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CLAUSWEWITZ DIDN'T HAVE A FACEBOOK ACCOUNT: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A THREAT TO CONTEMPORARY OPERATIONS

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JCSP 44

Exercise *Solo Flight*

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INTRODUCTION

> *Real tweets have the power to end careers, cause diplomatic tensions, fuel a revolution and find a kidney. Fake tweets can have the same ripple effect.*
>
> - Heather Kelly, CNN journalist

On September 11, 2014, Cable News Network (CNN) published the headline "Plant Explosion in Centerville Caused Panic."[1] The panic was caused because of a message sent to citizens in Louisiana about a chemical plant explosion and subsequent toxic leak. Google searches by those concerned resulted in a Wikipedia page with additional information, YouTube had a video of a burning building with an ISIS related actor reading a message, and it was even reported on the Louisiana News' Facebook page. The panic was very real, but there was no explosion, burning building, or even a newspaper called the Louisiana News. It was discovered that the story was fabricated as part of an elaborate misinformation campaign from a troll farm within Russia.[2]

The connection of the Russian troll farm to the residents of Louisiana was ironically made possible years earlier by United States (U.S.) Department of Defense (DoD). In the 1960's, the Department of Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) working for the DoD, created a link between two computers in San Francisco which evolved by the 1990's to the creation of the World Wide Web and ultimately the internet.[3] By 2016, more than three billion people had

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[1] Geir H. Karlsen, "Tools of Russian Influence: Information and Propaganda." *Ukraine and Beyond*. (Aug 2016) https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-32530-9_9.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Derek Reveron, Cyberspace and National Security: Threats, Opportunities, and Power in a Virtual World (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 7.

access to the internet on more than 5 billion mobile devices.[4] The expansion seemed limitless and the Executive Chairman of Google went as far as to comment that "by the end of the decade [2020], everyone on Earth will be connected."[5]

If the internet is the means by which more than 3 billion are connected, then social media is the way they are communicating. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (StratCom COE) stated that "social media has become one of the main channels through which people connect and communicate."[6] Despite all of the benefits social media provides, NATO StratCom COE also noted that "social media has also emerged as a powerful weapon, used more and more frequently in information warfare."[7] State and non –state actors alike recognize social media as a weapon to influence the strategic narrative of contemporary conflicts and spread propaganda. Most of these conflicts, also referred to as "wars of choice," are not battles of powerful military states competing against one another in conventional warfare, but are fought over ideologies and identities thus requiring a high degree of legitimacy by Western forces.

This paper will demonstrate that social media is a threat to the conduct of contemporary operations by Western forces by the spread of propaganda and misinformation by state and non-state actors. To get a better understanding of this complex topic, this paper will invest some time to define social media and identify some of the characteristics that empower it as a weapon which are exploited by our adversaries to further their desired outcomes. The role of social media in the influence operation against the American population in the 2016 Presidential election will

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[4] James Canton, "Next Gen Computers will soon Transform Battlefield Intelligence." *National Defense* (February 2017): 16.

[5] Doug Gross, "Google Boss: Entire World Will be Online by 2020." CNN. Last accessed 21 Apr 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2013/04/15/tech/web/eric-schmidt-internet/index.html.

[6] Juris Benkis, "New Trends in Social Media." *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*. December 2016, 4.

[7] *Ibid*., 4.

be discussed followed by the case of the Islamic State (IS) and their aggressive social media usage to discredit the legitimacy of Western forces and expand globally.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL TERRAIN OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Information is such a powerful tool, it is recognized as an element of U.S. national power.

- U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter

It is likely that anyone reading this paper regularly interacts with social media but may have a difficult time defining it. A definition that fits in the context of military operations is "internet connected platforms and software used to collect, store, aggregate, share, process, discuss, or deliver user-generated and general media content, that can influence knowledge and perceptions and thereby directly or indirectly prompt behavior…"[8] The number of users connected on social media is staggering and according to Statista, there are approximately 2.5 billion users interacting in the social media environment via various platforms but Facebook remains by far the largest single platform with a staggering 2.2 billion monthly active users.[9] The average user spends approximately two hours and 15 minutes per day on social media, and during that time NATO estimates the global number of mobile social media users to grow by over 90,000.[10] This statistic speaks to two more important characteristics, ease of accessibility and low cost of entry.

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[8] Thomas E. Nissen, "The Weaponization of Social Media: Characteristics of Contemporary Conflicts," *Royal Danish Defence College* (2015), 40.

[9] Statista, "Most Popular Social Networks Worldwide as of April 2018, Ranked by Users (in millions)." Last accessed 21 Apr 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/.

[10] Anna Reynolds, "Social Media as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare," *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*, 2018, 6. Jason Mander and Felim McGrath, "GlobalWebIndex's Flagship Report on the Latest Trends in Social Media," *GlobalWebIndex Flagship Report 2017*, 7.

It is often cited that the computing power that put the first man on the moon now rests in the pocket of every smart phone user. This extraordinary evolution in technology is governed by Moore's Law which states that computing power doubles every eighteen months, storage volume per dollar every twelve months and available bandwidth per dollar every nine months.[11] This has empowered any actor the capability to capture, store, edit and transmit nearly limitless amounts of data. The combination of volume and ease of access has resulted in an inundation of information, credible news, propaganda, etc. to users of social media. In an effort to avoid information saturation, social media platforms have developed algorithms to help the user find the news it believes the user wants to see. Accelerating the problem is that according to a study conducted in 2017, 93 percent of Americans use online sources, including social media, as their primary source of news. [12]

These algorithms assist in the creation of echo chambers which filter and push users' news and advertising based on a profile developed by the social media platform. Echo chambers promote like-minded individuals to connect and share ideas and opinions which can be useful in the quest for a cure for cancer for example, but can also be used to influence unaware targeted users. Trolls or "fraudulent online accounts operated by humans" like those in the poison gas example are often accompanied by bots or "accounts operated by automated processes."[13] The aim of these fake users is to interact with authentic social media users and spread whatever message they desire. In one coalition operation, NATO reported that up to 55% of Russian

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[11] Canada, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *2018 Security Outlook: Potential Risks and Threats,* Ottawa, Canada. 2016, 79.

[12] Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich, "Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life," *RAND Corporation* (2018). 108.

[13] Jente Althuis and Leonie Haiden, "Fake News: A Roadmap." *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*, edited by Anna Reynolds, Riga, 2018, 63.

twitter accounts discussing the coalition were comprised by bots, and although that number is on the decline, it is joined by a rise in trolls.[14]

Fake users and automated profiles make it difficult to be sure who one is actually communicating with and highlights the serious problem of attribution within social media and the internet as a whole. A shocking example of attribution comes from the financial sector on the 23rd of April 2013 when the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 143.5 points resulting in the Standard and Poor's 500 Index's value dropping by more than $136 billion USD.[15] The result of the loss was caused by a tweet from the official account of the Associated Press (AP) stating "Breaking: Two explosions in the White House and Barack Obama is injured."[16] The algorithm directing the trading trusted the AP account and took the information in the tweet to be correct and made trades on predictive stock fluctuations. The tweet was quickly identified to be the result of the AP account being hacked and the value restored but not without shaking the confidence in the financial sector. The hack was eventually attributed to the Syrian Electronic Army.[17]

Although the AP represents a trusted news organization, social media has enabled the citizen journalist who is not held to any standards or ethics. War reporter David Patrikarakos remarked about the "extraordinary ability of social media to endow ordinary individuals, frequently noncombatants, with the power to change the course of both the physical battlefield

[14] Rolf Fredheim, "Robotrolling 2018," *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*, Issue 1(2018), 2.
[15] Tero Karppi and Kate Crawford, "Social Media, Financial Algorithms and the Hack Crash," *Theory Culture and Society* Vol 33(I) (2016), 74.
[16] *Ibid*., 74.
[17] *Ibid*., 87.

and the discourse around it."[18] Social media permits the spread of whatever is posted online nearly instantaneously, globally, indefinitely and with few laws regulating its content.

The RAND Corporation recently conducted a study called 'Truth Decay' which discussed the "diminishing role of, trust in, and respect for facts, data, and analysis..."[19] The study identified that some of the drivers of 'Truth Decay' are the internet, social media, spread of disinformation and foreign actors. The consequences are the erosion of civil discourse, political paralysis, alienation, disengagement and uncertainty.[20] These are exactly the kinds of conditions hostile actors would wish to foster and exploit.

PUTIN, CLAUSEWITZ, VIETNAM AND FACEBOOK

One need not destroy one's enemy. One only needs to destroy his willingness to engage…

- Sun Tzu, Art of War

On the 6th of January 2017, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), released a report stating "We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process…"[21] It also found that the influence campaign included "…state funded media, third party intermediaries, and paid social media users or 'trolls'."[22]

Shortly thereafter on February 16th, 2018, special counsel Robert Mueller released an astonishingly detailed indictment of 13 Russians working under an organization known as the

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[18] David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty First Century*, New York: Basic Books, 2017, 14.
[19] Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich, "Truth Decay…, iii.
[20] *Ibid.,* xvii.
[21] United States, Intelligence Community Assessment, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in recent US Elections*, Washington D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2017, ii.
[22] *Ibid.*

Internet Research Agency (IRA). The indictment contained details of the ways and means of the influence operation and specifically the use of social media. The indicted Russians had exploited the social media characteristics of anonymity, reach, and low cost of entry to directly converse with the American voter.

The fake accounts purposely targeted political and social activists. A twitter account named @TEN_GOP claiming to be controlled by a US state political party had more than 100,000 followers.[23] In another instance, a fake account was created under the title of 'The United Muslims of America' which posted "American Muslim voters refuse to vote for Hillary Clinton because she wants to continue the war on Muslims in the Middle East and voted yes for invading Iraq."[24] Those manipulating the 'The United Muslims of America' account recruited an actual U.S. citizen to attend a rally and hold a sign claiming to quote Clinton saying "I think Sharia Law will be a powerful new direction of freedom."[25]

In another attack, Russian actors garnered 200,000 thousand followers for the fake account Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and shared politically sensitive and racially divisive material.[26] It is clear that the Russians understand the power of information and are using social media to influence the U.S. population to which Facebook later confirmed that disinformation had reached 126 million users. Facebook's civic Engagement Product Manager

[23] US Department of Justice, *Indictment in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia*, DC: US Government Printing Office, 16 Feb 2018, 15.

[24] *Ibid.,* 17.

[25] *Ibid.,* 21.

[26] Natasha Bertrand, "The Fake Facebook Pages Targeting Vietnam Veterans," The Atlantic, Last accessed 21 Apr 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/04/foreign-actors-are-still-targeting-veterans-on-facebook-twitter-and-instagram/557882/.

stated "if there's one fundamental truth about social media's impact on democracy it's that it amplifies human intent – both good and bad."[27]

These are examples in a larger Russian strategy of information manipulation divided into active measures (Aktivnye Meropriyatiya) and deception (Maskirovka). The term active measures is roughly translated as a cross between psychological and political warfare.[28] The press secretary for Vladimir Putin commented in 2013 that "Russia is locked in information confrontation, ideological confrontation. Sometimes information begins to dominate the reality and to change the reality like a broken mirror."[29] It is clear that Russia is looking towards the information domain as an important part of warfare, and has its sights set on the U.S.

After the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the U.S. achieved a unipolar moment by amassing the most powerful military in the world, at great cost to both sides. Russia has realized that it can leverage the informational element of its national power at much less cost and to great effect in what it considers nonlinear warfare, or what the West refers to as hybrid warfare.[30] This form of warfare employs all available methods of information, political, conventional and Special Forces in conjunction with other non-military measures. The World witnessed the effects of this form of warfare as 'little green men' appeared in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and quickly seized Crimea.

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[27] The Two Way. "Facebook Says Social Media Can be Negative for Democracy. Last accessed 17 Feb 2018.https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/01/22/579732762/facebook-says-social-media-can-be-negative-for-democracy.

[28] Lauder, Matthew Lauder, "Truth is the First Casualty of War: A Brief Examination of Russian Informational Conflict During the 2014 Crisis in Ukraine," *Defence Research and Development Canada*, (November 2014), 3.

[29] Geir H. Karlsen, "Tools of Russian Influence…

[30] Gerasimov, Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science in Prediction," Military-Industrial Kurier, Last accessed 21 Apr 2018, https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/.

The U.S. however does not share a border with Russia and is much more powerful than Ukraine. Social media has allowed Russia to erase any digital distance between the two countries and inject itself into the American social dialogue. Russia is avoiding direct confrontation with American military might and is instead targeting the population that comprises and supports it, along with the political institutions that employ it. General Gerasimov, The Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation commented that "in the 21st century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template."[31]

By this point it should be clear that Russia is engaging in information manipulation via social media (and other means) but it appears not to involve the military or its operations. After all, a Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) scientific letter commented "Although the Soviet approach to Informational Conflict was both robust and comprehensive, there were no clear lines between political and military applications." [32] Spreading false information or disinformation is also nothing new in the conduct of foreign relations and has been said that diplomats are all "good men sent abroad to lie for their country."[33]

This author would argue that the Russians understand the power of the population of a nation state and its effect on its armed forces. One of the great minds in warfare, Karl von Clausewitz described the importance of the population as part of his "remarkable trinity" of the people, military and politics.[34] He went on further to state that "a theory that ignores any of them…would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally

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[31] *Ibid.*

[32] Truth is the first casualty of war…4. This scientific letter refers to earlier operations but speaks to the mindset of information operations during the Soviet era as a precursor to operations under the Russian Federation.

[33] Patrick Wintour, "Revealed:UK's push to strengthen anti-Russia alliance," The Guardian. Last accessed 04 May 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/03/revealed-uk-push-to-strengthen-anti-russia-alliance.

[34] Harry Summers., *A Critical Analysis of The Gulf War*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 6.

useless."[35] A simplistic analogy is to think of a three legged stool that cannot stand with one of the legs missing, despite the strength of any individual legs. One does not have to look too far into U.S. history to see the effects of the National will and conflict, something Russia is acutely aware of.

In the case of the U.S. and the Vietnam War, the American people were deliberately not engaged and there was little national will to win the War. Former secretary of state Dean Rusk stated "since we wanted to limit the war, we deliberately refrained from creating a war psychology in the U.S."[36] A veteran of Vietnam, Col Harry Sanders commented that "factoring the American people out of the strategic equation was one of the most consequential and far reaching mistakes of the Vietnam War."[37] This is certainly not the only reason that America lost the war in Vietnam, but was certainly a contributing factor. An interesting statement made by General Fred Weyand in reference to the public's perception of the military amidst considerable protests at the time, "If we cannot be loved, we can be trusted and respected."[38] The trust in the institution would be tested many years later over alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in Iraq.

Before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, then secretary of state Colin Powell made the case to the United Nations (UN) and the world that Saddam Hussein was in possession of WMD's. Despite the convincing presentation, the "facts" were later proven to be false. The credibility of General Powell and the U.S. intelligence community were irreparably damaged as a result, and few can forget the image of then President Bush on an aircraft carrier with 'Mission

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[35] Carl von Clauswitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.

[36] Dean Rusk, quoted in Michael Charlton and Anthony Moncrief, *Many Reasons Why: The American Involvement in Vietnam* (New York:Hill & Wang, 1978), 115.

[37] Harry Summers., *A Critical Analysis of The Gulf War*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992, 10.

[38] Fred C. Weyland, "Serving the People: The Need for Military Power," *Military Review* (December 1976),8.

Accomplished' announcing the end of major combat operations. It is by no coincidence that Russian trolls used the wars in Vietnam and the Gulf (2003) to divide the American electorate. This is certainly not the first time Russia has attempted to interfere with elections, but according to a U.S. joint intelligence community assessment "these activities demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations."[39]

The threat against Western forces is not in bombs and bullets, but in the hearts and minds of its own population. General Gerasimov argues that the very rules of war have changed and that "the role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."[40] The U.S. is not the only target however and more countries are beginning to take a stronger stance against Russia, including the United Kingdom (U.K.).

British Member of Parliament (MP) Damian Collins commented "we know Russia is a big player in fake news around the world…we've seen evidence of intent to meddle in elections here…"[41] The British have formed a super committee involving chairs from defence and foreign affairs to call for a strategy to combat Russian disinformation campaigns. Concern for the potential role of social media in the vote for the U.K. to leave the European Union (EU) dubbed "Brexit" resulted in MP Collins demanding for the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg to appear before his committee.

His concern has been justified in a recent report released by the U.S. Congress that 400 of the IRA twitter accounts involved in the U.S. election meddling were actively posting about

[39] Assessing Russian influence…ii.
[40] Gerasimov, Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science in Prediction…
[41] Nahlah Ayed, "How British MP's are tackling Russia's war on perception," Canadian Broadcasting Company, Last accessed 04 May 2018, http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/russia-meddling-british-approach-1.4647750.

Brexit.[42] This report also highlighted that research conducted by a joint team of experts identified 150,000 Twitter accounts with various ties to Russia.[43] This example demonstrates the difficulty in attribution and speed of social media. The result of the election has long come and gone, yet the impact of Russian influence is still unknown.

Russia is not only weakening the populations support within a single nation state, but within coalitions and alliances. Alliances and coalitions are at the heart of nearly all major Western contemporary operations, and their potential breakdowns would weaken the West's ability to respond militarily against any Russian aggression. Unfortunately for the West, it is not only the Russians that understand the fragility of a coalition and its legitimacy.

HEARTS AND MINDS

In response to the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, NATO adopted its first ever Article 5 response which states that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or north America shall be considered an attack against them all…"[44] The ensuing American led invasion of Afghanistan to find Usama bin Laden and al Qaeda was therefore very legitimate in the eyes of the American population and the international community. However, nearly 17 years later, the mission now faces serious questions as to what the end state of the conflict will be and has seen an operational shift towards Iraq and Syria against a new threat called the Islamic State (IS).

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[42] United States, Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. National Security, DC: US Government Printing Office, 10 Jan 2018, 118.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] NATO website, last accessed on 01 May 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

The IS started as a faction of al-Qaeda know as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as a Sunni militia after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the U.S. led coalition. This organization among others would eventually become ISIS (or ISIL) under the direction of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. Despite the relatively small size of the force, ISIS was able to combine extreme brutality with aggressive messaging to expand its forces through foreign fighters. During testimony, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Nicholas Rasmussen stated that "ISIL's capacity to reach sympathizers around the world through its robust social media capability is unprecedented…"[45]

A letter from senior al Qaeda leaser Ayman al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi was discovered during operations in Iraq outlining their understanding of the importance of the support of the public and the impact of the media. Zawahiri commented that "in the absence of this popular support, the Islamic mujahed movement would be crushed in the shadows… I stress again to you and to all your brothers the need to direct the political action equally with the military action…" [46] The increased politicization of contemporary conflicts led David Killen to describe them as "armed variant[s] of domestic politics."[47] These contemporary conflicts are not "near peer" state on state conflicts, but a clash of control over the population which are taking place in an era of greater transparency due in part to the spread of information via social media.[48]

Killen also made an interesting observation that Western forces create a narrative to support operations, while non-state actors such as terrorists conduct operations to support a

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[45] United States, Operation Inherent Resolve: Report to the United States Congress, DC: US Government Printing Office, 01 Jul 2016 – Sep 30, 2016, 45.

[46] United States. Director of National Intelligence. "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi" https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf, 4.

[47] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 195.

[48] Thomas E. Nissen, "The Weaponization of Social Media…, 8.

narrative. [49] In this manner of thinking, the narrative itself is at the forefront and not the effect of the operation. Al-Zawahiri underscored the importance of the narrative and the media to al-Zarqawi when he wrote "I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma."[50]

ISIS took these lessons to social media and spread their influence via Twitter and a magazine named Dabiq in which every issue begins with a quote by al-Zarqawi stating "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq."[51] The publishers of Dabiq paid great attention to detail in production quality lending credibility to the magazine. It appealed to its readership by shaping the perception by which they viewed the conflict. It provided an "alternative agenda or cause – that is, a 'competitive system of meaning' designed to act as the lens through which its audiences perceive the conflict."[52] Although mislead, it is through this lens that ISIS could frame themselves as the protectors of the Sunni Muslim identity through strict adherence to Sharia law. On Twitter, its supporters were equally as determined.

Despite being outnumbered six to one by opponents of the terror group, IS members and supporters were able to post 50% more content on Twitter, in excess of 90,000 tweets per day.[53] Also, it is clear they understood the power of imagery as 88% of its content was visual in nature

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[49] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up..:*,347.

[50] United States. Director of National Intelligence. "Letter from al-Zawahiri…,10.

[51] Haroro Ingram, "An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine," Australian Journal of Political Science Vol 51, No 3 (2016): 466. Dabiq is available in print form, but is most readily available through digitally. Although a magazine represents a more traditional method of information, it is made significantly more available via social media.

[52] Haroro Ingram, "An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine…,461.

[53] Jane Cordy, "The Social Media Revolution: Political and Security Implications," NATO Parliamentary Assembly, (Oct 2017), 6.

and generally of very good quality.[54] A study attempting to measure the impact of the ISIS social media strategy collected all tweets generated by retweeters of ISIS accounts and discovered that they represented 1.4 billion tweets, or 15% of all the Arabic content on Twitter in 2015.[55] It can be said that there is a certain quality to quantity.

Drawing a direct correlation between the ISIS social media campaign and the number of foreign fighters recruited is unlikely but it is estimated that between 2011 and 2014, as many as thirty thousand foreign fighters joined the fight in Iraq and Syria. That represents the largest mobilization of foreign fighters in Muslim majority countries since 1945, and it is also estimated that the number has doubled in the 18 months following the publication of Dabiq coinciding with the taking of Mosul.[56] It is not only the import of foreign fighters that is a concern, but the export of the ideology to other areas around the globe. According to Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), 34 militant groups had pledged their support to IS as of December 2015.[57] As of the end of 2017, although IS had lost considerable ground in Iraq and Syria, it has been active in more than 10 countries around the world.[58]

It is clear that IS understood and exploited the near borderless reach and low cost of entry of social media to further its agenda. By using commercial social media platforms, they have created a global network capable of reaching nearly anywhere on the planet for very little cost and continue to evolve and survive despite the enormous efforts of Western forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. By changing the narrative on social media via Dabiq and on Twitter (among others), IS attacked the legitimacy of the coalition by its very presence in Iraq and Syria

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[54] *Ibid.,* 7.
[55] Measuring the impact of ISIS social media strategy….3.
[56] Haroro Ingram, "An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine…,458.
[57] Jasmine Jawhar, "Terrorists' Use of the Internet: The Case of Daesh*." The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism*, (2016), 29.
[58] United States, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Report to the United States Congress*. DC: US Government Printing Office, 01 Jul 2017 – Sep 30, 2017, 28.

while bolstering their own legitimacy. Similar to the Russian active measures, although at a much greater deficiency in military power, they avoided direct engagement with the coalition when possible and instead engaged with locals and Western populations in the information domain.

Non-state actors appreciate they lack military power as al Zawahiri commented "however far our capabilities reach, they will never be equal to one thousandth of the capabilities of the Kingdom of Satan that is waging war on us."[59] But, the power relationships are changing with the so called information revolution which prompted one former State Department director of policy planning to comment that "the proliferation of information is as much a cause of non-polarity as is the proliferation of weaponry."[60] Simply put, if information is power, and the internet/social media provide access to this information for all, then all are powerful. Consider reconnaissance as an example. It took the U.S. decades to develop high flying advanced reconnaissance aircraft and eventually satellites at the cost of many billions of dollars, while in 2018 Google earth is provided free of charge.

The information revolution has initiated a trend in the distribution of power from institutions to individuals and networks of individuals which was demonstrated during the Arab Spring in 2011.[61] On December 17th 2010, a desperate Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire Sdi Bouzid, Tunisia in protest of an unjust government. This moment marked the beginning of the Arab Spring, and less than 10 days later, the 23 year reign of Tunisian President Zine el-

[59] United States. Director of National Intelligence. "Letter from al-Zawahiri…,10.
[60] Nye, Joseph S. Nye,*The Future of Power*, New York, Public Affairs 2011, 134.

[61] David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty First Century*, New York: Basic Books, 2017, 15.

Abidine Ben Ali was over.[62] No more than two months later, the three decade rule of Egyptian President Mubarak was finished followed shortly thereafter by Colonel Gaddafi in Libya.[63]

It is evident that change was likely to occur before the catalyst of the events in Tunisia, but it is unlikely that they would have been as rapid and widespread without the communication ability provided through social media platforms. A tool for concealing online activity named the onion router (Tor) showed increases of 400% and 600% in Egypt and Libya respectively. One author commented "the US DoD's advantage in material, financial, and technological resources will be effectively negated if it fails to secure a foothold in these emerging communications spaces."[64] Indeed, it has been argued that Western forces have more to gain from social media as a source of intelligence that any threat it may pose to their operations.

This author agrees that social media is an excellent source for intelligence and is a domain that needs surveillance by the military and security professionals. Western forces currently leverage social media to great effect in operations through a developing discipline called social media intelligence (SOCMINT). A great deal of the intelligence created and shared via smartphones and computers used by hostile actors is intercepted and used by Western forces for targeting. The RAND Corporation for example, was able to provide a geographic laydown of ISIS supporters through geotagged tweets.[65] The United States Air Force (USAF) was also able to use a geotagged photo of an ISIS fighter in front of a headquarters (HQ) building to develop a target for a kinetic strike that was executed less than 22 hours from the photo being uploaded.[66]

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[62] Ian Bremmer, *Us Vs Them: The Failure of Globalism*. New York, Portfolio Penguin 2018, 55.

[63] Sasha Romanosky, Martin Libicki, Zev Winkelman and Olesya Tkacheva "Internet Freedom Software and Illicit Activity." *RAND Corporation* (2015). 35.

[64] William Marcellino, Meagan Smith and Christopher Paul. "Monitoring Social Media…2.

[65] William Marcellino, Meagan Smith and Christopher Paul. "Monitoring Social Media…12.

[66] Marc Goodman, *Future Crimes*, Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2015. 21.

Another powerful tool in intelligence collection is called social network analysis (SNA). This discipline is rooted in sociology and is concerned more in relationship data than in individual data.[67] SNA has allowed intelligence agencies to develop a clearer picture of important nodes in social networks like those of terrorist and criminal organizations. This is especially important because it can identify user accounts globally that are interacting with a terror organization for example, and not just a local network within a geographic operating area.

These are adaptive and emerging techniques in intelligence with tangible and lasting effects on the battlefield but are often achieved at the tactical level. They assist in targeting a fighter or leader, but have difficulty in achieving a strategic effect on the enemy. For example, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in a coalition strike but another leader emerged to continue the fight under a new name. At the strategic level across armed forces "there appears to be little doctrine available to guide government and defence organizations on how to overtly engage and, where intended, influence individuals and audiences effectively via social media."[68]

CONCLUSION

The world is more connected than ever before and social media is a growing method for those connected to communicate, but this does not make it the enemy. Social media is but a tool used daily by billions of people around the world every day to connect to friends and family members, get the news, share ideas, and conduct legitimate business. Advances in wireless networks and network enabled mobile devices have enabled individuals to access and share enormous volumes of information to nearly every populated area on the globe.

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[67] Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Todd Helmus, Madeline Magnuson and Zev Winkelman, "Examining ISIS Support and Opposition Networks on Twitter," *RAND Corporation* (2016). 39.

[68] Social media as an influence activity tool…2.

Despite the positive effects of this connectivity, social media is also being used as a weapon of information. State and non-state actors alike realize the potential of social media to communicate directly with citizens around the world and spread misinformation and propaganda. Liberal Western democracies are especially vulnerable due to freedoms of speech, expression and of the press. The line between protecting its citizens from propaganda and content filtering or censorship is becoming difficult to define and even more difficult to defend.

It is indeed the hearts and minds of populations that state and non-state actors are targeting. Influence operations by the Russian government seek to sow doubt and expand existing social divides through the use of social media thus weakening the resolve of the targeted population. All the while, non-state actors are simultaneously recruiting within Western nations and conducting terrorist attacks. The role of the military in the defence of such actions remains unclear.

The deployment of forces into Afghanistan has lost legitimacy and credibility over the course of nearly two decades, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq continues to be used to discredit the American military. No discernable victory can be declared in the War on Terror as ISIS inspired terrorist attacks continue around the globe despite the enormous costs in both cost and sacrifice of lives. Western militaries must remain vigilant and capable to combat a resurging Russia, all the while conducting operations in a more politicized environment "in the spotlight of the media and the shadow of international lawyers."[69]

Any uncertainty in contemporary operations is but an enduring characteristic of warfare and one to which Western militaries must adjust. However, the role of civil society will increase as hostile actors continue to target them with influence operations. The U.S. congress noted "it

[69] Staff Writer, "After Smart Weapons, Smart Soldiers," *The Economist*,Last accessed 01 May 2018. https://www.economist.com/node/10015844.

will ultimately be the education ministries, civil society, and independent new organizations that are most effective in inoculating their societies against fake news."[70] Although Clausewitz did not have a Facebook account, it may appear that Mark Zuckerberg has a gun.

[70] United States, Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy …, 154.

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