

INFLUENCING THE ADVERSARY

From Wet Affairs to Propaganda

Stephan Blancke, PhD



European Intelligence Academy
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About the Author

Dr Stephan Blancke is a political scientist and analyst, whose research focus is on international state and non-state intelligence structures. Dr Blancke's areas of expertise are North Korean and Chinese espionage activities, their intelligence agencies, these countries international clandestine networks, and their use of front companies, especially relating to proliferation. His other research interest is the current development of organised crime groups. In that context, he has examined --among others-- North Korean interests and the involvement of their elite structures. He uses various methods for research and data processing, such as Social Network Analysis and others.

Dr Blancke holds a diploma in administrative law as well as a diploma in political science. His doctoral dissertation examined counterintelligence and espionage activities of non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, religious cults and outlaw motorcycle gangs. He is the editor of *East Asian Intelligence and Organised Crime* (Verlag Dr. Köster, 2015). Among other journals and newspapers, he writes sporadically for *Jane's Intelligence Review*. In 2016 he published a series about North Korean intelligence activities for the NK PRO website. Dr Blancke can be contacted at stephan@blancke.de.

About the European Intelligence Academy

The European Intelligence Academy (EIA, www.euintelligenceacademy.eu) was established in 2013 as an international network of intelligence studies scholars, specialists and students, who are dedicated to promoting research and scholarship across the European Union (EU), as well as between the EU and other parts of the world. One of the primary aims of the EIA network is to highlight the work of emerging graduate and undergraduate scholars in the intelligence studies field, while encouraging cooperation in research and scholarship between students of intelligence. The EIA is an initiative of the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS), based in Athens, Greece. Its Director is Dr Ioannis Nomikos.

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Introduction

The United States Intelligence Authorization Act of 1991 defined covert action as an “activity or activities of the United States Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly¹”. By the time the Act came to be, influencing other states as a means of pushing ideological or national interests had already been used by several countries as a central instrument in foreign affairs. The Eastern Bloc’s intelligence agencies, especially the Soviet KGB, have been known for their so-called active measures (*aktivnye meropriiatiia*), such as the use of front groups in the West’s peace movement as well as the funding of sympathisers². In 2013, Putin’s Russia adopted the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine, which recognises the protest potential of the population or measures from outside as a means of influencing other states’ domestic processes³. This paper takes a closer look at the various methods and parties that show a great interest in influencing as well as manipulating.

On ‘Wet Affairs’

Liquidating dissidents, alleged terrorists or people that are generally deemed unpopular, can be seen as the most radical form of influencing domestic affairs. Such wet affairs, sometimes also called black operations, have a great effect on a country’s domestic security situation. This can demonstrate itself in the population’s growing sense of alarm and often results in a call for increased surveillance and repression, thus having a direct effect on socio-political discourse and decision-making. Some of these wet affairs also lead to violent demonstrations and acts of revenge —oftentimes in the countries where people find refuge as political opponents and become the target of other states.

In January 2013, three Kurdish PKK activists were assassinated in Paris. Ömer Güney, the Turkish MIT intelligence agent who was subsequently accused of the murder, was found dead in prison in December 2016⁴. This incidence was followed by numerous protests and conflicts between Kurds and left-wing sympathisers. Earlier, in 2012, the former member of the Marxist terror group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Nadarajah Mathinthiran, was also found dead in Paris⁵. The people behind this case are likely to have had connections to the Sri Lankan intelligence agency. A well-documented and therefore widely known example is also the assassination of Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh⁶, an important official of the HAMAS, by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad in 2010⁷. Umar Israilov was also assassinated by agents of the Chechen despot Ramzan Kadyrov after he had tried to escape from an attempt to abduct him from Austria⁸.

Such incidents, which include mocking national security authorities, such as by Mossad agents using various countries' fake passports, affect a country's domestic situation. When a government is forced to explain to the general public and the media how it is that foreign forces can readily assassinate targets on their very own territory, can spark a political crisis. Nevertheless, such drastic measures are an exception and have proven to be rather counterproductive in the long run. Usually, black operations are considered the last possible step, due to the possibility of being caught. Therefore, the risk of losing face, but also failing the mission, is too high for most States.

On More Robust Measures

Intimidating opposition forces abroad can be seen as another means of influencing. Widely used methods include violent actions against protesters, trashing dissidents' offices, as well as overtly observing and following activists. This method serves to illustrate that even abroad or in exile, neither the people concerned nor their families are safe, but have to live in a constant state of fear. Recent events such as the violent attacks by Turkish security guards on counter-protesters in Washington, DC, in May of 2017, show that such actions can backfire⁹. Although this resulted in confusion and fear among the protesters of mostly Turkish descent, the US government also made a clear statement by having federal prosecutors issue twelve arrest warrants for Turkish security officials¹⁰. These were publicized along with a list of photographs of the suspects¹¹.

Large ethnic groups within can sometimes be used for interfering in political quarrels. In 2015, the Osmanen Germania biker gang was founded in Germany. Their outward appearance is no different from traditional outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs); however, they largely operate within the violent scene of migrant petty-criminals and have close ties with the Turkish governing party AKP¹². They are considered extremely nationalistic and loyal to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Their visual appearance, as well as sporadic violent attacks, are meant to intimidate Kurdish activists in Germany¹³. The latter formed a similar Kurdish group called Bahoz in the spring of 2016, which can be seen as a counterweight to Osmanen Germania. Problems arise when such groups —with or without the use of violence— implement their propaganda and efforts to intimidate others on the internet as well as in the streets, as well as place sympathisers or even members within the ranks of law enforcement. The Turkish-nationalist society Turan, which has come to public attention due to its conflicts with members of the ethnic Kurdish population, features a salutation to the Turkish right-wing Grey Wolves on its Facebook page, shown by a man dressed in a German police uniform.

The threatening presence of such individuals, their club houses and meeting points, suffice to create a feeling of insecurity and fear among the general public. While traditional OMCGs try to intimidate or provoke their competitors, politically motivated groups need a certain infrastructure in order to function. Nationalist, Islamist and anti-Zionist organisations displayed clear and at times intimidating presence in Europe before the Turkish presidential elections of June 2018, especially in areas marked by the presence of a large ethnic Turkish population. According to recent intelligence reports, such proceedings could be seen with the Islamist Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), the political branch of the controversial *Milli Görüş* movement. After the elections, the Felicity Party's Berlin office appears to have been abandoned—despite carefully draped office supplies—which illustrates the typically provisional character of such influencing campaigns.

Prior to the Turkish elections, some Turkish consulates asked teachers, as well as students of Turkish descent, to monitor and report critics of President Erdoğan. Several organisations have recently come to attention for having spied on critical members, as well as for having pressured or even threatened them. Documents and witness reports keep surfacing, which confirm that there is a strong affinity between the Turkish intelligence agency MİT and the Union of European-Turkish Democrats (*Avrupalı Türk Demokratlar Birliği*, UETD) or the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği*, DİTİB), which is a branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). This usually comprises a grey area of influence, for it overlaps with traditional espionage techniques, such as collecting information. As early as in 1991, the Turkish media asked fellow countrymen in Germany to photograph potential traitors as well as generally suspicious Turks and send these photos to the relevant authorities in Ankara. In Europe, it is now widely assumed that certain mosques are used by thousands of informants and confidants as well as employees of the MİT to work for the Turkish security authorities and spy on critics of President Erdoğan, as well as to compile files on journalists¹⁴.

In January 2017, a spy from the Indian intelligence agency RAW was convicted for gathering information on opposition Sikhs in Germany, who were affiliated with the Khalistan movement—a group that seeks to establish an autonomous state at the Indian-Pakistani border¹⁵. In another case, RAW monitored separatist movements and extremist Sikhs across Europe, some of whom were also affiliated with the Khalistan movement¹⁶. The information gathered could then be used by RAW to detect relevant individuals and intimidate them politically. Collecting addresses and other personally identifiable information are important tools in espionage, as is influencing, for it allows to directly address policymakers. The (most likely Chinese) data breach of the United States Office of Personnel Management in 2015, which, according to the FBI, resulted in as many as 18 million people working for the government having their records hacked, must be seen in relation to this¹⁷. All this information can then be used to form the basis of successful social engineering.

In recent years, several individuals have been arrested in Europe for spying on Chinese opposition activists and passing their details on to Chinese intelligence. Chinese authorities were then able to pressure family members in China, a practice that had a direct impact on their sons' and daughters' political activities in Europe. John Zhou, one of the spies who were identified in connection with such operations, was sentenced in Germany in 2011. Since 2005, he had observed the Falun Gong movement and passed all information on to the Chinese embassy in Berlin. In court, Zhou's lawyer was the former Federal Minister of the Interior of Germany, Otto Schily, who began working as a lawyer after serving as a minister¹⁸. Ironically Schily was responsible for German counterintelligence. At the beginning of his term, the domestic

intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, BfV) noted that the Chinese intelligence services have not lost sight of Germany¹⁹. Finally, at the end of his term, the last intelligence report stated, that “opposition efforts abroad, be it by supporters of the democracy movement, ethnic minorities —i.e. Chinese Uighurs— or activities of the banned anti-state Falun Gong movement are systematically spied on. In Germany the Chinese intelligence uses the official representations to establish contacts”²⁰. In other words, Schily was well prepared for his later work as an advocate for a Chinese spy.

Whilst another form of influence may not have any consequences for the country where it is exerted, the effect on the individuals’ country of origin can be devastating. Germany used to be a place of refuge for people from Rwanda but it has only been a few years since court cases revealed that the Rwandan Refugee Community was heavily manipulated by members of the so-called Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which is a militia established by ethnic Hutus in 2000 and is believed to be responsible for large-scale war crimes and homicide in neighbouring Congo. Its leader, Ignace Murwanashyaka, who due to his residence permit status was subject to a political activity ban, funded and supported the African militia from his exile in Germany, travelled to the region several times and participated in military training²¹. The author was told by a source in Rwanda that individuals in Europe have repeatedly been pressured by the FDLR to donate money or act as spies. According to the source, however, this is thought to have stopped since the sentencing of Murwanashyaka in 2015.

Useful Propagandists

The American military strategist Edward Luttwak writes in his classic *Coup d'État: A Practical Handbook* that certain right-wing groups of interest tried to “keep up with violent mass movements, using their own illegal methods to seize power and overthrow regimes”²². During the Cold War, several left-wing groups formed such “violent mass movements” whose support promised political capital. Between 2003 and 2011, a Spanish think tank, the Centre for Political and Social Studies, received around €7 million from Venezuela²³. This think tank was founded by socialist and communist academics in 1993, who were also accused of having close ties with the Colombian armed groups ELN and FARC. Additionally, this think tank is closely linked to the Spanish left-populist party Podemos²⁴. Regarding the newspaper *El Mundo* one of its founders, Juan Carlos Monedero, allegedly received nearly €500,000 for “political consultancy” from some of the member states of today’s *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA), which has resulted in the neutrality of an important political force in Spain being questioned²⁵.

Nowadays, there are mainly populist parties, right-wing organisations, websites as well as small groups of conspiracy theorists that are mostly being supported by Russia and wealthy individuals, such as the Swedish industrialist Patrik Brinkmann²⁶. The shady but no longer existing Russian banks First Czech Russian Bank (FCRB), as well as Strategy Bank, financed the elections campaign of right-wing populist Front National in France with the help of millions of Euros²⁷. Loans were initiated by Alexander Babakov²⁸, who is a member of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s party United Russia and who is on the UKRAINE-EO13661 sanctions list, as well as by Konstantin Valerevi Malofeev, an oligarch with close ties to the Kremlin, who also features on the aforementioned sanctions list²⁹. Yet, there are also a number of nameless, obscure right-wing populists that are being funded and used by the Kremlin in order to interfere with domestic affairs³⁰. Activists from the so-called Reichsbürger movement in Germany as well as members of the Sovereign Citizen Movement in the US, who are known to have carried out

several attacks and murders, have repeatedly been invited to Russia in order to give “anti-fascist seminars” or have discussions with Russian nationalist politicians. This circle of people, which also includes Russian-Germans, can be seen protesting aggressively and openly critical of the government around the government district in Berlin³¹. This network further needs to be seen in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church³² as well as *Ruski Mir*³³, which was founded by Putin in 2007 and is globally represented in various offices, or Russia Today (RT), widely known for its “alternative facts”³⁴. Both act in line with Russian politics across the globe, have various links to the former KGB and its following structures, and *Ruski Mir* also receives instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, among others.

While such factions may not have a large political impact, they still agitate and organise on a micro scale where members feel misunderstood by bureaucratic and parliamentary processes. Groups such as the National Liberation Movement (*Nazionalno-osvoboditelnoje dwischenije*, NOD) channel fears and are involved in influencing politics in the interest of other powers, such as by staging protests in front of the target country’s seat of government, spreading rumours on members of the government, or beating up opposition members³⁵. In an effort to present themselves as supposedly neutral philanthropists, such groups organise aid deliveries and trips to politically instable regions, such as the Ukraine. Yet, they clearly position themselves in line with certain political regimes.

Other incidents show that terms such as “culture” or “religion” have been used to influence and manipulate, with the average consumer of such propaganda often struggling to separate cultural or spiritual habits from political intentions. The extensive report on the AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires in 1994, which was carried out by the Lebanese Ibrahim Hussein Berro, said to have been an active member of Hezbollah, demonstrates how members of a government operate in the shadows in order to influence and manipulate mentally instable individuals or fanatics by means of certain institutions or concepts of religiosity. In that case, the then sheik of the At-Tauhid mosque, Mohsen Rabbani, collaborated with the Iranian embassy in order to create a structure that was capable of successful influencing and manipulation: “This structure saw the development of a political religious group known as *Hermanos Musulmanes Argentinos*, which had the capacity to cement contacts with local groups and influence the Islamic community in terms of disseminating political and ideological views of a violent nature whose main impulse originated with the then government of Iran”³⁶. Influence campaigns pose a threat to democratic societies when the relevant power—in this case Iran—simultaneously tries to infiltrate public authorities and ministries. This was also stressed in the most recent US Congressional hearing on “Iran and Hezbollah in the Western Hemisphere” in March 2015³⁷.

In this context, it is worth pointing to the so-called Al-Quds day in June 2017, which was celebrated in a number of cities around the world³⁸. Aside from a few far-right extremists and right-wing orthodox Jews³⁹ that participated in the events, there were posters being displayed which glorified the religious dictator Khomenei and called upon people to fight all “Zionists”, “terrorists” and “murderers”. Hamidreza Torabi, head of the Islamic Academy in Germany, attended a conference hosted by the German Foreign Office shortly before the events⁴⁰. This academy is managed by the Islamic Centre Hamburg (IZH), which is reportedly being monitored by German intelligence⁴¹. A few months prior to the conference, a Pakistani student was arrested after having cased several potential targets in Germany, especially involving the Jewish community⁴². It is admittedly difficult to draw a clear line between influencing, manipulating, controlling and espionage. The organising team of the Al-Quds day referred to the “Zionist propaganda” against them as a “test of the believers”.

On More Sophisticated Methods

If carried out discretely or gradually, influencing is a lot more difficult for analysts and security practitioners to recognise. First of all, a distinction needs to be made between clandestine and covert operations or actions. Both are often organised and carried out by intelligence agencies, but neither is used in the sense of traditional information gathering. Covert operation means that the initiator or origin must not be revealed, while the operation may be. A clandestine operation, however, must be thoroughly concealed in both its origin and proceedings; the media, the general public or security authorities must not find out. Furthermore, there are covert operations of a politically opportune kind, which serve to covertly support allied States but must not be revealed to the public. Examples of such operations can be seen in discrete arms trafficking with dubious governments or the supply of sophisticated surveillance technologies to dictators⁴³.

First and foremost, however, the aim is to directly or indirectly influence another government and its politics by means of discrete operations against individuals within the government or more aggressively against entire sections of the population. Again, a closer look at the definitions can help differentiate the various methods used, all of which have proven their potential to cause great harm. Diplomatic talks are often held in secret between state representatives and must not be leaked to the media, for such talks are usually aimed at influencing the other side's politics. The difference between this and other methods of influencing lies in the fact that, in the former scenario, both parties should know about each other's intentions, whilst this is not the case with so-called agents of influence. These are usually individuals or organisations that are recruited and managed by intelligence agencies. Or they may be individuals or organisations that knowingly and voluntarily pass on information to intelligence agencies from time to time. Last but not least, there are the useful propagandists previously mentioned. Russia is a prime example for how difficult it can be to draw clear lines between these categories. For example, politicians from the German ruling party, the CDU, repeatedly delivered speeches and accepted awards from the Tolstoy Institute in Berlin—despite its aggressively uncritical and pro-Russian politics⁴⁴. Furthermore, the institute openly cooperated with right-wing extremists and has close ties with right-wing mystics, which can also be seen from its online activities⁴⁵.

The media called the member of the Trump team and former Merrill Lynch employee in Moscow, Carter Page, an agent of influence⁴⁶. He is said to have met with Russian agent Victor Podobny and the FBI has been monitoring his communication since 2016⁴⁷. Additionally, there are active lobbying firms both in Europe and the US that try to influence political discussions on behalf of countries from the former Eastern Bloc and therefore maintain connections with both sides. Thanks to the US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), numerous original documents reveal the names of both well-known and nameless lobbying firms, as well as their work for Russian oligarchs, the Kremlin, or the government of Iraq. Their work is often located in areas of political dispute and aimed at questioning political processes, as well as stirring up resentment against existing jurisdiction or pushing revision. A lot of the time, this concerns politico-economic decisions affecting companies from States that are subject to embargoes or other types of sanctions. An example can be seen in the wealthy Iranian exile community in the UK, which is interested in establishing business relations with Iran and approaches former politicians in order to derive to diplomatic solutions. The former Conservative minister Norman Lamont works as a consultant to such circles, thus influencing domestic processes: a lobbyist for Iranian businessmen will always use his political contacts in order to lift sanctions rather than intensify them⁴⁸. Vladimir Putin, for example, benefited greatly from the fact that the well-respected Gerhard Schröder just after his mandate as German chancellor had ended, joined a project

which he had already advocated while still in office: the North Stream Pipeline project, of which 51 percent is owned by Gazprom. Schröder, who called Putin a “flawless democrat”, is advocating Putin’s politics to this day and strongly attacks his critics. This has made some refer to Schröder as an agent of influence and Putin’s European lobbyist. At Putin’s inauguration in May of 2018, Schröder heartily congratulated him: “In Berlin, the conservative *Welt* newspaper said Schröder’s ‘depressing’ appearance showed he had left ‘his moral compass in the Kremlin cloakroom’⁴⁹. Referring to this event, another German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, called Schröder “*Erster Vasall Putins*” (First vassal of Putin)⁵⁰.

Authoritarian governments heavily depend on agents of influence in order to reach their political goals. The Turkish businessman Kamil Ekim Alptekin, one of President Erdoğan’s consultants, used his company, Inovo BV, to transfer large sums of money to the now dismissed National Security Advisor Michael Flynn⁵¹. His article, in which he demanded support for Erdoğan, was published in late 2016 and attracted quite a lot of public attention. In December of 2016, Intelligence Online highlighted the connection between another of Alptekin’s companies, ATH Defence and Security Solutions Co., and the Turkish intelligence agency as well as the police⁵².

Trump’s government started out with the promise: “Enact new ethics reforms to drain the swamp and reduce the corrupting influence of special interests on our politics”⁵³. It is therefore important to stress that FARA was established in 1938 as a means to fight Nazi propaganda⁵⁴.

There are also campaigns that may appear banal at first, but are in fact closely linked to social and economic interests. Examples span from the successful lobbying work of Jewish and Muslim organisations for the circumcision of new-born boys, which some doctors refer to as bodily harm⁵⁵, to international pharmaceutical, automotive and tobacco industries influencing decision processes in parliament. Their success is also beneficial to the country’s economy, wherefore national intelligence agencies support their efforts in some countries.

Mimosas

Some states are quite sensitive when it comes to their domestic affairs —at least those deemed as such. Particularly powerful states are in a position to take drastic measures: when Germany welcomed the Dalai Lama at the chancellor’s office in 2007, China suspended the dialogue on human rights⁵⁶. Numerous complaints, threats and intensified efforts to launch disinformation campaigns ensued. China’s international Confucius Institutes, which are meant to promote and spread the Chinese language and culture, played a vital role in this. Already back in 2009, Li Changchun, who had been in charge of propaganda at the Chinese Politburo Standing Committee for many years, explained to the *Economist* magazine that the Confucius Institutes are an “important part of China’s overseas propaganda set-up”⁵⁷. Their students were pressured and encouraged to spy on fellow students⁵⁸. Incidents such as Taiwanese documents going missing in 2014 lead to a number of international universities closing down their Confucius Institutes or refusing to extend the rental contract⁵⁹. Yet, another institute was inaugurated in Germany in April 2017⁶⁰.

China’s political struggle against their so-called five Five Poisons, among which are advocates of a free Tibet, has repeatedly resulted in more or less sophisticated disinformation campaigns being spread in numerous countries. In 2016, it was claimed by the Chinese website Tibet328.cn that the so-called “Dalai Lama clique” unsuccessfully tried to stop a fast food restaurant in Lhasa from opening, despite the Dalai Lama eating pork and beef. While this may be a rather trivial piece of information, the same article quotes a German Tibetologist who is claimed to have said

to the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle that the Dalai Lama is a vegetarian. This is typical of those producing propaganda and half-truths: If recipients are unsure of what to believe, they are more inclined to trust the photos and reports that “prove” the official Chinese point of view.

Aside from robust measures such as the overt observation and intimidation of Uighur dissidents in Europe, the US or Australia, as well as violent attacks on Falun Gong members in various Western countries, the top priority for the Chinese government is to build and maintain networks with political opportunists. On December 3, 2015, the Chinese embassy in Berlin hosted a discussion on Tibet, where German experts and Chinese officials had the chance to exchange their views on the history and development of the autonomous region of Tibet in the Southwest of China⁶¹. One of the guests, the Luxembourg scholar Albert Ettinger, was the author of a book in which the situation in Tibet is portrayed as a long-term, ongoing project of the CIA⁶² and in which he elaborates on the “West’s propaganda machine” that is said to make up “horror stories”⁶³. In other words, a pro-Chinese guest whose accounts can be said to match Beijing’s official portrayal. Official Chinese reports on the event also point to the fact that this guest’s remarks on the alleged funding of Tibetan monasteries by the Chinese government are based on a not otherwise specified scientific source. A pro-Tibet website claims that “China’s Ministry of Propaganda has a handful of western academic friends” and lists the name of the aforementioned German expert at the very top⁶⁴. Another German guest, Markus Rudolph, member of the ruling party CDU, explains the public interest in China as mere “religious enthusiasm”, for there are many more countries in the world facing various issues. In 2016, activists of the Free Tibet movement criticised Western representatives for participating in a conference of the Chinese government in Lhasa, which was also about the “real” portrayal of Tibet. It may not be surprising to know that one of the participants was the aforementioned member of the CDU, the “German politician Markus Rudolph from the political party CDU, whose colleague Michael Brand, a German lawmaker who chairs the Bundestag’s Human Rights Committee, was refused access to China in May after he criticized rights violations in Tibet”⁶⁵.

The Chinese ally North Korea displays similar methods, although less subversive and completely oblivious to democratic societies. A rather ridiculous example of this occurred in April 2014, when officials from the North Korean embassy in the United Kingdom complained to a London hairdresser about a poster showing Kim Jong Un’s distinctive hairstyle⁶⁶. The same year, a North Korean refugee was threatened in front of his residence in Denmark and beaten up so badly that he had to be treated in hospital—presumably by agents of the Pyongyang regime⁶⁷. Simultaneously, the North Korean embassies try to gain a basic influence on their host countries’ political processes by approaching left- and right-wing extremist factions. However, this is met with ridicule and rejection due to their amateurish practices and what is perceived as a grotesque line of argument by the democratic mainstream. So far, North Korean influencing—such as via the globally active Friendship Associations and various Juche followers—has had no significant outcomes.

Other countries are ready to take more drastic measures and, in the context of secret talks, even push for certain elected parliamentarians of the host country to be brought down. In 2016, for example, a political scandal involved Israel and Britain. The television channel Al Jazeera had secretly filmed various meetings and events of pro-Israeli groups and the Labour Party in the UK, while particular attention was being paid to statements by Shai Masot, who was at this time an employee of the Israeli embassy in London⁶⁸. Due to the political scandal, Masot soon resigned⁶⁹. Various means of administrative and financial support that were given to politically well-disposed people and countries can be traced back to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs of Israel—usually via an Israeli embassy. The latter mainly focuses on actions and activists of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), which some critics accuse of antisemitism: Boycott,

Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). This NGO has branches in several countries and is one of the prime targets of authorities in Tel Aviv due to its activism which, among others, focuses on the situation of the regions occupied by Israel. In March 2017, Gilad Erdan, Israel's Minister of Public Security and Strategic Affairs, demanded for a database to be established, in which all Israeli citizens that support BDS are to be listed⁷⁰. A former military official, Shai Masot, who introduced himself as a senior political officer at the Israeli embassy in London, is thought to have been responsible for the processing and alleged support of pro-Israeli lobbying groups in the UK since November of 2014. In secretly recorded conversations he referred to himself as a point of contact between members of the parliament, the foreign minister and the Israeli embassy. Andy Murray, a member of the Scottish National Party and BDS activist, reported that he was denied entry during a trip to Israel in 2015 after meeting Masot. During the lengthy interrogation at the airport he was presented with various photographs that had clearly been taken during surveillance operations in the UK⁷¹.

There are many more organisations that advocate Israeli interests and engage in successful lobbying across the globe. Oftentimes, topics of high symbolical but also practical domestic value are being exploited, such as the key words Antisemitism and Holocaust in Europe. Other examples include issues such as the nuclear industry in Iran or the question of an independent Palestinian state, which are being used by organisations such as Stop the Bomb, the Mideast Freedom Forum or the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) for sometimes subtle, sometimes very aggressive, campaigns⁷².

Tolerated or accepted?

For many years, Australia was one of the countries that permitted payments to political parties from foreign countries, which led to the question of whether influences from abroad were more or less accepted. But as of 2018, with the new "Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill", the Australian government is trying to limit these activities —mainly those of China, even if it is not directly named in the Bill⁷³. In 2015, the Australian intelligence service ASIO uncovered a network of wealthy Chinese who are thought to have interfered with domestic politics due to their targeted donations and a generous sponsor. One of them has a leading position in the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China —an organisation that is managed entirely from Beijing and operates internationally against Taiwan's supposed separatist efforts by means of propaganda and cooperation with the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party⁷⁴. Another person involved is Sheri Yan, who is likely to have accessed highly classified documents on Western intelligence agencies' information on Chinese operations, due to being married to a former high-ranking Australian intelligence official. While her flat in Australia was being raided, she was arrested in New York. Among other things, her charges detail the bribing of the United Nations General Assembly's former president, John Ashe⁷⁵. For good reasons, the discussions about the Chinese growing influence in Australia are currently ongoing⁷⁶. It should be mentioned that already Western publishers fear the pressure of China and refuse to publish books about Chinese measures to gain influence —as Professor Clive Hamilton describes in his book, after his publisher pulled the plug: "They [the publisher] were afraid of retaliation from Beijing, or people in Australia acting on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party"⁷⁷.

Recent years show a growing and influential network of Western Pro-China academics which have no problems celebrating and praising even the most boring propaganda pieces of the Chinese government —most recently seen with the new book by Xi Jinping. In Chinese state

media his book “marks a new milestone in promoting China’s development path” and in the view of Martin Albrow, a British sociologist, “a book for all mankind and the future of our planet”⁷⁸. Obviously not all people outside of China agree with this: “According to Scott Morton of Nielsen Bookscan, a data provider, fewer than 100 copies of the English-language version of the second volume have actually been sold in Britain since it was published in November”⁷⁹. In this respect, it is absolutely necessary to search for the earlier statements of the people who show a marked enthusiasm for the propaganda of authoritarian regimes. Often there are already earlier statements of this kind, or conferences, in which uncritical and unscientific tendencies can be recognized. The same people often sit on panels and act as multipliers of government-related views. Some of them do not know better, others do not want to know.

This Australian network stands as a typical problem of influencing campaigns: private individuals or non-state organisations try to influence political decisions when they are in fact representing other states’ interests. Usually, such links between private individuals and the government are not noticeable at first, and this is indeed intentional. The situation gets even more obscure when quasi-virtual organisations such as Anonymous or Wikileaks present themselves as political activists, but their goals and politics remain unclear. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, Wikileaks displays the behaviour of an opposing intelligence agency whose prime target are the US. Hardly anyone still questions the fact that US citizens’ votes were influenced by the information published prior to the recent presidential elections elections.

In the face of military conflicts, States often tolerate so-called governments in exile within their borders —often consisting of a website and a telephone number. Nevertheless, these serve the important function of making politics in line with one of the conflicting parties, thus showing which one the host country is taking sides with. This usually is nothing but spreading propaganda and influencing dissidents or refugees, as well as organising campaigns against generic forces and for an opportune political system. An example of this can be seen in Berlin, where the office of the so-called National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (ETILAF) almost goes unnoticed in an inconspicuous-looking house.

In conflicts where certain states are subject to sanctions, communication channels can be opened through the means of business executives travelling to a country that is under sanctions. It is not always quite clear, however, whether such missions actually serve the international demand for unofficial communication channels, whether they are used for state interests or whether they are purely based on a commercial motif. In any case, the visited state may well use such missions for propaganda purposes. The visits of Elia Valori for example, who is the Chairman of Italian General Investment Group, are being presented with great pride by the North Korean regime. Valori is also listed as a so-called UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Culture, but the outcome of such trips is certainly questionable in the light of the regime’s approval in the media⁸⁰.

Outlook

Influencing is successful if it has a lasting effect on the target’s actions. Although members of the German governing party participated in pro-Russian and pro-Chinese events, thus indirectly supporting certain views of the Russian government, the German government cannot be accused of the same uncritical stance. Various European pro-Putin movements may have a virtual following that amounts to hundreds of thousands of people, but aside from trolls that are paid by the Kremlin to manipulate blogs, there is hardly a sustained presence of the pro-Russian

opposition in European parliaments to be seen. On the contrary: Recent elections have shown how influencing campaigns failed to reach their goals, for neither in Austria nor in France were right-wing populists able to win national elections.

When talking about the usual suspects, the reader should be reminded that covert and clandestine operations are part of politics all over the world and there is a trove of information about Western operations in declassified documents—for example the 2014 declassified paper from the CIA, titled “Election Operation In Chile” by T. F. Schmidt, which “is based on a study submitted in May 1965 by a member of the former Pious and Evaluation Group of the Covert Action Staff of the Directorate of Operations (DO)”⁸¹. The former director of national intelligence, James Clapper, describes in his new book the US meddling in foreign countries⁸² and a current study describes 81 cases of US meddling in the election process of foreign countries between 1946 and 2000⁸³.

Successful campaigns are rare. This can be seen with the unsuccessful HIV/AIDS disinformation campaign by the KGB—the famous Operation INFEKTION⁸⁴. Others seem to be more successful, however, these are based on economic intentions: China can continue to rely on various states to refrain from forming official diplomatic ties with Taiwan, though this is certainly not due to the constant slogans and defamation of Chinese bloggers or semi-governmental front organisations, but rather due to the West’s interest in economic cooperation. In the future, new campaigns will surface to challenge democratic societies. The masterminds behind them will produce so-called ‘deep fakes’, using Artificial Intelligence, which promises to democratize the creation of fake print, audio, and video stories [...] deep learning and generative adversarial networks have made it possible to doctor images and video so well that it will be difficult to distinguish manipulated files from authentic ones⁸⁵. In the end, it depends on the interest of a society to recognize and to deal with a political influence campaign or a clandestine operation of a foreign state.

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