

National Security in the Era of Post-Truth and Fake News

Itai Brun and Michal Roitman

Has the era of post-truth and fake news disrupted our traditional mechanisms for understanding reality in the realm of national security? Are these mechanisms still capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood? Spin from facts? Do decision makers still regard professional fact-based analysis as the basis for decision making? There has been much debate in the media and in academia about the effects of the current period on the public and democratic processes. The purpose of this article is to warn that these phenomena also affect decision making in national security affairs. The main contention is that the terms “post-truth” and “fake news” describe a growing difficulty in clarifying and understanding reality, and consequently, in making correct decisions, including in the field of national security. This difficulty does not have a single cause; it results from a problematic convergence of factors involving political, technological, social, cultural, and ideological changes characteristic of the contemporary era. These factors find their way into rooms where national security matters are addressed, and affect – and at times disrupt – the decision making processes in these rooms.

Introduction

Are our traditional mechanisms for understanding reality in the realm of national security still viable? Are they capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood, or spin and influence efforts from facts? Do decision makers still regard professional fact-based analysis as the basis for decision making? Several events of the past months can certainly call this into question: the debate over whether Iran actually carried out the offensive activities in the Persian Gulf; the confrontation over whether the American UAV was shot down in Iranian or international airspace; the discourse that assigns Islamists responsibility for the burning of Notre Dame; the question of whether North Korea is keeping its promises to the United States concerning the nuclear and missile issues; and the quarrel between Trump and the American intelligence community about the espionage on his campaign.

In all these events, there were completely contradictory interpretations of matters, at least some of which should have been questions of fact. To be sure, the very existence of a debate does not prove disruption of the mechanisms for clarifying reality. On the contrary; in liberal Western democracy, these mechanisms should be based on casting doubt and arousing debate. The outstanding phenomenon arising from the series of events, however, is one of "multiple truths" – several more or less coherent stories about

reality, all based on facts and existing side by side, with little possibility of deciding between them. In a world of information overload, there is almost no opinion for which supporting facts cannot be found, and it appears that traditional mechanisms for clarifying and understanding reality based on professional analysis (or even common sense) collapse under a tangled web of information, conceptions, and interests. At the same time, signs have appeared around the world, including in Israel, of declining belief among leaders and the public in the ability of professionals to generate the necessary knowledge for decision making.

It is commonly assumed that we are in an era of post-truth and fake news. These two terms gained prominence in late 2016, following the referendum on Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) and Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential elections. These events led the Oxford English Dictionary to select "post-truth" as its word of the year, which many believed was a good reflection of the zeitgeist. According to the dictionary, "post-truth" is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." The term fake news is used in political discourse to attack the credibility of the media and politicians, but it has also made its way into academic discourse to indicate the ease with which lies, distortions, errors, spin, and conspiracy theories can now be spread on a very large scale. Such distribution can be either purposeful (disinformation) or unintentional (misinformation).

Much has been written in the press and in the academic world about the effect of this era on the public and on democratic processes. The purpose of this article, however, is to warn against the possibility of these phenomena affecting decision making in national security affairs. The article begins with the question of whether the current post-truth era is indeed a new and different era. It then looks at the connection between this era and the phenomena that characterize it on the one hand, and national security affairs on the other. The article concludes with an attempt to identify the factors and circumstances that have led to the current state of affairs. The main contention is that there is a reasonable likelihood that the terms post-truth and fake news connote a growing, genuine difficulty in clarifying reality, understanding it, and on this basis making correct decisions, including in the field of national security. This difficulty does not have any single cause; it results from a problematic convergence of factors involving political, technological, social, cultural, and ideological changes characteristic of the current period. These factors find their way into rooms where national security matters are addressed, and affect – and at times disrupt – the decision making processes in these rooms.

Are We Living in a New, Post-Truth Era?

The 2016 presidential elections in the US and Brexit in the UK have become symbols of the post-truth and fake news phenomena. The outcome of these two events can certainly be regarded as legitimate political decisions reflecting the authentic view of the voters. Nevertheless, to many (primarily on the liberal left), these unexpected results were caused by a disruption of the mechanisms used by broad audiences to clarify and understand the reality, and were due to a proliferation of lies – greater in number than on past occasions – that were disseminated in the public sphere. Therefore, the question arises whether an authentic phenomenon of post-truth indeed exists, featuring greater difficulty than in the past in clarifying and understanding reality. This preliminary question is relevant, because there is no doubt that there are also matters in which our ability to grasp reality has greatly improved.

Since 2016, the phenomena of post-truth and fake news have been addressed in both popular and scientific periodicals: *Time Magazine* and *The Economist* devoted cover stories to them, and *Science* published articles on the subject. Many books and articles have been published in recent years, mainly by journalists and philosophers, describing the phenomena, their sources, their ramifications, and possible tools to contend with them. Most writers offer similar descriptions that address actual phenomena that are of a global nature, have negative effects, and are linked to technological, social, and conceptual developments in recent decades (D'Ancona, 2017; Levitin, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Kakutani, 2018).

In contrast to these stances, there are approaches (Baggini, 2017) that argue that the dramatic description concerning the difficulty in clarifying and understanding reality is fundamentally mistaken, or at least exaggerated, or constitutes a temporary crisis that will be solved soon. Others (Harari, 2018) believe that the value of truth and the need to ascertain it have not eroded. A few even argue that the very appearance of the concept of post-truth and the obsession with it at the current time reflect the importance of truth in society and the realization that it must be preserved. It is also often asserted that the use of the term post-truth is completely political, reflecting the crisis in liberalism and the experts and the elite opposition to the inclusion of other ideas in public and political discourse (Fuller, 2018). In their point of view, the recent changes reflect a positive democratization of intelligence and knowledge. There are also those who reject in principle the idea that distinguishing truth from falsehood is increasingly difficult; they argue that technology and big data have improved our ability to know and understand the world.

Another theory holds that there never was a golden age of truth, and in this sense, the phenomenon is not new. For example, Yuval Noah Harari writes, "The truth is, truth has never been high on the agenda of Homo sapiens." Religions, nations, and political,

commercial, and other interest groups have always distorted facts or invented lies for the purpose of influencing public opinion and decision makers, usually successfully. According to Harari, human evolution always preferred tribal logic, which provides protection and survivability, over the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. Human rationalism developed in order to help navigate social situations, and many studies describe conceptual biases that make it possible to repress and dispose of factual information that contradicts existing beliefs.

However, several developments support a positive answer to the question whether this issue is a genuinely new situation: the very appearance of the concepts of post-truth and fake news and their increasing use suggest the need to affirm and describe authentic new phenomena. Extensive writings describe a crisis period in a variety of realms dealing with the challenge of clarifying reality (e.g., media, science, medicine, education, law enforcement, the judicial system). Various indexes (e.g., Gallup, 2018) show an unmistakable decline in the public's trust in some of the institutions whose key role in clarifying and understanding reality was formerly a matter of consensus. The variety of fact-checking enterprises, most of which appeared since 2010, suggests the large numbers of lies in the public space. These join careful disinformation efforts by interested parties that are detected (although usually without any ability to define the true impact of these efforts).

In order to specify the particular characteristics of the current era, writers describe four main problems. The first is the growing difficulty to ascertain the facts, i.e., to distinguish between truth and falsehood, mainly because of the information explosion and phenomena linked to the social networks (filter bubbles, echo chambers, and the use of algorithms and bots). The second is the questioning of the very need to clarify reality, which perforce undermines the key role of the truth in decision making processes and public discourse. The third is the politicization and polarization of the debate about what can be a source of authority for truth and what conditions make it possible to distinguish between truth and falsehood. The fourth is the organized and powerful campaign by interested groups against institutions designed to help ascertain the truth and the declining confidence among the public and decision makers in these institutions.

This article contends that the convergence of these problems has indeed created a new situation, in which it is increasingly difficult for both the general public and decision makers to clarify reality, understand it, and on this basis make correct decisions. In particular, the basic approach to the clarification of reality (the "scientific approach"), which was accepted overwhelmingly in Western liberal democracies until not long ago, has been undermined. This approach valued experience and expertise, gave priority to facts (insofar as they could be based on concrete and empirical evidence), acknowledged

limitations in face of complexity, recognized the need to learn, and respected the free marketplace of ideas as a basis for the process for clarifying and understanding reality.

The term “alternative facts” was coined in a television interview by Kellyanne Conway, a counselor to President Trump, where she defended false statements by the White House press secretary about the number of people who attended the President's inauguration ceremony in January 2017. Conway was probably referring to a different idea – the presentation of additional facts on other matters for the purpose of creating a broader context. But the dispute about the inauguration ceremony has become an important example of the denial of ostensibly indisputable factual reality in recent years by both decision makers and the general public (opposition to immunizations and denial of climate change are two prominent examples of this). As a result, more extreme views are also sounded, arguing that the problem at the current time is not the difficulty in clarifying and understanding reality, but the decline in the value of truth as a major element in social life.

Post-Truth, Fake News, and National Security

In February 2019, a British House of Commons committee published a report warning that fake news poses a grave threat to democracy (House of Commons, 2019). Like this report, most of those dealing with post-truth and fake news link the problems they create to various aspects of Western liberal democracy. Democracy is based on an informed and aware public, but many believe that the events in 2016 in the US and the UK prove that in the current era, it is increasingly difficult for the public to clarify reality with respect to issues relevant to its decision at the polls. Furthermore, a state of affairs in which different groups in society increasingly dispute the facts detracts from the ability to exchange opinions and conduct a sound public and political discussion on issues that must be decided. An absence of legitimate public debate impedes constructive processes of policymaking, increases the lack of trust between disputing groups, aggravates social polarization, and is liable to culminate in violence.

In addition to these effects on the general public, this article proposes that the phenomena connoted by the terms post-truth and fake news also directly affect the ability to understand reality and make decisions in the realm of national security. Literature on this subject is still scarce, likely due to the assumption that the mechanisms used by national security entities to understand and clarify reality are more resistant to falsehood than those of the general public.

In order to make sound national security decisions, participants in relevant discussions must have a good grasp of the strategic, operative, and tactical situation. They must understand what is happening, describe the problems on the agenda, consider possible options for action, and in the end make decisions that directly affect the lives of civilians

and soldiers. Errors in understanding reality are liable to result in wrong decisions in policy design, operational planning, and force buildup. Intelligence is designed to make it possible to understand the situation involving the enemy and the environment, while other agencies are designed to help understand the status of one's own forces.

Past experience, both recent and remote, proves that this is not an easy task. The difficulty in clarifying and understanding reality has always been essential to decision making processes. The problems in this sphere have been known and recognized for years. Many of them concern conceptual biases of various types. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that decision makers in national security assign greater likelihood to events similar to those familiar occurrences, especially events they have personally experienced. They find it difficult to imagine other scenarios, and are inclined to exclude possibilities that are unprecedented and extreme. They project their logic onto that of the enemy, although the enemy's logic can be fundamentally different. They have trouble letting go of the concepts that they have adopted, and consequently are slow to adopt new concepts more consistent with the dynamic reality. There is no limit to human ingenuity in reconciling previous understandings with information that contradicts them. Well-documented studies have proved the human tendency to adhere to what is familiar and expected, and to a large extent, what is desired.

Some of these old and familiar problems have been greatly intensified by the information revolution, and especially by the information explosion (the huge volume of data, information, and knowledge emerging at unprecedented speed and in a variety of differing formats). This article, however, proposes that these old problems have been joined by new ones involving post-truth and fake news, in which the information revolution plays a part. Making decisions about national security based on beliefs, opinions, and feelings is obviously questionable, and the same is true about reliance on falsehoods, distortions, errors, spin, and conspiracy theories.

The principal challenge, of course, is to prove empirically that there are now new problems that differ from those familiar from the past. In national security affairs, new problems are usually discovered following a crisis or failure, leading to a more insightful understanding of reality. Various writers have detected signs of such new problems involving post-truth in events that occurred in the past two decades, most notoriously the question of weapons of mass destruction possessed by Saddam Hussein and the war in Iraq. Nevertheless, whether the problems involved are genuinely new is an open question. The failures in clarifying and understanding those events can certainly be described in terms of the familiar problems from the past. The object of this article is, therefore, to provide food for thought concerning the possibility that the current era either creates new

problems or exacerbates familiar problems, such that the existing solutions are unsuccessful in dealing with those problems.

Intelligence as a Test Case

A major portion of the responsibility for clarifying and understanding reality rests with intelligence organizations. It appears that intelligence personnel are indeed the first to spot the grave consequences of post-truth and fake news for national security. Three books published in 2018 describe several of these consequences. The background to these books is the leadership change in the United States intelligence community caused by the election of Donald Trump as president. In line with established practice, Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper, the most senior US intelligence official, and CIA Director John Brennan resigned and left their jobs on the eve of Trump's inauguration in January 2017. The President subsequently fired FBI Director James Comey in May 2017. All three figures became vocal critics of Trump: his personality, capabilities, policy, and fitness for the position of president. Trump in turn has continued his attacks on them, and in August 2018, he revoked Brennan's security clearance, and threatened the others with the same measure.

Clapper and Comey published books combining an autobiographical description of their long careers with deep concern about the state of affairs in the US (Clapper and Brown, 2018; Comey, 2018). They were joined by Michael Hayden, Director of the CIA in 2006-2009, who wrote a book describing an organized attack on American intelligence from within and without (Hayden, 2018). The three are highly experienced intelligence professionals: between them they have over 100 years of experience, including the most senior positions in intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Clapper and Hayden began their careers as intelligence officers in the US Air Force, reached the top of that organization, and went on to serve in the US national intelligence agencies. Clapper was Director of the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), and DNI Director. Hayden was Director of the National Security Agency (NSA) and CIA Director. Comey was US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, US Deputy Attorney General, and FBI Director.

The three books deal explicitly with the issue of truth in national security affairs. They deliver a resounding warning and express deep concern at the loss of the ability to ascertain the truth at the current time. This is probably also the reason why matters of truth and falsehood appear in the subtitles of the three books. Clapper writes about "Hard Truths in a Life in Intelligence," Hayden about "American National Security in an Age of Lies," and Comey about "Truth, Lies, and Leadership." Their books reflect deep frustration about the situation, and share a gloomy outlook, which Comey describes as follows: "We are experiencing a dangerous time in our country, with a political

environment where basic facts are disputed, fundamental truth is questioned, lying is normalized and unethical behavior is ignored, excused or rewarded.” (Commey, 2018, p. ix). Clapper expresses a profound fear "that many Americans are questioning if facts are even knowable, as foreign adversaries and our national leaders continue to deny objective reality while advancing their own 'alternative facts.'" (Clapper and Brown, 2018. p. 4).

In their books, they describe a surprising development that caught them and the intelligence organizations unprepared. The expectation was that the new and wonderful world created by the information revolution would greatly improve the ability of intelligence to know and understand. In this world, it is possible to gather information of a previously inconceivable quantity and quality, analyze it rapidly, and distribute the intelligence knowledge directly to the relevant consumers. In practice, however, it emerged that these advantages also create weaknesses that some parties are quick to exploit.

The three books do not, however, address the root of the problem. As people who have spent their entire professional lives detecting enemies and criminals, they regard Trump as the main enemy of the truth, analyze extensively his transgressions against it, and regard them as part of a combined attack from within and without on the most fundamental values, institutions, and processes of American democracy. The writers view Trump's election as a historic accident that should not have occurred. The fact that they see him as the principal culprit in the problem leads them to propose a similar solution: waiting for better days when his term ends and the situation reverts to what it was before Trump. They hope that Trump will be removed from office in the 2020 elections (until not long ago, they hoped that the Mueller investigation would culminate in Trump's impeachment). Until then, they propose continuing the current intelligence approach, adhering to the facts, and especially continuing according to the basic commandment of "speak truth to power," even if the powers do not want the truth.

Trump is therefore perceived as undermining the basic foundations of the relationship formed over many years between decision makers and intelligence. He does not believe that intelligence experts (or other "truth tellers") are faithful representatives of reality, and therefore sees no particular reason to talk with them. He prefers his interpretation over that of the professionals. As an entrepreneur, he knows that it is sometimes possible to succeed even when all the experts think there is no chance, and that a rational analysis based on facts of the type longed for by intelligence personnel does not necessarily lead to a correct solution. Trump is far more interested in shaping reality than in understanding it, and such a course not infrequently involves telling lies. Shortly after taking office, he announced that he would skip the daily intelligence briefing for the president because he was a "smart person" who did not need "to be told the same thing in the same words every single day for the next eight years."

Loathing of Trump is evident on every page of the three books. At the same time, Clapper and Comey, at least, show a strong yearning for his predecessor – President Barack Obama (Hayden is more critical of Obama), who may have been critical of the intelligence agencies, but conducted a profound and open dialogue with their chiefs. Obama represents the classic format of a decision maker who wishes to understand the situation fully in order to deal with it. For the American intelligence community, Trump represents a different, unfamiliar, and primarily misunderstood model of their number one intelligence consumer. He regards intelligence as part of the "deep state" that thwarts his policy. He awakens sleeping demons when he accuses Obama of using intelligence capabilities to eavesdrop on him and his associates during the presidential election campaign.

The problems exhibited by Trump are well known. It is not, however, necessary to be a trained intelligence expert in order to realize that the problems described by Clapper, Comey, and Hayden are bigger than Trump. They involve the spirit of the era more than the President's questionable personality (actually, there is considerable justification for some of his assertions about the intelligence community). Indeed, critical reading shows that intelligence, as portrayed in the books, confronts the new era in a less than optimal state. Like other truth tellers, it too has suffered from fundamental problems with its methodology, the definition of its functions, and its relations with decision makers. These problems, which have never been resolved, are exacerbated in the current era. The inadequate solutions, which may have been suitable for other periods, cannot cope fully with the challenges of the information era, especially with the cyber threats. This is compounded by a different perception of the "truth," which undermines the accepted interpretation of this concept in the liberal tradition and the foundations on which intelligence developed in Western democracies.

The books, therefore, highlight a difficult question on several levels. Underlying this question is the gap that has always existed between the major challenge of establishing the real situation and the limited capability of intelligence to meet that challenge. Characteristics of the contemporary era, particularly the effects of the information revolution and the possibilities offered by cyberspace, add to this gap. Cyberspace creates a very convenient theater for groups seeking to disseminate lies or undermine the ability to distinguish between truth and lies, and current intelligence tools are hard pressed to cope with the situation. This chaos is highly attractive for decision makers who regard reality as a malleable space and are less interested in learning the truth. The overall result reflects both the difficulty clarifying and understanding reality and the diminished status of intelligence.

Reading the books is discouraging, because it is clear that the challenges and the lack of clear means to address them have caused an upheaval in intelligence. Nor is it possible to take comfort in the fact that the books describe events in another continent far away from Israel. The books indeed tell a very American story, and the discussion in them is affected by the structure of the US intelligence community, the way it was shaped, and how it was monitored following the trauma of the Vietnam War and the Watergate Affair, as well as the major intelligence failures in the preceding decade. The questions that they raise, however, are also relevant to other intelligence communities, including Israel's. The Israeli intelligence community is free of some of the limitations affecting its American counterpart. Its relations with the decision makers are also more open. Nevertheless, the spirit of the time is not confined to the US. The difficulty in ascertaining the truth is evident in many places, and the status of the truth is also questioned in Israel.

Why Now?

The analysis proposed in the books by the former senior American intelligence leaders is disturbing, but their focus on the nature of truth aims at the heart of the problem. The old problems, which always made it difficult to clarify and understand reality in the national security rooms, are now joined by a long list of relatively new problems cultivated by the post-truth and fake news era.

First, the current period features an escalation of partisanship and conflicts between competing ideological and political groups (right and left, conservative and liberal). These conflicts are not new; political groups have always struggled for priorities, influence, and the power to promote their interests. However, these conflicts have intensified in recent decades, reflected in growing disagreement on priorities and values, extreme ideologies of leading figures and parties in the political arena, and less willingness among political parties to compromise and cooperate. Ideology and political approaches are the main prisms through which facts are viewed, reality is interpreted, and decisions are made. These processes, together with the founding of new media platforms that provide an alternative to traditional media outlets, have resulted in multiple clashing interpretations of reality and a situation in which beliefs, opinions, and feelings are more influential than before. This pattern is particularly prominent among a new generation of leaders, which has less faith in professionals (in part due to a string of past failures). The new leaders are less interested in understanding reality and more in shaping it according to their beliefs.

Second, technological developments have disrupted the traditional mechanisms for understanding reality. This refers first and foremost to the information explosion and the changes in the flow of information caused by the information revolution, in particular,

changes in the communications market (the evolution from print and broadcast media to digital media, the decentralization of information sources, and the transition to 24/7 reporting), and the rise of the social networks. The disruptive technology has penetrated national security rooms. The flood of information, some of which is distorted or disseminated by groups with agendas, has complicated the task of clarifying reality and clearing away the fog of war. On the other hand, the large amount of information, which is often murky, makes it difficult to decide between the many interpretations, and often supports several of them. This technology has also made national security rooms, formerly considered secret and isolated, almost transparent – those present in a room know that the public outside will judge what they say, and that the public is aware of what happens in the room, a fact that influences the behavior of the decision makers within.

Third, there are major social and cultural changes that undermine ideas identified with the modern era in the West: liberalism, which served as society's organizing principle; professionalism and expertise and the institutions where these values were displayed prominently; changes in the traditional family unit; and others. These changes are attributed in part to three key processes: the 2008 global economic crisis, which caused a crisis in the public's confidence in governments and banks; the transition from largely homogeneous societies to multicultural societies, following an increase in immigration; and the rise of the social networks, which facilitated widespread dissemination of competing ideas. This reality, which undermines the modern fundamental principles, has led to the loss of trust in institutions previously regarded as bastions of truth, the growth of tribalism, and the entrenchment of tribal logic and the rise of non-liberal demagogic regimes that do not decide policy on the basis of public debate.

Fourth, new ideas that undermine the public, political, and even the security space have penetrated the public discourse. These ideas, which arose in the second half of the 20th century in various disciplines, such as literature, architecture, music, and others in the humanities and social sciences, resist meta-ideologies, all-encompassing stories, and institutional control of science, knowledge, and truth. Post-modernism, the general framework of some of these ideas, is commonly deemed responsible (not entirely justifiably) for the rejection of a single objective truth in favor of multiple subjective and relative truths. It includes views that hold that there is no single truth, no single scientific theory, and no single overall narrative, but multiple theories and stories created from a range of perspectives, none of which are preferable over the others. According to these views, there is no one objective truth, because everyone brings his or her own values, history, and personal beliefs and opinions to a subjective interpretation. Every claim of truth is nothing but a reflection of the speaker's political ideology. Thus, every interpretation is therefore legitimate, the argumentation mechanism as a tool for

understanding reality is challenged, and decision making is based mainly on intuition and ideology, regardless of any actual state of affairs.

Fifth, the influence of populist politicians appears to have increased around the world in recent years. These leaders attract support from the general public with simplistic and easy-to-understand messages appealing to the public's emotions, and by citing "alternative facts" that appeal to those emotions. Politicians have always lied, of course, but it seems that the current generation of leaders increasingly regards the truth as of secondary importance; they seek to shape reality according to their belief and the political agenda that serves them, including in national security. They often deliberately weaken established institutions (e.g., media, law enforcement, judiciary, and academia), including the professional defense echelon, and challenge them to promote policy.

Sixth, in contrast to the prevailing feeling in the 1990s with the dissolution of the Soviet bloc that a new stable world order had emerged, it appears that the world order of the past two decades features mainly growing disorder. Events that once seemed inconceivable occur not infrequently, the importance of non-state entities has increased, and the world is networked and connected in a way that accelerates the pace of events and turns local events into global ones. This state of affairs, with its prominent uncertainty and instability, complicates the traditional questions required for understanding the world. Many of them concern future developments ("mysteries") that are dependent on many players and the dynamic that emerges between them. This characteristic is especially relevant for national security affairs, where it is necessary to make decisions and take action in complex and sensitive matters that require understanding not only the current reality, but also the reality resulting from these actions. In answering questions of this kind, information has less value than in answering questions that have a factual answer ("secrets"). It is therefore easier to answer them on the basis of beliefs, opinions, and feelings (which are difficult to contradict).

Finally, in recent years, national security entities have increasingly emphasized influence campaigns and operations (against enemies, friends, and other parties). Russian interference in the 2106 US presidential elections is only one example. In many respects, the current state of affairs has made the "cognitive realm" another battleground, joining the kinetic battlespace. This development is attributable to various factors, but primarily to technological developments that make it possible to apply a range of focused efforts aimed at influencing a variety of target groups. The purpose of the influence campaigns is to prompt select target groups to adopt an approach to reality that is advantageous to the parties behind the campaign, which helps them promote their strategic or operative goals. Along with the use of force, the toolbox for these efforts to exert influence includes traditional tools (such as diplomacy and the use of spokespeople) designed to influence

the traditional media, and some of them are new tools operating in a digital space, particularly the social networks.

Conclusion

This article contends that the terms post-truth and fake news indeed reflect new phenomena featuring an actual, growing difficulty in clarifying and understanding reality and subsequently making correct decisions, including in the realm of national security. Although this assertion cannot be proven empirically, a series of indications point to a reasonable probability that this difficulty exists, and that there is a need to thoroughly investigate it in additional studies.

Another conclusion of the article is that this difficulty does not stem from a single cause. It is the result of a problematic convergence of factors and circumstances characteristic of the current era that have found their way into the heart of the decision making processes: intensified political disputes and radicalization of political discourse; technological developments that upset the base underlying the mechanisms for ascertaining reality; social, cultural, and economic developments that have undermined trust in the institutions previously responsible for clarifying the real situation (“guardians of the truth”); the introduction of undermining ideas supporting multiple truths into political, security, and public discourse; the rise of demagogic leaders; changes in the world order and the regional order that have aggravated uncertainty and instability; and focused efforts at exerting influence that utilize new tools. While many of these factors are not in themselves entirely new, the convergence of these elements has created a weighty, charged new reality.

A series of elements with diverse interests exacerbate otherwise known phenomena: countries and organizations utilizing means of influence in order to destabilize and deepen the polarization in other countries; political groups disseminating lies and disinformation in order to obtain political advantages; non-political groups disseminating false, inaccurate, or distorted information in order to promote various agenda; and commercial concerns motivated by economic interests and benefiting from the creation of uncertainty in specific spheres and from the great popularity of false information and the ability to convert it into a business model.

The challenge that these phenomena pose to national security and the democratic process is therefore a challenge that is difficult to overstate. The world has become more complicated, and the challenges that it poses cannot be met by simple solutions; they require deep and open analysis. The concern is that the decision making process is less influenced by professional fact-based analysis than by feelings, beliefs, opinions, and lies. A world without facts, divided according to beliefs, is a more dangerous world. The

truth is essential infrastructure in liberal Western democracy, and the post-truth and fake news phenomena arouse serious questions about the responsibility of the various parties and their ability to defend this truth and the processes for clarifying it.

The effort to address the challenges posed by this new situation is in its initial stages. The consensus is that the previous reality cannot be restored, and it is therefore necessary to find ways suited to the new era that will facilitate correct decision making in national security and a healthy democratic process. There is also agreement that dealing with the phenomena requires an interdisciplinary and international effort, and that there will be no silver bullet capable of dealing with all problems. The current discussion about directions to be taken mostly concerns problems linked to the democratic process. Four main directions are cited: technology for identifying lies and disseminators of lies; methodologies for clarifying reality (including fact testing and rating the reliability of information sources); regulation for preventing the dissemination of fake news; and public education from a young age for critical thinking and curiosity ("digital literacy"). Some of these directions toward a solution are also relevant to dealing with the problems in the national security realm.

Special emphasis should be placed on those at the professional level ("the experts"), who cannot escape these challenges and must therefore adapt themselves to the characteristics of the new era in both clarifying reality and making the results of this clarification accessible to decision makers. Initial ideas on the subject highlight two key matters. The first is developing capabilities for discovering facts aimed at establishing a high level of proof that will succeed in reducing the influence of beliefs, emotions, and opinions on the process of ascertaining reality. The second is adapting the persuasion methodologies and techniques in the discourse between the professionals and the decision makers in order to facilitate fact-based decision making processes, including for questions that do not involve only facts.

The directions toward a solution also present clear warning signals: the attempt to distinguish between truth and falsehood may be undemocratic and miss challenges to the accepted truth that are at the sidelines of the discourse. More generally, any restriction, direct or indirect, on freedom of expression arouses discomfort in liberal Western democracies. The strategies and the directions toward a solution, therefore, require a balance between two conflicting interests: the need to deal with the effects of the new phenomena in order to establish proper decision making processes and democratic processes on the one hand; and the liberal democratic values of freedom of expression and pluralism based on mechanisms of doubt and debate on the other. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is the first casualty of the new phenomena. Doubt and debate, which are among the cornerstones and strengths of the traditional processes of

understanding reality and making decisions, are also the weak point through which the new phenomena penetrate the decision making processes. Their infiltration into these processes disrupts the ability of doubt and debate to serve as effective means of clarifying the complex reality.

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