

THE ART OF DECEIT: HOW CHINA AND RUSSIA USE SHARP POWER TO SUBVERT THE WEST

EDITED BY DR ANDREW FOXALL & DR JOHN HEMMINGS



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INTRODUCTION

Dr Andrew Foxall and Dr John Hemmings

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, liberal democracy seemed to be in the ascendency while communist authoritarianism appeared to have been consigned to the ‘dustbin of history’. Over the last decade or so, however, it is authoritarianism, rather than democracy, that has been in the ascendency, with ruling elites in China and Russia centralising power inside their borders and exporting their norms and behaviour into the rules-based international system.

Defined by top-down authoritarianism and crony-capitalism, the two states have consolidated power under strongmen-style leaders, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. In the process of challenging the international order over the last two decades, both leaders have carried out ever-increasing acts of political warfare against the West. For China, the template for subverting one’s enemies can be found in Sun Tzu’s “winning without fighting” principle,¹ in addition to the “Three Warfares” concept described in a seminal 1999 People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) book, *Unrestricted Warfare*.² Such writings have been given pride of place in Xi’s promotion of the United Front Work Department, one of the ‘magic weapons’ of the Chinese Communist Party. For Russia, much has been made of the writings of General Valerii Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, since 2013, but the Kremlin’s contemporary tactics are similar to those it employed during the Cold War.³

What is meant by ‘political warfare’? The term encompasses a wide range of domestic and international instruments that have historically been used to persuade, intimidate, undermine, coerce, and weaken opponents, all in the effort of achieving desired political goals. It also includes economic warfare, cyber warfare, and many other forms of warfare short of conventional military combat. Within this, as China and Russia are claiming larger roles on the global stage they are devoting increasing amounts of effort and money to shape international public opinion. While such efforts cannot be considered ‘soft power’ due to their state-driven functionality, they are not exactly ‘hard power’ in the openly coercive sense either. Nor are they public diplomacy, since their modus operandi is to work behind the scenes, covertly.

In this context, the National Endowment for Democracy scholars Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig coined the term “sharp power” as the attempts to pierce or penetrate the political and information environments of targeted countries.⁴ While there has much debate over recent years as to whether sharp power is substantively different from soft or hard power, we believe there is merit in the term as a distinct sub-genre of what was historically called ‘influence operations’. The age of the internet and the pervasiveness of the digital space, combined with the internationalisation of Western media and business, have intensified the reach of authoritarian states in ways that simply were not possible during the Cold War. These developments give renewed importance to Henry Kissinger’s

¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2002), p. 49.

² Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, translated by Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Beijing, China: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999), available at: <http://www.terrorism.com/documents/unrestricted.pdf>, last visited: 28 November 2019.

³ Giles, K., ‘Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow’s Exercise of Power’, Chatham House (2016), available at: www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf, last visited: 28 November 2019, pp. 11-12.

⁴ Walker, C. and Jessica Ludwig, ‘From ‘Soft Power’ to ‘Sharp Power’: Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World’, *National Endowment for Democracy*, December 2017, available at: <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Introduction-Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence.pdf>, last visited: 28 November 2019.

observation, made in 1955, that the “predominant aspect of the new diplomacy is its psychological dimension”.⁵

The situation is increasingly stark. China and Russia are well-equipped, experienced, and highly skilled at conducting political warfare operations, including sharp power. Through such operations they are actively working to undermine the core interests of the West, seeking to subvert its cohesion, and attempting to erode the resilience of liberal democratic societies. In contrast to the Western bloc, which abandoned high-level political warfare operations at the end of the Cold War, China and Russia have been undertaking operations to achieve these goals for much of the last two decades. NATO member states in Europe – particularly those in the Baltics – have borne the brunt of Russian meddling and mischief-making, particularly in the wake of cyber-attacks on Estonia in 2007. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom are increasingly serving as testing grounds for intrusions into democratic political institutions and processes by China and its surrogates.

There is no set pattern or template for Chinese and Russian political warfare operations. The strength of this approach is that neither country relies too heavily on a single instrument or series of instruments to achieve their goals; different instruments are combined and their mix is adapted to the requirements of each specific circumstance. This full spectrum approach is mirrored in the relationships which the Chinese and Russian authorities seek to engender with individuals and organisations. Some are paid collaborators and agents, some are ‘fellow travellers’ sympathetic to the goals of the Chinese and Russian authorities, and some are ‘useful idiots’ who – perhaps even for the most altruistic or innocent of reasons – participate in Chinese- and Russian-backed activities and, in doing so, further the agendas of Beijing and Moscow.

This report explores Chinese and Russian sharp power in three key pillars of Western liberal democracies: pluralistic politics; a free media; and academia. It is based on a one-day, closed-door conference hosted by the Henry Jackson Society and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung’s UK and Ireland Office in June 2019. The conference brought together academics, commentators, think tankers, policy experts, and officials from a range of Western countries, including the United States, Germany, the UK, Italy, Taiwan, and Australia. The conference explored questions including: How deeply is the strategy and practice of political warfare held in China and Russia? What form does it take, and what instruments are used? How do these instruments differ across space and time? How much of a threat does Chinese and Russian political warfare ultimately pose to the West? And how can the West increase its resilience in order to counter this? Some of the answers the conference provided are contained in the essays that follow.

As it proceeds, this report is divided into seven essays.

The first two essays detail Russian and Chinese sharp power in the context of European politics. The first essay, by Neil Barnett, focuses on the ‘tripod’ of Russian political warfare instruments: disinformation and cyber; financial; and human. The second essay, written by Lucrezia Poggetti, describes China’s influence operations among Italy’s ruling elites and the nature of the challenge the operations pose to authorities in Rome. Across both essays, the authors address the ways in which China and Russia have: created

⁵ Kissinger, H. A., ‘Psychological and Pressure Aspects of Negotiations with the USSR’ in *Psychological Aspects of United States Strategy*, CIA (1955), available at: www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86B00269R000300120001-4.pdf, last visited: 28 November 2019, p. 170..

sympathetic lobby groups; funnelled money to political parties; generated good-will amongst politicians through seemingly non-political initiatives; and interfered with domestic political processes.

The third and fourth essays discuss Russian and Chinese political warfare in the context of a free media. The third essay, by Jakub Janda and Veronika Víchová, discusses the goals, key characteristics, and tools kits that Russia uses in Central and Eastern Europe. The fourth essay, by Didi Kirsten Tatlow, does this for Europe as a whole, describing the *raison d'être* and successes of China's 'Great External Propaganda'. Taken together, the essays consider the extent to which China and Russia influence the media agenda through, for example: the establishment of media outlets; the placing of opinion editorials and news by 'useful idiots'; and the creation of 'fake news'. While many in policy circles challenge the efficacy of 'clumsy' Russian and Chinese efforts to sway Western audiences, there is still too little being done to assess the impact.

The fifth and sixth essays provide details about how Moscow and Beijing undermine European academia. The fifth essay, written by Andrew Foxall, details four ways through which Russia has been able to extend its influence in Western academia: self-censorship; the funding of academic institutions; the use of academic activities for the purposes of intelligence gathering; and denying access to Russia for those who are critical of the Kremlin and its policies. The sixth essay, by Matthew Henderson, takes a similar approach to China, arguing that Britain's record of academic freedom, excellence, and innovation makes its universities a key target for Beijing. China's use of Confucian Institutes and student groups inside the West has been on full display in recent Hong Kong-related protests in Australia and elsewhere.

The seventh and final essay, by Andrew Hastie MP, argues that there is a serious mismatch between the major authoritarian states and the West in the political warfare domain. China and Russia are well-equipped and have been engaged in such operations for many years. The West, by contrast, has not addressed the challenge seriously since the end of the Cold War. In order to move beyond this impasse, the essay discusses a range of potential policy responses.

Taken together, we hope that these essays will bring such issues to a wider audience, for, as the report argues, Russian and Chinese efforts often seek to operate silently and in the shadows, beyond the glare of public attention.

1. THE TRIPOD: RUSSIA'S POLITICAL WARFARE WEAPON

Neil Barnett

Russia's campaign to influence, destabilise, and weaken liberal democracies is often viewed as a matter solely of 'online disinformation' and 'fake news'; combating these phenomena preoccupies governments, NGOs, and think tanks. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that, taken together, this represents just one of three legs of a 'tripod' that supports Russia's political warfare weapon, and that the three-legged system must be viewed and attacked holistically. The three legs are:

1. **Disinformation and cyber:** This covers activities originating in (but not confined to) the digital realm. These include the seeding and propagation of disinformation intended to obscure, confuse, and demoralise, as well as hacking, doxing, and other offensive information operations.
2. **Financial:** Large-scale international political influence operations require substantial financial resources. Since these activities are by their nature covert and to varying degrees deniable, the origin of the financing must be obscured. This is 'political money laundering'.
3. **Human:** This leg is the closest to traditional espionage, comprising the spotting, recruitment, and running of human agents. As will be explained below, the scope and definition of this activity has expanded considerably in recent decades, in ways that make counter-intelligence challenging.

Disinformation and Cyber

As this leg is the most widely covered, the least will be said. Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report⁶ on Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election is a good guide to how disinformation, abuse of personal data, botnets, hacking, and deniable distribution are used in combination. This pattern of activity is likely to continue in an evolved fashion. In particular, the geographic siting of hostile operations is liable to shift from offshore to onshore, and to be further decentralised. In other words, analysts believe that in place of large nodes based outside of the target country, for example, the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA), there is likely to be a move to multiple smaller operations based in or close to the target countries.

During the 2016 US presidential election, there were many documented instances of the IRA and equivalents remotely recruiting Americans, most of them unwitting, to do things in the real world.⁷ Increasingly, they are expected to rely on target country nationals and dual nationals and to shelter under the First Amendment and journalistic status, however dubious that status might be. This marks a major step up in combining the first and third legs, as a remote cyber threat mutates into a domestic counter-intelligence threat.

⁶ Mueller, R. S., 'Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election', US Department of Justice (2019), available at: www.documentcloud.org/documents/5955118-The-Mueller-Report.html, last visited: 15 November 2019.

⁷ DiResta, R. et al., 'The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency', New Knowledge (2018), available at: cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4326998/ira-report-rebrand_FinalJ14.pdf, last visited: 15 November 2019.

Financial

My colleague Alastair Sloan and I coined the term ‘political money laundering’ in our 2018 paper for the Atlantic Council, *Democracy in the Crosshairs*.⁸ Whereas conventional money laundering uses a series of layers to conceal a link to a predicate crime, the political variant employs similar layers to hide the link to a hostile state. The paper set out how campaign funding legislation and enforcement in most liberal democracies is decades out of date and practically invites illicit campaign funding.

For example, the lax control of small donations under the reporting threshold (\$200 in the US) would potentially allow in tens or hundreds of millions in funds from cashless cards and crypto currency, which is subsequently diced into small sums by automated systems. This is perhaps the gravest gap in financing defences, but it is far from the only one. Diamonds and other hard-to-trace commodities are also favourite conduits for illicit funding, while PACs (Political Action Committees, which are organisations that pool campaign donations) and PAC-like structures allow dark money to be deployed in media spending and other forms of support.

As well as covert campaign financing, laundered funds are required for payment of agents, subsidies to co-opted businessmen, and the setting up of front organisations such as think tanks and media outlets.

Anecdotal reports indicate that these funds are largely covered by a sort of tithe or zakat extracted from Russian businesses. When a Russian oligarch or business seeks to send large sums outside of the country, they must seek informal permission from the highest levels. If the answer is ‘yes’, there is often a condition: that a certain percentage of the money must be set aside for ‘patriotic purposes’. In a notional scenario, a Russian oil company might pay US\$1 billion for relatively worthless speculative oil blocks in West Africa. The vendor company would then distribute the proceeds back to the buyers via shell companies. But some of the funds – perhaps \$100m – would be used to finance campaigns, suborn individuals, and set up front operations. This again shows the interpenetration of Russian business, crime, and intelligence activities (as described in Karen Dawisha’s book *Putin’s Kleptocracy*),⁹ and how almost every vector of contact with the West has been weaponised.

Human

Like the financial leg, the human element is as old as espionage itself, although geopolitical, social, and technological changes in recent decades have opened up new opportunities. The end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the ideological divide is of limited relevance, contrary to popular belief: Russia still has the ambition of recruiting agents in the West, while the barriers to accepting their blandishments have lowered.

One generation of Russian agents is still in play from the early 1990s. Some are citizens of the countries of the Former Soviet Union, and some are citizens of target countries. As the Lithuanian international relations expert Marius Laurinavičius makes clear in his paper *Weaponizing Kleptocracy: Putin’s Hybrid Warfare*, these people are rich and often well-established:¹⁰

⁸ Barnett, N. and A. Sloan, ‘Democracy in the Crosshairs: How Political Money Laundering Threatens the Democratic Process’, Atlantic Council, 2 October 2018, available at: www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/democracy-in-the-crosshairs-how-political-money-laundering-threatens-the-democratic-process/, last visited: 15 November 2019.

⁹ Dawisha, K., *Putin’s Kleptocracy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

¹⁰ Laurinavičius, M., ‘Weaponizing Kleptocracy: Putin’s Hybrid Warfare’, Hudson Institute (2017), available at: www.hudson.org/research/13666-weaponizing-kleptocracy-putin-s-hybrid-warfare, last visited: 15 November 2019, p. 22.

It is well known that billions of dollars of the KGB and Communist Party's money vanished right before the collapse of the Soviet Union in what is typically regarded today as an unsolved mystery. However, from well-documented plans made public long ago, we know that the KGB and Communist Party sought to establish hundreds of business enterprises in the West that would provide cover for KGB and party members to transfer assets abroad with the assistance of organised crime.

Other promising people have been recruited over decades. Just as in the case of the spy ring uncovered by the FBI in 2010 (involving Anna Chapman), Russia's long-term ambition and patience in intelligence operations are baffling to the Western public. (Popular underestimation of Russia's intelligence apparatus is endemic and merits a paper in itself.)

At lower levels, stooge-like citizens of target countries are recruited as couriers, fronts, launderers, access agents, and dogsbodies. Typically, such people are more endowed with vanity and ambition than with intellect, and the Mueller report describes several of them. They are recruited by flattery, financial inducement, and sex.

Behind such people – but far less visible – is usually a 'kingpin' figure. These individuals are usually much more intelligent and experienced, and they are often dual citizens or have some demonstrable link to Russia.

Separately, it appears that there are also far more sophisticated networks of long-term influence agents whose task has been to create political conditions over decades for events favourable to the Kremlin. These individuals are often opinion formers: academics, political campaigners, and journalists. The locus of recruitment is first-division universities. While this is reminiscent of the 'Cambridge Five', it differs in that the aim is not to penetrate intelligence organisations, but to shift public and elite sentiment.

Collapsing the Tripod

The first leg is the most novel and therefore most appealing to researchers, since it relies partly on technologies that did not exist 20 years ago. It is also the most accessible to study, because instances of disinformation can be identified and tracked. *The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*, a research document from the consultancy New Knowledge, is an example of the excellent work being done in this field.¹¹ Conversely, the second and third legs are much harder to identify, explain, and prove, for reasons that are set out below. They are also more uncomfortable for political and financial elites in liberal democracies: whereas disinformation can be presented as an external threat that could potentially be blocked, political money laundering and improper contacts with hostile states are closer to home.

So while research on the first leg is welcome and necessary, it is also a displacement activity. Moreover, it will be impossible to root out influence operations unless it is accepted that they are deeply embedded in our onshore and offshore financial systems and that domestic citizens, including some politicians, businessmen, and people classifying themselves as journalists, are active collaborators.

This is, of course, a fiendishly difficult area for liberal democracies under the rule of law. Democratic politics is meant to operate free from state surveillance, as is journalism. The problem is that Russia's services understand very well that these protections can be

¹¹ DiResta, R. et al., 'The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency', New Knowledge (2018), available at: disinformationreport.blob.core.windows.net/disinformation-report/NewKnowledge-Disinformation-Report-Whitepaper.pdf, last visited: 15 November 2019.

exploited to protect their own influence operations, effectively neutralising our defences. Disinformation can then be deployed in defence of operations, by persuading citizens that counter-intelligence activity is a 'deep state plot' to thwart the popular will.

If the liberal democratic system is to survive, all three legs of this tripod must be dealt with. That will require new legislation that recognises the nature of the threat and its *modus operandi* and imposes on the security services the obligation to apply for clearance to investigate politicians, journalists, and other domestic citizens where probable cause can be shown. In the UK a panel of judges with high-level security clearance could be convened for this purpose, along the lines of the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) which was established in 1978.

Equally, counter-intelligence assumptions should be cleared of anachronisms: a trained and active foreign intelligence officer may never be identified in a specific case, and an intelligence operation is not defined by an attempt to recruit security officials or steal classified material.

Furthermore, domestic counter-intelligence resources should be bolstered. The overwhelming focus on counter terrorism since 9/11 is no doubt necessary, but it should not come at the expense of protecting the integrity of the political system. And just as 9/11 prompted a restructuring of the intelligence community, so should countering this 'tripod'. In the UK, for example, the Security Service (MI5) is responsible for counter-intelligence, but it has no capability to investigate money laundering and organised crime, which are integral to the tripod. This responsibility falls on the National Crime Agency (NCA) - which has no counter-intelligence mandate. Integrating these functions along the lines of the FBI, together with the ability to build prosecution cases, would be an important step forward.

In contrast to counter terrorism, it is hard to make the case for mass surveillance. Rather, there would be a need for action against tightly-defined groups and individuals. Such measures are widely accepted in wartime, and so the challenge is to make it widely understood (as our adversaries understand) that we - in the West - are at war.

2. CHINA'S GROWING POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN ITALY: A CASE STUDY OF BEIJING'S INFLUENCING TACTICS IN EUROPE

Lucrezia Poggetti

Italy's signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in March 2019 sparked controversy among Rome's European partners and the US. They feared it would undermine efforts to devise a more coherent EU China strategy and lend legitimacy to Beijing's geopolitical ambitions. However, before Italy formally endorsed the initiative, China had already been cultivating networks for the promotion of BRI in Italian business and political elites.

As China scholar Nadège Rolland has noted, Beijing utilises proxy organisations to disseminate a benevolent narrative around BRI. These groups work to “shape foreign perceptions and behaviours in a manner favourable to BRI, while at the same time inhibiting potential attempts to criticise or counter it”.¹² This is particularly true for organisations linked to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) United Front Work Department (UFWD), one of the agencies in charge of foreign influence operations. The UFWD seeks to work with prominent individuals, including foreigners, for the promotion of CCP goals.

In addition to courting Italian elites, China's foothold in Italian media has expanded. On the sidelines of Xi Jinping's March 2019 visit to Italy, many institutional agreements were signed, including those between leading Italian news agencies and Chinese party-state media.¹³ A growing foothold in Italy's media landscape gives Beijing a platform to spread its official views. With discussions on China being still largely limited to expert circles and only occasionally entering mainstream debates, Beijing has significant potential to influence the narrative on China in Italy relatively unchallenged.

Courting Italian Political and Business Elites to Cultivate Favourable Views of BRI

In 2013, the creation of the Italy-China Friendship Association (ICFA) largely went unnoticed. The ICFA describes itself as the “Italian branch” of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC).¹⁴ Experts on China's influence operations have described the CPAFFC as a CCP organisation that works to “make the foreign serve China” and as “the public face of the UFWD”.^{15; 16} ICFA's inauguration was held under the patronage of the Italian Ministry of Economic Development and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signalling a lack of awareness about the association's links to the Chinese agency that conducts foreign influence activities.

¹² Rolland, N., ‘Mapping the footprint of Belt and Road influence operations’, *Synopsis*, 12 August 2019, available at: sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/rollandbri.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹³ ‘Intese istituzionali sottoscritte tra Italia e Cina a Villa Madama’, *Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico*, 23 March 2019, available at: www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Intese_istituzionali_Italia-Cina.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹⁴ Pivetti, I. and L. Jianping, ‘Nasce Italy China Friendship Association Una Grande Opportunita per gli Scambi Culturali ed Economici tra Italia e Cina’, *Irene Pivetti*, n. d., available at: www.irenepivetti.it/news/174-nasce-italy-china-friendship-association-una-grande-opportunita-per-gli-scambi-culturali-ed-economici-tra-italia-e-cina, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹⁵ Brady, A.-M., ‘Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping’, Wilson Centre (2017), available at: www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/for_website_magicweaponsanne-mariesbradyseptember2017.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹⁶ Diamond, L. et al., ‘Chinese Influence and American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance’, The Hoover Institution (2018), available at: www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/chineseinfluence_americaninterests_fullreport_web.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

The ICFA's president is Irene Pivetti, a journalist, TV anchor, and former president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies as a member of Italy's far-right League party. Throughout frequent trips to China, she has been rewarded with councillor positions in the city governments of Yangzhou and Huai'an.^{17; 18} The Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) has described her lobby work as "mainly focused on the promotion of China's Belt and Road Initiative".¹⁹ Her business advisory firm, Only Italia, promotes Italy-China trade and investment ties.²⁰ Only Italia's vice president, Chinese national Vittorio Zhu (朱金亮), boasts on his biography of formal ties to Beijing's United Front, including having been invited by the United Front to participate in an event in 2015 and having become executive vice president of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (CPPRC) in 2011.²¹ Zhu is also honorary president of the Zhejiang Overseas Chinese Association in Milan and regularly attends UFDW-organised events in his official capacities.²² Most recently, he attended a reception in Milan in July 2019, organised on the occasion of an official visit by member of the Standing Committee of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee and Minister of the UFDW of the Provincial Party Committee, Xiong Jianping (熊建平), who met Chinese communities in Milan, Florence, and Prato.^{23; 24} On a trip to China in August 2019, Pivetti met United Front officials. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, administratively under the UFDW, reported the meeting and stated that since Rome endorsed BRI, the ICFA "has put BRI to its core, timely adjusting the priorities and direction of its work".²⁵

Pivetti is not the only lobbyist who has worked with the Chinese government. In 2017, Michele De Gasperis founded Italy's OBOR Institute, a BRI consultancy.²⁶ Since 2016, De Gasperis has also served as chief representative of the Italian office of the Overseas Investment Union of the Investment Association of China, an organisation under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of the Chinese government.²⁷ His promotional work on BRI has also been featured in publications by the La Rouché Movement, which became known in Germany's 2017 Federal Elections for being behind a political party whose campaign centred on promoting BRI.^{28;29}

¹⁷ 'Irene Pivetti Nominata Consigliere della Città di Yangzhou', *Only Italia*, n. d., available at: www.only-italia.it/irene-pivetti-nominata-consigliere-della-citta-di-yangzhou/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹⁸ 'Chi Sono', *Irene Pivetti*, n. d., available at: www.irenepivetti.it/chisono, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹⁹ 'Follow the New Silk Road: China's growing trail of think tanks and lobbyists in Europe', *Corporate Europe Observatory*, 8 April 2019, available at: corporateeurope.org/en/2019/04/follow-new-silk-road-chinas-growing-trail-think-tanks-and-lobbyists-europe, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁰ 'Organigramma', *Only Italia*, n. d., available at: www.only-italia.it/chi-siamo/sistema-only-italia/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²¹ 'I Soci', *Yinhe Hub*, n. d., available at: www.yhhub.it/it/2017/03/06/i-soci/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²² '米兰"改革开放40周年"图片展落幕 华人学生受益', *The United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee*, 24 December 2018, available at: www.zyztz.gov.cn/hrhq/300931.jhtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²³ '米兰华侨华人工商会换届 浙江统战部长提四点希望', *ChinaQW*, 13 July 2019, available at: www.chinaqw.com/hqhr/2019/07-13/226557.shtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁴ '浙江省委常委、统战部部长熊建平率侨务代表团访问普拉托', *Italia Prato Huashanghui*, n. d., available at: www.italiapratohuashanghui.com/a/info/2019/0718/424.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁵ '丽水统战部长会见对华友协代表团成员 促交流合作', *Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council*, 8 August 2019, available at: www.gqb.gov.cn/news/2019/0819/46627.shtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁶ 'About Us', *Istituto Italiano OBOR*, n. d., available at: www.oborit.org/about-us.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁷ 'Profile', *De Gasperis*, n. d., available at: www.degasperis.org/profile.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁸ De Gasperis, M., 'President of Italian OBOR Institute: Belt and Road Is a Strategically Stabilizing Factor', *Executive Intelligence Review* 46.23 (2019), pp. 22-24, available at: larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2019/eirv46n23-20190614/22-24_4623.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

²⁹ Allen-Ebrahimian, B., 'Lyndon LaRouche Is Running A Pro-China Party In Germany', *Foreign Policy*, 28 September 2017, available at: foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/18/lyndon-larouche-is-running-a-pro-china-party-in-germany/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

Beijing has also been courting Italian politicians with representative positions in China-led initiatives. Former EU Commission president and Italian prime minister Romano Prodi is a member of the Belt and Road Forum advisory council, a group of retired international officials coordinated by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.^{30; 31} Another former Italian premier, Massimo D'Alema, sits on the board of directors of the Silk Road Cities Alliances (SRCA), a Beijing-based initiative whose mission involves “mobilising, organising and coordinating domestic and overseas social resources” in the implementation of BRI.^{32; 33} Francesco Rutelli and former ambassador to China Alberto Bradanini also sit on the board of directors and the steering committee of the Silk Road Cities Alliances. Bradanini is also president of a China studies think tank in Italy.³⁴ Notably, D'Alema was recently conferred a ‘Silk Road Super Ambassador Award’ for his contribution to BRI.³⁵

With these networks already in place, the China-friendly policy promoted by then undersecretary of state for economic development, Michele Geraci, catalysed the process leading to Italy’s formal endorsement of BRI.^{36; 37} As he entered government, Geraci made signing onto China’s BRI and attracting investment under Beijing’s industrial policy, Made in China 2025, a priority by setting up a dedicated task force.³⁸ In a June 2018 op-ed, published on the blog of Five Star Movement founder Beppe Grillo, Geraci called for Rome and Beijing to work together in different areas, including “cooperation and information exchange with China on public security”. This op-ed outraged a group of Italian scholars so much that they published a letter in response to Geraci’s “Chinese panacea”.^{39; 40}

Geraci’s moves within the Italian government have been thoroughly reported in the media, from a failed attempt to hire a Chinese national as his personal assistant (raising concerns related to giving a foreign national access to his agenda and potentially sensitive documents) to more serious efforts to water down an EU framework for screening

³⁰ Crawford, A. And P. Suzara, ‘Riding China’s Rise: The European Politicians in Beijing’s Orbit’, *Bloomberg*, 4 July 2018, available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-03/riding-china-s-rise-the-european-politicians-in-beijing-s-orbit, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³¹ ‘The Advisory Council of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation Holds the First Meeting’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, 18 December 2018, available at: www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1624868.shtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³² ‘Introduction’, *Silk Road Cities Alliance*, n. d., available at: www.srca-info.com/srca/en/srca1/srca1_1/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³³ ‘Structure’, *Silk Road Cities Alliance*, 30 January 2018, available at: www.srca-info.com/srca/en/srca1/srca1_2/201801/t20180130_1141.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³⁴ ‘Consiglio Direttivo’, *Centro Studi sulla Cina Contemporanea*, n. d., available at: www.csccl.it/consiglio-direttivo, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³⁵ Yuanzhi, L., ‘Five Ambassadors to China receive Silk Road Super Ambassador Award’, *Global Times*, 27 January 2019, available at: www.globaltimes.cn/content/1137186.shtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³⁶ Poggetti, L., ‘Italy Charts Risky Course with China-Friendly Policy’, *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, 11 October 2018, available at: www.merics.org/en/blog/italy-charts-risky-course-china-friendly-policy, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³⁷ Poggetti, L., ‘Italy’s BRI Blunder’, *Project Syndicate*, 21 March 2019, available at: www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/italy-endorsement-of-china-bri-big-mistake-by-lucrezia-poggetti-2019-03?barrier=accesspaylog, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³⁸ ‘MISE: Costituita la Task Force Cina’, *Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico*, 20 August 2018, available at: www.mise.gov.it/index.php/it/194-comunicati-stampa/2038553-il-mise-lancia-la-task-force-cina#page_top, last visited: 5 November 2019.

³⁹ Geraci, M., ‘La Cina e il Governo del Cambiamento’, *Beppe Grillo*, 11 June 2018, available at: www.beppegrillo.it/la-cina-e-il-governo-del-cambiamento/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁰ Franceschini, I. et al., ‘The Chinese Panacea?’, 19 March 2019, available at: madeinchinajournal.com/2019/03/19/the-chinese-panacea/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

foreign investment.^{41; 42; 43} Geraci is reported to have asked his staff to download (and communicate via) the Chinese messaging app WeChat, which is banned in other Western countries (for example, Australia) for fears related to China's espionage.⁴⁴ He also took part in La Rouché-organised events in Italy promoting BRI,⁴⁵ and has downplayed security risks related to Chinese ICT company Huawei's involvement in the rollout of Italy's 5G network.⁴⁶

The recent election of Chinese Italians to positions in local administrations has also attracted Beijing's attention. In June, Democratic Party (PD) candidates Marco Wong (王小波) and Teresa Lin (林诗璇) became the first two such individuals, in the city of Prato which is home to the largest Chinese community in the country. Their election was celebrated by state-owned China Central Television (CCTV) as a success for "Chinese participation in politics" (华人参政), the slogan for a CCP strategy to support ethnic Chinese politicians abroad as a means to incorporate them in United Front work.^{47; 48; 49} By trying to associate itself with ethnic Chinese in foreign administrations, even when these individuals do not have ties to the CCP, China risks creating mistrust and undermining the much needed representation of overseas Chinese in host countries' politics.

China's Expanding Foothold in the Italian Media Landscape

As in other European countries, Chinese party-controlled media agencies are expanding cooperation with national news outlets. This allows the CCP to broadcast its views on domestic and international affairs via prominent European media, packaging propaganda as if it were independent news. China's interest in 'packaging' its official narratives this way is well summarised in the words of the Chinese vice-consul general in Italy, Huang Yongyue. In 2018, Huang visited ClassEditori, a prominent publishing house that broadcasts Chinese-language radio China FM. He thanked the publishing house "for the positive attitude that [it] has shown towards Chinese projects, such as One Belt One Road, which are usually seen as [examples of] China's expansionism, and not as opportunities for all the countries involved", and added that "when it is Chinese media talking about BRI, the message comes across as propaganda, while when it is a Western media communicating [the message], perceptions change."⁵⁰

⁴¹ Blenkinsop, P., 'EU Nears Deal for Tougher Screening of Foreign Investments', Reuters, 9 November 2018, available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-trade-investment/eu-nears-deal-for-tougher-screening-of-foreign-investments-idUSKCNINE1BK, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴² Fittipaldi, E., "'Prima Italiano". E il Ministero di Di Maio Caccia la Collaboratrice Cinese', *La Repubblica*, 18 December 2018, available at: espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2018/12/18/news/prima-l-italiano-e-il-ministero-di-di-maio-caccia-la-collaboratrice-cinese-1.329711, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴³ Fittipaldi, E., 'Per Salvini ci Sono "Prima gli Italiani", ma al Ministero Assumono Cinesi', *La Repubblica*, 4 December 2018, available at: espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2018/12/04/news/per-salvini-ci-sono-prima-gli-italiani-ma-al-ministero-assumono-cinesi-1.329184, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁴ Pompili, G., 'Chi Mise la Cina al Governo', *Il Foglio*, 7 March 2019, available at: www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2019/03/07/news/chi-mise-la-cina-al-governo-241742/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁵ 'Movisol Conference on BRI in Milan', *The International Schiller Institute*, n. d., available at: schillerinstitute.com/blog/2019/03/14/preliminary-report-movisol-conference-on-bri-in-milan/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁶ Follain, J., 'Trump's Huawei Threats Dismissed in Italian Pivot Toward China', *Bloomberg*, 19 February 2019, available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-19/trump-s-huawei-threats-dismissed-in-italian-pivot-toward-china, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁷ '[华人世界]意大利 两位华人当选普拉托市议员 创造当地华人参政历史', CCTV, 19 June 2019, available at: tv.cctv.com/2019/06/19/VIDEyMdM7LffK6LjaBsGYrlg190619.shtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁸ '[加油]全民支持意大利普拉托华人竞选议员, 大家都要去投上宝贵的一票!', 欧洲华夏集团, 17 March 2019, available at: ihuarenbao.eu/20190317/14928, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁴⁹ Yeung, W. L. and C. Hamilton, 'How Beijing is Shaping Politics in Western Australia', *The Jamestown Foundation*, 9 May 2019, available at: jamestown.org/program/how-beijing-is-shaping-politics-in-western-australia/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵⁰ 'China Fm, da Milano la Radio per i Cinesi', *ItaliaOggi*, 4 April 2018, available at: www.italiaoggi.it/news/china-fm-da-milano-la-radio-per-i-cinesi-201804041153062920, last visited: 5 November 2019.

In October 2018, op-eds written by a regular Italian contributor to the CCP's nationalist tabloid *Global Times* started circulating on Beppe Grillo's blog, which is widely read by the populist party's supporters. Less than two weeks before Xi Jinping's visit to Italy, just while Italian government officials were discussing whether to go ahead with the MoU signature, an article written for *Global Times* supporting the signing was translated in Italian and reposted on Grillo's blog.^{51; 52} Recently, this phenomenon has attracted the attention of Italian China watchers after Grillo's blog published articles supporting Beijing's policies in Xinjiang, written by the same Italian *Global Times* contributor.⁵³

While Italy-China media cooperation is not new, additional agreements were signed as Italy joined BRI. ANSA – the country's leading newswire service – signed a cooperation agreement with party-state media Xinhua for the cross-posting of Xinhua pieces on its platforms.⁵⁴ ANSA clarified that Xinhua content would be clearly identified and separate from the wire's own production (articles cross-posted from the Chinese state agency are introduced as "ANSA-Xinhua"). It is, however, unlikely that the majority of Italian readers will know that Xinhua is one of China's state news agencies. In March 2019, Rai, Italy's national broadcaster, signed an MoU with China Media Group (CMG), the state media group that incorporates CCTV, China National Radio and China Radio International (CRI) – entities that were recently required to register in Australia and the US as agencies representing foreign interests.^{55; 56; 57} More recently, *ClassEditori* also signed an agreement with CMG, its seventh Chinese partner.⁵⁸ This content exchange and co-production agreement also entails publicising documentaries produced by the Chinese propaganda agency.^{59; 60} An expanding presence in Italian media gives Beijing a platform to spread its official views, while potentially inhibiting more critical debates from emerging.

In addition to its footprint in Italian elite networks and media landscape, Chinese government agencies have been present in Italy through a more conventional network of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms and a Chinese Students and Scholars Union

⁵¹ Parenti, F. M., 'US Squirms as Italy gets Closer to BRI', *Global Times*, 10 March 2019, available at: www.globaltimes.cn/content/1141547.shtml, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵² Parenti, F. M., 'L'Italia nella Via della Seta? Si Scatena l'Irritazione della "Casetta Bianca"', *Il Blog di Beppe Grillo*, 10 March 2019, available at: www.beppegrillo.it/litalia-nella-via-della-seta-si-scatena-lirritazione-della-casetta-bianca/, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵³ Michelin, F., 'Nessuna Persecuzione in Xinjiang. Parola di Pechino? No, di Grillo', *Formiche*, 18 November 2019, available at: <https://formiche.net/2019/11/nessuna-persecuzione-xinjiang-pechino-grillo/>, last visited: 4 December 2019.

⁵⁴ 'ANSA-Xinhua collaboration accord signed', *ANSA*, 22 March 2019, available at: www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2019/03/22/ansa-xinhua-collaboration-accord-signed_aeba934e-af01-43a2-b5a3-cb90b4852fc4.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵⁵ 'Firmato MoU con China Media Group', *Rai*, 22 March 2019, available at: www.rai.it/ufficiostampa/articoli/2019/03/Firmato-MoU-con-China-Media-Group--8c088f24-51f0-4449-be76-d2b06843824f.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵⁶ O'Keeffe, K. and A. Viswanatha, 'Chinese State Media Giant CGTN Registers as Foreign Agent in U.S.', *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 February 2019, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-state-media-giant-cgtn-registers-as-foreign-agent-in-u-s-11549387532, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵⁷ 'Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Register Registration Record', *Australian Government, Attorney-General's Department*, n. d., available at: transparency.ag.gov.au/SearchItemDetail/71d37e84-f972-e911-8125-0050569d617d, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵⁸ 'Partnerships', *Class Editori*, n. d., available at: www.classeditori.it/partnership.asp?language=ENG, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁵⁹ Brustia, C., 'Mou fra Class Editori e China Media Group su Tv e grandi eventi', *Class Editori*, 1 July 2019, available at: www.classxhsilkroad.it/news/azienda-media/mou-fra-class-editori-e-china-media-group-su-tv-e-grandi-eventi-201907011641247244, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁶⁰ 'Roma, Conferenza Stampa sulla Trasmissione del Micro-Documentario 4k in 100 Puntate "Da Xi'an a Roma" in Italia', *China Radio International*, 19 July 2019, available at: <http://italian.cri.cn/opinioni/notizie/3208/20190719/342841.html>, last visited: 4 December 2019.

(CSSUI).^{61; 62} Italian think tanks have also concluded partnership agreements involving Chinese SOEs and state think tanks, which are transparently communicated on their websites.^{63; 64; 65}

With still few public debates on China, Italy is in urgent need to boost its own expertise and decrease dependency on Chinese actors regarding knowledge production and dissemination on China. For a country that has important ties with Beijing (for example, through law enforcement and extradition agreements),^{66; 67; 68} the ability to assess China's activities is key for safeguarding Italian interests.

While Italy's new government has already taken a few steps to pursue a more balanced China policy compared to that of the previous coalition (for example, with a new cybersecurity law that also aims to protect Italy's 5G networks and a resolution on Hong Kong),^{69; 70; 71} Beijing – whose campaigning across Europe has become more aggressive – will continue trying to exert influence through existing channels. As such, Italy's investment in China-literacy should be complemented with measures to strengthen transparency and disclosure requirements for media, universities, think tanks, and lobby organisations collaborating with foreign government agencies. Current engagements with United Front organisations and existing partnerships with Chinese party-state agencies should be reviewed to ensure that Italian interests and democratic principles – such as academic freedom and freedom of the press – are not being eroded.

⁶¹ 'Confucius Institute/Classroom', *Hanban*, n. d., available at: english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm, last visited: 5 November 2019. The list for Italy's Confucius Classrooms is not comprehensive.

⁶² '学联简介', *Chinese Students and Scholars Union in Italy*, 3 June 2009, available at: www.cssui.org/2009/06/03/%e6%84%8f%e5%a4%a7%e5%88%a9%e4%b8%ad%e5%9b%bd%e5%ad%a6%e7%94%9f%e5%ad%a6%e8%80%85%e8%81%94%e8%b0%8a%e4%bc%9a%e7%ab%a0%e7%a8%8b/, last visited: 5 November 2019. The CSSUI was established in 2002 in liaison with the Chinese Embassy in Italy and describes itself on its website with patriotic undertones.

⁶³ 'Programma Cina – Partner: Pirelli', *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*, n. d., available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/ricerca/programma-cina>, last visited: 4 December 2019. Chinese SOE ChemChina owns a 45% stake in Italy's Pirelli.

⁶⁴ 'T.Wai Partners', *Torino World Affairs Institute*, available at: <https://www.twai.it/>, last visited: 4 December 2019; 'T.wai – Stato Patrimoniale e Rendiconto di gestione 2018', *Torino World Affairs Institute*, 31 December 2018, available at: www.twai.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/T.wai-Bilancio-consuntivo-e-nota-integrativa-2018.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁶⁵ 'Dialogo strategico con il Cicir di Pechino sui rapporti di Ue e Italia con la Cina', *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, available at: <https://www.iai.it/ricerche/cina-e-unione-europea-nel-sistema-di-global-governance>, last visited: 4 December 2019; 'Collaborazione con il China Institute for International Strategic Studies (Ciis)', *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, available at: <https://www.iai.it/ricerche/collaborazione-con-il-china-institute-international-strategic-studies-ciis>, last visited: 4 December 2019.

⁶⁶ 'Ratifica ed esecuzione del Trattato tra il Governo della Repubblica italiana ed il Governo della Repubblica popolare cinese, in materia di reciproca assistenza giudiziaria penale', *Normativa*, 19 May 2015, available at: www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2015-04-29;64!vig=, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁶⁷ 'Ratifica ed esecuzione del Trattato di estradizione tra la Repubblica italiana e la Repubblica popolare cinese', *Normativa*, 10 October 2015, available at: www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2015;161, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁶⁸ 'Firmato Memorandum d'intesa tra Italia e Cina per l'esecuzione di pattugliamenti congiunti di polizia', *Ambasciata d'Italia Pechino*, 5 October 2015, available at: ambpechino.esteri.it/ambasciata_pechino/ambasciata/news/dall_ambasciata/2015/10/firmato-memorandum-d-intesa-tra.html, last visited: 5 November 2019.

⁶⁹ Poggetti, L., 'Italy's New Government Lays the Foundation for a More Balanced China Policy', *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, 17 September 2019, available at: <https://www.merics.org/en/blog/italys-new-government-lays-foundation-more-balanced-china-policy>, last visited: 4 December 2019.

⁷⁰ 'LEGGE 18 novembre 2019, n. 133', *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, 21 November 2019, available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/11/20/19G00140/sg>, last visited: 4 December 2019.

⁷¹ Lamperti L., 'Hong Kong, Sì alla Risoluzione Lupi. Quartapelle: "Superata la non Ingerenza"', *Affari Italiani*, 3 December 2019, available at: <http://www.affaritaliani.it/esteri/hong-kong-risoluzione-italia-lia-quartapelle-intervista-640699.html>, last visited: 5 December 2019.

3. RUSSIA'S MANIPULATION OF EUROPEAN MEDIA

Jakub Janda and Veronika Víchová

For around two weeks in January 2016, Germany was transfixed by the fate of a 13-year-old German-Russian girl. Lisa, as the girl was known, said that she had been abducted on her way to school and raped by three migrants. The story, which was first reported by a journalist from Russia's First Channel TV, was initially only covered by RT (formerly Russia Today) Deutsch and Sputnik. However, it was shared widely on social media, where it was particularly popular amongst right-wing groups, who organised demonstrations via Facebook with representatives of the German-Russian minority (*Deutschlandrussen*) and neo-Nazis.

As Germany's police failed to make progress in investigating the alleged abduction and rape, public concern turned into anger. There were demonstrations across the country, including in Berlin. Protesters carried banners reading "Our children are in danger" and "We have the right to doubt the objectivity of the police".⁷² Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, used a news conference in Moscow to call Berlin to task for not apprehending the rapists, saying "I do hope these issues do not get swept under the rug".⁷³ Frank-Walter Steinmeier, his German counterpart, hit back, leading to a minor diplomatic incident.

The story was fake.⁷⁴ It was created by Russian news outlets and given credence by the Kremlin in order to exacerbate already-existing tensions in German society, which at the time was sharply divided over Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow into the country almost 1.2 million migrants who were fleeing the war in Syria.

Across the West, hostile influence operations run by the Russian state and its proxies have been widely discussed by publics, politicians, and policymakers since the annexation of Crimea in early 2014. These discussions have intensified since Russia's well-documented interference in the 2016 US presidential election and the 2017 French presidential election,⁷⁵ when Russian-backed hackers leaked online materials stolen from the servers of Emmanuel Macron's campaign team.⁷⁶ While the level of understanding of the scope of Russia's operations differs significantly from country to country, there is a broad recognition that the Kremlin invests heavily in political warfare operations that focus on the media.

In September 2019, when Russia's draft federal budget for 2020 was revealed, it showed expenditure on state media totalling 1.3 billion euros.⁷⁷ The RT channel, which is the

⁷² McGuinness, D., 'Russia Steps into Berlin 'Rape' Storm Claiming German Cover-up', *British Broadcasting Corporation, Inside Europe Blog*, 27 January 2016, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-eu-35413134, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁷³ 'Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a news conference on Russia's diplomacy performance in 2015', *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, 26 January 2016, available at: www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2032328, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁷⁴ 'The "Lisa case": Germany as a target of Russian disinformation', *The NATO Review*, n. d., available at: www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/lisa-case-germany-target-russian-disinformation/EN/index.htm, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁷⁵ Mueller, R. S., 'Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election', US Department of Justice, March 2019, available at: cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2019/images/04/18/mueller-report-searchable.pdf, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁷⁶ Bulckaert, N., 'How France successfully countered Russian interference during the presidential election', *Euractiv*, 17 July 2018, available at: www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/how-france-successfully-countered-russian-interference-during-the-presidential-election/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁷⁷ 'Figure of the Week: 1.3 Billion', *EEAS East STRATCOM Task Force*, 1 October 2019, available at: euvsdisinfo.eu/figure-of-the-week-1-3-billion/?fbclid=IwAR1WTnMcFqe_tRFRaOJf82dWQxApfEqp_JktJxJFJ0ZQ08EFFWDjl0KXO40Y, last visited: 30 October 2019.

primary tool for spreading disinformation in many Western countries and languages, will receive up to 234 million euros. Also benefitting from the Kremlin's largesse is *Pervyi Kanal* [Channel One], whose branches target Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics.⁷⁸ The draft budget actually represents an increase from the current budget of almost 1 billion euros, despite Russia facing economic stagnation domestically.

Often the most obvious parts of Russia's media offensive, however, are the least effective. Apart from those channels officially financed by the Russian government, the Kremlin also covertly funds news agencies. In the Baltics, for example, *Rossiia Segodnya* has been funding three news agencies (Baltnews.ee, Baltnews.lt, and Baltnews.lv) since 2014, which have purchased social media views and comments from Russian companies in order to amplify their audience.⁷⁹

Beyond this, there are a sizeable number of outlets which contribute to spreading pro-Kremlin messaging and which, willingly or not, serve Russian interests. Some of them are financed by advertising income or financial donations from their readers; this is particularly the case with disinformation outlets in Central European countries where large numbers of citizens harbour views that coincide with those of the Kremlin.⁸⁰ However, many are non-transparent when it comes to their ownership and financial structures.

Russia's media operations make use of a network of officials, journalists, sympathetic commentators, and internet trolls.⁸¹ They seek to create circles of ideologically-motivated individuals who inject Kremlin messaging into local languages, making them look like domestic political issues.⁸² Often, direct Russian governmental channels like Sputnik or RT serve as sources of inspiration for domestic supporters of pro-Kremlin messaging; in practice, this means dozens of websites in most European countries.⁸³ Significant numbers of such websites have been identified by the European External Action Service (EEAS) East Stratcom Taskforce,⁸⁴ but most are only described and investigated on an anecdotal basis by local fact-checking organisations. Quite often, a key role is played by media moguls who multiply pro-Kremlin messaging among domestic audiences.

As well as EEAS East Stratcom, a number of civil society organisations are working to identify pro-Kremlin disinformation outlets. The European Values Center for Security Policy, based in Prague, has compiled an extensive list of those with significant outreach.⁸⁵ The website Re:Baltica focuses on journalistic integrity and the verification of narratives

⁷⁸ *Первый Балтийский Канал*, available at: www.1tv.lv/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁷⁹ The rate for amplification was about \$160 for 1 million views and about \$0.13 per comment. These three news agencies received direct orders from a *Rossiia Segodnya* employee, Aleksandr Svyazin. See, Roonemaa, H. and I. Springe, 'Moscow's Mouthpieces', *Re:Baltica*, 29 August 2018, available at: <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2018/08/moscows-mouthpieces/>, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁸⁰ 'Mechanisms of Influence of the Russian Federation into Internal Affairs of the Czech Republic', European Values Center for Security Policy (2016), available at: www.kremlinwatch.eu/userfiles/mechanisms-of-influence-of-the-russian-federation-into-internal-affairs-of-the-czech-republic_15273212578323.pdf, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁸¹ See, for example, Nimmo, B. (2015) "Anatomy of an info-war: How Russia's propaganda machine works, and how to counter it", Central European Policy Institute, 15 May 2015, available at: www.cepolicy.org/publications/anatomy-info-war-how-russias-propaganda-machine-works-and-how-counter-it, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁸² Similar tactics were used during the Cold War by the KGB – see books by former insiders Vasilij Mitrochin, Ladislav Bittman or Ion Mihai Pacepa on KGB disinformation modus operandi.

⁸³ For the specific lists of disinformation outlets in most of EU countries, see the disinformation database of the EEAS East STRATCOM Task Force.

⁸⁴ 'Pro-Kremlin Disinfo Cases', *EEAS East StratCom Task Force*, n. d., available at: euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁸⁵ 'Fungování českých dezinformačních a manipulativních webů – kompletní studie', *Evropské hodnoty*, n. d., available at: www.evropskehodnoty.cz/fungovani-ceskych-dezinformacnich-webu/fungovani-ceskych-dezinformacnich-webu-2/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

in three languages – Latvian, Russian, and English – with the aim of informing the native population as well as the Russian-speaking minority, and attracting the attention of the Anglosphere.⁸⁶ The Slovak organisation *Konspiratori.sk* has collated a wider list of media outlets in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic,⁸⁷ including ones which are nominally concerned with lifestyle or health issues. *Konspiratori.sk*'s goal is to draw attention to the outlets' activities and, in doing so, pressure advertisers to reconsider relationships.

One such example is the magazine *Zem&Vek*, which is published in Slovakia both online and in print. Nominally a lifestyle publication, it spouts conspiracy theories and disinformation, including hateful messages against minorities in Slovakia. In October 2019, its editor-in-chief, Tibor Eliot Rostas, was charged with spreading extremist materials, as well as for inciting national, racial, and ethnic hatred.⁸⁸ (The case began to be heard in court on 11 December 2019.) There is no evidence of foreign financing for the magazine, but in June 2018 a recording was leaked which appeared to show Rostas directly asking for funding from Russia's Ambassador in Slovakia, Pavel Kuznetsov.⁸⁹ Despite those revelations, according to a recent survey, up to 53% of primary school teachers in Slovakia would recommend *Zem&Vek* to their pupils as a credible source of information.⁹⁰

Across the border in the Czech Republic, six major platforms dominate the disinformation landscape.⁹¹ They are: *Parlamentní listy* ['Parliamentary Letters'] (which, despite its name, has nothing to do with the Czech Parliament, which has distanced itself from the site); AC24; AE News (also known as *Aeronet.cz*); *Nová Republika* [New Republic]; *První Zprávy* [First News]; and Sputnik CZ (the Czech-language branch of Sputnik).

With more than 800,000 readers per month in a country of 10 million people, the website *Parlamentní listy* is particularly notable.⁹² Part of a business model that has been developed by Our Media Inc., which is owned by the Czech businessman and politician Ivo Valenta,⁹³ *Parlamentní listy* has received considerable support from Milos Zeman, the Czech president, who otherwise shuns mainstream media and is dismissive of journalists. The website serves as a platform for local politicians to express their views, and multiplies and legitimises content with strong far-right or far-left inclinations, without any evident editorial policies.

The AE News portal is also notable. Shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, *Aeronet.cz* launched an aggressive campaign against the new Ukrainian government in Kyiv.⁹⁴ Later the same year, BIS, the Czech counter-intelligence agency, designated

⁸⁶ *Re:Baltica*, n. d., available at: en.rebaltica.lv/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁸⁷ *Konspiratori*, n. d., available at: www.konspiratori.sk/en/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁸⁸ 'Prokurátor podal na šéfredaktora Zem a Vek obžalobu za extrémizmus', SME Domov, 20 October 2019, available at: domov.sme.sk/c/22240542/prokurator-podal-obzalobu-na-sefredaktora-zem-a-vek-za-extremizmus.html, last visited: 14 November 2019.

⁸⁹ Šnidl, V., 'Odomkli sme: Čo šíri konšpiračný časopis Zem a vek, ktorý Billa už nechce predávať', *DennikN*, 23 June 2018, available at: dennikn.sk/1159635/co-siri-konspiracny-casopis-zem-a-vek-ktory-billa-uz-nechce-viac-predavat-odomknute/, last visited: 14 November 2019.

⁹⁰ S Cemper, J., 'Alarmující data ze Slovenska: Pro mnoho učitelů jsou dezinformační weby Zem & Vek nebo Hlavné správy důvěryhodné zdroje', *Manipulatori*, 5 September 2019, available at: manipulatori.cz/alarmujici-data-ze-slovenska-pro-mnoho-ucitelu-jsou-dezinformacni-weby-zem-vek-nebo-hlavne-spravy-duveryhodne-zdroje/, last visited: 14 November 2019.

⁹¹ Krejci, M., 'The ins and outs of the Czech disinformation community', *New Eastern Europe*, 8 November 2017, available at: <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/11/08/ins-outs-czech-disinformation-community/>, last visited: 4 November 2019.

⁹² *Parlamentní Listy*, n. d., available at: www.parlamentnilisty.cz/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁹³ Krejci, M., 'The ins and outs of the Czech disinformation community', *New Eastern Europe*, 8 November 2017, available at: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/11/08/ins-outs-czech-disinformation-community/>, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁹⁴ Smolenova, I., 'Russia's Propaganda War', *Forbes*, 25 March 2015, available at: www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2015/03/25/russias-propaganda-war/#2f00e0435bf4, last visited: 30 October 2019.

the news portal as a “source of dangerous pro-Russian propaganda”.⁹⁵ For example, it reported that the August 2019 large-scale protests in Prague against Zeman were organised by the US Embassy in the Czech Republic.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the propaganda published by Aeronet.cz has an appeal amongst certain sections of the Czech population. According to public polls conducted by European Values in 2016, between 20–35% of Czechs believe that the crisis in Ukraine was caused by NATO.⁹⁷ Many of the articles published on Aeronet.cz also share pro-Kremlin and anti-Semitic views.⁹⁸

Exactly how the news portal is funded, however, is unclear. Beginning in 2017, the journalist Ondřej Kundra investigated this issue, but was unable to reveal an answer.⁹⁹ What is clear, however, is that the website regularly asks its readers for financial contributions, indicating that whatever funding it might receive does not appear to be enough to cover its operating costs.

Entities like Zem&Vek and AE News have notable influence, especially thanks to echo-chambers on social media, and are equally as dangerous as the official Russian sources of disinformation. In Central Europe, the major social network is Facebook, where various pages (closed groups as well as individual accounts) spread disinformation, re-post new articles from disinformation websites, and further enforce their impact. In the case of the Czech Republic, this eco-system has been documented and described by *Čeští Elfové* [the Czech Elves].¹⁰⁰

There are a multitude of ways through which pro-Kremlin disinformation enters the European media landscape. Often, as the Lisa story told earlier highlights, disinformation travels from Russian-funded sources, through domestic enablers and multipliers to specific target audiences. On occasions, it is placed directly into the media, through a covertly-supported news agency. But, as it is clear, disinformation can be produced domestically for political purposes.

Why, ultimately, is the Kremlin willing to invest millions into spreading disinformation? And to what end?

Exploitation of information is one of the cheapest and most effective ways for the Kremlin to manipulate public opinion, influence policymakers, and legitimise its aggressive policies. The target groups lie both in the EU and in Russia itself. For the domestic audience, the Kremlin uses disinformation to strengthen its regime and to stay in power as long as possible. In the meantime, information operations against the rest of Europe help ensure that other countries are preoccupied with their own problems, including the decrease of trust in democratic institutions, instead of paying enough attention to what is happening in Eastern Europe and inside Russia.

⁹⁵ Kundra, O., ‘Putinův Hlas v Česku’, *Respekt*, 28 February 2015, available at: www.respekt.cz/z-noveho-cisla/putinuv-hlas-v-cesku, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁹⁶ ‘Exkluzivně: Když nemohou Zemana sesadit a hrozí jim i jeho znovuzvolení, rozhodli se najít cestu, jak funkci prezidenta v ČR zrušit! V pozadí Soros a londýnská schůzka! “Nulové řešení” je na stole!’, *Aeronet*, 28 October 2016, available at: aeronet.cz/news/exkluzivne-kdyz-nemohou-zemana-sesadit-a-hrozi-jim-i-jeho-znovuzvoleni-rozhodli-se-najit-cestu-jak-funkci-prezidenta-v-cr-zrusit-v-pozadi-soros-a-londynska-schuzka-nulove-reseni-je-na-stole/, last visited: 30 October 2019.

⁹⁷ Janda, J. et al., ‘Impact of disinformation operations in the Czech Republic’, European Values (2016), available at: www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Impact-of-disinformation-operations-in-the-Czech-Republic.pdf, last visited: 14 November 2019.

⁹⁸ ‘Annual Report on Manifestations of Antisemitism in the Czech Republic in 2018’, Federation of Jewish Communities, Czech Republic, available at: www.fzo.cz/wp-content/uploads/Annual-Report-on-Manifestations-of-Antisemitism-in-the-Czech-Republic-2018.pdf, last visited: 30 October 2019, p. 9.

⁹⁹ Kundra, O., ‘Kdo tu píše pro Putina’, *Respekt*, 21 April 2017, available at: www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2016/18/kdo-tu-pise-pro-putina, last visited: 14 November 2019.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Kdo Jsme’, *Čeští Elfové*, n. d., available at: cesti-elfove.cz/, last visited: 14 November 2019.

Analysis of the patterns of media consumption among Russian-speaking minorities in post-Soviet states suggests that it is relatively easy for the Kremlin to exploit the already-existing divisions within populations, particularly those that contain Russian-speaking minorities.¹⁰¹ This is a way for the Kremlin to destabilise societies, and even direct the attention of the majority away from or towards a specific area or subject. While the Kremlin rarely creates new challenges from scratch, it certainly uses and abuses information well enough to create more friction and enhance pre-existing problems, while using different methods and techniques designed to be most effective in a given country or society and its vulnerabilities.

¹⁰¹ Rostoks, T. and N. Vanaga, 'Latvia's Security and Defence Post-2014', *Journal on Baltic Security* 2.2 (2016): pp. 20-23.

4. “TELL THE CHINESE STORY WELL”: CHINA’S GREAT EXTERNAL PROPAGANDA IN EUROPE

Didi Kirsten Tatlow

“Manage the earth, make our voice heard everywhere in the world.”

*Mao Zedong, 1955*¹⁰²

“By a thousand means and a hundred plans, we must
get our external propaganda into foreign hands”

*Li Changchun, Politburo Standing Committee member, 2003*¹⁰³

“Tell the Chinese story well”

*Xi Jinping, 2013*¹⁰⁴

Whether 1955, 2003, 2013, or today, the Communist Party of China (CCP) has long understood the value of propaganda. The CCP aims to win acceptance for the party worldwide, shape the narrative about China to marginalise dissenting voices, and secure the loyalty of overseas Chinese to build a constituency of emotional, practical, and ideological support.

A central element of this is an intricate media and culture network known to Chinese as *da wai xuan* (大外宣) [Great External Propaganda].¹⁰⁵ Broadly overseen by the Propaganda Department of the CCP, other party departments carry out their work, including, importantly, the United Front Work Department (which includes the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, which has long liaised with Chinese abroad). Government ministries, including those of Culture, Foreign Affairs, and Education, also contribute heavily to the effort. In reality, it is a ‘whole of government’ – or ‘whole of party’ – approach.

While the role of the United Front in CCP influencing abroad has drawn attention among scholars, analysts, and journalists in recent years, *da wai xuan* is better-known within China and in Chinese-speaking communities overseas. *Da wai xuan* deepened in significance after China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, with Beijing determined to protect its political system in an internationalising environment. A second, bigger push began after the Beijing Olympic Summer Games in 2008, when leaders experienced China’s frequently-disrupted Olympic torch relay as a major loss of face. Party leaders realised international acceptance of the CCP could not be won so easily; other measures would be needed.

¹⁰² Zedong, M., *Mao Zedong, Selected Writings on Journalism* (毛泽东新闻工作文选), (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1983), p. 183.

¹⁰³ Changchun, L., ‘李长春出席全国对外宣传工作会议并讲话’, *People’s Daily*, 10 January 2003, available at: people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20030110/905569.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Mingzhao, C., ‘讲好中国故事 传播好中国声音’, *People’s Daily*, 10 October 2013, available at: politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/1010/c1001-23144775.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Qinglian, H., 紅色滲透：中國媒體全球擴張的真相 [*Red Infiltration: The Truth About the Global Expansion of Chinese Media*] (Taiwan: 八旗, 2019).

Reliable information is scarce, but a 2009 report put the annual cost that year at around 45 billion yuan, or US\$6.5 billion. More recent estimates have put it at almost double this, or \$10 billion a year.^{106; 107} Whatever the truth, Europe is a poorly-understood but significant site of CCP influencing.

In Chinese

Since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, and more recently since the early 1990s, when the party began to turn its attention back to the world after the human and public relations disaster of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, the CCP has directly or indirectly set up hundreds, probably thousands, of influencing channels, including: Chinese-language newspapers, websites, apps, WeChat channels, foreign language newspaper inserts and advertisements, sponsored columns, education and business linkups, think tanks, films, TV news, talk shows, and documentaries.

A baseline count of pro-CCP, Chinese-language media in Europe yields nearly 100, concentrated in the UK, France, and Germany, but also in the Nordic countries, as well as Eastern, Southern, Southeastern Europe, and Ireland in the far west.^{108; 109, 110} These media offer news, information, and services, but also have ideology and business functions. They all, for example, highlight the party's economic-strategic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as other state and party priorities, such as technology and connectivity, sticking tightly to the "correct" ideological line. Despite the scale of the effort, it is hard for non-Chinese to spot, since it takes place in Chinese. As Zhou Enlai reportedly said, "the first level of encryption is the Chinese language".¹¹¹

The effort can be either explicit or subtle. On 18 October 2019, *Ouzhou shibao* (欧洲时报) [European Times], the Paris-based, Chinese-language media outlet, carried reports emphasising the patriotism of Chinese viewers at European screenings of the film *My Country, My People*. One headline read: "On a Cold Paris Night it was Difficult to Stop the Patriotism".^{112; 113; 114} Five days later, European Times published an article on its "Chinese Forum" page, asking the question, "Why did Britain and the United States choose such unreliable leaders?"¹¹⁵ Of importance is not just what the media publish, but what they do not; critical discussions of the CCP's own leadership or of the political system are missing. The phrasing of the question is unflattering, and suggests systemic weakness in democracies, which reflects the CCP's anti-democratic stance.

¹⁰⁶ Yuang-ting, Y. and J. Chung, 'Interview: Author Says China Permeating Media Outlets', *Taiwan News*, 27 May 2019, available at: www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/05/27/2003715871, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹⁰⁷ '媒体: 中国也有民营电视台 只能在海外播放', *Phoenix New Media*, 15 October 2013, available at: https://pit.ifeng.com/a/20151222/46781396_0.shtml, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹⁰⁸ For a list of such media outlets, see: '第九届世界华文传媒论坛欧洲参会名单', *ChinaQW*, 6 September 2017, available at: www.chinaqw.com/kong/2017/09-06/160495.shtml, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹⁰⁹ More work needs to be done to capture every outlet, especially independently operating subsidiaries and those only on social media.

¹¹⁰ '公司简介', *Nordic Chinese Time*, n. d., available at: www.nordicapd.com/content.asp?pid=22, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹¹¹ As with quite a few quotes attributed to Zhou, the former premier, this may be apocryphal. However, I thought it worth including as it's so spot on.

¹¹² Like many reports in overseas Chinese-language media, there is no English translation available.

¹¹³ Xingjian, M., '巴黎寒夜难挡爱国热情 旅法侨界集体观影《我和我的祖国》', *European Times Network*, 18 October 2019, available at: www.oushinet.com/qj/qjnews/20191018/333131.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹¹⁴ 'My People My Country Ultimate Trailer', *YouTube*, 23 September 2019, available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvrJS1LL_HY, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹¹⁵ '【华人论坛】英美为何选出“不靠谱”的领导人?', *European Times Network*, 23 October 2019, available at: www.oushinet.com/voice/forum/20191023/333415.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

European Times, established in 1983, is a key part of *da wai xuan*, with about half a dozen main outlets across Europe. A Hong Kong interviewee recounted how, while he was on study leave in Europe in 1980, a cultural affairs diplomat at the Chinese Embassy in Paris approached him with the request to found the newspaper and be its editor. “They trusted me because I was already working for Wen Wei Po [the party’s overseas newspaper]”, the interviewee said, adding that he declined and went to Beijing instead.¹¹⁶ European Times is also directly linked to the United Front via its WeChat accounts.^{117; 118} In 1997, it set up 欧洲华文传媒协会 [the Association of Overseas Chinese Media in Europe], an entity that organises events attended by Chinese diplomats as well as officials from media that are formally part of the United Front.¹¹⁹

Readership figures are harder to establish. A Munich-based online media and business, Kaiyuan (known as Kaytrip in English), which began hosting the CCP’s People’s Daily Overseas edition in 2015, claims that its main WeChat social media account has “nearly 100,000 followers”. It says it puts out more than 1,000 original reports a year, and has 40 subsidiary WeChat channels in Germany, as well as main channels for France (Hello France) and the Nordic countries (Northern Europe Hello). Articles may record about 100,000 hits, with the highest scoring 1.5 million hits, it says.¹²⁰ Kaiyuan was founded by a Chinese former student in Germany.

In Foreign Languages

Pro-CCP entities also cooperate on projects in local languages.^{121; 122} The clearest example of this is likely the China Watch insert published by China Daily, which appears in about half a dozen major European newspapers, including Handelsblatt, a leading business daily in Germany, and the Daily Telegraph in Britain.^{123; 124} (Nevertheless, the Daily Telegraph, for its part, continues to publish insightful critiques of Chinese malpractices.) China Daily offered the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* more than a million euros for a year’s placement, but the Munich-based newspaper declined due to concerns over journalistic integrity – a painful financial decision. “A million euros is a lot of money in these difficult times”, said a reporter at the paper.¹²⁵

China Watch articles invariably present a positive version of events in China while failing to address controversies on the same issues. “Silk Road helps wealth bloom in desert regions”, says an article (published in September 2019) on China’s BRI in its Xinjiang region, without mentioning global concerns about the situation of the native Uighurs, many of whom who are being held in camps.¹²⁶ According to China Watch, China is

¹¹⁶ The Hong Kong source agreed to speak openly if the conversation was confidential. Their identity is known to the author.

¹¹⁷ *European Times Network*, n. d., available at: www.oushinet.com/, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹¹⁸ For the WeChat accounts, see a forthcoming paper by Alex Joske of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

¹¹⁹ 欧洲华文传媒协会第十三届年会布拉格开幕’, *China EU News*, 22 July 2018, available at: china-eunews.eu/6/2018/0722/9612.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹²⁰ ‘公司简介’, *Kaytrip*, n. d., available at: www.kaytrip.com/corp_about.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹²¹ ‘China Daily’s Global Development’, *China Daily*, n. d., available at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/static_e/global.html, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹²² ‘About Us’, *China Watch*, n. d., available at: www.chinawatch.cn/static_e/aboutus/, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹²³ ‘China Daily’s Global Development’, *China Daily*, op. cit.

¹²⁴ ‘About Us’, *China Watch*, op. cit.

¹²⁵ Author’s own source at *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

¹²⁶ Jia, C. and M. Weihua, ‘China’s new Silk Road helps wealth bloom in desert regions’, *China Watch*, 24 September 2019, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/china-watch/business/belt-and-road-initiative-brings-wealth-to-remote-region/, last visited: 29 October 2019.

continually “opening up”, an important message and one that is repeated in order to blunt Western criticism of China’s opaque political and economic system.¹²⁷ A combination of persistently upbeat stories in and about China, an absence of stories about China’s problems, assiduous attention to problems overseas, high-quality presentation that looks familiar to Western media consumers, and free online availability all contribute to an attempt to persuade the West that the CCP is, at most, a form of authoritarian capitalism and not a technology-driven, neo-totalitarian state.^{128; 129}

Sometimes, however, the ideology is a little more visible. “Education flaws linked to Hong Kong unrest” declared one China Watch article, published in September 2019 amidst massive, months-long demonstrations in the city against extradition to China and calling for protections and rights promised when China regained sovereignty from Britain in 1997.¹³⁰ The report, which failed to mention these fundamental disputes, says “liberal education” instead has led young protesters astray and hints at a purge of teachers to come: Hong Kong’s “biggest problem is that liberal studies classes put too much emphasis on critical thinking”, it quotes Ho Honkuen, an educator. Another educator, Tang Fei, says, “radical teachers, who cross the line of propriety, should be sacked”.¹³¹

POLITICO Brussels Playbook, presented by BP: Let the games begin — Liberals hit the brakes — Macron loses, Salvini soars

05/27/19 7:10AM CEST

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Figure 1, “- Vote for 5G”

¹²⁷ Wei, X., ‘Nation Will Only Become More Open, Premier Says’, *China Daily*, 18 October 2019, available at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201910/18/WS5da8db99a310cf3e35571233.html, last visited: 29 October 2019.

¹²⁸ This sentence owes its genesis to Peter Mattis, who said, on a somewhat different but related topic: “We have been persuaded that the Chinese Communist Party is not ideological and has substituted its Leninist tradition for a variation of capitalism.”

¹²⁹ Mattis, P., ‘China’s Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control’, *Hearing Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence*, 16 May 2019, available at: docs.house.gov/meetings/IG/IG00/20190516/109462/HHRG-116-IG00-Wstate-MattisP-20190516.pdf, last visited: 5 November 2019.

¹³⁰ ‘Education Flaws Linked to Hong Kong Unrest’, *China Watch*, 24 September 2019, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/china-watch/politics/education-flaws-linked-to-hong-kong-unrest/, last visited: 29 October 2019.

¹³¹ *ibid.*

Other efforts are subtler. In Politico's briefing, Brussels Playbook, sponsorship by Huawei appears to be presented differently to that of other sponsors. Where other sponsors' names are clearly presented as being sponsors of the briefing (e.g. "BP:" followed by news), Huawei's sponsorship (e.g., "Huawei —") appears to mimic the presentation of subsequent news items contained in the briefing. Whatever the reasons for, it sets the reader up to receive the message differently (see Figure 1, " — Vote for 5G:"). The telecom equipment manufacturing company could not be more politically sensitive amid a global controversy over the extent its ties to the CCP party-state and suitability to build global 5G systems.¹³²

Influencing is about culture, too. "In our broad overseas cultural exchanges, we must combine cultural exchange and foreign propaganda", said Li Changchun, formerly in charge of propaganda on the Politburo Standing Committee.¹³³ In one of many examples, China's State Council Information Office (SCIO) partners with UNESCO in a "cultural event series", Experience China, as described in a SCIO report.¹³⁴ Its goal: "to provide foreign audiences access to the Chinese culture" and build 人类命运共同体 (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*) [a 'Community of Human Destiny']. Such a 'Community' is central to Xi Jinping's ambition to facilitate China's rise by altering the post-World War II international system and universal rights enshrined at the United Nations. Tellingly, a former deputy minister of propaganda, Zhuang Rongwen, delivered the opening speech in Paris in 2018 (in the English language report by the SCIO, Zhuang's title is deputy head of the "publicity" department, the party's official English translation of "propaganda" department). Zhuang has since been promoted to director of the Cyberspace Administration of China, a core position in China's very extensive information and internet control system.¹³⁵

Ultimately, an intricate and vast landscape of propaganda and influencing by the CCP has taken root in Europe, which is in turn a microcosm of an ongoing, billion-dollar global push and trillions in investment. Beginning with media and "culture", the CCP has long cross-fertilised with business, IT, education, travel, and entertainment — and European politics. For example, the Global Chinese Institute is a London-based think tank which, in early December, hosted 'The 6th Global China Dialogue: Governance for World Peace' conference at the British Academy, followed by a reception in the UK Parliament. "How to comply with China's 'red line' of not interfering in a country's internal affairs", a policy frequently used to reject any criticism of the party, was a focus of discussion.¹³⁶

Global Chinese Institute's president is Xiangqun Chang,¹³⁷ who studied and taught for 13 years at the People's Public Security University of China, which is a university of the Ministry of Public Security. Other participants at the conference have or had prominent positions within the CCP including Ma Hui, who is a senior diplomat at China's embassy

¹³² 'Brussels Playbook', *Politico*, n. d., available at: web.archive.org/web/20191029105418/https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/page/6/, last visited: 29 October 2019.

¹³³ '李长春出席全国对外宣传工作会议并讲话', *People's Network*, 10 January 2003, available at: people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20030110/905569.html, last visited: 29 October 2019.

¹³⁴ 'Zhuang Rongwen attends exhibition of "Experience China" event', *The State Council Information Office, The People's Republic of China*, 21 June 2018, available at: english.scio.gov.cn/m/scionews/2018-06/21/content_52906947.htm, last visited: 29 October 2019.

¹³⁵ Bandurski, D., 'China Gets a New Cyber Czar', *China Media Project*, 5 August 2018, available at: chinamediaproject.org/2018/08/05/china-gets-a-new-cyber-czar/, last visited: 29 October 2019.

¹³⁶ 'Call for participants, The 6th Global China Dialogue (GCD VI), Governance for World Peace', *Global China Institute*, n. d., available at: www.gci-uk.org/call-participants-6th-global-china-dialogue-governance-world-peace-info, last visited: 15 November 2019.

¹³⁷ 'Prof. CAHNG Xiangqun', *Global China Institute*, n.d., available at: <http://www.gci-uk.org/xiangqun-chang>, last visited: 10 December 2019.

in London and was previously a director-general in the International Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, and Yu Hongjun, a former deputy minister of the same International Department and currently a Senior Consultant of the Beijing Belt and Road Cooperative Community, its title echoing the party-state's flagship, global, "Belt and Road" economic-strategic project.

Great External Propaganda (*da wai xuan*) is unlikely to stop any time soon. As Xi Jinping has said: "Wherever readers and viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend their tentacles and that is where we find the focal point and end point of propaganda and ideology work."¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Bandurski, D., 'How Xi Jinping Views the News', *China Media Project*, 3 March 2016, available at: medium.com/china-media-project/how-the-president-views-the-news-2bee482e1d48, last visited 5 November 2019.

5. RUSSIAN SHARP POWER IN EUROPEAN ACADEMIA

Dr Andrew Foxall

Karen Dawisha was a distinguished Russia scholar who, in early 2014, had been working for the past few years on a book manuscript about the links between business, organised crime, and the security services in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s. In March 2014, Cambridge University Press (CUP) got cold feet and backed away from publishing the manuscript. In an email to Dawisha, John Haslam of CUP explained that the legal risk was too great, stating that “given the controversial subject matter of the book, and its basic premise that Putin’s power is founded on his links to organised crime, we are not convinced that there is a way to rewrite the book that would give us the necessary comfort”.¹³⁹ Dawisha directed her indignation not at CUP but instead at the claimant-friendly libel laws in Britain that allowed, in her words, “pre-emptive bookburning”.¹⁴⁰ (The book was subsequently published by Simon & Schuster in the US under the title “Putin’s Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?”.)

Self-censorship is one way that Russia has been able to extend its influence in Western academia. But there are other ways, some of which are more insidious. This essay briefly considers three: the funding of academic institutions; the use of academic activities for the purposes of intelligence gathering; and denying access to Russia for those who are critical of the Kremlin. They are discussed below in no particular order.

Funding Academic Institutions

Since it was established by Vladimir Putin in a 2007 presidential decree, the *Russkiy Mir Fond* [Russian World Foundation] has been one of the key tools through which the Kremlin has sought to extend its influence in Western academia. The Foundation’s aim is to promote Russia’s language and culture,¹⁴¹ and it is the main channel through which Russia has established links with elite Western universities. In the UK, *Russkiy Mir* has established a network of three academic centres – the first, at Edinburgh, was opened in 2010,¹⁴² a second at Oxford in 2012,¹⁴³ and a third at Durham in 2013.¹⁴⁴

Russkiy Mir purports to be akin to the British Council or the *Goethe-Institut*, the German cultural association. Instead, it promotes ideas and values that challenge Western traditions, and its activities are closely coordinated by individuals acting in the interests of the Kremlin. Between 2007 and 2012, *Russkiy Mir’s* executive director was Vyacheslav Nikonov. Nikonov is a member of the State Duma (the lower house of parliament), a former member of Vladimir Putin’s staff, and the grandson of former Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov.¹⁴⁵ In 2012, Nikonov became the chairman of *Russkiy Mir’s* board of directors.

¹³⁹ ‘A book too far’, *The Economist*, 3 April 2014, available at: www.economist.com/eastern-approaches/2014/04/03/a-book-too-far, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ ‘Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on the Establishment of the Russkiy Mir Foundation’, 21 June 2007, No. 796, available at: russkiymir.ru/en/fund/decree.php, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴² ‘Dashkova Centre: About Us’, *Department of European Language and Cultures*: The University of Edinburgh, 24 October 2018, available at: www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/dashkova/about, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴³ ‘Russkiy Mir Foundation to Unveil Its Program at the University of Oxford’, *Ruskiy Mir*, 24 February 2012, available at: russkiymir.ru/en/fund/press/140665/, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴⁴ ‘The Russkiy Mir Centre’, *Durham University*, n.d., available at: www.dur.ac.uk/russkiymircentre/, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Vyacheslav Nikonov’, Board of Trustees, *Ruskiy Mir*, n.d., available at: russkiymir.ru/en/fund/board-of-trustees/Nikonov-Vjacheslav-Alekseevich.php, last visited: 22 October 2019.

Between 2010 and 2017, The University of Edinburgh received £254,000 from *Russkiy Mir* to establish The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre.¹⁴⁶ To mark the launch of the Centre, Nikonov was invited to give the inaugural lecture; he was given an honorary doctorate two years later. According to *Russkiy Mir*'s agreement with the university, the Foundation had the right to be consulted on staff appointments and its inspectors were given "unobstructed" access to the university's premises¹⁴⁷ The Foundation seemingly believed that this agreement gave it permission to act on campus however it wanted: according to Dr Peter Duncan, an Associate Professor of Russian Politics and Society at University College London, a *Russkiy Mir* employee planted "a bugging device to record an academic discussion on Russia held by the British International Studies Association in Edinburgh."¹⁴⁸

At Oxford, *Russkiy Mir* funded a programme within St. Antony's College. As part of this, St. Anthony's hosted a discussion entitled "Cultural memory in Sevastopol – Ukraine's City of Russian Glory" in February 2014, a month before Crimea was annexed.¹⁴⁹

The *Russkiy Mir* programme at Oxford ended in 2014 after St. Antony's College decided against renewing the relationship. However, both Durham and Edinburgh continue with theirs.¹⁵⁰ Elsewhere, other educational institutions have also been undiscerning. According to the British Council, the number of *Russkiy Mir* centres globally more than doubled between 2013 and 2018, from 82 to 171. While much of that growth took place in the Americas and Asia, the biggest increase took place within the EU-27, where the number of centres rose from 28 to 58.¹⁵¹

Using Academic Activities for Intelligence Gathering

Another way that the Kremlin has sought to further its influence is through the use of academic activities for the purposes of intelligence gathering. A case in point is the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, an espionage discussion forum at the University of Cambridge organised by Sir Richard Dearlove, the former MI6 chief, and Professor Christopher Andrew, the official historian of MI5. In late 2016, the Seminar cut its ties with an entity called Veruscript, which had been providing sponsorship for the Seminar's weekly meetings. Individuals who spoke at the Seminar during Veruscript's sponsorship included Mike Flynn, who was soon to be appointed as Donald Trump's national security advisor, and Sir Simon Fraser, who had recently retired as permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Kennedy, D., 'To Edinburgh with love: Moscow's Scottish links', *The Times*, 14 April 2018, available at: www.thetimes.co.uk/article/to-edinburgh-with-love-moscow-s-scottish-links-f9k6n3lsr, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Macaskill, M., 'From Russia with conditions', *The Sunday Times*, 19 November 2017, available at: www.thetimes.co.uk/article/from-russia-with-conditions-w2p7qjvxlx, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁴⁸ 'Written Evidence from Dr Pete Duncan (AFP0031)', *Autocracies and UK Foreign Policy*, *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee*, 3 September 2019, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Foreign-Affairs/Autocracies-and-UK-Foreign-Policy/Written/106058.html>, last visited: 3 December 2019.

¹⁴⁹ The event, 'Cultural memory in Sevastopol - Ukraine's 'City of Russian Glory'', took place on Monday, 17 February 2014 at 5:00pm to 6:45pm. The public notification of the event can be found at: www.sant.ox.ac.uk/events/cultural-memory-sevastopol-ukraines-city-russian-glory, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁵⁰ 'Katalog Russkikh tsentrov: Velikobritaniya' [Catalogue of Russian Centres: Great Britain], *Russkiy Mir*, available at: <https://russkiymir.ru/rucenter/catalogue.php>, last visited: 3 December 2019

¹⁵¹ MacDonald, A., 'Soft power superpowers: Global trends in cultural engagement and influence', British Council, November 2018, available at: www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/j119_thought_leadership_global_trends_in_soft_power_web.pdf, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁵² Jones, S., 'Intelligence experts accuse Cambridge forum of Kremlin links', *Financial Times*, 16 December 2016, available at: www.ft.com/content/d43cd586-c396-11e6-9bca-2b93a6856354, last visited: 22 October 2019.

Veruscript is an electronic publishing house owned by Gleb Cheglakov, a Cambridge graduate. Gleb's father Andrey is a Russian billionaire. The organisers of the Seminar were concerned that Veruscript was influencing debates and discussions in ways that would benefit the Kremlin. In a statement published by *The Telegraph*, Veruscript described the allegations as "spurious and completely unfounded".¹⁵³ Gleb, together with Nazik Ibraimova his co-founder of Veruscript, went on to say "We reiterate that we have not accepted, and would not consider, any form of state or agency funding under any circumstances, British or foreign."¹⁵⁴ Others clearly disagree.

Last year, while conducting some research on the activities of Russia's intelligence agencies in the UK, I spoke with an academic who told me about his concerns over Russia's espionage on London's university campuses, in particular the behaviour of a former colleague.¹⁵⁵ This former colleague, an expert on military and security issues, would regularly invite Russian diplomats to lecture on his undergraduate and masters courses. The person with whom I spoke speculated that his colleague was helping the diplomats identify students who might be useful targets for recruitment later in their careers.

If this is true, then it would not be unique. A professor of international relations at the University of Bath, Timo Kivimaki, was arrested and prosecuted when he worked at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark for doing precisely this. Kivimaki was paid to act as a "talent-spotter" for Russia between 2002 to 2010, and served a short, non-custodial sentence in 2012 for "mild espionage".¹⁵⁶ This part of Denmark's penal code relates to "assisting" a "foreign intelligence service to indirectly or directly act within the territory or matters of the Danish state".¹⁵⁷ At Bath, Kivimaki is based in the Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies. This Department, according to cached versions of its webpage at least, has provided "consultancy to governments and politicians", including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, and the US State Department.¹⁵⁸ It is notable that an individual convicted of conducting espionage on behalf of Russia is currently employed in a UK university.

Denying Access to Russia for Those Who are Critical of the Kremlin

Another way that the Kremlin has sought to secure its interests is by limiting access to Russia. Over the years, Russia has often tried to silence criticism of its politics and policies from academics and commentators by either denying them visas or expelling them from the country.

¹⁵³ 'Cambridge spy journal shuts after row over links to Russia', *The Telegraph*, 28 December 2016, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/28/cambridge-spy-journal-shuts-row-links-russia/>, last visited: 9 December 2019.

¹⁵⁴ 'Cambridge spy journal shuts after row over links to Russia', *The Telegraph*, 28 December 2016, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/28/cambridge-spy-journal-shuts-row-links-russia/>, last visited: 9 December 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Foxall, A., 'Putin Sees and Hears it all: How Russia's Intelligence Agencies Menace The UK', *Henry Jackson Society*, 5 November 2018, available at: henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/HJS-Putin-Sees-and-Hears-It-All-Report-web.pdf, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Lucas, E. 'Russia's Sub Rosa Statecraft', *The American Interest*, 10 December 2014, available at: www.the-american-interest.com/2014/12/10/russias-sub-rosa-statecraft/, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Kerbaj, R. and Cortbus, C., 'Politics professor spied for Russia', *The Sunday Times*, 26 February 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/politics-professor-spied-for-russia-zttzw3kbz>, last visited: 10 December 2019.

¹⁵⁸ 'Consultancy', *Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies: University of Bath*, n.d., available at: www.bath.ac.uk/polis/consultancy/, last visited: 22 October 2019.

A recent example of this is Lukas Latz, a German exchange student at St. Petersburg University, who was expelled from his university in June 2019 and ordered to leave Russia.¹⁵⁹ Latz's crime had been to write an article for a German news website about ongoing environmental protests in Chelyabinsk, one of the largest cities in Russia. Latz was in Russia on a student visa and, Russia's authorities argued, violated the terms of his visa by writing the article, which did not permit him to work.

The Kremlin is not only able to influence developments within Russia; it is also able to influence them outside of Russia. In January 2017, the American author David Satter was scheduled to discuss his 2016 book, *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin*, at the Paris Institute of Political Studies' Center for International Research (CERI). Two days before Satter was due to speak, the event was cancelled without explanation. Satter is one of the Kremlin's leading critics and was expelled from Russia in 2014 – in what was the first expulsion of an American journalist since the end of the Cold War.

Buzzfeed, who broke the story of Satter's event being cancelled, cited an unidentified academic at Sciences Po who claimed that the event had been cancelled to safeguard the relationship between Sciences Po and the three Russian universities it has exchange programmes with – Moscow State University, HSE (Higher School of Economics), and MGIMO (Institute of International Relations).¹⁶⁰ The relationship between Sciences Po and its Russian partners had come under pressure a year earlier. Shortly after hosting a conference on Chechnya in May 2016, CERI received complaints from the Russian embassy in Paris.

¹⁵⁹ 'German Student Expelled and Told to Leave Russia After Writing Article About Protests', *The Moscow Times*, 17 June 2019, available at: www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/17/german-student-expelled-told-leave-russia-after-article-protests-a66030, last visited: 22 October 2019.

¹⁶⁰ Aveline, P., 'One Of France's Top Universities Is Canceling Anti-Putin Speakers', BuzzFeed.News, 30 January 2017, available at: www.buzzfeednews.com/article/paulaveline/the-paris-school-of-international-affairs-cancels, last visited: 22 October 2019.

6. VICTORY WITHOUT A FIGHT: CHINA'S SHARP POWER IN UK ACADEMIA

Matthew Henderson

The foreign policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC) further the interests of the Communist Party of China (CCP). These interests include increasing China's political, military, and economic power, and combating all forms of opposition. The CCP works to achieve these goals by means of a multi-layered (and multi-vectored) strategy carried out across the world.

Britain's record of academic freedom, excellence, and innovation makes UK universities a key target for Chinese engagement. While some aspects of this are beneficial to the UK, others are harmful. The recent debate concerning Huawei has highlighted these concerns. Concerted Chinese efforts to influence, interfere in, exploit, and shape the UK academic environment in ways that run counter to British interests are manifestations of 'sharp power'. Such efforts are particularly evident in the following areas.

Combating Opposition to CCP Policies

The PRC uses human and technical means to prevent and punish anti-Party activity by Chinese citizens studying abroad.¹⁶¹ Criticism of the PRC and contact with organisations deemed to oppose PRC policies on issues such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law may be reported to the Chinese authorities and sanctions applied to those deemed responsible. A Chinese scholar in the US said that he and his colleagues faced a difficult choice about speaking openly as their relatives in China would suffer in consequence.¹⁶² At the least, these pressures prevent Chinese scholars from enjoying the benefits of free speech which should be available in UK academia. At worst, promising careers may be blighted.

UK academics who take a critical position or promote free discussion on these taboo themes may be openly challenged by Chinese interlocutors or subjected to more insidious pressure associated with threats to remove funding from their employers. Pressure to remain silent or stifle debate may also be applied pre-emptively by university authorities who fear Chinese disapproval.¹⁶³ This has even extended to pressure to take down a poster showing the Tiananmen 'tank man' in case it offended Chinese students.¹⁶⁴

Those exposed to such pressure may avoid trouble by conceding and thereafter self-censor to avoid further difficulties. Though inevitably impacts that are mainly negative are hard to quantify, this phenomenon is widely reported.¹⁶⁵ Following "a clear order"¹⁶⁶ from China, in 2017 CUP agreed to block access to around 300 articles and reviews in its journal *The China Quarterly*. This provoked widespread academic consternation which

¹⁶¹ Fish, E., 'How Chinese overseas students are learning harsh life lessons', *South China Morning Post*, 3 February 2018, available at: www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/2131738/how-chinese-overseas-students-are-learning-harsh, last visited: 17 September 2019.

¹⁶² Stone Fish, I., 'The Other Political Correctness', *The New Republic*, 4 September 2018, available at: newrepublic.com/article/150476/american-elite-universities-selfcensorship-china, last visited: 16 October 2019.

¹⁶³ 'Autocracies and UK Foreign Policy', *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee*, 3 September 2019, available at: www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/189a0558-804d-42f0-9428-fd6ab11903ab, last visited: 16 October 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Rachman, G., 'Chinese Censorship is Spreading Beyond its Borders', *Financial Times*, 14 October 2019, available at: www.ft.com/content/cda1efbc-ee5a-11e9-ad1e-4367d8281195, last visited: 4 November 2019.

¹⁶⁵ 'Autocracies and UK Foreign Policy', *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee*, 3 September 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Phillips, T., "Cambridge University censorship U-turn is censored by China", *The Guardian*, 22 August, 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/22/cambridge-university-censorship-u-turn-china>, last visited: 11 September, 2019

compelled CUP to reverse the decision.¹⁶⁷ The more individuals and institutions believe that they risk reprisals by ‘offending’ the CCP, the more pre-emptive censorship and surrender of autonomy becomes a tacit norm.

Embedding CCP Influence

PRC-backed institutions within UK universities are used as platforms for the direct pursuit of CCP objectives. ‘Confucius Institutes’ in Western countries may start as comparatively innocuous centres of soft power, but have been known to evolve in a more robust direction as Beijing-based officials intervene to impose conformity with CCP orthodoxy.¹⁶⁸ It is debatable whether bodies which teach Chinese language, history, and culture from the doctrinaire perspective of the ruling regime have a place in UK academia.

Other China-funded bodies in UK academia may be equally partisan. One such body, the China Centre at Jesus College, University of Cambridge, announces categorically on its website in language familiar from official Chinese propaganda, and with a similar disregard for historic realities;

“The 200-year era of global dominance by a small group of countries in the West is coming to an end. For most of the 2000 years prior to the British Industrial Revolution, China was a unified and peaceful country, ruled by a meritocratic bureaucracy. It was culturally sophisticated, with a vibrant market economy, and the most important location for global innovation... Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China since 1978 it has experienced an extraordinary transformation under the policy of ‘Reform and Opening Up’. China’s national rejuvenation is returning the country to the position within the global political economy that it had occupied before the nineteenth century.”¹⁶⁹

For 37 years the same Cambridge college, Jesus, has hosted a major annual conference, the Cambridge International Symposium on Economic Crime (CISOEC). According to CISOEC, the event typically attracts around 700 experts and 1800 participants from around the world to share practical expertise and intelligence on combatting issues of national and global concern including money-laundering, abuse of off-shore accounting, cyber-crime, crypto-currency and anti-financial crime compliance.¹⁷⁰ By degrees, Chinese participation at this event has increased and Chinese organisations are among the organising institutions and sponsors of the event. Ms Lihong Xing, Executive President of a bilateral trade promotion body (the UK Sichuan Business Association), which is a sponsor of the event, is now a Director of the Symposium.¹⁷¹ Numerous Chinese visitors and contributors to the 2019 event included PRC Government officials and lawyers. The programme included a session on pursuing Chinese financial criminals in foreign countries.

¹⁶⁷ Millward, J., ‘Open Letter to Cambridge University Press about its censorship of the China Quarterly’, 19 August 2017, available at: medium.com/@millwarj/open-letter-to-cambridge-university-press-about-its-censorship-of-the-journal-china-quarterly-c366f76dcdac, last visited: 17 September 2019.

¹⁶⁸ Lee, G., quoted in ‘The Debate over Confucius Institutes PART II’, *ChinaFile*, 1 July 2014, available at: www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes-part-ii, last visited: 10 September 2019.

¹⁶⁹ ‘China Centre, Jesus College’, *Jesus College Cambridge*, n. d., available at: www.jesus.cam.ac.uk/research/china/china-centre, last visited: 11 September 2019.

¹⁷⁰ The Centre for International Documentation on Organised and Economic Crime, n.d., programme for the Thirty-Seventh International Symposium on Economic Crime, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3312b1d274cbf1e812027c/t/5d9706450ff08444092432f6/1570178637595/2019+Symposium+Programme++Final.pdf>, last visited on 10 December, 2019

¹⁷¹ The Centre for International Documentation on Organised and Economic Crime, n.d., programme for the Thirty-Seventh International Symposium on Economic Crime, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3312b1d274cbf1e812027c/t/5d9706450ff08444092432f6/1570178637595/2019+Symposium+Programme++Final.pdf>, last visited on 10 December, 2019

Separately, in order to promote messaging on China's controversial economic globalisation programme known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, but earlier known as One Belt, One Road or OBOR), Beijing has taken steps to increase BRI's credibility through propaganda effort in UK academic circles. To this end, in July 2017 a new think tank called 'OBOR International @ Cambridge' organised 'The First Cambridge BRI International Conference' at the Cambridge University Science Park.

In a significant upgrade of the BRI campaign's impact and access, the 2018 CISOEC programme included 'The Second Cambridge Conference on OBOR'. The Jesus College website publicised the Conference as focused on "the new Silk Road, the road to sound, stable and honest business".¹⁷² In the same year, CISOEC noted that "an agreement was signed, with the endorsement of the Chinese government, to secure the financial viability of the symposium [CISOEC] in the foreseeable future".¹⁷³ In September 2019, 'The Third Cambridge Conference on OBOR' took place, again as a component of CISOEC and advertised in the programme as "the New Silk Road- One Belt One Road promoting trade, justice and stability".¹⁷⁴

Evidently the many opportunities arising from China's access to CISOEC have encouraged increased Chinese investment and engagement in the event, leading on to using CISOEC as a vehicle to promote BRI.

Access to Research on Dual Use and Military Technologies

In April 2019, the Director of the FBI, Christopher Wray, warned that China posed a broader, more severe intelligence collection threat to the US than any other country. In particular, China was increasingly targeting US information and ideas, innovation, research and development, and technology through engagement with academia. China was, in Wray's words, attempting to "steal its way up the economic ladder".¹⁷⁵

Chinese government plans for China's scientific and technical progress prioritise research in core areas, most obviously the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects, which Chinese students are encouraged to engage in overseas. Scholarship agreements make it clear that students abroad must work for the nation and report on progress in their studies to the local Chinese diplomatic mission.

A recent research paper from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) assesses that the top countries for research collaboration with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) are the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and Germany.¹⁷⁶ A Chinese scholar obtained his PhD from Manchester University in 2016 following research into graphene, a new material with potentially strategic military applications. The scholar had been sent to Manchester by the PLA, and since his return to China he has become involved in two of the PLA's key

¹⁷² 'College hosts 35th Crime Symposium', *Jesus College Cambridge*, 18 September 2018, available at: www.jesus.cam.ac.uk/articles/college-hosts-35th-crime-symposium, last visited: 5 September 2019.

¹⁷³ 'The Cambridge International Symposium on Economic Crime', *Centre for International Documentation on Organised and Economic Crime (CIDOEC)*, available at: www.crimesymposium.org, last visited: 17 September 2019.

¹⁷⁴ The Centre for International Documentation on Organised and Economic Crime, n.d., programme for the Thirty-Seventh International Symposium on Economic Crime, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3312b1d274cbf1e812027c/t/5d9706450ff08444092432f6/1570178637595/2019+Symposium+Programme+-+Final.pdf>, last visited on 10 December, 2019

¹⁷⁵ O'Malley, B., 'FBI chief warns universities to guard against China threat', *University World News*, 4 May 2019, available at: www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190503145355529, last visited: 11 September 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Joske, A., 'How the West's Research aids China's Military', *The Strategist*, 30 October 2018, available at: www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-the-wests-research-aids-chinas-military/, last visited: 17 September 2019.

military projects. Elsewhere, PLA Rocket Force scientists working on hypersonic aircraft, which, like graphene, has a transformational capability, have concealed their military affiliation when obtaining places to study in the UK, Germany, and Norway.

Data Capture and Exploitation

Huawei is believed by many analysts to advance CCP policy objectives.¹⁷⁷ Huawei has been active in the UK since 2001 and now funds numerous research projects at around 20 academic institutions at British universities from Oxford, London, and Cambridge to Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, and Southampton.¹⁷⁸ US-led concern about Huawei's CCP links has increased in the UK. In January 2019, following warnings from the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee on threats to national security, the University of Oxford decided to suspend further research grants or donations from Huawei.¹⁷⁹ Other universities have yet to review their arrangements with the company.

Huawei's presence as a major employer co-located with universities attracts gifted UK graduates into working for an organisation linked to the CCP. The large sums channelled by Huawei into research programmes at UK universities – in 2018 Huawei announced that it would spend around £3 billion in Britain over five years, including both research and procurement – give the organisation major direct and indirect leverage on a wide front where crucial CCP interests can be advanced.¹⁸⁰

A Single Narrative

CCP projection of influence into UK academic space is interconnected with parallel diplomatic, business, cultural, and other initiatives. Senior Chinese leaders visit UK universities where cooperation with China flourishes. On the last day of his October 2015 state visit to the UK, President Xi Jinping toured Manchester University's National Graphene Institute (NGI), where the PLA scientist referred to above would soon afterwards commence his UK-based research. On the same day, NGI announced a new partnership project on the uses of graphene with Huawei.¹⁸¹

In sum, Chinese interests are promoted in UK academia by means of funding from China, scholars and students from China, and an extensive, influential network of UK beneficiaries and collaborators. While it is undeniable that many benefits accrue, this activity clearly poses serious risks both to UK academic integrity and to key aspects of national security.

¹⁷⁷ Seely, B., P. Varnish and J. Hemmings, 'Defending Our Data: Huawei, 5G and the Five Eyes', The Henry Jackson Society (2019), available at: henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HJS-Huawei-Report-A1.pdf, last visited: 28 October 2019.

¹⁷⁸ Field, M., 'Universities under pressure to review Huawei links after warning China could 'subvert and manipulate' research', *The Telegraph*, 26 April 2019, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/04/26/universities-pressure-review-huawei-links-warning-china-could/, last visited: 16 October 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Cook, J., 'Oxford University suspends research grants from Huawei over security concerns', *The Telegraph*, 17 January 2019, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/01/17/oxford-university-suspends-research-grants-huawei-security-concerns/, last visited: 16 October 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Sharma, Y., 'Huawei research ties with world's top universities at risk from US advice', *University World News*, 25 January 2019, available at: www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190125061623487, last visited: 11 September 2019.

¹⁸¹ 'China's President Xi Jinping visits the National Graphene Institute', *The University of Manchester*, 23 October 2015, available at: www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/chinas-president-xi-jinping-visits-the-national-graphene-institute/, last visited: 28 October 2019.

7. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Andrew Hastie MP

Western strategic culture has long recognised the significance of decisive battle. The Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, likened war to a duel between two wrestlers – a contest of wills – with resolution arising when one party is forced to submit to the will of the other through overwhelming force. Western political and military leaders have been students of Clausewitz since his book *On War* was published posthumously in 1833.

Many students have taken Clausewitz's emphasis on decisive battle to heart. As he wrote forcefully: "Our conviction that only a great battle can produce a major decision is founded not on an abstract concept of war alone, but also on experience. Since time began, only great victories have paved the way for great results".¹⁸²

His legacy reveals itself through two centuries of Western military history, where commanders of opposing forces sought decisive victory on the battlefield for political ends. War, as an instrument of policy, served the greater political aim of victory and the reordering of a new peace. Our presupposition has been that war and peace are two sharply distinguished spheres of social activity.

Today, however, this strategic culture has not prepared us to understand the threats that manifest themselves in the middle ground between war and peace in the 21st Century. It has diminished our peacetime statecraft, fostering a culture of passivity and wishful thinking as modern great power competition begins to reshape the world order.

As a result, we are surprised to discover that authoritarian regimes like the Russian Federation or the PRC conduct hybrid and political warfare operations in the pursuit of strategic objectives, exploiting the norms and global peace built by the United States and its allies out of the ruins of the Second World War.

In less than a decade, China has built and militarised artificial islands in the South China Sea, forging unsinkable aircraft carriers from reefs and atolls. Russia has annexed Crimea from Ukraine. The international community has struggled to anticipate and reverse this development, as it has with respect to China's aggressive debt-trap diplomacy and Russia's general mischief and meddling.

Why is this so? The problem is primarily an intellectual one: we are unfamiliar with the strategic culture of our opponents, which emphasises subversion, and ignorant of our own Western assumptions and traditions.

Russian and Chinese strategic culture has not arisen in a vacuum. Nor have their hybrid and political warfare operations. To understand the objectives and means of such campaigns, it is necessary to appreciate the worldview of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung. These men – all avowed Marxists – saw class conflict as the basic driving force of world politics. The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against capitalism was both domestic and international – and necessarily involved using all the instruments of state power in a holistic approach.

Although their ideology has been defeated in the West, they are still shaping our world, especially in the East. Xi Jinping has been open about their influence, and it is important we take him at his word. In his 2013 speech to the Chinese Communist Party's then-

¹⁸² Von Clausewitz, C., *On War*, Howard, M. and P. Paret (eds. & trans.) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 260.

newly elected Central Committee, Xi explained: “It is Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought that guided the Chinese people out of the darkness of that long night and established a New China”.¹⁸³

The holistic approach developed by Lenin, and built upon by Stalin and Xi, is being pursued today, albeit it is now facilitated by advances in technology. Western societies are the targets of subversive operations, with state actors weaponising and amplifying the divisions natural to democracy. Domestic and international politics, for the Marxist-Leninist, are different expressions of the same revolutionary policy. The conceptual wall separating war and peace was replaced by the idea of continuous struggle.

The revolutionaries argued that all of life is political, inverting Clausewitz’s dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means. As Mao Tse-Tung put it, “Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed”.¹⁸⁴ Politics and warfare became interchangeable and all the instruments of the state were refashioned for subversive warfare.

Authoritarian states have weaponised previously benign activities like diplomacy, media, investment flows, infrastructure development, and foreign asset purchases. University campuses have become the modern battlegrounds of covert influence and interference.¹⁸⁵ These activities complement more aggressive forms of subversive warfare such as intellectual property theft, forced technology transfer, cyber-attacks, and espionage.¹⁸⁶ All these activities advance the efforts of authoritarian regimes to undermine the West.

The democratic West has lacked the intellectual framework both to perceive and to respond to these subversive tactics. We have not inhabited the revolutionary mindset or worldview, limiting our capacity to grasp the strategy of our authoritarian adversaries as they probe the boundaries of acceptable peacetime behaviour. Our passivity is dangerous, so that we risk escalating tensions if we attempt to recover ground lost by subversive means.

Nevertheless, as we awaken to the threat posed by these authoritarian campaigns of subversion, we can draw upon our own historical heritage in countering them.

We must take assertive diplomatic, economic and covert measures to push back against authoritarian states that undermine the global order at the very edge of peace. This is for both moral and practical reasons. If we want to preserve peace and avoid war, we must understand our adversaries and become practitioners of hybrid and political warfare ourselves.

The moral necessity of avoiding conflict is clear enough. But the acquisition of such expertise also multiplies the statecraft available to us to protect our geopolitical interests. Political leaders will have more flexibility and policy options at their fingertips. The question is: What needs to be done?

¹⁸³ Greer, T., ‘Xi Jinping In Translation: China’s Guiding Ideology’, *Palladium*, 31 May 2019, available at: palladiummag.com/2019/05/31/xi-jinping-in-translation-chinas-guiding-ideology/, last visited: 15 November 2019.

¹⁸⁴ Tse-Tung, M., On Protracted War (Selected Works, 1938, pp. 152-153), *Marxists.org*, n. d., available at: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch05.htm, last visited: 15 November 2019.

¹⁸⁵ Griffiths, J., ‘UK Lawmakers Warn of ‘Alarming Evidence’ of Chinese Meddling on University Campuses’, *CNN*, 6 November 2019, available at: edition.cnn.com/2019/11/06/uk/uk-china-universities-influence-intl-hnk/index.html, last visited: 15 November 2019.

¹⁸⁶ Tarabay, J., ‘Chinese Military May Gain From Western University Ties, Report Warns’, *The New York Times*, 20 October 2018, available at: www.nytimes.com/2018/10/30/world/australia/china-scientists-military-research.html, last visited: 15 November 2019.

First, we need to recognise, understand, and articulate the challenge facing the West. This requires political leadership, since the great power competition between authoritarian and democratic states is ultimately a contest of ideas. National leaders must affirm and articulate the values that define Western democracies, especially as we seek to build a coalition of like-minded partners to resist authoritarian political warfare. Over the last century, the West has built a powerful set of alliances and partnerships, and these now need to be mobilised.

This coalition of like-minded partners would share intelligence (at varying levels of security), technical expertise, training, and resources. It would provide an organisational framework for coordinating responses, particularly in the fast-paced cyber and information domains. It would also pay particular focus to smaller states, which are often ill-equipped to resist well-funded political warfare offensives.

Second, we must enlist the full weight of democratic institutions in this effort, including the giving of major speeches, initiating parliamentary inquiries and passing legislative measures, and educating the public. This must happen at the same time that we build resilience against clandestine and overt political warfare campaigns. Australia serves as a helpful case study of a democracy that has taken action to protect itself against such threats.

In 2018, the Espionage and Foreign Interference (EFI) and Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS) Acts were legislated with bipartisan support to strengthen the Australian political system and civil society against malign foreign interference. The former prime minister, The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, played a critical role by leading the public debate, ensuring the successful passage of the legislation. He also made the tough decision on Australia's 5G network, preserving our digital sovereignty for future generations by applying rigorous security tests that have excluded some telecommunication companies.

This year, the prime minister, The Hon. Scott Morrison MP, bolstered Australia's institutional resilience by establishing the University Foreign Interference Taskforce (UFIT) and a standing interagency Counter Foreign Interference Taskforce, manned by intelligence and law enforcement investigators. These decisions give operational and prosecutorial teeth to the existing legislative framework, aimed at disrupting foreign interference on Australian shores.

Universities remain key terrain for authoritarian powers searching for a strategic advantage because of the high value research and intellectual property held on campuses. It is therefore prudent and necessary that the Australian Government works closely with the university sector to articulate guidelines to protect against foreign interference. This includes the protection of cyber networks, safeguarding research that is of national significance, and ensuring transparency in collaborative programs with foreign entities.

Third, democratic leaders must develop a strategy and define victory. For too long, democratic states have been passive and reactive in dealing with authoritarian subversive campaigns. We need to get back to first principles.

Values must be articulated. Core interests must be defined. Sovereignty, where compromised, must be recovered and protected. A powerful narrative, that both supports our own values and pushes back against those of authoritarianism, must be constructed. Democratic partners, of course, need to enliven these elements as part of 'whole of government' strategy. None of this will be easy. But the alternative is reduced sovereignty, with democracies tethered to authoritarian, hyper-modern surveillance states.

Fourth, democracies should develop and establish expertise in hybrid and political warfare. This needs to occur across strategic, operational, and tactical levels of leadership in the civil and military wings of government. It will require a shift in educational focus as we reorient relevant institutions to better understand the strategic culture of our authoritarian rivals, as well as ourselves.

There will be a need for increased depth in the range of professional experience across government, given the breadth of skills required for the disruption of rival subversive campaigns, and for the conduct of our own – where necessary. Importantly, this shift must be driven by political leadership – formalised in policy documents, given democratic oversight, and appropriately resourced.

Fifth, we must build an array of political warfare instruments. This would include cyber, diplomatic, information, and media capabilities. These are important for informing domestic publics about the nature and scale of the challenge, but also for exposing to international publics the activities of authoritarian regimes. These activities include corruption, espionage, fake news, and human rights abuses.

Civil society has a crucial role to play in this. Think tanks and investigative reporters, particularly, are critical in exposing subversive activities undertaken by foreign authoritarian powers. Again, Australia serves as a helpful case study. Reporters from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Nine Media protected the Australian national interest by revealing multiple instances of malign foreign interference, setting the political conditions for the passage of EFI and FITS legislation.

Sixth, we should use economic measures to counter authoritarian economic coercion, the theft of Western intellectual property, and their future domination of strategically-vital industries and critical national infrastructure. Many democracies find themselves economically co-dependent on authoritarian states and vulnerable to coercion.

Restrictions should be placed on business and other dealings with key individuals and organisations (beyond those that are diplomatic). Technology export controls could be tightened. Awareness campaigns should be launched which highlight the risks of doing business with authoritarian enterprises. Magnitsky legislation should be introduced to stop human rights abusers from using the Western financial system. Heavy tariffs should be introduced on goods known to have been produced using stolen IP or technology.

Finally, democracies need to prepare for the long haul – and to pay a price. Countering and defeating authoritarian political warfare is likely to require sustained effort and spending over several decades – and it will require difficult decisions to be made. As such, democracies need to recalibrate the management of strategic risks and costs associated with this.

We have entered a new era of great power competition between authoritarian and democratic states. Now is the time to recognise the challenge posed by the unique strategic culture of our rivals and adapt our posture accordingly – our sovereignty and democratic way of life depends upon it.

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