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Who's Faking It? Pentagon "Cyber-Warriors" Planting "False Information on Facebook"

By Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich
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On November 22, 2012, t*he Los Angeles Times* published an alarming piece of news entitled "Cyber Corps program trains spies for the digital age". The "cyber-warriors" who are headed for organizations such as the CIA, NSC, FBI, the Pentagon and so on, are trained to stalk, "rifle through trash, sneak a tracking device on cars *and plant false information on Facebook* [emphasis added]. They also are taught to write computer viruses, hack digital networks, crack passwords, plant listening devices and mine data from broken cellphones and flash drives."

Not surprisingly, less than a month later, it was rumored that Iran 's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei had started a Facebook page. The style and content of the site ruled out its authenticity, but the State Department was amused. In spite of the potential for alarm, State Department Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland jokingly expressed Washington 's curiosity to see how many "likes' Khamenei would receive. This is no joking matter. Any message on this page would be attributed to Khamenei with a potential for dangerous ramifications.

Barely a month later, on January 24, 2013, Guardian's blaring headlines exposed fake blogs and Facebook pages made for BBC Persian's Iranian journalists with claims that these were made in order to harass, intimidate, and discredit the journalists. These fake blogs, according to The Guardian charges, are not by the American Cyber Corps warriors, but are alleged to be the creation of the Iranian 'Islamic cyber-activists' in "what appears [emphasis added] to be an operation sponsored by the authorities".

While truth is the first casualty of war, journalists are also fair game thanks — in large part owing to the provisions of the Information Operations Road Map of 2003 (signed by the then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and pursued by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta). As part of the plan, "public affairs officers brief journalists". In 2005 it came to light that the Pentagon paid the Lincoln Group (a private company) to plant 'hundreds of stories' in Iraqi papers in support of U.S. Policies. The plan also called for "a range of technologies to disseminate propaganda in enemy territory: unmanned aerial vehicles, "miniaturized, scatterable public address systems", wireless devices, cellular phones and the internet. "

In light of such wide spread propaganda, deception and digital warfare by the Pentagon, and with the recent Los Angeles Times revelations of the Cyber Corps training, truth has become indistinguishable from falsehood and thus accepting or rejecting the authenticity of allegations by the Guardian becomes subjective, in spite of the reality of the victimhood of BBC journalists (ditto Radio Farda, VOA) whose reporting is not welcomed in Iran.

The broadcast of BBC Persian into Iran is problematic. Leaving aside the illegality of it (see article), BBC Persian which was launched in early 2009, receives significant funding from the United States . To many Iranians, no doubt including the Iranian government, BBC's role was (and continues to be) a dark reminder of its past role in destroying Iran's democracy in 1953 when, by its own admission, the BBC spearheaded Britain's propaganda and broadcast the code which sparked the coup and the overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh.

As if in a reenactment, the role of BBC Persian in the 2009 post-election unrest was significant. Claiming that BBC Persian Services was basing its reporting on "citizen journalists" and on the receiving end of "eight user generated communications per minute", their own report indicates that some of the reporting was impossible to verify. Unlike BBC Persian (and VOA, Radio Farda, etc.), Wired Magazine did its homework fully. In its report aptly titled "Iran: Before You Have That Twitter-Gasm…" , it revealed that the " U.S. media is projecting its own image of Iran into what is going here on the ground." BBC Persian, true to its track record, and thanks to State Department funding, had a desire to trumpet in a new era in Iran 's history – A historical change planned from without, with help from within. Unlike 1953, it failed.

Once again, with the Iranian elections on the horizon, indications are that the recent elections in the United States and Israel will not produce a break-through in the US-Iran relations, or the foreign policy agenda of the United States toward Iran — warfare by other means, including propaganda. Cognizant of this fact, either the Iranian government is bracing itself for a propaganda war by discrediting sites with a potential to propagate misinformation, which may explain duplicating the BBC (admittedly, a clever move), or, the American Cyber Corps has outdone itself with the ability to point the finger at Iran.

Either way, in launching its cyber warfare, the United States has crossed the Rubicon. Cyber warfare, much like germ warfare, is dangerous, relentless, and without boundaries. The casualties of such warfare will continue to rise – unstoppable.

Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich is a Public Diplomacy Scholar, independent researcher and writer with a focus on U.S. foreign policy and the role of lobby groups.

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