



Information Warfare Watch No. 31

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ISRAEL VERSUS AL-JAZEERA

Since the start of its military campaign against Hamas in the Gaza Strip last Fall, Israel has come under sustained criticism from a variety of voices in the Arab World. None have been louder than that of *Al-Jazeera*, the controversial Qatari media powerhouse which dominates Arabic-language broadcasting in the greater Middle East. The television channel has played an outsized role in shaping Arab attitudes toward the conflict via its coverage, which – crucially – has included providing a platform to the militants of Hamas to disseminate their radical message to regional audiences.

Belatedly, Israel's government is moving to eliminate the reach of the outlet, at least for a while. On April 1st, Israel's Knesset approved a law giving the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the power to ban the broadcasts of TV channels "considered a threat to national security." The ban is temporary, and needs to be renewed every 45 days. However, its impact is immediate; Israel's government has said it would "act immediately" to shutter *Al-Jazeera's* local office. (*BBC*, April 1, 2024)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The Israeli decision is a controversial one. On the one hand, *Al-Jazeera* has long been accused by many of serving as a mouthpiece for some of the world's most extreme political elements, including Afghanistan's Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah and al-Qaeda. On that basis, it has already been banned by regional states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. On the other hand, however, Israel's selective exclusion of the channel (and its failure to replace it with more moderate regional alternatives) has generated criticism that it is trying to do nothing more than stifle coverage of the ongoing military campaign in Gaza.]

ADVANCED TECH POWERS CHINESE DISINFO

As artificial intelligence (AI) technology has advanced in recent years, it has become a key informational tool for the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has started using it to facilitate the spread of propaganda and disinformation. For example, during the recent Taiwanese elections, China used "Taiwanese voices to discredit Taiwan, cultivate official brands or personalities or influencers to push disinformation streams," says Chihhao Yu, co-director of the Taiwanese Information Environment Research Center. Additionally, "Beijing has used government-related accounts and generative AI to push fake videos, and used third-party and other data to micro-target messages and influence campaigns to specific individuals."

Moreover, China's actions in Taiwan are likely to foreshadow Beijing's conduct on the international stage. China's information manipulation in the context of Taiwan suggests that "wider adoption of AI, and particularly large language models, could greatly improve the effectiveness of China's disinformation campaigns, particularly when it comes to English-speaking countries," notes Patrick Turner of *Defense One*.

Turner is not the only one raising the alarm. A recent study by the Jamestown Foundation, a Washington, DC think tank, notes the dangerous potential inherent in the media manipulation Beijing can achieve via artificial intelligence. "The PRC's potential to interfere in elections with deepfakes has been noted, with strategies including creating false narratives around candidates and misleading information on electoral processes," the study lays out. "Advanced AI tools could further sophisticate these interference efforts, impacting democratic processes worldwide."

At the same time, China is aware of the destabilizing potential of artificial intelligence vis-à-vis its own internal situation. As a result, the Jamestown study notes, Beijing has embraced a "dual stance" on "deepfakes" — artificial videos or images generated by AI: "strict regulation domestically due to potential socio-economic and security threats, coupled with an ambition to leverage them for international influence operations." (Jamestown Foundation *China Brief*, March 29, 2024; *Defense One*, April 8, 2024)