

Russian Information Warfare and 9/11 Conspiracism

When Fake News meets False Prophecy?

Michael Bennett Hotchkiss

Independent Researcher (blogger at n01r.com), United States of America

ABSTRACT

Following the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks, several “prophecies” circulated on the internet claiming the 16th century French seer Nostradamus predicted the crisis, leading to ‘Nostradamus’ being the top search on Google and other search engines in 2001. Considering Nostradamus prophecies as popular eschatology, a dimension of political conspiracism – it is observed that while the hoaxes have never been attributed to a specific actor(s), the provenance of the prophecies which circulated on 9/11 are connected to a legacy of Russian Cold War-era propaganda. Additionally, several other conspiracy theories which circulated following 9/11 can be connected to Russia and its military proxy Syria. Considering conspiracy theories as a “populist theory of power”, leveraged by Russia in order to diminish American global dominance, a case is made that Russia is likely responsible for the Nostradamus hoax of 9/11 and similar “active measures” in Poland in 2010, Ukraine in 2014, and Hungary in 2015.

Keywords: Active Measures, Aleksandr Dugin, Alex Jones, Baba Vanga, Conspiracy Theory, Google Trends, Nostradamus, Orson Welles, Psychological Operations, Russia Today, Webometrics

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001 (9/11), a series of viral emails, text messages, and internet forum discussions drove interest in the term ‘Nostradamus’ to the top of results on major search engines. These communications were notable because they were not authentic prophecies written by the actual Nostradamus – Michel De Nostredame (1503–1566); yet they caused many people to wonder if he had foretold the terror attacks.

While attribution has never been ascribed for the 2001 hoax, there seems to be ample evidence today to suggest that Russia is most likely responsible.

This article will introduce how other conspiracy theories which emerged from 9/11 have been traced to Russian security and information warfare strategy. It will then examine Nostradamus prophecies within the context of popular eschatology, which is a domain of conspiracy theory (or conspiracism) primarily focused on apocalypticism, and often associated with millennial (or fin de siècle) expectations.

Using this background, the 9/11 Nostradamus social phenomenon is considered in light of the prophecies’ content which links them to Eastern European mysticism and the so-called “active measures” of the

Soviet Union. Large spikes in Nostradamus interest have been observed during known periods of Russian geopolitical activity, such as in Poland in 2010, Ukraine in 2014, and Hungary in 2015.

Russia is observed to have a disproportionately high focus on Nostradamus on its domestic top-level internet domain (TLD) *.ru; and its state media organs often portray Nostradamus and similar ‘prophets’ with credulity, rather than the skepticism typically associated with Western media.

Similarly, the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings are also evaluated within this theoretical framework of altered Nostradamus prophecy and found consistent with classical Tsarist and Russian Orthodox apocalyptic mythology, such as that of ‘Third Rome’. The ‘Syrian chemical weapons false flag’ narrative of 2012 to present is also closely linked to the 9/11 conspiracy theory networks traceable to Russia.

In the end, it is considered likely that Russia leveraged Nostradamus prophecies for nationalist and revanchist political purposes; specifically, to support arguments for a war on terror in a way that suits its evolving information security and military objectives and competition with America and the West.

BACKGROUND

Conspiracism as a Populist Theory of Power Employed by Russia

Conspiracism is defined in the Oxford Living Dictionary as “*The belief that major historical and political events are brought about as the result of a conspiracy between interested parties, or are manipulated by or on behalf of an unknown group of influential people; belief in or advocacy of conspiracy theories.*”

Because conspiracy theories are often transmitted through populist political narratives, they have been considered as a “*populist theory of power*” which pits the “*people*” vs. the so-called “*elite power bloc*” (Fenster 2008). Yablokov (2015) takes the approach developed by Fenster and has used this “*us versus them*” social dynamic of populism to explain how weaponized conspiracy theory narratives are employed by the Russian state news organ *Russia Today* (RT) in order to sow discord and exacerbate divisions in Western societies. By calling attention to inequities in a social system – in this case the classic dichotomy of ‘East’ vs. ‘West’, the politics of conspiracy theory on RT theoretically subverts the position and reputation of the target of the conspiracy (the US or Western establishment) in a way which achieves Russian public diplomacy objectives.

Russia’s embrace of international broadcasting seems to be linked closely to the *Doctrine of Information Security* adopted in September 2000 which authorized creation of multiple international news outlets which were intended to control narratives about Russia in the ‘global information space’ and ‘counterbalance Western dominance of the media’ (Yablokov 2015). RT (then *Russia Today*) was founded in 2005; during a time in which Russia was increasingly positioning the US as its “*competitor*”, and framing the relationship as one in which the West has conspired to contain Russia’s greatness. This reorientation against perceived US hegemony helped “*relocate anti-Western conspiracy theories from the margins of Russian political discourse to its centre... [and] became an inherent part of mainstream political discourse*”. The emphasis of the US’ domination of global politics within the concept of populist messaging seems to provide Russian public diplomacy tools like RT – which represents “*the will of the Russian political establishment*” – with a consistent framework from which to cultivate conspiracism in its audience. Rather than embrace an original goal of promoting Russian culture, RT ‘downplayed’ its connection to Russia by changing its name to RT; and the network was “*turned into a political tool to undermine the American position in global politics*” based on a core narrative about the untrustworthiness of the dominant global ‘Anglo Saxon media’ (Yablokov 2015).

9/11 Conspiracy in Russian Propaganda Networks

Conspiracy theories are not always organic. Sometimes they can be laid down for psychological influence purposes by state actors. As the history of so-called “*active measures*” or “*активные мероприятия*” (the political warfare activities of the Soviet Union) shows, the cultivation and use of conspiracy theory by Russian operatives is not a new concept. During the Cold War, disinformation was circulated in Western countries that for example the US government was involved in the creation of the AIDS virus, or the assassination of John F. Kennedy. It can be observed that these patently false conspiratorial narratives laid down by Russian intelligence agencies were intended to drive political wedges in US society and undermine the reputation of the US globally.

Whereas the Cold War-era active measures seem to have primarily targeted leftist and radical audiences; perhaps in alignment with a Marxist-Leninist worldview, in more recent years, Russian propaganda under plutocratic oligarchy has often come to be associated with right wing conspiracy.

Since 2010, RT has been used to spread the “*inside job*” or “*false flag*” conspiracy theory of September 11, 2001 in alignment with an increasingly conspiratorial approach to anti-Americanism (Yablokov 2015). The inside job theory argues that American intelligence (usually the CIA) was responsible for 9/11. Since 2014, other Kremlin-aligned media outlets like *Veterans Today* have spread material attributable to Russian sources which claimed that Vladimir Putin “*threatens to release satellite evidence of 9/11*” which would reveal it had been a so-called ‘inside job’. (Duff 2015, Schreckinger 2017). Prior to the 2016 ‘election hacking’, which began to publicly associate Russian cyber operations with 9/11-scale national security risks, this was one of the most relevant search results returned for ‘Russia AND 9/11’ on Google (Hotchkiss 2017).

The inside job narrative seems to have originally emerged from the network of right-wing conspiracist Alex Jones in July 2001; several months before 9/11 when he began to discuss false flag terrorism in the context of the US government (Stahl 2011). While it cannot be determined today that Russia had any influence on Alex Jones’ 2001-era conspiracy theories, it is observed that by 2018 he has posted more than 1000 RT articles at his site *InfoWars*, has had regular interactions with figures like the Vladimir Putin-linked ideologist Alexander Dugin, and promoted many of the same conspiracy theories which have come to be associated with Russian propaganda (Friday 2017, Hananoki 2017). In this same vein, *InfoWars* was brought into the scope of the Russian election meddling investigation for how its stories were used by Russian bots (Stone & Gordon 2017).

Another conspiracy theory which emerged shortly after 9/11 and can be traced to Russia is that of the “*4,000 Jews Stayed Home*” conspiracy; which argues the Israeli Mossad was responsible for 9/11, and had warned Jewish workers to avoid the site of the disaster. Less than 24 hours after the attacks, conspiracies about a Jewish connection began to circulate. The allegations seem to have appeared in the press first in the Syrian-government owned newspaper *Al Thawra* on 15 September, before it spread to the Assad-facilitated, Lebanese Hezbollah TV station *Al Manar* (17 September), and then by 21 September 2001 the allegations were printed in Russia’s *Pravda* (Curtis 2001, USDS 2005,1). While subsequent research shows that a statistically normal sample of New Yorkers died on 9/11; this rumor has persisted. As recently as 2005, a copy of the debunked theory appeared in a copy of *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* which had been approved by the Syrian Ministry of Information (USDS 2005,2).

Nostradamus in the Context of Psychological Warfare and Conspiracism

Much like the history of conspiracy theory in Cold War-era propaganda and modern ‘information warfare’, Nostradamus prophecies have a long history of employment in psychological operations. During WW2, both the Axis and the Allies employed Nostradamus prophecies in order to justify their own positions and attack their enemies – often deploying altered prophecies behind enemy lines in order to

damage morale. However, Nostradamus prophecies had previously been used for ‘disinformative’ purposes over hundreds of years of European history (Wilson 2007).

The use of political prophecy was common in the 16th century Europe of Michel de Nostredame; much as it had been allegedly used by early Christians in the *Book of Revelation* to undermine the political establishment of the Roman Empire. Similar observations have prompted one researcher of Medieval European literature to astutely note “*before fake news came false prophecy*” (Weiskott 2017).

This paper will adopt Fenster’s (2008) conceptualization of popular eschatology in order to explain Nostradamus prophecies within a theoretical framework of conspiracism. Popular eschatology is studied primarily within the context of Christian belief systems, and the linking of the coming millennium to conservative political action. (However, it should be noted clearly here that apocalyptic prophecy forms the basis for political action in non-Christian extremist groups as well, such as ISIS.)

According to Fenster (2008), popular eschatology acts as a set of “*interpretive practices and master narrative that overlaps with and is quite similar to that of right-wing conspiracy theory*” (p. 15), and though distinct from secular conspiracism, popular eschatology likewise “*invites an interpretation of historical events within a mechanistic theory of power*” (p.198).

Christian popular eschatology relates to the anticipated postmillennial return of Jesus Christ; making salient strong pro-Zionist (yet also anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim) beliefs that link a restored Israel to the so-called ‘end times’ and apocalyptic battle with the antichrist. While popular eschatology shares “*militaristic patriotism, fears of a one-world government, [and] virulent anticommunism*” (p. 226) with secular conservative conspiracism, and “*often echoes and at times explicitly borrows, the theories of more secular right-wing conspiracy theorists*” (p. 198), it does differ in that the religious conspiratorial eschatology encourages the “*perverse desire for the conspiracy’s victory*” (Fenster 2008, p. 15).

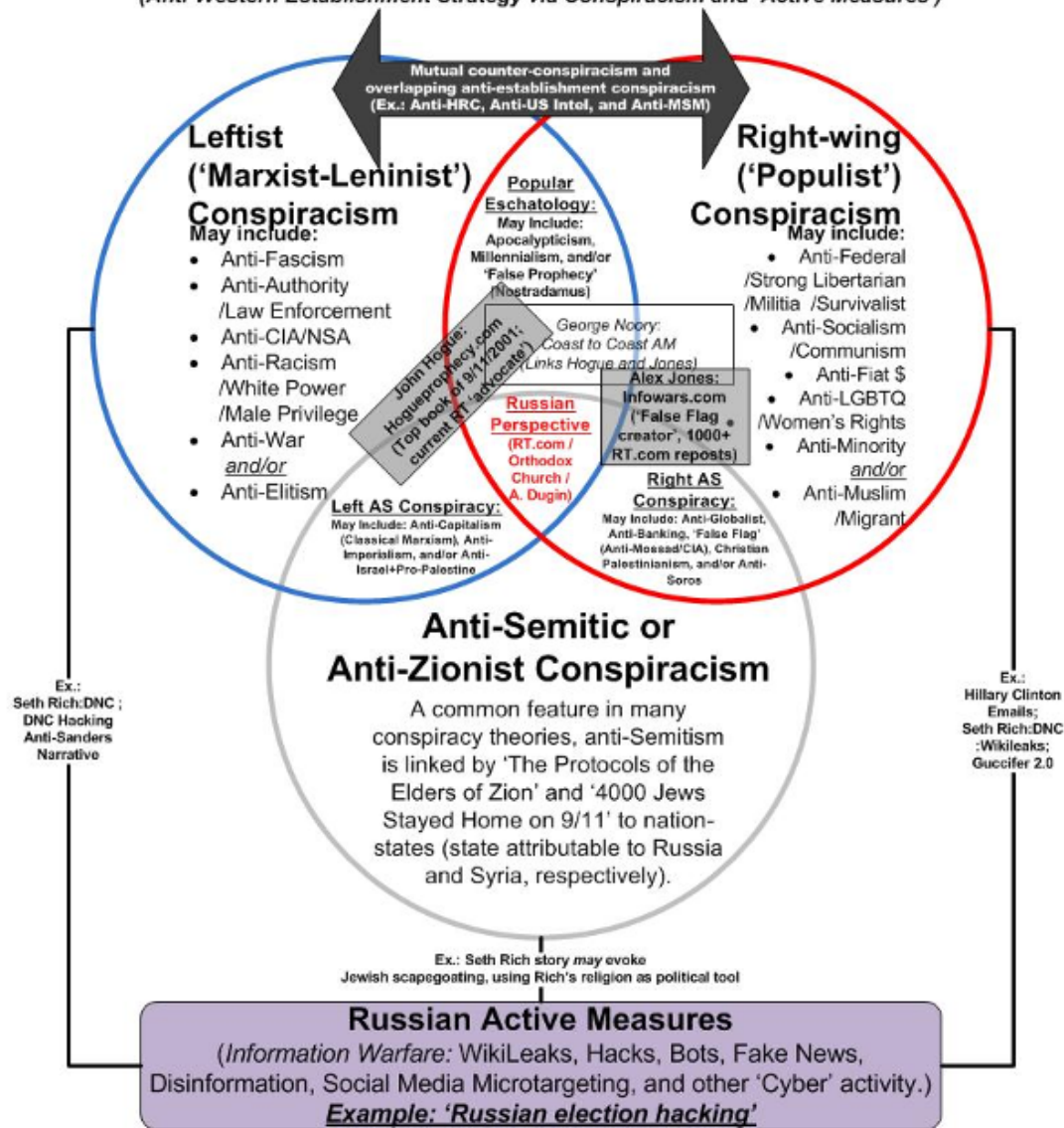
Perhaps the best-known conspiracy theory of all-time, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* was a concoction of the late 19th century Russian secret police (the Okhrana), and has remained an evolving staple of right-wing anti-Semitic conspiracism ever since. Much like popular eschatology, *The Protocols* play on medieval anti-Semitic beliefs about apocalyptic plans for world domination – and emerged as a so-called “*pogrom weapon*” from the ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church as represented by members of the Tsarist secret police (Wolf 1921). *The Protocols* spread worldwide following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia on the back of rising anti-Semitism associated with response to that movement.

While not inherently Christian, Nostradamus prophecies can be classified in terms of their interest to secular groups of individuals who are consumers of apocalyptic and eschatological information such as the prophecies of Jeanne Dixon, novels like the *Left Behind* series, or Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* (Fenster 2008). The prophecies make salient many concepts from Christian apocalyptic texts, such as popular interpretations that Nostradamus had foretold the end date of the world, or the return of a “*Great King of Terror*”, “*King of the Mongols*” in 1999 who was popularly equated with and anticipated as the antichrist.

Below is an example model of conspiracism (Figure 1) created by the author which locates popular eschatology in the overlap between the persistent legacy of left-wing Marxist-Leninist conspiracism attributable to Soviet-era active measures with that of the right-wing ‘Populist’ active measures of Vladimir Putin’s Russia; underlaid by the classical legacy of Tsarist anti-Semitic conspiracy (and such modern examples as the “*4000 Jews Stayed Home*” myth). An example of the ‘Seth Rich conspiracy’ which is most likely attributable to Russian propaganda is considered within the context of the “*2016 US election hacking*” as having influence on multiple dimensions of conspiracism which may be useful to Russian information strategy (Schindler 2016). Exposes of Russian ads that ran in the 2016 election show that Russia frequently agitates both sides of debates, a concept which has been acknowledged by current FBI Director Christopher Wray (Tiku 2017, Reichmann & Butler 2018).

Political Model of Post-9/11 Conspiracism in Interest of 'Russian Perspective'

(Anti-Western Establishment Strategy via Conspiracism and 'Active Measures')



The three major viral attributable post-9/11 conspiracy theories are: 1.) 'Nostradamus' (John Hogue + hoax emails and texts of unknown origin), 2.) 'False Flag' (Alex Jones), and 3.) '4000 Jews Stayed Home' (Syrian Government). Following these influencers since 9/11 reveals close parallels to Russian philosophical leanings in their narratives.

Figure 1. Model of Russian Conspiracism

How did an irrational association that Nostradamus predicted 9/11 come to exist? It seems to be due to the legacy of Russian propaganda and figures connected to the Cambridge Five spy ring – the film director and self-described 'magician' Orson Welles and the 'controversial' Nostradamus interpreter Erika Cheetham. Welles and Cheetham collaborated on the 1981 Nostradamus film "The Man Who Saw

Tomorrow” (Noble 1998, Wolper 1981). In elaborating their backgrounds relative to this film, we may see how the movie benefited Russian propaganda strategy and the role it plays in 9/11 conspiracism.

COLD WAR RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ROOTS OF THE MAN WHO SAW TOMORROW

Orson Welles, Anti-Fascist Propagandist Connected to the Cambridge Five and Other Russian Intelligence Agents

Before WWII, Orson Welles was involved in propaganda, a fact which he was conscious of, and of the difference between propaganda and art (Wollaeger 2006). Welles’ first foray into propaganda seems to be as the original narrator in the Communist-inspired Joris Iven’s film *The Spanish Earth* (1936) which was an anti-fascist film about the Spanish Civil War written by Ernest Hemingway (identified as a Soviet asset by the Vassiliev notebooks) (Haynes 2014). Later, Welles made anti-fascist interpretations of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (1937), and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1939).

Citizen Kane (1941) was deemed potential communist propaganda by the FBI and Welles likely portrayed William Randolph Hearst in a fascist light via the eponymous Charles Foster Kane character. Welles carried the anti-fascist theme into the post-war years with *The Stranger* (1946), about a murderous escaped Nazi who became a teacher at a postwar Connecticut boarding school (Denning 1998).

Welles had also been commissioned to make anti-fascist propaganda for the U.S. during WWII. His (officially unreleased) documentary film *It’s all True* (shot over 1941-1942) was for the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and intended to resist Nazi efforts in South and Central America (Wollaeger 2006).

Out of concern about Communist intentions in *Citizen Kane*, the FBI opened a file on Welles, eventually linking him to multiple fronts of the Communist Party (CPUSA) via his involvement in the Hollywood ‘Popular Front’ (Denning 1998). Welles appeared as a speaker at CPUSA events with figures like I.F. Stone (also identified as a Soviet asset by the Vassiliev notebooks) (Haynes 2014).

Welles’ self-described “*political mentor*” in the early 1940’s was Louis Dolivet (aliases Ludovici Udeanu and Ludwig Brecher; 1908-1989) (Leaming 1995). Dolivet was a close associate of Willi Munzenberg, Otto Katz, and Pierre Cot and was identified in the Vassiliev notebooks as a Soviet agent (Haynes 2014). During the 1930’s Dolivet was active in leading NKVD and Comintern anti-fascist agents in France. Dolivet also worked with the Russian spy Noel Field; and through this network, a number of French Popular Front figures made their way to the USA (Marnham 2015). Dolivet produced the magazine *Free World* and was married to the heiress Beatrice Straight, sister of Michael Straight: the only American member of the Cambridge Five spy ring. Dolivet introduced Welles to Michael Straight during this time (Denning 1998, Perry 2005).

Dolivet had goals to make Welles into either a UN official or a politician, and through Dolivet’s connections in 1944 Welles campaigned for FDR and (CPUSA-compromised) Henry Wallace (later editor of Michael Straight’s *New Republic*) (Leaming 1995). FDR had welcomed the efforts of foreign anti-fascist propagandists supporting U.S. entry into WWII. Despite his proximity to the FDR-Wallace administration, following FDR’s death, Welles left for Europe in 1947 seemingly due to pressure from authorities for his political views.

Though unable to prove he was communist, the FBI listed him as a national security risk and he was named to the *Red Channels* list in 1950 (McBride 2013). His publicly available FBI file is more than 200 pages, detailing many connections to Soviet front groups and Communist-connected individuals. During his blacklisting, one of Welles’ first roles was to play Harry Lime in Sir Alexander Korda’s production of screenwriter Graham Greene’s *The Third Man* (1949). *The Third Man* was based on the exploits of Kim

Philby and H.P. Smolka (main alias Peter Smollett), members of the Cambridge Five. Prior to scriptwriting for Korda, Greene worked directly for Philby in the intelligence services, and many of the ideas for the criminal rackets in the film (and Welles' character) came from Smolka's input (Foges 2016). (Both Welles and Smolka were on George Orwell's list of crypto-communists. Greene had earlier been a registered member of the Communist Party in Britain, which caused him to be denied entry to the U.S. in 1952.)

Alexander Korda's studio was described by British Security Coordination (BSC) operative H. Montgomery Hyde as a "*clearinghouse for British Intelligence*" (Hyde 1982); and Welles' FBI file shows his association with Korda gained their attention relative to film productions planned for Russia.

Korda had connections to Russian espionage and a history of producing anti-fascist cinema. He was the employer of the Soviet spy Moura Budberg during the 1930-40's. She had met Lenin, appeared publicly at the side of Stalin, and been the lover of both Maxim Gorky and H.G. Wells. She facilitated the prior work between H.G. Wells (former head of anti-German WW1 propaganda in Britain) and Korda to develop the propaganda film *Things to Come* (1936). This was around the time she was under the control of NKVD (a KGB-predecessor) leader Genrikh Yagoda (Day 2014). When questioned by British intelligence over her espionage connections in 1951, Budberg provided information implicating Cambridge Five members Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt (Tweedie & Day 2002). Altogether, there is strong evidence that Welles' work for Alexander Korda overlapped a network with the Cambridge Five spies.

In the early to mid-1950's Welles became dependent on financing from Dolivet. Welles also relied on another producer who was a suspected former Soviet GPU/OGPU intelligence asset: Michael Olian (aliases Michel Olian, Michel Oliansky, Michel Holianski; 1897-1967) (Callow 2016, Wisner 1953). Welles' concept for *Confidential Report: Mr. Arkadin* (released 1955) was developed in 1951 and inspired by Olian and Josef Stalin (Callow 2016). According to a CIA informant, at this time Olian was rumored to be handling "*large sums of money for the Soviet Union*" and "*dealing in war materials on a large scale*" (Wisner 1953). Olian provided Welles with shelter and contributed \$200,000 to Welles' struggling production of Shakespeare's *Othello* (1951) (Callow 2016). Dolivet later produced and bankrolled *Mr. Arkadin* (Gear 2016).

Welles' projects close to 1981 (when *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* released) aligned with anti-fascist conspiratorial themes. In 1975, Welles assumed creative control of the film *Sirhan Sirhan or RFK Must Die* (unreleased), which he co-wrote with "*left wing activist*" Donald Freed. Freed had been a co-writer of the 1973 conspiracy thriller *Executive Action* with the blacklisted Hollywood writer Dalton Trumbo; a film which was a spiritual predecessor of sorts to Oliver Stone's *JFK* (Gear 2015, Burr 1992). The scripts implied U.S. intelligence agency involvement in the Kennedy assassinations. This is a theme uncovered in the *Mitrokhin Archive* – at least in the case of John F. Kennedy – to be Soviet disinformation (Andrew 2000). The script for *Sirhan Sirhan* was about a mind-control plot causing the Robert F. Kennedy assassination. The script portrays the assassin sympathetically and equates U.S. intelligence with "*Nazis*", suggesting involvement of the "*New Orleans Mafia and the CIA*" in the assassination (Gear 2015).

Following the 1981 Nostradamus movie, Welles was a prominent speaker at the massive peace rally that accompanied the June 12, 1982 United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD-II) in New York, an event which contemporary FBI reports stated "*Soviet-controlled organizations participated at the highest levels*" and "*nearly every instrument of Soviet active measures was directed towards infiltrating and influencing*" (Congressional 1983, Rhodes 1982).

Erika Cheetham, Controversial Interpreter of Nostradamus

Erika Cheetham's background is less clearly tied to Russian espionage/propaganda. However, she was known by a future British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) agent at Oxford as a leftist and she associated with students (known to one another as "*comrades*") that included James Greene (nephew of Graham Greene), Kingsley Shorter (a future Russian interpreter at the UN), Perry Anderson, and Quintin Hoare (who both went on to become editors of the 'Western Marxist' *New Left Review* journal) (Hagger 2015).

Apparent claims of Cheetham's books in the 1980s and 1990s (with no need to read the book itself, only examine the cover) suggested that Nostradamus had predicted the deaths of JFK and RFK, the rise of Middle Eastern terrorist figures, nuclear war/third world war, the AIDS epidemic, a rise in earthquakes, as well as "*the rise and fall of the Third Reich*" (Cheetham 1983, Cheetham 1989, Cheetham 1991). Once again, many of these themes have close parallels with concepts suggested as Soviet active measures in the *Mitrokhin Archive*, exposes of the World Peace Council, as well as parallels with WWII anti-fascist propaganda (Andrew 2000). The film even considers the Spanish Civil war in an anti-fascist context.

A 1989 Australian TV version of *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* titled *Nostradamus: The Final Chapter* implied that the CIA was involved in the JFK assassination which was not clearly illustrated in the 1981 version (Drane 1989). Both versions discussed grassy knoll conspiracy theories; suggesting Lee Harvey Oswald in the words of Nostradamus is "*innocent of the deed*" and that the Warren Report was dubious/faulty (Orson Welles did not narrate Australian edition, but much of footage, including the voice of Nostradamus is the same, and Cheetham appears in this version).

It is apparent that Cheetham emerges from a similar network of figures close to the Cambridge Five spy ring as did Welles, and her books call particular attention to some of the most notable active measures concepts of the Cold War era, but put them in a conspiratorial eschatological anti-fascist context.

NOSTRADAMUS CONSPIRACISM IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA

The 9/11 Nostradamus Hoax: A Blend of Fake Nostradamus and Baba Vanga?

Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, several fake Nostradamus prophecies circulated on the internet claiming the 16th century seer had predicted the crisis. An example of a 'Nostradamus' prophecy which appeared in the *soc.culture.palestine* newsgroup one day after 9/11 read:

In the City of God there will be a great thunder, Two brothers torn apart by Chaos, while the fortress endures, the great leader will succumb, The third big war will begin when the big city is burning. – Nostradamus 1654

...on the 11 day of the 9 month that... two metal birds would crash into two tall statues... in the new city... and the world will end soon after

From the book of Nostradamus (Emery 2018)

Notwithstanding the first portion was a *five-line* quatrain signed Nostradamus 1654 (88 years after Nostradamus' death), the first four lines had been written in a Nostradamus-debunking essay in 1997. The fifth line was added by the unidentified hoaxer(s) in 2001 (Wilson 2007). The idea of 'metal birds' in the second part doesn't seem to appear in any prior Nostradamus prophecy though – real or fake.

Another example:

Two steel birds will fall from the sky on the Metropolis. The sky will burn at forty-five degrees latitude. Fire approaches the great new city (New York City lies between 40-45 degrees)

Immediately a huge, scattered flame leaps up. Within months, rivers will flow with blood. The undead will roam earth for little time. (Emery 2018)

The incorrect idea that Nostradamus predicted a “45 degrees” attack on New York City is primarily attributable to the film *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* and Cheetham’s controversial interpretations. In the film, Welles suggests that Nostradamus foresaw a terror attack by Muslim extremists between 1994 and 1999.

The film introduces a controversial version of Nostradamus’ Century X, Quatrain 72 as interpreted by Cheetham: “*In the year 1999 and seven months; From the sky will come the great King of Terror. He will bring back to life the King of the Mongols; Before and after, war reigns.*” (Wolper 1981)

In original 1555 French editions, the Century X, Quatrain 72 prophecy reads:

L’an mil neuf cens nonante neuf sept mois; Du ciel viendra un grand Roi deffraieur. Resusciter le grand Roi d’Angolmois. Avant apres que Mars regner par bon heur.

(Translated: *In the year 1999 and Seven Months; From the sky will come the Great Appeaser King to resurrect the king of Angolmois; Mars reigns after by good fortune.*)

Cheetham’s view is controversial because her interpretation of the French included substantial differences with Nostradamus’ original text. In the original editions for example, the term ‘deffraieur’ (appeaser) was used instead of the term ‘d’effrayeur’ (terror). Cheetham also interpreted ‘Angolmois’ as an anagram for ‘Mongols’ (translated from the pseudo-French anagram ‘Mongolois’). Critics have postulated that Angolmois is a better analogue for ‘Angoumois’ (or Angouleme), a region of France in Nostradamus’ time (Wilson 2007).

Returning to the 1981 film, Welles intones: “*Nostradamus names the first target, a great new city around 45 degrees latitude — experts agree that that could only mean New York*” (apparently taken from Nostradamus’ Century VI, Quatrain 97, lines 1-2). The arguments in this part of the film are a breathlessly narrated amalgamation of partial verses of Nostradamus, which are apparently only connected by Cheetham’s notably controversial interpretive focus.

In a similar disjointed narration related to the NYC attack, the film uses ‘snippets’ of Nostradamus prophecy to argue that an Islamic “*Antichrist*” would be responsible. “*Out of the country of greater Arabia shall be born a strong master of Mohammedan law*” (Century V, Quatrain 55, lines 1-2). “*This king will enter Europe wearing a blue turban*” (Century IX, Quatrain 73, line 1) ... (Wolper 1981).

This fake prophecy, like the online prophecies -- seems to have supported a view of the attacks as being foretold by Nostradamus; and likely to explain the public interest in Nostradamus, quantitatively reflected in increased sales of Nostradamus merchandise and its performance as a search term in 2001 (Figure 2). In keeping with the 2001 Nostradamus-mania, NY Daily News reported personnel from the search engine Lycos saying “*Nostradamus received more searches in one week than any other subject [since we began tracking it] two years ago*”. It was also the top search on Yahoo and Google (Megna 2001).

Top 10 Queries Related to Terrorist Attacks: Sept. 11, 2001	Top 10 Gaining Queries: Week Ending Sept. 13, 2001	Top 10 Gaining Queries: Sept. 2001	Top 10 Gaining Queries: 2001 (Taken from list of Top 20 Gaining Queries)
1. cnn	1. <i>nostradamus</i>	1. <i>nostradamus</i>	1. <i>nostradamus</i>
2. world trade center	2. cnn	2. cnn	2. cnn
3. bbc	3. world trade center	3. world trade center	3. world trade center
4. pentagon	4. osama bin laden	4. osama bin laden	4. harry potter
5. msnbc	5. pentagon	5. taliban	5. anthrax
6. osama bin laden	6. fbi	6. afghanistan	6. windows xp
7. <i>nostradamus</i>	7. american red cross	7. nimda	7. osama bin laden
8. american airlines	8. american airlines	8. american flag	8. audiogalaxy
9. fbi	9. afghanistan	9. bbc	9. taliban
10. barbara olson	10. american flag	10. fbi	10. loft story
Sources:			
(1) "Search Statistics Related to September 11, 2001" https://archive.google.com/press/zeitgeist/9-11-search.html			
(2) "2001 Year-End Google Zeitgeist" https://archive.google.com/press/zeitgeist2001.html			

Figure 2: 2001 Google Searches

In the days following 9/11, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* was the number one selling film on Amazon. The top selling book was John Hogue's *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, and Hogue himself has said the 1981 Welles film was a major motivation for his own interpretations of prophecy (Elder 2001, Hogue 2011). Much like Alex Jones' prescient July 2001 discussions of false flag conspiracy; Hogue in June 2001 popularized an idea on his website *Hoghueprophecy.com* that Osama Bin Laden might be the supposed "third antichrist" foretold by Nostradamus (Hogue 2001).

In 2014, following Russia's annexation of Ukraine, Hogue made his media preferences abundantly clear: "These days, the only networks that give some critical journalism on television are American news bureaus of overseas networks. One of these happens to be RT (Russia Today), along with Al-Jazeera and to a lesser extent BBC WORLD" (Hogue 2014).

While it does not suggest Hogue's open collaboration with any foreign government, Hogue does openly admit that the English-language bureaus of government-operated RT and *Al-Jazeera* are his preferred media outlets. When the US government forced RT to register as a foreign agent in 2017, Hogue compared the action to both communist and fascist censorship, declaring: "A year ago, I foresaw the potential that the last real news network on television would have its plug pulled by the US government in 2018" (Hogue 2017).

Since at least 1999, Russia has been advancing the idea of Osama Bin Laden in association with a war on terrorism; and claimed to have repeatedly warned US authorities in the months preceding the 9/11 attacks (AFP 2001, Jamestown 1999). Hogue's focus on state media today, and Osama Bin Laden in June 2001 may be indicative of his earlier consumption of Russian media narratives.

In addition to reflecting clear fabrications of Nostradamus prophecy, the 9/11 fakes also included apparent elements of Baba Vanga prophecy. Baba Vanga (d. 1996) was a Nostradamus-like Eastern European mystic who is "extremely popular in Russia", and who according to Sputnik News, successfully predicted the 2000 Kursk disaster, the 9/11 attacks, and even Vladimir Putin's succession of Boris Yeltsin (Sputnik 2010).

Modern tabloids have claimed that Baba Vanga predicted the 9/11 attacks by saying "Horror, horror! The American brethren will fall after being attacked by the steel birds. The wolves will be howling in a bush, and innocent blood will be gushing" (Maloney 2017).

It seems likely that at least some of the 2001 hoax prophecies integrated aspects of Vanga’s Eastern Orthodox mysticism borrowed from the idea of ‘steel birds’ or ‘metal birds’; as well as core Nostradamus themes popularized by Cheetham. In 2018 it would seem that the main Nostradamus promoter who benefited from the 2001 prophecies is an ardent defender of Russian state media.

Perhaps it should also not be so controversial to consider Orson Welles, who had legendarily executed the 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio hoax, or who had been the auteur behind the hoax-film *F for Fake* (1974), as having been involved in other media activities which might have intentionally led to public panics. Afterall, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* had already been associated with a prior 1988 ‘earthquake hoax’ in Los Angeles posthumous to Welles’ 1985 death (Abrams 1988).

Other Web Search Data Linking Russia to Nostradamus

In addition to spiking during the 9/11 attacks, Nostradamus has since become a viral trend in regions which are engaged in geopolitical struggles objectively involving Russia in Eastern Europe.

While some of the global and regional spikes in increased Nostradamus interest can be attributed to natural disasters or cultural events, they can also be tied to geopolitical crises. Three crises which led to world-leading spikes are the April 2010 spike in Poland, the March 2014 spike in Ukraine, and the August 2015 spike in Hungary.

The following Google Trends representations were performed with the capitalized term ‘Nostradamus’, currently subcategorized as ‘French Physician’ (at times it may also be subcategorized as ‘Apothecary’). Data was exported for the worldwide trend and the top three regional trends and combined on a single spreadsheet. Data was charted after transforming the #2 and #3 ranked regions returned for the sample according to their proportion to the #1 rank. (Because the data returned for a query in these instances is an unbiased random sample of non-real time Google Search data, your results might vary slightly) (Google 2017). Google also tells us related topics and searches for these spikes, which helps attribute them to a cause.

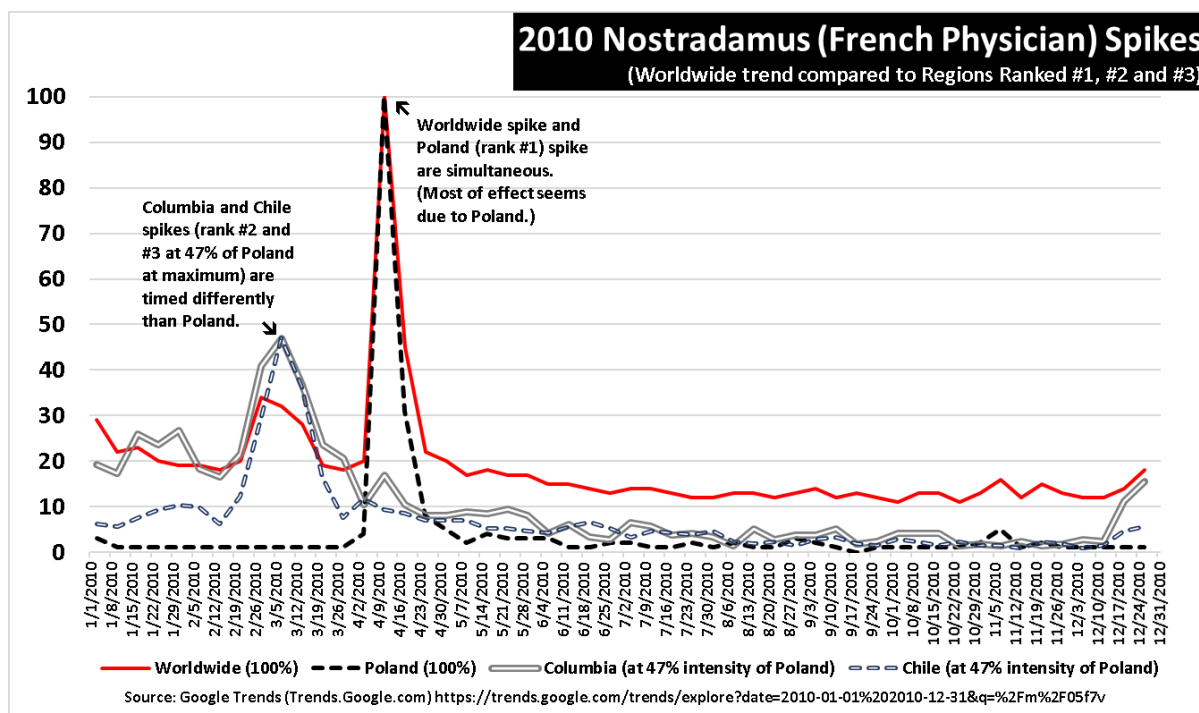


Figure 3: 2010 Google Trends spike comparison

In 2010, an 11-17 April maximum spike was recorded on a worldwide basis and simultaneously in Poland (Figure 3). This was caused by an association between Nostradamus and the death of the Polish President Lech Kaczynski (and other executive branch personnel) in a plane crash at Smolensk, Russia on 10 April 2010. Lower rank regions did not spike at the same time. The majority of the global effect is due to Polish interest.

Immediately following this catastrophe, it was attributed to a faked prediction of Nostradamus (including a reference to a ‘metal bird’; and associated searches with ‘Baba Vanga’ (Google 2017)). Simultaneously, conspiracy theories blaming the Russian government for the disaster emerged (Adamski 2010). At the time of this writing, there are legal efforts underway in Poland to prosecute the disaster as a criminal act by Russians. (Baba Vanga was a closely related topic according to Google Trends.)

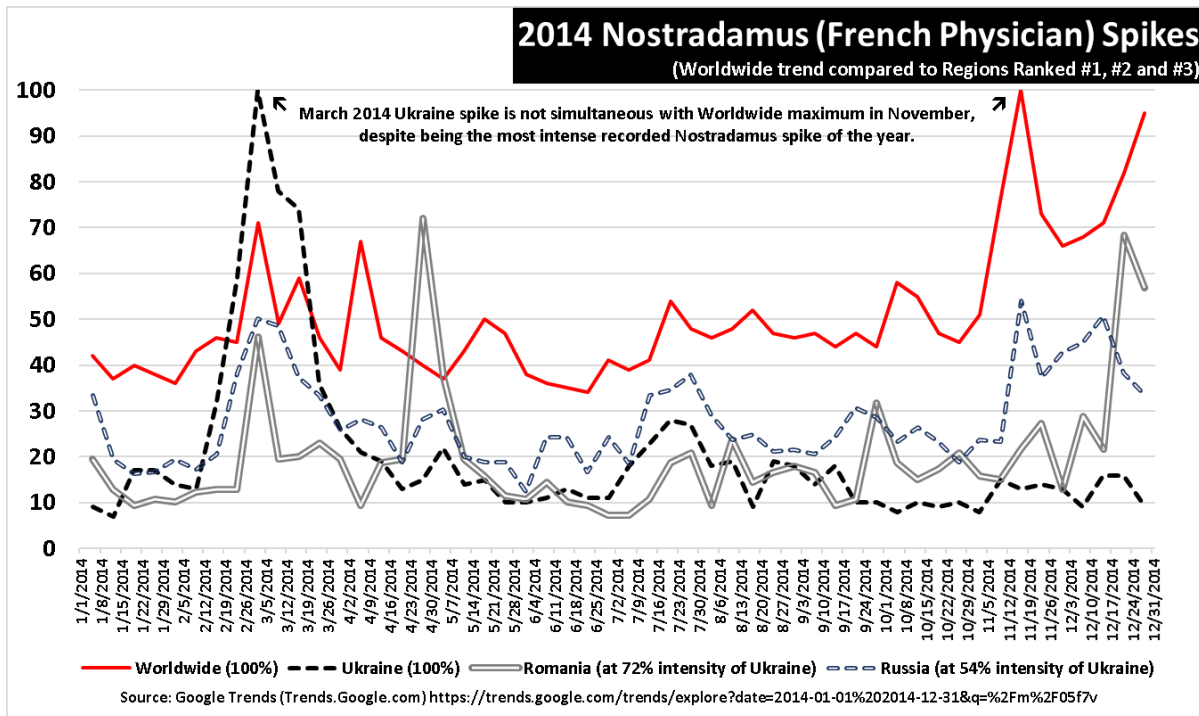


Figure 4: 2014 Google Trends spike comparison

In 2014, the top worldwide spike in Nostradamus interest occurred from 16-22 November (seemingly due to interest in solving Nostradamus-themed puzzles in an ‘Assassin’s Creed’ videogame); but the #1 region in the world for proportional Nostradamus interest was Ukraine (Figure 4). However, this is a ‘wide’ spike and it began in mid-February continuing through March, where it peaked from 2-8 March before subsiding. Within two days of the approval of the use of force by the Russian Duma, the spike escalated to maximum. There was no clear ‘hoax’ found relating to this spike. Many former Soviet Bloc countries (especially Belarus and Ukraine), associate the apocalypse with Nostradamus (Christensen 1998). We cannot say for sure that Russia prompted this spike with information warfare tactics or if it was driven by cultural factors, but we can confidently say that Russia is involved in this spike in public interest in Nostradamus in Ukraine.

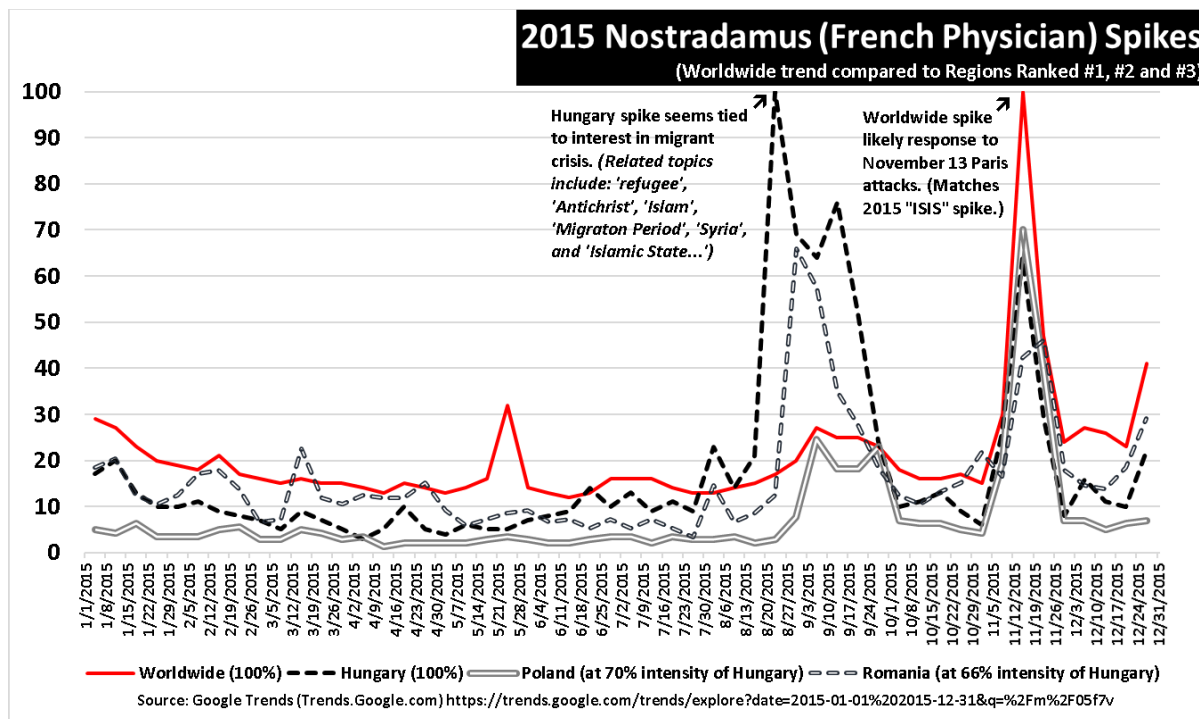


Figure 5: 2015 Google Trends spike comparison

In 2015, the highest worldwide spike in Nostradamus interest occurred from 15-21 November (and seems tied to the Paris terror attacks); but the #1 region in the world for proportional Nostradamus interest was Hungary (Figure 5). The Hungary spike occurred 23-29 August and continued through early September. It was connected to the Syrian migrant crisis, in which former NATO Commander Philip Breedlove claimed that Russia was “deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve” (Higgins 2016). A sample of 17 related searches from the time of the spike in Hungary includes: “World War III”, “refugee”, “Antichrist”, “Islam”, “Migration Period”, “Syria”, and “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (Google 2017). These terms correspond to the ‘Islamic Antichrist’ interpretation of Nostradamus. The signing of a military agreement between Russia and Syria occurred on 26 August. (A secondary, less intense spike in Hungary in November parallels the global spike.)

Further providing a quantitative basis to attribute information operations involving Nostradamus to Russia, a 2017 webometric study of Google Hit Count Estimates (HCEs) for a sample of 38 top level domains (TLD) and a sample of 38 global news sites found that there was a significantly higher ratio of pages on the Russian TLD *.ru than on other compared TLDs with the term Nostradamus (regional alphabet) (Figure 6). Additionally, of the tested news sites, Russia was unique not only for its proportion of Nostradamus stories, but for treating such figures as Nostradamus with credulity rather than the skepticism they are often ascribed in the West (Hotchkiss 2018).

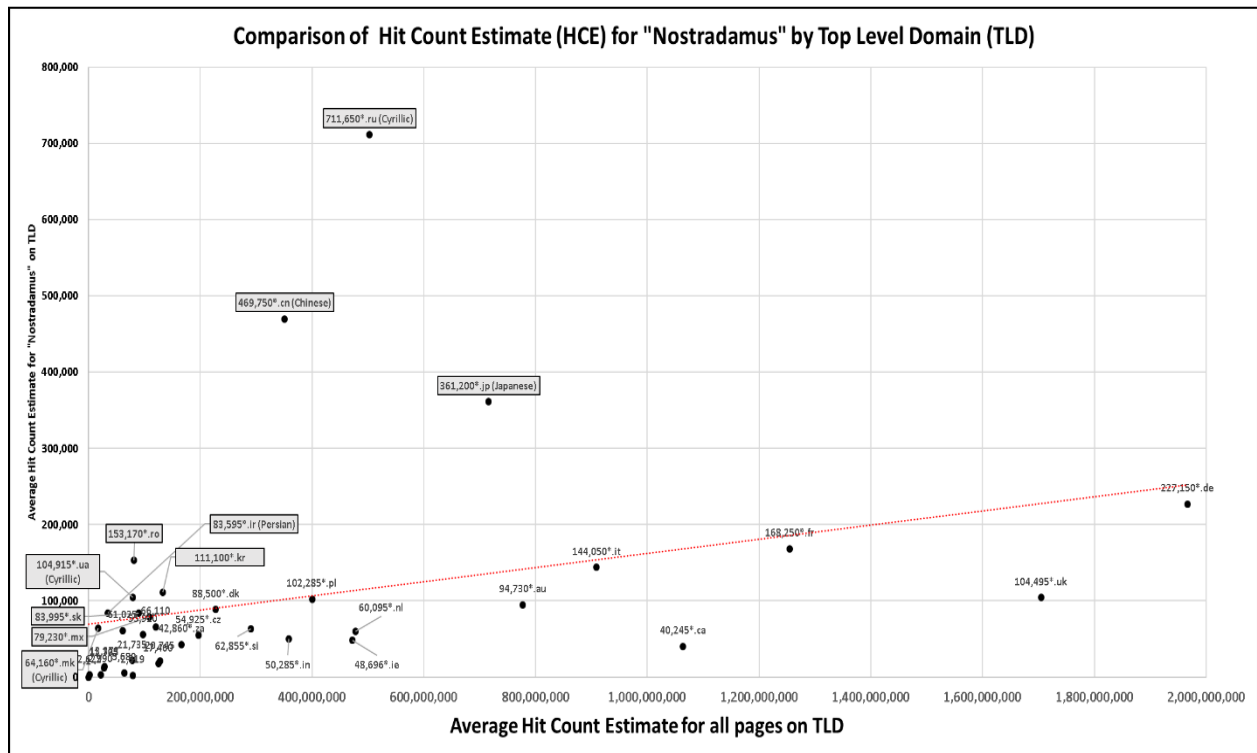


Figure 6: Comparison of global Top Level Domain (TLD) sample of Google Hit Count Estimates (HCEs) for Nostradamus indicating disproportionate Russian content

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Two areas of current interest for researchers of Russian strategy relate to Russia’s involvement in the Syrian Civil War; as well as the classification of Vladimir Putin’s system of government as contrasted with the preexisting Tsarist and Soviet systems. These are areas which the study of conspiracism related to 9/11 conspiracy and Nostradamus may once again be informative in terms of predicting and explaining Russian behavior patterns.

Syrian ‘Chemical Weapons False Flag’ Narratives

Alex Jones and John Hogue have also been centrally involved in promoting RT content, as well as promoting the idea of a ‘Syrian chemical weapons false flag’ in concert with RT.

On 10 June 2012, RT ran the story ‘*Syrian rebels aim to use chemical weapons, blame Damascus*’, which claimed rebels had acquired Libyan chemical weapons (RT 2012). It claims to have sourced the story from *Dampress.net*, which is a Syrian-government friendly news site based in Damascus. (This story was also reported on 10-11 June 2012 on *InfoWars* and the conspiracy website *GlobalResearch*, citing *RT*.) Achieving what must have been an initially strong run of disinformation, the story was picked up by the UK’s *Daily Mail* around 28 January 2013 before it was deleted (it cited *InfoWars* as the primary source) (Palma 2017).

The RT report may have been the first English-language press report linking chemical weapons in Syria with Western-backed rebels. Within two months, then-US President Barack Obama would be warning the

Bashar al-Assad regime that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would constitute a “red line” justifying a Western military response.

Continuing this theme, John Hogue claimed on 29 April 2013 that chemical weapons attacks officially attributed to the Bashar al-Assad regime were the cover for a ‘false flag’ by Western-backed rebels of the Free Syrian Army (Hogue 2013,1). In August 2013, Hogue cited (as valid) Russian reports on chemical weapons used in Syria as inconsistent with the chemical composition of official Syrian stockpiles, and denigrated United Nations testimony on chemical weapons given by then-US president Barack Obama (Hogue 2013,2).

Also, contemporaneously to Hogue, on 2 May 2013, on the *Al-Jazeera* (Qatari government) owned *CurrentTV*, former US defense official Lawrence Wilkerson claimed it had been an “Israeli false flag” (Shalev 2013).

Appearing 4 September 2013 on the widely syndicated conspiracy radio show *Coast to Coast AM*, which claims to reach “three million weekly listeners”, host George Noory introduced John Hogue as having predicted “using astrological methods” in July 2013 that “we would eventually learn” the chemical attacks were a “rebel false flag” (there was no emphasis on the RT story, *CurrentTV*, or *InfoWars*) (Noory 2013). Noory, who regularly hosts Alex Jones on his show and appears on *InfoWars*, has been observed by some credible Marxist commentators to be consistently “Assadist” and a proponent of “Baathist rule” citing this appearance by Hogue as specific evidence (Proyekt 2014).

Within a week, RT again claimed the ‘false flag’ angle regarding Syrian rebels (RT 2013); bringing the narrative full circle shortly before the Russia-led UN Security Council Resolution 2118 on chemical weapons in Syria was implemented on 27 September.

Today, the *Center for Research on Globalization* is being investigated by NATO’s *Strategic Communications Centre* as a front for Russian disinformation (Clark 2017). Alex Jones’ *InfoWars*, which has recently been banned on many social media networks, is allegedly under similar scrutiny from the FBI (Stone & Gordon 2017). It is unknown if John Hogue is under similar scrutiny due to his generally lower and generally insignificant profile. Hogue’s prior perspectives on prophecy may indicate however that his 2001-era predictions were influenced by Russian information; certainly, beyond an affinity for RT and Al Jazeera, his perspectives on prophecy seem iterative from the views of Orson Welles and Erika Cheatham by self-admission (Hogue 2011).

Complementary from a ‘Nostradamus prophecy’ perspective related to the situation in Syria, in August 2015 Russian state-news agency Sputnik published a Turkish language story that said Nostradamus foretold the Islamic State (Sputnik 2015). After Turkish warplanes shot down a Russian jet in November 2015, RT ran a Russian language story from an affiliate saying a “Greek Nostradamus” had foretold Russians restoring Constantinople to Greece (Gazprom-owned NTV ran a similar story in December 2015) (RT 2015). While these sites do not apparently peddle English-language Nostradamus prophecies, they are notable as state-propaganda organs that give credibility to prophecy. In this case, the prophecies seem tailored to a conflict with a regional rival.

1999 Russian Terror Attacks

The ideas of apocalypse and antichrist in former Soviet-bloc countries are deeply culturally ingrained concepts associated with millennial/centennial mythologies. This has synergy with the popular eschatological prophecies of Nostradamus.

For example, a 1996 survey found that a significant number of people from Belarus believed that Nostradamus predicted the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, and that it heralded the coming apocalypse (Christensen 1998). Before Perestroika, references giving credibility to Nostradamus in the context of “political murders” and “revolutions” were published in Soviet journals which should have been

censored at the time (JPRS 1978). In the post-Soviet period, Nostradamus has continued to be associated with ‘poor religion’ or ‘*bednaya religiya*’ in Russia (Laqueur 2015).

Notable from the standpoint of Nostradamus promotion, Aleksandr Dugin is a right-wing Russian philosopher considered influential on the Putin regime. Dugin embodies anti-Western, Eurasian-centric views of the world (often referring to the United States as ‘antichrist’) and has promoted Russian prophetic mythologies like Third Rome. (The Russian Orthodox Monk Filofei of Pskov (1465-1542) created the mythological concept of Third Rome, wherein Russia viewed itself as the final incarnation of Orthodox Christianity (Perrie & Pavlov 2003). Rome was the so-called ‘First Rome’, and Constantinople was ‘Second Rome’.)

Third Rome was a view of Russia adopted by the 16th century Tsar Ivan IV (The Terrible) and 17th century Orthodox ‘Old Ritualists’ (also called ‘Old Believers’), who associate the ‘fall’ of Third Rome (Moscow) with the apocalypse (Cherniavsky 1966). Dugin often identifies with this Old Ritualists sect (Clowes 2011). Likewise, Rosalind Marsh associates Dugin with Orthodox apocalyptic beliefs that have had:

” *...a major impact on Russian religious thinking and the ideas of the Russian Far Right... Belief in the medieval traditions of Satan and the Antichrist... proved much more enduring in Russia than in other European countries, and many of these concepts have been resurrected in the ideas of the Far Right in contemporary Russia.*” (Marsh 2007, pp. 356)

On multiple occasions, Dugin referred to the controversial ‘Mongols-Terror’ 1999 prophecy in the context of apocalypse and as proof Putin was foretold by Nostradamus (Dugin 2014). In 2014, Dugin quoted the controversial version associated with Erika Cheetham, relating it to Putin being an “*ideal ruler of the period*” (p.22) in a ‘Eurasian’ context; as well again referencing his own 1999 usage of the quatrain on his sometimes-apocalyptic website *Arctogaia*.

One of the most widely-suspected instances of active measures from the post-Soviet era is that the September 1999 Moscow apartment bombings were the result of a Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) ‘false flag’ attack intended to hasten transfer of power from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin. Following Putin’s decisive responses to these bombings, he was unshackled from Yeltsin’s near single-digit popularity and his polling numbers surged.

Investigations into FSB responsibility for the bombings generally focus on the discovery of an explosive device in an apartment building in Ryazan Russia on 22 September 1999. Initial forensic testing showed evidence of military-grade explosives, and suspects were traced to the Moscow branch of the FSB – before the FSB claimed it was a training exercise using sugar and further investigation was discouraged (Boghardt 2006, Dunlop 2014). This incident followed a series of bombings in Moscow blamed on Chechen terrorists that killed over 300 Muscovites.

The pattern seems to have begun in March 1999 with a bombing in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia that killed 51 people (it was the largest terror attack in Russia since November 1996). Then-FSB Director Vladimir Putin investigated. Russian press reported on this event saying Russian security speculated Chechens or Osama Bin Laden were responsible (Jamestown 1999).

Interpreted from the French version of the altered Cheetham prophecy, a great parallel is noted between Russian cultural history, the 1999 terror attacks, and Nostradamus’ Century X, Quatrain 72.:

- **Mars and ‘Sept Mois’:** September was the seventh (French ‘sept’ for ‘seven’) month of the early Roman calendar which started in March (French ‘Mars’). The timeline of terror attacks from March to September 1999 matches Nostradamus’ prophecy in the context of historical and resurgent Third Rome mythology.
- **King of Terror:** Ivan IV was known for his reign of terror and the installation of the first Russian political police – the Oprichniki. Additionally, he adopted the legends of Vlad the

- Impaler (a.k.a. 'Dracula'), a 15th century tyrant king from Wallachia known for brutal law and order; who was also the subject of one of Russia's first 'belletristic texts': *The Tale of Dracula* (de Madariaga 2006, McNally & Florescu 1994).
- **King of the Mongols:** The Mongol Golden Horde once ruled Russia and is connected to the Christian identity of Kievan Rus which Ivan IV capitalized on to become protector of the Orthodox Church (Perrie & Pavlov 2003). Russia also rules most of the territory once held by Mongols, and it was the style of Ivan IV's mythology for Russia to ascribe itself the legitimacy of the Christian world, Byzantine empire, Roman emperors, and even biblical Israel (by comparisons of Ivan IV with King David), all adopted by (quite dubious) 'translatio imperii'.

Despite the positive appraisal of Putin by Dugin related to Nostradamus, the association of Nostradamus' millennial 1999 prophecy with the antichrist is interesting because among Old Ritualists (and Dugin's inspiration Nikolai Berdyaev), it was common to see the Russian leader as the physical incarnation of antichrist since the time of Peter the Great and the '1666 apocalypse' of the Russian Church (Christensen 1998, Marsh 2007).

CONCLUSION

Despite New York City not being on 45 degrees latitude, nor 1999 being 2001; today, *The Nostradamus Society of America* (est. 1997) refers to the 'King of Terror' 1999 prophecy as the "9/11 prophecy", arguing that "It is obvious that Osama bin Laden is the "great king of terror who comes from the sky". Regarding the "great king if [sic] the Mongols", Kabul was the capital of the Mongol Empire during Nostradamus' lifetime." Based on the legacy of this interpretation of Nostradamus, it should be clear such an interpretation is gravely flawed historically, and derived from a very controversial translation that is most likely informed by Russian influences.

It cannot be simply said that Russia has embraced conspiracism in the post-2000 timeframe. It seems clear that considering the history of *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, Cold War "active measures" and *Russia Today*; that Russia has employed conspiracism as a political warfare tactic for more than 100 years. In a similar vein, some interpretations of Nostradamus prophecies seem to represent a specific brand of popular eschatology potentially traceable to even older Tsarist influence campaigns (e.g. Third Rome) which may have relevance to both internal and external Russian governance and diplomacy. Before Nostradamus adherents claimed that Osama Bin Laden was Nostradamus' 'third antichrist' plausibly as the result of Russian influence operations, perhaps it should be telling that the two figures who are associated as having been 'antichrists' foretold by Nostradamus according to Erika Cheetham were Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler; who also shared a commonality in their failed invasions of Russia.

Followingly, Nostradamus prophecies are observed to embody a long history of wartime psyops and disinformation, even before WW2 (Wilson 2007). However, the applicability of prophecy to propaganda concepts goes back potentially thousands of years. Such 'popular eschatologies' seem to be effective in certain recipients of the messages because their quasi-religious nature provides a framework for interpretation of global events which is mechanistic, populist and conspiratorial, and draws on culturally ingrained ideas about apocalypse which can create agency for political action (Fenster 2008). Despite their modern provenance linked to apparently politically left (even apparently 'Marxist') figures like Erika Cheetham, Orson Welles, and John Hogue, the 9/11-era 'prophecies' may have had particular effectiveness in influencing the beliefs of conservative Christians, but also other more secular, superstitious readers who were not specifically religious.

Parsimoniously, the 1999 prophecy might have made powerful appeals to postmillennial religious expectations; evoking fears of the so-called ‘end times’ in some recipients of the messaging. It would seem plausible that Russia leveraged such millennialistic fears of apocalypse strategically in both 1999 and 2001, by intentionally aligning the popular Nostradamus prophecy with nationalist concepts deployed in propaganda. Since 1999, recorded world-leading spikes in interest in Nostradamus on search engines are observed regionally in 2001, 2010, 2014, and 2015 during known periods of unambiguous Russian geopolitical and military activity. The Nostradamus prophecies which have gone viral are linked to individuals who seem to be plausible influencers of, or influenced by, Kremlin narratives. Internally to Russia and in former satellites, there seems to be significantly higher potential interest in Nostradamus than elsewhere in the world, and rather than treating Nostradamus (and similar prophetic figures) with skepticism, as is often the case in the West, Russian state media narratives often encourage readers to view these narratives with credulity. This may be a legacy of the apparent promotion of Nostradamus in Russia in the subversive context of “*political murders*” and “*revolutions*” even during times of late 1970’s Soviet censorship. Presumably, the legacy of state promotion could go back much further.

While it is still unknown who distributed the 2001 hoax prophecies, it would seem they strongly supported contemporary Russian narratives arguing for a war on terrorism/terror. Vladimir Putin’s widely publicized and self-admitted outreach to George W. Bush as the first world leader to contact him on September 11, 2001 was framed within the claim that the 1999 Russian and 2001 American tragedies were linked by the common threat of Islamic terror (Walters 2001).

Much like conspiracy theory and “*fake news*”, the application of a theory which posits that Nostradamus had predicted the September 11 events as an unavoidable, predetermined catastrophe diminishes critical thinking about world events and may plausibly allow for some ‘reflexive control’ of affected audiences; or otherwise provide cover for information operations. As Russian influence is often noted for ‘staggering scope’, perhaps we would be wise to see the turn of the millennium Nostradamus prophecies or Baba Vanga prophecies in a similar light as fake news when we encounter variants in the wild.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Active Measures: Commonly used term to refer to the political warfare activities of the Soviet Union and Russian Federation which often rely on a combination of propaganda, political pressure, and sometimes covert military activity to achieve national objectives.

Anti-fascism: A common theme in WW2-era, Soviet-era, and current Russian propaganda which was rumored to be created by Josef Stalin and formed the ideological recruitment basis for many Communist front organizations.

Conspiracism: The application of conspiracy theory to the interpretation of political and historical events which can be used as a basis for power reallocation in populist politics; or the intentional deployment of such conspiracies for the purposes of social engineering a public.

False Flag: The conspiratorial belief that government organizations orchestrate chaos or terrorism against their own citizens in order to achieve political ends.

Nostradamus: The Latinized name of Michel De Nostredame, A 16th century 'seer' who has come to be associated with war-time disinformation and propaganda in the several hundred years since his death.

Popular Eschatology: A closely related, overlapping concept with conspiracism which explains world events in terms of apocalyptic religious narratives.

Webometrics: The application of quantitative bibliometric and informetric approaches to the analysis of web data in social science research (sometimes called cybermetrics).