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Social Media Warriors: Leveraging a New Battlespace

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ABSTRACT: This article explains modern efforts to create a new battlespace within the civil societies of Western countries. This battlespace consists of the internet, social media, and other technologies that can be used to foment social and political discontent. The article includes recommendations for countering such efforts.

Civil society presents a fundamental blind spot in the American military understanding of warfare. Long associated by philosophers as a bulwark against tyranny in liberal democracies, civil society has been weaponized by hostile actors, such as Russia and China, and violent nonstate actors, such as the Islamic State. The adversaries' strategy involves infiltrating Western civil society in order to foment dissent and create breaches along ethnic, racial, religious, and socioeconomic lines. These actions generate and intensify hyperpartisanship on both sides of the political spectrum for the purposes of deepening societal divisions. Such new tactics differ from their historical antecedents in which hostile adversaries (Cold War Communist states) supported one side of Western civil society (left-wing political movements) in hopes of shifting political attitudes.

The new tactics create ideologically sympathetic individuals who desire policy changes that align with the adversarial state's ideology or that promote detrimental and self-destructive views; these views, in turn, can undermine societal cohesion while disrupting foreign policy choices. This approach accentuates attacks on Western civil society across multiple dimensions by using social media warriors who indirectly receive orders from, and are secretly paid by, Moscow, Beijing, and other Western adversaries. These social media warriors and their handlers regard the internet as an unguarded, undersurveilled, and ill-defined human-to-human interface that can be easily manipulated. Subsequently, social media forums such as Facebook and Twitter become a battlespace of ideas, injected with disinformation in hopes of influencing individual, societal, and political behavior.[1]

As a consequence, the discourse of Western civil society is shaped in ways fundamentally hostile to the effective functioning of pluralist

1 Ashley Hoffman, "Here Are the Memes That Russian Operatives Shared To Influence 2016," *Time*, November 1, 2017; and Timothy P. McGeehan, "Countering Russian Disinformation," *Parameters* 48, no.1 (Spring 2018): 49–57.

liberal democracies.[2] Fomenting dissension by spreading divisive social media posts and polarizing memes leads citizens in Western societies to like, and to share, the messages as well as to advocate for the ideas, thus creating a destructive civil discourse. In a homogenous society, such as Iceland, this type of campaign has less impact because the societal differences are primarily economic. But in countries with a variety of cultural and historical cleavages, malicious civil discourse deepens existing divisions that make social relations more acrimonious.

Disinformation tactics against civil societies in the United States and its Western allies are not particularly new.[3] The novelty, however, is the use of free and open civil discourse, which is traditionally a Western strength, as the center of sociocultural strategy aimed at manipulating civil society into a new battlespace. The first component of this strategy relies on the existence of the internet and the use of social media. With the internet as the medium, individuals conduct essential societal interactions through a variety of apps and platforms that provide instantaneous, uberefficient, daily social contacts without the boundaries that affected civil interaction during the twentieth century. Anti-Western actors use these virtual networks to produce and to breed ideas degenerative to stable societal norms, which ultimately impact policy debates and elections.[4]

The second component of this strategy involves the exploitation of the rules that govern pluralist-liberal democracies. When an adversarial state recruits an informer, it is an act of espionage. But a private group providing material, ideational, rhetorical, and inspirational support to a community, industry lobbying, or religious group is squarely within the protected legacy of free speech. In this manner, adversaries search for and capitalize on the weaknesses available to them. Many virulent Salafi-Jihadists preach Western destruction in Western capitals and large cosmopolitan cities where their dialogue is legally protected. But such liberty is nonexistent in their tyrannical home regimes.

The cumulative impact of this dual strategy not only degrades institutions, norms, and values but also increases distrust toward the government, undermining Western policy-making capacity and state power. With statistics indicating public trust in the American government is near an all-time low and trending downward, the adversarial strategy of further breaching civil society and democratic processes seems to be effective.[5] In fact, a poll commissioned by former President George W. Bush and former Vice President Joe Biden found 55 percent

2 Douglas A. Ollivant, "The Rise of the Hybrid Warriors: From Ukraine to the Middle East," War on the Rocks, March 9, 2016; and Jahara W. Matisek, "The Blockchain Arms Race: America vs. China," *National Interest*, March 14, 2018. The Iranians, Turks, Syrians, and many other governments are relying on hybrid warriors to influence the Middle East and beyond.

3 Tyler Quinn, "The Bear's Side of the Story: Russian Political and Information Warfare," Strategy Bridge, June 27, 2018; and Emilio J. Iasiello, "Russia's Improved Information Operations: From Georgia to Crimea," *Parameters* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 51–63.

4 Hoffman, "Here Are the Memes."

5 "Public Trust in Government: 1958–2017," Pew Research Center, December 14, 2017.

of respondents thought democracy was "weak and 68 percent believe[d] it is getting weaker."[6]

The process of creating societal rifts to expand existing divisions, and to generate self-destructive behaviors was called *schismogenesis* in 1935.[7] The Office of Strategic Services, an institutional precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency, used this theory in the South Pacific during World War II to sow disunity among enemy fighters and to create schisms in communities supportive of Japanese rule.[8] Likewise, the recent rise of extremist politics in the United States and in western Europe provides growing evidence that schismogenesis appears to have been fueled by Russia, China, and numerous other hostile actors who can benefit from the cost-effective method of weakening the rules-based international order without directly confronting the West.[9]

The internet, formed by multiple layers of human-to-human and machine-to-machine interfaces that are neither malevolent nor benevolent, was intended to be self-governing. The permissible legal architecture guarantees individual and community freedoms, especially in liberal democracies that are easily exploitable by hybrid actors who face few mechanisms of enforcement. Moreover, the ubiquity of connected devices and Western dependency on them makes it easier for adversarial powers to penetrate systems and create social media chaos.

The value of freedom to liberal societies further complicates efforts to detect hostile attempts to create schismogenesis because recognizing the activity requires substantial domestic surveillance. Three years into the conflict in the Donbass, for example, scholars in the Ukraine finally began to document the various ways in which Russia had achieved schismogenesis.[10] Thus, the decision to let the internet be self-governed has inadvertently meant agencies that are supposed to protect the citizenry are unable to, save for exceptional circumstances. Moreover, the conceptual and analytical void created by these protections prevents operational countermeasures.

Exacerbating this challenge is the informational asymmetry between countries, which enables hybrid actors to exploit their knowledge of what America and Europe are in the context of the strengths and the weaknesses of their own countries. Because the average Western citizen

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6 James Hohmann, "The Daily 202: A Poll Commissioned by Bush and Biden Shows Americans Losing Confidence in Democracy," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2018.

7 Gregory Bateson, "Culture Contact and Schismogenesis," *Man* 35 (December 1935): 178–83; and David Lipset, *Gregory Bateson: The Legacy of a Scientist* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), 143–44.

8 David H. Price, "Gregory Bateson and the OSS: World War II and Bateson's Assessment of Applied Anthropology," *Human Organization* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 379–84; and David H. Price, *Anthropological Intelligence: The Deployment and Neglect of American Anthropology in the Second World War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 239–42.

9 William M. Downs, "Democracy's New Normal: The Impact of Extremist Parties," *World Politics Review*, January 22, 2013; William Hague, "Western Voters Are Very Angry—and Extremists Are One Crisis Away from Power," *Telegraph*, January 26, 2016; and Mike Lofgren, "Trump, Putin, and the Alt-Right International," *Atlantic*, October 31, 2016.

10 Roman Dodonov et al., "Polemological Paradigm of Hybrid War Research," *Philosophy and Cosmology* 19 (2017): 97–109.

has little knowledge of these factors, external adversaries can hire inexpensive part-time social media experts to insert polarizing rhetoric into ongoing political, societal, and cultural debates inside the West.

Current conceptions of this kind of warfare typically focus on how hostile actors best combine kinetic and nonkinetic tactics to degrade US power and influence in various regions.[11] General Philip M. Breedlove recently expressed concern for the false narrative affecting the West.[12] This is a step in the right direction, but it does not take into account the depth and severity of schismogenesis created with the intent of dismantling Western civil society. This oversight is because the West's adversaries rely on a strategy of socially embedding hostility into the political discourse, converting civil society from a constructive force into a destructive one.

Civil society is the total of nonstate organizations that represent the collective interests of its members by checking state power, upholding public interest, and shaping public discourse.[13] In one form, political parties maintain the republican tradition and pluralistic form of interest representation in the United States.[14] Other such organizations include industry lobbyists; civil rights organizations; ethnic-, racial-, and religious-specific organizations; and environmental activist groups. Registered lobbyists, which can advance the interests of foreign governments, can range from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to lesser-known groups that work on behalf of actors such as India, Armenia, and Kurdistan.[15] Other domestic lobbying groups promote national issues such as racial equality or prison reform and some represent local organizations such as a neighborhood humane society.

Civil society is vital for holding diverse populations together and is a defining strength of Western liberal democracies. Liberal, in the sense of John Locke, means a system that highlights and safeguards individual freedoms.[16] In such a system, citizens have the right to form nonviolent contractual organizations that sustain economic and political competition as well as a vibrant civil society.[17] These alliances provide an outlet for political discourse from motivated individuals who pursue their interests in finding moderate policies and agreements without resorting

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11 John J. Kruzel, "'Hybrid War' To Pull US Military in Two Directions, Flournoy Says," Department of Defense, May 4, 2009.

12 Jim Garamone, "NATO Commander Breedlove Discusses Implications of Hybrid War," Department of Defense, March 23, 2015.

13 Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

14 Theda Skocpol, "Civil Society in the United States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109–21.

15 John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Ashok Sharma, "Behind Modi: The Growing Influence of the India Lobby," *Conversation*, June 27, 2017; Ömer Taşpınar, "The Armenian Lobby and Azerbaijan: Strange Bedfellows in Washington," Brookings, March 8, 2010; and Eric Lipton, "Iraqi Kurds Build Washington Lobbying Machine to Fund War Against ISIS," *New York Times*, May 6, 2016.

16 John Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

17 Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, "Violence and the Rise of Open-Access Orders," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 55–68.

to destructive behaviors such as violence. In this manner, negative and positive freedoms are balanced, rights are not trampled on by either side of the political spectrum, and the two remain in constant contention.[18]

Communal organizations that constitute civil society are a necessary foundation for liberty and resisting the tyrannical tendencies of unchecked executive power.[19] Some organizations are goal driven, and as a consequence, can be utterly uncivil, profoundly illiberal, and easily manipulated if the organizational objectives align with those of a patron or patrons. Before the Nazi party took control of Germany in the early 1930s, the country was dense with civil society organizations and had more Nobel Prize winners than any other country in the world.[20] Unfortunately, many civil society organizations, to include the Nazi movement, happened to be explicitly Fascist, or contained Fascist sympathizers, despite Germany being highly sophisticated and educated.

The strength of American democracy similarly promotes the same rights for all groups whether they are white supremacist groups in Charlottesville, Virginia, or Black Lives Matter marches in Houston, Texas. This equality allows true freedom of thought and expression, which makes America diverse and interesting—and creates a vulnerability. Ideas contrary to the opinions of Western authorities do not lead to harassment and oppression. And Western laws, traditions, and norms prevent governments from investigating the actions of civil society organizations without reasonable cause. Hybrid actors, therefore, work around the edges of this system to find its weaknesses and achieve their goals. Consequently, civil society becomes a battlespace as social media actors pose as insiders to create and to foment societal schisms.

The same concept applies when external actors deliberately use aspects of the liberal order, integrated markets, and lax immigration rules for elites and professionals. Each individual has the potential to undermine the strengths of each aspect of civil society from within, sometimes with the complicity of individuals, sometimes via inadvertent foreign threats, and sometimes through soft power influence such as China's educational exchanges through the Confucius Institute.[21]

Another fundamental distinction in a liberal democracy is that every citizen has the same rights: each has the opportunity to reach the highest ranks in public and private life. The late General John Shalikashvili, for example, was a refugee during World War II who immigrated to the

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18 Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 162–66.

19 Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie* 25, no. 2 (1984): 185–213.

20 Ulrich Herbert, "Berlin: The Persecution of Jews and German Society," in *Civil Society and the Holocaust: International Perspectives on Resistance and Rescue*, ed. Anders Jerichow and Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke (New York: Humanity in Action, 2013), 75–83; Sheri Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (April 1997): 401–29; Michael Mann, Fascists (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162–205; and "All Nobel Prizes," Nobel Prize, accessed March 6, 2019, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-prizes/.

21 Falk Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17, no. 1 (March 2012): 53–76.

United States at age 16 and learned English by watching westerns. He became the first foreign-born chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[22] This uniquely American moment was possible only because of the country's liberal democratic tradition. In contrast, an American citizen immigrating to many other countries might struggle to get a lowly job, let alone be allowed to achieve the highest military rank. Nefarious governments, state affiliated proxies, and nonstate actors can, and do, exploit this defining liberal principle.

In one such exploitation of Western politics, oligarchs affiliated with the Chinese government bankrolled the winning campaign of a naturalized Australian citizen during a parliamentary election, which essentially made the politician a stooge of the Chinese government.[23] In New Zealand, a naturalized Chinese citizen who had been a high-ranking military member in a Chinese intelligence agency is an elected member of parliament; his wife, who is also a naturalized citizen, runs a civil society organization that explicitly advocates for positions favorable to the Chinese Communist Party.[24] Evidence likewise suggests Beijing has successfully penetrated both political parties in New Zealand, which has led allies in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance to question if China's influence should affect New Zealand's membership in the organization.[25] Liberal regimes, however, have difficulty categorizing such activities as illicit or licit.

Social media actors also use sharp-power tactics to force subjects to be complicit.[26] There are recorded instances of China using such tactics to silence critics and to shape debates using state-sponsored groups registered in liberal democracies, such as New Zealand and Australia.[27] And although security agencies in liberal democracies with immigrant traditions neither hold citizens as hostages for bargaining purposes or use the familial relationships of naturalized citizens to compel them to be complicit in treasonous acts, evidence suggests Iran, Turkey, Russia, and China are leveraging transnational family relationships in this manner.

Displaced populations provide another opportunity for Western adversaries, such as Iran and China, to influence other countries.[28]

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22 Shaila Dewan, "Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, Military Chief in 1990s, Dies at 75," *New York Times*, July 23, 2011.

23 Philip Wen, "China's Patriots among Us: Beijing Pulls New Lever of Influence in Australia," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 14, 2016.

24 Jamil Anderlini, "China-Born New Zealand MP Probed by Spy Agency," *Financial Times*, September 13, 2017.

25 David Fisher, "Chinese Communist Party Link Claimed," *Otago* (Dunedin, New Zealand) *Daily Times*, May 26, 2018; and Eleanor Ainge Roy, "New Zealand's Five Eyes Membership Called into Question over 'China Links,'" *Guardian*, May 27, 2018.

26 "How China's 'Sharp Power' Is Muting Criticism Abroad," *Economist*, December 14, 2017.

27 Elif Selin Calik, "A Newly Coined Phrase: 'Sharp Power' and Reasons for Attributing It to China," *Rising Powers Project*, January 6, 2018.

28 Timothy Heath, "Beijing's Influence Operations Target Chinese Diaspora," War on the Rocks, March 1, 2018; and Linda Robinson et al., *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

Turkey exploits the Turkish diaspora in France and Germany.[29] Russia sends explicit threats and conducts highly public murders.[30] These realities are further complicated by the democracies' desires to protect equality, which causes them to view the mere suggestion of such issues being a security concern as a sign of xenophobia.

A larger target exists in the integration of markets and the manipulation or capture of big data from transnational corporations. By law and tradition, liberal democracies have stringent privacy standards directing how much data governments can access; illiberal regimes do not. Therefore, many corporations maintain double standards in their privacy efforts. The US government, for example, has to go through numerous legal procedures and provisions to access a criminal's iPhone. But Apple provides backdoor keys to the Chinese government and hosts iCloud services on Chinese government-run servers, in effect collecting and collating data on behalf of the Chinese state.[31] Due to market incentives, Apple actively collaborates to support state surveillance with China and widely purports to guard data privacy in the West.

The value of this effort becomes clear in the context of an average citizen generating more than a terabyte of data in a day. Western governments, by law, have almost no access to this information even though private companies can freely access, collect, collate, use, and sell the data. Cambridge Analytica became the posterchild of this emerging problem when it used data mining to help political candidates.[32] Moreover, nothing prevents business proxies of foreign states—including the state-owned enterprises of Russia, China, and Iran—from accessing them. One can imagine a nightmare scenario in which Chinese intelligence officials aggregate data purchased from a social media outlet with the data hacked from the Office of Personnel Management (2014–15).[33] An individual posing as a real estate agent, could use this information and financial data legally purchased from a credit bureau to create a near-complete profile of any individual that the Chinese government may want to target. Such an effort could possibly compromise anyone in the United States who has a security clearance. But the security implications have rarely been discussed because Western capitalism rarely results in patriotic fervor towards one's home country, which is becoming increasingly problematic in the rising era of the "Davos Man" and the pursuit of a home with the lowest tax burden.[34]

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29 Zeynep Sahin Mencutek and Bahar Baser, "Mobilizing Diasporas: Insights from Turkey's Attempts To Reach Turkish Citizens Abroad," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (September 2017): 86–105.

30 Lucy Pasha-Robinson, "The Long History of Russian Deaths in the UK under Mysterious Circumstances," *Independent*, March 6, 2018.

31 Sherisse Pham, "Use iCloud in China? Prepare to Share Your Data with a State-run Firm," CNN News, January 11, 2018.

32 Scott Neuman, "In Hidden-Camera Exposé, Cambridge Analytica Executives Boast of Role in Trump Win," NPR, March 21, 2018.

33 Brendan I. Koerner, "Inside the Cyberattack that Shocked the US Government," *Wired*, October 23, 2016.

34 Samuel P. Huntington, "Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite," *National Interest* 75 (Spring 2004): 5–18.

Social media manipulators also directly infiltrate public debates, interfere with political consensus, and support domestic civic society organizations, political parties, and individual candidates. With loose election finance laws that recognize individuals and corporations equally, nothing prevents foreign corporations with proxy firms from creating super political action committees to influence elections. The rise of cryptocurrencies makes this process even easier. Again, American defense and security agencies are not allowed to look into the affiliations of these actors without reason due to privacy laws fiercely guarding against such efforts. Such opportunities in Western civil society make perpetrating schismogenesis easier.

Other technologies also play a fundamental role in new forms of hybrid attacks against the West. Troll farms contribute to hyperpolarized debates, further developing schismogenesis.[35] Many citizens with access to social media are subconsciously led to choose one side of a purely manufactured debate. Interest is often generated and sustained by the spread of memes that play to each side of a divisive debate in a civil society, which makes identifying hostile attempts to undermine civil society even more urgent for the United States and its allies.

Adversarial states rely on their social media actors to pose as citizens in other states to deepen and to polarize divisions and cleavages, as well as to turn policy debates into threats to groups on both sides of an issue. These actors create seemingly genuine domestic movements such as fake veteran groups that appear American but pursue conspiratorial grievances in hopes of gaining citizen-advocates for the movement.[36] The hope is that the artificially implanted movement will take on a life of its own as more such actors encourage duped citizens to fight for both sides of the fabricated causes.

The problem with these movements is that they encourage debates about governance while making active calls for violence. Little investigation has considered how much antigovernment activity is homegrown and how much is exploitation by foreign actors with knowledge of divisive issues, which remains within the theoretical framework of schismogenesis. Although identifying true intellectual debates between citizens and fabricated divisive discussions among hybrid actors is quite difficult, evidence does suggest a Russian troll farm pushed for "Brexit," hacked the 2017 French presidential election, and meddled in the 2016 American presidential election.[37] The US military, due to the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, however, cannot respond to such hybrid attacks on civil society. National intelligence agencies and federal law enforcement must deal with these problems.

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35 Dave Lee, "The Tactics of a Russian Troll Farm," BBC News, February 16, 2018.

36 Craig Timberg, "Russian Operatives Used Twitter and Facebook to Target Veterans and Military Personnel, Study Says," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2017.

37 Robert Booth et al., "Russia Used Hundreds of Fake Accounts To Tweet about Brexit, Data Shows," *Guardian*, November 14, 2017; Laura Daniels, "How Russia Hacked the French Election," *Politico*, April 23, 2017; and Dan Mangan and Mike Calia, "Special Counsel Mueller: Russians Conducted 'Information Warfare' against US during Election To Help Donald Trump Win," CNBC, February 16, 2018.

As Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster said, "There are two ways to fight the United States military: asymmetrically and stupid."[38] The stupid way was how Saddam Hussein engaged in conventional battles with the US military and its coalition allies in 1991 and 2003. The asymmetric way is combating US influence and American military power with indirect efforts. China's and Russia's sociocultural attacks on American society are an asymmetric, nonkinetic method of perpetrating a political and an informational war within the United States. Such warfare is difficult for political and military leaders to respond to adequately, which has dark implications for how democracies are supposed to work.

In a cruel twist of fate, the same Western culture and civil society institutions that made America and the West culturally stronger than the Soviet Union have been exploited by the losing side of the Cold War. It is almost as if Western leaders never thought the features that enabled the triumphant defeat of Communism could ever be used to fragment the United States and its allies. Because Western leaders typically think of warfare in terms of the Clausewitizian trinity—government, people, and the military—civil society is often overlooked as a target.[39] What Clausewitz did not address in his early nineteenth century writings was that civil society is the sinew binding the citizenry, military, and government to one another. Attacking this "glue" appears to be more successful than targeting each part of the trinity directly.

Strategic Scope

The West has several suspicions regarding Chinese and Russian motivations for relying on this type of warfare to create schismogenesis and to weaken the American-led world order. Such infiltration and disruption of Western civil society undermines democratic institutions, thereby complicating the policy-making process. More importantly, it is an asymmetric strategy that weakens Western power and strength without substantial financial investments in conventional armaments. And finally, there is little risk of igniting a conventional military engagement with a more powerful opponent.

By injecting polarity, divisiveness, and fragmentation into free-speech debates, hybrid actors can sow political confusion in Western states to give authoritarian regimes more breathing space, both domestically and internationally. Besides using social media trolls and bots to encourage division, Russian-backed media and news platforms present counternarratives and conspiratorial ideas in the West.[40] During the Cold War, the United States actively defended against such political and information warfare with the US Information Agency.[41] Today, however,

38 LTG H. R. McMaster, quoted in Jeff Schogol, "'American War Generals' a Sobering Reflection on US Failures in Iraq," *Military Times*, September 11, 2014.

39 Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 32, 89.

40 T. S. Allen and A. J. Moore, "Victory without Casualties: Russia's Information Operations," *Parameters* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 59–71.

41 Nicholas J. Cull, *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989–2001* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

adversarial methods are subversive, the amount of threat activity is overwhelming, and US government agencies are hard-pressed to keep up with, counter, deter, or defeat adversaries in the information domain.

Civil societies in Australia and New Zealand also appear to be under assault from the Chinese government. A scholar who identified how the Chinese were buying political parties and public intellectuals in Australia and New Zealand began to be intimidated by Chinese agents when she exposed these actions in her published writings.[42] This documented attempt by an adversarial government to usurp civil society has major implications for the West since it shows China could easily use transnational connections to pursue similar actions in the United States and Europe.

Growing evidence also indicates Russian support of various civil society groups in the United States such as an antifracking group and the National Rifle Association (NRA).[43] Such actions by Russia seemingly to protect the environment and support constitutional gun rights are not virtuous. Instead, supporting the antifracking group protects Russia's economic interests and supporting the NRA allows Russia and other authoritarian governments to paint American democracy as a dangerous experiment that should not be emulated.[44]

Similar actions by foreign entities to support other civil society groups indicate American politics are being subverted to foment long-term instability. If one accepts the idea that such groups are designed to uphold the rights of citizens, then one should also assume America's adversaries understand that idea too. China and Russia likely find it in their national interests to fund and to support controversial civil society groups for the purpose of exacerbating societal tension and violence, which fits the model of schismogenesis.[45] This practice has been best exemplified by Russian troll farms creating seemingly homegrown movements that center on unarmed black men being shot by police and include one sham group cheering police actions and another protesting them.[46]

Cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence technologies also provide tools for schismogenesis. With the advent of Bitcoin and similar cryptocurrencies, covertly funding various civil society groups becomes much easier for adversaries to do and more difficult for Western security

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42 Matt Nippert, "University of Canterbury Professor Anne-Marie Brady Concerned Break-Ins Linked to Work on China," *NZ Herald*, February 16, 2018.

43 Merill Matthews, "Democrats Dig for Russian Connection and Uncover Environmentalists," *The Hill*, October 26, 2017; and Tim Dickinson, "Inside the Decade-Long Russian Campaign to Infiltrate the NRA and Help Elect Trump," *Rolling Stone*, April 2, 2018.

44 Isaac Stone Fish, "How Chinese Media Covers U.S. Gun Violence," *USA Today*, February 17, 2018; and Erin Griffith, "Pro-Gun Russian Bots Flood Twitter after Parkland Shooting," *Wired*, February 15, 2018.

45 Philip Ewing, "Russians Targeted U.S. Racial Divisions Long Before 2016 and Black Lives Matter," NPR, October 30, 2017.

46 Donie O'Sullivan, "Her Son Was Killed—Then Came the Russian Trolls," CNN News, June 29, 2018.

agencies to detect.[47] The development of artificial intelligence will only make employing social media easier because bots can maintain hundreds of social media accounts to interact with citizens in a humanlike fashion, and potentially to recruit humans to support their false causes. Furthermore, future developments of quantum computing will improve the efficacy of such actions to a currently unthinkable level of precision.

Actively creating schisms to undermine societies is a relatively effortless venture in heterogeneous societies with deep-rooted and crosscut social cleavages. As a result, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Islamic State, and other illiberal states will likely continue and even escalate their efforts in hopes of tearing apart the civic fabric in the United States and other Western nations. This strategy, which was used to promote Texas's secession and California's independence, is meant to undermine Western societies by making citizens feel that they have no stake in the system and that their government is no longer working.[48] With California initially allowing a radical measure to propose splitting into three different states on the November 2018 ballot, there is little doubt Russia and other anti-Western actors will support similar initiatives to weaken American power.[49]

Strategic Implications

The United States and many of its Western allies lack the legal framework and the institutional capabilities to deal adequately with this challenge. Since most democracies have federal laws that forbid their militaries from operating domestically, the new battlespace falls under the responsibility of domestic law enforcement. Thus, the challenge ahead is both conceptual and operational. The threat must first be recognized and then countered. Regardless, an active defense and a strategic offensive by Western governments are required to discredit hybrid actors and to punish the regimes backing their attacks.[50]

The internet and the many web-based tools create a separate, exploitable social dimension within the evolving human-to-human interface. When external hybrid actors create schisms within this network, security and law enforcement authorities must evaluate the jurisdictional limitations of law enforcement, counterintelligence, or counterespionage authorities. Regardless, any efforts to generate public awareness of the hybrid activity will have to use the previously exploited interfaces. Deep-rooted antigovernment sentiments in the American public's discourse present an additional challenge for the US government's responses. And so, the only way to prevent hybrid actors

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47 Jahara Matisek, "Is China Weaponizing Blockchain Technology for Gray Zone Warfare?," *Global Security Review*, September 28, 2018.

48 David Martin Davies, "Examining How a Russian 'Troll Factory' Pushed Texas Secession," Texas Public Radio, October 23, 2017; and Will Yates, "'Russian Trolls' Promoted California Independence," BBC News, November 4, 2017.

49 Bob Egelko, "Splitting Up California: State Supreme Court Takes Initiative off Ballot," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 18, 2018.

50 James P. Farwell, "Countering Russian Meddling in US Political Processes," *Parameters* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 37–47.

from labeling any public awareness campaign as a covert psychological operation conducted by the US government against its own citizens is for the United States to maintain transparent efforts to encourage civil society groups to behave with civility. Even then, success is not guaranteed.

Security agencies can deter social media actors by using continual vigilance and countermeasure efforts resembling those employed during the Cold War. Western states can also create costs for hybrid activity by engaging in retaliatory acts that likewise empower civil society actors to antagonize the adversaries responsible for schismogenesis. This strategy may be difficult, however, because of the risk associated with crossing authoritarian regimes and illiberal democracies that exercise tight control over civil society. Regardless, Western values and traditions are generally idealized by citizens in authoritarian countries, which leads many refugees to seek asylum and educational opportunities in the West. Western governments can consult Cold War era tactics, techniques, and procedures to combat and to deter hybrid actors from attacking Western civil society. These governments can also use emerging technologies such as quantum computing to detect hybrid actors operating in Western civil society under false pretenses.

If we transcend the optimism surrounding globalization and the internet as benevolent forces and take account of the reality that they will be increasingly exploited to undermine the West, then a proper conceptualization of schismogenesis warrants the development of deterrent capabilities. Western leaders do not critically engage in debates about the attacks on civil society nor are deterrent capabilities credibly mused beyond academic recommendations from the cyber protection measures outlined in the Tallinn Manual that have yet to be operationalized into robust security policies in the West.[51] As a result, illiberal regimes act with impunity. It is precisely because authoritarian regimes fear their own internal weaknesses that they decry the appeal of liberal democracies. Yet that appeal is the profound reason why refugees flow toward the West and not toward Russia, China, or Iran, and it is what compels these regimes to engage in the grand strategic game of schismogenesis against the West.

Elites within the political and security establishments must acknowledge and comprehend the nature and character of this threat to civil society. This recognition will enable the preparation of the legal frameworks needed to protect the new battlespace within Western civil societies from being exploited by adversarial states and their proxies. This effort will likely require an updated twenty-first century version of the Posse Comitatus Act that enables the American military to work domestically to protect civil society from hybrid actors pursuing schismogenesis. Western governments must balance their efforts to

51 Michael N. Schmitt, *Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

counter these external challenges with their protection of fundamental liberal values and principles.

Such equity might be problematic for the nature and the strength of the American republic, however, when the winner of the 2016 presidential election has reluctantly acknowledged, or outright rejected, the likelihood of hostile social media activity influencing that election's campaigns.[52] Moreover, the future of the United States could be bleak if it continues denying the information presented by its intelligence agencies or it remains reluctant to investigate and to punish those who aid and abet hybrid actors. Without decisive action, American civil society will likely continue to be fractured by social media warriors well beyond the 2020 election.

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52 Jonathan Masters, "Russia, Trump, and the 2016 U.S. Election," Council on Foreign Relations, February 26, 2018.