

The Fragility of Order

Essays in honour of K.P.S. Gill

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How to Thwart Subversion and Death by a Thousand Doubts

Anna Simons

... the power of terror... has been enormously enhanced by the character and content of contemporary media, with their overwhelming focus on the sensational, and their near complete ignorance of context and lack of historical memory. As even remote incidents of terrorist attack are brought dramatically into our homes through television, death anxieties proliferate among the population, whipped up into near hysteria in the wake of each new incident of violence. The political leadership and security establishment – riddled with information discontinuities of their own – are not immune to this process, and this has compounded policy and strategic errors across the world.

K.P.S. Gill, "The Implosion of International Terrorism",
April 19, 2008

If information discontinuities were a problem in 2008, where are we in 2018? The short answer is: in trouble. The situation K.P.S. Gill describes has worsened along two dimensions: the unfettered flow of what passes for 'information,' and what can be done with it.

The argument this essay makes is that the unfettered nature of information in the 21st century means that subversion of democracies will be easier to achieve than ever before, while subversion will predominate as a major 21st century threat thanks to at least three sets of developments. To thwart these efforts will require a major shift in who the public can count on for credible and authoritative information—which is where, fortunately, Gill's character is suggestive of what can and should be done.

To be clear, subversion is hardly a new technique. Undermining people's faith in their government and one another has long been a tried and true (even necessary) method for weakening a stronger foe, and has long proven critical to those bent on conquest and/or revolution.¹ But typically, fomenting collapse, civil war, or severe decline has served as a means to both these other ends – not as a goal in itself.

What is new today is that efforts to subvert are not necessarily being undertaken because states or non-state actors are striving to achieve some sort of political end – e.g. accommodation, restitution, or anything negotiable. Instead, the goal of at least some is to ensure democracies' (and democracy's) unmistakable, irreversible decline. Nor is this likely to change.

In other words, what has begun to occur is a shift from subversion as a means to weaken and take over (or to weaken, free, and have 'good guys' take over), to subversion as a tool by which to *permanently* wreck. Some might contend that this is what the Soviets sought *vis-à-vis* the West. Yet, the communists' ultimate aim was to also convert and dominate.² Nor were they as gratuitously destructive as actors today can afford to be. And here I am not just alluding to ISIS and its affiliates, or to those who would de-Judaize Israel, but to states. Also actors like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden may well realise what they are doing, but it is not clear everyone does: documents, ideas, and 'facts' released online never die. Nor do questions which can fester and multiply. While innocent-seeming questions may actually represent the most subversive form of subversion there is. Thus, in what follows I make a number of assertions that are hard to substantiate, but I do so in the spirit of provoking readers to ask themselves Nikolai Chernyshevsky's famously subversive question: what is to be done?

My argument consists of four parts. In the first, I explain why subversion poses a different kind of threat today than in the past. Second, I consider how subversion works, as well as what it has to work with (and on) in democracies. Third, I sketch 'death by a thousand doubts' in somewhat more detail. Finally, I turn to remedies.

SUBVERSION

Three broad reasons account for why subversion is with us in perpetuity (or for at least as long as we remain globally networked).

- We (still) live in a post-conquest era. Ever since World War II, the international community has strenuously objected to both the seizure of territory and/or the subjugation of other populations. Irredentism has enabled some countries to expand their borders, but, essentially, wars of conquest are no longer countenanced.³ This has unleashed a perverse kind of liberation. Without any incentive to have to try to *want* to seize control, competitors today have no reason not to simply seek to collapse one another, especially since this is far less costly to do than trying to dominate, subjugate, or take over.⁴ Plus, subversion can be accomplished through several sets of indirect means – to include, increasingly, via the Internet and what I am calling 'death by a thousand doubts.' Nor do these means require coordination.⁵ Instead, as the Russians seem to recognise, "non-kinetic instruments – subversion, corruption, disinformation, misdirection – can accomplish the desired results without the need for any shots being fired."⁶
- And though, for the moment, 'desired results' might only refer to efforts to 'destabilise and confuse,' destabilisation with no plan to oversee a regime change *is* collapse. Of course, just because collapse-oriented subversion will not require violence does not mean that violence won't be used.
- Though it is common to refer to 9/11 as a major turning point in relations between the non-Muslim and Muslim worlds which many Muslims would be the first to point out is a historic characterisation, 9/11 did usher in an era of more intense, more direct, and more disruptive confrontation in an ever growing number of locations. So much so that it is hard to imagine being a young Afghan, Iraqi, Somali, Yemeni, Libyan, Syrian, Malian, Kurd, or Pakistani today, and *not* want to take down those who just upended your life or the lives of those you care about. It is equally hard to imagine not wanting to ensure that your children will take revenge if you can't. Or, as Osama bin

Laden threatened (or promised): "... we will fight you as long as we carry our guns. If we fall, our sons will replace us. May our mothers become barren if we leave any of you alive on our soil."⁷

- Worth bearing in mind, too, is that while revenge may not be considered morally obligatory in the democratic West, for many peoples, many places it remains a clear, sacrosanct duty. (This is one reason among many that terrorism is not going to wither away.)
- A third threat to democracy will continue to come from those who don't like it, or capitalism. Some people strongly prefer communism, socialism, theocracy, and/or they oppose the modern world's profligate treatment of Mother Earth. While ideologically motivated critics have condemned Western-style democracy (and Western-style capitalism) from the outset, efforts to undo either are fairly recent. Even during the U.S. Civil War, both sides only sought to undermine one another's application of democratic (or non-democratic) principles.⁸ A sustained *systemic* attack on democracy (and capitalism) really only began with the rise of the Communist International and the birth of the Soviet Union.

Revealingly, some people believe attacks initiated by the Soviet Union remain underway. One need only google 'subversion' to find patriotic Americans convinced that "the Communist subversion of America is nearly complete: Left-wing media has already achieved 3 out of 4 steps for Soviet-style overthrow of American society and government."⁹

Such connections point to subversion's long-term effects. Flash-to-bang can take decades, and critiques can lurk for years as they acquire academic scaffolding and supporters.

More mundane reasons subversion will persist as a strategy of choice include the fact that it remains an ideal weapon of the weak and the most satisfactory means by which those who can't afford (or don't want) to have to openly fight, can cripple stronger opponents: think Russia, Iran, China, and North Korea vs. the U.S. Subversion-by-doubt also generates less mess and less physical risk than when two sides directly tangle, or even tangle via proxy.

Finally, subversion is fun, especially for those who enjoy being sneaky – and for those with the patience to bait and set traps. Plus, given the information discontinuities Gill alludes to in the passage above, along with today's unfettered flows of information, sowing mistrust and distrust has never been easier. All it takes is innuendo along with the smart marshalling or manufacture of evidence, which can consist of virtually anything. No longer is as much effort required as once was – for instance, when it took planting stories in an Indian newspaper for the 'news' to get 'innocently' picked up by 'sister' outlets in Africa in the hopes that, over time, enough Africans might be convinced that AIDS was engineered in a U.S. lab.¹⁰

The virtual instantaneity with which rumors can be spun into clickbait and then news today, represents a sea change. So does the extent to which, clicks, hits, or mentions *guarantee* attention once they rise above a certain threshold – all of which can be engineered by algorithms and bots. Nor are sufficient incentives in place to prevent this from accelerating: "politics as a permanent bonfire has become both a thrill ride and a business model."¹¹ Or, as *The Economist* notes, "From South Africa to Spain, politics is getting uglier. Part of the reason is that, by spreading untruth and outrage, corroding voters' judgment and aggravating partisanship, social media erode the conditions for the horse-trading that [Bernard] Crick thought fosters liberty" – horse-trading that previously let "people of different beliefs live together in a peaceful, thriving society."¹²

DEMOCRACY AND ITS VULNERABILITIES

As for how subversion works: all societies are riven by fissures. In many countries, the most intractable and obvious divides are based on ascriptive differences; individuals are born into different clans, tribes, or communal groups (and, acutely in the Indian case, caste), and everyone can be identified according to inescapable, ineradicable affiliations. Ascriptive identity makes splits both obvious and deep. In contrast, democracy is supposed to be predicated on individuals choosing their political affiliations, and being able to change these at will, which means factions and their memberships should fluctuate.¹³

Three sets of events or conditions can make differences especially worrisome in democracies: 1) elections, 2) economic hard times, and 3) prolonged security crises (or long wars). Each of the three leads to and then exacerbates tensions and makes differences more, rather than less, pronounced. Typically, whichever political party is in power will be blamed for weakening the economy or national security, while that party will blame its predecessors. The critical point here is less how the causal arrows can be made to point than that, with the right spin, any and all blame can quickly turn disagreement into a zero-sum game. How so?

Because the nature of politics in democracies is, by definition, 'identity'-oriented' (in the sense, again, that individuals freely choose their associations), citizens are *supposed* to join with others who share their values and views and, together, vote for those who best represent their preferences. Invariably this renders 'one man one vote' democracy a bit of a charade wherever communal alignments tell everyone exactly who should be able to count on whom (and for what); too often we see 'demography = destiny' where 'new states' are comprised of 'old societies.' But increasingly this also describes more mature democracies (like the U.S.), where people are being divided by their opposition to one another on more and more issues.

Or, as one American political scientist summarises the situation, "'Partisanship, for a long period of time, wasn't viewed as part of who we are... It wasn't core to our identity. It was just an ancillary trait. But in the modern era we view party identity as something akin to gender, ethnicity or race – the core traits that we use to describe ourselves to others.'"¹⁴

Meanwhile, the more irreconcilable people's allegiances can be made to seem, the more this feeds the perception that the system isn't just rigged, but is zero-sum. Granted, people's allegiances are not as fixed as the fixation on them suggests (otherwise there wouldn't be so many surprise election results, e.g. in Britain with Brexit and Theresa May, in the U.S. with Donald Trump, in France with Emmanuel Macron, etc.). Nonetheless, the extent to which citizens can be *made to feel* that profound, unbridgeable gaps divide them, the more reason they have to regard those across the divide as dopes or dupes whose judgment can't

be trusted: "People increasingly view institutions as corrupt, strangers as suspicious, rivals as illegitimate, and facts as negotiable."¹⁵

Essentially, the dynamic I am describing here is one in which people don't just stay factionalised, but increasingly view one another as belonging, permanently, to another camp (or side). This is not just antithetical to how democracy is supposed to work, but the winning party is never supposed to preferentially look out for itself *at losers'* expense. Although voters may reflexively say that "of course politicians run for office in order to benefit themselves and their supporters," in democracies 'majority rule, minority rights' means that no one is supposed to be purposefully disadvantaged. Just the opposite: turnout is supposed to ensure fair play.

What makes entrenched differences so divisive in democracies is that once suspicions take root that those in power will use their position to do things *in order* to disadvantage others, democracy doesn't just start to take on the guise of a winner-take-all contest, but one that is punitive, too.¹⁶ While graft and patronage are hardly new, government's ever more pervasive reach and scope is, along with the degree to which modernity has increasingly forced all of us to be ever more dependent on government to regulate and supervise our daily lives (e.g. via regulations, licenses, the protection of property rights, delivery of critical services, etc.). Consequently, when evidence suggests the deck is being purposely stacked *against* us (or anyone we care about), we become increasingly likely to believe even worse of those in power – and of the system that enabled them to get there.

DEATH BY A THOUSAND DOUBTS

Consider what classic subversion makes use of: 1) grievances and inequities, 2) the state's inability to deliver services efficiently, effectively, and/or equitably, 3) the state's inability to provide sufficient security, and 4) government dishonesty – or denial.¹⁷ When government fails along any of these dimensions, its failures raise doubts about its aptitude and its priorities.

As for how this ties back to subversion, democracies already face challenges over anything that relates to 'national security.'¹⁸ The trap no government can avoid is that whenever it is secretive about some things,

it opens itself up to charges that its keeping of secrets proves it must have something to hide – which it often does, since both diplomacy and military planning occur behind closed doors.

Now imagine what can be wrought by exposing those secrets. Alternatively, imagine the doubts that can be raised (and the seeds of future doubt planted) by purposely asking questions a reporter or blogger knows the government can't answer, maybe because it has to protect 'sources and methods,' or perhaps because it doesn't know the answer but can't afford to admit it doesn't know.

Exhibit A: accusations, counter-accusations, and counter-counter-accusations regarding alleged collusion between the Russian government and Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Are these allegations based on actual evidence of wrong-doing? Or was the so-called evidence cooked up by the Hillary Clinton campaign, as has also been alleged?¹⁹ No one (at the time of writing) – not the U.S. Congress, not the White House, not even the Federal Bureau of Investigation – seems to be able to get to the bottom of where the truth lies, which stirs up yet more suspicions in all camps, not to mention lots of highly suggestive questions.

As for what makes suggestive questions so subversive: they can arouse suspicions regardless of whether they are grounded in fact. As with supposition and innuendo, they are ideal for creating confusion.

Indeed, there are at least three ways to shake confidence in democratic systems via information: you can use false narratives and erroneous facts to misdirect and misinform; you can overwhelm, making it so difficult for people to independently verify who or what is accurate that they essentially give up;²⁰ or, you can raise earworm-like questions, the kind that embed themselves without people being aware, but that then subconsciously change how people interpret what they see and hear.

REMEDIES

I do not want to suggest that 'death by a thousand doubts' (a figurative means of subversion) will ever replace 'death by a thousand cuts' (the literal use of violence), and particularly not since they work so well in tandem. But I do want to highlight why it is important to appreciate that some of the same effects achieved when terrorists, insurgents, and others use violence will increasingly be achieved via the 'exposure' of certain

information (real or manufactured) and/or by making allegations that today's democratic governments find it hard if not impossible to counter.

Two points are worth underscoring here. First, the targets of old-style and new-style subversion are essentially the same: confidence in the government-of-the-day and confidence in government overall. Ironically, trying to inflict death by a thousand cuts represents the creakier and less direct of the two approaches. Violence, terror, inciting fear, creating insecurity – all are undertaken to make people lose faith and confidence, and ultimately turn them against their government. As an approach, though, this takes time. So does 'death by a thousand doubts'; but the difference between the two is that 'death by a thousand doubts' goes straight for the credibility jugular. By doing so, it precipitates mayhem more effectively, and precludes people from seeing any reason to pull together or close ranks (which is what can still happen after terrorist attacks). Inject doubts into a system that already appears to be zero-sum and nothing is more ideal for adversaries who don't have to care about asserting or establishing control, but prefer *their* adversary (namely, us) to stay weak and divided in perpetuity.

The second point to underscore is that since confidence in government is the target, *government* has to respond. To restore confidence, government has to respond *with* confidence, while the only conceivable way to do this is for it to serve as the authoritative, unimpeachable, credible source of all information about itself.²¹

Only by (re)presenting itself as a source of timely, accurate information can government retain its legitimacy over the long run. This is why one of the chief missions of government spokespersons (or ombudsmen) should be to ensure that they report any untoward event, mistake, or wrongdoing before anyone else is able to. In other words, to both preserve its credibility and to get ahead of those who will use its silence, its 'spin,' or its foot-dragging to ill effect, government needs to break all hard, bad, embarrassing news first.

Basically, so long as democratic governments own up to, and then proactively correct, whatever mistakes they make, no adversary – or media outlet – should be able to exploit what *isn't* being said. Nor should leaks from within be able to be spun out via conjecture into the drip-drip-drip of 'death by a thousand doubts.'

Another reason democratic governments need to become the authoritative, unimpeachable, credible source of all information about themselves, is because today's media can no longer be considered trustworthy purveyors of unvarnished truth or objective information: "Conjecture and commentary increasingly color even hard news. The biggest threat to an informed electorate isn't so-called fake news websites, but supposedly trustworthy media organisations that present their political opinions as fact."²²

With the advent of cable television, the internet, and cell phones;²³ the blurring of the lines between news, analysis, opinion, and entertainment;²⁴ the proliferation of outlets, voices, and platforms; and the 24/7 globalised accessibility of all of the above, journalism has lost any semblance of being considered neutral by most consumers of news. Nor is it likely that journalism will recover now that most media platforms have fallen prey to 'corporate capture,' owned as they are by entities that (at a minimum) have strong partisan and/or business interests, and thus profit by turning everything into the equivalent of a contest.

While more reasons than those just listed account for journalism's demise, it also needs to be recognised that the media and government are not alone in no longer being trusted as sources of reliable, unimpeachable information.²⁵

In a previous era—in, for instance, Gill's day—reputational hierarchies functioned as filters. For better or worse, they weren't just presumed to matter, but did matter in terms of how information was disseminated and what was considered authoritative. The *who* mattered: which speaker, writer, reporter; published or broadcast by which outlet; educated where, in what subjects, and by whom, etc. Because the price of entry was steep, it was exceedingly difficult for new institutions to become 'institutions' overnight. This is no longer the case.

Nor is there is any indication that the market will curb whatever mix of the sensational, salacious, and speculative it thinks might attract an audience.²⁶ Unfortunately, what compounds this democratisation of information is that, as Gill pointed out a decade ago, most of what passes for information today comes context free. Purveyors do not have the time or space to provide the backstory or history, even if they know it.

Yet, as Tom Nichols puts it in a much-cited *Foreign Affairs* article about the denigration of expertise:

Unless some sort of trust and mutual respect can be restored, public discourse will be polluted by unearned respect for unfounded opinions. And in such an environment, anything and everything becomes possible, including the end of democracy and republican government itself.²⁷

I would push this a step further: the extent to which the media today covers virtually everything as though it is a contest—*who's up, who's down, who's winning, etc.*—not only makes our system seem increasingly, irredeemably zero-sum but, worse, helps democracy seem to be little more than a blood sport.²⁸

Here, too, is why government needs to project itself as the repository of wisdom and not just expertise. Because politicians may never be able to rise above the fray, it is vitally important to have a cadre of experts who can credibly and effectively point out when others get their facts and suppositions wrong—in detail.

What do I mean?

Unfortunately, I came along too late to witness Gill demolish his prey in either Assam or Punjab. But, by all accounts he was formidable: more clearly knowledgeable, more empathetic toward victims, more supportive of his 'troops,' and more forensically gifted than any subversive on the other side. It strikes me that all democracies now need a select number of similarly talented civil servants—individuals who have more knowledge than those seeking to undermine democracy (whether wittingly, e.g. adversaries, or not, e.g. the media), along with the verbal skills, the wit, the stamina, *and* the appetite to take on purveyors of misinformation and disinformation, turn their assertions inside out, and fill *their* heads with doubts.

As should be clear:

There has always been bad information, propaganda, and disinformation deliberately put out to affect political outcomes. The traditional free speech defense has been the marketplace of ideas: if there is bad information, the solution is not to censor or regulate it, but to put out good information, which will eventually counter the bad. More information is always better. But it's not

clear that this strategy works so well in the internet age, when thousands of bots and trolls can amplify the bad messages without anyone knowing.²⁹

Indeed, despite what is often written about the need to craft better narratives or counter misinformation with 'correct' information more quickly and in greater volume, thwarting 21st century subversion will require more.³⁰ Among other problems, simply countering – or ferreting out and exposing – what is 'fake' is too reactive; it cedes all of the initiative to those bent on subversion. And subversion, we need to remember, is no longer just a precursor to war; for some, it will be the entire gambit.

Here is yet another reason why it is essential to have a cadre of individuals in government who intimately understand who is likely to be behind any and all such efforts to subvert, and who have the knowledge base, the command presence, the wit, and the verbal wherewithal to be able to publicly *eviscerate* subversive arguments – on air, live.

Think Coliseum, but with two 21st century twists: the gore will only be figurative, and immortality is guaranteed, with footage available online in perpetuity.

Not only is it essential to figure out how to flush out, fix, and finish today's 'knights of falsehood,'³¹ but we also need to devise ways to ensure that the defense of democracy outcompetes other sources of titillation. This is one reason why discrediting should be done as publicly and as sensationally as possible, while if those being called into the public arena refuse to publicly debate, well, it needs to be made clear that *they* thereby dig their own graves. At the same time, forcing democracy's adversaries to have to defend themselves (and, in the process, stripping them of their anonymity) has to be done in such a way as to ensure the spectacle *entertains*, as well as educates. Indeed, the entertainment value in blowing bad arguments apart and unpicking tissues of lies is paramount – critical for making evident *why* subversion won't work, and critical for demonstrating what truly worthwhile blood sport should consist of in the 21st century: ideological dismemberment.³²

1 See, for instance, Rosenau, William, "Subversion and Insurgency", *RAND*, 2007, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2007/RAND_OP172.pdf; also, "Political Warfare Executive: The Meaning, Techniques and Methods of Political

Warfare." *British Government*, 1942, <https://www.psywar.org/psywarreproductions/MeanTechMethod.pdf>.

2 "Soviet leaders hold that the Soviet communist party is the militant vanguard of the world proletariat in its rise to political power, and that the USSR, base of the world communist movement, will not be safe until the non-communist nations have been so reduced in strength and numbers that communist influence is dominant throughout the world. The immediate goal of top priority since the recent war has been the *political conquest of western Europe*". Note by the Executive Secretary on U.S. Objectives With Respect to the USSR To Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security, *Report to the President by the National Security Council*, NSC 20/4, November 23, 1948, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v01/p2/d660>, emphasis mine.

3 A fuller argument appears in Simons, Anna, "The Death of Conquest," *The National Interest*, March 1, 2003.

4 A secondary liberation, though not exactly described as such, is that "Today the Kremlin is less focused on promoting itself, and more on undermining others", in Cull, Nicholas J. et al., "Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against It: An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present," *The London School of Economic and Political Science*, October 2017, p. 7, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ig/asssets/documents/arena/2018/Soviet-Subversion-and-Propaganda-how-the-west-thought-against-it.pdf>. It is probably an understatement to point out that by not having to be exemplary in any way, Vladimir Putin can engage in a variety of actions the Soviet Union couldn't.

5 For instance, as Galeotti, Mark, writes of Russia, "To a large extent, individual initiatives appear unconnected, often opportunistic, their moves shaped by local conditions, concerns, and considerations. They connect only sometimes and frequently clumsily. There appears to be no master plan, but rather a broad strategy of weakening the European Union and NATO, distancing Europe and the United States from each other, and generally creating a political and cultural environment more conducive for Moscow and its interests" in "Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, ECFR/228, August 2017, p. 2, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228_-_CONTROLLING_CHAOS1.pdf.

6 Galeotti, Mark "Russian intelligence is at (political) war," *NATO Review Magazine*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2017/Also-in-2017/russian-intelligence-political-war-security/EN/index.htm>.

7 As cited in Francis, Matthew, "Why the 'sacred' is a better resource than 'religion' for understanding terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2016, p. 921.

8 I cite the U.S. Civil War because democracy and capitalism were first welded into a coherent political economic system in the U.S. Rulers elsewhere may have staved off either or both from being implemented on their soil, but attacks on this *as a system* didn't begin until the rise of socialism (and concomitant closing of the American frontier). Systemic attack took till after World War II.

9 Adams, Mike "The communist subversion of America is nearly complete: Left-wing media has already achieved 3 out of 4 steps for Soviet-style overthrow of American society and government", January 9, 2017, <https://www.naturalnews.com/2017-01-09->

communist-subversion-of-america-is-nearly-complete-left-wing-media-soviet-style-overthrow-yuri-bezmenov.html.

10 For more on Operation Infektion (as it was called), see Boghardt, Thomas, "Soviet Bloc Intelligence and Its AIDS Disinformation Campaign", *Studies in Intelligence*, vol. 53, no. 4, December 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol53no4/pdf/U-%20Boghardt-AIDS-Made%20in%20the%20USA-17Dec.pdf>.

11 Henninger, Daniel "Bonfire of the Prosecutors," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bonfire-of-the-prosecutors-1510790687>.

12 "Do social media threaten democracy?," *The Economist*, November 4, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/11/04/do-social-media-threaten-democracy>.

13 The full argument can be found in Simons, Anna, "Purity is Danger: An Argument for Divisible Identities," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 12, 3-4, September 2000, pp. 174-92.

14 Taub, Amanda, quoting Sean Westwood in "The Real Story about Fake News Is Partisanship," *The New York Times*, January 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/11/upshot/the-real-story-about-fake-news-is-partisanship.html>.

15 Schumpeter, "Mistrust in America could sink the economy," *The Economist*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/business/2017/08/10/mistrust-in-america-could-sink-the-economy>.

16 There are ancillary dangers, as well. While still citing Sean Westwood, a professor at Dartmouth as well as Shanto Iyengar from Stanford, Taub notes that both are concerned that "the natural consequence of this growing national divide [in the U.S.] will be a feedback loop in which the public's bias encourages extremism among politicians, undermining public faith in government institutions and their ability to function".

17 The deeper pre-existing divides, too, the less proof or corroboration of inequity is required, given past misdeeds, singular incidents or even accidents in the present will often suffice.

18 For instance, in a recent account about his trials and tribulations as a prize-winning national security reporter at *The New York Times*, Risen, James, writes, "After the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration began asking the press to kill stories more frequently. They did it so often that I became convinced the administration was invoking national security to quash stories that were merely politically embarrassing." Later in the same article, Risen describes interviewing for a job with "another national news organization" where a senior editor told him "that their publication would never run a piece if the White House raised objections on national security grounds". Risen, James, "The Biggest Secret: My Life as a *New York Times* Reporter in the Shadow of the War on Terror," *The Intercept*, January 3, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/03/my-life-as-a-new-york-times-reporter-in-the-shadow-of-the-war-on-terror/>. Of course, this is hardly new: The use of 'national security' as a pretext to avoid releasing embarrassing information is a tried and true technique. For an especially vivid insider's account, see Ellsberg, Daniel, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, New York, Viking Penguin, 2002.

19 For an especially damning indictment, too, consider: "in the US and the UK, for example, the charge that the Kremlin spreads 'fake news' lacks force, given how much fake news domestic media produce by themselves", in "Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against It: An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present," op. cited, p. 8.

20 Or people give in to whatever strikes them as most palatable. As Wu, Tim writes, "dominating mindshare is a classic strategy of influence, because the sheer volume of messaging allows the leader to drown out alternatives, transform, minds, and begin changing the rules of the game itself," in Wu, Tim, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*, Vintage Books, 2016, p. 347.

21 *The Sovereignty Solution: A Commonsense Approach to Global Security* [co-written with McCraw, Joe, and Lauthengo, Duane, Naval Institute Press, 2011] outlines what else I think is required, which is beyond the scope of this essay. But most importantly, there needs to be congruence between deeds and words.

22 Finley, Alysia "Scholars Get the Real Scoop on 'Fake News'," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 7, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/scholars-get-the-real-scoop-on-fake-news-1515360315>.

23 "Cable, he said presciently in 2003, was 'beginning to change the agenda of what is news' in "The man for the message: Obituary: Roger Ailes died on May 18th," *The Economist*, May 27, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/obituary/2017/05/27/obituary-roger-ailes-died-on-may-18th>.

24 One of the pithiest proofs is captured in this headline, "Goodbye Nonpartisan Journalism. And Good Riddance: Disinterested reporting is overrated," *Politico Magazine*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/26/goodbye-nonpartisan-journalism-and-good-riddance-215305>.

25 For a fairly typical overview of many (but not all) of the sources of citizens' mistrust worldwide, see Schoen, Douglas E. *The End of Authority: How a Loss of Legitimacy and Broken Trust Are Endangering Our Future*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

26 This is one reason why individuals like Patrikarakos, David, "Social Media Networks Are the Handmaidens to Dangerous Propaganda," *Time*, November 2, 2017, seek "for the government to draft clear regulation for what is impermissible on the great social media platforms of our age. Failure to comply must result in heavy fines and public censure." A suggestion which might be fine, but does nothing to undo doubts once they've been raised or implanted.

27 Nicholos, Tom "How America Lost Faith in Expertise: And Why That's a Giant Problem," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2017-02-13/how-america-lost-faith-expertise>.

28 On corporate capture, see "Introduction" in Schiffirin, Anya "In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy," *Center for International Media Assistance*, 2017, https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CIMA-MediaCaptureBook_F1.pdf. Not surprisingly, in the wake of the 2016 presidential election in the U.S., journalists themselves have been led to wonder, "How media rebuild public trust in quality journalism will be a major question in the coming years, and not just for academics and students of mass communication. The information crisis

is one that touches on the prospects for democracy. The rise of propaganda, hate-speech and self-regarding politics with an extremist edge threatens stability and peace both within countries and abroad," in "Facebook and matters of fact in the post-truth era", *World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers*, <https://blog.wan-iffa.org/2017/01/10/facebook-and-matters-of-fact-in-the-post-truth-era>. Although as some contend (and/or hope), "the old 'on-the-one-hand-this, on-the-other-hand-that' style of journalism is not coming back. The condition that created it – a limited supply of news organs, which sought large audiences by not offending – is gone" in Stephens, Mitchell, "Goodbye Nonpartisan Journalism and Good Riddance," *Politico Magazine*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/26/goodbye-nonpartisan-journalism-and-good-riddance-215305>.

29 Fukuyama, Francis "Social Media and Democracy," *The American Interest*, October 30, 2017, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/10/30/social-media>.

30 Ferreting more (and doing so more quickly) is a common recommendation. For different suggestions about how this might be done, see O'Malley, Martin J. and Levin, Peter L., "How to Counter Fake News: Technology Can Help Distinguish Fact from Fiction," January 5, 2017, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2017-01-05/how-counter-fake-news>, Maxwell, David S., "The Cyber Underground – Resistance to Active Measures and Propaganda: The Disruptors" – Motto: "Think for Yourself", *Small Wars Journal*, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-cyber-underground-%E2%80%99-resistance-to-active-measures-and-propaganda-%E2%80%99-the-disruptors%E2%80%99-mot-0>.

31 The title of K.P.S. Gill's book on Khalistani subversion in Punjab, see, Gill, K.P.S., *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/nightsoffalsehood/index.html>.

32 For those skeptical about how many viewers might actually tune in, three of the top five most watched television broadcasts in the U.S. in 2016 were the Presidential debates. At #7 was the Vice Presidential debate. Worth noting is that the U.S. is a country that does not particularly prize the verbal arts; other democracies do. A side benefit might well be a revival of (or boost in) respect for rhetoric, and for education.

The Bear, the Eagle and the Elephant The Counterinsurgency Doctrines of Russia, the United States and India

Peter A. Kiss

*Truth does not triumph; unless it has champions to propound it,
unless it has armies to defend it.*

*K.P.S. Gill: "Punjab Knights of Falsehood",
1997*

Divergent concepts of insurgency have more or less common – or very similar – elements: the insurgents are a part of the society they attack; they fight for (or sometimes against) significant political change within the state; their methods are subversion, propaganda and military pressure. The final objective may be the overthrow of the constituted government, or independence, but it may also be something far more limited, for example autonomy, or a more equitable distribution of political power or economic resources.¹ The anti-government actions of some criminal organisations may also be labelled as insurgency: a weakened, but still functioning government may be the best opportunity to realise their interests.² Although insurgencies are ordinarily classified as organised movements, recent experience suggests that this is not always the case: autonomous and often rival groups, and leaderless, decentralized networks cooperate with increasing frequency in order to achieve only vaguely defined common goals.

Russia, the United States and India have all faced major domestic insurgencies going back to the 19th century, or even further. However, for the armed forces of the United States and Russia counterinsurgency is an occasional task that they undertake only reluctantly: they train for peer-on-peer conflict that involves the manoeuvre of large units and the employment of heavy firepower. Asymmetric conflict with