



### Proceedings of the 16th European Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security

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# Proceedings of the 16th European Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security ECCWS 2017

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Edited by Dr Mark Scanlon and Dr Nhien-An Le-Khac

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#### **Nostradamus Prophecy as a Russian Information Warfare Concept**

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**Abstract:** Nostradamus prophecies have been used to explain geopolitical events since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Historically, they may have been viewed in a context that is negative in regards to Catholicism. In the modern era, the appearance of Nostradamus prophecies often aligns with Russian influence operations known as "active measures". Historical research may show Russian involvement in the promotion of the prophecies of Nostradamus in the Cold War era to the present day. Google search statistics connect searches for Nostradamus to the events of September 11, 2001 and other destabilizing events in Europe provably related to Russia. It is hypothesized that modern distribution of Nostradamus prophecies may be a form of Russian information warfare which is a digital evolution of "prophecy as propaganda" related to Russian state mythology, such as the concept of "Third Rome".

Keywords: active measures, psychological warfare, September 11 2001, 9/11, Google trends, Third Rome

#### 1. Introduction

Outlier Google statistics regarding "Nostradamus" (Google 2011, Google 2017) are correlated to destabilising events occurring in September 2001 (USA), April 2010 (Poland), March 2014 (Ukraine), and August 2015 (Hungary). It has been argued that these search statistics are the by-product of Russian Active Measures operations (Hotchkiss 2017).

Nostradamus interpreter Erika Cheetham had a leftist-Marxist social network. Orson Welles was blacklisted by the United States for communist party affiliations and had direct connections to Russian intelligence (Hotchkiss 2017). From the mid-1960's, Cheetham produced multiple revisions of her Nostradamus prophecies, including the early 1980's film, "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow", starring Welles (Noble 1998). The best known of Cheetham's prophecies are that Nostradamus predicted the assassination of John F. Kennedy (JFK), superpower nuclear war, the AIDS epidemic, as well as turmoil in the Middle East (Cheetham 1986, Noble 1998).

"Russian active measures" are political warfare strategies which influence world public opinion against Russia's adversaries and create an information environment favourable to Russia (Boghardt 2006). Soviet-era campaigns included attempts to promote beliefs that the CIA was involved in the JFK assassination, AIDS was created by the US Government, anti-nuclear peace movements, and promoting anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism in the Middle East (Boghardt 2006, Boghardt 2009, Pacepa & Rychlak 2013, Pringle 2015).

Nostradamus prophecies have often aligned with proven or suspected Russian active measures operations which is argued here to be intentional. Nostradamus prophecies can also be interpreted from a mythological perspective which aligns with the contemporary 16<sup>th</sup> century Russian theme of "Third Rome".

#### 2. Nostradamus, Russia and the USA

On September 11, 2001 (9/11), several "fake" Nostradamus prophecies circulated via email. These predicted the collapse of the Twin Towers. The emails caused public interest in Nostradamus to spike along with sales of the Cheetham prophecies (Wilson 2007). "The Man Who Saw Tomorrow" was the top selling video on Amazon. 'Nostradamus' became the 7th most popular search term on Google on 9/11, as well as the "top gaining" search of September 2001 (Google 2011).

The most parsimonious way such a volume of emails could spread was a mass mailing feature. The well-known cyberthreats of June, July, and September 2001 (Code Red, SirCam, and Nimda) had propagation methods which would have theoretically enabled this behaviour (Hotchkiss 2017).

The worms had common digital forensics ("Chinese" clues in Nimda and Code Red, and a similar signature style between Nimda and SirCam) and Nimda was sophisticated enough to be considered a cyberweapon. SirCam was called "the worm that spreads secrets" and struck the FBI cyber-unit as well as the Government of Ukraine (Coursen 2001). According to 2001 research, Russia and China had the degree of sophistication to deploy cyberweapons, but Al Qaeda did not (Hildreth 2001).

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Despite Vladimir Putin's outreach to George W. Bush on 9/11 as the first world leader to contact him and provide Al Qaeda-related intelligence, modern Russian propaganda now promotes the idea of the "inside job" or "false flag" theory of 9/11 (Hotchkiss 2017).

Sources close to Alexander Litvinenko allege he believed that Putin had caused 9/11 (Lampert 2016). Litvinenko also claimed the Second Chechen War was provoked by a series of FSB bombings in Moscow during September 1999. Putin's claims to Barbara Walters in 2001 he had told Bush that Al Qaeda and Chechen terrorism were internationally linked and that the 1999 Russian experience was parallel to the 2001 American experience is undermined by this evidence (ABC News 2001). Combined with Litvinenko's other not-fully substantiated claim that Ayman al-Zawahiri was a Russian agent (Weiss 2015), the contradiction exposed by Putin's direct premise of rapprochement with Bush on September 11, 2001 and the emergent facts of the 1999 Moscow case strengthens the argument that 9/11 was linked to an active measures operation.

#### 3. Demystifying Nostradamus

Credible biographers of Michel Nostradamus have highlighted Nostradamus prophecy appearing at times of political destabilisation in Europe, linking it to "disinformation" (Wilson 2007). However, prophecy had been used in Europe for propaganda purposes since well before the time of Nostradamus. In 15th century England for example, the "Prophecy of the Six Kings" was used to plot against Henry IV (Weiskott 2016).

Nostradamus (b.1503 – d.1566) can be examined in the mould of near-contemporaries Heinrich Agrippa (b.1486 – d.1535) and John Dee (b.1527 – d.1608) which provides a more realistic perspective on his activities than ascribing supernatural powers. Both Dee and Nostradamus considered occult physician (and espionage asset) Agrippa to be a model for their work (French 2013, Wilson 2007). Dee was a physician serving the Elizabethan court as a cryptographer. Some allege he was inspiration for the character of James Bond, claiming Dee signed his name "007" (Birkwood 2016). When Nostradamus died in 1566, Dee performed similar court physician duties in France as Nostradamus had. Autobiographical details of Dee's life indicate that he was recruited by Tsar Ivan IV, and that while he did not take the job, his son Arthur Dee served Tsar Mikhail on the recommendation of King James (Sherman 1997).

Nostradamus' biography suggests he was suspected of anti-Catholic activities and fled France, travelling in Orthodox areas protected by the Tsar (such as Greece and Turkey) before he returned to France in 1547 (Biography.com 2015).

#### 4. Nostradamus in Modern Europe

In the 20th century during World War 2, the Axis and Allies deployed Nostradamus prophecies for psychological warfare.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Google Trends data has connected a surge in Nostradamus interest to the events surrounding the annihilation of the Polish executive government in Smolensk, Russia in April 2010. As in 2001, the cause of the spike seems to have been a false Nostradamus prophecy applied to the disaster (Google 2017). There is strong speculation in Poland that Russia may have had intentional involvement in this crash.

Other anomalies in Nostradamus search data can be tied to obvious Russian military operations. During the March 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russian-backed separatists, Ukraine experienced a Nostradamus "event". At the height of the (Russian-military exacerbated) Syrian migrant crisis in 2015 during which many European nations were considering closing their borders, Hungary experienced a spike in Nostradamus-related searches that tied terms like "migrant" and "antichrist" together (Google 2017).

#### 5. Nostradamus and Russia

The CREST 25 year CIA archive included a reference to the endorsement of Nostradamus prophecy in a 1977 Soviet government censored journal for predictive powers in the context of "political murders" and "revolutions" (JPRS, 1978). This has a connotation which is very similar to "active measures".

The 1999 bombing case is also examined in the context of active measures intended to propel a little-known Vladimir Putin to power (Boghardt 2006). In this sense of connecting proven Russian active measures to

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Cheetham variant prophecies, there is but one of startling specificity in his Centuries X volume, quatrain 72 (Cheetham was the first to controversially translate "Angolmois" as "Mongols"):

French: "L'an mil neuf cent nonante neuf sept mois, Du ciel viendra un grand Roi d'effrayeur: Ressusciter le grand Roi d'Angolmois, Avant après Mars regner par bonheur."

English: "The year 1999 seven months From the sky will come the great King of Terror. To resuscitate the great king of the Mongols. Before and after Mars reigns by good luck."

The Russian Orthodox Monk Filofei of Pskov (b.1465 – d.1542) created the mythological concept of "Third Rome", wherein Russia viewed itself as the final incarnation of the seat of global Christianity opposed to perceived Catholic/Western secularism (Poe 1997). The Mongol Golden Horde is also connected to this concept, as well as closely tied to the Russian Christian identity derived from Kievan Rus (Galstyan 2016). Considering that September was the seventh month of the Roman calendar which started in March (French Mars), the apartment bombings of September 1999 may be viewed as correlating to the Nostradamus prophecies, but in the context of historical and contemporary Russian state mythology.

#### 6. Conclusion

There is a pattern aligning many Russian active measures to Nostradamus prophecies. Nostradamus prophecies are seemingly used by Russia in modern times for psychological warfare (aided by information technology systems). Nostradamus prophecy is likely a form of Russian "prophecy as propaganda" related to state ideals such as "Third Rome" and fits well with Russia's modern revanchist agenda.

Nostradamus changed his last name from Nostredame to the Latinised "Nostradamus". It may be pertinent that Nostradamus is associated with anagrams and his altered name can be anagrammed as "Tsar Domanus" or "Satan Mordus" which have potential Russian / occultist connotations ('domanus' being the Sanskrit form of Latin 'dominus', 'satan' being Sanskrit for 'truth', and Sanskrit also being sometimes associated with occultism. Both Tsar (Slavic or Mongol king) and Mordus (bitten) are French words.). Like Nostradamus' supposed travels in Greece and Turkey during the 1540's, these are circumstantial details which may highlight historical connections between Nostradamus and Russia.

Further exploration of anti-Catholic disinformation tied to Nostradamus is suggested, as many of the unaccounted "spikes" in Nostradamus data as recorded by Google Trends (2017) not directly traceable to Russia are clearly tied to Catholic events, such as the change of Popes, and as Pacepa and Rychlak (2013) have shown, this has been a consistent target of modern Russian active measures and disinformation.

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