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This publication has been edited with Open-source software OpenOffice and Gimp. We have used Garamond for our main-body text and titles and LHF New Trajan for the logo.

Cover page: Cavalry Battle (1600s) by Jan Martszen de Jonge, privately held.
Foreword

As will become apparent, there have been some adjustments made to the Strife Journal since Issue Two. We hope the most discreet will prove to be the change in editorship: our thanks are due to Pablo de Orellana, who has stepped down after two issues’ toil at the helm, and we hope we can continue his excellent work.

Other modifications are more cosmetic, and hence perhaps more obvious. The font and formatting is slightly different, and we also have a new logo, aligning us with the blog (at www.strifeblog.org) and illustrating more clearly than ever how unified the Strife project is across blog and journal. As in the last issue, we have reprinted an extract from our online counterpart: the excellent five-part series on drone warfare entitled ‘The Good, The Bad, The Drones’, which was posted online over the course of April.

The other major change has been the revamping and expansion of the reviews section, thanks for which must go to my co-editor Nikolai Gourof. We have four reviews this issue, on texts ranging from early modern history to (post)modern political theory. Issue four will see this section expand further.

Of course, the skeleton of Strife Journal has been and remains its extended pieces, and there are four in this issue. Nikolai Gourof writes about Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan The Terrible, and draws parallels between it and Stalin’s contemporary regime. Alexander Langer, meanwhile, draws attention to Church resistance against state oppression in Latin America. Langer speculates as to why the state responses to broadly similar resistance movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador took such different forms. Alexandra Gallovicova’s piece is another Strife first: it is split into two instalments, the first of which is printed here, the second of which will be published in Issue Four. In her first part, Gallovicova explores the idea of the ‘image’ in IR theory, and lays firm groundwork for the case study that will form her piece’s second instalment: French and British perceptions of Germany in the wake of its abstention from the UN Security Council vote on establishing a no-fly zone in Libya during the 2011 Libyan Civil War. Finally, Thomas Colley looks at propaganda in the Yugoslav conflict of the 1990s. Colley asks whether any of the lessons learnt then can be applied to the current crisis in Ukraine.

As always, many thanks are due to the department of War Studies at King’s College London, which has provided unceasing support. Special thanks are due to Dr Christine Cheng, Prof. Vivienne Jabri, Dr Oisin Tansey, Prof. Mats Berdal and Dr Kieran Mitton. Thanks are of course also owed to all the contributors to this issue, who have handled our editorial demands with grace and rapidity. We have continued with the peer-review model established in Issue 2, and we thank all our reviewers.

We are always on the lookout for interesting perspectives on conflict for both the journal and the blog; anyone interested in contributing is encouraged to pitch an idea or simply declare interest via email.

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The Importance of Being a Propagandist: Yugoslavia and Ukraine
Thomas Colley

Propaganda has long been rejected by communications practitioners in the West as nefarious, deceitful, dishonest and manipulative. The preferred term in recent years has been ‘strategic communications’, which attempts to present what still amounts to persuasion in a more positive and transparent light. Advocating the need to be ‘first with the truth’ and to operate pro-actively in the modern networked media environment, strategic communicators have designated ‘propaganda’ outdated and immoral, the toolkit of Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Milosevic rather than contemporary liberal democracies. Debate continues over the similarities between the two concepts. Philip Taylor’s popular definition of propaganda, ‘the deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way’ for political purposes, implies similarity; the aim being to persuade people to behave in the way you want them to. Either way, the conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated that propaganda and censorship, dismissed by Western strategic communicators as ‘doomed to fail’, is still influential in contemporary conflict.

From a communications perspective, the crisis in Ukraine has been particularly notable for the re-emergence of forms of propaganda that might be considered archaic in today’s networked world. Misinformation and censorship have been employed at an intensity not seen for decades within Europe. Social media is considered the future of mass communication based on events such as the Arab Spring. In Ukraine, however, while all sides have used social media, television has arguably been the dominant medium for information warfare; even leaflets have generated international outrage. In the informational realm, the West has so far demonstrated limited capability to respond to mass propaganda methods it has long rejected. Meanwhile the new Ukrainian government under Oleksandr Turchynov has been mercilessly portrayed in a pro-Russian multimedia propaganda barrage as a ‘fascist junta’, bent on subjugating ethnic Russians at the behest of the US and Europe.

Uncertain of the future, strategists in such situations have little choice but to look to the past as a source of guidance. Of all comparisons that could be made with Ukraine, the situation is arguably most similar to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Both conflicts began with the emergence of nationalist governments, attempts to legislate against minorities, reactionary protest, territorial annexation, declaration of autonomous regions, unofficial referenda in which ethnic minorities have

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2 Communication efforts in the West have been variously called information operations, public diplomacy, public affairs, psy-ops, influence operations in recent years, to name but a few. Even strategic communication has since been discredited. See S. Tatham, U.S. Governmental Information Operations and Strategic Communications: Discredited Tool or User Failure? Implications for Future Conflict, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S Army War College Press, 2013.

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7 Ibid.
refused to participate, as well as sporadic armed confrontations. In both cases actions were justified based on putative threats of annihilation by other ethnic groups and ultra-nationalist elements. In spite of two decades of development in which the media environment has changed beyond all recognition, the methods used to spread propaganda have been remarkably similar as well.

The main purpose of this article is to evaluate the significance of propaganda in the Yugoslav wars. In doing so, certain comparisons will be made with Ukraine today. These comparisons are to some extent limited, since the situation in Ukraine has not, and hopefully will not, degenerate into civil war. Nonetheless, re-examining the Yugoslav wars will hopefully enable some tentative conclusions to be drawn about Ukraine, as well as the significance of propaganda to contemporary conflict more generally.

The Yugoslav Wars
There are many facets of the Yugoslav Wars of Succession about which analysts disagree. Academics debate anything from when they started, who is to blame, how many wars there were and how they should be defined. Few events in recent history have provoked such vehement debate. However, one point on which many authors agree is that propaganda was one of the most important weapons of war that destroyed the former Yugoslavia.

Propaganda does not fire weapons, rape women or execute people. Nonetheless it was a central feature of the Yugoslav wars. It was the means by which competing sides mobilised nationalist sentiment, constructing false histories to justify expansionist or secessionist claims. Propaganda was also central to the strategies of the belligerents. Croatia and Bosnia adopted a victim strategy, subordinating military strength to portray themselves as helpless victims of Serb aggression to foster international support. Slovenia based their strategy on generating images of their tenacious stand against the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) in order to legitimise their independence. Serbian domestic propaganda was extremely effective in mustering domestic public support for war. Yet Serbia’s attempts to either play the victim, or legitimise their actions internationally, failed due to their brutality at places such as Tmopolje, Markale, Srebrenica and Racak. Ultimately it was these Serb actions, rather than propaganda per se, that were decisive in precipitating the external interventions that ended the Yugoslav wars.

Given the plethora of debates on both propaganda and the Yugoslav wars, a number of clarifications must first be made. The Yugoslav Wars of Succession, or ‘Yugoslav wars’, refer here to the wars between 1991 and 1999 that occurred due to the collapse of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Many authors treat the Yugoslav Wars of Succession as a single war. However, the various stages of war in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo will primarily be referred to separately, in order to tease out the unique role of propaganda in each.

Additionally, analysis of propaganda in the Yugoslav wars is made uniquely challenging by the extent to which many academics from the former Yugoslavia have obfuscated debates about the conflict through nationalist bias. An historical example of this is the reporting of the number of deaths at the Ustashe-run Jasenovac concentration camp in the Second World War. Depending on whether Croatian or Serbian historical accounts are consulted, the supposed number of Serbs killed by Croats varies

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13 Gow & Tilsley, 1996.
between 50,000 and 700,000.\textsuperscript{15} It is difficult to draw valid conclusions from academic research when the research itself is inherently propagandistic. Nonetheless, the extent to which propaganda has permeated academia is in itself indicative of its significance to the Yugoslav wars.

Communist propaganda was instrumental in the unification of Yugoslavia after the Second World War, just as nationalist propaganda was influential in the state’s destruction after the Cold War. After the Second World War, which saw vicious internecine conflict in Yugoslavia in which hundreds of thousands were killed, Tito successfully constructed a collective identity of Yugoslavism, by which people coexisted relatively peacefully under the propagandistic slogan of ‘brotherhood and unity’. However, Tito’s demise in 1980 was followed by a decade of economic decline, rampant hyperinflation and mass unemployment. Combined with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this created a febrile situation in which political elites, under external pressure to democratise, mobilised nationalist sentiment in order to consolidate their power and pursue secessionist or expansionist political agenda. Elite politicians, manipulating the mass media, called on people to reject Communist propaganda and embrace their previously suppressed Serbian, Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian and Kosovar identities. This precipitated a security dilemma in which each side armed themselves against the perceived threat of anything from discrimination to genocide at the hands of their ‘brothers’.\textsuperscript{16} Thus whilst economic decline and external political pressure created the permissive conditions for the breakdown of the SFRY,\textsuperscript{17} propaganda was a key catalyst in making war thinkable in Yugoslavia, let alone inevitable.\textsuperscript{18}

The propaganda methods used to mobilise nationalist support were a fairly traditional combination of rhetoric, myth and symbolism. Essentially, each republic’s leaders propagated the same idea; that they were threatened with annihilation by the others. A ‘Manichean morality’ pervaded media coverage, whereby each side constructed false histories proclaiming their innocence and the evil of their opponents.\textsuperscript{19} Kosovar Albanians were accused of forcing out Serbs with a ‘physical, moral and psychological reign of terror’.\textsuperscript{20} Bosnians were portrayed as part of a dangerous Islamic conspiracy.\textsuperscript{21} Croatian propaganda conjured images of ‘Greater Serbia’, an evil, expansionary, annihilatory Other, seeking to invade, enslave, and exterminate the Croatian people.\textsuperscript{22} The Serbian media evoked the horrors of the fascist Croatian Ustashe during the Second World War as evidence of continued Croatian genocidal intent.\textsuperscript{23} The propagation of fear drove each party towards a war of ‘self-defence’ to protect their constructed identity group.\textsuperscript{24}

There are striking similarities with Ukraine, though the persuasiveness of such propaganda was enhanced by avoidable political mistakes. The vetoed attempt by Turchynov’s parliament to downgrade the status of the Russian language in February 2014 draws immediate parallels with new Croatian president Tudjman’s downgrading of the constitutional status of the Croatian Serbs in 1990.\textsuperscript{25} Both cases provided ammunition for opponents to claim the threat of cultural genocide, given the symbolic importance of language to ethnicity. At a time of growing tension, the Ukrainian parliament should have considered the threatening effect of such a decision on ethnic Russians, but also the propaganda opportunity it provided to elites such as Putin to manipulate

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Thompson, 1994, p.1.
\item[19] ibid., p.7
\item[22] ibid,p.8
\item[23] Silber & Little, 1995.
\item[25] Turchynov came to power after the former president, Victor Yanukovych fled on February 21\textsuperscript{st} 2014, in the wake of the ‘Maidan Revolution’, months of political protests against the Kiev government.
\end{footnotes}
public sentiment.

Such propaganda could not have worked without resonating with pre-existing beliefs. The idea that one’s ethnic group was threatened by nationalist opponents would be rejected without some historical basis from which such ideas could germinate. Consequently the significance of nationalist propaganda in both Yugoslavia and Ukraine was to harden dormant, historically contingent ethnic identities, rather than to create new ones. This analysis in no way supports the overly deterministic thesis that ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’ caused the conflicts in Yugoslavia or Ukraine.26 However, without a more recent history of enmity between Serbs, Croats and Muslims, or tension between Ukrainians and Russians, such messages would likely be rejected.

Nevertheless, the precise effects of propaganda are extremely difficult to methodologically prove and this can lead to exaggeration of its effects. That propaganda causes certain actions appears to be common sense, but proof is far harder to elicit.27 In the First World War, for example, many Germans firmly believed that insidious Allied propaganda rather than military defeat caused their ultimate collapse. Similarly, many in the USA believed that British propaganda duped them into entering the war.28 However, many historians agree that Germany would have faced military defeat had the war continued to 1919, just as it was mainly Germany’s resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare rather than British propaganda that provoked US intervention in the First World War.29 In the case of Yugoslavia, Scot MacDonald emphatically states that ‘propaganda set off brutal campaigns of ethnic cleansing.’30 Conversely, Ellul asserts that to measure any effects of propaganda on human behaviour as they experience it in society is almost impossible.31

Indeed, existing data indicates that the effects of demagogic nationalist rhetoric in driving Yugoslavia towards war may have been exaggerated.32 In Croatia, Tudjman’s nationalist party only gained 42 per cent of the vote when it came to power in 1990, and less than 25 per cent of Serbs voted for their nationalist party.33 Milosevic’s Socialist Party of Serbia never even achieved an electoral majority during his entire tenure.34 Furthermore, despite intense Serbian propaganda regarding the genocidal threat of the Croatian Ustashe, between fifty and eighty per cent of the Serbs called up to territorial defence units during the Yugoslav wars refused to serve.35 This suggests that far fewer people believed the ‘message’ than many have suggested.

This is unsurprising. It is too simplistic to assume that simply by referring to history and symbolism, dormant identities would be awakened and people would be inexorably compelled to fight.36 Much of the Yugoslav wars were fought in areas that had previously seen the greatest amounts of positive coexistence.37 The assumption that people would immediately rise up to defend against historical enemies is based on outdated hypodermic or ‘magic bullet’ theories of propaganda that assume a uniform response exists to a given stimulus.38

Evidence of the propaganda effects once the wars began is equally inconclusive. During the Serbian shelling of Sarajevo in July 1992, a

26 See Kaplan, 1993.
survey of Serbs showed that 38 per cent wrongly believed that Muslims and Croats were responsible, indicating that Serb propaganda, led by the Serbian Radio-Television (RTS) ‘lying machine’, was extremely effective. Crediting this to propaganda is understandable, given that RTS was known to present blatantly false information, even claiming quite ridiculously that it was actually Muslim authorities who were holding Sarajevo under siege ‘from within’. Perhaps more illuminating was a survey in the same month that revealed that 44 per cent of Serbs stated that RTS kept them badly informed. This suggests that Serbian censorship was effective, but many Serbs were still sceptical about how the conflict was portrayed.

There is further evidence that the effectiveness of propaganda in popular mobilisation in both Yugoslavia and Ukraine has been overestimated. In Bosnia, Mueller claims that ethnic warfare, where entire communities fought against each other, neighbour against neighbour, did not occur. Most of the violence was actually driven by small groups of paramilitaries, while ordinary people were inextricably caught up in the bloodshed. This contradicts the notion that nations were propagandised en masse in a wave of nationalist hysteria that drove them towards internecine conflict. The parallels with Ukraine are again noteworthy, where the occupation of government buildings has been led by small numbers of pro-Russian separatists, while journalists report little involvement by the majority of the population.

Propaganda and the Conduct of War
At present, the situation in Ukraine resembles what Judah refers to as a ‘phony war’, characterised by sporadic confrontations rather than widespread conflict. This situation inflates the importance of propaganda, since most of the conflict is taking place in the global informational realm. Hopefully, a diplomatic resolution will be found to end the conflict, though at the time of writing this is highly uncertain. However, if the conflict does escalate, the Yugoslav wars demonstrate that propaganda will likely be as important to the conduct of war as to its initiation.

While the extent to which nationalist rhetoric permeated Yugoslav society is equivocal; that propaganda was central to the belligerents’ strategies is beyond doubt. From the outset of the military action in Slovenia, through Croatia, Bosnia and eventually Kosovo, domestic and international perceptions of the combatants were integral to each nation’s plans. The most powerful demonstration of the successful use of propaganda was Slovenia’s victory in their ten day war against the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA).

In a meticulously planned media campaign, Slovenia presented a legitimate fight for political and economic freedom, whilst achieving total strategic surprise against the sparsely deployed and poorly informed JNA. By generating images of incidents such as JNA tanks crushing vehicle blockades and then swiftly making them available to the international press, Slovenians portrayed themselves fighting valiantly against illegitimate aggressors, even though the Slovenians probably fired first. Slovenia’s proactive portrayal of competence generated significant international support, which Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian victim-based propaganda found extremely difficult to obtain.

For Croatia and Bosnia, the ‘propaganda of the victim’ was central to their strategies. Initially for Croatia, generating an image of victimhood superseded military effectiveness. Croatia deliberately left besieged forces in Vukovar and Dubrovnik under-reinforced to generate images of suffering. The plan was to foster the ‘CNN Effect’, which would compel Western powers

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39 Thompson, 1994, p.viii; 127.
40 ibid., p.127.
42 ibid.
44 ibid.
45 Gow & Tilsley, 1996.
46 ibid.
to intervene to prevent further bloodshed.\(^{48}\) Ironically, the staunch Croatian defence of Vukovar merely embarrassed President Tudjman, undermined his strategy and forced Croatia to take a stronger military stance thereafter.\(^{49}\) His failure resulted from ignoring a fundamental rule of successful propaganda; in order to function effectively it must remain undetected.

Bosnia was a genuine victim of Serbian aggression, but its attempts to embellish its victimhood were largely ineffective, arguably generating deleterious effects. On several occasions, the Bosnian Army was identified by UNPROFOR peacekeepers as firing on its own people to generate more international support.\(^ {50}\) Such behaviour led UNPROFOR peacekeepers to conclude that all sides were equally at fault,\(^ {51}\) and was therefore counterproductive to the Bosnian cause. This cynical tactic reached such levels that the Bosnian forces were accused of the infamous Serb mortar attacks on Sarajevo’s Markale marketplace in 1994 and 1995.\(^ {52}\) Serbian authorities worked hard to promulgate the lie, replacing Muslim corpses with Serbian casualties from elsewhere in the city.\(^ {53}\) Yet the fact that Bosnians were even suspected demonstrates how ineffective their victim strategy had been. Arguably though, Western intervention to end the Bosnian war was precipitated by the genuine victims of the Serbs at places such as Srebrenica rather than Bosnia’s victim strategy per se.

In Kosovo, Serbia’s strategy again centred on propaganda, as Milosevic attempted to portray Serbia as a victim of NATO aggression, a sovereign state acting legitimately to crush a secessionist movement.\(^ {54}\) Rather than taking steps to avoid NATO air attack, Milosevic appeared to provoke it.\(^ {55}\) He hoped that the superiority of NATO air power would foster a ‘bullying effect’, which would reduce Western political will for continued intervention on the grounds that it was both disproportionate and legally questionable.\(^ {56}\) Images of NATO collateral damage could then confer victim status on the Serbs and discourage further intervention, especially a ground campaign.\(^ {57}\) Concomitantly, the disruption caused by NATO bombing could provide cover for the rapid ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population.\(^ {58}\)

The generation of propaganda was the fulcrum about which the Serbian campaign pivoted, but propaganda was no less important to NATO. Western leaders presented the war as a struggle between the humanitarian forces of good and the Serbian forces of evil.\(^ {59}\) Parallels can be drawn with Western propaganda towards Ukraine, portrayed as torn between affiliation to the Nobel Peace Prize-winning European Union and the ‘Big Bad Bear’ of Putin’s Russia.\(^ {60}\) Invariably, such Manichean propaganda oversimplifies a complex geopolitical situation in which both the West and Russia accuse each other of encroachment in their respective spheres of influence.\(^ {61}\)

Nonetheless, the Russian response in Ukraine demonstrates the disadvantage the West faces against an opponent willing to employ overt propaganda and censorship. Western commentators decried Russia’s decision to block transmission of Voice of America radio in Russia from April 2014.\(^ {62}\) Yet the refusal to

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\(^{49}\) Gow, 2003.

\(^{50}\) J. Honig & N. Both, Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime, Penguin, 1996.

\(^{51}\) ibid.


\(^{53}\) Thompson, 1994.

\(^{54}\) Freedman, 2000.

\(^{55}\) Gow, 2003.

\(^{56}\) Freedman, 2000, p.335.


\(^{58}\) Gow, 2003.

\(^{59}\) Hammond, 2000.


\(^{61}\) ibid.

engage in such practices disadvantages the West against an opponent who has no compunction about doing so.

In reality though, Western radio broadcasts, blocked or otherwise, are unlikely to have significant opinion effects within Russia or Ukraine. As the Yugoslav wars demonstrated, both Serbia and the West’s propaganda was effective on the domestic level but had very little impact on opposition public opinion. On Kosovo, many Serbs genuinely believed that Kosovar Albanians were fleeing NATO bombers rather than Serb paramilitaries. Yet few in the West were likely convinced by a crude RTS video of a Clinton speech with Hitler’s face superimposed. As Ellul attests, internal propaganda is far more likely to succeed than propaganda directed or received externally.

The same lesson is demonstrated in Ukraine. It may be obvious to Western audiences that NATO or the EU is not attempting to annex Ukraine, or that the Ukrainian government is not ‘fascist’. Indeed as with Milosevic’s televisual propaganda, Russian propaganda about the situation in eastern Ukraine must seem unsubtle and archaic to foreign audiences. Nevertheless, by resonating with pre-existing conservative beliefs it is likely to be more influential among ethnic Russians than the most sophisticated and forthright strategic communication arriving externally from the West. Decades of propaganda have demonstrated the limited ability to persuade foreign audiences, regardless of the medium used.

**The Importance of Images**

Images are immensely powerful for propaganda purposes. While images are often unpredictable in the way they emerge and spread, and thus hard to control, they are often more powerful than conventional weapons in the battle for ‘hearts, minds and retinas’ that is contemporary war. The publication of images of Tmopole concentration camp in Bosnia in 1992 appeared to lead to UN Resolution 770 which enforced humanitarian aid in Bosnia; coverage of the Markale marketplace massacre in 1994 was immediately followed by the NATO ultimatum that ended the city’s bombardment; and finally images of massacres, first at Srebrenica in Bosnia and later at Racak in Kosovo, directly precipitated decisive UN and NATO interventions to end the wars.

In the Yugoslav wars, effective image control was demonstrated by the slick Slovenian propaganda machine. For example, international journalists were transported to a burnt out JNA Armoured Personnel Carrier, providing further evidence of Slovenia’s successes against the mighty JNA. The fact that it had been burnt out by local youths rather than the Slovenian army was omitted from the explanation to the press. Propaganda based on falsehood is often ineffective, especially when exposed. However, this deception worked since it reflected wider truths about the conflict; that ‘plucky little Slovenia’ was defending itself resolutely against one of Europe’s largest armies.

Conversely, Croatia and Bosnia overestimated the effect of images of suffering in encouraging external military intervention. In 1994 the West received a plethora of images of the Rwandan genocide which were no less harrowing than Bosnia, yet failed to act to prevent the carnage. Likewise, while the images of Tmopole concentration camp in 1992 caused international condemnation, they did not yield decisive military action, since non-intervention was the policy of states such as the US at the time. By 1995, the images of the Srebrenica massacre led to international intervention largely because of a change in political will.

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64 Gocic, 2000.
69 Michalski & Gow, 2007, p.205.
70 Thompson, 1994, p.1.
71 ibid.
72 ibid.
particular of the US. 74 It was this change in perceptions of state self-interest, rather than the propaganda effect of images of suffering, that precipitated decisive intervention in the Yugoslav wars.

Image control is equally important in Ukraine, a point apparently recognised by Putin in both Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Ensuring the Russian forces sent to help annex Crimea wore no obvious insignia that would identify them as Russian soldiers enabled Putin to claim that Russian separatist civil defence forces were solely responsible, and acting legitimately to protect themselves. Again, this deception might have appeared obvious to Western audiences, but it generated enough doubt of who was responsible to facilitate the pro-Russian propaganda campaign in Ukraine. Putin’s use of unidentifiable forces was and is an exceptional example of image control in modern conflict, since it made the information environment murky enough to give him plausible deniability for Russian actions. The subsequent admission of the truth of Russia’s involvement was moot given the lack of Western intent or capability to respond meaningfully in Crimea.

In the Yugoslav wars, the interaction of propaganda with the willingness of external powers to intervene was similarly nuanced. Arguably the main effect of images such as those of Trnopolje concentration camp was not to incite external intervention but to delegitimise the Serbian cause, so that a war in which no side was in truth an innocent victim was perceived to be the action of a single aggressor. 75 In Kosovo, Milosevic attempted to portray Serbia as a victim as he televised images of Serb civilians standing on bridges facing NATO air attacks. 76 Yet he could not convince the international community of Serbia’s innocence when images were published of trainloads of Kosovar Albanians arriving at the Macedonian border, drawing immediate comparisons with the Holocaust. Whereas Putin’s image management introduced doubt regarding culpability for the situation in Ukraine, Milosevic’s unsuccessful image management delegitimised the Serb cause in Kosovo leaving no doubt who was at fault. Ultimately though, image management or not, Milosevic’s cause was clearly illegitimate, since he was conducting ethnic cleansing on a massive scale.

Conclusion
To conclude, what can be learnt from the Yugoslav wars and from Ukraine about the use of propaganda today? Both Yugoslavia and Ukraine bear the hallmarks of ‘ethnic conflict’, in which identity groups are mobilised to fight against Others supposedly bent on their destruction. However in both cases, conflict was and is being driven by elites, manipulating identity for political purposes, rather than deep-seated ethnic animosity. This has placed Ukraine in a dangerous situation where provocations may precipitate a security dilemma, in addition to the spectre of external Russian intervention. This requires a response that coordinates the physical, the diplomatic and the psychological. The strategic use of communication is vital, but the West must recognise that words must be backed up with decisive action.

War cannot be won by propaganda alone, but poor media and public relations strategy can certainly lose wars. Each of the protagonists in the Yugoslav wars placed propaganda at the centre of their strategies; with the exception of Slovenia they did not master how to do so effectively. Nonetheless, the experiences of each of the belligerents have yielded invaluable lessons regarding the significance of propaganda to strategy.

The lesson from the Slovenian war is that media and propaganda campaigns are most likely to be effective if they are meticulously planned and ideally short. This does not guarantee success, but it places the belligerent in prime position to exploit information opportunities as they arise. The lesson from the Croatian and Bosnian wars is that, as reinforced by conflicts such as Syria, victimhood may generate humanitarian aid but should not be relied upon for military support. Military

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75 Michalski & Gow, 2007.

76 Hentea, 2006.
intervention is still based on whether it is in the interests of individual states.

What can be learnt from the current situation in Ukraine? Firstly, that propaganda and censorship are still influential, even in the global media age. Even in a networked media environment where information can become ‘viral’ at a moment’s notice, it is still possible to use traditional propaganda methods to introduce enough doubt to achieve limited political objectives. The West should take note, rather than devoting their energies to determining the ideal terminology to describe (and obscure) their communication operations.

Perhaps the key lesson regarding the significance of propaganda in these conflicts is a lesson Serbia failed to learn: that no amount of propaganda can legitimise certain actions. The only option if massacre and deportation, rape and execution are the basis of strategy is absolute external censorship. Since this is virtually impossible today, propaganda’s ability to positively influence the outcome of such a strategy is limited. Propaganda was central to strategy for each of the protagonists in the Yugoslav wars, as it clearly is in Ukraine. Ultimately though, it is actions, rather than words or images, that are most decisive in determining the outcome.

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