

Course Information

Course Number:	INTA 689
Course Title:	Disinformation and Information Warfare: From World War I to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine
Section:	<i>Section</i>
Time:	Mondays from 6:30-9:10pm
Location:	Bush School of Government and Public Service
Credit Hours:	3

Instructor Details

Instructor:	Professor Amy Austin Holmes, Ph.D.
Office:	TBD
Phone:	TBD
E-Mail:	aaholmes@tamu.edu
Office Hours:	Monday and Thursday from 4-5pm and by appointment

Course Description

This course provides students with an understanding of the complex interplay between propaganda, disinformation, governance, and national security. Offering an overview from World War One until the present, including cases from the United States, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, including Russia and Ukraine, the course equips students with an understanding of how the proliferation of disinformation and sophisticated information warfare poses challenges to both governments and societies, and how policymakers have attempted to respond to this challenge.

Course Prerequisites

None

Course Learning Outcomes

- Understand the concepts related to propaganda and disinformation and critically analyze them.
- Independently conduct analysis of information sources, and be able to identify propagandistic narratives, disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation.
- Evaluate the challenges and threats to national and global security associated with propaganda and disinformation.
- Understand how disinformation and information warfare has been used based on a study of historical case studies from World War One to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

- Understand how both state and non-state actors have used propaganda and disinformation.
- Differentiate between different types of autocratic regimes, based on their usage of propaganda, disinformation, and information warfare.
- Understand the gendered dimension of disinformation.
- Through the analysis of primary documents, including declassified archival documents, understand how the U.S. government made efforts to disseminate its views during the early period of the Cold War into different countries in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, including behind the Iron Curtain.
- Understand how the U.S. government is currently responding to Propaganda and Disinformation
- Increase critical thinking skills and the importance of questioning the status quo or received wisdom, in particular as it relates to how disinformation and state propaganda can prevent accountability and good governance.

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

Main books used in the course; articles and other reports listed under each week.

Available through the TAMU bookstore.

- Thomas Rid. 2020. *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*. First edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman. 2022. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lee McIntyre. 2023. *On Disinformation: How to Fight for Truth and Protect Democracy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Available through the TAMU library.

- Paul Baines, Nicholas J O'Shaughnessy and Nancy Snow. 2020. *The Sage Handbook of Propaganda*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Jones Marc Owen. 2022. *Digital Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Deception Disinformation and Social Media*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.
- Nina Jankowicz. 2020. *How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Required films for the course

- Crimea [Крым/КРЫМ] (2017)
 - Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6WJu5hbL04&t=5s>
- The Battle at Lake Changjin (2021)
 - Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRVGP7GDm1E>

Grading Policy

Grading Scale:

A: 90-100

B: 80-89

C: 70-79

D: 60-69

F: 68 and below

Research Project: 40% -- Due November 18, at the beginning of class

- Presentation (20%)
- Paper (20%)

The research paper should formulate a hypothesis, ground it in relevant literature, and illustrate an argument or puzzle using evidence. The paper should be between 10-12 pages long, not including the bibliography. Each student will give a 15 minute presentation about their paper in class.

Policy Memo: 15% -- Due Wednesday December 4, at the beginning of class

The policy memo should include an analysis of the problem, how it impacts governance or security, and actionable policy recommendations. The policy memo should be between 3-4 pages long.

One-Page Brief: 5% -- Each student selects which week they want to write the brief, which should be shared with the class 24 hours before class.

The one-page brief summarizes key points of the readings for that week. Students will select which week they want to be assigned, beginning in Week 2.

Presentation of Archival Documents: 5% -- in class on Sept 18

Debate on the Role of Disinformation and US Presidential Elections: 5% -- In class on Sept 30

Participation: 10%

Students should participate actively in every class. Through their contributions to the classroom discussion, they should demonstrate that they have done the readings, be able to engage critically with the main ideas, and discuss how they agree or disagree with the ideas and evidence presented by the authors of the various readings .

Final Exam: 20% -- Due no later than Monday, December 9 at 8am. Early submissions are encouraged.

Late Work Policy

Missing the deadline for assignments leads to a decrease in grade by 10% for each 24 hours.

Course Schedule

Week 1:

Introduction to the course

Week 2:

Theories of Propaganda

A guide to the approaches used in studying propaganda and disinformation. Overview of the concepts of propaganda, disinformation, fake news, and hybrid war as aspects of political communication.

Readings:

- Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy (2020). Chapter 4: "From Disinformation to Fake News: Forwards into the Past." *The Sage Handbook*.
- Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo. (2013) "Introduction: Thirteen Propositions About Propaganda" in: *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*

Week 3:

American Efforts to Counter Russian Disinformation

Readings:

- Cull, N. J., Gatov, V., Pomerantsev, P., Applebaum, A., & Shawcross, A. (2017). Soviet subversion, disinformation and propaganda: How the West fought against it. *London: LSE Consulting*, 68.
- Disinformation Roulette: The Kremlin's Year of Lies to Justify an Unjustifiable War, Report by the Global Engagement Center of the U.S. Department of State, February 23, 2023
 - <https://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation/disinformation-roulette-the-kremlins-year-of-lies-to-justify-an-unjustifiable-war/>
- Jankowicz Nina. 2020. *How to Lose the Information War: Russia Fake News and the Future of Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris. - Please read Chapter 5 "Ukraine: Dutch Disinformation" pages 123-153

Film

Please watch the movie listed below about the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Be ready to discuss and answer questions. Try to think theoretically about some of the concepts from the readings to analyze the film.

- Crimea [Крым/Крым] (2017)

Week 4:

Historical Overview of Propaganda in the World Wars and Cold War

Readings:

- Rid, Thomas. (2020). *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*. First edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
 - *Prologue: What is Disinformation?* (pages 3-14)
 - *Chapter 4: American Disinformation* (pages 61-73)
 - *Chapter 5: The Kampfgruppe* (pages 74-84)
 - *Chapter 6: LC-Cassock* (pages 85-100)

Primary Source Analysis of Archival Documents and Student Presentations

- Please select at least three archival documents from the National Security Archive on US Information Activities in the Middle East during the 1950s and give a 5-10 minute presentation on the archival documents, relating them to the other readings.
- Documentation on Early Cold War U.S. Propaganda Activities in the Middle East • <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/docs.htm>

Week 5:

Gender and Disinformation

- “Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Foreign Malign Actors,” (2023). Global Engagement Center, March 27, 2023
- Gabrielle Bardall . (2022.) “Nasty, Fake and Online: Distinguishing Gendered Disinformation and Violence Against Women in Politics” in: *Gender and Security in Digital Space*, Routledge
- Dhanaraj Thakur and DeVan L. Hankerson. (2021). “Facts and Their Discontents: A Research Agenda for Disinformation, Race & Gender.” Center for Democracy & Technology.

Week 6:

Big Tech and Disinformation in the United States

- Lee McIntyre. (2023). *On Disinformation: How to Fight for Truth and Protect Democracy*. MIT Press
- Jon Bateman and Dean Jackson. 2024. “Countering Disinformation Effectively: An Evidence-Based Policy Guide,” Carnegie Endowment, Chapters 1-9
- *Other readings TBD – Students are encouraged to recommend readings focused on disinformation and the US presidential elections.*
- In-class debate on the role of disinformation and US presidential elections.

Week 7:

Global Propaganda by the Islamic State and Counter-Narratives for Deradicalization

Source discussion on the Islamic State Propaganda. Possible guest lecture by Dr. Anne Speckhard, Director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) on countering propaganda by the Islamic State and other extremist organizations. To be confirmed.

Readings and Videos:

- Louisa Tarras-Wahlberg (2020). Chapter 32: ISIS Female Recruits: The Alluring Propaganda Promises. *The Sage Handbook*.
- Charlie Winter & Craig Whiteside. (2020) Chapter 33: IS's Strategic Communication Tactics. *The Sage Handbook*

Videos on the website of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE)

- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCumpEsozixbl-PyKw12hmnw/playlists>

The Knights of the Caliphate - with English subtitles:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFMUgk_t1XA&list=PLqpy96DXqN-dK01K_FikteDoSxScG_OT0

ISIS Defectors Speak Out - with Russian subtitles:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNcvaMk5o54&list=PLqpy96DXqN-fxHJOEuwxlk1tA8JUQLtYj>

Week 8:

Syria: Turkish State Media and Military Operations in Syria

A review of propaganda in Syria, specifically comparing propaganda and disinformation by the Syrian regime, Russia, and Turkey.

Readings:

- Greg Simons. (2020) Chapter 26: Syria: Propaganda as a Tool in the Arsenal of Information Warfare, in: *The Sage Handbook*
- Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman. (2023) *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*, chapter 1 “Fear and Spin”
- Amy Austin Holmes. (2021) “Threats Perceived and Real: New Data and the Need for a New Approach to the Turkish-SDF Border Conflict.” The Wilson Center Occasional Paper Series, No 39.
- Killing the Truth: How Russia is Fueling A Disinformation Campaign to Cover Up War Crimes in Syria: <https://thesyriacampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/KillingtheTruth.pdf>

Week 9:

Chinese Propaganda and the Global Media Offensive of the PRC

- Kurlantzick, Joshua. (2023). *Beijing's Global Media Offensive: China's Uneven Campaign to Influence Asia and the World*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

- Uyheng, J., Carley, K.M. (2020). Bot Impacts on Public Sentiment and Community Structures: Comparative Analysis of Three Elections in the Asia-Pacific. In: Thomson, R., Bisgin, H., Dancy, C., Hyder, A., Hussain, M. (eds) Social, Cultural, and Behavioral Modeling. SBP-BRiMS 2020. Lecture Notes in Computer Science(), vol 12268. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-61255-9_2
- Global Engagement Center. (2023) “How the People’s Republic of China Seeks to Reshape the Global Information Environment” Global Engagement Center, September 28 <https://www.state.gov/gec-special-report-how-the-peoples-republic-of-china-seeks-to-reshape-the-global-information-environment/>

Film

Please watch the Chinese film listed below. Try to think theoretically about some of the concepts from the readings to analyze the film.

- The Battle at Lake Changjin (2021)

Week 10:

Research Paper Due at the beginning of class and in-class Presentations of Research Projects.

Week 11:

Spin Dictators, Algorithms, and AI

An overview of information security on the Internet, social dimensions of information security, group polarization and civil confrontation in social media.

Readings:

- Hyunjin Seo (2020). Chapter 8: Visual Propaganda and Social Media. The Sage Handbook
- Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman (2023) *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*, chapter 3 and 5
- Jon Bateman and Dean Jackson. 2024. “Countering Disinformation Effectively: An Evidence-Based Policy Guide,” Carnegie Endowment, Chapters 12-13

Week 12:

Policy Options. Countering propaganda and disinformation. *An overview of resilience to information warfare, fact-checking, and policy options.*

Readings:

- Nina Jankowicz (2020). *How to lose the information war*. I.B. Tauris Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, Chapter 1 on the United States and chapter 2 on Estonia
- Christopher Paul & Miriam Matthews (2020). Chapter 18: Defending Against Russian Propaganda, *The Sage Handbook*

Week 13:

Propaganda and Disinformation in the Arab Spring: Egyptian Revolution

A historical overview of propaganda in Egypt during and after the Revolution that overthrew the 30-year Mubarak dictatorship.

Readings and Videos:

- Amy Austin Holmes (2019). *Coups and Revolutions: Mass mobilization the Egyptian Military and the United States from Mubarak to Sisi*. Oxford University Press. Read Chapter 4: "Down down with military rule": The Second Wave against the Military Junta"
- Videos on the Mosireen Collective's website:
- <https://www.youtube.com/mosireen>
- Videos by Kazeboon:
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1VQ4Gqcqhg

Week 14:

Presentations of Policy Memos – due at the beginning of class

Groups of two present policy options for countering propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation.

Optional Course Information Items

- Attending Class is highly recommended and counts toward your participation grade. If you are sick, however, you should stay home.
- I will not share my power point slides online. You should take notes.
- You are expected to do the readings before class.
- Please come prepared to discuss and ask questions.
- Critical questions are encouraged but please be respectful of each other.

University Policies

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

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You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below). Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

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Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

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Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus

Texas A&M College Station

Students who need someone to talk to can contact Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) or call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Campus-Specific Policies

Statement on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of educational records by limiting access to these records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their educational records and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Currently enrolled students wishing to withhold any or all directory information items may do so by going to howdy.tamu.edu and clicking on the "Directory Hold Information" link in the Student Records channel on the MyRecord tab. The complete [FERPA Notice to Students](#) and the student records policy is available on the Office of the Registrar webpage.

Items that can never be identified as public information are a student's social security number, citizenship, gender, grades, GPR or class schedule. All efforts will be made in this class to protect your privacy and to ensure confidential treatment of information associated with or generated by your participation in the class.

Directory items include name, UIN, local address, permanent address, email address, local telephone number, permanent telephone number, dates of attendance, program of study (college, major, campus), classification, previous institutions attended, degrees honors and awards received, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, medical residence location and medical residence specialization.

College and Department Policies

College and departmental units may establish their own policies and minimum syllabus requirements. As long as these policies and requirements do not contradict the university level requirements, colleges and departments can add them in this section. Please remove this section if not needed.

Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Department of International Affairs is committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for all students, staff, and faculty. We welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, citizenships, disabilities, ethnicities, family statuses, genders, gender identities, geographical locations, languages, military experiences, political views, races, religions, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, and/or work experiences (see diversity.tamu.edu/). We recognize a special responsibility to undertake particular efforts to include the participation and voices of those from historically underrepresented groups. In all of this, diversity alone is not the only goal; we also strive to hear, listen to, and incorporate new voices in our teaching, research, and service. We hold that embracing and supporting new perspectives, individuals, and ideas invigorates academic excellence and pushes our entire community forward. The Department of

International Affairs and the Bush School expect everyone to demonstrate respect for different experiences, beliefs and values expressed by other members of our community and to engage in reasoned discussions. As a department of international affairs, within a university dedicated to the public good, a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is critical for preparing and ensuring the success of the next generation of leaders.

(adapted from Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver)