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# Russian Active Measures and September 11, 2001: Nostradamus Themed Disinformation?

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## ABSTRACT

The early English-language promoters of Nostradamus (Orson Welles and Erika Cheetham) had strong Leftist-Marxist connections including ties to the Cambridge 5 spy ring. Nostradamus was the top search anomaly of Sept 11, 2001. Interest was driven by a surge in emails and text messages via the internet. This behavior is discussed in relation to known cyber threats from 2001. Similar spikes in Nostradamus searches (Google Trends) emanated from Poland (April 2010), Ukraine (March 2014), and in Hungary (August 2015). Nostradamus mirrors proven Russian disinformation operations, such as those that today implicate 9/11 as being an “inside job” by the US government, or that the CIA killed JFK, or that the CIA engineered the AIDS virus. Noting Nostradamus’ use by both the Allies and the Axis powers as a psychological warfare tool in World War 2, the case is made that it was the Russians carrying out an “information attack” on 9/11 that is consistent with Russian cyber warfare and active measures strategy; and that they may have used similar techniques elsewhere since 2001.

## KEYWORDS

Alexander Litvinenko, America, China, Cyber Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, Information Warfare, Orson Welles, Osama Bin Laden, Psychological Warfare, Psyops, Russia, The Man Who Saw Tomorrow, Vladimir Putin

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores the evidence for Russian active measures and information warfare operations surrounding September 11, 2001. It will demonstrate that Putin’s Russia utilized tactics and exhibited behaviors which may implicate them as involved in this event from an informational perspective.

The argument is based on an examination of the Nostradamus search term “anomaly” which saw Nostradamus become the top gaining search on Google for the week of the attacks, and the seventh overall search term on the day of the attacks (Google, 2006). It had similar performance across all major search engines, and ended the month as the top gaining search on Google (Google, 2011; Kornblum, 2001; National Research Council, 2003). This surge in searches related to Nostradamus was not mirrored by other attack-related search terms and seems to have been driven by Nostradamus emails and text messages which were forwarded at a massive scale during and after the attacks (Aravilla, 2001; Rose, 2001; Wiggins, 2001).

Google Trends data from 2004 to present is analyzed and notes similar spikes in Nostradamus-related searches which corresponded to geopolitical events, pop culture, and natural disasters (Google, 2016). Several of these events and trends - such as the Polish national tragedy at Smolensk in April 2010 and the invasion of Ukraine in March 2014 - experienced similar surges in country-level Nostradamus-related queries which pushed those countries to the top of global Nostradamus search trend index in those years.

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The distribution of the Nostradamus emails through the same computer network-based vectors as several well-studied computer viruses which book-ended 9/11 is considered as well. The computer viruses which surrounded 9/11 had code which upon forensic examination seemed to implicate Chinese actors, and other data showed similar contemporary viruses had struck targets such as the Government of Ukraine and the FBI - while others targeted Federal institutions like The White House (Belcher & Yoran, 2002; CAIDA, 2014; Ducklin, 2011; Erbschloe, 2005).

Next, the proven links between the early promoters of Nostradamus such as Erika Cheetham and Orson Welles and broad pro-Russian, leftist elements are presented. Welles was directly connected to H.P. Smolka (aka the “sixth” member of the Cambridge Five) by way of his participation in the production of Graham Greene’s “The Third Man” (1949) (Beer, 2001; Foges, 2016). Erika Cheetham was the premier English-language translator of Nostradamus (Noble, 1998). Cheetham associated at Oxford with a notably “leftist” clique, that seems to have included the nephew of Graham Greene and several other figures who would later obtain notable roles as public proponents of leftist and Marxist causes (Hagger, 2015).

Additional circumstantial evidence is considered such as “Operation Northern Vigilance” and Russian intelligence leads provided to the Bush and Clinton administrations leading up to 9/11 (Mitchell, 2012; NORAD, 2001; Powell, 2001). The foundations of many of the claims which were the basis for these intelligence exchanges have later been called into question by the scrutiny of the Moscow apartment bombings of 1999 and the Litvinenko poisoning case of 2006 (BBC News, 2006; Felshinsky & Litvinenko, 2007).

Nostradamus prophecy mirrors historical Russian disinformation operations around events like the assassination of JFK and modern similar variants of disinformation such as that which seeks to explain the events of September 11, 2001. Much like how the Soviets blamed the assassination of John F. Kennedy (JFK) on the CIA, modern Russian disinformation has promulgated beliefs in a false flag attack by the American government on 9/11 (and notably which conflicts with earlier Russian claims to have knowledge of who were the actual perpetrators) (Boghardt, 2009; Holland, 2001; RT.com, 2013).

It is proposed that Nostradamus prophecy was used as a central component of a long-term active measures campaign which was intended to undermine American power and global relationships, and may have subsequently been used in other similar “hybrid warfare” operations in locations like Romania, Hungary, Ukraine, and Poland where Russia is plausibly connected and has a distinct strategic interest (Google, 2016).

Taken in measure with the lessons of the last 15 years, and with the consideration of the Nostradamus information case, it becomes hard to dismiss a notion that Russia was not somehow involved with enabling the events of September 11, 2001 via active measures which can be traced to their strategic interests and motivations.

## **The Cyber Threat Landscape in 2001**

2001 had been dubbed “The Year of The Worm” by cybersecurity experts (Hayes, 2001). Preceded by the Melissa and ILOVEYOU viruses in 2000, several notable and costly cyber threats entered the public consciousness before and after 9/11. From SirCam (summer of 2001 – before, during and after Code Red), Code Red (July 19, 2001), Nimda (September 18, 2001), BadTrans (April 2001), to Anna Kournikova, there was increasing public attention called to these threats (Erbschloe, 2005).

2001 also saw an increased attention to cyberwar as a national security threat as well. The goal of Russian cyberwarfare was in part described to the US Congress as:

*for competing sides to gain and hold information advantages over the other. This is accomplished by using specific information technology capabilities to affect an adversary’s information systems, decision making processes, command and control system, and even populace. Some Russians believe that after conflict begins, ‘combat viruses and other information related weapons can be used as powerful force multipliers. (Hildreth, 2001)*

Similarly, the Chinese approach to cyberwarfare was in part described as:

*heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology regarding warfare. Much of its approach has to do with an emphasis on deception, knowledge-style war, and seeking asymmetrical advantages over an adversary. Cyberwarfare is seen as a 'transformation from the mechanized warfare of the industrial age to a war of decisions and control, a war of knowledge, and a war of intellect. (Hildreth, 2001)*

Both adversaries' contemporary strategies employed an emphasis on disrupting information, public psychology and / or decision making.

Some of the forensics behind the 2001 threats point to state actors, or at least to hackers who were operating in the interests of nation states. SirCam infections were noted at the Government of Ukraine and the FBI (Bridis, 2001; Stenger, 2001). Code Red famously contained code which cartoonishly implicated the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), leaving websites defaced with "Hacked by Chinese" (CAIDA, 2014). (CodeRed attempted but apparently failed to target the White House with DDOS attacks.) Following 9/11, distinct forensic traces were found in the Nimda worm indicating the product might have been developed using PRC software tools ("Concept Virus(CV) V.5, Copyright(C)2001 R.P.China"), and it was speculated at the time to be an act of cyber terrorism (Ducklin, 2011).

Other clues may indicate the some viruses had specific regional targets - such as SirCam utilizing English and Spanish 'phishing' attacks exclusively, Badtrans looking for specific keywords in English and Russian, and the "Code Red II" worm utilizing a different algorithm for Chinese language which ran twice as quickly and scanned twice as deeply (CAIDA, 2014; (Delio, 2001); Virus Encyclopedia, 2016).

Seemingly many of the cyber threats of 2001 had forensics which exposed plausible links to state- actors or those acting in the interest of state actors. There are reasons to believe that American, Russian, and Chinese cyber attacks were all occurring around this time based on the effects of the attacks. Notably, the most glaring of these forensic findings seemed to implicate the Chinese -- while more subtle forensics revealed via the SirCam data seems to implicate the targeting of traditional foils of the Russians.

### **The Curious Case of Nostradamus**

Search engine metrics (Table 1) following 9/11 showed some predictable, yet perplexing trends.

Many of these were logical searches following 9/11, but Nostradamus is a clear outlier. How was it that it became the top gaining search term of all, and the seventh overall behind Osama Bin Laden and ahead of FBI?

Unlike search terms for CNN, Pentagon, World Trade Center, and Osama Bin Laden, which trailed off in the hours following the attacks, Nostradamus search interest stayed steady and continued to grow through the month of September 2001. It finished the month as the top-gaining search term of all. There were no alternative competing queries for apocalyptic terms in the top 10 gaining queries for the month. The other queries were logical and related to the terror attacks or other war-related events (Google, 2006; Google 2011).

Press reported that there were swarms of chain mails and text messages circulating with Nostradamus prophecies on the day of the attacks and following them (Aravilla, 2001; Kornblum, 2001; Rose, 2001). (Also note. very common in the early 2000s were email to text (SMS) messaging systems.) There was a massive spike in sales of Nostradamus related literature and media; with copies of Orson Welles' "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow" and other books devoted to Nostradamus selling out online (Elder, 2001). Reports indicate many of the top sites devoted to Nostradamus were offline due to heavy traffic from public interest. Public librarians reported an increased interest in Nostradamus (Matthews & Wiggins, 2001).

Table 1. Search engine metrics following 9/11 (Google Press Center, 2011)

| Top 10 Queries Related to Terrorist Attacks - 9/11/01 |
|---|
| 1. cnn  |
| 2. world trade center                                 |
| 3. bbc  |
| 4. pentagon   |
| 5. msnbc  |
| 6. osama bin laden                                    |
| 7. <i>nostradamus</i>                                 |
| 8. american airlines                                  |
| 9. fbi  |
| 10. barbara olson                                     |
| Top 10 Gaining Queries Week Ending Sept. 13, 2001     |
| 1. <i>nostradamus</i>                                 |
| 2. cnn  |
| 3. world trade center                                 |
| 4. osama bin laden                                    |
| 5. pentagon   |
| 6. fbi  |
| 7. american red cross                                 |
| 8. american airlines                                  |
| 9. Afghanistan  |
| 10. american flag                                     |

### Google Trends Data Analysis 2004 – Present ([www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends))

While studying any major spikes in Nostradamus which may have occurred between 2001 and 2004 remain elusive since those years are not indexed, Google Trends can give some interesting insights into worldwide Nostradamus-related searches from 2004 to present. These trends clearly show that disaster and popular culture stimuli can lead to increased interest in Nostradamus. However, some of the spikes may also show something more, just like on September 11, 2001. (Google has become a more global search engine than just an American one over time, so the earlier global data may not reflect global trends as accurately as later data.)

#### *Searches for Nostradamus (Disambiguated as Apothecary)*

Worldwide Spike reported if in top decile (90%+), country reported if in top quartile (75%+).

**2004:** Top spike: December 26, 2004 - January 1, 2005 (100%)

- Top countries: Germany (100%), United States (83%)
- Correlated event: Indian Ocean Tsunami, December 26, 2004

**2005:** Top spike: April 3, 2005 - April 9, 2005 (100%) (second associated spike April 17, 2005 - April 23, 2005)

- Top countries: Mexico (100%), Poland (100%)

- Correlated event: Death of Pope John Paul II and election of Pope Benedict XVI
- 2006:** Top spike: June 4, 2006 - June 10, 2006 (100%)
  - Top country: Mexico (100%)
  - Correlated event: Date of June 6, 2006 (06/06/06); Omen Movie?
- 2007:** Top spike: October 28, 2007 - November 3, 2007 (100%)
  - Top countries: India (100%), Mexico (86%)
  - Correlated events: History Channel airs “The Lost Book of Nostradamus” on October 28, 2007; Pakistani state of emergency which began November 3, 2007.
    - Note for some reason, India pops in and out of results returned for this search, but when it appears, it is at 100% -- if it doesn’t appear, it isn’t in the results at all. Drilling down into the country data shows a clear spike in India from December 9 through the end of the year. Could be a glitch in the Trends platform.
- 2008:** Top spike: November 2, 2008 - November 8, 2008 (100%)
  - Top countries: Romania (100%), Colombia (83%), Russia (82%)
  - Correlated event: Election of Barack Obama as US President
- 2009:** Top spikes: January 4, 2009 - January 10, 2009 (100%);  
April 26, 2009 –May 2, 2009 (95%), November 8, 2009 - November 21, 2009 (96% - 95%)
  - Top countries: Chile (100%), Romania (100%), Peru (94%), Colombia (90%), Mexico (76%)
  - Correlated events: Release of “Nostradamus 2012” TV movie on January 4, 2009
- 2010:** Top spike: April 11, 2010 - April 17, 2010 (100%)
  - Top country: Poland (100%)
  - Correlated event: Polish President and staff killed in April 10, 2010 crash at Smolensk, Russia
- 2011:** Top spike: March 13, 2011 - March 19, 2011 (100%)
  - Top countries: Iran (100%), Philippines (97%), Peru (75%)
  - Correlated events: Tohoku earthquake and tsunami (March 11, 2011); (The Iranian searches peaked in September 2011 and appear related to interest in 2012)
- 2012:** Top spike: December 16, 2012 - December 22, 2012 (100%)
  - Top countries: Philippines (100%), Iran (97%)
  - Correlated event: Arrival of December 2012 solstice, correlated to Mayan calendar end; Jokes about “Gangam Style” being so bad it will be the end of the world.
- 2013:** Top spike: February 10, 2013 - February 16, 2013 (100%)
  - Top countries: Venezuela (100%), Philippines (95%), Peru (86%), Colombia (82%), Mexico (79%)
  - Correlated event: Election of Pope Francis
- 2014:** Top spike: November 16, 2014 - November 22, 2014 (100%)
  - Top country: Ukraine (100%)
  - Correlated event: Release of Assassin’s Creed Unity videogame which featured Nostradamus “enigmas”.
    - Note that Ukraine led the world as the highest % search for Nostradamus in 2014, but the worldwide spike in November seems tied to the videogame. Zooming into the Ukraine-specific data, the spike occurred March 2, 2014 - March 8, 2014 which is tied closely to the Crimean crisis which ran from February 21, 2014 - March 19, 2014. On March 1, 2014, it was declared that the separatists would be in charge of Ukrainian military installations on the peninsula.
- 2015:** Top spike: November 15, 2015 - November 21, 2015 (100%)
  - Top country: Hungary (100%)
  - Correlated event: Unclear.
    - Note that Hungary led the world as the highest % search for Nostradamus in 2015 but the worldwide spike in November may be tied to several earthquakes which occurred in short order or a television program. Hungary country data shows August 23, 2015

- August 29, 2015 is tied closely to the Syrian migrant crisis coming to a head in that country and strong anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim sentiment which is reflected in the associated search terms.

**2016:** Top spikes: January 3, 2016 - January 9, 2016 (100%),  
March 20, 2016 - March 26, 2016 (90%)

- Top countries: Philippines (100%), Romania (75%)
- Correlated event: Unclear.
  - Note that it is not exactly clear what drove the global spikes in 2016 so far (there is no major correlated geopolitical event with the spikes), but the number one related topic globally is “Rodrigo Duterte” and digging into the country data for Philippines shows the spike following Duterte’s election (May 9, 2016): May 8, 2016 - May 21, 2016. Romanian searches may have been driven by fears of an end- times war with Russia or ISIS. It is possible the global spikes had to do with a television show or another media event.

## Nostradamus’ Connections to Leftist Figures and Psychological Warfare

Nostradamus was widely used as a psychological warfare tool in World War 2. The Allies dropped pamphlets of Nostradamus verses on German territory. The Germans also put out Nostradamus books predicting allied defeat (Howe, 1967). There are some suggestions the Nazi’s ambitions were furthered by beliefs in Nostradamus prophecy due to the influence of Eastern European mystics.

Most Americans and English-speakers were unaware of the prophecies of Nostradamus until Erika Cheetham’s translations from the 1960s made it to bookstores (Noble, 1998). Cheetham, who died in 1998, was the author of the book “The Man Who Saw Tomorrow” which later was made into the TV film “The Man Who Saw Tomorrow” starring Orson Welles and presumably became the basis for many Americans’ understanding of Nostradamus. Much like the post-9/11 phenomenon, Cheetham’s work sought to explain away recent national tragedies like the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, using the rubric of unavoidable foretold prophecy (Walters, 1982). (Later editions were updated to reflect the deaths of both Kennedy brothers and even to explain the AIDS virus.)

While there is evidence that Cheetham was a precocious child – once expelled from a parochial school for her stated atheist views, she nonetheless went on to a career based on convincing her followers of a belief in the supernatural powers of Nostradamus (Noble, 1998).

According to one of Cheetham’s Oxford acquaintances who later served in British intelligence, she was known to associate with a group of left leaning students who have continued to have prestigious careers in Marxist and Russian connected circles (Hagger, 2015). This includes Perry Anderson: a “Western Marxist” historian and essayist who was a former editor of the well regarded “New Left Review” journal (Wikipedia (1), 2016). Another of her college associates: Quintin Hoare – also became an editor for the “New Left Review” and later Director of the Bosnian Institute (N. Hagger, personal communication, October 2016; Wikipedia (2), 2016;). The list also included a Russian interpreter at the UN and the nephew of famed English novelist Graham Greene (himself a man well known to harbor some degree of communist sympathy or fascination; if not party affiliation) (Hagger, 2015; Hodgkins, 2008).

It’s hardly convicting evidence, but it does begin to illustrate the strong Marxist literary connections which Cheetham had prior to developing “The Man Who Saw Tomorrow” and presumably kept later in life. Prior to his work on “The Man Who Saw Tomorrow”, the auteur Welles - a self-proclaimed magician and mentee of Harry Houdini, famed for his brilliant adaptations of “War of the Worlds” and “Citizen Kane”, was put on the FBI’s Hollywood Blacklist as a suspected (but unproven) communist, and labeled a threat to the national security of the United States before “self-imposing” exile on himself in Europe in the late 1940’s (Andrews, 2016; FBI, 2016).

In 1949, Orson Welles starred-in, and contributed to the script for one of Britain's great films: Graham Greene's "The Third Man". One of the influential - and paid - but uncredited scriptwriters of "The Third Man" was Hans-Peter Smolka who also wrote under the name H.P. Smollett Esq. or Henry-Peter Smollett (Beer, 2001; Justice, 2006).

Smolka, who died in 1980 in Vienna, was posthumously discovered to have been a Russian spy and is sometimes called the "sixth member" of the Cambridge Five. According to the Mitrokhin Archive he had been recruited by Kim Philby (Ash, 2003). It is alleged that he and Kim Philby formed the basis of the plotline and characterization captured by Greene and later acted out by Welles in "The Third Man", and that the movie is unofficially about Philby (Foges, 2016).

As Welles was at that time in 1949 under FBI investigation, but not yet named on the "Red Channels" list, and Philby had not yet been first suspected of being a spy (that happened in 1951) nor defecting to Russia (that happened in 1963); and of course, Smolka, who died in 1980 was never found out until after his death - and because Philby was in no way involved officially in the writing of the script - and whose intelligence connections with Smolka had apparently been undetected - there was no way until the modern day to pin a strong connection on Orson Welles to the Cambridge Five. But in light of Greene's multiple connections and Smolka's and Welles' mutual direct involvement in the scenario and film production, there seems to be one today.

There are other plausible connections between Welles and Russia via way of magicians. Welles considered one of his mentors to be Harry Houdini. Like (yet unlike) his fellow Houdini "disciple" and skeptic James Randi, Welles often publicly promoted Houdini's skeptic approach to psychic phenomena, despite his earnest endorsement of Nostradamus later (Welles, 1970; Charlson, 1993). Houdini notably was known to freelance globally as a spy - and some of his most well-known adventures in this regard occurred in Russia. Houdini may have worked on behalf of the Tsarist secret police to suppress anarchist movements; in addition to greatly impressing Tsar Nicholas with his legendary "Tsar Bell" trick, as Welles himself fondly recounted on his BBC show "Orson Welles' Sketchbook" (Kalush & Sloman, 2007).

## Literature Review of Russian Disinformation and Active Measures

Psychological warfare and disinformation operations are not new concepts. Deception of the enemy is a principle of war which hearkens back until at least the time of Sun Tzu. The major renovation of these kinds of activities which occurred in the post-World War 2 era, was the innovation of state-sponsored "mass production" of disinformation (Bittman, 1981). If radio, film, and television offered clear opportunities for the mass production of disinformation, the internet and its capacity for direct, and customized/personalized contact with users has boundlessly scaled that production capacity.

Russian psychological warfare operations are often referred to as "active measures". Active measures are Russian information and influence operations which are typically used to undermine American or western interests and "conquer world public opinion" (Boghardt, 2009). Active measures are made up from a mix of propaganda, calculated falsehoods, agents of influence, and sometimes special operations / provocations, all built around a kernel of truth. Oftentimes, the product of these active measures is in sum referred to as "Disinformation". Some of the most notable, proven disinformation resulting from Russian active measures are the persistent rumors of CIA involvement in the assassination of JFK, or that the CIA created AIDS (Boghardt, 2009; Holland, 2001).

Research from the years following 9/11 has continued to expose the role of active measures fueled by provocations in the Putin government, particularly around the 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow; which may not have been immediately apparent to intelligence agencies in the hectic and confusing times following 9/11 (Boghardt 2009; Felshtinsky & Litvinenko, 2007). There is ample evidence to suggest that Putin's government staged the attacks as a provocation against its own constituency in order to justify a crackdown on civil liberties and for a second Chechen war. The war paved the way for Putin to reassert a strong executive function on the basis of national security principles. Before the bombings, he polled at 2% popularity (twice Yeltsin's 1%) but quickly thereafter surged as a



popular leader given his decisive response to the bombings (Nekrasov, 2004). Similar patterns of provocation and disinformation accompanied the denied and now acknowledged Russian invasion of Crimea (Oliphant & Sabur, 2015).

Contemporary evidence has shown the current Russian government's preference for digitized means of disinformation distribution. Kremlin-operated online media outlet RT is widely considered a tool of disinformation with an annual budget between \$200m and \$500m USD. For example, RT has been used to promote an idea that 9/11 was a false flag attack by the US government in the days just before September 11, 2013 (RT.com, 2013).

In addition, a number of "shadow" disinformation / propaganda outlets exist on the web seemingly undermining US interests with a less clear attribution to Russia. For example - while they denied ever receiving any money from a government - the popular financial blog ZeroHedge was exposed to harbor a strong editorial preference for pro-Putin, anti-Obama stances. The site's owner Daniel Ivandjiski (who along with several others writes for the site under the name "Tyler Durden"), is a Bulgarian national whose father runs the pro-Putin Bulgarian publication "Top Secret". Both Top Secret and ZeroHedge are apparently based in Bulgaria (Mishev, 2016). ZeroHedge regularly promotes ideas of strong Putin/weak Obama, fall of the US dollar, global war, and stock market collapse which dovetail with Russian propaganda at RT.com and elsewhere (Alloway & Kawa, 2016; Mishev, 2016). Similarly, the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity regularly advances positions which undermine the US dollar as a global reserve currency; and Ron Paul himself advocates for the legality of Putin's actions in Crimea, and appears on RT.com, receiving favorable coverage there.

Researchers allege that these outlets spread conspiracy theories and sow confusion so as to advance a Kremlin strategy which creates the impression that "nothing is true, and everything is possible", and is also characterized as a "Fog of Falsehood" or "Firehose of Falsehood" (Paul & Matthews, 2016; Pomerantsev, 2014; Pynnoniemi & Racz, 2016). The goal may be to so overwhelm the information space that it sows confusion in a target environment; thus, allowing Russia better freedom to maneuver or influence events.

There is also evidence that these actions can have spontaneous and intentional effects on the psychology and behaviors of target populations which cause them to be manipulated in ways favorable to Russia. Russia was exposed to run a "troll factory" in St. Petersburg at 55 Savushkina Street. This operation has been responsible for several "hoaxes" such as the "Columbia Chemicals" disaster hoax of September 11, 2014, an Atlanta Georgia Ebola outbreak on December 13, 2014, and on the same day in Atlanta, unsubstantiated claims an unarmed black woman had been shot by police (Chen (1), 2015). Generally, these "attacks" which prompted some degree of social panic followed a pattern of swarms of social media accounts advancing false stories. (Later, many of the same for-hire troll accounts based in Russia were seen to be spreading pro-Donald Trump propaganda via social media (Chen (2), 2015).)

## **Conceptualizing Nostradamus on September 11 as "Active Measures"**

### *Psychological Influence*

The Nostradamus emails and "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow" media fit the profile of a psychological influence operation because they undermined the image of America as a strong nation and that it was "inevitable" to defend itself from certain attacks. This is a similar application to the use for demoralization of the enemy in World War 2.

The event capitalized on the concept of an "Islamic Antichrist" (here cast as Osama Bin Laden) which had been laid down by a knowledge of Nostradamus brought to the English world primarily by Erika Cheetham and Orson Welles. Welles had claimed that "that Master of Mohamedan Law" would strike New York City (Drane & Guenette, 1981). (Cheetham also introduced the concept of Nostradamus as being associated with end-times nuclear war involving modern superpowers, which it had not previously.) Cialdini (2016) has shown the power of "pre-suasion" as a powerful form of psychological influence which can greatly enhance the likelihood of compliance with a request.

Orson Welles has demonstrated himself to be an expert social psychologist and well nuanced in the inner workings of the mind. The effects of Welles' 1938 "War of the Worlds" radio drama, are controversial, but are often studied in the context of inadvertently (or advertently) induced mass hysteria. Welles himself referred to War of the Worlds as an "experiment" on his BBC Show, Sketchbook. Welles' great film "Citizen Kane" was seen by the FBI to be an attempt to affect public opinion in a negative way towards William Randolph Hearst, who was being cast as an Anti-Communist figure.

In this sense, at least two of Welles' prior creations have been proven or suspected in their attempts to manipulate public opinion. Much like Bittman's (1981) explanation of modern "mass produced" disinformation -- books, film, radio, and television provided a similar model of distribution for dissemination of mass produced ideas to a wide audience. Given this perspective, and the seemingly consistent psychological scope of Welles' work, "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow" also fits well into this canon as a psychological influence and disinformation operation.

Cheetham used Nostradamus to explain the deaths of the Kennedys; first of JFK, and then by later revisions of her work to include Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) which parallels Russian disinformation blaming CIA elements for these actions (Holland, 2001). Some of the same "quatrains" were used to explain the Twin Towers collapse later on, which parallels clear current disinformation emanating from Russian sources implicating US intelligence in an attack on 9/11 (RT.com, 2013).

### *Coincidental Events and Foreknowledge*

The build up to the millennium also saw fringe elements making apocalyptic predictions for Y2K, 1999, and towards the Mayan Calendar, which reinforced earlier knowledge of Nostradamus among the population. People were primed for this kind of thinking by continuous reinforcement in pop culture and current events. Evidence from Google Trends confirms that stimuli from war- time actions, pop culture, and natural disasters can produce spikes in Nostradamus interest (Google, 2016).

The circumstances which would be created by the attacks hypothetically became the opportune time to "inject" the information "fuel" of Nostradamus into the information environment. It seems likely that the emails and text messages caused the documented spike in Google searches as opposed to a spontaneous collective interest in Nostradamus (instead, it seems more likely that receipt of those messages on the day of the attacks may have rekindled dormant knowledge/interest). The evidence shows that many of the "quatrains" predicting the collapse of the towers were "false", so it is unlikely people would have thought of them when the accident happened. Further, the Marxist history of the Nostradamus promoters makes a simple coincidence on this day and on other Russia-relevant days in modern history which have caused Nostradamus-related searches even less likely. (Even in cases where people have a fear of nuclear war with Russia, that is an idea provably introduced by the suspected disinformation agents Cheetham and Welles.)

### *Russian Diplomatic and Geopolitical Activity*

Evidence emerged that Russia was influential in building the mystique of Osama Bin Laden as an enemy of America. Putin's intelligence services apparently warned the Clinton administration in June 2000 about him (Mitchell, 2012). They warned the Bush administration of impending trouble two months prior to September 11, as substantiated by Condoleeza Rice. Putin himself claimed to have warned the Bush administration just days before the attacks (Mitchell, 2012). Many Americans were aware of the Al Qaeda threat prior to 9/11 and potentially as a result of Russian intelligence as a result of these repeated warnings. (Of course, the Nairobi bombings in 1998 were the work of Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Alexander Litvinenko alleged the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) had trained Zawahiri in Dagestan/Chechnya in 1997 (BBC News, 2006). Only after that event did the attacks on the "west" begin.)

In describing World War 3, Cheetham featured a "US-Russia Alliance" against China and the Middle East (Drane & Guenette, 1981; Walters, 1982). This actually continues to be a common theme

in some Nostradamus interpretations. Note specifically that Code Red and Nimda both contained code which implicated Chinese hackers both immediately preceding and following 9/11 respectively. The “Man Who Saw Tomorrow” film proposed that an Islamist figure would overtake Russia and use Russian weapons to strike America. Later in the same scenario, Russia and the US were prophesied to team up against China.

Russia may have attempted to fulfill a prediction of a US-Russia alliance vs China. The forensic breadcrumbs which made China look guilty preceding and following the attacks could be evidence of attempts to manipulate the psychology of the public or intelligence community against China at an opportune time (Cialdini, 2016).

### *Cyber Warfare and Information Systems Operations*

The “Year of the Worm” shows that many cyber attacks were plausibly in the interest of nation states -- if not directly state sponsored – and typically focused on infecting mail contacts or spreading via network server vulnerabilities. The Nostradamus text messages and emails followed a similar pattern of viral distribution over the same networks as the viruses themselves had apparently traveled. They also had some similar characteristics to other cyber threats, for example in that ILOVEYOU was capable of sending several different messages (such as the Nostradamus emails apparently presented), and that CodeRed had emerged first in the same Philippine neighborhood as ILOVEYOU had (Auza, 2008).

As the Google data shows, Philippines is one of the “hottest spots” for interest in Nostradamus, and as the historical evidence shows, there was a surge in Nostradamus text messages in the Philippines (Aravilla, 2001). It may have been an effective and proven place to start a “viral” outbreak of this information that would later/simultaneously infect the US.

Social proof is a powerful form of influence as demonstrated by the spread of contemporary email viruses like ILOVEYOU which preyed on expectations of friendly communications (Cialdini, 2006). Panicked people receiving letters and texts from loved ones on the traumatic day would be more likely to forward them, and perhaps even believe the content of the messages.

It is plausible, but not necessary to assume that some of these viral emails about Nostradamus may have been churned by one of the pieces of malware out there. Backdoors were established by prior viruses which helped Nimda spread. There may be a connection between all of these malware features and the similar presentation of the Nostradamus emails. SirCam for example, was seen to demonstrate “virus mating behavior” in the wild with the FunLove.4099 virus, which may possibly have been intentionally engineered, and augmented the spread and effects of both pieces of malware (Coursen, 2001). Despite having code which seemed to indicate that it was written for English and Spanish speakers, SirCam notably struck the Government of Ukraine, and the FBI, potentially stealing sensitive documents from both sources. Much like Nimda, it contained a forensic clue that implicated Mexico in a similar style to Nimda: “[SirCam Version 1.0 Copyright 2001 2rP Made in / Hecho en - Cuitzeo, Michoacan Mexico]” (Symantec, 2001).

While mass mailing support from a virus is not a precondition of this influence operation, it would certainly have facilitated the unprecedented boost in online search results as revealed by the Google data and the surge in emails and texts which were received. Many of the viruses had mass mailing features, such as SirCam, BadTrans, and Nimda. The Nostradamus messages apparently cycled several different message bodies, which was also a characteristic of many of these viruses. Russia has demonstrated itself to be adept at using online methods to spread disinformation in the years following 9/11 and the internet provides excellent “scaling” for the production of disinformation. Russian information warfare strategy views viruses as “combat multipliers”. Using them to spread disinformation would comport with the then-known strategy (Hildreth, 2001).

## **DISCUSSION**

Ascribing attribution to cyber attacks is notoriously difficult and sometimes dangerous, as the medium provides an inherent degree of anonymity (Develle & Jackson, 2015). Pinning an event unknown to

be an information or cyber attack as one is probably even more difficult. However, common sense has a case.

Notwithstanding Alexander Litvinenko's controversial claims that the FSB had trained Ayman Al Zawahiri in Dagestan / Chechnya in 1997 (corresponding to his claims surrounding his investigation of the FSB involvement in the Moscow apartment bombings) prior to Al Qaeda's pattern of attacks on the West, and the general acceptance by scholars that FSB involvement in the Moscow bombings is a fact based on the events in Ryazan and subsequent cover up; Putin's full circle shift from telling Bush who was responsible for 9/11 and offering support in 2001 to using his propaganda apparatus to regularly suggest US complicity in the attacks today may be telling strategically.

Today, a quick Googling of 'Russia AND 9/11' will not yield much good information on a first pass. In fact, resulting from this hardly accusatory search, some of the most likely relevant searches returned seem to reference obvious propaganda sites that have Putin claiming to be preparing to release satellite imagery or other "Smoking Gun" evidence that 9/11 was an inside job. However, to put these apparent claims of the current Russian disinformation machine in perspective, it should be remembered how the geopolitics of September 11 actually played out.

An often-forgotten element of the US-Russian relationship leading up to September 11 was the occurrence of Operation Northern Vigilance by NORAD which represented a massive shift in US air defenses and intelligence collection towards monitoring a large-scale Russian nuclear training exercise near the North Pole (NORAD, 2001). At the time, the deployment was mysterious and somewhat unprecedented. Officially, as soon as the 9/11 attacks were announced, the Russians stood down their training operation in what was interpreted then as a sign of solidarity with America.

On 9/11 the first world leader to contact Bush was Putin. This has been substantiated by both Colin Powell in his speech to the McConnell Center in November 2001, as well as in Vladimir Putin's interview with Barbara Walters following 9/11 (ABC News, 2001; Powell, 2001). When he contacted Bush, Putin is alleged to have also drawn parallels with the Russian apartment bombings of September 1999 and the tragedy surrounding 9/11. The common theme, alleged by Putin – was radical Islamic terror. America and Russia needed to team up to fight the terror (ABC News, 2001).

Later testimony emerged that not only had Putin told Bush about the involvement of Al Qaeda and the Taliban – but Russian intelligence had previously provided this information to the US in the days leading up to the tragedy, warning of Islamist plots. Condoleeza Rice stated that in June 2001, Putin had prophetically,

*turned quite dramatically to Pakistan, accusing the Pakistanis saying it wasn't just that they supported the Taliban, but in fact, they were feeding extremists into Afghanistan and they were a lot of the problem; and basically saying 'this is going to explode' on your watch (Mitchell, 2012).*

Putin claimed in 2001 to have told Bush a couple of days before the events of something about to take place, and previously had made warnings of Osama Bin Laden to the Clinton Administration in June 2000 (Mitchell, 2012). Putin's FSB director Nikolay Patrushev claimed to have known where Bin Laden was right up until the Tuesday of the attacks (AFP, 2001).

So why has the disinformation machine changed on a dime from telling the US who was responsible, to now blaming the US for the event? Unlike the JFK assassination, where Russia had plausible reason to want to distract people from Lee Harvey Oswald's legitimate connections to Russia (Russian wife, lived in Russia, etc.) with their disinformation – even if they were not involved – nobody except Alexander Litvinenko was coming close to accusing Russia of 9/11. Why so much focus in Russia today on blaming the US and trying to clog out any other discussion of Russia and 9/11 by using disinformation to make Putin look like a hero? Why has Russia staked so many of its online disinformation resources around "9/11 truth" movements?

Certainly, it makes sense that promoting a belief in false flag attacks in the population here undermines American well-being; and that makes it fit with classic Russian active measures strategy

(Boghardt, 2009). But more so, based on the evidence, maybe there really is an element of trying to hide Russian involvement in the event based on plausible evidence that Russia attempted to frame China with faked evidence in software code timed to perfectly correspond with maximum paranoia during the attacks – and thus undermine US - China solidarity (it is highly doubtful China would have made such careless mistakes or invited the wrath of the US so directly). China had taken on more of the multi-polar role previously held by Russia, and American analysts largely acquiesced to that fact. The timing of the cyberattacks corresponds to having foreknowledge of 9/11 by whoever perpetrated it, and the Al Qaeda elements had no such plausible advanced cyber capability. Only the Chinese and the Russians probably did (Hildreth, 2001).

Just like “how clear” Chinese involvement seemed to be in the cyber attacks, which may have deflected suspicions about Russia; repeated evidence was presented to the Bush administration by Putin and his intelligence services of the involvement of certain Saudi and Pakistani elements – who were certainly the hijackers – but may downplay the role of Russian elements in engaging and agitating those parties (as could be interpreted the role of Ayman Al Zawahiri as alleged by Alexander Litvinenko).

The game of attribution may suggest the Chinese were framed in this operation based on all of the other data. The presence of code implicating the Chinese certainly contributed to mutual accusations and mistrust in the days leading up to, and following 9/11. While they are not total partners in America’s plans and there are legitimate tensions on some fronts between the US and China, the Chinese don’t seem to have an obvious motive as major stakeholders in the US debt and financial system to destroy America financially, it doesn’t seem that Russia is obliged by any similar compunction.

The 9/11 attacks impacted America’s “financial epicenter” and American economic prosperity had been a target of Russian attacks historically, and continues to be. In the 2008 timeframe, Hank Paulson testified the Chinese had reported the Russians had approached them with a plot to sell Fannie and Freddie securities on the open market, thus undermining the managed recovery of those organizations (Peston, 2014). Kremlin is constantly seeking to undermine the USD as a reserve currency, and seemingly puts propaganda weight behind sites like ZeroHedge and Ron Paul who advocate for the end of fiat monetary systems (Alloway & Kawa, 2016).

Finally consider - not only is there evidence that Russian-aligned media figures pushed the knowledge of Nostradamus on the West, and that Nostradamus chain mails and queries demonstrated extreme “outlier” behavior from a statistical perspective, they followed similar digital distribution vectors to the contemporary computer viruses which contained the Chinese- implicating code and others which targeted the Ukrainian government and FBI.

Google Trends data suggests additional connections between Russian hybrid warfare or intelligence operations and Nostradamus as well - and the same data shows essentially zero interest in Nostradamus in China. In fact, it seems with the exception of the “elusive” 2007 Indian Google Trends results which correspond to the Pakistani crisis, most provably “man-made” crises which caused global outlier-like spikes in Nostradamus country data have provable Russian involvement.

- Notably the 2010 Smolensk, Russia crash which killed much of the Polish executive government correlated to Nostradamus searches. While certainly a “conspiracy theory” to blame Russia for this incident (which supposedly resulted in a massive intelligence coup for Russia), it is a very popular one in Poland.
- 2014 data clearly showed fears by both Ukraine and Romania about Russian aggression; and Ukraine’s world-leading spike in Nostradamus-related interest corresponded to the March 2014 invasion of Crimea. This is not a conspiracy involving Russia, but fact.
- In 2015, Putin-aligned Viktor Orban’s Hungary dominated with searches clearly tying the Muslim refugee crisis to Nostradamus. There is evidence according to NATO, that Putin is “weaponizing” the migrant crisis; and that this is fueling right wing political victories in Europe and elsewhere. This is speculation backed by strong research and psychological evidence.

Nostradamus' role in propaganda and demoralization in the Second World War, now apparently forgotten, should also not be forgotten or understated. It has been used for psychological warfare operations in the "modern" era.

## CONCLUSION

There seems to have been an almost certain connection between Orson Welles and Russian intelligence by way of his participation in the creation of "The Third Man" which was heavily influenced by the input of spies from the Cambridge 5 network - Kim Philby and Hans-Peter Smolka. This fact could not have been determined at the time pressure from the US national security community seems to have encouraged Welles to voluntarily leave the US in 1948, before he was named to the "Red Channels" list. In addition, the other promoters of Nostradamus have provably leftist connections. Nostradamus seems to have been used contemporaneously to other provable Russian disinformation schemes, such as that the CIA was involved with the JFK assassination; or that the CIA is somehow involved in a false flag attack on 9/11.

Taken from a psychological perspective, the use of Nostradamus in a supposed active measures / influence operation seems to have had a desired effect. Without Nostradamus, and his proponents like Welles and Cheatham, most Americans wouldn't have had a mental image of an "Islamic Antichrist" who was prophesized to strike New York City (by way of some very odd conversion of latitude by Welles). It created a sense of inevitability, powerlessness, and irrationality in explanation for the crisis which provoked fear in many members of the population and subdued any sort of sense that the event could have been prevented. In addition, the trend manipulated social influence techniques common to the propagation of contemporary email viruses which plausibly enabled it to spread rapidly.

The fact that the Nostradamus search results and interest were so disproportionate following the attacks, and that the emails followed viral patterns which were similar to the distribution of - and may have been established by - contemporary malware such as Code Red, SirCam, and Nimda - should be examined further by experts. Code Red and Nimda contained code which forensically and clearly implicated the Chinese before and after 9/11 respectively, while data from the SirCam infection seems to indicate it targeted Ukrainian and US law enforcement targets.

At this point, some good evidence seems to point to Russia. Someone wanted the US to be skeptical of China around 9/11 it seems, despite contemporary advanced attacks which targeted Ukrainian and FBI targets and may be somehow connected. However, China does not have plausible connections to the Nostradamus story or key players in the same way that Russia does, nor the same strength of motive. Nostradamus may in fact himself have been a Russian agent. Those who promoted Nostradamus have "outlier level" ties to Russian interests. Putin's direction of the Russian Air Force in unprecedented nuclear exercises at the same time as 9/11 as well as his preliminary call to Bush, reporting intelligence and a story which to some extent would be betrayed by the future scrutiny of the 1999 apartment bombings, seems to be grounds for further suspicion about Russian motives.

Lastly Putin's about face on who was responsible for 9/11 - going from blaming Osama Bin Laden and being the first person to contact Bush - to nearly outright blaming the US for a false flag attack in a classically themed Soviet-style disinformation campaign is also somewhat perplexing unless it is seriously considered that the Russians had something to do with enabling the whole series of events.

Going further, there is plausible circumstantial evidence to connect every major man-made crisis related spike in Nostradamus related searches to Russia since 2010. There may be evidence that this technique is considered effective and is used in an ongoing fashion. It seems to be a brand of disinformation that has not been deeply considered even as it has paralleled other proven Russian disinformation schemes. If this theory is correct, it raises hopes for identifying yet undiscovered Russian plots and intercepting or disrupting them. Similar figures like "Baba Vanga" may be used by Russians to advance similar strategic aims.

In the end, Alexander Litvinenko's claims of the Russians training Zawahiri and him being an agent may not be so fantastic after all.

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