

HYBRID WARFARE AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: COLD WAR PROPAGANDA BLOWBACK LEGACIES FOR BULGARIA AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

This analysis demonstrates that the instruments and personnel inherited from containment have been adapted to the post-Cold War environment to expand state influence. Their tactics include reliance on local clients in third states that major powers patronize to engage in indirect, often obscured competition for control within the broader nuclear setting. This paper outlines the reverberations of US-Soviet clandestine competitive interference within the internal politics of third parties, including disinformation campaigns. This competitive interference contributed to the contemporary vulnerability of nationalist public opinion constituencies to conspiratorial stereotyping, embracing so-called fake news. This examination of the nature of propaganda illustrates the implications of the lack of transparency in the external sources supporting, advocating and utilizing public diplomacy initiatives. A study found the Balkans to be most vulnerable to the propagation of fake news which include claims of conspiratorial networks to undermine Balkan national sovereignty. This paper highlights how US' public diplomacy capacity to combat fake news is significantly affected by this Cold War legacy. The digital information revolution exacerbates these vulnerabilities. The US and the USSR legacy of intense Cold War propaganda disinformation combat should be addressed transparently today lest US public diplomacy initiatives inadvertently reinforce the circulation of fake news.

JEL: D74, F54, I23, I26, I28, N4

KEYWORDS: Bulgaria, Cold War, Disinformation, Hybrid Warfare, Public Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Disinformation propaganda operations have a very long history. The postwar nuclear setting together with mass public nationalism and political participation has accentuated the importance of shaping public opinion. It requires avoiding the plausibility of charges of treasonous collaboration with external actors (Hemment, 2017, 569). Axiomatically, state authorities are prone to portray international challengers as seeking and utilizing domestic collaborators as their internal, covert/hidden clients. Transparency in sponsorship of information campaigns is generally expected. Manipulation of public opinion to promote a hidden agenda is condemned. Political attacks on competitors often thus assert that the other side's ultimate motivation and sponsorship is concealed because of the political efficacy of such attacks if perceived as plausible. Allegations that the opponent is unpatriotic, even treasonous, can be more effective to the extent to which these accusations tie the opponent to an obscured, external actor (DeDominicis, 2019b).

Like much in the modern era of international relations, the 1945 use of nuclear weapons marked an important watershed in accelerating earlier trends. Precursors to US covert Cold War international propaganda and psychological operations emerged in the early part of the century. E.g. Hill notes that the US administration tasked George Creel and his Committee on Public Information (CPI) to mobilize US public opinion to support US intervention against Germany in the First World War. It utilized modern

advertising techniques. The CPI continued its work, producing a 1918 pamphlet, *The German-Bolshevik Conspiracy*, “that continues to circulate today,” claiming that Lenin and Trotsky were paid German state agents. George Kennan in 1956 demonstrated that it is a forgery (2018, 304).

Nuclear weapons making great power conflict far too costly to be fought directly increased the focus on covert and indirect means of influence generation within target polities, including the homeland. The longevity of the Cold War created incentives for both the Soviet and American leaderships to promote domestically the willingness of public opinion to bear the costs of Cold War competition. The boundaries between international and domestic propaganda campaigns blurred along with the erosion of traditional geographical sphere of influence boundaries (Morley, 2017, 79). American disinformation propaganda campaigns included the accusation that the Soviet Union sponsored international terrorism, targeting both foreign and domestic audiences. A high-profile case of this supposed sponsorship was the papal assassination attempt in 1981 (“Pope Clears Bulgaria,” 2002). The alleged Bulgarian sponsorship, with Moscow’s blessing, was disinformation that the Reagan administration propagated, utilizing the public persuasive credibility of the CIA (Goodman, 2017).

During the Cold War, US national research centers under contract to the US Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency developed what became the Internet starting in 1969 (Abbate, 2001, 150). Social media emerged on this digital technology foundation. Recent events illustrate how social media platforms have facilitated disinformation campaigns. Topical literature (Korta, 2018) highlights, for example, the greatly increased capacity social media has provided for so-called information laundering (see Figure 1 below).

Social media provides an immense potential for unregulated inputs by nearly infinite overt and covert sources, with an almost unlimited diversity of viewpoints and vast variations in extent of “credibility” (Richtel, 2020, para. 18). The social media sphere expedites the insertion into innumerable simultaneous interchanges of what heretofore the so-called mainstream media authorities had viewed as fringe, militant and taboo assertions. Routing these placements onto some of the limitless number of Internet-based platforms inevitably leads them to being liked/disliked, forwarded, tweeted, bottled, copied and critiqued. The nature of Internet-based social media increases their media exposure. These fringe statements, including what some have tagged hate speech, thereby become part of electronic conversations, with their original sources in unknown or taboo authors and media outlets often obscured. Information laundering, like money laundering, aims to conceal the original source of the hate speech in order to legitimate it. I.e. it aims separate the assertion from the negative reputation that its original source has in mainstream media discourse. Readers/consumers of the assertion are therefore less likely to dismiss the assertion than they would be if its originator was publicly identified.

Propaganda by a government agency, a terrorist organization or for-profit company, or non-profit organization, aims to “reinforce or modify the attitudes, behavior, or both of an audience” (Korta, 2018, 40, quoting Jowett and O’Donnell, 2014, 4). The audience member’s pre-existing perceptions determine if the perceiver views the propaganda message as “self-evident” or “controversial” (Korta, 2018, 40, quoting Jowett and O’Donnell, 2014, 19). Undermining the public credibility and reputations of competitors is the aim of disinformation campaigns. The perception of the intentionality of this type of information is another point of interest:

“According to the study “Influence of fake news on public opinion”, carried out by Estudio de Comunicación y Servimedia (2018), 88% of respondents, including journalists, politicians, scholars and entrepreneurs, believe that fake news are spread “to damage the image and reputation of individuals and organisations”, and according to 75.8%, the motivation would be a benefit for a person or a group. In relation to the impact of fake news, the study also points out that the greatest damage is reputational, both for organisations (85.5%) and individuals (66.2%)” [sic] (Rodríguez-Fernández, 2019, 1716).

Rodríguez-Fernández highlights that the Spanish audience for fake news understands that fake news aims to undermine the credibility of political adversaries. Amongst all categories of information, “fake news stories are 70% more likely to be retweeted and spread further, faster and deeper and more widely than true stories in all categories of information” (Rodríguez-Fernández, 2019, 1715, citing Vosoughi, Roy and y Aral, 2018).

Exploitation of the US intelligence community’s public credibility for information laundering is a reflection of the increasing salience of national influence expansion driving postwar American foreign policy (DeDominicis, 2019a). This manifestation takes a form in the “politicization” of the national intelligence gathering, analysis and interpretation processes and in counterintelligence operations (Haberman, Barnes and Baker, 2019, para. 38). The precedents for recent manipulation of raw intelligence reports to serve the pursuit of expansionist foreign policy goals arose in the Cold War as explained below in the post-1945 international context. This behavioral pattern became particularly evident in the latter stages of the Cold War with the inauguration of the Reagan administration. The motivations for this pattern intensified as the ever more evident internal weakness of the Soviet Union became a topic of scholarly and media discussion in the late 1970s (Hyland, 1979, 56, “A Fortress State,” 1980).

The Soviet Union as an increasingly dangerous imperialist actor compensating for its internal dysfunction was a premise that emerged after the US Vietnam defeat. This national humiliation was followed by the rise of Soviet-allied regimes in the Horn of Africa as well as in Nicaragua, Grenada, Mozambique, Angola and Afghanistan. Threats arose to US clients in El Salvador, Iran and Israel. A supplementary premise that emerged concurrently was the need to fortify American public perception of a primary Soviet threat, e.g. through refashioning by right-wing figures in 1976 of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) (Rosenberg, 2015, Jurdem, 2017). The CPD was revived in 2004 to mobilize American public opinion against a perceived militant Islamist threat and again currently against a perceived “existential” Chinese Communist threat to the US (Swanson, 2019, para.1).

This analysis begins by outlining some of the findings in cognitive psychology that help determine the appeal and persuasiveness of propaganda. It incorporates those findings into the neoclassical realist international relations literature to place disinformation within the context of nation state behavior. It then highlights the political circumstances surrounding the rise of neoconservatism and its advocates’ claim to rally and lead the US to victory in the Cold War. It underscores the implications of the end of the Cold War for American influence expansion employing these covert and propagandistic instruments perceived as instrumental in successfully containing the USSR. The postwar prevailing view in Washington was that the USSR was, in effect, a Russian version of Nazi Germany, i.e. the Cold Warrior worldview (Cottam, 1977, 118). The supposed US defeat of this dire global threat is an implicit justificatory assumption for the continued employment of covert as well as indirect forms of US influence expansion. These indirect forms include public diplomacy policies that have utilized these Cold Warrior personnel and their resource access. These policies aim, among other goals, to institutionalize the expansion of US influence. The American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), a US Agency for International Development (USAID) public diplomacy project which first admitted students in 1991, is presented as a case study to illustrate this policy pattern behavior.

The continuing circulation and Internet recycling of Cold War-era disinformation fortifies contemporary conspiratorial worldviews among the public. Condemnation of opposing media viewpoints as so-called fake news emerges in part because of the lack of sufficient transparency regarding the pedigree of current policy activities and roles. These earlier Cold War containment-era disinformation campaigns still challenge nationalist sensibilities. Association with them should be avoided in public diplomacy initiatives such as AUBG as explained in the section below, “A Path Forward.” The conclusion notes the necessity of highlighting transparently the causes for historical and current policy as a prescription to undermine propensities towards conspiratorial stereotyping.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Korta (2018) draws from Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) in analyzing the persuasiveness of propaganda. Propaganda aims to influence the audience in a desired direction through obscuring the motivations of the source of the information/disinformation. Obscuring the actual source is the most blatant form of obscuring motivations. Source credibility is a means for propaganda influence, i.e. a trusted or admired source ideally should deliver the message. Positive affect is also important. Highlighting the danger of the resurgence of old threats and dangers, i.e. pre-persuasion, increases vulnerable amenability to messages (2018, 39). Delivering a message resonating with romanticized national achievements in the view of the audience increases its persuasiveness. Perceived national humiliation generates negative emotions.

This paper applies the political psychological conceptualization of nationalism by Cottam and Cottam (2001). It is the overarching framework for this analysis of US and Russia's post-Cold War legacies of Cold War disinformation and hybrid warfare campaigns. Nationalism associates with stereotyping and affect, and unsanctioned external intervention in the internal politics of a nation state is prone to propagate stereotype image and public opinion affective responses (Cottam and Cottam, 2001, 99-105). Covert interventions, by their nature intentionally masked or obscured, contribute to local conspiratorial perceptions of the nature of external challenge. These propaganda campaigns target the politics of each other and of third actors as well as one's own, home polity. This Cold War legacy emphasizes critical shared elements in post-Cold War grand strategy of the US and Russia.

Korta (2018) surveys the social psychology literature to outline the belief perseverance/confirmation bias, the backfire effect and the availability heuristic. Confirmation bias is the tendency of the perceiver to emphasize information that confirms the perceiver's preconceived biases while tending to discount information that does not conform. Confirmation bias supporting belief perseverance overlaps with the backfire effect, i.e. the tendency of the perceiver to view incongruent information presented as a hostile ego attack. The perceiver defensively responds by reaffirming the perceiver's preconceived biases. The availability heuristic is the perceiver's tendency to judge the frequency, likelihood and significance of incidents on the basis of the ease to which these incidents come to mind (51-53). Confirmation bias, backfire effect and availability heuristic all came into play as challenges to the Cold War enemy stereotype of the USSR and its associated Manichean worldview became apparent in the 1970s (Cottam, 1977). A response was the neoconservative movement, one manifestation being the Committee on the Present Danger which reaffirmed the Cold Warrior worldview, influencing media reports to reaffirm this outlook (Swanson, 2019).

After 25 years of early Cold War portrayal of the Soviet bloc as an evil empire, much of the American public would be susceptible to propaganda which reaffirmed these portrayals. The commitment of significant components of the American public to the Manichean worldview would generate a backfire effect. Their hostility would be directed towards New Left critiques of the Vietnam debacle and the Manichean Cold War worldview more broadly. "Reagan's decisive victory [in the 1980 US presidential election] marks the final political defeat of the movements of the 1960s and important step toward the reconstitution of hegemonic world order" (McQuade, 2014, 46).

An overlap with the so-called availability heuristic is evident here insofar as the backfire effect intensified in the midst of partisan political struggle over perceived challenges to US national security. This battle became significantly more internally divisive in the midst of the Vietnam catastrophe. The overwhelming postwar consensus among establishment authority figures regarding the nature of the international challenges to the US that centered on the Soviet Union fragmented (Hook, 2020, 93). Elite leadership factions emerged that challenged and questioned the Manichean worldview focus on Moscow as an intensely imperialist global threat to the US. As analyzed below, figures such as Eugene McCarthy, George

McGovern and Jimmy Carter gave expression to these alternative worldviews. They themselves disagreed on what political conflicts were driving change in world politics. The elite factions that continued to focus on the Soviet Union as the primary instigator of threats to US national security coalesced around various groups including the Committee on the Present Danger.

The American national humiliation in the failure of US power to prevail in Vietnam contributed to the emotive energy compelling the backfire effect. The availability heuristic of the familiar Manichean worldview of the struggle between the so-called free world versus Communism ultimately directed from Moscow provided a focus for the backlash. US President Ronald Reagan exploited the “evil empire” stereotype of the Soviet Union (Reagan, 1983, ~2:25, ~4:19). Scapegoating an alleged “empire of evil” was familiar after 25 years of Cold War propaganda. It would place the blame for terrorism and the papal assassination attempt on the Soviet Union (via Bulgaria) to rally American nationalist public opinion.

Eisenfeld (2016) references Marrin (2013) who concludes that “the concept of politicization of intelligence analysis is for the most part analytically useless.” One’s viewpoint as consumer or producer of intelligence determines whether or not one person’s alleged politicization of intelligence is another person’s standard operating procedure in analysis (2016, 81-82). A rephrasing of this tendency emphasizes the pre-existing cognitive-perceptual frameworks used in analyzing intelligence data. Those observers who were convinced, for a variety of reasons, that the USSR was a belligerent, aggressive global threat and viewed it through an enemy stereotype would resist changing their views. Some did change their views over the course of the Cold War, e.g. Senator J. William Fulbright (Bennett, 1999, 612). Those establishment figures who revived the CPD were not among them. The reasons for this divergence are beyond the scope of this paper. The top-down nature of politicization characterizes the early Reagan administration’s approach to the intelligence community and its products (Eisenfeld 2016, 83-84). Reagan as patron of the CPD and its members committed themselves to the Cold Warrior stereotype of the USSR. Reagan’s Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), William J. Casey, blatantly politicized the intelligence product to oblige in propagating the allegation of Soviet sponsorship of global terrorism. This alleged Soviet sponsorship included the papal assassination attempt (Goodman, 2017).

The political incentives for politicization of intelligence focus on foreign policy decision makers seeking validation of their preconceived assumptions and policy prescriptions towards target states. Pinkus highlights a recent, notorious case involving the G.W. Bush administration’s use and modification of US intelligence estimates. They incorrectly claimed Saddam Hussein’s Iraq continued to develop weapons of mass destruction to justify the US-led 2003 invasion. Referencing support from the US intelligence community adds persuasiveness in the partisan struggle to shape public opinion, domestically and abroad, i.e. public diplomacy (2014).

This analysis incorporates neo-classical realism’s orientation towards a historical sociological path dependency approach to foreign policy analysis (Zodian, 2015, 189). Neoclassical realism accentuates states’ preemptive efforts to manipulate and influence their political “environment” (Sears, 2017, 23). These policies affect the policy making dynamics within polities to shape domestic political trends at home as well as abroad. Covert interventions, by their nature intentionally masked and obscured, contribute to local conspiratorial perceptions of the capabilities and motivations of threatening external actors. These policy instrument legacies of the Cold War are critical shared elements in post-Cold War international strategy of the US and Russia. This paper underlines the influence of Cold War-era actors as political vested interests that shape today’s foreign policy. These domestic vested interests include Cold War-instituted national security institutions. They are important internal considerations affecting the foreign policy making dynamics in their particular political systems. Their impact affects the patterns of foreign policy behavior of an initiator state regarding its efforts to produce influence in a target state’s policy making processes in the nuclear setting. The legacy of US-Soviet Cold War competitive, covert interference in the internal

politics today increases amenability to conspiratorial worldviews (Hänni, 2020). It thus contributes to nationalist populism and so-called fake news proliferation.

US President Jimmy Carter initially emphasized human rights promotion as the strategic goal of US foreign policy to supersede the postwar focus on Soviet containment (da Vinha, 2016a, 2016b). The neoconservative activists constituting the Committee on the Present Danger challenged this affirmation of this new foreign policy strategy. “The CPD used its influence in the press to shape public perception of his foreign policy as weak, vacillating, and incapable of addressing the danger posed by Soviet expansionism” (Rosenberg, 2015, 721). “Team B” analyses by the CPD also challenged CIA (i.e. Team A) National Intelligence Estimates of Soviet military capabilities and intentions that supported the arms control détente strategy of the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger era (Haar, 2017, 45). Team B engendered the “window of vulnerability” claim that superior Soviet nuclear military capabilities made the US vulnerable to a Soviet first strike by eliminating US nuclear retaliatory capability (Prados, 1993, 23, 29).

Rosenberg notes that twenty-seven CPD members joined the Reagan administration in 1980 under a new president who shared their worldview (2015, 72). In sum, the rise of the neoconservatives reflected intensifying American perception of immediate Soviet imperial aggressiveness. This intensifying perception of challenge emerged concurrently with increasing American perception of longer-term Soviet regime vulnerability. The Reagan administration sought to mobilize the national will and determination to exploit the US ever-increasing power capability base advantage to defeat the USSR by expanding American benign “hegemony” (George, 2005, 183).

The Reagan administration leadership would utilize the intelligence services as part of this American national remobilization (Herman, 1996). If the respective analyses of these intelligence agencies were not supportive of the portrayal of a resurgent Soviet threat, then minimally their use as authoritative sources of information would be exploited. DCI Casey utilized the authority of the CIA while politicizing the agency’s intelligence analysis process. CIA analysis under Casey propagated CIA disinformation to mobilize public opinion to support the Reagan administration’s resurgent containment strategy, claiming a global terror network sponsored by Moscow (Hänni, 2016, 968). The CIA disseminated disinformation that the USSR instigated terrorism in Western Europe that was then referenced in Western investigative journalism, e.g. Claire Sterling’s *The Terror Network* (1981) (Zulaika, 2003, 196, referencing Herman and O’Sullivan, 1990, 171). I.e. the intelligence agencies would help legitimate in American political discourse what the Reagan administration leadership strove to portray to justify Reagan administration policy.

The strategic goal would be ultimate victory. As Casey stated, “[w]hen we win one [containment battle], the whole house of cards will come tumbling down. It will set off a chain reaction throughout the [Soviet] empire” (Busch, 1997, 459, referencing the Casey quote in Schweizer, 1994, 250). The postwar Soviet Union, perceived as motivated to achieve what Nazi Germany had not, i.e. world domination, yielded its empire and disintegrated (Cox, 2011, 629-30). The remarkably sudden and peaceful end of the Cold War and dissolution of the USSR appeared to vindicate this long-term, so-called Cold War struggle of the vast US national security establishment (Platon, 2015).

After the Cold War, this US national security enterprise was adapted and strengthened to address the latest task: the so-called war on terror by the G.W. Bush administration (Patman, 2009). Figures within the George W. Bush administration refashioned this earlier “Team B” tactical maneuver. Again, the aim was to supersede government intelligence agencies that once more were reaching initial conclusions that US decision makers did not want to accept. US intelligence agencies focused on the lack of evidence for Baathist Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs and militant jihadist Islamist connections. An ad hoc intelligence analysis group sought to generate its own analysis to justify an invasion to bring regime change to Iraq. According to George, “their primary vehicle for such evidence was the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans (OSP) a little-known organization set up after 9/11 by [Paul] Wolfowitz and [Donald] Rumsfeld to

provide alternative intelligence on Iraq from that of the CIA and the Pentagon's own Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). It was, in short, Team B all over again, and like it is less than illustrious predecessor it was staffed by hand-picked hawks" [*sic*] (2005, 42). G.W. Bush administration foreign policy decision makers did more than "cherry pick" intelligence to fit their preconceived notions. "The record strongly suggests elements of exaggeration and outright manipulation of intelligence" especially by those individual decision makers who favored the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq (Henderson, 2018, 72).

Later, post-Soviet Moscow covert intelligence units interfered in the 2016 US presidential election via a social media disinformation campaign to influence US public voter opinion. In the view of some, the consequences confirmed the necessity of leadership in shaping US public opinion by the US national security community to confront the renewed Russian and other hybrid warfare threats (McGeehan, 2018, 56-57).

Post 1991, the overarching prevailing view in Washington became that the US occupies a position of world leadership under its comparatively benign post-Cold War hegemony (Brooks, 2012, 36-37). Today, so-called rogue states are threats to the international stability and consequently to this American-led world order (Kim and Hundt, 2011). The 2002 "axis of evil" label applied by US President G.W. Bush stereotypically categorizes these lesser power rogue states, e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and North Korea ("Text," 2002, para. 52). The watershed for the US commitment to intervene militarily despite the opposition of other permanent UN Security Council members to remove US-perceived rogue regimes was the earlier 1999 Kosovo crisis (Lobel, 2000). NATO's Operation Allied Force commenced on March 24, 1999. The escalating 78-day NATO air bombardment intensified Serb-Kosovo Albanian chaotic ethnic conflict dynamics. Gentry notes the latter included Kosovo Liberation Army enticement of NATO intervention on its behalf by "provoking the Serbs into atrocities" (2006, 211). This intervention was the denouement of the Clinton administration's long-festering hostility towards historically pro-Russian Belgrade.

The imminent, explicit threat and commencement of bombardment led to the province-wide communal population expulsion, elements both pre-planned and not, that NATO claimed it was trying to stop (Fisk, 1999, sentence 51). German security services allegedly distorted vague Bulgarian intelligence reports from Yugoslavia that "could not be verified" (Sofia News Agency, 2012, para. 10). Berlin referenced a forwarded Bulgarian report of an alleged Belgrade plan, codenamed Operation Horseshoe, to justify the US-led NATO air campaign (Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2000, para. 93-98). E.g. the Bulgarian report allegedly referenced Operation "Podkova" (Horseshoe), while the Serb (transliterated) word for horseshoe is "podkovitsa" (поtkовица). "Podkova" [potkova?] is the Croatian word for horseshoe (Goetz and Walker, 2000, para. 9). Podkova is the Bulgarian (transliterated) word for horseshoe (подкова).

According to one retired German brigadier general, the actual Bulgarian report "concluded that the goal of the Serbian military was to destroy the Kosovo Liberation Army, and not to expel the entire Albanian population" (Goetz and Walker, 2000, para. 9). Responding to criticism, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer on April 8, 1999 stated that Belgrade on February 26, 1999 began implementing this supposed pre-planned Operation Horseshoe. Belgrade's aim was allegedly so-called ethnic cleansing: to expel all ethnic Albanians from Kosovo (Radio Free Europe, 1999, para.10-13). Former long-time Canadian diplomat James Bisset noted that "[i]t is interesting that although the Operation Horseshoe scandal has been discussed in the German parliament, there has been little or no media coverage of it in the North American media" (2001, 41, fn1).

The NATO air campaign began after Belgrade rejected February 23, 1999 formal NATO demands for NATO freedom of movement throughout all Yugoslav territory in the draft Rambouillet Accords (Schwarz, 1999, 1, "Rambouillet Accords," 1999, 86). After Belgrade's capitulation and withdrawal of its forces from Kosovo, NATO and UN forces limited their occupation to Kosovo. In October 2000, a popular uprising

forced Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic from office. In June 2001 he was transferred to the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia for trial. His arrest and transfer by the new Belgrade government followed an indictment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in May 1999 during the NATO air campaign. Milosevic died in 2006 before the trial's conclusion. In 2007, the International Court of Justice ruled that Belgrade did not orchestrate ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina against non-Serbs; nor did it intervene to stop war crimes by Bosnian Serb actors (Simons, 2007). Examples of US scholarship continue to reference the alleged Operation Horseshoe as justifying NATO intervention to stop Belgrade's violations of international humanitarian law, including genocide (Daalder and O'Hanlon, 2001, Steinke, 2015).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This analysis has employed a review of the public record including triangulation utilizing findings and evidence afforded in scholarly peer-reviewed publications. This study utilizes *New York Times* investigative reporting in part because peer-reviewed research suggests that it is the most authoritative American news channel through agenda setting for other media news conduits (Denham, 2014, 18-19). The author had been an officer of the American University in Bulgaria Faculty Assembly during most of his 1994-2009 employment at AUBG (DeDominicis, 2013). He had conversations about these matters with other senior AUBG administrators and senior faculty representatives to the AUBG Board of Trustees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rise of mass public nationalism increased local resistance and the costs of overt external intervention (DeDominicis, 2019b). National self-determination emerged as a component among the postwar international human rights regimes (Cassese, 2005, 16, 39, 63, 75, 84, 207). Covert and indirect intervention abroad became increasingly politically desirable by governments. Competitive Cold War aid and assistance included financial and military support to respective local clients, often exacerbating conflicts within polarized communities around the world. Great power competition became progressively indirect; the nuclear setting made avoiding the outbreak of direct great power conflict a top priority. Preventing loss of escalatory control over local conflict dynamics became a primary high level strategic foreign policy objective. Washington and Moscow reacted positively to solicitations from readily identified political contestants in third states in severe conflict with local antagonists. They appealed for Soviet or US assistance and aid to win in their local contest, and inevitably, their adversaries sought support from the other Cold War bloc rival (Cottam, 1967).

Supporting local actors as political clients to dominate polities became a focus of great power competition for global influence and control. This overt or covert external intervention, if and when perceived by particular local actors in effect as an intolerable infringement on national sovereignty, likely would generate political resistance. The external interference rationale was characteristically the depiction of an urgent menace from the hostile external opponent in a particular local facet of the worldwide Cold War contest. The consequent aggravation of the identified threat from the local adversary would justify the interference by their own external patrons from the viewpoint of each local contestant.

“The covert aspect of information and propaganda dissemination ... has been of exceptional importance during the Soviet-American cold war” [*sic*] (Cottam and Gallucci, 1978, 32). Disinformation as part of what is today labelled “hybrid warfare” encouraged this mobilization against the perceived local, treasonous threat conspiring with its Cold War great power patron (Isikoff and Corn, 2018, 44). The local contestant and its external patron would portray as national in origin their own resistance-focused disinformation against the portrayed threat of the other to local sovereignty. The foreign encouragement and assistance for one contestant or another would typically be obfuscated, if not concealed (Voss, 2016, 40). The degree to which such opposition was believed to be essentially domestic was constrained. Concealing completely and

indefinitely external involvement in covert operations involving numerous individuals is improbable. Making it plausibly deniable via obfuscation facilitates diverting and disorganizing the resistance to make subduing it more feasible. The uncertainty of the initiator and forms of the external intervention including the extent of local collaboration with it would in turn intensify mutual suspicion and fear of the local other, i.e. polarization.

Covert intervention obfuscates the delineation between external and internal sources of initiated foreign imperial influence. Attitudes of suspicion and paranoia emerge from generations of obscured imperial control, creating fertile conditions for conspiratorial worldviews. I.e. an external “hidden hand” supposedly threatens control of the polity through secretly collaborating local elites (Cottam and Cottam, 2001, 112-13). Post-colonial polities are particularly prone to such perceptual stereotypical tendencies (Gray, 2010). Bulgaria has been portrayed as a post-colonial polity (DeDominicis, 2015).

Hybrid warfare is not new. Aside from the exploitation of new digital and social media and communication technologies, both Cold War Washington and Moscow engaged in this covert policy pattern (Renz, 2016, Ransom, 1977). The American leadership inclined towards veiling its covert, long-term, continuous struggle with the USSR while intervening globally (Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017). Aside from foreign publics, targets polities also included domestic public opinion (Wilford, 2017). Intelligence agencies contributing to the mobilization of the American public to recognize the intensely aggressive challenge was a component of Cold Warrior containment strategy (Cone 2005, 2007). Sufficient segments of the American public had to be persuaded to accept the sacrifices necessary to counter the Soviet global imperialist threat. These material resources were diverted from consumption to create the diverse array of bureaucratic power instruments necessary to engage in its global containment, i.e. guns over butter.

In accordance with the totalitarian enemy stereotype of the USSR, the Cold Warrior worldview emphasized that, unlike the US, the imperialist USSR leadership was not constrained by public opinion (Cottam and Cottam, 2001, 96-98, 106-08). The US leadership must guide public perceptions, at home and abroad, in this long-term, life and death global struggle largely happening very much covertly and indirectly. Its social and career network allies in shaping public viewpoints included academics, journalists, and civil society actors (DeDominicis, 2014). Civil society groups by definition are supposedly autonomous from state control. Government actors have access to vastly greater, diverse resources, including information as well as material incentives available to entice and coopt many of these civil society actors. They may collaborate, cooperate and coordinate with US government authorities to varying degrees. With the supposed US victory, these Cold Warrior elites and their containment strategy power instruments gained vindication as part of the post-Cold War prevailing US worldview (DeDominicis, 2014). The post-Cold War globalization of this diverse array of containment-era regimes and organizations is to be advanced. These state agencies will continue to foster cooperative for-profit and non-profit civil society actors through subcontracting domestically and internationally to support US-led globalization.

US Public Diplomacy

Disinformation operations differ from public diplomacy campaigns insofar as the former obscure their external patronage. The latter declare this backing while overtly promoting the ally image of the patron within the broader target polity, thereby indirectly influencing target government policy. Obscuring the covert external support behind disinformation tactics aims to avoid negative interpretation of the motives of local beneficiaries of these campaigns. The purpose is to avoid target perceiver dismissal of the misinformation as foreign partisan propaganda (Roose, 2018). US Cold War foreign policy makers recognized the imperative of maintaining the appearance, if not necessarily the reality, of a separation between covert US intelligence service activities and public diplomacy programs. This separation was necessary to achieve the objective of such public diplomacy programs, i.e. overtly to encourage positive local public opinion attitudes towards the United States. Covert activities, i.e. US government intelligence,

counterintelligence and influence operations undertaken without official local national consent would risk appearing to violate the national sovereignty of the target. US foreign policy makers recognized this imperative in the establishment of an iconic public diplomacy initiative, the Peace Corps.

Peace Corps staff policy since its 1961 establishment has forbidden hiring as prospective employees or volunteers those previously employed in the US CIA. Peace Corps Director Jack Vaughn, its second director and the first Republican appointed to the position by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Democrat, reiterated this policy in 1968 (1968, 1). Due to DCI William J. Casey's indignation against "unfair stigmatization" of individuals owing to their prior CIA service, the Peace Corps director agreed to lower the public profile of this prohibition (Brown, 2018, para. 1). Current Peace Corps policy on its website restates this restriction:

"Peace Corps Manual Section 611 sets our policy for individuals with either a personal or familial association to an intelligence agency or intelligence-related work. In order to carry out its mission, the Peace Corps must maintain complete separation from the intelligence activities of the United States government, both in reality and appearance [emphasis added]. The only automatic disqualification is any previous employment with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Individuals with previous employment history at the CIA, including contractors and interns, are indefinitely disqualified from Peace Corps Volunteer service" (Lenihan 2015, para. 3).

Various US government decision makers perceive the necessity of maintaining this apparent separation from public diplomacy as less politically acute for programs other than the Peace Corps. The supposed victory of the US in containing and removing the global Soviet totalitarian imperialist threat legitimizes these Cold War containment instruments, including their intelligence community. In sum, the latter's policies and personnel helped save the postwar world, and they and their extensive networks and resources should play a leading role in creating the post-Cold War world. The public role of former CIA figures in managing the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) initiative illustrates the decline in the perceived intensity of this separation imperative.

Cold War Hybrid Warfare and Contemporary US Public Diplomacy: The American University in Bulgaria

AUBG protested to the editor of the *Economist*, responding to a January 5, 2002 article that AUBG "has sometimes been known in the Balkans as "the CIA university"" ("Europe," 2002). The protest letter stated that the *Economist* report "might provide misleading information about the university" ("AUBG 'Not CIA'," 2002). A founding American faculty member of the AUBG business administration curriculum told this writer in the mid-1990s that he had been in the CIA early in his career. He was engaged temporarily at AUBG through the US Fulbright scholar exchange program. He also noted that his British spouse, an AUBG faculty member in the humanities and social sciences, had earlier in her career been in the British intelligence services. This business administration faculty member also claimed that the Bulgarian intelligence services had an informant placed within AUBG. At this time, one English language and literature faculty member, an evangelical Christian, had been quietly proselytizing and baptizing receptive AUBG students. He received an ominous voice mail message in English on AUBG's new digital telephone system warning him to stop. Bulgaria is overwhelmingly an Orthodox country that, like Russia, displays strong national skepticism towards other faiths perceived as foreign. E.g. the Bulgarian 1991 constitution, article 13 sec. 3 declares, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity is a traditional religion in the Republic of Bulgaria" ("Constitution," 1991). This faculty member immediately left Bulgaria.

Hans J. Morgenthau, one of the founders of the theory of classical realism in international relations, identified Bulgaria as demonstrably within the Russian sphere of influence. Bulgaria is part of the "Russian security belt" (2005, 192). Great power competition for influence in the nuclear setting has emphasized working indirectly through polity constituency access pressure points to influence target government

foreign policy behavior. These postwar patterns have contributed to the fluidity and diffuseness of what heretofore had been geographic boundary determinations of the limits of respective great power spheres of influence.

Prof. Colleen Graffy, the Assistant Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy for Europe and Eurasia at the U.S. State Department, visited AUBG in October 2007 (FlashNews, 2007). During a group lunch with this writer and a group of his students, Prof. Graffy expressed disappointment upon learning that this writer was showing a 2004 BBC video series, *The Power of Nightmares*, in his classes to portray the rise of the neoconservatives (“Adam Curtis Documentary,” n.d.). (The author was on the AUBG faculty in the political science and European studies department during 1994-2009.) Interviewees included former CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman, who noted that the new DCI William Casey under Reagan was committed to propagating the specious theory that the Soviet Union instigated leftist terrorist cells in Western Europe (Ibid., ~54:40). According to Goodman, this theme was in fact US-sourced propaganda, i.e. disinformation, covertly propagated by the CIA. Goodman claimed in the interview that he and other CIA analysts introduced Casey to those CIA operational personnel who oversaw the disinformation campaign. Casey, nevertheless, was committed to adopting this disinformation as in fact an actual CIA intelligence finding.

Goodman in this video did not comment on the case of the 1981 assassination attempt against the pope (see below). Other individuals interviewed included prominent neoconservatives, e.g. Michael Ledeen, a Reagan administration official (“Adam Curtis Documentary,” n.d., start~52:24). Ledeen played a prominent role in publicly claiming Bulgarian involvement in the papal assassination attempt (Lobe, 2003). Ledeen had been an analyst for the SISMI, the Italian military intelligence agency. It would later be the source of a falsified document indicating that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was attempting to buy yellowcake uranium in Niger. This forged evidence would be used to justify the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq (Unger, 2006). The propagation of these false allegations of Communist Bulgarian support for the papal assassination attempt antagonize contemporary Bulgarian national self-identity sensitivities. “Bulgarians still feel stigmatized by the Agca case,” (i.e. Mehmet Ali Agca the attempted assassin from Turkey allegedly utilized by the Bulgarian Communist secret police) (Pavlov, 1998, 31).

Bulgarian mass public national identity self-expression became comparatively well-entrenched in this society under Communism. The evidence lies in that fact that the post-1989 main democratic opposition, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) was hesitant to appeal to Bulgarian nationalism for electoral support. The UDF was the main party protagonist of the Bulgarian Socialist (formerly Communist) Party until 2001. The UDF viewed nationalism “as a vestige of communism and a façade for the BSP to preserve the centralized state and economic structures of the former regime” hence “UDF liberals developed an aversion to Bulgarian nationalism” [*sic*] (Anagnostu, 2005, 101).

The Bulgarian and other Balkan Communist authorities relatively effectively mobilized support in their comparatively more rural, traditional societies to legitimate their rule by leading national modernization (Tarifa, 1997, 454). A consequence is that contemporary conservative nationalist populism in Bulgaria has a securer foundation built on Communist-era public policy legitimation mechanisms and tropes (Gigova, 2016, 170-71). It leads to the analytical dilemma noted by others studying Bulgarian nationalism. I.e. an ideologically programmatic, influential right-wing nationalist party in Bulgaria is today absent. This deficiency is in part because Communism historically had been more firmly legitimated via appeals to Bulgarian nationalist sentiments (Meznik, 2016, 31, Bechev, Sakalis and Kurzydowski, 2014, para. 7). The post-Communist, Bulgarian Socialist Party remains the largest, cohesive, most formidable political opposition party today in Bulgaria.

Various US government agencies may foster non-profit contractors for public diplomacy outsourcing. E.g. the US encourages and contracts with various non-governmental organizations through USAID and other

federal agencies to provide humanitarian relief, civil society and institution building aid (USAID, n.d., Villarino, 2011). US and Bulgarian government officials initiated AUBG as a non-profit institution of higher education incorporated in the US state of Maine and in Bulgaria, starting teaching operations in 1991. It is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization according to the US federal code (Guidestar, n.d.). During this writer's employment at AUBG, journalism and mass communications was the second most popular major areas of study among the ~ 1000 students there (~50% Bulgarian, the others from ~40 Balkan and other countries). The first was business administration. AUBG was highly selective in its student admissions. It did not have a faculty tenure system during the author's employment there. The US government via USAID and other agencies have provided much of its funding particularly in its early years before student tuition and room & board fees became significant. AUBG also relies on donors and Bulgarian government support.

In Bulgaria, post-Communist political actors were initial purveyors of anti-George Soros tropes, significantly due to Soros' long-term efforts to weaken the economic legacy of state socialism. Anti-Soros sentiment has been associated with Soros' efforts to liberalize Bulgaria, undermining nostalgic perceived national achievements under Communism (Ghodsee, 2008, 31). Anti-Soros stereotyping in Bulgaria today tends to emphasize his advocacy of cosmopolitan human rights, including gender minority and Roma ethnic minority rights protection (Chastand, 2019). George Soros had a personal representative on the AUBG Board of Trustees while the author was on the faculty there as did USAID. Soros himself spoke as the commencement speaker at one point during this author's employment. During the start-up phase at AUBG, Soros purchased all of the textbooks for the students (DeDominicis, 2013). The US government's position towards AUBG was publicly one of cooperation. E.g. the US ambassador regularly sat on the receiving stage during the annual spring graduation ceremony. The US ambassador as well hosted welcoming dinners for the twice annual AUBG Board of Trustees meetings in Bulgaria (the third annual meeting in January-February was typically in Washington, DC). The US embassy in Sofia exerted pressure successfully to remove one AUBG president due to dissatisfaction with the incumbent president's performance during this writer's employment there.

The late Ralph P. Davidson, chairman of the AUBG Board of Trustees (2000-5) while the author was on the faculty, was a retired chairman of *Time* magazine. Early in his career Davidson had been a CIA official (Langer, 2014). During Davidson's chairmanship, Robert C. McFarlane also joined the AUBG Board of Directors in 2000. McFarlane soon resigned after the AUBG student media published an expose about his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair:

"He [Davidson] added that McFarlane was one of the people in Reagan's administration who were very instrumental in bringing about the end of the Cold War. "If it weren't for people like McFarlane, you [Dobrinova] might be sending your copy for approval to Moscow," he said. McFarlane said he considers service for AUBG a good use of his time since most of his life has been trying to spread democracy and "universities are particularly effective at teaching those concepts" (Dobrinova, 2001, para. 10-11).

William Casey was also a senior figure in the Iran-Contra scandal (Walsh, 1998, Walsh, 1993). As noted in Langer (2014), Davidson had been chairman of the board of the Kennedy Center before becoming chairman of the AUBG Board of Trustees: "'Mastergate,' a stinging satire of the Iran-contra scandal, was rejected for a possible July run at the Kennedy Center because of its political content, according to the producer who plans to open the play on Broadway. Neither Kennedy Center chairman Ralph Davidson nor the center's general manager of theaters Drew Murphy was available for comment" [*sic*] (Masters, 1989, para. 1).

According to former CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman, the evidence of Bulgarian or Soviet orchestration of an assassination plot against Pope John Paul II was "a classic example of the political corruption of intelligence":

“The next campaign was initiated by [CIA Director William J.] Casey, who remained dissatisfied with the inability to link the Soviet Union with the 1981 shooting of the Pope. The intelligence record clearly exonerated both the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, and, as late as the winter of 1983-1983 [sic], even [CIA Deputy Director Robert M.] Gates’ briefings to Congress emphasized the non-involvement of Moscow and Sofia. Just as Vice President Cheney pushed to prove a non-existent link between Saddam Hussein’s secular regime and al Qaeda in 2002-2003, Casey would not stop linking Moscow to the plot to assassinate the pope. He was getting a great deal of pressure from right-wingers on Capitol Hill ... to produce evidence of Moscow’s role. [Claire] Sterling was needling CIA officers in Rome about their unwillingness to point an accusing finger at Moscow. At one cocktail party, where Sterling was elaborating her perspective on CIA complicity, a CIA operative dismissed her views as conspiracy theory, which -- according to one witness - - “pissed her off. She climbed all over the guy.””

“The 1985 assessment “Agca's Attempt to Kill the Pope: The Case for Soviet Involvement,” became a classic example of the political corruption of intelligence. Two Agency post-mortems took the assessment and it co-authors (Kay Oliver, Beth Seeger, and Mary Desjeans) to task for their flawed work. Their careers did not suffer as a result, however. All three continued to be promoted in the CIA’s bureaucracy, with Desjeans becoming chief for intelligence on the former Soviet Union and even an assistant to the deputy director for intelligence, and Oliver became the chief of the Agency’s historical staff. All three also received generous cash awards for their efforts in support of Casey and Gates” (Goodman, 2017, 123).

Sterling authored an article promoting the Moscow-Sofia orchestration of the papal assassination attempt that the *Reader’s Digest* published, “The Plot to Murder the Pope” (Sterling, 1982). The CIA initially rejected this thesis (“CIA Reaction to Claire Sterling’s *Reader’s Digest* Article,” 1982). Despite the CIA’s initial dismissal of this proposition, the CIA later supported it. Sterling subsequently published a monograph promoting this argument, *The Time of the Assassins* (1983).

Goodman later continues,

“[Robert] Gates was a master at cherry-picking intelligence to serve Casey’s views. Long before I had the opportunity to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee, I collected evidence on the false assessment that linked Moscow to the Papal assassination plot in 1981. Casey and Gates had cherry-picked a clandestine report from a third-hand source, a Bulgarian, whose previous information lacked credibility. The Operations Directorate was not even planning to issue the report or circulate it in any fashion, but Casey--unlike other CIA directors--saw clandestine reporting in its raw form before it was circulated to the intelligence community. The Bulgarian was a member of the GRU--his country’s military intelligence--and not connected to the KGB. If the Soviets had been involved in the Papal Plot, then it would have been a KGB operation, not GRU. As a result, a third-hand source, and an unreliable one, got to be the sole driving force behind one of the most dishonest intelligence assessments ever designed to manipulate a President of the United States” [sic] (2017, 295).

One of the AUBG Board of Trustees members (2005-2010) was John Dimi Panitza. Panitza, a Bulgarian expatriate, had been head of the *Reader’s Digest* editorial office in Paris. He allegedly helped disseminate disinformation that the Bulgarian Communist secret police had orchestrated the plot to attempt to assassinate the Pope in 1981, utilizing as the attempted assassin a Turkish national, Mehmet Ali Agca:

*“The European editor of Reader’s Digest, John Dimi Panitza, is a transplanted Bulgarian aristocrat who has been described on the BBC as a CIA agent. According to *The Condensed World of the Reader’s Digest* [Schreiner, 1977], “Each foreign editor has some research staff and the Paris office under Staff Senior Editor John D. Panitza rivals that in Washington.” Panitza invented the Bulgarian Connection in the KGB Plot to Kill the Pope and assigned the job to Claire Sterling and Paul Henze. Henze was CIA Station Chief in Turkey while Sterling is a career disinformation agent for the CIA and Mossad. In the *Reader’s Digest**

introduction to the first installment of Edward Jay Epstein's Legend [1978], Panitza is credited with helping uncover the KGB plot behind the Kennedy assassination” [sic] [Landis, 1988, 41-42, available on the Internet since 2016].

The *Washington Post* 2011 obituary for Paul Henze notes, “... in 2006, an Italian commission reexamined the [papal] assassination attempt and concluded that it had indeed been masterminded by Soviet military intelligence. Russian and Bulgarian officials condemned the finding” (Brown, 2011, para. 14). Henze’s estate donated his personal papers to the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University. The on-line catalogue listing for Henze’s papers includes correspondence with Panitza:

[...]

“Correspondence, travel documentation, and writings, 1947-2010”

“Scope and Contents note”

“Includes correspondence, travel documentation, research materials, and writings, as well as notes and transcripts from diaries.”

[...]

“Box/Folder 217 : 3 John D. Panitza, 1971-1982”

[...] (“Inventory of the Paul B. Henze papers,” n.d.)

Henze, apprising Panitza on his investigation of the Agca case, writes, “[t]here is a very good chance – if we pursue this situation with energy and perseverance, that we can bring the whole [Soviet] effort against Western society by support of terrorists and subversive elements much closer to definitive exposure” (Henze, 1981a, para. 6).

Goodman (1997) soon after the Cold War wrote that Casey:

“had read the late Claire Sterling’s The Terror Network and—like [US Secretary of State Alexander] Haig ... was convinced that a Soviet conspiracy was behind global terrorism.... But specialists at the CIA dismissed the Sterling book, knowing that much of it was based on the CIA’s own “black propaganda” – anticommunist allegations planted in the European press.... Haig had support from State Department counselor Robert MacFarlane and director of policy planning Paul Wolfowitz ...” [sic] (134-35).

According to Korta (2018), the key feature of propaganda is the intent to achieve an organizational objective through shaping the perceptions and behavior of a target audience. Propaganda involves a planned information campaign. In this sense, all so-called news may contain elements of propaganda, according to particular perspectives. For-profit media companies aim to encourage greater viewership in an intensely competitive business. Non-profit news sources also aim to achieve an objective, depending significantly on their sources of funding. E.g. US public television and radio aim to promote a more informed American citizenry. Korta notes that propaganda is of the white, gray or black variety. White propaganda is open about its purveyor and the purveyor’s intent, e.g. a government public health agency’s public awareness campaign to promote measles vaccinations. Black propaganda conceals its organizational source while spreading falsehoods. These falsehoods may include intentional efforts to discredit a source of information that is hindering the public opinion goals of the black propagandist. Gray propaganda involves so-called media spin on particular current events by an organizational entity by responding to news media reports with constructed public narratives. Gray is not black because black propaganda consists of knowingly spreading lies and hence its source aims completely to avoid identification as the source (2018, 43-43, citing Jowett and O’Donnell, 2014).

Henze shared the disdain of the Committee on the Present Danger for US President Jimmy Carter’s downgrading of containment of the USSR as the primary US strategic goal. Referencing the election of Socialist candidate Francois Mitterrand as president of France, Henze writes to Panitza, “I wonder whether

the man has a very clear concept of what he wants to do – he could end up being a sort of Jimmy Carter which, with the Communists always lurking on the sidelines, will be much more dangerous than Jimmy Carter’s warmed-over McGovernism was here. Will be interested in your assessments as events unfold” [sic] (Henze, 1981b, para. 4). Haar writes that the Democratic Party’s 1972 presidential nomination of Senator George McGovern instigated the CPD’s resurrection. It aimed to counter the growing domestic opposition to US support of right-wing dictatorial regimes after the Vietnam entanglement. Prominent neoconservative figure Jeanne Kirkpatrick linked US President Jimmy Carter’s downgrading of containment by cutting aid to right-wing authoritarian human rights abusers to McGovern. Carter was “a brand of McGovernism without McGovern” [2017, 45, citing Winik (1988-89, 138)].

Panitza appears to have been sympathetic to the worldview of the CPD. A bete noire of the neoconservatives was Henry Kissinger and his détente strategy (“Adam Curtis Documentary,” n.d., start~23:02). They saw his policy as compromising with and thereby appeasing Soviet imperialist expansion. In a letter to Henze, Panitza concludes by praising US President Gerald Ford’s 1975 cabinet reshuffle firing Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger and replacing him with Donald Rumsfeld because it reduced the formal authority of Henry Kissinger: “Personally, I think that the changes in Washington were salutary for the main loser is undoubtedly Henry the K. – and he deserves it. In order to survive, he’ll now have to adopt much of Schlesinger’s ideas and play ball with Rumsfeld who is no choirboy, don’t you think?” (Panitza, 1975, 2). Rumsfeld in 1976 emphasized the comparatively superior will and determination of the Soviet Union relative to the US in the Cold War struggle as manifested in the arms race: “year after year after year they have been demonstrating that they have steadiness of purpose” (“Adam Curtis Documentary,” n.d., start~26:21). The Cold War evil empire stereotype would later be evoked as a case of this availability heuristic to mobilize the public to explain the assassination attempt on the pope as part of global Communist terrorism.

The propagation of the alleged Bulgarian-Soviet instigation of the papal assassination attempt evidently was part of the disinformation warfare in which Washington and Moscow engaged in the pre-Internet era. *Reader’s Digest*, at its height in the 1980s second only to *TV Guide* in US subscription numbers, had built an editorial reputation basically for propagating the enemy image (Cottam and Cottam, 2001, 96-98, 106-08) of the Soviet bloc:

“These types of stories earned the Digest a reputation as a leading voice in anti-communism. As it gained prominence, Reader’s Digest drew criticism. Despite the publication’s determination to celebrate individual freedoms, it was accused of being nothing more than state propaganda. There were claims of CIA funding and editorial control, especially in its foreign editions in Latin America” [sic] (Sharp, 2013, para. 8-9).

The owner of *Reader’s Digest* filed for bankruptcy in 2009 and again in 2013 (“Reader’s Digest,” 2013).

To commemorate Panitza’s service and charitable donations to AUBG which began with AUBG’s establishment, the AUBG library was named after him in 2009 (“Panitza Library,” n.d.). Panitza died in 2011 (“Dimi Panitza,” 2011). In May 2019, the Bulgarian authorities named a street after Panitza in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia and this writer was invited to attend the ceremony. The public email invitation text:

“UPDATED TIME: Dr. Steven F. Sullivan, President of the American University in Bulgaria, requests the honor of your presence at the Dimi Panitza Street Dedication, 9:30 a.m., Thursday, May 16, 18 Tsar Osvoboditel Str. The event is made possible through the kind support of Sofia Municipality. Mayor of Sofia Yordanka Fandakova and Panitza’s friend Professor Minko Balkanski, along with representatives of the American University in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian School of Politics, the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, and other institutions that have changed the country thanks to Panitza’s leadership, will honor the late philanthropist, visionary and ardent supporter for the development of democracy and education in

Bulgaria. A reception will follow at the Residence Exclusive Club, the house where Panitza was born and raised. RSVP.” [sic] (AUBG President, 2019).

The impact of this Cold War disinformation operation includes ongoing references to a supposed Bulgarian support of the 1981 papal assassination attempt in authoritative news media reports. They imply that alleged Communist Bulgarian encouragement is still an unsettled question, while referencing more recent events. E.g. in 2019, Italian authorities opened Vatican tombs in the search for the remains of Emanuela Orlandi, the daughter of a Vatican employee kidnapped in 1983. “Like other well-scrutinized cold cases around the world, Emanuela’s disappearance has inspired many conspiracy theories. She has been linked to the C.I.A., to Bulgarian agents, to a Roman crime gang and to an American archbishop involved in a major Italian banking scandal” [sic] (Povoledo, 2019b, para. 5, Povoledo, 2019a). Attempted papal assassin Mehmet Ali Agca claimed in erratic testimony in the early 1980s that Orlandi had been abducted by Bulgarian secret agents as part of the covert efforts to cover up Bulgaria’s engagement in the attempt. Warsaw Pact covert intelligence agencies generated their own disinformation in this case. According to the *Toronto Star*,

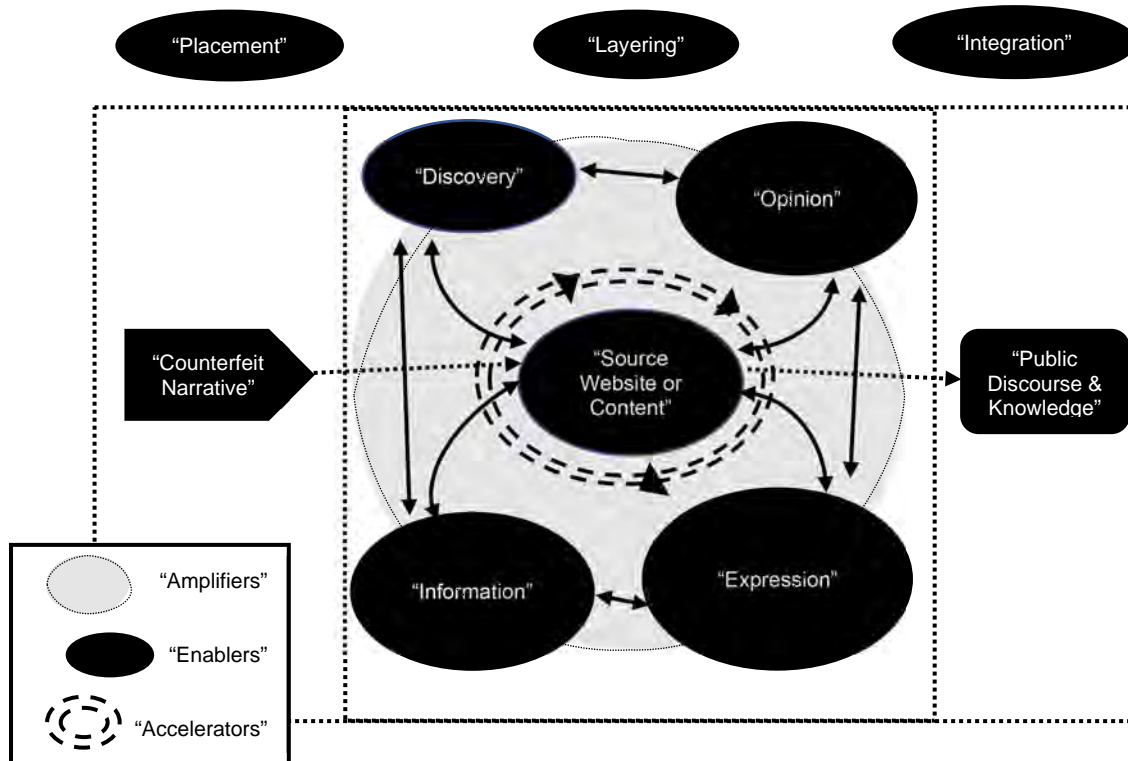
“[A]fter the fall of the Soviet Union, [Ferdinando] Imposimato [one for the Italian magistrates investigating the Papal assassination attempt] travelled to Berlin on behalf of the Orlandi family to interview Gunter Bohnsack, a former member of East Germany’s Stasi intelligence agency. He claims Bohnsack told him the letters from the Turkish Anti-Christian Liberation Front [a faked terrorist group demanding the exchange of Agca for Orlandi] were written by the Stasi. The goal was to divert attention away from Soviet spy agencies and place it on Islamist fanatics” (Contenta, 2014, para. 57).

A popular 2010 monograph describes an elaborate east European Communist covert operations network as responsible for the papal assassination attempt and disinformation surrounding it. It incorporates the Orlandi abduction (Weigel, 2010, 525, fn93).

A PATH FORWARD

Korta formulates a digital information revolution-focused elaboration on the pre-existing model of propaganda dissemination: “Information Laundering 2.0” (2018, 80). Korta identifies three phases. The placement phase prepares and inserts the information/disinformation into the media communication arena. The next, layering phase launders the information/disinformation through its autonomous transmission across a variety of connections and domains. The greater the so-called virality, the greater the potential audience is prone to accept its potential veracity as its originator and its motives are obscured. Accelerators to increase impact include advertising promotion, botting and other computational propaganda, and social media echo chambers. Amplifiers, i.e. actors enhancing the campaign for ideological or financial gain, will also engage. The information/disinformation becomes part of the public narrative and knowledge due to successful laundering (80). Below (Figure 1) is Korta’s schematic representation of her “Information Laundering 2.0” model:

Figure 1. Korta’s “Information Laundering 2.0 Model”



This figure shows how the Internet facilitates the laundering of disinformation through the virtually infinite number of access points for placement of any piece of propaganda (Korta, 2018, 81). Persuasion includes citation of real or alleged sources of varying degrees of public credibility. Persuasion appeals to romantic national identity stereotypes of self vis-à-vis other increase authority. These national self-identity stereotypes include momentous historic events, e.g. the alleged Western Cold War victory over Soviet Communism and critical events within it, e.g. the Polish pope and his attempted assassination. Government black propaganda disinformation that is decades old survives as tropes referenced in today's Internet-based media environment. Higher learning institutions should avoid becoming inadvertent propagators of these tropes.

Innumerable so-called sources of information on the Internet in the post-Cold War era exist. They generate exponentially greater opportunities to turn what originally was black propaganda into ongoing topics of public discussion regarding their plausibility. In the case of the papal assassination attempt, disinformation propagated nearly 40 years ago continues to be referenced in 2019 *New York Times* reporting in the Orlandi case. Continuing references to this misinformation reflect the appeal of stereotypes of self and other, historically through to the present. The appeal of these conspiracy theories may be sought in the emotional appeals of stereotypes, i.e. perceptual oversimplifications which are at the foundation of conspiracy theories. Stereotyping associates with emotion/affect and emotion/affect associate with nationalism; nationalism associates with stereotyping and affect (Cottam and Cottam, 2001, 3-4). The role of entertainment more or less masquerading as national and international news reporting may be a focus of future research. These romantic nationalist narratives of self and other have accelerator, enabler and amplifier installments in the form of so-called news updates happening continuously via the Internet.

The emotional gratification stemming from belief perseverance/confirmation bias and the backfire effect stem from forms of framing in relation to the national self-identity of the news media consumer. With an infinite number of so-called news sources now available, the news media consumer can select those sources that conform with that consumer's affective biases and perceptual predispositions. The imperative of these so-called news sources to appeal to these affective biases is almost irresistible in the intensely competitive, for-profit media industry.

The policy prescription against information laundering is not a simple one as Korta (2018) highlights. Tools from the pre-Internet era in the legal sphere already exist, but they require adaptation and implementation in the digital environment. E.g. trademark and copyright law may be adapted to criminalize identify theft in the form of fake tweets and posts (Korta, 2018, 102). Just as a user must truly identify him or herself to access the financial system to prevent money laundering, so user identity verification requirements should be implemented to prevent information laundering (Ibid., 104). Institutions of higher learning may play an important role in serving as digital as well as brick-and-mortar sites for combatting gray and black propaganda/fake news. Institutions of higher learning should avoid association with actors that have propagated such disinformation in the past. They otherwise risk inadvertently slipping into the role of de facto enablers, amplifiers and accelerators of this disinformation.

Bulgaria is vulnerable to fake news because it is a society with a weak state as manifested in high levels of corruption (Pavlovska-Hilaiel, 2015). It will be particularly vulnerable to information laundering. US agencies as inoculators against information laundering risk undermining their public credibility. AUBG is a Bulgarian flagship university supported by the US government. It pays homage to a Bulgarian expatriate who evidently facilitated CIA disinformation propagation about Communist Bulgaria during the Cold War. AUBG confronts this dilemma today because of the imperative its senior administration has continually faced to raise funds for the university. AUBG as a non-profit institution formally independent from the US government confronts the necessity of fund raising from governmental, charitable and other sources. During this writer's employment at AUBG, US government representatives continuously reiterated the goal of AUBG becoming financially self-sustaining. I.e. AUBG should cease being reliant on periodic US government budget allocations to cover its operating expenses.

The AUBG senior administration, and especially the president, faced the continual imperative to find financial donors. One recent study notes that the pressure to engage in successful fundraising is a major factor disinclining female academic institutional chief academic officers from seeking promotion to a university presidency (Rodrigues, 2018, 562, fn. 191). This writer attended one meeting with the AUBG president with senior faculty representatives in which she stated that AUBG would not accept financial donations without exercising due diligence. Specifically, a Bulgarian entity with a problematic reputation had apparently offered a donation to AUBG. AUBG would not accept donations from particular Bulgarian entities if the sources of those funds were not transparently clear and legitimate. Corruption and motive opacity are a major challenge to the Bulgarian state and civil society. "[T]he NGO sector in Bulgaria is currently perceived as politicized and many NGOs are politically operated" (Pavlovska-Hilaiel, 2015, 213). "[...] NGOs are at best driven by a political agenda or at worst serve the interests of a particular political actor" (Ibid., 2014). AUBG, and all US public diplomacy initiatives, should follow the long-established policy of the US Peace Corps and avoid the public association with past CIA activities in its fundraising and support efforts. They risk serving inadvertently as a disinformation enablers, amplifiers and accelerators today because of the credible public authority reputations of academic institutions.

CONCLUSION

One of the tactical aims of AUBG as part of post-Cold War US international strategy is to influence trends within the post-Communist polities of Bulgaria and elsewhere regarding elite alteration. These aims serve to expand US post-Cold War hegemony. These public diplomacy policies include utilization of Cold War-era resources and capacities adapted to post-1989 circumstances. Communist Bulgaria had the most cooperative relationship with Moscow within the Warsaw Pact (Banov, 2018). Economic destitution and corruption characterized post-Communist Bulgaria, and it is the poorest member of the EU (Hope and Dimitrov, 2019). Encouraged by socialization and cooptation via AUBG, the upcoming cohort of potential future leaders seeking social mobility would establish cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, political and business networks. These associations would be rooted within Euro-Atlantic polities. The project illustrates again the indirect, broader polity-focused competition between the US and its competitors to influence

trends within the politics of third parties. It illustrates the essential relevance of soft power in the current era of mass politics and nuclear weaponry. Competition includes a focus on shaping short, medium and long-term trends in public attitudes concentrating on potential future elite members.

International strategic competitive interference targets not only political leaders and governments. It focuses on the broader polity, including constituency leaders and activists and risks increasing polarization between constituencies in the polity. Constituency influence targets are both abroad and at home. These containment-type intelligence bureaucratic instruments continue to engage in covert intervention in the post-Cold War era. E.g. South Korea's Cyberwarfare Command, created in 2010 to counter North Korean cyberattacks, waged a clandestine "online smear campaign" against domestic targets it perceived as allied with Pyongyang (Choe, 2013, para.7). Its intent was to help the right-wing presidential candidate Park Geun-hye, the daughter of South Korea's military junta leader Park Chung-hee (1961-79), in the 2012 South Korean presidential election. President Park Geun-hye was subsequently impeached and removed from office and is in prison for corruption.

With the global rise of populism, establishment elite control in the targeted polity becomes more challenging. Conservative populist constituencies transfer their allegiance and obedience to political entrepreneurs seeking access to resources. External covert intervention to encourage this instability has precedents in the doctrine of total warfare which predominated by the mid-twentieth century, i.e. all national citizenry constituencies subsidize the war effort (McGeehan, 2018, 52). They are potential targets, despite being civilians. The post-1945 nuclear setting incentivizes avoiding direct confrontation through covert, unofficial, informal and indirect targeting of civilian constituencies to reduce the potential for uncontrolled escalation (Carson, 2016).

Awareness of a policy target's inevitable tendency to impute or infer an initiator actor's motives is advisable in planning an initiator actor's political strategy towards a target actor. E.g. comprehensibility regarding financial sponsorship of political campaigns, allowing for consequent imputation of political motivation, has always been part of contemporary US government regulation (Bauer, 2018). Predictability is necessary to reduce insecurity, fear and polarization and consequent conspiratorial worldviews propagating within society. Clarity regarding the identities and roles of key actors' sponsorship of policies and patronage of clients facilitates inferring motivations and capabilities. It permits the citizenry to predict with more confidence the consequences of their own political participation activities. The absence of transparency regarding contextual causation regarding influence activities in a target polity contributes to uncertainty and trepidation. It promotes the consequent stereotyping of globalization as a source of imperial threat. It enhances support for populist nationalist figures in the US and Europe and elsewhere. Current political debates illustrate the effort to upgrade current legal tools to fight information laundering. These adaptations will be arduous and never ending and beyond the scope of this paper as a limitation of it in terms of the substantive meaning of transparency.

George Soros' Open Society Institute of Sofia, Bulgaria published a study showing that "Balkan countries to be among the most vulnerable to the spread of fake news, described as 'rumors, hoaxes, outright lies, and disinformation from foreign governments or hostile entities'" (Nicholls, 2018, para. 3). The US consequently reopened Radio Free Europe bureaus in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary in 2019 (Novak, 2019). This Open Society Bulgaria study noted that "[...] education seems to be the best all-round solution to fake news and the post-truth phenomenon with less drawbacks and more possibilities to tailor it to different situations" (Lessenski, 2018, 12). I.e. the aims of civic education should include a focus on analytical training in analyzing the historical contextual legacy factors motivating a current campaign position, public policy or foreign policy. This legacy is as a critical component of transparency. Transparency regarding the historical political context that contributed to current US public diplomacy initiatives strengthens them.

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