The Intelligence Brief

The magazine that delivers analyses about world issues to foster understanding, foment empathy, and lead to action.

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TIB

“It is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old, they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams.”

— Gabriel García Márquez

The Intelligence Brief

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"*The World Slips Away*"
by: John Arias

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In This Edition

World: *Misinforming Democracies*

by: Kevin Truitte

In the United States, Europe, and beyond, foreign actors continue to invest in disinformation campaigns to undermine democratic institutions.

By now, the Russian Federation's covert efforts to disrupt the 2016 elections in the United States are well documented. From Twitter botnets that magnify divisive messages to popular Facebook pages covertly run from offices in St. Petersburg, Russian intelligence operations aim to sow discord within the U.S. political system and undermine the integrity of the American democratic process. While the Russian 2016 election interference is the most overt example, it is not the only instance of an authoritarian state seeking to disrupt trust in democratic institutions.

In Europe, Russian disinformation campaigns have targeted votes over policy,—(as was the case when Russian disinformation flooded the Netherlands to influence a non-binding referendum on whether the country should approve a European Union (EU) deal with Ukraine for closer economic and political ties), electoral campaigns (as in the recent Moldovan elections), and more broadly flooding Europe with continuous messages that exacerbate divisions. Furthermore, China has conducted similar efforts including against Taiwan's 2018 elections and India's 2019 elections.

With the rise of social media, disinformation can be spread with ease across online mediums such as Facebook and Twitter, often times far faster than fact-based news. These campaigns remain a cost-effective option for authoritarian states to disrupt their democratic adversaries' internal political cohesion and reinforce anti-democratic policies domestically.

Russia and other undemocratic actors like China and Iran recognize that these campaigns can have an impact on their rivals without eliciting major retribution. These efforts often rely on obfuscation to disguise the fact they are being conducted at the behest of a nation-state actor, making attribution particularly difficult for countries such as the United States or European states.

For example, Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election relied heavily on the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a St. Petersburg-based organization that generated fake news and messaging. The IRA is under the direct control of Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch and close personal associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin. In addition, efforts by Russian military intelligence (GRU) to place stolen emails into the American information environment relied on both the false persona of a Romanian hacker named Guccifer 2.0 and the transparency website Wikileaks. These enabled disinformation to enter the U.S. electoral discourse without initial direct attribution to the Russian state security apparatus, and thus allowed them the Kremlin, at least initially, to avoid retribution.

Moreover, disinformation efforts ultimately seek not only to sow discord in foreign domestic populations but also to reinforce anti-democratic narratives at home. By catalyzing conflict over democratic elections, the Kremlin or Chinese Communist Party can more effectively sell their own brand of authoritarianism to domestic populations, stressing that their strong-handed tactics and consolidated political power prevent this sort of domestic conflict.

If allowed to continue unchecked, foreign disinformation campaigns could more broadly undermine the societies of these states, helping turn citizens against one another. At the very least, the instigation of echo chambers—semi-closed systems of like-minded beliefs echoed through repetition—could reinforce the opinions of already radical elements in the affected states. To combat these disruptive efforts, governments, civil society, and individuals will need to take a more active role in contesting these campaigns. Even if one agrees with the substance being espoused by a foreign disinformation campaign, it must be broadly understood that political disagreements should not be driven by external actors. These campaigns intend to exploit the free and open discourse of democracies and undermine participation in elections, which authoritarians see as an existential ideological threat. Governments should seek to more closely cooperate with social media companies to shutter these disinformation campaigns while preserving individuals' freedom of expression online. Civil society should aim to teach critical thinking and fact-checking when seeing questionable online content. Lastly, individuals should always seek additional information about politically divisive issues and understand where those messages originate. For Europeans, sources like the EU's EUvsDisinfo.edu shed light on Russian disinformation, particularly in Eastern Europe. In the United States, sources like the German Marshall Fund's Hamilton 68 Dashboard serve a similar purpose.

Ultimately, countering corrosive disinformation campaigns will require short-term stop-gaps and long-term efforts, mobilizing societies and governments alike. Otherwise, ill-intentioned actors will continue to catalyze domestic strife that could leave states politically paralyzed, weak, and exploitable. 🌍

United States: *Suppressing Democracy*

The State of Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial election was among the country's most expensive and turbulent races, and has revealed sophisticated new efforts of voter suppression in action.

by: Ubah Abdullahi

To properly understand the contentious results of Georgia's 2018 Gubernatorial Election, one must be acutely aware of the subtleties of Georgian politics, particularly its long and pernicious history of voter suppression. To analyze the events leading up to democratic candidate Stacey Abrams' narrow defeat by Governor-Elect Brian Kemp is to recognize the nefarious attempts by Republicans in Georgia to suppress the minority progressive vote. These efforts are residual symptoms of a deeply rooted disease: voter suppression. The practice itself as old as the 15th Amendment itself. Georgia's 2018 Gubernatorial Election is yet another chapter in the state's long history of systematic disenfranchisement, specifically, a result of the evolution of policies enacted to suppress voting and election practices during the race.

The rise in controversy surrounding Georgia's 2018 election highlights a troubling trend in the state's voting and election policy. This trend dates back to 1870, when the 15th Amendment was adopted. The 15th Amendment marked a turning point in the struggle for African-American civil rights. However, it was swiftly followed by a feverish effort by white legislators to subvert the newly enfranchised African-American population. This was done primarily through the creation of a carefully curated set of obstacles at the ballot box. Lawmakers looked at societal characteristics of the African-American population and exploited them via voting and election policy that all but explicitly excluded African Americans from participating in the democratic process.

These regressive voting policies included things such as the authorization of a poll tax and literacy test, meant to disqualify low-income Jim Crow educated African-Americans as outlined by Georgia's 1877 and 1907 Constitutions.

In addition, systems of racial discrimination and oppression often included police power and intimidation, economic retaliation, and racially motivated violence perpetrated by white Americans. Due to these tactics, voter suppression in Georgia reared its ugly head for decades before the adopting of the 24th Amendment and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Although both pieces of legislation helped bolster the bedrock of democracy for millions of African-Americans, the struggle for voting rights remains relevant today.

Historical injustices have had a repercussive and detrimental influence on contemporary American public life, particularly in Georgia. Voter suppression manifested itself as election day terrorism as African-American plantation workers voted in front of their employer, and African-American voters handed their ballot directly to white election officers for inspection. Today, these practices have evolved into what can only be described as an ostensible hunt for voter fraud. Under the guise of preventing such fraud, policymakers purge voter rolls and restrict voting procedures that disproportionately impact Progressives and African Americans.

In the 2018 Gubernatorial Election, Democratic candidate Stacey Abrams was forced to combat an archaic system equipped with newly evolved capabilities designed to further marginalize poor and black voters. Her opponent, former Secretary of State Brian Kemp, enacted several voting and election policies that experts likened to Jim Crow-era political strategies. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg called the laws, "purposely discriminatory". Although this modern subversion of the African-American and progressive vote is decidedly more covert, it is almost equally insidious.

Secretary of State Kemp further employed the aforementioned voter fraud tactics prior to the election. according to an APM report, he purged approximately eight percent of registered voters from voter rolls. More than 100,000 of these were further purged as a result of Georgia's "use it or lose it" law, which disproportionately affected African-Americans (by a staggering seventy percent). The "use it or lose it" policy removes inactive voters from the state's registry. This law is often used in conjunction with the "exact match" law and other voter identification policies. Following the landmark Supreme Court ruling *Shelby v. Holder*, Section 4(b) of the 1965 Voting Rights Act was declared unconstitutional and thereby removed pre-clearance requirements for all jurisdictions. Former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder equated such laws to a modern-day poll tax. This further supports the claim that the pretext of combating voter fraud is used as an excuse to reduce the political rights of minorities, the poor, students, and other groups that tend to vote progressive.

In the midst of the 2018 race, Democrat Stacey Abrams, whose strategy relied heavily on boosting voter turnout, repeatedly called for Kemp, to recuse himself as Secretary of State, due to voting and election policies in the state constitution that provided him an unfair advantage. Overseeing his own election created a clear conflict of interest. Kemp's refusal to step down came amid growing concerns that this conflict of interest would run counter to the most fundamental principle of democracy by compromising the state's electoral integrity. Among the most prominent Democrats to call for Kemp's recusal was Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who in an interview with the Associated Press stated, "In order to foster voter confidence if the race ends up very close, I urge you to step aside and hand over to a neutral authority the responsibility of overseeing the governor's election". Kemp, however, continued to deny any notion that he should step away from his oversight role, and instead strengthened his commitment to serving as Secretary of State for the remainder of his campaign.

After the prolonged and highly politicized gubernatorial race, Georgian citizens made their way to the polls to elect their new governor. Thousands were met with frustrating delays, non-operational voting machines, and misinformation from election officials as they waited to cast their votes. These challenges took place in largely minority precincts and were demonstrative of the gross mishandling of the election.

Kemp denied involvement in the issues, arguing that although he was Secretary of State at the time, voting and election day practices are largely dealt with at the local level. However, the Office of the Secretary of State coordinates and monitors all election activity: this includes voter registration in addition to municipal, state, county, and federal elections. Therefore, after last-minute lawsuits filed on behalf of the Abrams campaign, the race continued for ten days after election day. Abrams' campaign's efforts to ensure that all provisional and absentee ballots were counted was not enough to secure a runoff election against Kemp, who won by just fifty-five thousand votes.

Instead, in her informal concession, Democratic hopeful Stacey Abrams claimed that voting and election policies used in Georgia and elsewhere in the United States presented a credible threat to the fair administration of elections and the fundamental freedom to vote. In a scathing address, Abrams was unequivocal in asserting, "I know that eight years of systematic disenfranchisement, disinvestment and incompetence had its desired effect on the electoral process in Georgia". Kemp, in a recent follow-up interview with Fox News, rejected claims that the Georgia Race was unfair, candidly stating, "In Georgia we have secure accessible fair elections." As Abrams launches *Fair Fight*–her operation to pursue accountability of elections in Georgia–and Kemp now serves as Georgia governor, the issue of voter suppression will continue to have lasting effects on the millions of Americans, a festering sore on the democratic process.

The impact of voter suppression is difficult in that research shows not only that it depresses a willingness and ability to vote but that it also depresses the sense that one's vote matters. In her *New York Times* best-seller, "One Person, No Vote" Carol Anderson lays bare the vicious cycle of voter suppression. She describes the ways in which certain policies systematically undermine the ways that African Americans have achieved access to their basic civil rights, particularly the right to vote. So, what has often been viewed in Georgia as an apathetic and disengaged minority electorate is, in fact, an incisive and terrifying practice wreaking havoc on the electoral process. 🌍

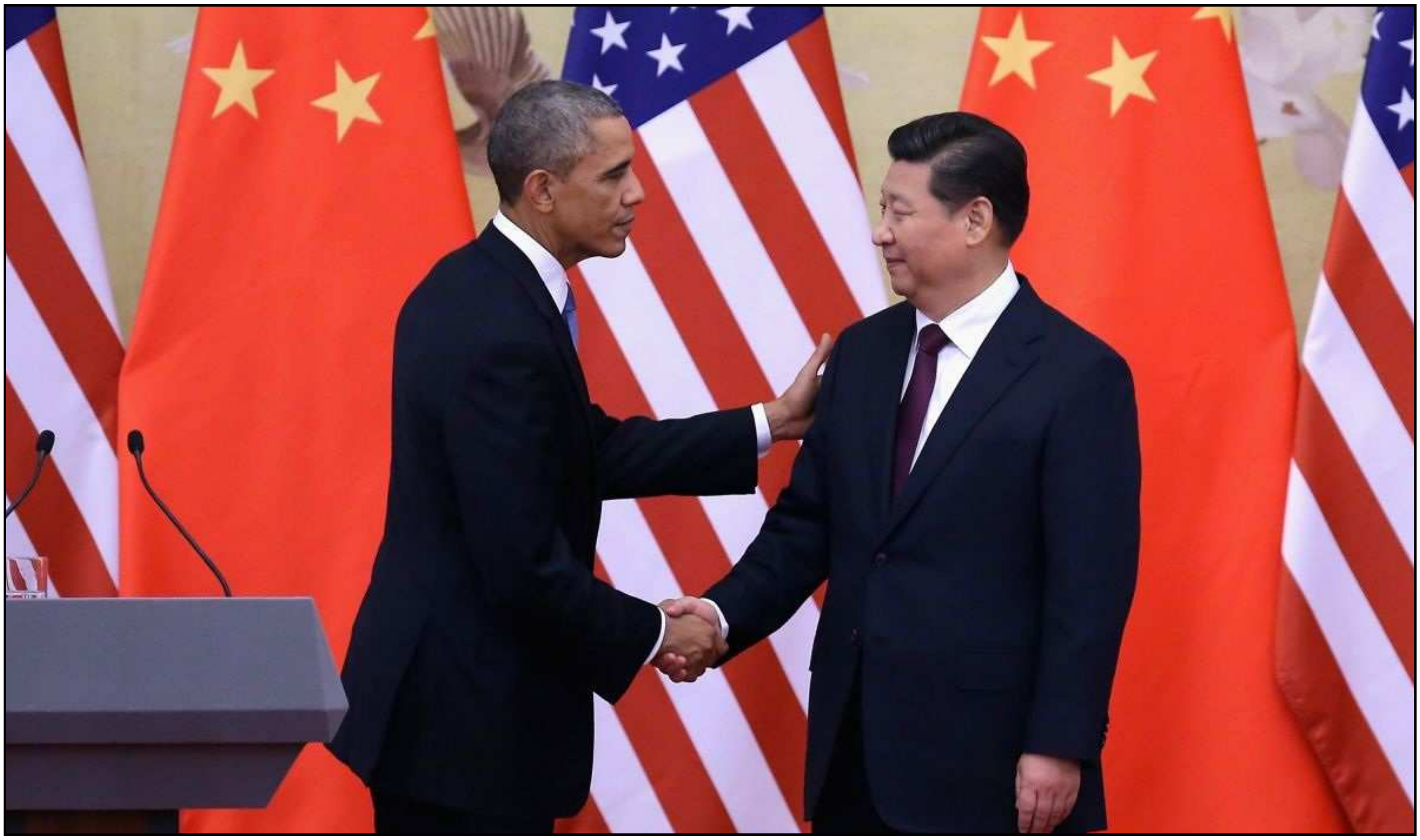
United States-China: The Great Pushback

The United States should implement a comprehensive government approach to pushback against China's growing influence.

by: John Arias

To many, the United States has been the sole economic, political, and military superpower since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. For the last three decades, the United States has enjoyed this position largely unchallenged. But the rise of China as a global power—one able and willing to challenge the United States in realms not currently challenged—throws a wrench into the status quo and superimposes a defining question for foreign affairs professionals of the 21st Century: Are we on the brink of a U.S.-Chinese cold war?

Most analysts will explain that an imminent confrontation is almost certainly expected. How, in what format, and when that showdown between the two countries occurs is still unknown. At the same time, some analysts are quick to describe what implications a US-Chinese cold war could have. Some suggest a cold war would be catastrophic for both countries and the world. As such, for the United States, it is best to continue to deal with China's rise through the prism of integrating it into the current world order. However, consistent U.S. administrations have followed that concept more or less for the last twenty years, and have largely failed. China has played by the rules when convenient and has gone rogue when not.



The time for a paradigm shift is now. A well-thought-out strategic pushback against China is needed and will benefit U.S. national interests in the long run. A “great pushback” will have three main benefits for U.S. national security. First, the United States excels at countering finite adversaries as opposed to infinite ones (i.e. state-based entities vis-a-vis non-state based entities). Second, at a time when the country lacks unity, rallying behind one common adversary will likely bring citizens and parties together. Third, the successful victory over what is seen as a primary challenger to the current liberal world order will prove the resilience of the order and help the United States regain the trust and confidence of populations around the world by pushing back the rise of authoritarianism.

The Infinite vs Finite Game

U.S. grand strategy has mostly been served best by symmetric adversaries rather than asymmetric ones. In other words, the United States has always understood geopolitics best through the paradigm of a finite game. A finite game has one clear opponent with defined goals and objectives. The game ends when one side wins, desists, or loses.

The cold war against the Soviet Union was a good example of a finite game. The United States had a defined objective: to defeat communism in every realm. At times, the defeat of communism was almost more important than the underlying core principle of spreading democracy. Through this single focus, the United States developed a strategy that helped bring down the Soviet Union. It developed an industry that propelled technological change, advanced weaponry, and a multitude of soft power tactics that proved successful in deterring the spread of communism. The United States involved itself in multiple proxy wars and underpinned the security of Europe and Asia in order to accomplish its defined goal of defeating the Soviet Union.

The United States understands and fights finite games well. In contrast, infinite games are much more complicated. There is no winning, losing or desisting. There are no clear opponents. Infinite games are often characterized by abstract adversaries. A clear example of an infinite game is terrorism. In fact, terrorism has been the primary context that has guided U.S. foreign policy for the last two decades. This asymmetric *modus operandi*, one that does not operate under the bounds and guides of a state, imploded the U.S. foreign policy establishment's paradigm of how to formulate a grand strategy. As a consequence, the United States formulated blunders like the invasion of Iraq and the prolonged counterinsurgency mission in Afghanistan. The United States attempted to fight an asymmetric or infinite game with a finite mentality. It has proven costly in blood and treasure.

China's rise represents an opportunity to utilize what the United States does best and apply it. China's challenge to the liberal world order (and by extension to US interests) is one that can be quantified and conceptualized into a clear objective: contain China's rise. Within the context of a finite game, the " great pushback" should involve a similar approach to the U.S. grand strategy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. The United States should apply a comprehensive government approach that counters China's economic influence, military modernization, and ideological soft power. It should leverage U.S. technology and call on a sense of duty and patriotism to sustain U.S. supremacy in important fields like quantum computing, sensitive military electronics, consumer technologies, and intellectual property.

In fact, there is nascent evidence that a wider pushback has begun. In recent months, and according to Western media, the United States and its allies most notably Australia and New Zealand denied Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications company, access to their 5G networks. In addition, the United Kingdom and Canada are considering similar bans. Earlier last year U.S. Representative Joe Wilson proposed an amendment that seeks to register China's Confucius Institutes as foreign agents. Most recently the U.S. Department of Justice indicted two Chinese agents in charges related to hacking and economic espionage. For now, these recent examples remain loosely coordinated and are not woven into a broader strategy. If the U.S. frames China's rise as a finite threat, these disconnected actions would be easier to weave into a greater and more coordinated pushback.

Us vs Them

Psychologist Henri Tajfel is the father of social identity theory. In his theory, Tajfel theorized that humans categorize the world in terms of in and out groups or us vs them, seeking to identify negative concepts of the outgroup to rationalized their in-group's superiority. In its most negative extremes, the us vs them paradigm leads to racism and antisemitism. But Tajfel's theory also presents positive benefits. That is because it helps to unify an in-group based mostly on similarities than differences with the out-group. In other words, as they seek to denote differences from the outgroup they unify around commonalities they encounter in the process. In the same sense, a great pushback against China should unite the United States politically, economically, and ideologically.

Xenophobia, far-right and left extremists, racial tensions, fear of immigration, and populist rhetoric coupled with stagnant wage growth, increasing student loan debt, high healthcare costs, the loss of manufacturing jobs in the midwest and pundits for each side have left the socio-economic-political divide in the US in dire circumstances. The continuous immigration debate and the past Government shutdowns are only examples that the divide is deepening.

The foil to a deepening divide is a common entity and or adversary that transcends individual pains and unites people against one common hardship. There is historical evidence that backs this trend. In the midst of the Great Depression and in the wake of the attack against Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D.Roosevelt united the nation against Nazism and Japanese aggression. During the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy and then President Lynn B. Johnson united the country against the Soviet Union– and that helped the country withstand tough social and economic divisive times like the Civil Rights Movement or the Vietnam war protests. As much as those two events almost brought the country to its knees, there was a higher ideology and cause to unite around: the fight against communism.

In order to accomplish this, the threat from China needs to be conceptualized into a broader threat, one that is capable of altering the American way of life and the values it holds dear. It is not that China's rise is an existential threat per se but if one frames the threat as that it could be it will help unify the in-group as it tries to rally against the out-group.

It should be noted that it is important to not take the "great pushback" to extremes. The unification that would result from framing China as an adversary should be based upon a state versus state competition and not antisemitism nor racism. It should emulate the approach used during the Cold War when there was still a healthy exchange of culture and peoples between the US and the Soviet Union.

The Resilience of the Global World Order

Finally, there is another global benefit to a "great pushback." China's state-led economic model represents the most existential threat to the US-led world order. If successful, a pushback would revitalize the liberal world order, underscoring its resiliency, and pushing back the wave of authoritarianism. It would engrain the values of market-led world order as the model to follow for decades to come.

In fact, 2016 was a boiling point for the slow simmering rise of authoritarianism and right-wing populism that had been brewing since the 2008 economic recession. The Trump presidency and Brexit led the charge. In 2017 and 2018, right-wing wins in Brazil and party gains in most European parliamentary elections, as well as left-wing populism wins in Mexico followed and underscored an increasingly non-democratic trend. The danger lies in that these wins are data points used by authoritarian regimes (i.e. China, Russia, Turkey etc) to evidence the demise and incompetence of the US-led liberal world order. These states don't argue on the merits of their authoritarian state-led capitalist system. Instead they argue and capitalize on the inherent weakness and flaws of the US-led liberal world.

A healthy liberal world order is the best counter argument to authoritarianism. A recent and clear example of how the strength of democracies can reduce the authoritarian system's space to operate and generate appeal is in Venezuela. While there are other factors that have affected the socio-economic situation in Venezuela one key takeaway of recent actions by the Western democracies to recognize the interim president Juan Guaido is that it highlights not only the strength of a system that has been ingrained in the international community for more than half a century but the isolationism, shame, and lack of moral argument that the authoritarian led system has in the eyes of the world. Russia, China, and Turkey are now considering recognizing interim president Juan Guaido to save face with the international community and their substantial investments in the country.

In all the “great pushback” should revalitize the order by discrediting and denying space for China ’s system to operate and gain appeal. But the “great pushback” doesn’t defeat the authoritarian system by solely discrediting its appeal. What the “great pushback,” if done properly, will ultimately do is regain the liberal-order appeal and reignite its importance vis-a-vis the authoritarian model. In other words, the liberal-order will win by re-showcasing what made it so appealing (i.e.rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech, market-led economies, multilateralism, etc) almost seventy years ago.

Too Risky?

Some analysts will argue a “great pushback” will have negative consequences that outweigh the possible benefits. One particular concern is that a strategic all-around pushback against China may accelerate and develop into a full-blown cold war plunging the world into bi-polarism and ignite proxy wars as well as an arms race. Yet, while this critique is important to recognize it is shallow and overly cautious.

For one, at the moment, China has not shown signs it intends to challenge the United States in proxy wars like the Soviet Union did in Korea and Vietnam. Nor does it seem interested in entering a prolonged arms race. This is because China’s strategic intention and the ultimate goal is heavily focused on obtaining and sustaining economic power. It is not to say that it will not change its strategic goals nor that it is not investing heavily in its Armed Forces. But it is unlikely that it will do so in the near term and that military goals will take precedence over economic goals. This stems in part from the fact that China’s economy remains heavily intertwined with Washington's and Beijing recognizes the significant leverage the United States still holds in the international economic system. For example, in 2018 the United States levied an export ban on US technologies to Zhong Xing Telecommunications (ZTE), China’s second largest telecommunications company, effectively bankrupting it. Additionally, since early last year, China’s economy has slowed due in part to US tariffs. It is why a great pushback is likely to not antagonize China in military terms or warrant a response from it that will signal the need to escalate competition into an arms race.

Another reason the "great pushback" is unlikely to escalate to militarily conflict is that China's economic rise has been in part do to its integration into the US-led liberal world order. As a result, and by extension and strategic benefit, Beijing is keen in avoiding confrontation that puts free trade, and exploitation of developing economies in danger. The most direct evidence that points to this calculus is that of China's "assistance" with North Korea and helping enforce some aspects of the US' sanctions regime (despite it going against it is ideological and even to some extent its security interest). And as referenced earlier, it has gained economic strength in leveraging aspects of the international systems it deems beneficial like free trade– which it has shown an interest in protecting even as the US retrenches towards protectionism–and opposed rules that can be negative towards its economic progress like protection of intellectual property and the curtailing of state-owned enterprises.

This is all to say that Beijing cares too much about its economic progression to risk antagonism by entering a protracted arms race or military to military conflict with the United States that could derail its economic progress since Mao's revolution.

A Great Pushback…

The full implementation of "great pushback" will benefit US grand strategy in three ways. First, the United States excels at countering finite threats. Second, a "great pushback" should unite the country around a common entity, and finally, a successful pushback should reinvigorate the liberal world order ensuring its continuance for years to come.

World:

Swiping Away Privacy

Dating apps might help you find love but at the expense of privacy.

by: Andrea Li

Geosocial networking applications (apps) offer a new way to socialize that differs from "old school" dating sites on social media. They favor the selection of matches through pictures, minimize space for textual self-description and draw on Facebook profile data. The Global Positioning System (GPS) in dating applications such as Tinder or Grindr allows people to find new matches using data entered during registration that show common interests.

Despite the accessibility and effectiveness of these new dating apps, inserting personal data on dating apps involves serious privacy risks. The case of the Grindr data breach in April 2018 highlights this problem. According to a report by the Norwegian research institute SINTEF, Grindr transferred the data of over 3.6 million users to Apptimize and Localytics, including the HIV status of users, through a sharing system that allows people to send data entered in real time. Mobile dating apps have a vulnerability that makes sensitive user information potentially subject to extortion, bullying, hate speech, stalking, prostitution, piracy, and even revenge pornography.

According to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards, a user must expressly consent to the collection, use, and disclosure of personal data in accordance with the privacy policy at the moment of registration. This involves important problems regarding personal privacy.

The terms and conditions of many mobile dating apps clearly state that the data can be used for advertising purposes and that all data, including chat messages and personal information, cannot be considered safe. In addition to nebulous contractual conditions contained in the apps, one of the problems in terms of privacy is the lack of the "https" security protocol on dating apps such as Tinder, Paktor, and Bumble which exploit instead simple http (*difference between http and https*). In other words, using these apps on public or compromised Wi-Fi networks allows potential hackers to misuse, monitor, or steal personal data.

A second flaw concerns the swipe and match dating system used in applications such as Tinder. In truth, these apps should consist of data equipped with some form of cryptography to increase security. Researchers at the app security company Checkmarx have shown that different events on Tinder produced different sequences of "bytes" (an information unit) that were recognizable in their encrypted form. According to their research, Tinder uses a swipe to the left to reject a potential date, which corresponds to 278 bytes. A swipe to the right to accept a potential date corresponds to 374 bytes. While a new match corresponds to 581 bytes. Combining this strategy with the lack of the https protocol makes it possible to extract "sensitive" user information from dating apps.

A third problem concerns the method of processing personal data used in dating apps. In some cases, companies examining large amounts of sensitive data against users' wishes represents a clear example of personal privacy violation. Therefore, it is important to understand the basics of data protection rights. Some data included in apps can be used by consumer product companies for targeted advertising on dating apps. As explained by Grindr, other data can be taken by users, and transferred to third parties, for vague purposes linked to a hypothetical improvement of the app itself. However, two problems can arise from this. First, as Maryant Fernandez Perez, a Senior Policy Advisor of EDRi, European Digital Rights explains, no clear indication is given about the nature of these services. The second problem is the social impact: for some people, Grindr or other dating apps represent a “safe space”, where meeting new people takes place without fear, stigmatisation or judgment, and above all, persecution or violence. According to analysis by Brian Moylan of *The Guardian*, in the digital age, the community created by these dating apps has an important impact on how people meet and form connections. Yet, after the personal data violations of Equifax and Cambridge Analytica, most users have become more aware of the risk of sharing confidential information with companies. Users are particularly cautious especially in a context where information sharing can not only violate the right to online confidentiality, but also change the real life position or social consideration of a person.

A fourth flaw pointed out by Guido Noto La Diega, Senior Lecturer in Cyber Law and Intellectual Property Northumbria Law School, is the "intermediary liability" of the companies developing the app. This means that “if a site (or a dating app) does not actively produce content, but is only operating as a host, under the current European legislation, then the site or app is not responsible for the illegality of the content that is ‘produced’ and shared by its users. In other words, a site or dating app cannot be held responsible if it does not know the nature or existence of such content or activity. However, if the app receives a notification or a removal procedure, or if a user informs the platform of the existence of something illegal, then the dating app is responsible and must act immediately to remove the content.” Such a system presents an important disadvantage, if we take into consideration: (1) There is no legal obligation for companies to monitor the flow of user data; (2) With the excuse of the right to “personal privacy and freedom of expression,” the developers or managers of the dating app formally and substantially avoid the task of monitoring misuse and being held responsible for any violations; and (3) De facto dating apps perform *ex-ante* and *ex-post* checks on the images and personal biographies uploaded by users to avoid explicit content. However, this is equivalent to the systematic monitoring of personal data sent by people.

Furthermore, current economic practices further exacerbate the possibility that users' sensitive data ends up in the wrong hands. In 2016, the Chinese Beijing Kunlun Tech Company, a videogame company that previously developed a special version of Angry Birds, bought 60 percent of the shares of the largest social network for gay men in the world: Grindr.

The question that emerges is what does the purchase of the dating app entail and what will happen to the personal data of people after data is sent to China. In other words, can the Chinese government access users' sensitive data? Grindr explains that "if a company acquires our company, shares or assets, then that company will be in possession of the personal data we collect." The dating app also adds that all personal data can be processed in the country where they have been collected as in other countries, including the United States, where laws on the processing of personal data may be less stringent. Indeed, in some circumstances, this may leave users with little to no legal safeguards in the event of personal privacy violation. According to the user guidelines on the Grindr website, the app may decide to disclose personal data in response to mandates, orders from a supreme court, or following a legal proceeding, in order to comply with applicable laws. In China there are three laws that can affect the sharing of personal data from the Grindr archive: (1) *New Security Law*: in order to protect national security, the Chinese government will be able to monitor and investigate foreign and national individuals and organizations; (2) *Link between tech giants and the Communist Party*: Wechat, a communication service through text and voice messages for portable devices, blocks political posts and sensitive messages and sends the identity of the content creators to the national police; and (3) A Chinese politician has previously defined homosexuality an anomaly and has banned homosexual content on the Internet.

The proactivity of users in trying to know the conditions and methods used by dating apps and meeting platforms is an important element that underpins personal experience. In addition to the laws for the protection of users' personal data (e.g the GDPR), it is necessary to develop education in the field of protection of personal data and to strengthen non-governmental organizations capable of highlighting legal disputes on these issues, in order to increase the overall level of data security.

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