

two in “Part III: Evolution” and the last in “Part IV: Apotheosis.” Similarly, he presents a new cyber attack called Bad Rabbit/Olympic Destroyer, followed by a chapter on false attribution, all in “Section V: Identity.” These interruptions create confusion and tangents that detract from his fundamental question: Who is Sandworm? Nevertheless, Greenberg’s research, analysis, and impressive sources provide credibility, and a sense of urgency and mystery, making it an exciting read.

*Sandworm* makes a convincing case about the threats of unrestricted cyber war and the vulnerability of civilian critical infrastructure. The book is thorough, with rich accounts from cyber security specialists and cyber attack victims adding weight and perspective to the main argument. Greenberg’s focus on Ukraine as the test bed for Russian malicious cyber activities provides the greatest example of cyber conflict’s complexity. Offensive cyber attacks to support tactical military operations, as seen in Ukraine, are just a tiny facet of the cyber influence that strategic competitors leverage to obtain combat advantage. There is also a psychological component to cyber war, manifesting as harassment, extortion, and even destruction—all aimed at eroding civilians’ trust in their governments and their ability to protect its people.

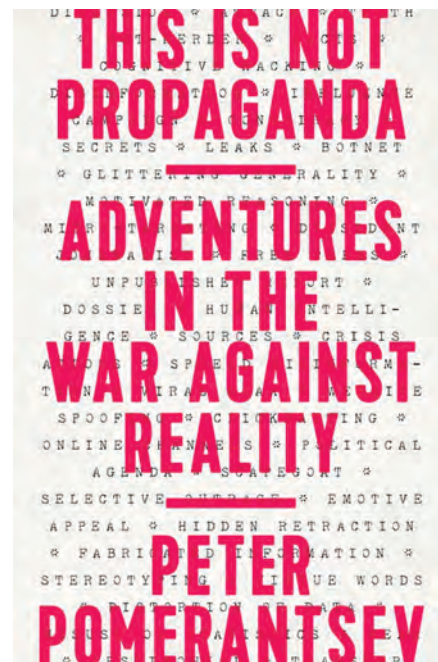
Although Greenberg is careful to question U.S. cyber security policy in the wake of NotPetya, his efforts in this regard fall short. Despite interviewing top cyber security officials from the administrations of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, Greenberg never critically examines U.S. cyber security policy, U.S. Federal cyber security operations teams (national roles, authorities, and responsibilities), or the ways international humanitarian law applies to cyber activities. He fails to address the U.S. creation and alignment of responsible cyber security organizations, such as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the policies that govern their activities—a notable omission. The Department of Defense’s official policy states that the law of war will apply to cyberspace operations; however, *Sandworm*

chronicles malicious activity that occupies the gray zone—below the threshold of armed conflict. In a missed opportunity, *Sandworm* pirouettes around the most significant issue the United States faces in the wake of the Ukrainian case study: How does the Nation conduct cyber operations consistent with domestic law, applicable international law, and rules of engagement, when the same rules do not constrict our competitors and adversaries?

Despite failing to address some of the most significant legal considerations the United States faces to cyber operations, *Sandworm* is one of the most comprehensive chronicles of cyber warfare available over open-source platforms. The book forces self-reflection—which at times triggers vulnerability—and challenges our underlying assumptions of U.S. cyber security policy, methods, and capabilities, as well as those belonging to actors within the strategic environment. Its warnings and insights on cyber’s “gray areas” make it a formidable resource for those in the joint force and the national security community charged with the preservation and the defense of U.S. military advantage and U.S. interests. JFQ

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## This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality

By Peter Pomerantsev

PublicAffairs, 2020

256 pp. \$16.99

ISBN-13: 9781541762121

Reviewed by Jeffrey Mankoff

In the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, the concept of *tsimtsum* represents an alternative, essentially deistic vision of creation—with God stepping back from the universe He created, leaving behind a vacant space for humanity to impart its own meaning. From this concept, the critic Boris Groys coined the phrase *Big Tsimtsum* to describe the void created by the collapse of the intellectual, ideological, and moral certainties embodied (or at least claimed) by the Soviet Union. For journalist Peter Pomerantsev, Groys’s Big Tsimtsum, the absence of meaning left behind when the certainties of the past evaporated, was the necessary condition for the emergence of a new, more cynical brand of politics—and not only in post-Soviet Russia. Unlike the seemingly existential, ideologically infused

debates of the Cold War, this new politics is superficial, the product not of long-haired German intellectuals, but such spin doctors as Gleb Pavlosky, the Russian “political technologist” who, by his own account, was instrumental in selecting and promoting Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency.

Weaving together stories from his own life and interviews with journalists, scholars, and practitioners (Pavlosky among them) in multiple countries, Pomerantsev has crafted, in *This is Not Propaganda*, a wide-ranging and readable account of how the post–Cold War promise of a global liberal democratic utopia came apart, first in Russia and then, increasingly, in the rest of the world—including the United States. While emphasizing the role of Putin’s Russia, Pomerantsev suggests that the current era of democratic malaise is extensive—and everywhere intractable.

Even before the rise of Putin, figures such as Pavlosky recognized the possibilities this new world offered, exploiting it first at home and then abroad. They paved the way for ambitious political charlatans, who use the tools of advertising to “sell” themselves to audiences whose identities have “broken down into mini-values that they cling to and that define them.” Such charlatans (among whom Pomerantsev includes the current generation of populist leaders in Europe and the United States) are primarily self-interested, and they attain power through instrumentally targeted appeals emphasizing narrow issues of identity over appeals to the common good. Instead of genuine mass movements, Pomerantsev sees modern politics as characterized by what a scholar he interviews terms *manufacturing consensus*, the work of political technologists, who have become the true power brokers. These figures are motivated less by belief in a cause than by purely mercenary considerations. One Mexican political technologist interviewed by Pomerantsev explains that while he himself is a man of the left, he will work for any cause or candidate who pays.

This shadowy figure offers up one of Pomerantsev’s key points for analysis: that “[p]opulism is not an ideology, it

is a strategy.” Pomerantsev goes on to show, for instance, how the authentic grassroots mobilization of Otpor, the loose collection of activists driving the protests that prompted the fall of Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević, was soon mimicked by far-right groups and state actors in Serbia and beyond. Whereas Otpor succeeded by mobilizing a wide swath of Serbian society around demands for greater democracy, its illiberal opponents embraced Otpor’s mobilization techniques to rally subsets of the population around a wide range of grievances—some mutually exclusive—in a cynical bid for power.

Pomerantsev focuses primarily on Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, but he also includes interviews with journalists and activists from countries as diverse as Serbia, Mexico, Syria, and Ukraine. This wide net helps Pomerantsev avoid the trap some analysts fall into of overestimating the centrality of Putin’s Russia to the new era of virtual politics. Russia is among the most visible and aggressive practitioners of this kind of politics and, arguably, its pioneer. Putin’s Russia has also integrated disinformation and other forms of deception into its foreign policy to a degree matched by no other modern state. Yet the spread of virtual “manufactured” politics is global, arising out of the loss of meaning accompanying the end of the Cold War and its accompanying ideological battles.

Pomerantsev echoes Francis Fukuyama’s observations from three decades ago that, having vanquished its rivals on the left and the right, liberal democracy’s biggest threat will in the future come not from competing ideologies but from the quest for meaning among citizens whose role in public life has been reduced to that of consumers. In many ways, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism represented a vindication of liberal democracy, but, in true dialectical fashion, that triumph also contained in it the seeds of its own undoing. As Fukuyama feared, the collapse of old certainties created a longing and a void on both sides of the old Cold War divide—one into which the political technologists stepped. Once there, they

used techniques drawn from both old-fashioned Soviet propaganda and Western advertising to stir up popular passions not on behalf of grand schemes to remake the world but merely for the sake of wealth and power. As recent years have shown, the presumed victors of the Cold War were no more inoculated against this manipulation than their onetime rivals behind the Iron Curtain. The end of the Cold War did indeed usher in a new, more integrated world—the cynical world of the Big Tsimtsum.

For members of the joint force, *This is Not Propaganda* provides an important dissection of the warped information environment accompanying the erosion of democracy’s promise. The road back will be long. If “populism is a strategy” in the time of the Big Tsimtsum, Pomerantsev suggests, it is not enough to address the socioeconomic grievances of the “left behind” populations of the American Rust Belt or the north of England—or to pursue a containment strategy against Russia. The only solution, he argues, is to give ordinary people agency, allowing them—rather than social media companies, government-backed trolls, political technologists, or other 21st-century flotsam—to “engage with [information] on equal terms” while taking back control of their own stories. This task may be harder and more diffuse than deterring an invasion of the Baltic states, but its success may prove more consequential for the future of liberal democracy. JFQ

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