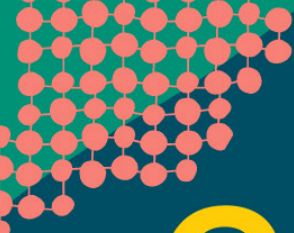# PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

SUBVERSIVE & MALICIOUS INFORMATION

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Letter from the Editor

The malign use of information is not a new practice. However, it is certainly on the rise. From disinformation and misinformation to propaganda and covert influence campaigns, nefarious actors worldwide have deployed such tactics for centuries to achieve whatever their end goal may be. As the issue of malicious and subversive information has gained even more traction over the last five years, the public has witnessed its ability to erode information spaces that are crucial for democratic processes and participation, its deadly threat to public health, and the challenges it poses to public safety and civility. Additionally, given the rise of digital technologies that encourage the easier, more widespread dissemination of information, along with tools, such as artificial intelligence and algorithmic selection, that discourage critical thinking skills, information consumers around the world are inherently impacted, for better or worse.

Personally, this issue's theme is especially important to me. As someone in their early 20s, it seems as if subversive and malicious information has been a part of almost every significant juncture in my adult life thus far. In 2016, at just 18, the term and concept of fake news was front and center as I prepared to vote in my first U.S. presidential election. Fast forward to 2018 and 2019, fake news, disinformation, and misinformation were even more prevalent in international public dialogue. From U.S. congressional hearings that put social media CEOs in the content moderation hot seat to several news stories about governments clandestinely employing bott and troll farms to protect their political power, the topic was everywhere. And of course, throughout 2020 and 2021, the world witnessed subversive and malicious information's dangers vis-à-vis the COVID-19 crisis and the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Public diplomacy teaches the value of active listening and the power of effective, truth-based communication. As such, while subversive and malicious information's threats may seem insurmountable to adequately address, I hope this magazine sparks conversation among all stakeholders – whether they be government officials, policymakers, technologists, activists, researchers, educators, or students – and inspires them to deploy listening and communication practices to devise innovative, multi-stakeholder solutions for the future.

I would like to thank the entire Editorial Board for making this publication possible and USC professors and Master of Public Diplomacy program co-directors Dr. Robert Banks and Dr. Jay Wang for their guidance throughout the editorial process. I'd also like to thank Fabiana Teofan, the magazine's Creative Director, for her hard work designing and digitally formatting this issue. Finally, thank you to our contributing authors for your dedication to the magazine and its revision process over the past several months. Despite operating in a completely remote environment, with team members working around the world, this magazine was truly a collaborative effort.

Maddie Masinsin
Editor-in-Chief

Editorial Board

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Disinformation: Getting Beyond the Botts and Trolls

Scott W. Ruston

In the 21st century security environment, information warfare campaigns use propaganda and disinformation to assault citizenries' political will, manipulate public opinion, and erode socio-political institutions—all of which contribute to the fundamental fabric of democracy. While this phenomenon is not new or isolated to the 21st century, technological advances and societal changes have dramatically accelerated information exchange. These technological changes have taken center stage with much attention on social media platforms and the exploitation of their algorithms by bots and trolls. Reducing disinformation to a primarily technical problem, however, overlooks the goals, vectors, and targets of disinformation campaigns. Responding to the threat of disinformation poses significant challenges: misconceptions abound and stove-piped approaches tilted towards detection and interdiction impede more scalable solutions built on societal resilience. Unpacking misconceptions and introducing promising research efforts to detect, understand, and characterize disinformation campaigns can give public diplomacy practitioners and students a foundation from which to participate in developing new solutions.

Misconceptions

Disinformation is about truth vs. falsity

There is a common misconception that disinformation and fake news are synonymous. Setting aside that fake news has lost any usefulness because of frequent use by politicians to describe unfavorable news coverage, the term also over-emphasizes in objective binary of truth and falsehood to the phenomenon of disinformation. Disinformation is much more than false claims: it works to distort, dismiss, distract and despair[1], and does not necessarily nor exclusively depend on lies or false claims. Disinformation leverages inaccuracies, exaggeration, alterations of context, emotional rhetoric and humor, as well as false statements and surreptitious manipulations of sound, image, and video in order to achieve effects.

Understanding that disinformation is not primarily about truth or lies reveals why countering disinformation with facts has only limited success (consider that The Washington Post identified 30,573 false claims made by former President Trump in his four years in office, with no appreciable effect on belief in his claims by his followers[2]). Approaches to understanding the origins, spread, and impact of disinformation cannot be predicated on an assumption of universal truths or even facts but rather through human communication and information processing mechanisms.

It's all about the bots

Another misconception is that the problem of disinformation is exclusively a modern problem of technological information acceleration. Or put another way it's a problem of bots—but it is far more than that. Whereas bots and other large-scale manipulations of social media platforms are an important part of the problem, they do not tell the whole story. A consequence of the technological and social advances of information technologies is the convergence of the roles of consumer, producer, and distributor of media. Not only do more people have access to more information than ever before, but more people are producing information and distributing to more people than ever before. Social media news feed algorithms further accelerate this information exchange, but these changes have also dramatically lowered the capital investment required to reach large audiences, and commensurately eroded the inherent editorial oversight such investment imposed. These forces combine to create an information environment where information competes for attention and adherence. Social media algorithms are designed to increase engagement and thereby garner attention, and do so by privileging content most likely to garner a reaction: the incendiary and the extreme, provoking fear and outrage responses.[3] Disinformation campaigns exploit this feature of social media, but garner adherence by constructing narratives that appeal to values and identity across the whole spectrum of media types.[4]

Progress in interdisciplinary approaches

If the problem is more than sorting truth from lies, and the problem is beyond simply the detection of bots on social media (remember, too, there are non-malicious social media bots), then how can the problem be addressed? A recent Computing Community Consortium quadrennial white paper observes that "the digitization of information exchange, however, makes the practices of disinformation detectable, the networks of influence discernable, and suspicious content characterizable".[5] This white paper calls for dedicated research efforts beyond detection, but into provenance, attribution, and verification, and to do so in a consciously interdisciplinary manner. Three research trends point in this direction: fusing human communication with computer science, the rise of social-cyber forensics, and studies of manipulated media (or "deepfakes") incorporating insights from journalism, media studies, and psychology.

Disinformation and malign influence content are not simple "message bombs" fired down network pathways, but rather the content nests within the complex ecosystem that is human communication and human understanding. Narrative is increasingly a theoretical underpinning for the study of disinformation, whether as rumors[6], support for strategic narratives[7], or influence on national identity,[8] as it offers a route to insight about the appeal and resonance of disinformation. Narratives are central to how humans make sense and significance of the world, and they are central to identity formation.[9] The complexity of narrative and other rhetorical forms such as framing introduce challenges to scaling with computation, as they are not the equivalent of theme, or message, or topic, and are thus resistant to topic-modeling and keyword-based approaches. Combinations of data mining, natural language processing, and human communication are tackling this challenge, such as recent work from Arizona State University that developed a machine classifier to identify adversarial framing in news media texts, and thereby plot a signal of shifts in influence operation strategy over time.[10]

Disinformation campaigns can strategically use multiple social media and news media platforms, along with blog farms, social bots, commenter mobs and other inorganic engagement tactics to dominate the information environment for specific effect. To better understand these coordinated and intentional activities, social cyber forensics combines mathematical social network analysis, data mining, and the study of group

behavior in an effort to triangulate between information flows, disinformation, and social movement. For example, researchers from University of Arkansas Little Rock partnered with NATO to analyze propaganda and disinformation activities surrounding NATO's Trident Juncture exercise, revealing how information competitors drew attention and strategic messages away from NATO in order to further their own agenda.[11] Through its Minerva Research Initiative, the Department of Defense has made a major investment in social cyber forensics and similar approaches, with five of the most recent twenty research awards falling in this category and focusing on adversarial disinformation campaigns globally.

The recent fervor over TikTok videos purportedly showing actor Tom Cruise highlights the impending threat of manipulated media, also known as "deepfakes".[12] The advent of computer-generated, high fidelity moving images that can appear as any person and are difficult for the lay person to detect is a disconcerting threat for militaries, intelligence agencies, law enforcement, and anyone concerned with information sharing and credibility. Despite the use of computer-generated effects in movies, and the ubiquity of Photoshop on personal computers, we still assign to photos and videos (outside of constrained contexts of entertainment) an ostensibly indexical relationship to the person event, behavior, speech, or action depicted. And while the capability to produce high fidelity "deepfake" videos right now still requires weeks of work, special skills, and access to high performance graphics processing units[13], reducing these barriers is only a matter of time. Most current research into deepfake detection concentrates on identifying anomalies in the image or video. But when the video is viewed within a social context, such anomalies are easily overlooked, ignored or even disregarded. Additionally, distinguishing between manipulations done for artistic effect or technology advancement from those executed for nefarious purpose is necessary to fully understand the threats to national security, democracy and information sharing posed by deepfakes. Promising new research trends include interdisciplinary approaches to understanding social and psychological contexts of deepfake viewership and distribution,[14] intersections of veracity and contexts,[15] and digital ledger technologies for identification of provenance.[16] These approaches will improve detection, attribution and characterization of manipulated media, with input from a wide range of academic disciplines beyond artificial intelligence and computer vision.

Roles for public diplomacy

Bots are not the sole problem, but they exacerbate the problem. Falsity is not the sole problem, but when congruent with identity narratives and fueled by emotionality, lies and inaccuracies and other forms of maliciously influential content often out-compete facts and truthful statements. To level the playing field between credible information and malign influence, we need new tools that leverage the computational power of artificial intelligence and machine learning, but we need that mated with first-hand experience of strategic communication, national strategy, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding—exactly the talents and experience of diplomats.

Human nature abhors an information vacuum. For the past 75 years, studies of rumors have confirmed, whether from a psychological sociological or narratological perspective, that false, inaccurate, and misleading seeds of information grow and flourish in sparse information environments.[17] When communities have access to consistent information they deem credible and congruent with the frameworks they use to understand the world, then rumors and malicious information finds a less hospitable landscape. In part, public diplomacy is about seeding the information environment with ideas, activities, and engagements that enable communities to understand how another country's values, beliefs, and actions are consonant with their own. Being attentive to the tell-tale signs, deleterious effects, and capabilities to detect and interrupt disinformation will be a critical component of the public diplomat's skill set in the years ahead. – 🐛

Scott W. Ruston

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GLOBAL TRENDS: WHEN PROPAGANDA BECOMES POLICY

What Iran gets Wrong About Disinformation

Simin Kargar

February 10th marked the forty-second anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has struggled with ways that information can make a difference. As a revolutionary regime, Iran has remained keen on communicating its ideology beyond its borders, seeking to appeal to international audiences and subvert adversarial actors. The regime has also realized that unfettered flow of information could cost its own legitimacy domestically. It has thus sought to curtail freedom of expression through media censorship, Internet filtering, satellite jamming, and suppression of dissent. In short, Iran has come to see itself engaged in an invisible "soft war" – one that requires complex strategies to avoid defeat.

The term soft war is a play on Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power," which indicates the ability to get what one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments.[1] Similarly, soft war denotes strategic use of nonmilitary means to achieve what may otherwise be obtained through coercion or conventional warfare.[2] In this so-called soft war, non-kinetic measures such as cyber, media, and information warfare are prime currencies. Under Iran's soft war doctrine, strategic communicators from abroad (mainly the US and other Western powers) seek to instigate domestic discontent and subvert the regime in Tehran. They are considered as existential threats to Iran's national power and the Iranian-Islamic identity that unravel the country's value system from within.

Over the past five decades, Iran has sought to turn this threat on its head through defensive and offensive strategies. The distinction is not always clear-cut and becomes blurry at times. Together, however, these strategies have shaped and bolstered Iran's extensive disinformation apparatus, which operates in accordance

with the regime's geopolitical interests. Through a motley of strategies, Iran seeks to combat Western soft power and expand its own spheres of influence.

Domestically, Iran exerts control over the conduits through which the West is believed to target the hearts and minds of Iranians. The Internet, social media platforms, and satellite televisions are characterized as soft weapons of the West and need to be policed.[3] If they cannot be completely restrained, they can still be manipulated to bolster pro-regime narratives and suppress opposition voices. To this end, Iran propagates social, cultural, and political narratives through official outlets such as Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the state-owned broadcaster.

Over the past decade, Iran's security apparatus, such as the Basij (a volunteer-based paramilitary arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)) has turned to influence operations on social media and other virtual platforms.[4] These operations seek to manipulate the public opinion, in particular on sensitive topics related to Iran's national security such as the regional proxy conflict in Yemen. Iran also

Through mischaracterizing content production and amplification and spearheading – or co-opting – social media debates by inauthentic accounts, Iran seeks to take control of the public discourse even outside the state-sanctioned channels.

uses coordinated disinformation campaigns to smear dissidents and discredit their views on issues of social and political significance. Through mischaracterizing content production and amplification and spearheading – or co-opting – social media debates by inauthentic accounts, Iran seeks to take control of the public discourse even outside the state-sanctioned channels.

Internationally, Iran has dedicated substantial resources to broadcasting its pro-Shi'a and anti-Western positions to audiences in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans. Over the past decades, the IRIB's foreign language operations have expanded significantly, currently broadcasting in eight languages worldwide, including English, Arabic, and Spanish.[5] Iran characterizes IRIB's international programming as part of its public diplomacy efforts. Yet, IRIB's dubious public engagement strategies yield it as a centerpiece of Iran's disinformation apparatus, whose distinction from public diplomacy has become increasingly obscure. It is unsurprising, then, that IRIB enjoys a generous budget that remains unaffected by the adverse impact of US sanctions on the rest of Iran's economy.[6]

In addition to IRIB[7], the IRGC has also taken an active role in influence operations. Since 2018, social media companies have identified and suspended networks of inauthentic news websites, Facebook groups, and Twitter and Instagram accounts associated with the IRGC and its Special Operations unit, the Quds Force.[8] These networks have conducted social media campaigns to present pro-Iran narratives to international audiences and sway their opinion in favor of Iran and its strategic interests. Their operations seek to promote criticism of US foreign policies and disseminate subversive narratives against Saudi Arabia and Israel. These narratives tend to receive some traction from the left-wing in the United States and anti-imperialist activists around the world.[9]

Iran's international information operations are a bellwether of geopolitical tensions. Since 2018, when former President Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal, tensions between Iran and the US intensified. In response, much of Iran's disinformation has focused on undermining US democratic institutions and driving wedges into pre-existing divisions in society. In particular, Iran has tested techniques like impersonating political figures, including US senators[10] and candidates for the House of Representatives[11], to sow informational chaos. Over the past year alone, Iran has amplified such topics as race, police brutality, voter suppression, and the US response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[12] In October 2020, amid a heated presidential election season in the US, Iran was caught sending threatening emails to democratic voters on behalf of the Proud Boys, a pro-Trump white supremacist group, in an attempt to spread discord among American voters.[13]

Subversion has been rooted in the Iranian foreign policy of "exporting the revolution" since the formation of the Islamic Republic. Under this policy, Iran has justified propagation of pro-Shi'a, revolutionary narratives as well as its support for Shi'a minority groups and militias in predominantly Sunni states across the Middle East. These measures continue to evolve with advancements in media and communication technologies. The use of subversion through networked communication tools and social media provides a unique opportunity for Iran to attempt to undermine the integrity and constitution of its regional and international adversaries.

As a regional power and a pariah state, Iran seeks to leverage the power of rhetoric on networked platforms to improve its image internationally and challenge existing norms. However, these objectives do not fare well with Iran's track record. Its poor human rights performance, coupled with decades of abuse of power

and subversive activities across the world, do not lend much legitimacy to Iran's rhetoric.

To garner support for its foreign policy, Iran's attempts to present itself as a responsible actor need to resonate with diverse audiences, domestically and internationally. However, as the data published by social media companies indicate, Iran's influence operations have not generated much engagement beyond audiences that probably already agree with its talking points. This meager impact perpetuates the credibility challenge that Iran faces in using disinformation: building and maintaining trust with diverse audiences require effective and transparent public diplomacy. Authentic soft power cannot be earned with disinformation. This is what Iran fundamentally gets wrong about the use of disinformation in lieu of ethical public diplomacy. – 𝓅𝒹

Simin Kargar

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The Re-branding of Confucius Institutes in the Face of Bans and its Impact on China's Soft Power Strategy

Nemanja Dukic

China's global network of Confucius Institutes aim to represent China's culture worldwide, foster mutual understanding and cooperation and offer language courses through partnerships with universities. The institutes have expanded rapidly since 2004 and now distribute services to over 500 locations. In a statement published on the U.S. Department of State website, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo has labelled the Confucius Institute as a "Foreign Mission" of the People's Republic of China. Pompeo noted that he believes that China has been using the institutes to distribute its "large scale and well-funded propaganda" to "malignly influence operations" in the USA.[1] This statement comes at a time where closures of Confucius Institutes are happening in numerous Western countries like the USA[2], France[3], Sweden[4], the Netherlands[5], Canada[6], etc.

This article examines the Chinese government's decision to re-brand the Confucius Institutes - from being government-controlled to being administered by an umbrella of NGOs. Concerning the larger context of the importance of Confucius Institutes for China's soft power projections, this analysis will look at how the institutes operate and how they compare to their Western counterparts to ascertain whether this re-branding is essentially institutional camouflage, and what the implications of this might be on both the institutes and China's future.

Same but Different

Closures of Confucius Institutes in Western countries are happening almost daily. China's Confucius Institute Headquarters, also known as Hanban, announced in July 2020 that the global network of Confucius Institutes will be run by a newly established non-governmental foundation called the Chinese International Education Foundation[7]. According to the press release, this rebranding is being done to ensure that Chinese language education courses are continued at universities worldwide. This decision can be interpreted from several angles. First, this rebranding may be a result of actions of closures and terminations of contracts with the institutes; second, these changes might be implemented to prepare Chinese language educators and trainers for a new situation in which they ought to actively tackle the emerging Western interpretation of Confucius Institutes as breeding grounds of Chinese state propaganda. Confucius Institutes are primarily organized around the blueprint of Western countries' cultural institutes in terms of their function, mission, and services. Thus, this rebranding can also be interpreted as institutional mimicry, as China may be looking to mimic the non-profit foundation/association type of organizations seen in cultural institutes such as the Goethe-Institut, the British Council, the Dante Alighieri Society, Instituto Cervantes, Instituto Camões, etc.
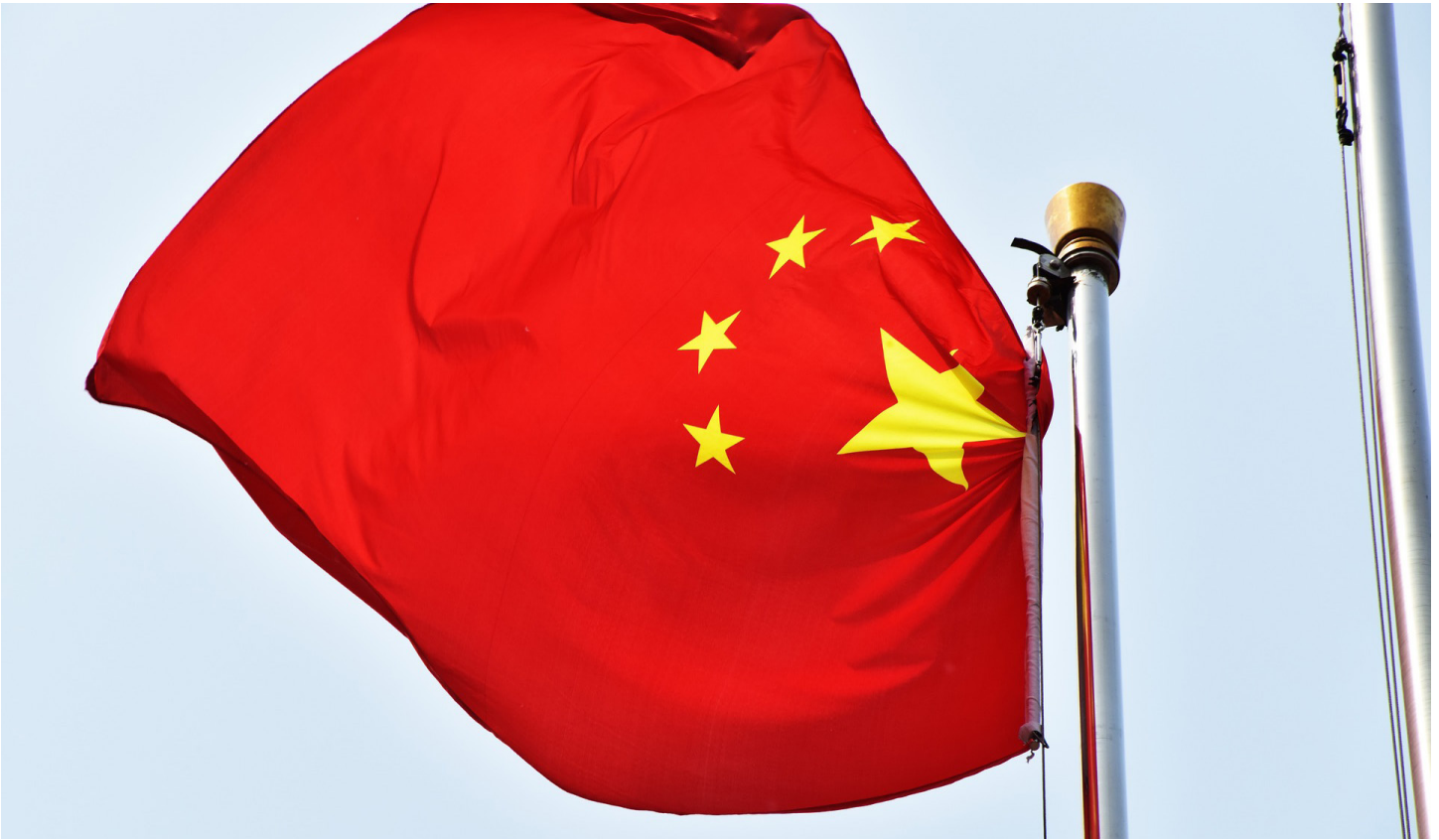
These efforts to re-brand Confucius Institutes appear to be a logical reaction of China and its Ministry of Education to ensure that the institutes survive in the West and change perceptions about their role and mission. On the other hand, the depth of this transition is debatable. This shift towards an NGO-type of organization and administration does not ensure complete freedom from China's Ministry of Education. Although this new form of management includes more stakeholders, like Chinese universities and businesses, the essential part of the institute's work – the language courses - will continue to be influenced by the Ministry of Education, who forms and decides on the course materials, what is taught and covered by educators, and creates the standards for teaching and training employees of the institutes.

This re-branding towards an NGO-type organization comes at a time in which China is attempting to alleviate criticism of its treatments of domestic NGOs, which increase in number every year. Out of tens of thousands of NGOs operating in China, only around 1% are considered to be involved in foreign policy-related issues.[8] China is starting to react to these criticisms by stepping up efforts to actively spin a narrative in which

Domestically, China continues to censor NGO initiatives by limiting freedom of expression and increasing barriers to operation; to create an impression that these groups do not operate outside of government control, the government even redefined them as "social organizations" instead of non-governmental organizations.

Chinese NGOs can and should act as important agents of its soft power projections. Success in these efforts adds to the government's attempts at presenting a somewhat more sanitized picture of China to the world. This indication of a willingness to include more non-state actors in shaping China's soft power strategy plus the fact that the government is still not ready to give up its autonomy over the Confucius Institute, keeping it under the watchful eye of the Ministry of Education, creates a contradiction. This contradiction shows that, at least for some time to come, the Chinese government is not willing to add more actors to the stage of soft power projection without getting to play the role of director, having the final say on how the regime and its ideology is presented to the world. Thus, the rebranding effort of the Confucius Institutes may very well be an attempt at institutional "camouflage" instead.

Domestically, China continues to censor NGO initiatives by limiting freedom of expression and increasing barriers to operation; to create an impression that these groups do not operate outside of government control, the government even redefined them as "social organizations" instead of non-governmental organizations[9] (Feldshuh, 2020).

Confucius Institute's Financial Activities in the U.S. Education System

According to the Director-General of Hanban, Ma Jianfei, the rebranding of the Confucius Institutes comes as a reaction to the USA's increasing efforts to side-line the proliferation of the institutes at American universities. Therefore, this rebranding is meant to develop a somewhat more pragmatic and more efficient model for interaction with the USA and its relevant institutions.[10]

This raises a few questions: Is this a case of institutional "camouflage," and if so, does this institutional "camouflage" serve any purpose other than changing perceptions? It is important to consider this because the recent changes made to the Confucius Institutes also allowed them to choose to change their names. This means that many Confucius Institutes across the world may use this opportunity to rebrand and do so, making it harder for policymakers to track their activities as the network appears more decentralized. There appears to be more basis to these changes when considering Section 117 of the Higher Education Act[11], which requires American colleges and universities to report every foreign government agency that donates to American universities and colleges. This legislation does not require colleges and universities to do the same regarding donations by non-profit foundations and individuals, making it possible for the newly established Chinese International Education Foundation to enjoy anonymity as a foreign donor because it would no longer be considered a Chinese State Agency.

The U.S. Department of Education comprehensively researched Hanban's funding activities and found that around 70% of the country's education facilities failed to report the funds they received from Hanban. They were legally obliged to report anything more than $250,000. The Department of Education found that from January 2012 to June 2018, 15 schools admitted to receiving more than $15 million from Hanban. The sheer amount of Hanban's spending on schools in the USA is further exemplified by the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Report that analysed financial records from some 100 schools in the USA; the subcommittee reported that Hanban has injected more than $113 million into American schools.[12]

The U.S. Department of Education publicly called out colleges such as Cornell University, Yale University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Texas, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Universities of Chicago, Boston, and Pennsylvania for not reporting around $3.6 billion of Hanban donated funds. The Department stated that these universities actively solicited foreign government corporations and nationals for funds, despite the fact that some of these donors, China's Hanban being among them, actively participate - with hostile intention - in projecting soft power and spreading propaganda for their own benefit.[13]

Do Western Cultural Institutions not do the Same?

Confucius Institutes are regarded as flagships of Chinese cultural diplomacy and soft power, but constant attacks

by Western media and Western governments have shaken this aspect of China's soft power. Confucius Institutes are now, more than ever, presented as untrustworthy, unreliable, and spreaders of malignant propaganda. This raises another set of questions: are these perceptions biased?; are Western cultural institutions not acting in the same manner?

In the case of the Confucius Institutes, they used the experiences of other relevant cultural institutes like those of the UK, France, Germany, and Spain to create an institutional blueprint for their own promotion of language and culture. On one hand, this institutional mimicry looks virtually the same, as the aforementioned Western institutes appear to have rather similar missions to those of Confucius Institutes and follow their own countries' soft power agendas. However, the Confucius Institute is perceived entirely differently, as evidenced. These perceptions can essentially be broken down to the following: Confucius Institutes are a tool of establishing new cultural hegemony and sanitizing the image of China to the world, thus enhancing its power.[14]

Part of what fuels these perceptions of the Confucius Institutes can be traced back to their governing contracts in host countries. The terms of hosting a Confucius Institute are normally agreed upon in a contract signed by Hanban and interested universities. These contracts typically contain provisions that indicate that both the host country and Chinese laws may apply for cases involving Board members or Institute teachers breaking the contract of establishing a Confucius institute. To make the matter more unfavourable for the image of the Confucius Institutes, the contracts with the directors of these institutes and lecturers request them to safeguard the national interests of China and ensure that they regularly report to the Chinese embassy upon their arrival to the United States.[15]

While the Western counterparts of the Confucius Institutes are connected to their own respective countries' soft power objectives, they are not perceived as infringing on academic freedoms and censoring unfavourable presentations of their countries - or, at least not on the same level as Confucius Institutes are claimed to be doing. Cultural organizations of Western countries conduct their soft power activities in a more sophisticated way, which comes as no surprise as they had decades of institutional practice through which they were able to polish their practices.[16]

Finally, Confucius Institutes tend to be more connected to the universities and campuses, unlike their Western counterparts. This proximity and functioning within universities can be seen as an Achilles' heel. These factors make it easier and convenient to put the institutes in the spotlight and help form perceptions about their attitudes towards infringement of academic freedom and freedom of expression. It appears that the perception of Confucius Institutes matters more than how it perceives its own mission. In the case of the Confucius Institutes, this perception of untrustworthiness and unsophisticated propaganda methods have been transformed - from perceptions into knowledge that can be utilized by institutes to improve their practices.

The rebranding of the Confucius Institutes under the NGO umbrella comes as no surprise after a series of closures of these institutes in Western Countries. Time will tell whether the Chinese government will have to give these institutes more autonomy to ensure their survival and if the institutes and the country will be able to achieve a level of sophistication in projecting soft power. China is showing signs of trying to adapt and overcome challenges to its soft power and these developments have the potential to go in many directions: more autonomy for its institutes, distancing from the universities, or full mimicry of Western cultural centres' soft power practices. One thing is certain: China is becoming aware of its initial naïveté and learning how to better play the soft power game through cultural diplomacy. – 🦉

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Platformizing Digital Public Diplomacy Strategy: How China's Media Combats Misinformation and Disinformation

Tong Tong and Runtao Dai

In late May 2020, famous Chinese left-wing journalist and key opinion leader, Hu Xijin, posted a message on the popular Chinese social media platform, Sina Weibo, as well as on Twitter, claiming that China should increase its nuclear warhead stockpile. This statement was later confirmed as fake news yet stirred up an Internet storm, both in China and overseas. Li Bin, professor at Tsinghua University's School of International Relations, noted that Hu's remarks were not credible, as it lacked common sense from scientific and military perspectives. Facing international controversy, Hu later explained on Twitter that the motivation for his remark was motivated by a nationalistic thought related to increasingly strained China-US relations. Obviously, Hu had no intention of spreading fake news. However, because Hu is the Chief Respondent for a national newspaper, it triggered havoc for China, both domestically and abroad. While there are numerous other negative posts and comments regarding China's military expansion ambitions on Twitter and Facebook, Hu's comments on social media should be considered an unconsciousable made mistake. He has no intention of triggering Internet turbulence.

A Thorn in Digital Public Diplomacy's Side

Social media is quickly becoming the infrastructure for human communication. As a result, public diplomacy is also undergoing a comprehensive transformation to suit the digital age. Social media has expanded the scope of government-public connections and has created new possibilities for public diplomacy with the empowerment of Internet technologies. Digital public diplomacy makes it easier for communication organizations to carry out activities more efficiently and conveniently, which helps transcend the geographic boundaries of the nation-state. However, this also brings an "information black-box" mediated by bytes. Thus, how to deal with false information becomes an increased challenge for public diplomats.[1]

There are three academic terms related to false information: fake news, misinformation, and disinformation.[2] Fake news has perplexed scholars for years, and the 2016 U.S. election made it one of the most frequently mentioned terms relating to social media in recent years. Yet, as a word with politicized value, the term fake news does a poor job of explaining the

media and communication phenomena in digital times. In this regard, scholars suggest that the idea of fake news be divided into two categories: misinformation and disinformation, which distinguishes whether a statement is executing intentional or non-intentional malicious subversive behavior. This is extremely important for public diplomacy, especially when diplomats face audiences from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, as it is a communicative activity which is endowed with a cross-border and cross-platform attribution, the mechanism of how false information affects public diplomacy is twisted more complicatedly. Thus, recognizing misinformation and disinformation becomes the first question scholars face when it comes to digital public diplomacy.

How to Recognize Misinformation and Disinformation

The core difference between misinformation and disinformation is whether the information intends to maliciously subvert existed order.[3] In this light, although misinformation itself indeed releases false signals due to inaccurate understanding or interpretation of both the deliverer and the public, it has no intention to mislead

them. Yet, it is very destructive when combined with social media characteristics. Moreover, misinformation is at great risk of amplification when mediated by Internet communities, which can be radical. With the influence of echo chambers and filter bubbles, a small piece of misinformation can cause enormous turbulence among social media audiences. In the era of digital public diplomacy, personal opinions expressed by politicians and media professionals are often mistaken as official government information. From an organizational perspective, misinformation in the social media era is caused by an organization's external communication inconsistencies. In addition, the revival of argumentative communication has also become a major cause of misinformation in the field of public diplomacy. As US-China relations reach a freezing point due to issues such as the trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent disputes between the two governments on a series of issues have spawned a large amount of misinformation.

In contrast, disinformation has a much stronger negative connotation, as it refers to an individual, organization, or government deliberately spreading misleading and

biased information to discredit their counterparts. Disinformation's consciousness can lead to dangerous consequences, including influencing foreign publics' opinions to undermine the political process of its country. Therefore, journalistic actions should be carefully examined by the government or a third party, as disinformation is highly disruptive and distrctive. Many politicians believe that disinformation even affected the 2016 U.S. election, the 2016 Brexit referendum, and the 2017 German election.[4]

Platformization: How China Deals with Fake news

Currently, the Chinese government is finding a refined way to govern misinformation and disinformation through its Internet and social media platforms. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government has cooperated with World Health Organization and Internet companies, such as Tencent, Alibaba, and Byte-dance, to deal with mis- and disinformation to protect the public from fears and panic about the virus. All of the aforementioned companies have spared great effort to rectify false information by creating new computer algorithms to detect possible risks. TikTok employed very strict censorships policies to the content of videos that may threat national security and trigger turbulence in internet communities. Those who post misleading information could be banned from the platform forever.[5] WeChat typically pays more attention to political rumors on its platform. In February 2020, right after the pandemic's first wave,

WeChat built up an online platform called the "rumor pulverizer" to help the global citizens prepare for the pandemic. Specifically, it marks rumors on the social platform and distributes the latest news regarding the pandemic with an algorithm's help. Additionally, the number of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 and "high-risk regions" in the country are noted on the platform daily.

Chinese social media's fact-checking mechanisms can screen out almost all fake news posts. Yet, these platforms have always had a harder time identifying misinformation, especially as they relate to public diplomacy. The governance of misinformation on Chinese Internet platforms mainly focuses on the domestic side. How to intercept and monitor misinformation with a cross-border effort remains to be discussed.[6]

In terms of response strategies, China's public diplomatic entities take a cautious and avoidance attitude towards that misinformation that is not yet widespread. The rationale: responding to this kind of misinformation too positively will only amplify the influence and give the impression that the public diplomatic department is sophisticating the problem on purpose. Therefore, it should be clarified from the unofficial nature of the source to prevent the misinformation from being over-interpreted. For example, when the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hua Chunyin, responded to the comments made by Hu, she attributed this speech to Hu himself, emphasizing Hu's freedom

of speech. In this way, she successfully shifted the original agenda of "military expansion" under the framework of "freedom of speech."

However, dealing with misinformation less positively does not mean treating it negatively. Misinformation should not be ignored because it will be much more difficult to address once it transforms into disinformation. The cause of foreign policy misinformation originates from the public's misunderstanding of the subject or topic discussed. At the same time, the function of public diplomacy is to explain the policy intentions of a country to the public of other countries. Digital public diplomacy plays a great role in helping different countries with different interests understand each other and reach mutual consensus. If public diplomacy organizations could understand the cognitive needs of the target public through digital public diplomacy, which could be achieved by regulating fake news at the very beginning, establishing an effective, stable diplomatic connection, and increasing cross-country cooperation and interactions, these goals could be achieved. This is vital, especially in today's world where increasing misunderstanding and noncooperation are becoming the primary risk of mankind, which is as harmful as the virus itself[7].

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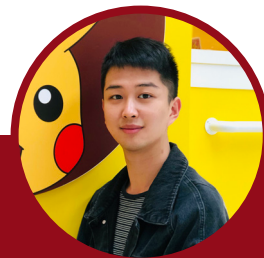
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Russian Disinformation: Europe's Cold War Response vs. Today

Aly Hill

In recent years, social media and the digital age thrust disinformation into the limelight through newly available public knowledge. Historically, misinformation spread throughout civilizations, although the digital age encourages the greatest information-spread quickly over a large population with Internet access. Wartime propaganda discouraged enemies and promoted soldier and civilian morale. However, most Western countries primarily utilized disinformation and censorship to limit enemy fake news during these times of war. Since the Cold War's outset, the United States focused attention on state-sponsored Soviet misinformation campaigns to gain influence in the Eastern European bloc. Europe remained lackluster in combating the Soviet attempts to discredit the United States and Western alliances.

During the Cold War, Europe became a battleground of ideas and ideologies. In today's digital and globalized age, the European Union (EU) again faces a quandary of how to respond to misinformation, specifically in light of Russian attempts to utilize new technology like social media and the Internet to encourage chaos. The tug-of-war between Russia and the West in key Eastern Europe countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary is well-documented and well-known. What is less highlighted is the fact that Western European countries such as Germany and France are fighting these same battles.

Despite Western European countries' history being on the frontlines of malicious information, the EU has routinely failed to prevent the mass proliferation of fake news, propaganda, and disinformation to its population. This results from bureaucratic difficulties hindering the streamlining of policies between the various European nations making up the EU. It also comes from a failure to adapt an effective peacetime apparatus for limiting the spread of fake news without appearing like censorship. This becomes especially problematic when creating fair and effective social media regulation and Internet governance.

All elements considered, Europe's failure to properly address new digital age concerns creates a poor environment for effectively managing misinformation. This article directly confronts Europe's difficulties associated with confronting new technologic communications by highlighting the parallels with failures to combat Cold War-era Soviet propaganda in this region. It highlights past similarities with today's EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, which commits to scrutinizing advertisements, ensuring transparency, and safeguarding against disinformation. Both of these examples highlight the EU's response failures. They also showcase global difficulties in combating digital fake news campaigns due to over-proliferated publicly available knowledge running amok.

Communication today is cheaper, more readily accessible, and democratized globally. However, greater challenges emerge as a result for assuring accuracy and unbiased information.

Cold War Disinformation in Europe

Following World War II, Europe became a battleground between the West and East, Democracy and Communism. This presented propaganda implications on both sides, as the ideological Cold War manifested in swaying the hearts and minds of global citizens. Soviet disinformation proliferated throughout the Cold War, ranging from false reports to forged documents.[1] The West, the U.S. especially, deemed this dangerous as post-World War II European elections threatened to turn Western European states communist. Europe, specifically Eastern Europe, presented the chief source of these fake news stories as a means to sway opinion. This resulted from Europe's proximity to the Soviet Union. It also occurred due to Western Europe's close relationship with the United States. Europe represented the metaphorical break between the West and the East as it was split between Soviet satellite states and Western Allies -- which became increasingly noticeable with the manufacturing of the Berlin Wall.

At this time, response to disinformation campaigns was not timely or particularly effective compared with Soviet campaigns. This limited Europe's ability to reach potentially vulnerable people who were susceptible to believing fabricated stories, even if credible sources redacted them days, weeks, months, over even years later. Western countries combatted Soviet attempts by creating institutions exposing Russian disinformation. They also circulated the truth through media outlets like the VOA and BBC. Headlines from the BBC External Service and Radio Free Europe (in partnership with the VOA) promoted Western news broadcasts and interpretations contrasting with Soviet disinformation in Europe. They strove to convey the truth to Europeans behind events ranging from political unrest, such as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, to combating social issues and Soviet disinformation, including the 1980s AIDS pandemic being a U.S. plot.[2] Despite Europe's proximity to these concerns, most attempts to combat disinformation occurred through the United States and United Kingdom. The 1980s especially highlighted attempts to counter Soviet distortion and KGB disinformation (which reached a peak of 25 fake documents per year) through quick acknowledgement and rebuttal.[3] However, this work was done through America's USIA rather than by European bodies. The failure to confront the region's own domestic concerns establishes the background for the European Union's current policies pertaining to misinformation.

The EU's Misinformation Response Today

Given Europe's history with Soviet propaganda and misinformation during the height of the Cold War, specifically the "Iron Curtain" descending over information and people on the continent, one would think the EU today establish precedence for strictly securing and combating fake news and misinformation for stability. This especially increases in importance due to Russia's well-known disinformation campaigns within Eastern Europe especially. In the past, the USSR created fake documents and news stories that took time to proliferate society. Today, the Kremlin sponsors website creation, fake social media-proliferated stories, and widespread daily disinformation campaigns designed to discredit the EU, EU-allies, and stability to European citizens. While the EU has instituted policies to combat Russian misinformation, they remain lackluster and unlikely to be as effective as Russia's campaigns.

Today, the European Union's Code of Practice on Disinformation commits to assure transparency and fight disinformation, while using a voluntary basis of self-regulation standards for online platforms like Google, Facebook, and Twitter[4] This immediately

creates questions of how effective voluntary standards and self-regulation for companies can be. On the one hand, the EU's Code promotes individual privacy rather than governmental regulation. But on the other hand, this detrimentally results in few quantifiable standards for preventing fake news from proliferating society. Continual media stories about cyber security concerns with social media like Facebook highlight these sites' failure to properly regulate false information. These concerns come to a head today. They also showcase the EU's failures of fighting misinformation by creating its own properly-funded, staffed, and encouraged bodies.

In terms of European Union-initiated efforts to develop a plan in terms of Russia's disinformation in March 2015, the EU East StratCom Task Force is one such body. The EU East StratCom Task Force identifies, monitors, and exposes Russian propaganda.[5] It also communicates EU policies in Eastern Europe. However, despite these goals, the Task Force faces serious limitations undermining its credibility and effectiveness. For one, it remains underfunded and understaffed, with only 16 employees.[6] This limits their ability to properly combat

successful and far-reaching Russian campaigns with extensive resources. For another, due to bureaucratic limitations, the EU takes too long to respond to Russian misinformation.[7] The website promotes daily data monitoring of disinformation, however in the digital age responses to combat misinformation take far too long. By the time the organization takes the time and creates its own media to fight fake news, the false data already existed long enough in society to become public knowledge and cement itself in the minds of risk groups.

Therefore, the EU's current strategy for disinformation, specifically relating to Russia, presents that most "effective" work is done by private companies rather than public institutions. But when self-regulating companies like Google and Facebook do most of this regulation, this creates a potential vacuum for knowledge when these companies fail to properly monitor and fight disinformation. The lack of properly resourced EU initiatives showcases a limited framework for combating fake news. In the digital age of quick, readily available information it takes too long for the Task Force to identify and combat Russian attempts before fake news reaches at-risk audiences likely to be influenced by messages.

This presents a situation similar to the one faced during the Cold War for Europe. Just as the Soviets focused on disinformation for Europe to sway minds away from the U.S. and towards the Eastern bloc, today Russia focuses on the EU to propel fears and uncertainties and move Europe away from U.S. alliances. However, unlike during the Cold War, U.S. attempts and willingness to combat these campaigns for Europe are limited and shifts depending on the political situation. This situation highlights that changes must be made. The EU itself needs to establish better practices and enhance resources for organizations fighting fake news. Changes are already beginning in the wake of lawsuits and media attention towards private enterprises and social media platforms. However, revamping governing institutions would allow the quick, concise, and widely accessible means of stopping fake news, especially in the digitized world.

Difficulties in the Digital Age

Despite similarities between the European Union's response to disinformation during the Cold War and today, there also exist key differences. Long-term consequences of digitization and socialization due to the rise of the Internet especially highlight these distinctions. New technologies allow for greater communication across boundaries but also create new potential vehicles for fake news stories to proliferate quickly before being found out. This contrasts greatly with the mostly traditional forms of Soviet disinformation presented within Europe during the Cold War. Communication today is cheaper, more readily accessible, and democratized globally. However, greater challenges emerge as a result for assuring accuracy and unbiased information. Fake news stories today can spread much faster over Facebook than over radios and TV from the past due to the capabilities of new technology to speedily connect previously isolated audiences through communication devices like cellphones and the Internet.

More so than the issues the EU historically faced in combatting disinformation and fake news stories -- especially in terms of the Soviet Union during the Cold War and Russia today -- the world today faces a huge influx of information allowing malicious information to continue. Popular issues of governmental regulation and privacy vis a vis social media and the during the digital revolution make it difficult to create policy that actually successfully helps against mass proliferation of fake news. Until these graver concerns are properly dealt with globally, regions like Europe face a near impossible challenge to properly combat digitally-spread disinformation created by well-established fake news generators such as Russia. Until international intervention measures properly justify and showcase the importance of preventing malicious information spread for ensuring global unity and peace, private enterprises will remain the chief apparatus of restricting disinformation as bureaucratic inefficiency and political polarization plague government decision-making. –

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Inside Out: How Misinformation in Myanmar Transformed from Facebook Posts to Official Government Policy

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Daniel Kent

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Facebook and Ethnic Cleansing

A fall from grace is perhaps the best way to describe the change in Myanmar over the least several years. Up until 2017, foreign investment was booming, international governmental support was surging, and reform was taking root against seemingly impossible odds.

Sadly, this optimism was not to last. In 2017, reports of widespread displacement and killings erupted in the western Rakhine state of Myanmar. Security forces, backed and supported by the powerful military junta, burned Rohingya communities to the ground and drove people from their homes. Current data indicates that 725,000 people were displaced, and another some 10,000 may have been killed[1]. Displaced people from the Rakhine state migrated across the border into neighboring Bangladesh, creating the biggest refugee camp in the world – Kutapalong, which currently holds around 600,000 people.[2] Responding to these events, Western governments reimposed many of the previous sanctions that had been largely lifted in 2012.[3] To date, the most optimistic reports indicate that a vanishingly small 600 individuals or so have returned to their homes in Myanmar, despite official words of goodwill from the Burmese government after an international outcry.[4]

The role of misinformation in fomenting and accelerating this crisis cannot be understated. Facebook is the most widely used website in Myanmar, and in much of the country is synonymous with the internet itself. It was particularly important as the breeding grounds for much of the country-wide animosity and vitriol towards the Rohingya. As Thant Myint-U points out in his book The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st Century, there are deep-rooted unresolved issues of race and nationalism in Myanmar, stemming in part from the days of British colonialism. But rather than help resolve these deep-

> **Governments should become aware of the increasing importance that social media networks have on discourse and information and hold these platforms accountable for the false and violence-stoking actors on them.**

seated issues, as is implied in its mission to "give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together,"[5] quite the opposite took place. Facebook was used as gas to the fire, heightening attention to isolated incidents of racial violence, spreading misinformation, and reinforcing stereotypes of the Rohingya minority -- with gruesome results in the western states.

In many ways, this was the predictable end to a series of missteps on Facebook's part. The Silicon Valley ethos of 'growth at all costs' prevented them from seeing the clear warning signs. Facebook had zero employees in Myanmar, and after several years of exponential growth and millions of users posting daily, had only 4 Burmese-speaking content moderators by 2015 operating out of a skyscraper in Manila, Philippines.[6] In such a context, it is unsurprising that they were caught flat-footed, slow, and unsure how to respond to escalating violent rhetoric on their platform.

In 2018, a report from Business and Social Responsibility (BSR) found that members of the powerful military establishment had used Facebook, through both open and veiled means, to spread disinformation about the Rohingya minority.[7] Other reports detailed how military leaders impersonated trusted Burmese celebrities online (such as a beauty queen with an unusual penchant for spreading military misinformation) and posted false information including photos that were incorrectly attributed as from Myanmar.[8]

Facebook responded by increasing content moderation, hiring Burmese speakers, and other efforts outlined in the BSR report for their operations in Myanmar. Despite this, the spread of misinformation has not quelled since Facebook began to bring its house in order. It continues to pour through and out of the country: the conduit and content has simply changed. Namely, as official government policy.

Besides tarnishing Facebook's reputation and Myanmar's as a place worthy of international investment, perhaps the most poignant change was the international community's reevaluation of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. While it may be unsurprising for the military junta to spread misinformation about the Rohingya as a threat to Burmese society, it was surprising when in the Hague, in front of the International Criminal Court, Aung San Suu

Kyi insisted on her government's innocence. The seemingly sole concession made during the hearings was her statement that "It cannot be ruled out that disproportionate force was used by members of the Defense Services in some cases, in disregard of international humanitarian law."[9] This statement and others like it are a vast misrepresentation of what took place, diminishing the tragedy (and the government's role in it) and refuted by the official fact-finding report of the UN, which was based on interviews with individuals as well as remotely sensed data.

Shortly after Aung San Suu Kyi's testimony in late 2019, the Burmese government released an internal commission report detailing their assessment of events.[10] While it did acknowledge that war crimes took place, it was ultimately an attempt to burnish the government's reputation. The extent of the atrocities were underplayed, and some ignored. Thus, it seems that although the platform on which the misinformation is propagated has changed, the spread of the misinformation itself has not. Rather than openly disparaging the Rohingya minority, official government policy has now become to negate and erode a consensus on what took place.

The Military Coup

Of course, all of these events must now also be viewed within the prism of the recent successful coup by the military, the widespread popular backlash to that coup, and the brutal military crackdown in response. The original justification for the military's overturn of the election results – which would have put Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party in a supermajority – was that there were "irregularities" in the voting results. Election officials and international observers in Myanmar still dispute these assertions. The military then arrested Suu Kyi and her president, U Win Myint, with fabricated charges of importing walkie talkies and interacting with a crowd during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, as millions of people protest this abuse of power, the military junta has consistently downplayed the number of protestors arrested or killed. Such pronouncements by the military junta reflect the reality that power has become more important than truth. This can also be seen in the country's formerly vibrant free press being put under severe censure and regulation by the acting government; in fact, five independent media organizations had their media licenses revoked, and dozens of reporters have been arrested.[11]

While events stemming from the coup are still quickly unfolding, tech companies have responded by de-platforming Myanmar's military rulers, such as on YouTube and Facebook, for their use of the platforms to spread misinformation.[12] Western governments have imposed even harsher sanctions, making Myanmar once again a pariah internationally. The Burmese government has responded to these actions by simply stating: "We must learn to walk with only a few friends."[13]

Acting Before Crises

Governments should become aware of the increasing importance that social media networks have on discourse and information and hold these platforms accountable for the false and violence-stoking actors on them. This is necessary to prevent similar events – including genocide and military coups – of the scale that has been seen in Myanmar. The United States is in a unique position to act here. As the social media headquarters of the world, regulators should consider ways to require social media companies to identify and limit the spread of violent misinformation globally, well in advance of its eventual physical manifestations.

One of the most central roles of public diplomacy is to spread information about a government's priorities to foreign populations, and ultimately burnish its image in the eyes of the world. Unfortunately, official government lines from Myanmar – from the devastation of the Rohingya to the military's overthrow of the democratically-elected government –are attempting to rewrite history. Indeed, Facebook has since ramped up content moderation, hired more Burmese speakers, and joined other social networks in de-platforming the military leadership. Yet, for the ravaged Rohingya population, it is too little, too late. – 🐍

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Instigated on Facebook: Disinformation as the Greatest Security Threat in the Digital Age

Lucy Santora

One person posting about how an election was rigged may raise some eyebrows. When millions of people are, you might end up with a military coup such as that on January 6th at the US Capitol. Or even a brutal systematic slaughter like that seen across the Pacific. What do the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar and the January 6th Insurrection at the US Capitol have in common? Both found traction and an audience on Facebook. While Facebook is not to blame for these events, their role in integrating fringe ideas into the mainstream must be more deeply understood, given that our world is increasingly driven by virtual connection. We are living in a digital age, where facts are disputed and truths are half-told. Global security now necessitates monitoring the spread of dangerous misinformation. Facebook and its social media colleagues must take responsibility for their role in this security frontier and shape operations to protect free speech while mediating dangerous misinformation. At the same time, governments in developed nations must acknowledge the potential of social media to subvert public diplomacy campaigns and work alongside companies like Facebook to mitigate these challenges.

> We are living in a digital age, where facts are disputed and truths are half-told. Global security now necessitates monitoring the spread of dangerous misinformation.

Facebook rose to prominence during the liberalization of Myanmar because it was the only online platform at the time that supported Burmese text. Suddenly, in a population of 50 million, 18 million people were using Facebook as their main platform of communication. Thet Swei Win, director of Synergy, an organization that promotes social harmony between ethnic groups in Myanmar, told the BBC that "Facebook is being weaponized."[1] It has become inundated with anti-Rohingya rhetoric, from slurs to images of rape and torture, and at worst, the type of baseless claims that have led to violence towards the Rohingya in the physical world. A Reuters investigation in August of 2018 found more than 1,000 Burmese posts attacking Muslims.[2] Although hate speech and threats aren't officially tolerated on Facebook, these posts stayed up and were shared repeatedly.

Indeed, these types of posts violate Facebook's community guidelines, which state "We believe that all people are equal in dignity and rights. We expect that people will respect the dignity of others and not harass or degrade others."[3] However, Facebook lacks the manpower to enforce these guidelines in Myanmar. In 2014 Facebook only had one Burmese-speaking

content monitor, which increased to 4 in 2015 and 60 by 2018. Even with 100 content monitors, that's still at least 180,000 accounts per employee. Facebook started hiring more content monitors and focusing increased resources in removing 484 pages, 157 accounts, and 17 groups that promoted human rights abuses. Hence, Facebook must invest in hiring enough personnel to monitor their platform in every available language, especially when a threat presents itself. Their slow reaction to invest in Burmese language speakers allowed the dangerous misinformation to fester and incite more death.

To be clear, Facebook cannot and should not be blamed for the genocide of the Rohingya people. Thet Swei Win succinctly explained the role of the social media company: "I wouldn't say Facebook is directly involved in ethnic cleansing, but there is a responsibility they had to take proper actions to avoid becoming an instigator of genocide."[4] Their platform was used in a propaganda campaign, the ugly twin of public diplomacy. Companies and governments alike must come to terms with the fact that the same tools that provide impactful public diplomacy strategies can also be wielded for malicious purposes. The issue is not relegated to one corner of the world, it's happening on different scales across the globe.

In the United States, we see misinformation pushed to mainstream with the QAnon conspiracy theory and increased involvement in white supremacist groups. In October 2020, Facebook decided to ban any groups, pages, or accounts that represent QAnon after their attempt to mitigate the spread of the conspiracy failed.[5] QAnon has been identified as a potential domestic terror threat by the FBI, and while its followers aren't expressly calling for genocide, their mission is subversive to democracy.

Distorted and outright wrong information wasn't limited to QAnon, but spread through overlapping circles. In early February, Facebook announced that they would be removing false claims about COVID-19 vaccines as anti-vax messaging started to enter the mainstream and contributed to people refusing to get the vaccine and cancelling their appointments.[6] Misinformation on the vaccine had begun spreading long before February, but Facebook was slow to react. The company faced tough decisions in the wake of the January 6th insurrection and ultimately decided to remove then President Donald Trump from its platform – a move that some champion and others lambasted. Some argue that the first amendment protects his right to say whatever he may choose through all available mediums, while others take a more nuanced approach and factor in his position of power and the content of his words rather than just his ability to share them. It raises questions of free speech, but maybe this could have been avoided, to an extent, if Facebook had reacted more swiftly to the dangerous trends on its site.

Facebook must continue to take responsibility for the dangerous messaging on its platform and work to react more expediently to ways their algorithms and third party actors amplify fringe movements. It is easy to demand that social media conglomerates like Facebook be more proactive in their approach. However, their only option is speeding up their reaction time. They couldn't anticipate that the algorithm that suggests soccer mom's join the local women's book club would also bring far-right extremists to QAnon and anti-vax groups that would explode during a pandemic election year. We must call on Facebook and its peers to monitor content trends closely and react with timely intensity and precision. I recommend three policy shifts to mitigate this growing challenge:

1. Adequate investment in native language speakers to monitor content with an influx of capital when a crisis spikes or a trend of misinformation is detected

2. React swiftly in removing false information

3. Communicate policy updates to all users and group administrators to clarify the changes and share with users how to flag inappropriate content.

Facebook cannot fix the situation in Myanmar. The recent military coup and recapture of Aung San Su Kyi demonstrates the fragility of the country's fight for democracy. Since the military instituted a total media blackout to prevent citizens from passing information or strategizing in groups on Facebook, it is clear that they are acutely aware that Facebook's ability to bring people together can be a massive liability when trying to consolidate power. The case of Myanmar should be utilized as a case study of extremism bred online and how these platforms can be used as tools to both bolster and destroy democracy. All too often, we assume that tragedies in the far corners of the world couldn't happen in a highly-developed nation. The digital age laughs at such assumptions – we must be more vigilant and more demanding of Facebook and its social media colleagues. – 𝒫𝒟

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Misinformation in the Global South is Becoming an International Export

Taylor Wilcox

Over the last few years, social media's negative impact on issues such as foreign election interference, trolling, doxing, and misinformation spreading have made headlines. Disinformation, the purposeful spreading of false or misleading information, and misinformation, the sharing or spreading of false or misleading information unknowingly, have run rampant across platforms. Politicians, celebrities, and regular citizens alike have access to tools that can be used to purposely interfere and spread disinformation online, and perhaps the most infamous example was Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when Russians pretending to be Americans spread fake news targeting America's political divisions. Similarly, during the coronavirus pandemic, misinformation has run rampant on social media with false claims regarding where the outbreak first began and the safety of the vaccines. Despite these dangers, social media platforms have largely been unable to stay ahead of the controversial content produced on their sites and have only found ways to mitigate it. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are public; these companies can see all posted content, yet they continuously struggle to keep up with take-down requests, flagged disinformation, and other harmful posts. The struggle is even greater for messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, and other apps that are rapidly gaining popularity, especially in the Global South, where zero-rating policies and cheaper devices provide more people with access than ever before. As usage rates have grown, more actors, especially domestic politicians, have used these malicious tools for their own gain. With these disinformation tools being used successfully within the borders of their home countries, there is also a growing trend on these actors' willingness to expand their disinformation campaigns globally.

WhatsApp is the dominant social media messaging platform in many African countries, including Nigeria. It also plays host to a slew of disinformation. In February 2019 during the Nigerian presidential elections, WhatsApp witnessed a heightened amount of disinformation posts amongst users in the country. A group of researchers conducted a study on WhatsApp's impact on elections in Nigeria by interviewing prominent figures such as political officials and influencers as well as conducting a survey of over 1,000 individuals.[1] The study found that politicians and parties created vast networks of WhatsApp groups to spread false, politically motivated messages through regional leaders and hierarchies made up of staff and volunteers. Another notable aspect of the study was the use of influencers, including the use of Nollywood actors to spread campaign messages to wider audiences. In this instance, influencers leveraged their followers toward one political party or candidate in the hopes that they will be rewarded in the future, perhaps with a job in the new administration, if the candidate is successful. These individuals, many of them young people, gained a new set of social media skills from their work in the election that may have looked promising to the most infamous actor utilizing disinformation campaigns to peddle their agenda - Russia. A recent CNN report showed a connection between Russia's Internet Research Agency, that meddled in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and troll farms based in Nigeria. The Nigerian troll farm's job was to masquerade as Americans on various social media platforms to spread false information. While it is unclear if the group used WhatsApp, accounts from both Facebook and Instagram that were linked to the troll farm were used to spread disinformation. It is clear from this example that in a globalized world enabled by technology, problematic usage can spread from being an internal problem within a country to have international implications, especially once the skillset is present.[2]

Over 400 million people in India use WhatsApp, making it the platform's largest market worldwide. It has become so ingrained in the social fabric of Indian Internet users that many have claimed it is their main source of information.[3] In 2019, misinformation spread during the country's general election, causing concern worldwide. However, there were already well-documented instances of violence caused by the spread of false information on WhatsApp before the elections. Mobs of angry users have killed innocent people on more than one occasion based on something they read on WhatsApp.[4] More than a third of the posts catalogued during the election were forwarded, which means the person sharing had no way of knowing where the information came from, making it more difficult to know whether it was true or not. The most shared items were more often videos and photos than text. This type of content has also proven to be more likely to go viral.[5] Politically motivated disinformation campaigns target India's already deep divides on categories such as religion, ethnicity, and caste. The party that ultimately won Prime Minister

Modi's re-election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had the largest social media network, with estimates that around 1.2 million volunteers worked digitally to get him re-elected. India, with its large population and stark societal divisions, has become especially vulnerable to misinformation, leading it to be a prime target for research and the testing of new policies aimed at mitigation. While misinformation has run rampant within the country, actors that identified success using these tactics have also been found to target issues with disinformation campaigns outside the country and most notably, the relationship between India and Pakistan.[6] While internally the spread of misinformation on social media has heightened tensions between the two nations, actors have also targeted international institutions. DisinfoLab, a non-governmental organization based in the E.U., released a report finding that organizations connected to India have pedaled fake news targeting the United Nations and European Union with disinformation against Pakistan through a vast network of fake news organizations and NGOs.[7] The skillset political parties utilized within their country during the elections has also clearly been utilized while in office to affect foreign policy outcomes and influence global public opinion.

Commonalities from studies of populations of the Global South show that some of the most vulnerable groups to disinformation are populations with a general lack of trust in political figures, widespread usage of WhatsApp without full access to other parts of the internet, the spreading of false and misleading information coming from sources perceived as trustworthy (influencers), lack of digital literacy, and coordinated information campaigns from major political parties and/or foreign actors with the capacity to produce a large troll infrastructure. As on other social media platforms, it is clear that false or misleading images and videos are shared more widely than true content. These recurring themes show that already deep divisions in society are being used to the advantage of politicians and others and that microtargeted messaging is aiding their success. Platforms that offer end-to-end encryption, like WhatsApp and Telegram, are making this kind of action easier to produce and harder to detect with global implications. Actors have realized that their ability to influence events in their own country can translate to success and influence worldwide.

While social media companies have made some strides toward mitigating bad actors' ability to use their technology to spread messages quickly, more needs to be done. Research on these efforts to show effectiveness or limitations should be funded. The companies should share as much information as possible with academics to ensure accurate measures while maintaining their stringent privacy standards. Mitigation efforts focusing on the average user will need to be the responsibility of many stakeholders, including governments, international institutions, and civil society, not just the platform companies' responsibility. There will never be a time where 100% of misinformation is stopped, but as more and more people worldwide gain access to the internet, more opportunity arises for nefarious actors to take advantage to meet their own goals on both domestic and international scales. A multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to at the very least limit the spread and minimize dangerous consequences. The kinds of international agreements and programming necessary to achieve any success will need a vast public diplomacy initiative that brings together all of the necessary components for success. The stakes are only rising as more actors realize the success of using social media platforms for dangerous and effective influence campaigns, which are soon to become the norm rather than an outlier.

> **There will never be a time where 100% of misinformation is stopped, but as more and more people worldwide gain access to the internet, more opportunity arises for nefarious actors to take advantage to meet their own goals on both domestic and international scales.**

Taylor Wilcox

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When Propaganda Comes Home

Thomas Brodey

Social media has become a new battlefield for subversive public diplomacy campaigns. Since Russia began using fake personas and bots to influence social media in other countries, many experts have viewed covert social media operations as a valuable new tool. Countries such as Israel, China, and Turkey have developed sophisticated covert influence operations on social media, aimed at secretly shifting public opinion and creating divisions in other countries, often through disinformation.[1] These operations can be huge. China's task force, nicknamed the "50 Cent Army," enlists hundreds of thousands of Chinese Internet users to spread Chinese propaganda on social media and message boards to people in Taiwan, Korea, and the United States among other countries. In recent years, the United States has become a new, but enthusiastic, player in this global arms race. Yet as a liberal democracy, the US faces many unique challenges, stemming from the contradiction between its domestic values and foreign policy. The United States' efforts may well backfire on its domestic politics and weaken the very liberal system the covert campaigns were intended to protect.

The United States uses subversive public diplomacy frequently in its many global conflicts. Perhaps the most unsettling instance is Operation Earnest Voice, a campaign designed to change public opinion in the Middle East through the creation of fake social media personas, or "sockpuppets."[2] Each agent working on Operation Earnest Voice operates up to ten sockpuppets, posing variously as civilians, officials, or even terrorists themselves. In doing so, the military hopes to disrupt terrorist communication and spread pro-American propaganda.

The idea of a liberal democracy like the United States using covert operations to observe and influence foreigners is a controversial one. Ever since the infamous Committee on Public Information during World War I, Americans have been wary of government propaganda at home. Abroad, however, the United States has

It may seem like an insignificant issue, but when propaganda campaigns come home to roost, it can have serious practical consequences.

managed countless propaganda campaigns during the Cold War and beyond, ranging from Voice of America to the more recent Radio Sawa, a Middle Eastern program broadcasting pro-American news to Arab teens.[3] For over seventy years, the US has maintained this fragile balance, distributing propaganda abroad while carefully restricting it at home.

But in modern times, this fine line is growing more and more blurred. Take the most important piece of propaganda legislation still on the books, the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act, which forbids American agencies from exposing Americans to propaganda meant for foreigners.[4] In theory, this means that any messages the United States government distributes abroad will remain abroad. But in reality, the situation is far murkier.

In the new age of mass Internet disinformation, the Smith-Mundt Act has become rickety and ineffective. For one thing, it applies primarily to the State Department. This was not a problem during the Cold War because the vast majority of propaganda occurred through the State Department, but as the government has grown, many departments not covered by the Smith-Mundt Act have begun to produce foreign propaganda, such as the Department of Defense. For the DoD, the fine line drawn by the Smith-Mundt Act is no line at all, which is why the more subversive forms of diplomacy, such as Operation Earnest Voice, have been managed by the Defense Department.

But the more pressing problem facing the Smith-Mundt Act, and American propaganda abroad in general, is that public diplomacy is no longer a targeted weapon. When the Smith-Mundt act was written, American agencies could broadcast radio programs like Voice of America far away from domestic audiences, without risk of accidentally spreading the information to Americans. Now, with the Internet, a message intended for Pakistanis is easily visible to Internet users in France, Russia, or even the United States itself. Any American

with access to the Internet can go onto Middle Eastern social media sites, translate posts via Google Translate, and potentially be exposed to propaganda created by Operation Earnest Voice.

It may seem like an insignificant issue, but when propaganda campaigns come home to roost, it can have serious practical consequences. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union created a conspiracy theory that HIV/AIDS had been created by the United States to hurt its Black population. In recent years, the legacies of that very disinformation campaign have begun a resurgence on the Russian Internet. Many Russians began to believe their own propaganda, and so fell prey to a virulent series of conspiracy theories saying that AIDS was an American fabrication which could not affect Russians.[5] That's part of the reason Russian HIV/AIDS cases have more than doubled over the last decade, while cases have decreased in much of the rest of the world.

This sort of boomerang effect is harmful enough in Russia, but in the United States, where the public expects honesty and transparency from its government, it has the potential to lead to rampant distrust. Knowledge of Russian Twitter bots has already sown dissent in American politics, and as Americans come into closer contact with fake accounts created by their own government, that dissent can only amplify and continue to eat away at American civil society.

In many ways, it seems the United States has given up on reimposing the limit between subversive information at home and abroad. The 2012 Smith-Mundt Modernization Act further weakened the Smith-Mundt Act, particularly on

the Internet.[6] Yet the illusion of separation remains, even as the line between foreign and domestic propaganda becomes more and more blurred in practice. The time is fast approaching where the United States will have to make a decision. The government will either have to spare the American public by stopping its subversive activities abroad, or continue with its current policies with the understanding that any subversive messages it sends out into the world will eventually return home to roost. – 🏴

Thomas Brodey

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Historical Comparison of Falsely Reporting People of Color to Police

Desmond Jordan

Since the inception of the United States, power imbalances fester oppressive systems that disproportionately affect people of color. What U.S. citizens now understand to be modern-day police in fact grew from an abusive force known as the Slave Patrol.[1] Created in 1704, the Slave Patrol ensured no enslaved persons escaped captivity and to prevent any potential uprisings in the colonies. Throughout time, this act of "maintaining public order" evolved into an expansive system of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Historically, white people are the sole beneficiaries of this system. Reported incidents reveal the sheer number of white people seeking to take further advantage of their public servants by falsely reporting people of color of committing heinous crimes. Weaponizing privilege and race is no new phenomenon. However, in this context, the ease of a 9-1-1 cell phone dial has further expedited the summoning of police officers with the intent to cause harm on Black and Brown bodies.
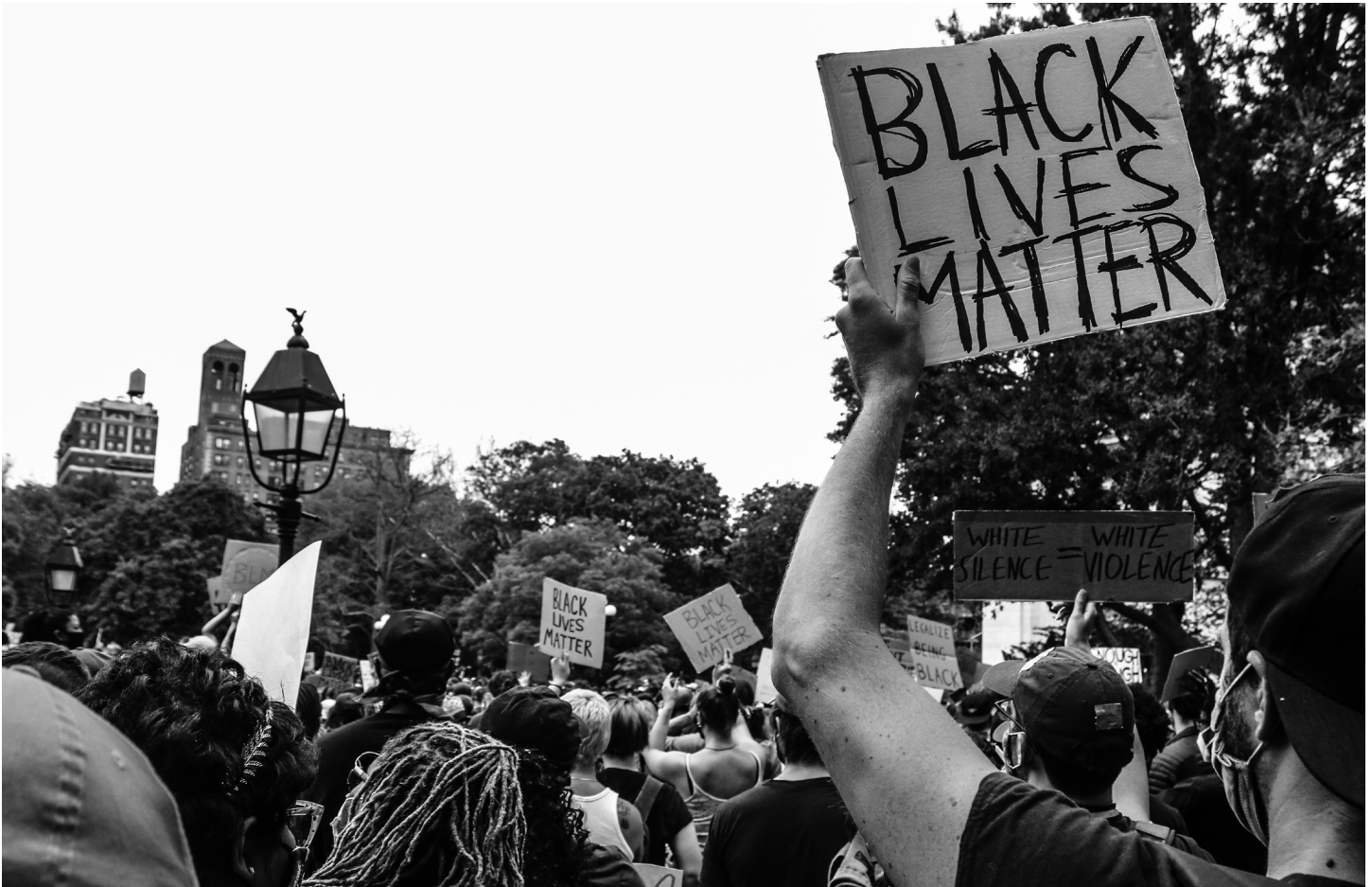
The Threat Does Not Exist

Information can either be true or false. The former is indisputable, fact-based claims or statements. The latter, for example, can speak to the rise of disinformation delivered to publics from even the highest levels of government. When sharing false information to the police, this crime takes on a heightened degree of malignity when the accuser is targeting an innocent person of color. For instance, an incident in Central Park involving Amy Cooper (a white woman) maliciously calling the police on Christian Cooper (a black man) made headline news, leading to public humiliation and job loss.[2]

On May 25, 2020, Christian Cooper asked Ms. Cooper to leash her dog which she had roaming freely, against park rules. Upon the request, Ms. Cooper became retaliatory in a frenzy, eventually falsely reporting an attack by Christian Cooper to the police: "There is an African American man! I am in Central Park! He is recording me and threatening myself and my dog! "Please send the cops immediately!" Ms. Cooper weaponized law enforcement to exert power despite her breaking the rules. No threat existed, yet Ms. Cooper created a threat by inserting Christian Cooper's Black identity as a [false] signifier that her life was in danger and she needs someone to "save" her. Ms. Cooper

followed the playbook of a system derived from racism and white supremacist patriarchy. As a white woman, she felt confident enough her fabricated account held weight over that of a black man's. Worse still, despite Christian Cooper videorecording this encounter on his phone, people like Ms. Cooper still have the gall to try and manipulate situations. This makes one wonder how many unrecorded incidents have occurred when Black people were threatened with use of force by police officers.

This Part of History Should Not Repeat Itself

Before modern-day technology and communication systems, one's speech was how information was disseminated. Before Christopher Columbus set foot on what is deemed the Americas, Native people abundantly inhabited the land. The sheer disinformation from European colonizers about Native people set the stage for centuries-long pillaging and occupation. Colonialism thrives when an "adversary" is identified to conquer. Hence, colonizers characterized Native culture as savagery, labeling Natives to uncivilized beasts that must be tamed. This harmful narrative was and still is used to justify the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Native land occupation is still occurring. The stripping

of infrastructural resources on Native reservations has never ceased. Like Black Americans, Natives too experience racism that ironically is met with an arm of its system, law enforcement.

On April 30, 2018, Lorraine Kahneratokwas Gray received a disturbing call from her two Native sons about a white woman calling the police on them during a college tour at Colorado State University.[3] Thomas Kanewakeron Gray (19) and Lloyd Skanahwati Gray (17) were falsely reported to the police for looking and acting suspiciously in black clothing on Brown skin. Upon the arrival of police, the brothers were pulled out of their tour group and questioned by the officers. Something as simple as a distressed white woman summoning the police on the grounds of uncomfortability and falsehoods can dangerously escalate a situation. As police are expected to investigate information presented to them, white people consistently abuse this system, reinforcing law enforcement as a tool of oppression.

Colonialism thrives when an "adversary" is identified to conquer.

Immigrants Mind Their Business, and So Should You

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency was created in March 2003 to secure the country from cross-border criminal activity, especially the prevention of acts of terrorism.[4] Born from the post-911 Department of Homeland Security installment, ICE grew to be an obscure agency that eventually merged with the [then] Customs and Border Protection force. It is misinformation to spread that undocumented immigrants crossing the border (specifically the U.S.-Mexico border) heighten the national security threat and overall public safety. Intermixing bureaucracy with racism produces an uptick of racial profiling and unlawful arrests of immigrants.

On April 1, 2018, Luke Macke, a Pennsylvania state trooper, pulled over a passenger van for a traffic violation.[5] Upon asking the driver for his license and registration, Macke became suspicious of the Latino driver's other Latino passengers. He then proceeded to open the van door to demand the nine other passengers show legal documentation they were allowed in the U.S. These men, being undocumented immigrants, were unable to immediately provide this information, and so was arrested and turned over to ICE for deportation. One must ask, would Macke demand a group of white passengers to show their "papers?" Is the demand of one's immigration status inherently warranted by police? The irrelevance of this information during a traffic stop is recognized. Yet still, it is manipulated into an agent of persecution.

Your Identity is Being Used Against You

Respect for self encompasses regard for one's identity. One's identity can be multifaceted, from cultural identifiers, ethnicity, and nationality. The U.S. prides itself on being a nation of nations; though in practice, there appears to be a hierarchy. Looking past the specific outliers that refute the claim, it is evident that a person of color's ethnicity can be used against them in a charged manner. This sensitive, yet distinct information can foreshadow if a civilian dispute will escalate or deescalate upon the arrival of police. Legal ramifications are being discussed more broadly in the field of law so as to make false reports against people of color a hate crime. For centuries, municipal police forces have taken oaths to protect and serve the people, but an institution born out of white supremacy cannot wholly commit to such a promise. Instead, the people of color endure innumerous cases of the police protecting and serving nervous white people. –🔁

Desmond Jordan

Desmond Jordan is a USC Public Diplomacy Master's Candidate and a CPD Student Fellow. Born in Washington D.C., Desmond received his bachelor's degree from George Mason University where he double-majored in global affairs and journalism. Desmond's professional experience includes global peacebuilding at the United States Institute of Peace where his work focuses on rehabilitating and reintegrating people disengaging from violent extremist conflicts. His other experiences include youth empowerment and education where he volunteers for international exchange programs and public charity. Upon graduation, Desmond will return to Washington, D.C. to pursue a career in the U.S. Foreign Service through his Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellowship. He aspires to be a Public Diplomacy Officer in the Foreign Service, and plans to use his CPD and USC experience to aid in his future, diplomatic endeavors.

PEACE AND PARTNERSHIP IN THE INFORMATION AGE

"Our Candidate is Democracy" Securing Democratic Elections as an Instrument of Public Diplomacy

Adam Clayton Powell III

For decades, the United States and other democracies have helped support democratic movements and governments around the world, arguably as a core mission of public diplomacy. But this mission, and the tools used to support it, have evolved markedly in recent years, as attacks on democratic governments and democracy itself have intensified and changed.

In the U.S., awareness of these new attacks and attack tools became widespread after the 2016 digital attack on the Democratic National Committee that duplicated and publicized private, embarrassing emails. But that attack was, if anything, rudimentary compared to other attempts to disrupt elections in the U.S. and other democracies.

For decades, the United States and other democracies have helped support democratic movements and governments around the world, arguably as a core mission of public diplomacy.

Authoritarian regimes in China, Iran, and especially Russia now devote considerable resources to attacking democracies. And in China, Iran, and especially Russia, they fund research and development teams that are developing new, ever more effective ways of disrupting democracies, to reduce support for democratically elected governments, and to reduce confidence in democracy itself.

Responding to and preventing digital attacks on elections and democracy has become a core mission of the U.S. and other democracies around the world. Sharing intelligence and tools to safeguard democracy has become part of the public diplomacy toolkit in capitals from Washington to Canberra, New Delhi to London, and Kiev to Jakarta.

Much of this is done by government agencies in public and behind the scenes. But much of it is also done by NGOs, large and small, some little known to the general public.

One of the best known NGOs in this space is the National Endowment for Democracy, which has one of its operating programs, the International Forum for Democratic Studies, focusing entirely on many of the "sharp power" issues raised by authoritarian states' attacks on democratic elections and democracies. For example, its Sharp Power and Democratic Resilience series just published a report showing how China uses "disinformation, censorship, and influence over key nodes in the information flow"

that go well beyond simply "telling China's story."[1]

Another well-known NGO, the German Marshall Fund of the U.S., is a second example. One of its programs, the Alliance for Securing Democracy, has as its slogan "Securing Democracy from Authoritarian Interference." Its mission: "We develop comprehensive strategies for government, private sector, and civil society to defend against, deter, and raise the costs on foreign state actors' efforts to undermine democracy and democratic institutions. The Alliance works to publicly document and expose these actors' ongoing efforts to subvert democracy in the United States, in Europe, and around the world." Much of its work consists of public forums and reports, described in "Our Work."[2]

But for an example of a broader, deeper set of initiatives designed to defend democratic elections, consider an NGO with a lower public profile: the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, which has worked in more than 100 countries around the world. With decades of experience, IFES focuses on elections throughout the world, most of which will attract much attention in the U.S. IFES is already active on the ground in most of these countries, helping election officials fight digital interference and corruption.

Now, defending elections against cyber-attacks is very much part of IFES's agenda. In Ukraine, for example, the U.S. and Europe have been "involved in day-to-day assistance" with IFES to combat electronic attacks from Russia, focusing on Moscow's attempts to interfere with Ukrainian elections.[3]

Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz, IFES Director for Europe and Eurasia, explained that their work is not just in Ukraine but throughout the region. Speaking at a University of Southern California forum last year, she described her organization's tracking of election interference from Russia, China, and Iran, "including disinformation, including cybersecurity." She added, "Increasingly, we have been providing technical assistance... to countries like Ukraine, the Republic of Georgia [and] Macedonia."[4]

Today, novel attacks on elections have created new legal issues for judges and courts around the world. So together with partners, to keep up with new technological and legal challenges, IFES has just launched Election Judgements, a global online tool that creates a "searchable, curated database of national election judgments from around the world is intended to facilitate the exchange of sound precedents across jurisdictions.[5] Designed for judges, election professionals, and researchers, each judgment added to the database includes a brief summary to provide

These are just some of the innovative tools that public diplomacy can use to combat evolving technological threats to democratic elections and to attempts to reduce confidence in democracy itself. Here is another way of seeing this, offered by Bob Shrum, who ran John Kerry's Presidential campaign in 2004: In the fall of 2019, at a meeting to plan USC's national election cybersecurity initiative, told we were planning a 50-state campaign but without a candidate, Shrum responded, "You're wrong: Your candidate is Democracy."

And so it is now, more than ever: For American public diplomacy, our candidate is democracy.

a snapshot of the decision, as well as a link to the full written decision. Judgments can be searched by region, country, legal issue, language, court, and date."[6]

IFES also responded to the impact on elections of the Covid pandemic, producing a guide shortly after the pandemic began, "Global Impact of Covid-19 on Elections," to alert governments around the world to ways the dates, places and, methods of voting were being changed, and to call on "its global network of election authorities, local partners and field offices to aggregate the latest information on election postponements, adjusted election dates and risk-mitigating strategies adopted during elections."[7]

IFES has also joined with hundreds of other organizations and individuals to show how the Covid pandemic is being used by authoritarian leaders to attack democratic elections and civil society in "A Call to Defend Democracy." "Authoritarian regimes, not surprisingly, are using the crisis to silence critics and tighten their political grip," warns the document. "But even some democratically elected governments are fighting the pandemic by amassing emergency powers that restrict human rights and enhance state surveillance without regard to legal constraints, parliamentary oversight, or timeframes for the restoration of constitutional order."[8]

Adam Clayton Powell III

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Response to COVID-19 Misinformation: How Can Each Social Sector Effectively Deal With it?

Leyi Zhang

In the early stages of COVID-19, the Washington Post reported on Americans' fright, referencing a post on Instagram that got much attention. The post incited violence, claiming that the shooting of every Asian in Chinatown is the only way to destroy COVID-19 in New York. This post was ultimately deleted since it violated the platform's policies.[1]

The seeds of hatred against Asians in America are rooted in considerable false information (e.g., conspiracy theories and biological weapons) that are forwarded on social platforms. Former President Donald J. Trump publicly argued that he was not a racist and begged people to protect the Asian-American community, despite himself using the term "Chinese virus" multiple times when talking about COVID-19. His use of this word has arguably changed the views and treatment of some Americans towards Asians. Additionally, his claims that the CDC's COVID-19 tracker, amongst other information related to the pandemic, was "fake news" added to the fears felt by Americans, not only towards Asians in America but the virus itself.[2]

The University of Michigan defines "fake news" as fabricated information without verifiable facts, sources or quotes, primarily recognized as propaganda, which attempts to mislead and influence an audience.[3] Instant and extensive information and dissemination on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google, and others can be edited by users themselves, with these platforms acting as a significant stage to spread fake news at will. It is worth noting that fake messages spread efficiently via content editing of AI automatic robots, and that these messages spread by the aforementioned accounts are often slanderous, malicious rumors.[4]

Spreading false information damages the truth and people's right to be informed and displays a particularly tight relationship to international diplomacy.

Spreading false information damages the truth and people's right to be informed and displays a particularly tight relationship to international diplomacy. The false information spread during the COVID-19 pandemic is seriously misleading and damaging to not only citizens' mental health but their physical health as well; for example, people were encouraged to drink disinfectant water to effectively defend themselves against viruses. Besides that, it also adversely affects a nation's reputation, social-democratic development, NGO reputation, and economic stability. In the United

States, The New York Times primarily accused Russia, China and Iran of carrying out inflammatory, false propaganda and speech interaction on a global scale. To be specific, the Kremlin is said to have publicized coronavirus conspiracy theories on some western audience-oriented websites, which had exaggerated or distorted the facts, causing the spread of fear. China's spreading of false news through social media, however, was more subtle.[5] An Italian journalist in Beijing admitted that, "The ongoing pandemic has triggered a large-scale propaganda war."[6]

In addition, false information spread during the COVID-19 pandemic will cause people to distrust their own government. As reported by a study done by Reuters investigating the trust of governments or public institutions in 10 nations, 39% of the COVID-19 rumors were directed at the government's anti-virus actions and policies; as a result, only 48% of people considered the information regarding viruses presented by the government reliable.[7] This data reveals that the anti-virus methods of governments in different nations are inefficient and full of loopholes.

For the aforementioned reason, governments, non-governmental organizations, social platforms, and educational institutions in various nations should fight together against false information spread internationally during the pandemic. In the following sections, we will explore what measures these sectors have taken to deal with COVID-19 false information and offer suggestions for how these sectors can work together to improve communication practices during future pandemics like COVID-19.

Governmental Efforts

In March 2020, Washington and Beijing reached temporary peace after China and the United States attacked each other over the spread of false COVID-19 information. Both sides agreed to stop and contain the false information concerning COVID-19, and the leaders of the two nations were willing to join hands to overcome the virus.[8] As Cull and Magnier wrote, politicians should not use the coronavirus to make gains with their own political interests. The government should instead cooperate with medical experts and the WHO to formulate effective strategies to attack the virus, letting experts speak.[9]

To that end, the European Union has launched a special website to explain and correct false coronavirus information. Moreover, the EU has cleared up the false

information spread that accused the alliance of lacking unity in member nations, restoring its international reputation. It has been regularly publishing the latest progress of nations' responses to the virus and discussing the medical reports with the media, the public, and medical experts.[10]

NGOs Efforts

Approximately 1,900 non-governmental organizations worldwide cooperated with the United Nations Propaganda Department to provide medical knowledge and resources on COVID-19 to nations and regions in need globally, as well as launched activities abiding by the WHO's pandemic response policy.[11] NGOs and the United Nations Propaganda Department jointly conducted false information activity investigations during the pandemic. NGOs accurately responded to clear up false information on social media; for example, the NGOs named Witness and Accountability Lab are assuming this task.[12]

Efforts by Social Media Platforms

Private social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Google) are essential channels for the proliferation of false information and have thus made considerable contributions to combating disinformation. For instance, Google has employed an "SOS Alert" to guide their search for coronavirus fake news in an attempt to acquire and promote accurate and fact-based information primarily originating from the WHO. Twitter has a dedicated page for COVID-19, which provides users with reliable virus news. Facebook works with Web Verification and the Department of Health to flag fake COVID-19 posts on its platform as fake content, notify users who have viewed them as inaccurate posts, and push updates that have already been posted by official authorities.[13] In addition, the three social platforms work together to advertise

free-of-charge for the WHO and to help disseminate useful COVID-19 information.[14]

Education Efforts

Nurturing journalists and media personnel's professional news literacy can effectively crack down on disseminating fake news regarding COVID-19. Dozens of media personnel in the Caribbean have efficiently received professional training in gaining the ability to report on pandemic diseases and identify false information. Africa built the COVID-19 Network Resource Sharing Center to train African journalists to convey objective and accurate information regarding COVID-19 to people.[15] These journalists have worked closely with media stations in marginalized communities in Africa to cope with information shortage and false information flooding taking place in remote areas.

Suggestions for Moving Forward

During a global pandemic like COVID-19, governments should be required to distinguish between domestic misinformation on social platforms and foreign political communication that complies solely with political interests. In response to false domestic information, the government should urge social platforms and technology companies to release officially verified, fact-based, and transparent data (preferably from the WHO) in a timely manner to counter false information accurately. They could regulate technology companies to exploit technology for accurate fake information data locating and tracking and the analysis of spoofing algorithms and search engines, as an attempt to provide the public with a set of optimal search engines that avoid fake information. The success of such public-private partnerships, for example, like the Global Internet Counter-Terrorism Forum[16] (organized by governments in partnership with Google, Facebook, Twitter, and
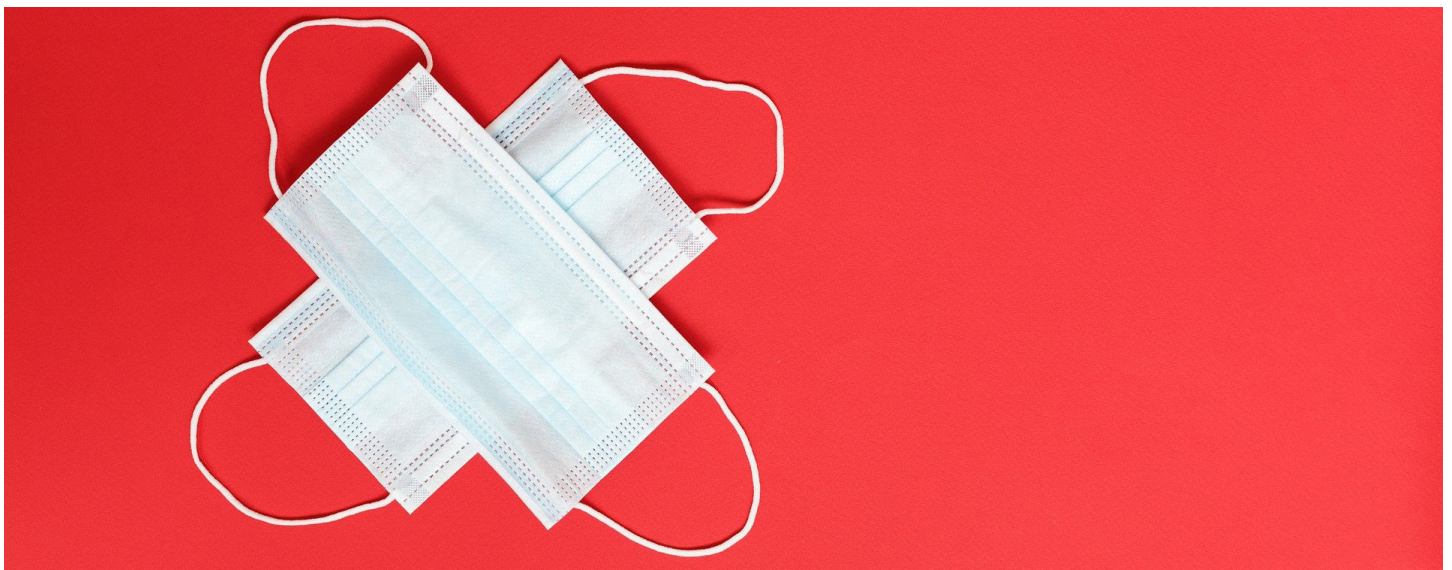
Microsoft), has been conducive to impeding online terrorism from spreading.

Moreover, the government should strive to supervise social platforms and delete information originating from the foreign extremism-based political organizations that aim to spread obvious political false information and racial hatred speech concerned with the coronavirus. The U.S.'s Global Engagement Center sets a good example for this, as it exposes, and attacks foreign false news propaganda intended to undermine U.S. and allied relations and destabilize U.S. society. It is committed to working with professionals familiar with foreign intelligence to access fake news material firsthand.[17]

NGOs can also play a role through cooperating with the WHO and social media platforms to build a public-official information dissemination network, which would enable NGOs to remove and correct false information existing on social media in time. In poor and remote areas without internet, NGOs are required to convey accurate information on pandemic prevention. For example, NGOs in developed nations helped developing nations like Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and others set up their own NGOs as well as coronavirus fact-checking teams. The teams' jobs were to track statistics related to the region's pandemic prevention and medical resources, provide the media with transparent data, crush false information descriptions of these areas, and call on the international community to provide effective resource assistance to these areas.

Furthermore, social media platforms themselves should stress two facts about themselves to aid in combating false information during a pandemic effectively, the first of which is that they are required to cooperate with official international institutions to disseminate accurate information. For example, the WHO, in cooperation with Facebook and WhatsApp, has published a multilingual guide about COVID-19 which could be spread to many countries on social platforms, thus enabling citizens around the world to unite to fight the epidemic. Moreover, the WHO cooperated with Viber to launch interactive chat robots capable of directly transmitting effective information.[18] Secondly, Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, once questioned whether they should permanently delete false information on Facebook, thereby revealing the powerful censorship mechanism of social media. With that said, governments and social platforms should exploit their collective capabilities to accurately define the types of false information seriously jeopardizing society, down-regulate its frequency, label it as false, or directly quote and refute this information from official accounts. Doing this will help both to avoid being accused of over-monitoring information and encourage people or professional journalists who are reluctant to risk political censorship to express their political free speech.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the aforementioned measures regarding education and media literacy apply to poor developing nations. By nurturing the media literacy of professional journalists, accurate information can be optimized and shared. Accordingly, journalists are capable of effectively transmitting the latest progress of the WHO and governments in attacking viruses and building a global network to disseminate information regarding the virus. Moreover, popularizing the act of distinguishing between true and false information and nurturing every citizen's abilities to distinguish false information is recognized as a remarkable progress being made in education, and this has the added bonus of helping people to better understand one another's cultures, values, and societies, which may help combat the marginalization of specific communities of people.

Conclusion

To tackle false information regarding COVID-19 and future pandemics, a global information-sharing network should be built for the governments, non-governmental organizations, education organizations, and social media platforms, enabling them to acquire, share, and enhance their knowledge. Nations should communicate closely, not for the sake of promoting their own political interests, but to help developing and developed nations address existing global health problems and help their citizens understand other countries' values and cultures. – 🔟

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The Human Element

Jonas Heering and Alistair Somerville

Bots. Troll farms. Deep fakes. All are now buzzwords in the world of online information operations. But these terms suggest that the problem of malign influence operations, specifically those conducted online, is primarily technological. However, as influence operations have evolved, especially since the 2016 U.S. election, it is increasingly clear that the spread of mis- and disinformation is a fundamentally human problem, exacerbated by technology. We are the target of these operations, and human beings' susceptibility to believe comforting false narratives and conspiracy theories can have deadly consequences, as the January 6 insurrection in the United States so shockingly demonstrated. Moreover, the problem blurs the lines between domestic and foreign policy, and therefore requires a new domestic and diplomatic response that draws on both the national and international policy tool kits.

As an October 2020 report from the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy highlighted, the human element of this problem means that ordinary citizens — alongside their governments — must also be part of the solution.[1] The Institute convened a group of experts in the field of information operations from government, think tanks, academia, and the private sector to provide insights and

recommendations on a path forward. The final report noted that attempts to mitigate the effects of information operations must take a whole-of-society approach, and that educators, journalists, and the private sector should all play an important role, alongside governments.

Ordinary users of social media platforms drive the problem but can also help to fix it. Not everyone who spreads misinformation (false information circulated unwittingly) or disinformation (false information disseminated intentionally) is a Russian bot. Far from it. Human beings drive the spread of false narratives, and people engage in this behavior based on a complex array of economic, political, and social motivations, or fall into it unwittingly.[2] While it is important to recognize the threat that fake social media accounts and developments in artificial intelligence pose to online political discourse through automation and fabrication, researchers should stay away from primarily technological explanations. It is all too easy to attribute disinformation to foreign actors without substantiation, and further compound the circulation of false narratives. False attribution can contribute "to a belief in pervasive inauthenticity," if people believe that every misleading political post online comes from a fake account.[3] In fact, many of those who
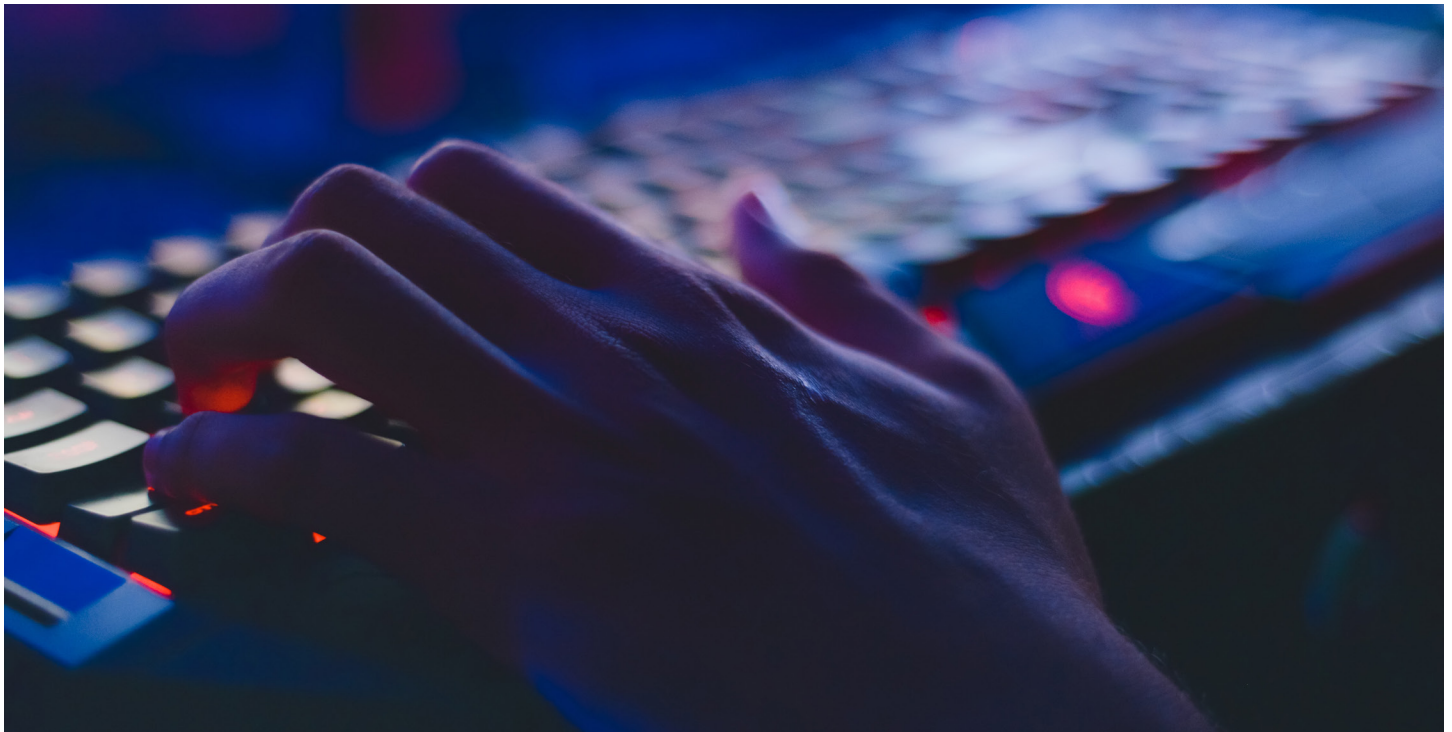
spread disinformation in the United States today are real American individuals: members of anti-vaccine Facebook groups and the former president are just two examples. Our discourse around mitigation strategies needs to reflect that reality, while acknowledging that all societies, not just in the United States, experience this problem.[4]

Take the 2016 case of two competing political Facebook groups: "Heart of Texas" and "United Muslims of America." Heart of Texas trafficked in conspiracies about Muslims implementing Sharia law in Texas, while United Muslims of America claimed to be on a mission to save "Islamic knowledge."[5] Escalating tensions between the two groups led to a physical standoff in the city of Houston in late spring 2016. However, the seemingly spontaneous protest was far from an organic expression of the two sides' First Amendment rights. Rather, American citizens found themselves as pawns in a Russian information operation. The now infamous Internet Research Agency, based in St. Petersburg, had created the rival Facebook groups and stoked the protests. Unwitting Americans did the rest, demonstrating one of the many ways in which foreign and domestic actors interact with each other in attempts to sow confusion and erode faith in democracy as a system of government.

The scenes at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 were the destructive consequence of years of disinformation. Only this time, disinformation did not come from the Kremlin but from the White House itself. Starting months before the election, then President Trump and his allies spread the false narrative that the election was rigged — the so-called #StopTheSteal campaign.[6] Republican leaders spread this disinformation so rapidly and so vociferously across all forms of media that thousands of Americans were convinced their violence was in defense of democracy.

In these cases, and in so many others, social media platforms provided a vehicle to inflame and exacerbate existing tensions. After-the-fact suspensions of accounts, as occurred after January's insurrection, were a necessary but insufficient band-aid. As the results of the 2020 U.S. election have only confirmed, partisanship leaves domestic political tensions ripe for exploitation through government propaganda and disinformation by foreign governments and domestic players. The electoral appeal of populist leaders across democratic societies suggests that divisive politics is here to stay, in an era where governments have largely failed to address deeply rooted economic problems and feelings of dislocation from the consequences of globalization.

The global spread of the QAnon conspiracy reminds us that the transnational flow of ideas across free societies paradoxically also poses challenges for the very system in which the spreaders live freely. Coordinated domestic and diplomatic responses are necessary. To borrow a phrase from the technology world: a fractured body politic, at least in the United States, seems to be a feature not a bug.

Easy as ABC?

As a human problem, spanning foreign and domestic, mitigating disinformation requires a human-focused solution. Technological progress may facilitate the quick removal of fake social media accounts and misleading posts as well as limit their virality, but content moderation alone is insufficient. Just as we will develop better technological tools to fight disinformation, so will those who disseminate it upgrade their toolkits. As the disinformation researcher Camille François has described it, attempts to tackle disinformation must focus on the "ABC": actors, behaviors, and content.[7] On both sides of the information operations divide, influential actors shape the behavior of others. In our attempts to mitigate the problem, we need "validators of truth" who can transcend partisan lines to help inform the public. In the past, news organizations and experts at trusted institutions fulfilled this function. Walter Cronkite, longtime anchor of the CBS Evening News, is the oft-hailed archetype. But the COVID-19 pandemic has once again exposed deep distrust of the media among Americans and non-Americans alike. Notably, between May 2020 and January 2021, trust in traditional media across 27 countries, including the United States, declined by an average of eight percent.[8]

Identifying new validators of truth requires creative solutions. In Finland, the government worked with social media influencers to spread factual information about COVID-19 among parts of the Finnish population that did not consume traditional media.[9] Flipboard, a popular news curation app, launched its Truth Seekers project just ahead of the U.S. election, which aims to highlight and elevate trusted, objective voices from across the American news media.[10] While such steps alone cannot overcome polarization in the United States, they are a crucial first step. We need champions, influencers, and validators who can transcend at least some of the myriad political divisions facing the country. This is also an important message for diplomats and other public diplomacy practitioners, who must identify and collaborate with local influencers around the world to combat false narratives, now more than ever.

> **As a human problem, spanning foreign and domestic, mitigating disinformation requires a human-focused solution.**

Another approach, in the United States and elsewhere, could enlist public libraries and librarians as independent sources of trusted information. Nearly 80 percent of Americans, across most age groups and ethnicities, trust public libraries to help them find reliable information.[11] Libraries offer the advantage of the existing public infrastructure to fight disinformation, rather than having to create new programs from scratch. More importantly, as trusted pillars in their local communities, libraries offer an excellent avenue for a highly-localized disinformation mitigation effort through better media literacy training. This approach can help overcome potential shortfalls in national fact-checking initiatives, which are often ineffective in countering the localized spread of disinformation, especially around election season.[12] Increased funding for public libraries, as well as public diplomacy initiatives overseas that harness local library capacity, can equip large parts of the population with the skills to identify mis- and disinformation.

While a human-centered approach toward mitigating disinformation should be front and center, its implementation must come in tandem with additional measures by technology companies. Our research at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy charted the steps forward that social media companies have taken so far — especially over the course of the U.S. presidential election and through attempts to tackle the spread of false information about the coronavirus.[13] Twitter decided to flag misleading information from President Trump and his associates about both the pandemic and election results, and acted rapidly to prevent users from sharing links to a misleading October 14 New York Post story about a laptop supposedly belonging to Joe Biden's son, Hunter. The story may have been an unwitting vector for a Russian information operation.[14] Content-focused actions by platforms can be effective, particularly in the short term — research by Zignal Labs showed that in the week after Twitter and other social media platforms removed accounts by Trump and his key allies in January, election fraud misinformation dropped by nearly 75 percent.[15]

However, these steps alone are not sufficient. Returning to Camille François' "ABC" moniker, the platforms' algorithms mean that user behavior is just as significant as content moderation in shaping the spread of information online. As the rapid growth of the pro-Trump "Stop the Steal" Facebook group — by as many as 1000 new members every ten seconds — showed, Facebook has unleashed an algorithm that it cannot itself control. This has created a transnational army of witting and unwitting "disinformers" on the platform, particularly within Facebook groups, as the researcher

Nina Jankowicz has described them.[16] This suggests that a long-term approach, to include media literacy education campaigns delivered by trusted local actors, is necessary. As Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy, Nathaniel Gleicher, noted in an October New York Times interview: "One of the most effective countermeasures in all of this is an informed public. So we have to do the best — all of us, not just Facebook — to amplify authentic information."[17]

A path forward

Linking up local, national, and international efforts to combat this problem will be a crucial challenge. Government officials around the world, from the local to the national level, will need to foster transnational cooperation to share best practices and learn from media literacy and election security success stories in countries like Taiwan and Finland. On the diplomatic level, the United States and other democracies should work together to pursue the development of international standards and norms to govern social media companies. Several countries have started to press ahead in designing new rules of platform governance, as exemplified by the European Union's Digital Services Act.[18] But information flows on social media transcend national and regional boundaries. Thus, to be truly effective, countries will have to cooperate to set new rules and standards.

At the societal level, local leaders and trusted influencers will be the key, especially in the United States. The role of trusted local players has implications for both U.S. foreign and domestic policy. Public diplomacy initiatives will require Washington to adopt the latest digital communications tools, while giving diplomats in the field enough freedom to shape narratives based on U.S. values that harness the power of local influential players. Conversely, stories of how U.S. embassies successfully counter disinformation abroad can hold valuable insights for how to address this issue domestically. For example, in Latvia, the U.S. embassy developed a program to provide media literacy skills training for school teachers.[19] In the United States, government initiatives to train teachers on how to conduct media literacy education could be modeled on these efforts.

Information operations and the spread of disinformation will never cease altogether, no matter what tech companies and governments do, and regardless of new technologies to detect false narratives. Some citizens will no doubt continue to believe whatever information fits their worldview, no matter where the information comes from or its veracity, but public awareness remains a critical element. To build long-term resilience, democracies will need stronger civil society, independent media, fact checkers, and governments that model transparency. Harnessing both the domestic and diplomatic toolkits will be crucial. – 🌐

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Schools and Caretakers' Role in Combatting Malicious Information

Krista Galleberg

The past several years have shown the threat and impact of subversive and malicious information on the United States' political and social systems. Citing such examples as foreign interference in our elections, viral disinformation about voter fraud, or widespread misinformation about the impact and legitimacy of Covid-19, many people worry about the role that malicious and subversive information plays in our society. This worry has become even more pronounced as new forms of social media continue to deliver high-speed, algorithmically-driven content at massive scale.

Nations have approached the challenge of subversive and malicious information in various ways, and some have met the challenge more successfully than others. Finland, for example, was rated the most successful at combating fake news in 2019 according to the Media Literacy Index by the European Policies Initiative (EuPI) of the Open Society Institute – Sofia. Researchers determined which nation's citizens were best equipped to detect malicious and subversive information in each nation's information ecosystem.[1]

To understand malicious or subversive information in the context of the United States, we must understand its scope and severity in the context of the larger information ecosystem. Nearly ten years ago, researchers calculated that the average person on an average day in the United

States encounters at least thirty four gigabytes (GBs) of information per day.[2] Assuming that approximately 300 photos equal one gigabyte of information, the average American sees the equivalent of over 10,000 pictures per day - and that was ten years ago!

According to more recent research, "fake news" comprises about 0.15% of all media information consumed in a single day in the United States.[3] To go back to the previous analogy, that works out to about 510 pictures worth of "fake news" per day for the average American who is seeing well over 10,000 pictures worth of information each day. Meanwhile, researchers found that fake news spreads more quickly on social media platforms such as Twitter than does real news. In fact, these researchers found that "falsehoods are 70% more likely to be retweeted on Twitter than the truth."[4] Together these insights show that both the rate of information spread and the huge quantity of information makes detecting and combating malicious information a challenging task for the average American.

Consider the following thought experiment: Out of 10,000 pictures worth of information that the average American sees each day, which 150 pictures are malicious or subversive? It's not immediately obvious.[5]

The importance of sifting through massive information sets to identify malicious, subversive, or misleading information is a vital life skill. And it has real impacts on our society. In the aftermath of the publication of that Media Literacy Index, a British journalist interviewed several Finnish leaders about their nation's success with critical literacy. Among the experts interviewed were Jussi Toivanen, the chief communications officer for the Finnish prime minister's office; Saara Jantunen, a senior researcher from the Finnish defense ministry; and Kari Kivinen, a Finnish educator with decades of experience in international education and now the head of Finland's information literacy program in their schools.[6] This selection of experts makes it clear that Finland considers critical literacy to be not only an important political issue, but also a pressing national defense and educational challenge.

As Henley explains in his article, Finnish society began taking media and information literacy extremely seriously in the wake of a cyber-attack by Russia on Finnish information systems. In the past several years, Finnish governmental bodies have collaborated with welfare organizations and other services to train thousands of front-line workers, including teachers and librarians, how to detect and combat misinformation. Their "broad, unique strategy" is meant to arm everyday Finnish citizens to detect and dismantle malicious

and subversive information in order to protect and strengthen Finland's autonomy and democracy. A key part of their national defense strategy to teach Finnish children how to be critically literate of media and information from a young age.

Kiviven, the educator in charge of Finland's media literacy program, explained the importance of training children to be critically literate: "Kids today don't read papers or watch TV news…They don't look for news, they stumble across it, on WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat … Or more precisely, an algorithm selects it, just for them. They must be able to approach it critically. Not cynically – we don't want them to think everyone lies – but critically." As part of Finland's campaign to arm their citizens with critical literacy skills, Kiviven explains, schools play a vital role.

The United States can learn key lessons from Finland's approach to media literacy. Of course, the United States is a very different society from Finland in both size and complexity. Finland is home to just over 5.5 million people; the United States is home to 331 million people. Finland is a small nation that borders Russia, a world superpower. The United States is a large nation that is protected by two large oceans. As of 2018, Finland's foreign born population is only 7.3% of the national population; in the same year, the United States' foreign born population reached record highs at 13.4% of the national population.[7] Therefore, the United States cannot simply import Finland's approach to combating malicious information, nor would we want to.

As American education researchers Glenn DeVoogd and Maureen McLoughlin put it, "no technique that promotes critical literacy can be exported to another setting without adapting it to that context."[8] In that spirit, the United States must find a way to learn from Finland's media literacy program, while adapting it to our unique context.

So what can the United States learn from Europe's leading nation in media and information literacy? One concrete actionable we can adopt is to explicitly teach media literacy to American children, at home and at school. Unlike Finland, the United States is unlikely to have a coordinated governmental plan or a mandated curriculum from which to teach children about critical media literacy. But teachers, parents and caregivers can start in small and meaningful ways to integrate media and information literacy into a child's day.

Consider the following approach that is part of Finland's school-based media literacy program: teachers use three

The importance of sifting through massive information sets to identify malicious, subversive, or misleading information is a vital life skill.

categories to teach critical literacy: "misinformation, or "mistakes"; disinformation, or "lies" and "hoaxes", which are false and spread deliberately to deceive; and malinformation, or "gossip", which may perhaps be correct but is intended to harm."[9] These categories - mistakes, lies, and gossip - can help American children, too, make sense of the big ideas foundational to critical literacy. Critical literacy awareness requires children to grapple with thorny questions such as, who is sharing this information? What is being said? What is not being said? Who benefits from this version of the story? To a critically literate reader, text is powerful - and that power can be both constructive and destructive.

Teachers and parents in the United States can help children practice this critical awareness in context, such as while reading familiar stories. When reading the Little Red Hen, for example, caretakers might ask young children, "Why do you think the animals tell Little Red Hen that they are too tired to help with the chores on the farm? Do you think that is true? Are the animals making a mistake? Telling a lie? Or spreading gossip?" One child might respond that they think the animals are telling the truth about being too tired. Another child might answer that they think the animals are telling a lie. It is not so important whether the child answers "correctly,"

especially when they are very young. What is more important is that children get in the habit of evaluating the information that they hear and read.

Another strategy that teachers and parents can use when teaching young children to be critically literate is to present multiple perspectives. As DeVoogd and McLoughlin explain, adults can model how to "raise questions and seek alternative explanations as a way of more fully acknowledging and understanding the complexity of the situation."[10] A familiar example is the parable of the blind men and the elephant: each blind man feels a different part of the elephant, and they each insist that they are the one who truly knows what an elephant looks like. One insists that an elephant is long and thin, like a snake; another insists that an elephant is tall and strong, like a palm tree; yet another insists that an elephant is flat and wide, like a stingray. Of course, we cannot truly understand what an elephant is like until we put all these perspectives together: the elephant's trunk, legs, and ears come together to create the animal itself.

Similarly, when discussing an event or story with a child, caretakers can take the opportunity to evaluate different perspectives on the event or story. Perhaps a

child got into a disagreement with a sibling - this can be an opportunity for the caretaker to model critical literacy. After listening to the child's perspective on the disagreement, the caretaker can model empathy and perspective taking. Sample questions to ask your child: How do you think your sibling felt when X happened? If you were your sibling, how would you feel if X happened? This can be an important moment to coach into multiple perspectives, and teach the danger of a single story.[11]

In summary, the United States can learn from Finland's approach to media literacy by empowering schools and families to teach critical literacy skills to young children. Children are increasingly exposed to digital content, and this content is not always accurate and well-intentioned. With intentional, explicit adult guidance, children can learn critical literacy skills that empower them as individuals while also strengthening our democracy against cyber-attacks. Children can learn to evaluate information and detect potential lies, gossip, or mistakes in the information they see and hear. This will empower American citizens to combat and detect malicious information and strengthen and protect our democracy. –

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Why the World Needs US Leadership on Developing Cyber Peace Goals

Scott J. Shackelford,

Valmiki Mukherjee, Durga Prasad Dube, & Kalea Miao

A common theme emerged during the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris – that the time for multilateral action to tackle common problems has arrived. As President Biden said, "We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again. Not to meet yesterday's challenges, but today's and tomorrow's challenges."[1] Although the list of such issues is as pressing as it is extensive, and must include fighting the pandemic, mitigating the worst effects of climate change, and addressing pervasive racial injustice, we believe that the list can and should include not just cybersecurity, but cyber peace.

Cyber Peace

The idea of 'cyber peace' has been around for some time, at least since 2008.[2] But reaching consensus on its scope and meaning has been difficult. It is not, though, the end of cyber attacks; however beneficial that outcome might be for business and society, it is as unlikely over the medium term as ending physical violence.[3] Realistically, the best that we can hope for is to make the cyber risks that we face, including misinformation, more manageable. As former Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper said, "the

cyber threat cannot be eliminated; rather, cyber risk must be managed."[4] As I argued in a recent book called Governing New Frontiers in the Information Age, by working together, and with leadership by the Biden administration and other engaged institutions and individuals, we can stop cyber war before it starts.[5] We can achieve this by laying the groundwork for a positive cyber peace that respects human rights, spreads Internet access along with cybersecurity best practices, strengthens and widens the circle of who's at the table making governance decisions, and promotes stability.

The U.S. government has been slow to embrace the concept, in part to maintain freedom of operation in a dynamic and increasingly vital strategic environment. As the historian Jason Healey argued back in 2014, "We [the U.S. government] like the fact that it is a Wild West because it lets us do more attack and exploitation."[6] That may be overstating the point, but it is true that the Trump administration took advantage of ambiguities in existing domestic and international law to, among other things, focus on a policy of "defend forward" or "persistent engagement" to actively target adversaries around the world.[7]

Although there have been benefits to adding an active defense component to U.S. cyber deterrence alongside efforts at improving deterrence-by-denial, the time has come for the Biden administration to re-engage in global dialogues about building a global culture of cybersecurity. This process should begin with the U.S. government signing on to the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace, and the Christchurch Call to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online. The U.S. government should also do more to lead the charge to not just define and spread cyber norms, but couple them with tangible efforts to build peace, stability, and sustainability in cyberspace.

Sustainable Development Goals

The two issues of climate change and cyber attacks are both driving forces shaping the twenty-first century. It has long been challenging to pin down the costs of both cyber attacks range from approximately $400 billion to more than $6 trillion annually (a figure, if accurate, larger than estimates for the global illegal drugs market). Similarly, the cost of climate change has been estimated at some $1.2 trillion annually, which if accurate is roughly 1.6 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP). The impact of these issues is expected to increase with time, making action now even more imperative.

In responding to the climate crisis, companies and countries have developed a diverse array of tools including certificate schemes and trustmarks as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The latter took the place of the Millennial Development

Goals, and were the result of years of negotiation and public diplomacy that crystallized into 17 initiatives ranging from the need to ensure access to a quality education to all children worldwide to promoting the use of clean, renewable energy.

Although far from perfect, the SDGs have seen success in mitigating certain pressing issues, such as child deaths and extreme poverty. They have also had a galvanizing impact that could be mirrored to further the cause of cyber peace. Learning from this history can help inform U.S. and allied efforts to shape and further foreign policy goals, and leverage initiatives such as exchange and visitor programs to build awareness and appreciation for the core tenants of cyber peace.

Cyber Peace Goals

During the inaugural Cyber Peace organized by Cyber Future Foundation (CFF), and held virtually on January 21, 2021, a diverse group of stakeholders including representatives from the United Nations Development Program, World Economic Forum, and Microsoft, along with leading grassroots organizations such as the Cyberpeace Institute, the Cyber Peace Foundation, the Cyber Future Society, gathered to discuss cyber peace. In particular, the group focused on the potential of crafting a set of Cyber Peace Goals, modeled after the SDGs, to help galvanize public attention on the topic, along with creating a Cyber Peace Index to track progress toward their realization. The list is a work in progress, and we welcome any and all input on them, but the group landed on the following notions:

1. Guarantee Universal Internet Access

2. Access Quality Cybersecurity Education

3. Spread Cyber Hygiene and Build Capacity

4. Defend Intellectual Property

5. Reduce Inequality

6. Empower Diverse Communities and Voices in Internet Governance

7. Defend Electoral Processes

8. Protect Privacy

9. Define Enforceable Cyber Norms

10. Protect Children and at-risk Groups Online

11. Safeguard Critical Infrastructure

12. Promote Lifecycle Security and Corporate Social Responsibility

13. Counter the Spread of Disinformation

14. Support Cybersecurity Frameworks & Best Practices

15. Encourage the Growth of Just, Resilient Institutions

16. Clarify Legal Standards and Cybersecurity Expectations

17. Deepen and Widen Collaborations to Fight Cybercrime, along with Terrorism and Cyber Conflict

These Goals build from many existing efforts and are aimed at galvanizing and engaging the public in a conversation that has for too long been relegated to policy forums and boardrooms. We freely admit that there are inevitable problems with this exercise,

mirroring criticisms of the SDGs themselves. However, the goal here is not to have the last word, but to merely start a conversation about the Internet we want in 2021, and for the foreseeable future.

Much like the climate crisis, we have a limited time to address prevailing cyber insecurity, manage disinformation, and come together around data governance best practices. The choice is not whether this process should be led from the top starting with the Biden administration, or the bottom – we need an 'all-of-the-above' approach to make cyber peace in our time a reality. We need you! – 📖

Professor Scott J. Shackelford

Professor Scott J. Shackelford serves on the faculty of Indiana University where he is Cybersecurity Program Chair along with being the Executive Director of the Ostrom Workshop. He is also an Affiliated Scholar at both the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and Stanford's Center for Internet and Society, as well as a Senior Fellow at the Center for Applied Cybersecurity Research, and a Term Member at the Council on Foreign Relations. Professor Shackelford has written more than 100 articles, book chapters, essays, and op-eds for diverse outlets He is also the author of The Internet of Things: What Everyone Needs to Know (Oxford University Press, 2020), Governing New Frontiers in the Information Age: Toward Cyber Peace (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and Managing Cyber Attacks in International Law, Business, and Relations: In Search of Cyber Peace (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Both Professor Shackelford's academic work and teaching have been recognized with numerous awards, including a Harvard University Research Fellowship, a Stanford University Hoover Institution National Fellowship, a Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study Distinguished Fellowship, the 2014 Indiana University Outstanding Junior Faculty Award, and the 2015 Elinor Ostrom Award.

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Endnotes

INFORMATION OVERLOAD: FROM FOUNDATIONS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Disinformation Getting Beyond the Botts and Trolls

By SCOTT W. RUSTON

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PEACE AND PARTNERSHIP IN THE INFORMATION AGE

"Our Candidate is Democracy" Securing Democratic Elections as an Instrument of Public Diplomacy

By ADAM CLAYTON POWELL III

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Schools and Caretakers' Role in Combating Malicious Information

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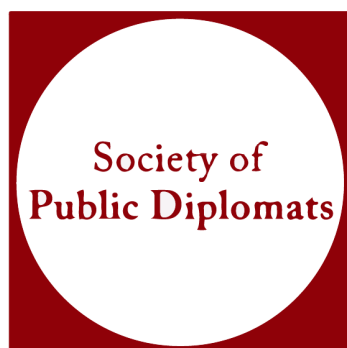
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By SCOTT SHACKELFORD, VALMIKI MUKHERJEE, DURGA PRASAD DUBE, & KALEA MIAO

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