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UNCERTAIN FUTURES: THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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JCSP 43

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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UNCERTAIN FUTURES: THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing.

- George Orwell, 1984

State power, national interest and international relations are in permanent contest, with information fuelling this dialectic. Yet the character of information and its ability to become a decisive factor in international relations, and conflict, has fundamentally changed the nature of affairs between states, and indeed amongst governments and their citizens. The 20th century gave rise to a greater sense of global community that, whilst often fractious, linked disparate populations more closely. The spread of fast and economical worldwide transport links, coupled with an explosion of reliable and far reaching telecommunications networks connected the world in previously unrecognisable ways.¹ Significantly, the World Wars in the first half of the century acted as a catalyst for science and innovation. “World War II was the first war in history in which the weapons in use at the end of the war differed significantly from those employed at the outset. The atomic bomb is the most obvious example.”² This produced technology which changed the traditional balances of power through atomics, computerisation and the foundations of cognitive machine learning; all of which migrated into civil society. Critically people gained greater access to education and knowledge, supporting a generational leap into a new and more informed digital age.

¹ By 1950 there were 25 million telephones in use worldwide, a rise from 2 million in 1900. Anton A. Huurdeman, *The Worldwide History of Telecommunications* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2003), 230.

² Foreign Policy Research Institute, “War and Technology, Professor Alex Roland,” last modified 27 February 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/article/2009/02/war-and-technology/>.

The turn of the century witnessed a further acceleration of technology which resulted in the proliferation of smart mobile devices, further closing the gap between information access and the consumer. It is estimated that in 2017 mobile device ownership will rise to 4.1 billion people globally, or 61% of the population.³ Alongside this the collection and storage of information continues to grow at extraordinary rates, to the measure of 2.5 quintillion bytes of data per day. This equates to 90% of the world's total recorded data being created in the last two years alone.⁴ When fused these statistics illustrate the rich and abundant seams of information which can be mined, exploited and even weaponised by the many actors who attend the international forum of the 21st century.

This paper will show that state power in the information age is becoming less coercive in both advanced and developing countries. As such, the political intent of government is becoming increasingly challenged by the influence of both their citizens and the international community. The result of this is confusion in the global commons and unexpected electoral choices within nations, which are impacting international norms. All of this has been catalyzed by the proliferation and democratization of information, which is becoming increasingly more accessible and immersive due to the explosion of social media.

By discussing how the character of information has altered international relations and state power, this paper will seek to explain what has led to the political dynamics at

³ Statista – The Statistics Portal, “Number of mobile phone users worldwide from 2013 to 2019”, last accessed 20 April 2017, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274774/forecast-of-mobile-phone-users-worldwide/>.

⁴ IBM, “Bringing Data to the Enterprise”, last accessed 20 April 2017, <https://www-01.ibm.com/software/data/bigdata/what-is-big-data.html>.

play in international relations in the contemporary environment. To do this it is important to understand the role of technology in promoting both the creation and accessibility of data, and how this is fundamentally different to the beginnings of the information age following the end of the Second World War. Finally, the paper will exemplify this analysis with a discussion of international involvement in the Syrian conflict, and how this crisis has been defined through the influence of social media.

The Power of Information

The concept and application of power in international relations is a provocative subject. Classical realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, suggest that “international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim.”⁵ In contrast, a more liberal view focuses less on the relationship between power and realpolitik of the state and more on that of the global community. Robert O. Keohane, when discussing the theory of interdependence and the importance of communication, asserts that “the characteristics of international rules, norms, and institutions are more crucial in affecting ability to communicate and cooperate.”⁶ This view also centres the discussion on the nature of power, characterising it as attractively soft or coercively hard. A more contemporary view, drawn from the American experience, and offered by Joseph Nye, is the synergy of the two types as smart power. He asserts that power should be synergised, enabling the exploitation of the full spectrum of tools available to the state. To some extent this acknowledges the concerns of both the realist and neoliberalist.

⁵ Raymond Aron, *Politics and History* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 111.

⁶ Robert O. Keohane, “Power and Interdependence Revisited,” *The MIT Press Vol 41*, no. 4 (Autumn 1987): 24, http://www.ri.ie.ufrj.br/intranet/arquivos/power_and_interdependece.pdf.

Importantly, Nye recognises the fundamental role of information in international relations theory, “information is power, and modern information technology is spreading information more widely than ever before in history.”⁷ This statement capitalises on two key aspects, firstly the criticality of the narrative to guide the three pillars of political, military and economic intent. Secondly, that data is irrelevant unless there is a mechanism to transport and exploit it in a meaningful way. Yet this recognition should not be limited by a consideration of information simply as a raw material. The unique aspects of culture and how it shapes our intelligence must also be considered. The former advisor to the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Professor Hamid Mowlana, offers that “no one culture or value system has ownership of the truth. Only in the dialogue of adversaries will the truth emerge.”⁸ This alternative perspective speaks to the idea of interpretation and meaning, and how this can be challenged from a global perspective. It categorises information not only as a data medium, but also as an interlocutor of cultures, emphasising the importance of legitimate narratives. The chronology of the information age offers insights into Nye’s second assertion when considering how communications and technology have shaped international relations. It also illustrates why the behaviours of society in both the developed and developing world have been significantly modified in that same period.

The vulnerability of a state to the threat of an opposing nation possessing advanced technologies, through which it may upset the balance of power, is a documented challenge. During the 1970s and 1980s, the U.S. military approach, focused

⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 151.

⁸ Hamid Mowlana, *Global Information and World Communication: New Frontiers in International Relations* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1997), 245.

on the “offset of Soviet numerical advantage in conventional weapons by upgrading American tactical forces with modern technology, with a special emphasis on information technology.”⁹ This became known as the second offset strategy. Therefore, in moments of national crisis the swift acquisition of military, and supporting civil technical knowledge, becomes imperative. Another example is the rapid development of Colossus, the first set of electronic programmable digital computers, in 1943. Colossus was used for breaking German codes in World War 2, providing distinct advantages to the Allies.¹⁰

These early moments in the information age were defining, yet were far from the digital computing ubiquity of modern times. Indeed, it was not until the late 1970’s that advances in microprocessors, networking and the portability of computers, proved critical in allowing rapid and global access to shared information resources. This period of technical transition set the conditions for the liberalist theory of soft power and interdependence, through which Nye asserted that “countries that are likely to be more attractive and gain soft power in the information age are those with multiple channels of communication that help to frame issues.”¹¹

The following three decades were typified by an exponential growth of Information Communications Technologies (ICT). Innovative approaches to computer processing power, articulated by Moore’s Law which observed that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit will double approximately every two years,

⁹ Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventative Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 179.

¹⁰ Jack Copeland, “Machine Against Machine,” in *Colossus: The Secret of Bletchley Park’s Codebreaking Computers*, ed. Jack Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76.

¹¹ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 31.

revolutionised ICT and assisted in the rise of the internet.¹² Complimentary to this were the shrinking costs of hardware and software, which became instrumental in facilitating the wider trends of globalisation through ubiquitous technical connectivity. However, this leap in technology was not without consequence. It created a significant digital gap between those states which were technologically rich and the developing world. This correlates with Nye's theory of attractive countries, and the growth of state inequalities in international relations, "dividing the haves from the have-nots in terms of [technology] access and usage."¹³

Whilst stark economic inequalities persist in the 21st Century, the gap in access to technology and the internet is closing more rapidly.¹⁴ The world population is becoming wealthier but there remains a distinct disparity between the poor and the rich, with 8.1% of the world population retaining 84.6% of global wealth, much of which is resident in Europe or North America.¹⁵ When equated with the proliferation of cheap ICT in the developing world this comparison of wealth against information access demonstrates that society, in addition to state, is not only becoming increasingly globalised but also physically interconnected at a more personal level. This presents a new and historically unique domain for interaction in cyberspace. What is clear is that the distribution of wealth does not simply align with the global distribution of economy, market access or

¹² Kerry G. Coffman and Andrew M. Odlyzko, "Growth of the Internet," in *Optical Fiber Telecommunications: Systems and Impairments*, ed. Ivan Kaminow (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 19.

¹³ Johan Eriksson and Giampiero Giacomello, *International Relations and Security in the Digital Age* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 1.

¹⁴ The median annual growth of global internet users is 1.2% with approximately 40% of the world's population having consistent internet access in 2016. Internet Live Stats, "Internet Users," last accessed 24 April 2017, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/>.

¹⁵ Inequality.Org, "Global Inequality," last accessed 24 April 2017, <http://inequality.org/global-inequality/>.

information. This introduces powerful societal dynamics for inter and intra-state relationships, through perceived and actual inequalities.

Social Media and the Power of Population

To understand the role of information and social media, in the context and application of international relations theory, it is important to understand the concepts of both state and society. This provides a basis when explaining the influence of social media and its ability to disrupt traditional power norms. The character of modern society is a product of the media and culture in which it is immersed. Professor Friedrich Krotz, characterises this as mediatisation, “media development and the resulting transformation of everyday life, culture and society [are] determined primarily by technological developments.”¹⁶ Yet the nature of society is broadly consistent, in that it is based upon differing social roles and hierarchies. As such, “humans are expected to behave according to specific rules that govern the various social systems of which modern society is composed.”¹⁷

Access to social media across diverse traditional roles provides a unique trajectory for interaction which evades established hierarchies. In this capacity “individual citizens may use [social media] to communicate with other citizens in the context of any number of social roles, as well as for purposes which transcend roles.”¹⁸ This contravenes the traditional conventions of social interaction and allows a member of society to freely challenge the narrative of that same social order. Furthermore, the

¹⁶ Friedrich Krotz, “Explaining the Mediatisation Approach,” *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture* 24, no. 2 (2017): 115, <http://nca.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13183222.2017.1298556?needAccess=true>.

¹⁷ Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuchs, *Social Media, Politics and the State: Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

physical boundaries of the specific constituency are now largely irrelevant, as interaction occurs in the cyber domain. This means that the anonymity of a publisher on social media can allow the responsibility of how information is used to be abdicated by the originator, in a way that physical social interaction previously restricted.

The role of state is equally complex. A state is defined as “a nation or territory considered as an organized political community under one government.”¹⁹ In the modern context this definition becomes challenged when considering how broadly the concept of state should be applied, outside of physical and geospatial boundaries. Additionally, the relationship between a state and its economic and political structures is increasingly divergent, whilst persistently and perhaps contradictorily interdependent. In part this can be attributed to the need of state to promote industry and economy in support of wealth and security. Therefore “economic interdependence is first and foremost an electoral issue, rather than a security dilemma . . . governments that need to worry about reelection will foster trade and avoid conflict escalation.”²⁰

It is because of this equation of state and economic interdependency, that Multinational Corporations (MNCs) prosper. The nature of globalized economies, which have matured in the information age through the rise of a networked international community, mean that corporate business transcends the boundaries of independent sovereign states. This creates additional confusion in international relations through the presence of influential and well-resourced non-state actors, whilst also exacerbating

¹⁹ Oxford Dictionaries, “English Oxford Living Dictionaries,” last accessed 1 May 17, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/state>.

²⁰ Christopher Gelpi and Joseph M. Grieco, “Economic Interdependence, the Democratic State, and the Liberal Peace,” in *Economic Interdependence and International Conflict*, ed. Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 36.

inequality. “The contention is that the poverty, of the peripheral world is not an inscrutable natural phenomenon; rather, it is largely, but not exclusively, the result of exploitative globalization in which the MNCs remain the principal actors.”²¹ This exploitation is often cited as creating dependency for developing countries on the MNCs and the financial organizations of the core countries. However, without the continued trans-national activities of MNC the ability of a state to drive an economy becomes significantly more challenging. Indeed, Professor of Economics, James Ahiakpor, asserts that “it may not be the intent of Third World governments, but perpetuating poverty in the name of protecting their people from alleged exploitation by MNCs has little moral justification.”²²

Frustration at inequality is fueled by the unethical employment of transnational economics and the role of sovereign states coupled with the politics of society, given voice through social media. This is accomplished by shaping the trending narrative of a society, through media immersion and the use of emotive and challenging information. Conducted in a discretionary manner it serves the desired intent of the originator to influence. Thereby focusing state attention on headline issues, “today the media is the focal point and [principal] site of political debate.”²³

The power of social media to shape politics has been particularly evident in the 21st Century. The role of social media in the Arab Spring, for example, is often cited as

²¹ Kema Irogbe, “Global Political Economy and the Power of Multinational Corporations,” *Journal of Third World Studies* Volume 30, no. 2 (Fall 2013) <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-352230764/global-political-economy-and-the-power-of-multinational>.

²² James C.W. Ahiakpor, “Multinational Companies in the Third World: Predators of Allies in Economic Development,” *Religion and Liberty* Volume 2, no. 5 (July 2010) <https://acton.org/pub/religion-liberty/volume-2-number-5/multinational-corporations-third-world-predators-o>.

²³ Jonathan Cable, “More Than an Electronic Soapbox.” in *Social Media, Politics and the State: Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*, edited by Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuchs (New York: Routledge, 2015), 132.

being pivotal in shaping the political outcomes in several countries across North Africa and the Middle East, “Social media indeed played a part in the Arab uprisings. Networks which formed online were crucial in organizing a core group of activists.”²⁴ Yet, in of itself social media is irrelevant unless it is employed to deliver a particular narrative, “[scholars] seem to overemphasize the centrality of social media in protest. As always, the “real” question is not whether this or that type of media plays a major role but how that role varies over time and circumstance.”²⁵ In the case of the Arab Spring, it was the narrative of change driven by political unrest and sectarian inequality which was pivotal to the movement.²⁶ The mechanism used to broadcast this narrative was accomplished through social media sites, such as Twitter²⁷, which promoted awareness and shaped national and global political response.

Curiously, in those areas of the global south where conflict appears more prevalent, there is a significant disparity in the access to technology and media. In particular, that which is not state controlled. This is changing as key infrastructure limitations are resolved and new technology supports telecommunications distribution. Nevertheless, the real challenge in understanding the importance of social media as a tool for forcing change is the inability to measure the effect of the media narrative in these conflicts. In part this is caused by change itself, “assessing the impact of internet access

²⁴ Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media, “The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings,” last accessed 24 April 2017, <http://www.journalism.org/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings/>.

²⁵ Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segav and Tamir Sheafer, “Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Come First,” *The International Journal of Press Politics* 18, no. 2 (2013): 132.

²⁶ The World Bank, “Middle-Class Frustration Drove the Arab Spring,” last accessed 22 April 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/10/21/middle-class-frustration-that-fueled-the-arab-spring>.

²⁷ During the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's resignation, the total rate of tweets from Egypt about political change in that country ballooned from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. University of Washington, “New Study Quantifies Use of Social Media in Arab Spring,” last accessed 1 May 2017. <http://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>.

and social media participation is [challenged] as the statistics change incredibly fast.”²⁸

What is critical to recognize regarding the importance of social media is that it provides an alternative globally connected forum, which is generally outside of the control of any one sovereign government.

The use of social media and open source news to support the interests of change agents is also becoming increasingly prevalent as a strategy for government. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported in 2014 that “Social media has the potential to make policy processes more inclusive and thereby rebuild some confidence between governments and citizens.”²⁹ As discussed, this is predicated on the provision of a narrative and supporting information to create a dialogue. In an increasingly connected world, which is generating vast quantities of data, the flow of information has exceeded the capacity of the consumer to digest it. Therefore, information consumption is becoming more discretionary. As such media feeds are increasingly targeted and personalized. This introduces another consideration, one of perception, where no two people receive and therefore understand the same information.

Where this confusion of information occurs, it can lead to ‘black-swan’ events, such as the UK vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. It is clear from an analysis of social media statistics at the time of the referendum that, whilst social media user numbers for each campaign were broadly similar, the Leave camp employed a message which was much more intuitive and straightforward. Subsequent academic analysis

²⁸ Olatunji Ogunyemi, “The Image of Africa from the Perspectives of the Diasporic Press in the UK”, in *Africa’s Media Image in the 21st Century*, edited by Mel Bunce, Suzanne Franks and Chris Paterson (Abingdon: Routledge., 2017), 104.

²⁹ Mickoleit, “Social Media Use by Governments: A Policy Primer to Discuss Trends, identify policy opportunities and Guide Decision Makers,” *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, no. 26 (2014): 3.

showed that “ the Remain campaign lacked a clear, simple narrative on the benefits of EU membership that could resonate at both a rational and emotional level with different audiences. This became very important in the development of a social media campaign.”³⁰ Similarly and in support, Oxford University network scientist, Vyacheslav Polonski, asserts that “[the Leave] message was highly emotionally charged, which facilitated the viral spread of Leave ideas . . . high arousal emotions such as anger spread faster than messages focusing on rational or economic arguments.”³¹ Through the employment of emotional narratives, based on limited facts and delivered in a socially safe environment online, it is possible to more deliberately shape a constituencies intent. This is achieved as the traditional social hierarchal system becomes superfluous, thereby neutralizing the dynamic of personal interaction which can engender a more critical and logical approach to decision making.

A Choir of Voices – Social Media and the Syrian Crisis

The conflict in Syria presents a fascinating reflection of the importance and role of social media in international relations. It presents a compressed temporal analogy of how information has altered perceptions and the balance of power in regional dynamics. Syria, like many countries in the Middle East, had a relatively small penetration of technology and internet access prior to the conflict. In fact, “Syria appeared to be among

³⁰ Mike Berry, “Understanding the Role of the Mass Media in the EU Referendum”, in *EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, ed. Danial Jackson, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (Poole: Dorset Digital Print Ltd., 2016), 14.

³¹ EU Referendum Analysis 2016, “Impact of Social Media on the Outcome of the EU Referendum,” last accessed 24 April 2017, <http://www.referendumanalysis.eu/eu-referendum-analysis-2016/section-7-social-media/impact-of-social-media-on-the-outcome-of-the-eu-referendum/>.

the least penetrated societies in the region.”³² It was a nation that exemplified the descriptor of a developing country in the Global South, with state run media dominating and social media seen as an alternate, yet limited independent forum. However, the conflict in 2017 is widely acknowledged as the first social media war, where “social network media is used by all actors . . . to influence and shape perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of audiences, both inside Syria and internationally.”³³ This significant shift in the role of social media and technology has been definitive.

One of the principal drivers for the social media precedent has been the nature of the conflict itself. The country is divided by competing state, non-state and independent actors and agencies. Also, there is a severe risk to life for journalists operating in the country, 108 have been killed in the country to date.³⁴ As such, news and information from the region is most commonly distributed externally via the internet on social media sites. The danger of this, as previously discussed, is the limited ability to determine the providence of the information, “the risk of manipulation for political ends is high ‘given that there are few journalists or international observers on the ground to scrutinize and provide external validity checks of claimed materials.’”³⁵

This capacity to employ social media as a tool of misinformation has been pivotal to the conduct of the conflict. Essentially, misinformation is increasingly used for strategic influence in the campaign and is central to the creation of an external narrative

³² Hamoud Salhi, “Assessing Theories of Information Technology and Security for the Middle East,” in *International Relations and Security in the Digital Age*, ed. Johan Eriksson and Giampiero Giacomello (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 109.

³³ Thomas Elkjer Njssen, *The Weaponization of Social Media* (Copenhagen: Rosendahl, 2015), 81.

³⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, “108 Journalists Killed in Syria: Motive Confirmed,” last accessed 1 May 2017, <https://cpj.org/killed/mideast/syria/>.

³⁵ Kasturi Sen, Hamid Hussain and Waleed Al-Faisal, “Ethics in Times of Conflict: Some Reflections on Syria, in the Backdrop of Iraq,” *BMJ Global Health* 2016, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 4, <http://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/1/3/e000149.full.pdf>.

to influence foreign affairs. In an era of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) driven narratives, it is critical that any policy of intervention proposed by the international community is based in fact. Yet, consistently in Syria “social media appears to have the potential for the kinds of biases and manipulations that can confuse rumor with fact and favor sensational claims over sober analysis.”³⁶ This is achieved in the emotive characterization of the social media stories which are played out internationally, analogous to those methodologies described by Dr. Polonski. What results is distinct unease in the global commons regarding the international response which should be instigated when considering a resolution for the humanitarian crisis and the conflict in Syria.

This was most recently exemplified by the contentious US kinetic strikes on Syrian regime targets in Shayrat airfield in response to reported chemical weapons use violations, originating from widespread reporting on social media. In the aftermath of the attack, political dividing lines on the UN Security Council (UNSC) were exacerbated between Russia and the US. Arguments centered upon illegitimate interventionism which asserted that “identifying Syria’s evident violation of international law should not be confused with an international law justification for the use of retaliatory force.”³⁷ Regardless of the legal and intelligence protocols applied by the US in the preparation of the operation, the perceptions of society remain focused on the manipulative social media narrative.

Of course, the fractious views of the international community and the UNSC cannot be limited purely by the influences of social media. Yet neither can they be

³⁶ United States Institute of Peace, *Syria’s Socially Mediated War* (Washington: USIP, 2014), 29.

³⁷ Richard Falk, “The US Attack on Al-Shayrat Airfield,” *Foreign Policy Journal* (April 2017) <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2017/04/12/the-u-s-attack-on-al-shayrat-airfield/>.

ignored. It is here that the gap in the association between social media and power in international relations is closed through the theory of constructivism. Political scientist Alexander Wendt proposes "that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature."³⁸ These shared ideas are found in the themes and context of the social media narrative, and whilst the facts may be inaccurate, biased or false, they construct a dialogue which is exploitable. If this commonality in dialogue becomes firm enough in society, it can lead to challenges to the status quo and introduce the 'black-swan' events which surprise state governments and transnational organizations.

In the context of Syria, the complexity of the conflict is exacerbated by character of the situation and the many actors involved; there is no single exploitable theme. Yet, the role of social media, from the early stages of the peaceful uprisings of the Arab Spring, through to the recent manipulation of international state behavior, has been consistently important within the country. It has provided the meeting space for an international dialogue which has shaped perceptions through emotive narratives. Critically, it continues to challenge international cohesion in the UN, whilst constraining interventions and the resource economics for conflict participants. All of this is achieved through the rapid production and ubiquitous application of targeted information.

³⁸ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

Conclusion

The role of information in international relations is critical. It is increasingly the principal mechanism for state and non-state actors to define and shape perceptions, through which they can influence intra and inter-state affairs. Alongside this the extraordinary amount of data that is being produced in the information age is fundamentally changing the character of world affairs and how societies interact globally. The requirement to understand this digital evolution is paramount. As the global population becomes increasingly empowered through technological and informational immersion, yet economic and social inequality persists, states will be presented with new and unique threats to their security. This will manifest itself in the inability of a nation to coerce or influence its own people, institutions and economies. Social media is defining culture in the digital age, creating uncertain futures for the politics and theories of international relations.

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