

Russia\222s Disinformation Campaign  
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Last week, we reviewed Russia\222s long-term foreign policy, a policy that is a reflection of its historic vulnerability and weakness. This time, we will examine Russia\222s long-term use of disinformation and discord. They have turned to this policy because it is inexpensive and can divide democratic societies without firing a shot. It is effective because so many people in our liberal democracies (rule of law) are not willing to think things through; it is easier to latch onto a source of information that confirms their already existing resentments.

Many people believe that the educated elites look down on them, that the benefits of a capitalistic system are designed to keep them poor, and that a strongman will rise up to protect them. When they hear "power to the people," they believe it, not seeing the hypocrisy behind the slogan. Populism has never provided what its supporters hoped. The swamp does not get drained.

The rumor mill is as old as civilization itself. In antiquity, it was the unproven belief in gods, goddesses, and evil spirits, forces that needed to be appeased. As our civilizations grew larger and kings (and later emperors) ruled them, people were willing to obey their authority and believe in them until some catastrophe occurred. A plague, famine, or barbarian invasion created a situation in which the supreme power no longer seemed to protect them. In China, emperors were replaced when they had lost the "mandate of heaven." Losing the mandate of heaven, however, did not necessarily produce the next emperor mandated by heaven. Instead, they had anarchy, war lords, and utter misery until the next strongman took power.

Throughout history, rulers tried to avoid losing control during a catastrophe by spreading rumors that someone or something else was to blame. Successful minorities were convenient scapegoats. Blaming Jews was, and still is convenient today in Muslim lands, and enjoys a revival in the former Soviet colonies of Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary. It is also an ugly underbelly in France, Germany, the UK, and Sweden.

In the dark and Middle Ages, women were targeted: witches who magically called on devils to cause miscarriages, failed crops, plagues. Women are still targeted as witches in Africa, along with Albinos. These victims are the product of the rumor mills, nonsense believed by the credulous.

Russia has used rumors and disinformation as early as the 19th century, when the secret police created a fraudulent document "proving" that Jews had a plot to rule the world (Protocols of the Elders of Zion). Despite this piece of propaganda being unmasked as a fraud in 1922, it was nonetheless published and distributed by Henry Ford in the 1930s, the Nazis used it as a justification for genocide, and is popular reading in the credulous Muslim world today.

During the Cold War, the Russians spread conspiracy theories to the gullible around the world. Stories about Americans stealing body organs in Central America got unwary travelers and missionaries killed. They also funded terror groups throughout Europe and Middle East and poisoned elections.

Putin, despite his country\222s weakness, fights back. He finds his enemies\222 weak spots and play on them. In the UK, the Russians secretly funded the referendum that removed Britain from the European Union (Russia\222s target). This campaign successfully fooled British nationalists who hated the elite European Union and its rules, but now regret this.

Then he funded both far-left and right-wing fringe parties in French and German elections (and now Italy as well), in the hope of further eroding the EU. It failed in France and Germany because in those countries, the mainstream press still enjoys popular support. Russia succeeded in Poland and Hungary, both of them with enthusiastic histories of fascism.

Russia corrupted our last presidential and congressional elections by clandestinely funding fringe parties and cleverly perverting of our social media, sowing exactly the right falsehoods and propaganda to appeal to each of our divisions.

This can only work if we let it. If it is too good to believe, use your brain, not your emotions. Russia\222s involvement gets onto a longer list every day.

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