



Information Warfare Watch No. 11

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Related Categories: Europe Military; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Middle East; Europe

FOR THE SWISS ARMY, FOREIGN SOCIAL MEDIA IS A THREAT

Worried over potential leaks of "metadata," the Swiss army has banned foreign messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram. Instead, conscripts will use the Swiss-made app Threema for all service-related communications. Threema spokesman Daniel Reist explained that the app has end-to-end encryption, and its servers are in Switzerland. Unlike U.S.-based apps, Threema is not subject to the U.S. Cloud Act, which enables the U.S. government to obtain user information through a legal request. Even with end-to-end encrypted apps, messaging companies could provide data on who the users were, whom they were speaking to, and the size of the messages exchanged, which the U.S. could use for traffic analysis. Notably, however, the measure is more recommendation than edict, and does not punish soldiers who continue using foreign apps. (*Sky News*, January 7, 2022)

STOCKHOLM GETS SERIOUS ABOUT MISINFORMATION DEFENSE

On January 1st, the government of Sweden officially launched a Psychological Defence Agency to monitor foreign disinformation campaigns targeting the Scandinavian nation and combat online propaganda from hostile states, including Russia, China, and Iran. These disinformation campaigns have targeted areas of public concern - including the efficacy of COVID vaccines, official governmental responses to the pandemic, and immigration - in a bid to undermine public trust and erode the legitimacy of political leaders throughout Europe. "The security situation in our near European environment has deteriorated for some time now and therefore we need to rebuild our total defence," Magnus Hjort, the new agency's deputy director, has said. It will do so by enhancing the nation's "ability to identify and counter foreign malign information influence, disinformation and other dissemination of misleading information directed at Sweden." The new agency will also collaborate with municipalities to teach the country's public how to verify vital information.

Experts are praising the move as an essential step in the face of expanding disinformation campaigns from a growing number of hostile actors. "As many countries have found, the pandemic has spawned a new breed of disinformation, which has spread as rampantly as the virus. This is not only from usual suspects but also from new actors, who are copying Moscow and Beijing's methods," writes Elizabeth Braw of the American Enterprise Institute in the *Financial Times*.

The stakes are high. "Public trust in the government is the Achilles heel of western democracies seeking to defend themselves against innovative adversaries. Disinformation aimed at weakening public confidence in its military forces or political leadership can have a potent destabilising effect," Braw explains. Thus, "the most important task in psychological defence is to inoculate the population against believing false information." (*Washington Post*, January 6, 2022; *Financial Times*, January 11, 2022)

THE END OF QATAR'S LATEST INFLUENCE OP

Since it was launched in the late 1990s, the *Al-Jazeera* television channel has transformed Qatar from a tiny Gulf nation into a foreign policy powerhouse - one with the ability to shape Arab and global public opinion. Along the way, *Al-Jazeera* has spawned a number of ancillary political influence projects specifically geared at target demographics whose worldview and outlook the channel has sought to shape. The most recent, launched in February 2021, was *Rightly*, a digital platform designed specifically to engage the political right in the United States.

Rightly, however, appears to be a thing of the past. According to *Axios*, *Al-Jazeera* has shuttered *Rightly* following poor viewership totals and growing scrutiny on the part of Congress and the press. The future of the platform is currently uncertain, with *Al-Jazeera* executives maintaining that they plan to "reevaluate" in the future whether to restart *Rightly* programming. (*Axios*, January 18, 2022)