

Chapter 61

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

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ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

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

The argument is based on an examination of the Nostradamus search term “anomaly” which saw Nostradamus become the top gaining search on Google for the week of the attacks, and the seventh overall search term on the day of the attacks (Google, 2006). It had similar performance across all major search engines, and ended the month as the top gaining search on Google (Google, 2011; Kornblum, 2001; National Research Council, 2003). This surge in searches related to Nostradamus was not mir-

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rored by other attack-related search terms and seems to have been driven by Nostradamus emails and text messages which were forwarded at a massive scale during and after the attacks (Aravilla, 2001; Rose, 2001; Wiggins, 2001).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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