

Propaganda and the pandemic disease

The discovery of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s caused considerable concern and controversy, as the medical community and public health sector mobilized to understand and contain the disease—and opportunists sought to vilify those afflicted or introduce myths about the syndrome's origins, in some cases for political advantage.

In geopolitical terms, the timing of the disease's outbreak at the height of the Cold War would prove to be a not so insignificant detail. Into the cauldron of uncertainty and fear surrounding the disease's origins an incredulous hypothesis was introduced, likely by propagandists and conspiracy theorists, that HIV had been a product of bioweaponry research by the U.S. military, specifically, from experiments gone awry at Fort Detrick, Maryland, an Army medical installation some 46 miles northwest of Washington, DC.

Relying on original document analysis from three countries, Erhard Geissler and Robert Sprinkle in this issue's lead article explore the propagation of the "HIV-from-Fort-Detrick myth" by the East German security service, an elaborate bureaucracy known as the Stasi. Their central question is whether the myth's dissemination was a Stasi success (a salient presumption in intelligence circles following German reunification).

Ultimately, they conclude no, the loosely orchestrated campaign was not a Stasi success. What the security service was able to propagate, however, was disinformation *about* disinformation—intentionally false information intended to influence public opinion that Geissler and Sprinkle refer to as "disinformation squared." Their analysis makes for fascinating reading.

In addition to being a compelling whodunit, this heavily researched, meticulously documented, and prosaically written article has the distinction, at 98 pages, of being the longest single research article to ever appear in the pages of the journal.

The accompanying piece by Paul D'Angelo, John Pollock, and colleagues also examines HIV/AIDS from an international perspective, focusing on the coverage of the pandemic disease in four sub-Saharan Anglophone

newspapers. In their content analysis of news coverage over a six-year period (2002–2007), they distinguish between Contained Democratic and Repressive Autocratic media systems and find that AIDS prevention campaigns were reported as being more efficacious in the former than in the latter.

Beyond their topical focus on HIV/AIDS, both of these articles make important theoretical contributions by introducing new concepts (disinformation squared) and analytical frameworks (a macro-level media system typology for developing countries) that should assist other scholars with new research in their respective areas.

With this issue I am pleased to announce that Gregg Murray of Texas Tech's Political Science Department, already serving as the journal's contributing editor for book reviews, has agreed to take on additional duties as the new executive director for the association. Gregg oversaw a successful APLS meeting here in Lubbock and is busy organizing next fall's meeting while looking for ways to revitalize association activities.

As part of these efforts, look for a revamped association webpage in the coming months and other announcements on the APLS Facebook page (facebook.com/AssnPoliticsLifeSciences). If you would like to receive association updates and announcements and are not already on the APLS distribution list, contact Gregg at g.murray@ttu.edu or simply "like" the association's Facebook page.

I am also happy to introduce two new members to the journal's editorial advisory board: Gad Saad, University Research Chair in Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences and Darwinian Consumption at Concordia University in Montreal, and Sopal Ear, an expert on the political economy of infectious disease control presently on the faculty at the Naval Postgraduate School. We welcome their involvement.

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