks with modern accents, imagery is drawn unapologetically from the world of consumption: ‘the video boasts the production values and soaring music of a multinational firm’s big brand advertising campaign’.⁷⁹ The promise of a consumption utopia and a political utopia are interdependent and the stylisation hints at this. Alongside this is the attempt to humanize President Xi and to move away from the bureaucratic imagery of previous Chinese leaderships: ‘the two-minute cartoon opens with a folksy jingle and a smiling bobblehead of President Xi Jinping, dimpled and cherubic’.⁸⁰ Xi himself is behind the supercharged propaganda renewal, complaining (as Goebbels did) about lacklustre and formulaic messaging constructed by party hacks; this is potentially being subverted by a more self-consciously modern approach making messages go viral on social media. The stylization is contemporary: ‘hip-hop songs pay homage to party history’; for example, via the rap group CD REV—‘its patriotic music videos

⁷⁴ Kramer, ‘How The Kremlin Recruited’.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ MacFarquhar, ‘Russia’s Powerful Weapon’

⁷⁷ Walters, Guy, *Berlin Games: How Hitler Stole The Olympic Dream*, (London: John Murray, 2006).

⁷⁸ Doland, Angela, ‘Watch the Chinese Propaganda Ad Playing 120 Times A Day In Time Square’, *Advertising Age* (Global News), 25 August 2016.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hernandez, ‘Propaganda With a Millennial Twist’.

mostly in English featuring songs about China's claims in the South China Sea and Mao's legacy'.⁸¹

Under Putin, the evolution of a formal and conscious soft power strategy occurred over a number of years. In 2000 he approved 'creating a positive perception of Russia abroad'; but the *New Gazette* explains that 'on the external front, inside the enemy trenches, it is television, not radio, aimed at foreign at a foreign audience that is important' (note the choice of metaphor: enemy trenches).⁸² Thus, RT (launched in 2005) is propaganda: not merely the news from the Russian perspective, it communicates or obfuscates a regime worldview.⁸³ This of course is in the tradition of the old Bolshevik Radio Moscow. In Russia television thus transmits 'continuous propaganda glorifying their leaders'.⁸⁴ Yet it is a subtle form of propaganda as it resembles other Western news channels and has familiar stage props. Other proselytising agencies include the Russian Gazette, the Valdai International Discussion Club, and International Cultural Cooperation (*Rosstrudnichestvo*, which was established by Presidential decree in 2008 and is under the auspices of the Russian Foreign Ministry).

New Media: The success—for that it is what it is—of Russian propaganda today is governed by two particular kinds of related media evolution. The first is the maturity of cyberspace use as an information network replete with free but partisan media where objectivity has simply ceased to be the aim—a metamorphosis into an echo chamber with a corresponding decline of scrutiny. The second and parallel evolution is the demise of mainstream media—mainstream news channels, but specifically of the large local and national newspapers. The rise of new media in all cases has a deterministic effect on propaganda, since it is capable of transmitting messages on a scale never previously seen.

China to-day fights a vigorous online campaign via armies of emailers and social media scribes and this is centrally managed by the Party. In one investigation, analysis of hacked e-mails included instructions. The most common was that of cheerleading, that is to say great satisfaction with the party or with life for example 'Way to go Ganzhou!' Or 'Party Secretary Shi is an exemplary Party Secretary!' Hardly any of the posts could be categorised as 'taunting foreign countries' or 'argumentative praise or criticism'.⁸⁵ But cyberspace is a liability as well as a utility and is easily sabotaged, conscripted into counter-propaganda as with the ridiculing of Putin via satirical memes such as the one of him half naked riding a bear; although this may also reinforce rather than undermine him.

Their method is saturation—not simply a few slogans or a few stage-managed events, rather it is the manufacture of partisan meaning on an industrial scale. The Nazis were also very good at this, since, even though they expired long before the rise of

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⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Institute of Modern Russia, 'The Propaganda Of The Putin Era'.

⁸³ Knight, Amy, 'The Truth About Putin and Medvedev', *New York Review of Books*, 15 May 2008.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Sonnad, 'China's Internet Propaganda'.

the Internet, their radio transmissions could hit the entire globe including Australia.⁸⁶ The message of the Indian nationalist Subhas Chander Bose, residing then in Berlin, could target all and any Indian who had access to radio.⁸⁷ Unlike modern regimes, of course the Reich did not possess cyberspace; though the reach of its six transmitters at Zeesen was enormous.⁸⁸ And such propaganda can indeed be noticed (if nothing more); the wartime radio broadcasts from Berlin of William Joyce, ‘Lord Haw Haw’, were getting up to 70% of British radio listeners at weekends.⁸⁹

Entertainment: One curious aspect is the comparative failure of China and Russia to use film and entertainment as propaganda, and in this sense their methodology is very different from that of Nazi Germany, since their propaganda is publicly stamped as such. even in the case of RT even though it mimics an entertainment form. Goebbels however regarded all propaganda perceived as such to be bad propaganda.⁹⁰ So his extensive film output resembled much more the structural propaganda as embodied in the Frankfurt School critique of popular entertainment.

5. Impact

The objective is acquiescence, not belief: However, the object of that propaganda is not necessarily to persuade, or to create true believers: rather it is to ensure passive acquiescence; this is an important distinction. One Chinese dissident, Han Han, ‘argues that, to ordinary Chinese, the “news” in the official media, even if it is true, always seems phoney after its official packaging, because of its official packaging’.⁹¹ But this doesn’t matter because the regime does not ask for belief—only the facsimile of belief. The same was true of the Nazis, they had to settle for external compliance not internal fervour. Han even argues that the party doesn’t want people to be too sincere in their love for it.⁹² Such regimes are asking their citizens not so much to deny as to selectively see. And so, in the end, the peoples of these nations have to accept a duality of vision, a binary life with a public and private sphere and they must learn never to confuse the two. The party’s goal ‘is not to inspire deep love of China or hatred of its enemies. It instead aims to prevent, or at least break-up, any widespread anti-party consensus among the public’.⁹³ This is revealing: for example the party emerges as subtly manipulative in its approach to online dialogue, which is of course from-many-to-many rather than, as in the case of classic government propaganda, from-one-to-many. This is a strategy of distraction. What works is the sheer saturation level of noise which manages to frustrate discussion of significant issues.

⁸⁶ West, *Truth Betrayed*.

⁸⁷ Hayes, Romain, *Subhas Chandra Bose In Nazi Germany*, (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2011).

⁸⁸ Walters, *Berlin Games*.

⁸⁹ Farndale, Nigel, *Haw Haw: The Tragedy of William and Margaret Joyce*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2004).

⁹⁰ Renstshler, Eric, *The Ministry of Illusion*.

⁹¹ Link, ‘China: Capitulate’.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Sonnad, ‘China’s Internet Propaganda’.

Subsequently we look at the evidence for the impact of propaganda in several senses.

Dysfunctionality of Propaganda?: Despite the attempts at reform and reinvention, what remains distinctive in China and Russia is the extent to which they represent the continuity of Communist propaganda methods. And yet the old monopoly-transmitter/multiple-receivers model is no longer so powerful given the rise of the Internet. Official party messages are often mocked online.⁹⁴ All of these regimes have giant propaganda bureaucracies. But the product remains often moribund, lacking the freewheeling creativity of commercial campaigns and constrained by the atrophy of the critical faculty which is inherent in the authoritarian state: ‘Along the way, the video issues a torrent of inspirational platitudes. “On the road chasing our dreams, we walked side-by-side” viewers are told, “transcending differences in shaping the future together”.’⁹⁵ Chinese propaganda is often clumsy, for example, the English-language music videos praising the 13th Five-Year Plan or claiming that Americans love working for a Chinese boss.⁹⁶ And, the old Soviet mentality ‘is still at the core of Russian propaganda’ and its method evokes the earlier Soviet propaganda.⁹⁷

In this of course they exhibit very well the limitations of propaganda as a genre, its evangelising properties are not great: it does not create converts so much as conformists. Internally there is also a dissonance between claim and practice, the propaganda projects a utopia, the reality is mediocrity. Moreover, while there is the formal (state) propaganda effort, to-day the informal unofficial (citizen) propaganda thrust may be more important—thousands are empowered by cyberspace. They produce the viral memes that subvert authority with cruel wit.

Conclusion

The article concludes by suggesting that a propaganda-augmented pseudo democracy is, if not the coming form of world government, a significant genre for years to come.

For both China and Russia, their internal (national) and external (global) propaganda campaigns are formed, in the last analysis, via five elements. They are:

- 1) *Consolidation:* The objective is power. The party wants something specific to conserve its power, which is not necessarily the same thing as supporting aggressive assertions of national greatness or the elimination of all hostile comment.
- 2) *Contradiction:* The monopoly of power is directed to its preservation and the management of the basic existential contradiction of an ex-communist or even ‘communist’ government of a capitalist country, so the regime is essentially an organised hypocrisy.

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⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Beech, Hannah, ‘This Is What Communist Propaganda Looks Like These Days’, *Time*, 9 February 2015.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Institute of Modern Russia, ‘The Propaganda Of ‘The Putin Era’.

- 3) *Coercion*: The roles of coercion is to cut off the information flow via intimidation, even including, as in the case of Russia, the murder of journalists and the imprisonment of critics. The message is clear—don't rock the boat. Crucially, criticism is equated with subversion as one observer, the Marquis de Custine, wrote in 1839: 'Russia is a nation of mutes; some magician has changed sixty million men into automatons'.⁹⁸
- 4) *Coherence*: The regime offers a worldview that is simple, coherent, and easily communicated. It is authoritarian, and this is an effective way to arouse the mob, given the wide appeal of coercive force against a nation's enemies.
- 5) *Calculation*: There is (even in the case of Nazi Germany) a calculus underlying coercion/persuasion, an understanding that they are both parts of the same idea. Chinese aggression is however carefully tabulated and controlled via rhetorical/symbolic assertion over minor targets. It is sufficient to appeal to the internal constituency and tell foreigners China is no push-over, without actually taking any real risk of war against people who are in fact China's major markets and trading partners.

Anticipatory account: Adolf Hitler represents an archetype and an anticipatory account of what came to be, plagiarised by others either consciously or rather unaware of the derivation of their methods. I have argued:

Hitler was merely the most vivid in a by now long line of public image makers. And the German people themselves were the targets of the most vigorous, lucid and sophisticated public relations campaign ever conjured in all of history, and one which both anticipated and surpassed the public opinion sorcery of the twenty-first century.⁹⁹

The methodologies that he established entered the global bloodstream, to be copied half consciously by other kinds of demagogues and aspirational autocrats. These strictures of course do not apply only or merely to Putin's Russia and Xi's China: they are part in fact of a broader movement, where democracy is used not to establish government parties of either the right or the left, but to entrench visionary regimes founded on some idea of a nationalist utopia. This can of course have a left-wing as well as right-wing aspect: famously that of the Chavistas and their successor Nicholas Maduro in Venezuela who have manipulated the forms rather than the reality of democracy, and have used classic propaganda techniques to do so—not least the attribution of blame, and the displacement of responsibility to external forces who have a malign and irrational desire to crush the government of Venezuela.

But there are other candidates as well, such as the new government of the Philippines whose president Duterte has specifically claimed resemblances to Adolf Hitler, primarily in his decision to launch a 'holocaust' of drug dealers and drug addicts, cheerfully promising he will murder three million of them.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Knight, 'The Truth About Putin'.

⁹⁹ O'Shaughnessy, Nicholas, *The Packaging of the Third Reich*, (Routledge, 2017); O'Shaughnessy, *Selling Hitler*, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Lamb, Kate, 'Philippines secret death squads...', *Guardian*, 1 October 2016.

An earlier word in political science for such charismatic-authoritarian regimes was ‘populism’, as for example embodied in the rule of the Perons in Argentina. In this new order, whether the government does actually remain a dictatorship or graduates into a kind of managed democracy, the form is always the same—propaganda is more than just an instrument of government, it is in many ways the central organising principle of the new nation state.

Such states, although in no other way comparable to Nazi Germany, nevertheless use an admixture of coercion, persuasion, and plebiscite. These populist appeals with managed outcomes are characteristic in fact of fascism, of which they are in so many ways a modern evolution: aggressive in their foreign policies and authoritarian at home, super-patriotic and intolerant of internal dissent. We might speculate on whether the coming form of national government globally is something similar to this: the triumph of the ballot box is not foreordained, universal brotherhood is a difficult product to sell. For example one cannot assume that Russia and China will evolve into Jeffersonian democracies. The common feature is, and will be, the use of propaganda as lubricant, augmented by the rituals of pseudo-democracy.

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