

The background is a dark blue gradient with a starry, nebula-like texture. Overlaid on this are several faint, light-colored circular elements. On the left side, there is a vertical scale with numerical markings: 40, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, and 260. Various circular patterns, including solid lines, dashed lines, and arrows, are scattered across the frame, suggesting a technical or scientific theme.

PROPAGANDA & DISINFORMATION: DEVELOPMENT & HUMANITARIAN AID

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DEFINITION: PROPAGANDA

- Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell *Propaganda & Persuasion* (2014).
- *“Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”.*
- Appeals to emotions, prejudices, values rather than logic, reason
- Is political in motive
- Uses selective information
- *“Dealing with a government with whom mendacity is a science is an extremely difficult and delicate matter.” (Sec. State John Hay to President Roosevelt on Russian efforts to absorb Manchuria prior to the Russo-Japanese War, 1904)*

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

- Elizabeth Briant Lee and Alfred McClung Lee, *The Fine Art of Propaganda*, 1939
- **Bandwagon**
- **Testimonial**
- **Transfer**
- **Name-Calling**
- **Card Stacking**
- **Glittering Generalities**
- **Plain Folks**

DEFINITIONS: MIS/MAL/DIS/INFORMATION

- **European Commission – policy definitions**
- **misinformation** : when false information is shared, but no harm is meant
- **malinformation** : when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere
- **disinformation** : verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm [which is understood to be] threats to democratic political and policymaking processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security

PERSUASION & COERCION TOOL KIT: *TARGETING & WEAPONIZING HUMAN COGNITION*

Disinformation/Propaganda

Targeting, weaponizing human cognition

Memes

Symbol

Spectacle

Data mining

Bots/Spam

Diplomacy and public relations

Advertising

Info/Entertainment/News

”Research”

Conspiracism/Horror/Absurdity/Myth making/ambiguity

Trolling/Doxing

THE NEUROPSYCHOLOGY OF DISINFORMATION

- Robert Sapolsky, neurobiologist
- Disinformation is as addictive as any illegal drug
- Why?
- Dopamine response in human brain
 - reward for reaching goal
 - Dopamine spikes more when there's only a 50/50 chance of a payoff – the power of maybe
 - In the information space, if news, opinion show, YouTube channel etc. can be anticipated, less dopamine. Need more and more sensational stuff to get the same hit. See Alex Jones
 - Shoshana Zubhoff – the addiction economy

DISINFORMATION AND GROUP THINK



- Robert Sapolsky - 3 line test
- Individuals tested alone
- Individuals tested with 10 other actors
- Corridor follow up
- Follow up months later
- Brain activity observed and measured
- 75% went along to get along with wrong information, even though they knew it was wrong
- Further studies – over months, hippocampus will actively rewrite memory

DISINFORMATION EFFECTS

- Mobilisation
- Pacification
- Politically motivated violence/radicalization/terrorism
- Epistemic destabilization
- Chilling effects on public discourse/journalism/marginalized groups
- Governance paralysis, breaking public trust
- Complete erosion of socio/political systems, usually democratic

THE GLOBAL DISINFORMATION & PROPAGANDA ECOSYSTEM

- Has been highly successful in driving destabilization of global security order
- Almost always part of a comprehensive influence/grey zone/hybrid/ cyber/ economic/critical infrastructure campaign
- Most disinformation actors from far right/ authoritarian end of political spectrum, with some notable exceptions
- State actors like Russia – to prepare ground for swift, successful territorial warfare, but also destabilization for profit (Africa)
- Foreign interference, works best with domestic partners
- Depends on information asymmetry and mass surveillance techniques
- Dissemination platforms highly concentrated
- Data privacy regularly compromised on mass scale – sold to state and private actors
- Disinformation & propaganda content and practices becoming mainstreamed – every conflict or major political/policy now has a disinformation component
- Infection even more chronic in the global south
- Attention/addiction economy - extreme content central to the business models of major social platforms and is lucrative source of income for other actors like spam companies, PR agencies, influencer armies
- Many attempted fixes only having a marginal effect

BRIEF PRE-HISTORY OF DISINFORMATION



POLITICAL TECHNOLOGISTS

Vladislav Surkov: Lead author of Putinism
'Sovereign democracy'
Ukraine Novorossiya project
Poet

'I am proud that I was part of the reconquest. This was the first open geopolitical counterattack by Russia [against the West] and such a decisive one.'

INFLUENCE OPERATIONS: BREXIT & TRUMP

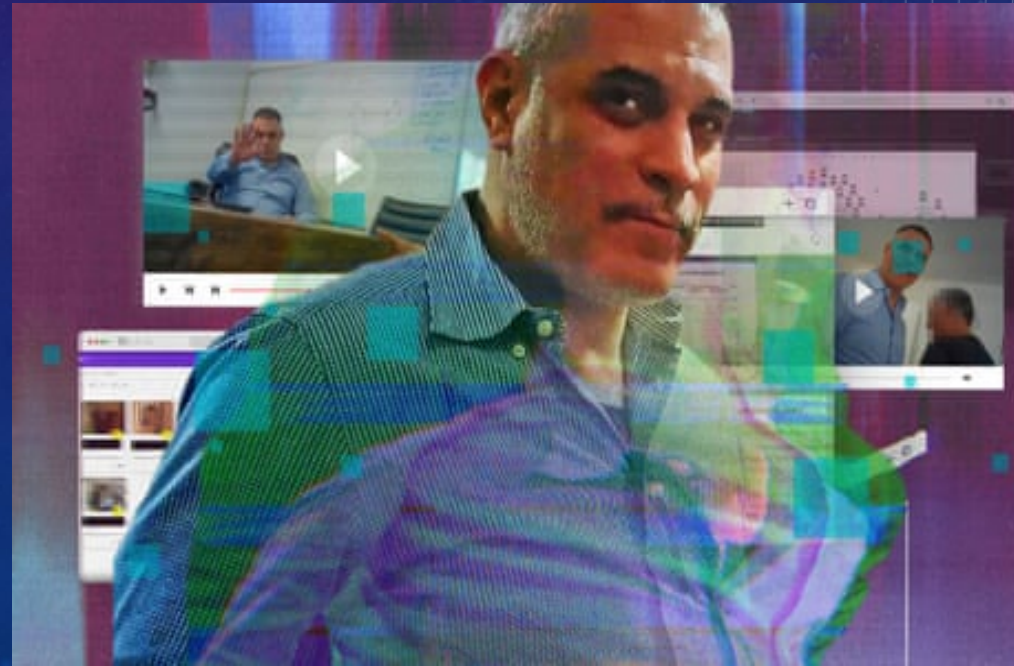
- Russia, Cambridge Analytica, Steve Bannon, Oleg Deripaska, Paul Manafort, Konstantin Kilimnik, IRA, Prigozhin etc.
- Hack and leak, Democratic Party server, GRU
- Elite influence campaign
- Disinformation meets culture wars
- The Big Lie and J6
- Ukraine RT and Fox symbiosis, Solovyov, Carlson, Simonyan et. al

DISINFORMATION ENTREPRENEURS: THE ENTERTAINERS

- Radio Rush Limbaugh and imitators
- Cable TV, Fox, News Max etc.
- Paula Fox
- Alex Jones
- Joe Rogan
- Donald Trump
- RFK Jr

DISINFORMATION & PR ENTREPRENEURS: FOR HIRE

- Tal Hanan: Team Jorge, election hacking
- Chris Rufo, CRT astro turfing (Moms for Liberrty)
- IRA, Prigozhin and Wagner, Africa



DISINFORMATION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

- Developing world subject to proxy information warfare – eg: Mali, Solomon Islands, South Africa, India
- Local elites: disinformation for hire, electoral manipulation, targeting minority/vulnerable groups – using elements of Trump/Brexit playbook
- Targeting aid workers - Syria White Helmets, Ukraine ICRC
- Health disinformation
- Climate and disaster disinformation
- Propaganda & disinformation through religious vectors
- Propaganda & disinformation through commercial vectors
- Narratives: Anti-colonialism, pro-traditional values, strongman, anti-science, conspiracism, anti-Semitic
- Actors: Local elites, PR firms, spam companies, mercenaries, political technologists, overseas disinformation networks, international religious organisations, social media platforms, criminal networks, influencer armies

PROPAGANDA & DISINFORMATION IN THE PACIFIC

- Climate disasters: Hawaii wildfires, China & Russia used AI generated images to originate and amplify, narrative "Hawaii not Ukraine", climate denial, directed energy weapons
- China disinformation and propaganda networks, also influential in traditional media. North American propaganda and disinformation prevalent also
- Access to information tech of any kind remains an issue in many areas
- "media environment in the region is desperate"

PROPAGANDA & DISINFORMATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

- Disinformation a huge industry, often financially motivated, Instagram click farms serve a global influencer clientele, can be repurposed for elections
- Governments have embraced disinformation campaigns while at the same time legislating against disinformation to stifle dissent
- Vehicle for anti-China hate speech
- Indonesia: West Papua, criminalization of disinformation and public order, politics, health, religion and environment, Russian propaganda
- Civil society approaches to combatting disinformation politics may be best approach

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AID: OPERATIONAL

- Permanent feature of operating environment
- Dirty data worked into programs
- Aid and development workers often a target
- Local resistance to aid programs, suppression of voices
- Loss of local partners
- Insider threat
- Sudden amplification of violence

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AID: POLITICAL/CUMULATIVE

- Chronic geopolitical destabilization, too dangerous for aid and development orgs to operate
- Continual erosion of democratic principles and institutions in Indo-Pacific
- More favorable environment for organized political violence, organized crime, kleptocrats, dark money, generalized corruption and erosion of rule of law
- Erosion of credible information about the region
- Erosion of democracy at home –no aid budget, or budget redirected to approved groups only, for illiberal ends
- Erosion of the idea of a global community and development aid

ACTIONS: AID AND WHOLE OF NATION

- Need for disinformation training and disinformation response teams in development /humanitarian agencies for rapid response, bre-bunking and strategic narrative
- Work cross institutionally /multilaterals/donors/allies – see US
- Prepare and have strategic and tactical narratives ready
- Safe, accurate information space as a development goal – legislative frameworks
- Training in disinformation literacy
- Establishment of regionwide disinformation observatories
- Hosting credible journalists who have been forced to leave homeland, supporting public interest journalist networks in country – reporting on news they cannot
- Australia as a provider of credible news regionally and supporter of international networks of investigative journalist and open-source intelligence analysts
- Support and training of local news
- Aid and developments workers as truth tellers
- Work with partners to regulate platforms
- Some of this work being done (Australia PACMAS program, US - but needs to be scaled up to meet the challenge