

# Information Warfare Is Not “Optional”

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Global Research, May 29, 2016

[New Eastern Outlook](#) 29 May 2016

*Nations without information warfare capabilities in the 21st century are like nations without armies and navies in the 20th century. They are defenseless.*

Imagine a nation without an army, a navy or an air force. What would its prospects be of defending itself against even moderate aggression? What if it had an army, even a formidable one, but was missing an air force and/or navy? Would its chances be any better?

Before the invention of human flight, war was fought in two dimensions by armies and navies upon the surface of the planet. With the introduction of aircraft to warfare, a new dimension was added. Nations that fell behind the curve building and rebuilding their air forces would find themselves consistently at a disadvantage. Those nations that stayed ahead of the curve would cite air power as key to their victories throughout recent history. Today, undoubtedly, information warfare is no longer a novelty. It has been honed into a weapon of devastating effect able to confuse, divide and destroy nations in a dimension conventional warfare often cannot even reach.

The use of the Internet and information warfare soared to new heights during the Arab Spring. Hardly the spontaneous uprising it was portrayed as across the Western media, for years beforehand [the US State Department together with tech-giants Google and Facebook](#) prepared armies of information warriors to disrupt, divide, confuse and take over the information space in the respective nations the US targeted for regime change in 2011.

Like an air force entering undefended airspace, the US State Department's information warfare capabilities met little resistance and quickly overwhelmed and assumed control over information space in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Syria. Only Syria and Egypt's immense conventional military and political power prevented tragedies like that which unfolded in Libya from repeating itself elsewhere. However, it cannot be denied that across the region, information warfare was neglected and unnecessary leverage was conceded to the US amid a much larger theater of conflict.

## Vulnerabilities in the Information Space

While the Internet and its use in information warfare is relatively new, information warfare is not. The US and the British before them have spent over the decades, and for the British, centuries, investing in whatever forms of media existed at the time to ensure their voice among it was loudest if not the only voice to be heard.

Today, the US through a myriad of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reaches deep into a foreign nation's information space and media creating entire fronts to broadcast their messages from.

With overseas scholarships and training programs they aim at luring young, ambitious journalists into becoming indoctrinated and reliable outlets of US propaganda and ideally, collaborators with US interests when opportunities present themselves.

In many nations, particularly throughout the developing world, governments do not take advances in information technology seriously, failing to recognize the importance of maintaining control over it and countering efforts to co-opt and use it against them. Their views of how to manage the media are very often outdated, leaving them particularly vulnerable across the entirety of their information space.

In these nations, information from the government's point of view is often disseminated through press releases or government-owned broadcasters that hold little credibility both domestically and internationally.

### Building Better Defenses for Information Space

Defending one's information space depends on occupying it fully, first and foremost. This means making it difficult if not impossible for foreign nations to set up and operate media operations within a targeted nation's borders to begin with.

Occupying Your Information Space: Russia's relatively recent NGO laws forcing foreign-funded organizations to register as foreign agents undermines their legitimacy simply by demanding in reality the transparency these organizations often demand disingenuously as a means of attacking and undermining a targeted government.

By exposing the foreign-funded nature of their operations, effectively exposing the disingenuous intentions and financial motivations they harbor and making it difficult for them to operate while giving space to legitimate, indigenous and most importantly, constructive opposition, squeezes them out of a nation's information space like a well planned garden crowds out weeds.

Controlling and Projecting From Your Information Space: Russia's RT, China's CCTV, Iran's PressTV and South America TeleSUR are all examples of another means of filling and dominating one's information space.

Not only do these news organizations adequately cover the news in their respective nations alongside a myriad of similar state-run media operations, they are able to communicate with, appeal to and persuade audiences well beyond their borders. It is a way of countering US and European propaganda both at home and abroad, balancing what has been for decades a lopsided information war.

Because these operations are run as professional, internationally aware and objective news organizations with minimal overt government influence, they are effective at appealing to foreign audiences.

For nations sorely lacking such news organizations, particularly across Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East, nations like Russia and China already exporting defense capabilities of a more conventional kind, could consider exporting defensive capabilities for information space.

### Neglecting Information Warfare Invites Attack

Nations that have habitually neglected information warfare have invited attack. Nations with notoriously unsound defenses for their information space are often flooded with foreign NGOs who occupy and control it to such an extent, governments are forced to capitulate to otherwise easily countered propaganda campaigns.

Investing in information warfare is not “optional” any more so than investing in a properly trained and equipped conventional military. The reality of the 21st century is that wars are no longer fought merely on land, sea, and air. They are fought in information space as well and failure to understand and defend against such threats accordingly is as bad as leaving a nation’s borders undefended, its skies unwatched, and its shores unguarded.

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