THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

DISINFORMED DEMOCRACY: THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF INFORMATION WARFARE

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Welcoming Remarks:

JOHN R. ALLEN
President, The Brookings Institution

Opening Conversation: How Disinformation Threatens World Order:

KEYNOTE: H.R. McMASTER
Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University
Former U.S. National Security Advisor

MODERATOR: FIONA HILL
Senior Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe
The Brookings Institution

Panel 1: The Road to Russian Interference in 2016:

MODERATOR: FIONA HILL
Senior Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe
The Brookings Institution

CATHERINE BELTON
Special Correspondent, Reuters

ARKADY OSTROVSKY
Russia and Easter Europe Editor, The Economist

THOMAS RID
Professor of Strategic Studies
Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

DAVID SHIMER
Global Fellow, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Associate Fellow, Yale University

Panel 2: Domestic Drivers of Disinformation:

MODERATOR: CHRIS MESEROLE
Fellow and Deputy Director, Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology Initiative
The Brookings Institution

RENÉE DiRESTA
Research Manager, Stanford Internet Observatory

ELAINE KAMARCK
Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Effective Public Management
The Brookings Institution

KATE STARBIRD
Associate Professor, Human Centered Design & Engineering
University of Washington

Panel 3: Novel strategies for countering information warfare

MODERATOR: FIONA HILL
Senior Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe
The Brookings Institution

EILEEN DONAHOE
Executive Director, Global Digital Policy
Incubator, Stanford University
Former U.S. Ambassador, United National Human Rights Council

THOMAS KENT
Adjunct Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs
Columbia University

DANIEL KIMMAGE
Principal Deputy Coordinator, Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State

TEIJA TIILIKAINEN
Directorm European Centre of Excellence for Countering
Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE)

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Good morning, ladies and gentleman. My name is John Allen and I'm the president of the Brookings Institution. And it is a great pleasure to welcome you to this event, this virtual conference entitled "Disinformed Democracy: The Past, the Present, and the Future of Information Warfare."

And before I begin I want to take a moment to address the troubling news that we've heard this morning that President Trump and the First Lady have contracted COVID-19. This is a very serious moment for our nation and a moment in which our shared American values, especially empathy and as well charity must be on full display. It's also a moment where the resiliency of our institutions will be further tested, as well as one that highlights the critical importance of medical, science-based guidance and research.

Beyond the 7.3 million infected Americans and the over 208,000 precious Americans who've lost their lives, when I spend some time very morning in contemplation and prayer for all of them, I now turn to the entire First Family. They are very much in my thoughts and prayers this morning, and I hope you'll join me in wishing them well for a quick and full recovery in the midst of these challenging moments.

So, now to the purpose of our gathering this morning. As part of Brookings' Policy 2020 series, this conference is part of a greater effort to "empower voters with fact-based, data-driven, nonpartisan information to better understand the policy matters discussed by candidates running for office in 2020."

The importance of this undertaking simply can't be overstated, especially considering the theme of today's event. Now, as witnessed in the lead-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election when Russian agents launched a comprehensive disinformation campaign directly against the American people, information can be easily weaponized to great effect.

These types of operations can rob individuals of their confidence and even desire to exercise their own sacred democratic right, which is to vote. Indeed, we're seeing this happen in real time internationally, as well as right here in the United States, especially as the Election Day draws nearer. Recent reports indicating that the Kremlin has begun to employ advanced artificially intelligent

systems to create and deploy false social media accounts only adds to the urgency of this issue.

For those of who have been closely watching and following this topic, we know that this has, in fact, been happening for some time, for years, in fact. But it will only worsen as core technologies, such as artificial intelligence, supercomputing, and big data analytics, both mature and become interconnected. Indeed, modern conflicts will be defined by these capabilities and governments much catch up if they're to not be left entirely behind by this new reality.

At the same time, there is also a clear and overwhelming need for a whole of society approach to bolster and protect every citizen's right to fair and democratic process. So, to that end, I'm very pleased to welcome an excellent set of panelists today who join us from across academia, the tech sector, government, and the media. They'll be speaking across three separate panels this morning and early afternoon, and we're really very honored to have such a seasoned and distinguished group.

First, however, to kick off today's conference we are deeply honored to welcome Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, United States Army, as our keynote speaker. A visionary leader by any standard and a dear friend, H.R. McMaster has dedicated his life to public service. Again and again, he has timelessly demonstrated his unique brilliance as a soldier and scholar and one of the best officers to come out of West Point in the modern era.

At a personal level, I know him to be a gallant and heroic leader in combat. And he has translated those characteristics into the moral leadership which has defined him in the period since.

His reputation as an academic and thought leader has earned him high praise for his first book, one I read very carefully in my earlier years, "Dereliction of Duty." It's a book with lessons still enormously relevant today. I've little doubt that his second one, which was just published this past September entitled "Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World," will rise to the same pedigree.

On a personal note, I'll also share that when we were both together in Afghanistan, H.R. was instrumental in supporting our efforts via his leadership of a counter-corruption combined joint interagency task force called Shafafiyat, which was all about transparency. And during our time together he demonstrated without fail his core principles of ethics and integrity which were unimpeachable.

I was proud to stand alongside you then, H.R., and it is a great pleasure to welcome you and to honor you this morning and to have us in this crucial conversation.

Moderating this discussion today is Brookings' senior fellow, Dr. Fiona Hill, a person of great integrity; also a long-time public service. Dr. Hill is an expert on European and Russian affairs and she most recently served as the deputy assistant to the President and senior director for European and Russian affairs in the National Security Council. It's going to be an excellent, panel, ladies and gentlemen. And I hope you'll listen closely to what they have to say and the views they will express and exchange together. I certainly will.

Now, before I turn the floor over to them, a brief reminder that we're very much on the record today and we're streaming live. Please feel free to submit your questions via email either to events@brookings.edu or on Twitter using the hashtag #Policy2020.

And with that, thank you again, H.R. It's wonderful to see you. Thank you for your commitment. Thank you for getting up so early and the for the vital issue that you'll express today on the American people and helping us to preserve our democracy. Fiona, the floor is yours. Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thank you so much, John. And the reference to General McMaster having to get up early is the fact that he's actually out in California, so this is 6:30 in the morning. Although knowing General McMaster, because I had the great privilege and honor of working with him when he was National Security Advisor, he's probably already been up for hours running around and paddleboarding, which he used to do even before he got to the office back in the day. So, it's really wonderful to see, sir. Really delighted that you were willing to join us.

I also wanted to, like General Allen, thank you not just for your service, but also for enlightening so much with recent books. I have the copy of your book here, Battlegrounds, and I know that you've been speaking about this over the last week or so since the book was released at the end of last month. And, of course, it very well frames the discussion that we're hoping to have today because in the book, Battlegrounds, you take on all of the challenges that are facing the United States in the national security arena and the information space is one of those battlegrounds that you talk about.

And I just wondered if you'd be able to kick us off with your thoughts on how we have to tackle this battleground of the information space. And you yourself have had so much experience on the physical battleground in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. But you also did try to tackle head-on during your service in the military the issue of Russian information warfare, disinformation, what you and your

other colleagues called maskirovka, the way that the Russian military would use psychological operations as part of their whole campaign against the enemy opponent, including the United States, and how we should start thinking about this issue as we move on today.

So, thank you again, General McMaster, for joining us.

GENERAL McMASTER: Hey, Fiona, thank you so much. What a privilege it is to be with you. You are such a great example of service to our country and what a privilege it was to serve with you back then on the National Security Council staff. And to be with John Allen, my former commander and someone else who leads by example. So, thanks to you, thanks to Brookings.

I think what this conference is doing is part of the answer to the problem of Russian cyber-enabled information warfare because so much, as General Allen alluded to already, has to be a whole society response. And that begins with education. Brookings has always been at the lead of educating the American public about the challenges to our security as well as opportunities to exploit, and it's a real privilege to be with all of you.

I thought what I might do is try to be brief because I'm really looking forward to the discussion with you, Fiona. So, I just thought I'd tell the story that I tell in the book.

I was walking, it was the Friday before Columbus Day weekend in 2017, so really about this time in 2017. And I was walking down Walnut Street in my hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on my way to the Foreign Policy Research Institute to give a briefing on Russian new generation warfare. In my position at the Training and Doctrine Command I was charged with designing the future Army.

And I commissioned a study about 18 months previously on Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine. And we had combinations of -- an interdisciplinary group of experts from all different fields, including psychologists and sociologists on this team, of course engineers and military historians. And it was a really excellent study that was completed, and I wanted to share the initial findings and get some feedback.

And as I was on my way to FPRI, a Philadelphia think tank, my phone rang and it was the deputy chief of staff of the White House asking me to go to Mar-a-Lago the next day to interview for national security advisor. So, it came quite out of the blue and I was in the job in the West Wing of the White House the next Tuesday afternoon.

But, of course, Russia's sustained campaign of political subversion against Europe, against Ukraine in particular, was part of this study. And it struck me as I came into the White House that we should have seen 2016 coming. This isn't a threat that just came out of the blue.

So, I thought I might begin with is what we did in that first year after the 2016 election to respond to this threat of cyber-enabled information warfare, which is designed to drag us down. Right? Putin, I think, even from that speech that he gave New Year's Day in 2000, he set out a course, right, to restore Russia to national greatness. And I think somewhere along the way, probably around 2005/6, Fiona, you've written about this, he probably decided I'm not going to be able to take on the EU head-on. I'm not going to be able to take on the United States head-on.

And so I believe that Putin's approach to the West has been to drag everybody else down under the theory that he can essentially be the last man standing. And one of the principle ways that he's doing this in his campaign, what I describe as disruption, disinformation, and denial, one of the ways to do this is to conduct cyber-enabled information warfare with the real purpose of polarizing our societies, pitting us against each other, reducing our confidence in who we are as a people, and reducing our confidence in our democratic institutions and principles and processes.

And so as we looked back at 2016 and placed the election in context of this much longer and sustained campaign against us, what I believe is the case is that around elections, especially in large countries like ours that are -- it would be very difficult to influence the outcome in a direct way, that what the Kremlin tries to do is sow doubts about the result. Right? That's the main effort is to sow doubts about the result of the election.

And I recall that in 2016, I think the Kremlin was as surprised as maybe Donald Trump was when Donald Trump won the election. And there was a campaign ready to go that they actually initiated prematurely that, hey, Hillary Clinton won the election, but it was rigged. It was a rigged election. Well, when it was revealed that President Trump had won, they shifted that campaign to, well, if the election had been fair, then Donald Trump would have won the popular vote, too. Right?

So, this is what we're encountering today. I thought just to summarize our actions that we took to protect ourselves better against a sustained campaign of disruption, disinformation, and denial is that, first of all, we had to identify this problem more fully. And our intelligence community shifted, it

was already shifting, but shifted more dramatically toward collecting and analyzing intelligence relevant to this sustained campaign not only against us, but also against our allies and also in connection with breaking apart our alliances and rending the transatlantic relationship.

And what we found is that the IRA and other entities associated with this sustained campaign were adaptive. Right? And as we would counter certain elements of this effort, I mean, this is a sustained effort. It's not going to go away and they're not going to stop. And so I think understanding the nature of the threat was immensely important.

Related to that was the necessity we felt to pull the curtain back on this activity and to show it to the country. Because, as I mentioned, inoculating ourselves against cyber-enabled information warfare, it is largely an educational effort. Now, we were impeded by this by the President's really unwillingness to call Putin out directly for this campaign.

And, you know, Fiona and I, we talk about this. Why is this, right? And really what I determined is the president, I mentioned this in a couple of interviews and I write about this in the book, he conflates three separate questions.

Did Russia intervene in the election? Heck, yes, they did. That's the answer to that.

Second is if they did, did they care who was going to win? I really don't think they cared who was going to win because when you see the bot and troll traffic, the main effort is trying to divide us on issues of race and secondarily, a distance second, immigration and gun control, for example, and to reduce our confidence in the process. Right?

And third, if they did want Donald Trump to win, did they put their finger on the scale and did it have an impact? That third question is what the President worries about because he fears that it will draw into question his legitimacy. And so he conflates all three of those and that's unfortunate because, as I mentioned, education is immensely important.

I think we did make some tremendous progress, Fiona, on -- and you were there longer than I was, so you'll be a better judge of this, but on protecting election infrastructure. And, you know, we hear the President and others sowing doubts about that. I mean, we're doing the Kremlin's bidding when we sow doubts about our own election process.

There's the cyber infrastructure security office stood up. I think they're doing immense,

important, and very effective work. I mean, these are very competent people and they're at it. They understand what is at stake and they're working with the states. You know, we have a very decentralized process here with all sorts of different systems. But there are federal standards established and the teams at the federal level are working very diligently with the states and the states are, as well, to protect the infrastructure itself.

And then I think what's also extremely important here is that our cyber warriors, our cyber force is much less encumbered than they were in the past. And I won't go into any details on that, but there was some reporting about this in connection with the difference between the 2016 election and the 2018 election.

And then, because I want to get into the conversation, Fiona, I'll just stop there. And I would just make a final observation that it's important to focus on the election and the disinformation and information warfare around the election, but it's also very important to understand this is a sustained campaign. And we are extremely vulnerable to it because new tools are available to the Russians that the Soviets didn't have available when they began this sort of activities in the 1920s against the United States.

And principal among those is social media, which is having itself a destructive effect on our society and, in particular, the avarice of these companies and the business models that are essentially making you the commodity and your data the commodity. But then, also, the advertising money and the drive to get more and more clicks by showing us more and more extreme content, that reinforces our predilections and our political leanings and our stance on issues. That's magnified even further by the pseudo-media and the toxic atmosphere around that, as well as now mainstream media and cable news I would say in particular because of this phenomenon in which now Americans go to a particular station that is associated with maybe their political leanings. And so we don't have kind of a common authoritative source of information either.

So, I'm really looking forward to the conversation. I'm so glad that Brookings has taken this on head-on at this critical time for our country and the free world. And just great to be with you, Fiona. Thanks.

MS. HILL: Well, thanks so much. And you've managed to, you know, as I suspected, to

cover the entire battlefield that we're going to be talking about today.

And the first panel, after you've finished, General McMaster, we're actually going to try and unpack that, the history of that sustained campaign. Because you're absolutely right, this has been going on for an extraordinarily long time just using old tools rather than new tools, and it's not going to go away.

And in the second panel we're going to try to talk about the domestic information space that you've touched on because I think that this was the dilemma that we face, and I'd like to get back to you on this, while we were in government that we were the national security team. We weren't dealing with the domestic home front. I mean, everybody was very reluctant for all the right kinds of reasons to call that a battleground. And, of course, you know, we've seen how that's played out in a negative fashion when it's been referred to by some of our colleagues in the Pentagon in other contexts.

People don't want to see the national security techniques that the U.S. would adapt bleed over into home, although we know that the Russians honed a lot of the techniques that they deployed against us at home in dealing with their own domestic opposition and dealing with other groups.

So, that's a real challenge. It was a real challenge for us and I'd like to get back to you on that about how did we tackle the issue of a lot of stuff was happening on the domestic front --

GENERAL McMASTER: Right.

MS. HILL: -- and domestic actors were also producing an incredible amount of information and disinformation.

And then in the third panel we want to talk about all the tools that we have ourselves to tackle this beyond just what the government has done.

But I've got a lot of questions in from the audience already. And I'll have to put my glasses on because I've had to print them out and they're all very small. So, I mean, a lot of these questions that the audience are wanting to ask relate to this, about all these different actions and disinformation campaigns. And how do we basically disentangle the domestic front from the international front when you have, as you point out, pseudo-media?

And, of course, we know that the Russians -- colleagues of yours at Stanford, you're out at the Hoover Institution now, did an awful lot of work at looking about how Russians and other actors

have created fake news sites. And, in fact, in some cases they have managed to recruit American freelance journalists to write for them, and they've targeted both the left and the right. And we've seen other countries do that in regional arenas, as well, not just targeted against the United States, but that is targeted against enemies. I mean, it's a broader phenomenon right now.

And then the destructive effect that you talk about, about social media, where everyone's in their own realm of, as Kellyanne Conway put it, alternative facts. And we don't have anything to pull everyone together.

And that idea of click bait that everybody talks about, you know, many news and information agencies come up with splashy headlines and trying to get people to click onto the messaging and then to pass it on to others. And, of course, that's what the Russians thrive on. They want you and others to click on this and to pass things on.

So, as you've been out of the government now and also out of the military since your retirement, you're sitting at Hoover Institution at Stanford. Stanford University has an incredible amount of senior staff and specialists working on these topics. How have you started to reconcile for yourself that problem that we faced in the NSC about how do we put the domestic and the foreign battlefields together?

GENERAL McMASTER: Well, Fiona, I'll just start by saying they have to be completely integrated. I think it's not only this challenge to our security, but it's many other challenges. They don't, obviously, respect orders and they move very rapidly from an overseas challenge to one that we have to cope with domestically. And once these threats penetrate our shores, oftentimes we have to counter them at really an extraordinary cost, at a high cost. I think COVID-19 is a good metaphor for that. So is jihadist terrorism.

And so what this means is we have to remain engaged abroad to understand better the threats that will affect us at home. And I think there is some organizational implications for this, as well.

I think one of the organizational impediments that I encountered is the bifurcation of the National Security Council between the National Security Council and a Homeland Security Council. I don't think that makes any sense. Right? I think that the senior directorates there, the way that they're structured, ought to be a sort of self-synchronized organization that works across each of those offices

from understanding better the threats overseas associated with a particular region or a particular country, like Russia, Fiona, your office, and those that are coping with more homeland security-related issues like not only protecting the elections, but countering Russian disinformation and denial.

And so there are structural changes that have to be made. We got around it, right, but forming these task forces, these interagency teams, and I think that worked okay. But I think that there are some structural aspects to this that we need to work o.

There probably ought to be an organization that has both the tools to understand better what the threats are from cyber-enabled information warfare and then also have the tools available to address it. And those tools aren't just cyber tools. Right? Those tools are other informational tools. They're also sanctions, law enforcement actions that could be taken. And really the effort, I think, is to be able to mobilize all elements of national power and efforts of like-minded partners. This is in the private sector, I think.

It's extremely important, for example, for the government to have a trusted relationship with investigative journalists, for example, who probably are best equipped to uncover a lot of this. And I think if you look at the track record, you know, most of the -- or the best stories, the best reporting on how Russia does this, what their objectives are, how they're using these false personas and sites, and the bot and troll effort to divide us and pull us apart from each other has been from investigative journalism.

So, anyway, I think there are some organizational changes that could be improved in this connection, but the main, as you were alluding to, the main effort has to be on education. It's what we're doing here today. But it's really trying to convince everyone, our political leaders maybe especially, but also in the media, don't be our own worst enemy.

You know, we talked about how Russia's try to divide us on certain issues. They're also trying to divide us further in this vitriolic partisan political environment we find ourselves in. And we make ourselves susceptible to it, I think, by oftentimes, you know, if the President says something that is offensive and divisive, the reaction on the other side is equally offensive and divisive, and we pull ourselves apart from each other.

Very rarely are there conversations that begin with what we agree on. You know, we immediately go to corners these days about what we disagree on.

So, I think a lot of it is example setting. And our media, I think journalism as a profession really has to ramp up their standards, you know. I think in part because of this new information environment and the need to compete, as you mentioned, but also because of the vitriolic partisan environment, journalism is kind of, I think, in a phase of self-destruction right now. And we need the Fifth Estate now more than ever to be of the highest standards.

And then what Americans need to do is to up their expectations and go to the authoritative sources of information rather than get drug down into the morass of this pseudo-media and to less responsible elements of the mainstream media.

MS. HILL: Well, I think that that's kind of one of our challenges, though, isn't it, is about how do you restore trust in a lot of these institutions? I mean, as you say the Fifth Estate and the media, but also in many of the other institutions of government. And, obviously, you've been thinking about that a great deal, as well.

I mean, we've had the politicization of what really should have been, in many cases, sort of standard, all of government, national security approach to dealing with an external threat. And in the time that we were there and the time after you left, it actually got much worse, as well. So, we had a lot of domestic actors not really wanting us to get our act together, the accusations of being a deep state working against the interests of individual politicians. And we really tried to push back against a national security threat.

How do we get out there? I mean, obviously, writing your book, getting out and speaking to as many audiences as possible is part of that, as doing this kind of event. But how can we penetrate the noise domestically to get all of the audience that we have to reach across the entire country to realize that we're facing a common national security challenge as a battleground that we're all in and that we need to have some trust in some institutions? How do we do this, do you think?

GENERAL McMASTER: Well, I think our great opportunity is in the fact -- lies in the fact that we do have influence over how we're governed. Right? We do have a say in how we're governed. So, I think we have to demand better from elected leaders, for sure. And we have to restore faith in our institutions.

This is a tremendous gift for Russia, the doubt that we have in our own government. The

deep state narrative, you know, the deep state narrative is damaging. This is not a new phenomenon really. Remember Ronald Reagan kind of ran against, you know, big government, but now it's taken on -- it's gone to a whole new level.

Fiona, I think back to your testimony before Congress and you made it so clear in your testimony that we need to transcend this partisan politics and restore faith in our government and in our institutions. I have tremendous confidence in our institutions despite the recent failures and shortcomings associated with COVID response and so forth. There are areas that we have to improve. But, you know, it's our government. We all have a say in it and we all have a say in setting out a course for reform and demanding more from our leaders.

You know, I think it's just the democratic process and I think that it begins maybe with Congress. I don't know. I mean, I think that if there could be an example set, right, for the American people, it could be by their representatives in Congress. And I think that Congress reflects and also helps to create the polarization that we're seeing in our society. They could also, therefore, at least be a source for bringing us back together.

So, demanding, I think, that our representatives -- because everybody's voice is a bit louder, right, at the local level within your congressional districts, I mean, demanding that they work together with -- you know, across the aisle and begin conversations with what we can agree on and how we're going to work together to overcome our challenges, take advantage of opportunities, and build a better future for generations to come.

MS. HILL: Well, this ties into a few of the questions that we've got here. One question, I mean, it may be a bit of a tall order, from an attorney who has written in has asked are there any means to apply great focus and public reckoning on elected officials, like members of Congress, who deliberately engage in dissemination of foreign power propaganda?

GENERAL McMASTER: Yes.

MS. HILL: Now, I guess we do have some means if people are caught deliberately disseminating foreign power propaganda. We've got the Foreign Agents Registration Act and another mechanisms. But I guess the problem is, which a lot of the other questions, I've got questions from school teachers and students here, is when some of that disinformation is the same domestically

produced disinformation because it's following the same political purposes, you know, which was, again, another of the problems that came up in the testimony that you referenced.

GENERAL McMASTER: Right, right. And it was a bit personal for us, Fiona. You know, I think another aspect of cyber-enabled information warfare is that the Russians have actually now engaged in campaigns that are directed at disrupting the effectiveness of our government and of government institutions and, in our case, Fiona, the National Security Council staff. And this is the August 2017, you know, so-called "Fire McMaster" campaign that also during which that campaign went after individuals on the National Security Council staff, individuals who in the past would not really be known to Americans. You know, they would just be working every day for the country and the White House.

So, I think that exposing those who are witting and even unwitting agents of the Russians is immensely important. And I think we can begin with organizations that employ Americans and put them on the payroll to advance Russian propaganda. I mean, anyone who takes money from Sputnik or any other Russian media arm ought to be profoundly embarrassed about their un-American and disloyal activities. And so I think exposing people who are engaged in that activity is important. To use maybe positive social pressure to convince people that it's not worth that paycheck they're getting to act against our own society and act against our nation.

And there are some outstanding examples of this. Right? And there have been even members of Congress, you know, who have been extraordinarily sympathetic to Russia's agenda and especially been super-helpful to Putin's efforts at what our old colleague Mark Sedwill from the UK used to call "implausible deniability." Right? So, I think this is a big aspect of it.

What we don't want to do is have some kind of McCarthyite, you know, overzealous effort to hunt down the Russian sympathizers, but I think there is a role for exposing those who are acting as agents of the Russian government.

MS. HILL: Well, and I think that last point about being very careful about a McCarthyite campaign is important because there are a lot of other actors who have the same approach.

GENERAL McMASTER: Yeah.

MS. HILL: And maybe that's one of the things to call everybody out from all kinds of non-

state actors, extremist groups and others, who are adopting the same approach and also, as you said, this sort of pseudo-media and many of the Internet websites who also get traction because of sowing disinformation and divisive content.

GENERAL McMASTER: Absolutely. And, you know, China is getting better. Right? They're taking a page out of Russia's book here. And there have been some really landmark studies. I mean, I think the first of those was done in Australia by John Garnaut. It's extremely well done. And then the Hoover Institution where I am did an excellent study about two years ago on Chinese influence.

And what's important to understand is Russia and China have different objectives in mind and they employ different techniques, but they're clearly learning from each other. Right? So, China's method used to be to co-opt the elites and use elites as mouthpieces for the Chinese Communist Party. These are people who have had extremely profitable relationships with China in large measure. And then to dominate the narrative, right, to dominate the narrative on any issue.

But now what you're seeing is they're going after more targeted audiences, like the Russians do. And they're getting more involved in politics, in particular like in the Midwest, for example, to try to build sentiment against tariffs against China and other trade enforcement mechanisms that the administration has been employing.

MS. HILL: Yeah, that's really a very important point. I mean, because we do see that a lot of these actors do have a broader strategy, which is obviously promoting their own national interests and some real strategic objectives, be it, as you said, removing tariffs or in the Russian case it's getting rid of sanctions or --

GENERAL McMASTER: Right. You know, for Russia, Fiona, there were three big policy issues, right?

MS. HILL: Right.

GENERAL McMASTER: Alleviate the sanctions. Right? They want to drag us down, first of all.

MS. HILL: Yeah.

GENERAL McMASTER: And then they wanted sanctions alleviated. They wanted us out of Afghanistan and out of Syria. Right?

MS. HILL: Right.

GENERAL McMASTER: And those were the policy messages that their disinformation was really aimed at. And overall, from a foreign policy perspective, it's to reinforce this really shift toward a neo-isolationist sentiment reflected in the new left interpretation of history on the far left that defines us as the problem in the world and the Russians reinforce that narrative; or on the far right, which is associated with this so-called "realist school," which is really an ideological argument for U.S. disengagement as an unmitigated good. It's infected with strains of -- I won't do -- oversimplify.

But there really is a Russian push to reinforce the neo-isolationist sentiment in America, as well. Because, again, what Russia would like us to do is to withdraw, so they can fill the vacuum, as they did in Syria. You know, after the unenforced redline in Syria in 2014, Russia intervened in the Syrian civil war. So, I mean, I think that nature abhors a vacuum and Russia's all too ready to fill it, even with the small amount of resources they have available.

MS. HILL: Yeah. I mean, that's very important to lay out, I mean, as you do in the book, that there's a context to all of this. We may not be in the same systemic struggle that we were during the Cold War, but we're still in a struggle where many of the international actors really do want to have the maximum room of maneuverability on all kinds of issues that concern them, and that's much more effective if we the United States are out of the way. So, this is not just, you know, kind of exaggerating what's going on here.

One final set of questions that I've had from people here that I'd like to get you to speak to and then I'd, obviously, like to let you have another moment to get across some of the points that you think are more important. There's a lot of people writing in from schools, from universities, and kind of also asking about the military, as well, the military education, also from the State Department, about how can we educate people to effectively discern disinformation?

Now, that was something you did in the Army back in the day because you entered the Army during the Cold War, at the end of the Cold War, admittedly. We're kind of not really Cold War warriors either of us, but it's just kind of right there at the very end of it all. But you were trained right from the beginning to spot a psychological operation and disinformation. What have you taken away from that that could be helpful to apply on a much larger scale and for, you know, young people who are starting

out?

GENERAL McMASTER: Right. Well, I think it's -- and first of all, thanks to all the teachers who are here. You're actually heroes. My mom taught for 35 years in inner-city Philadelphia and two of our daughters that teach for America.

And I think, you know, in "Battlegrounds" I end in my final paragraph I quote our friend Zachary Shore, who's a wonderful historian, and his observation that the greatest strength of a nation is an educated populace. And I think just recognizing that we do need to help educate young people, all of us, ourselves about how to discern authoritative sources of information from efforts to influence us.

You know, I think this Netflix show that just came out, "The Social Experiment," I think that's great for the people that are watching. It's entertaining, it's well put together, and I think it can highlight the dangers of social media in a way that's acceptable to a broad audience.

So, I think, you know, developing products that clearly identify the danger associated with disinformation, but then what people can do about it. Always leave people in any talk or any class that you're giving with something to do, something they can do. And I think we can do a lot. You know, we can educate each other, as we're talking about, but we can just come together in various venues that are available to us and have civil discussions, right, and reject this vitriolic discourse and restore faith in who we are as a people.

And I think that understanding how our adversaries are using technologies and exposing it is a big part of that. But it's also the substance of the message.

The other aspect of this is civics education, Fiona. And I really believe that we kind of lost our way in allowing this interaction that we see now, interaction between what you might call identity politics with bigotry and racism, and how that interaction is creating centrifugal forces that are pulling us apart from each other. And I think this is due in part to many people, especially in younger generations, losing confidence in our American experiment in democracy and in our republic.

And I think what civic education should do is focus on history. You know, focus on the wonderful, radical idea of our revolution, that sovereignty lies neither with king nor parliament, but with the people. And then recognize the great gift of our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, and our Bill of Rights, but also recognizing that it was flawed, that American was flawed at the creation because of

the contradiction of the horrible institution of slavery. But then we can celebrate, right, we can celebrate that we emancipated 4 million people in our most destructive war in history.

And then again, we can still be disappointed because of the failure of Reconstruction, the rise of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan and then Separate, But Equal. But then, again, you know, we should restore faith in our ability for improvement by recognizing that the civil rights movement dismantled de jure prejudice and inequality of opportunity. And then, again, recognize, right, that there is still de facto inequality of opportunity that we have to work on and we will work on and we will get better.

But we can only get better if we work on this together. What I worry about is what we might call the end of empathy, Fiona, where now there are certain movements. This is the so-called "cancel culture" on the far left or these bigoted movements associated with White supremacy on the far right. I mean, nobody even acknowledges the need to talk to each other, to respect each other. And I think these are minorities, right? This is not who America is.

So, those of us who still have confidence in our country, who recognize the work that we have to do, we have to kind of amplify our voices and convene as many people who are willing to be convened so we can come back together.

MS. HILL: That's a really very important point. I mean, we have to talk the country up no matter what the problems are and not keep talking down because that's when everybody else from the outside will pile on, as well.

GENERAL McMASTER: And we should --

MS. HILL: You know, we really --

GENERAL McMASTER: We have a lot to be proud of, Fiona.

MS. HILL: Yes.

GENERAL McMASTER: You're a case in point because you're on of our greatest citizens and you're an immigrant. I don't think there are a lot of people trying to immigrate to China right now or into Russia. Right? And that is one of the greatest strengths of our country is the draw that we have internationally.

So, in the book what I write about is the need to improve our competence against threats like Russian cyber-enabled information warfare, for example, but also the need to restore our confidence,

right, our confidence in our ability to implement a sustained and reasonable and reasoned foreign policy, but also our confidence in who we are as a people.

MS. HILL: No, that's absolutely right. And actually we've got that course (phonetic) coming up. And I think you growing up in Philadelphia and its storied role in American democracy really underscores this, an opportunity for all of us to play a role by going out and voting. But we all know that one of the problems we had in 2016 was we just had a razor-thin margin in the electoral college. And that was, of course, one of the issues that engendered all of the suspicion about what had actually happened in the election.

And if everybody realized that they have, and you referenced the Voting Rights Act, you know, it's 55 years ago, it took a lot of time for people to get the vote. There was a lot of struggles for that right of citizenry. And as you were saying, if we have confidence, we should go out and vote.

GENERAL McMASTER: Absolutely.

MS. HILL: If you have any final thoughts for us, H.R., we'd greatly appreciate it.

GENERAL McMASTER: I would just say have confidence, too. If it is a close election have confidence that our Founders really did a great job of trying to anticipate everything that could go wrong. Right? And they based it -- and this is where I think The Federalist Papers are worth reading, even it's worth reading the Anti-Federalist Papers and see what was on their minds and what underpins the Constitution.

But what they had in mind were the bloody wars of the 17th century in England and a desire to avoid the English civil war, to avoid an Oliver Cromwell figure, for example. And in the transition that is forthcoming here, even if it's close, the Executive Branch has no role in it. I mean, it's really -- I mean, there's been all this talk about it that is really superfluous because it's the courts and the Congress will completely determine the outcome if it's close and it's a process we ought to have confidence in.

I think what's been more irresponsible, Fiona, and certainly this is a theme that the Russians will pick up on and try to use against us, is this idea that there should be any break in the very bold line between our military and our democracy and partisan politics. Our military has to stay out of partisan politics.

And this is one of the reasons why I'm not going to endorse anybody, I'm not going to

sign any letters, or any of that stuff because I think now, even as a retired officer, it can create the impression that the military's taking a side. And I don't know if you're noticed this practice in recent years where, you know, each party comes up with like dueling lists of generals and admirals and, hey, I've got more than you do and vice versa. And I respect people's decisions, right, to support a particular candidate as an individual, but I think collecting these lists of people I think is maybe -- it comes with a cost anyway, you know, and we ought to be cognizant of that, as well.

MS. HILL: Well, that's a good and important reminder about how you maintain the integrity of institutions and to make sure that they don't get politicized in ways that could be very damaging. And I think you've given us a good segue into the next panel, which will, as I mentioned before, take us through the history of all of these campaigns of disinformation, which we called active measures.

And I also want to thank you so much for being able to join us today. I mean, if you can stay on for a bit longer, I imagine you've got other things to do, you know, the time.

GENERAL McMASTER: I can stay on as long as I can.

MS. HILL: You know, you probably haven't had your breakfast yet.

GENERAL McMASTER: I can stay on as long as I can. And I'm reading Thomas' book right now.

MS. HILL: That's excellent. I've got it here, too, so we've got Thomas coming on. I've actually got a big pile of books. And that's also part of --

GENERAL McMASTER: It's super well-written, you know.

MS. HILL: That's excellent. Part of the whole exercise is to let people out there know the kinds of books that they can access to be able to get more information here. And I think you and obviously General Allen and others exemplify that scholar-soldier-statesman role that we look to in the American military. For our military academies and colleges, really train people well not just in being able to discern disinformation, but giving people that civic education that a lot of us now have been lacking.

I mean, I had to have a civic education to become a citizen, but I'm mindful all the time about how few Americans in comparison with what we would hope are really still well-informed about the history of the country and how our democratic institutions came about. And hopefully, these books and,

as you said, seminars, webinars like this will also be very helpful.

And I do hope that other people after seeing this will invite you to go and speak on Zoom fora across the country, as well, so they can have the benefit of your wisdom. Thank you so much for joining us today.

GENERAL McMASTER: Thank you, Fiona. Thanks for putting together an amazing conference and thanks for your personal example.

MS. HILL: Well, likewise. Thank you so much for this. And I can see Thomas Rid and others kind of coming onto the line now, so we'll move over into the next panel. Thanks again. Really appreciate you joining us.

GENERAL McMASTER: Thanks much, Fiona. Take care.

MS. HILL: Take care. Thanks a lot. Thank you.

GENERAL McMASTER: Bye.

MS. HILL: Thank you. So, I just want to now bring the next panel members in. Thomas Rid has already had an introduction with two dueling copies of his book.

And I'm really delighted that you could join us, Thomas. It looks like you're actually outside in a woods somewhere.

MR. RID: Yeah, I'm in my garden actually.

MS. HILL: You're in your garden, okay, very good. Hopefully, everyone will be able to hear you okay.

Thomas Rid, a professor at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, the School of Advanced and International Studies, who has written, as we've all talked about, the "Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare." But this is really 100 years of disinformation campaigns. And as General McMaster laid out, it's important to understand the overall context.

We're also really delighted to have coming in not from his garden, but from The Economist office in Moscow, Arkady Ostrovsky, who we hope is feeling better. Because against the backdrop of today's news about the President and First Lady, Arkady has also been stricken by COVID and we're hoping, Arkady, that you're feeling better.

MR. OSTROVSKY: Thank you.

MS. HILL: Arkady is, as well as being the well-known Economist correspondent, also the author of the prize-winning book "The Invention of Russia," which also tells the story about how we went from *glasnost* and openness and Gorbachev to the situation where we see with Putin spreading around disinformation as a tool of both domestic policy and also international warfare in many respects. And Arkady is going to talk to us about how this is all playing out now from the vantage point of Moscow.

After Arkady, I've also got another book which I can highly recommend, a very big book, because it's covering basically almost sort of a lifetime of investigative journalism by Catherine Belton, "Putin's People," where Catherine talks about how the KGB took back Russia and then took on the West. It's kind of a compendium and follow-on from Arkady's work about Gorbachev to Yeltsin, then through to a Putin period.

And then we also have, last but not least, David Shimer, another book, "Rigged." David spent quite some time investigating what had actually happened in 2016 and interviewing a large number of the participants from the Obama administration, others who were trying to unpack what had actually happened in the Russian campaign in real time back in 2016. And David also puts the story of 2016 between -- about the Russian intervention in America's election into that larger context of 100 years of covert election interference, electoral interference.

So, I've been busy looking through all of these books and I do hope that everyone listening will consider going out and buying them, not just as book sales, which, of course, for writing (phonetic) also is really kind of important, but also because these really do, taken together, give, I think, everyone a really in-depth analysis and understanding of the issue that we're dealing with today. And I know that they've also greatly informed General McMaster's thinking about this topic.

So, Thomas, I'll just turn over to you for a few minutes to give us kind of a sense of what struck you most in writing this book. I mean, you're obviously originally from Germany, Germany, of course, having a history of being the battleground, the physical battlegrounds, between East and West, between the KGB and the Western Stasi, the East German equivalent, also engaging heavily in disinformation. But you've also told the story not just from your personal perspective, but of this larger history of, disinformation as we call it, "active measures."

So perhaps you could explain for everyone listening just exactly what this issue is and a

quick history of it.

MR. RID: Yeah. Thank you for the intro and for the double plug.

MS. HILL: Thomas, you're a little quiet actually. Is it possible --

MR. RID: Sorry, is this better?

MS. HILL: Yes.

MR. RID: Yeah, sorry, apologize. So, initially -- first of all, thank you for inviting me. It's a true honor to be on this panel with such fine authors next to me. So, I'll be brief.

When the 2016 election interference became public in mid-June, I was in the middle of investigating (inaudible) angle, an old -- the first major digital espionage campaign known under the USG code name "Moonlight Maze." So, at that time, I was closely analyzing the data that we were able to find on an old machine, talking to a lot of companies that investigated the case, mostly actually with Kaspersky, who helped me a great deal, the Russian security company, who helped me a great deal to investigate the case, but also CrowdStrike and FireEye, two major American firms in this space.

And when the interference began through the Guccifer 2 and DCLeaks first, I quickly realized that I was equipped to understand the digital forensics side, but I was unequipped intellectually to understand what was really going on, to understand the history, to understand the dynamics of these types of operations. And I know a little bit about strategic theory in history, but not in depth. I didn't have a grasp what active measures truly are.

So, I started digging in and as I was doing so, reading a lot of memoirs of former Soviet bloc intelligence officers, the best are actually from Czechoslovak and German officers. The best one is a book (speaks in German) in German, never translated into English, by two former Stasi Department X officers.

And I also began interviewing some of these people who are still alive, most importantly Ladislav Bittman, who at that point in time was still alive, who wrote one of the best books on disinformation. And as I was speaking to these old men, and they were all old men, I realized that I learned more from them than from studying the additional forensics. So, it made it real to talk to the operators themselves.

So, when I had that experience I started going in even deeper (inaudible) in Berlin and in

Prague and to a degree with files from Russian KGB sources, which are difficult to locate because, obviously, we can't just go into KGB archives. But it turns out in Sofia in Bulgaria and in the Czech state security archives you can find some really interesting memos and documentation from KGB because they obviously shared with their partners, and in Berlin, as well.

So, that's what the book is doing, telling the long back story. And I'll just ask the hard question that I don't have a good answer to because this is such a high-powered panel. One of the most difficult questions is about the transition period.

KGB goes down when the Soviet Union goes down. The first chief directorate of the KGB, which housed the Service A unit, which is responsible for active measures. At the time an extremely self-confident and powerful unit as we know from these memos. It transitions into SVR. They literally stay in the same building out in Yasenevo, in the forest outside Moscow. But we don't really know what happens to that unit. There's not -- the sourcing there is not very good.

And of course, the really hard question is can all these major disinformation operations that we've observed since -- and they really picked up steam in 2013, late 2013, early 2014, mostly in the context of Crimea -- Ukraine, not just Crimea. The most significant operations that we can study are GRU operations. The attribution is quite strong already then.

So, what happened to SVR? What happened to Service A? What happened to the human intelligence-driven disinformation operations? Because we don't really see them. It's hard to find examples today. How did they shift from SVR basically to GRU? And what does it mean, also, that the unit inside GRU that is mainly responsible for these operations is a signals intelligence unit by origin, not a human intelligence unit. I mean, obviously I'm simplifying.

But essentially, we see a shift of this skillset within the Russian intelligence (inaudible) culture. That's an interesting shift because it may explain the really low quality of tradecraft that we see, at least that we saw in 2016. And it's difficult to say what currently is going on because all revelations that we have seen, almost all of them, are IRA, Internet Research Agency, or Internet Research Agency-linked assets, which really weren't that impressive in 2016 and tradecraft was bad, OPSEC was bad, discipline was very bad, show (phonetic) the joke at GRU about the performance there in St. Petersburg.

So, what's going on today among the more serious player? What is the A team doing?

That is the really interesting question that I don't have a good answer for.

MS. HILL: Thanks very much, Thomas. That is very interesting and, hopefully, we've still got Arkady online because I know he was having some technical issues.

But, you know, Arkady and perhaps also Catherine may have some answers to that big question about why after the collapse of what had been a wholistic approach to all of these active measures, as you said, under the KGB when there was a lot of focus on manipulating people very specifically and physically in real life as humans, as you mentioned, as opposed to signal intelligence, which is all using the technology, tapping phones, hacking emails, you know, for example, why was that shift made and why was it so crude as a result?

And could we anticipate some more of a return to some of the things that the KGB did back in the past when they had physical agents, physical people running around actually interacting with others and trying to manipulate them, blackmail them, or use them in some way? And I just want to flag that Vladimir Putin would always himself, when he was asked about the work that he did in the KGB, take pride in the fact that he was more of a human case officer, someone whose whole job was to work with people. In other words, figuring out how to manipulate people and turn people into assets, not a technical specialist that was listening into people's phones or obviously, you know, hacking their email. That was obviously before the time.

So, Arkady, if you're able to come in right now, I know you were having a few issues before, if you want to use Thomas' comments as sort of a stepping-off point for some of the points that you'd like to make. Because I know that you've also been focused on what's been happening at home and the way that these same techniques that we're talking about that have been deployed abroad have also been used with some effect at home to try to keep opposition to the Kremlin in check.

MR. OSTROVSKY: Thank you very much. Sorry for the technical issues. I'm actually now, because of the crazy logistics of now traveling around the world, I'm in Istanbul on the way to London from Moscow, so no longer stranded in The Economist Moscow office, which is a nice break.

So, yes, so picking up from what Thomas said and what General McMaster said, and listening to General McMaster struck me just how, in some ways, familiar some of the challenges that the U.S. has been dealing with that Russia has posed have been over the years. If I could start with a quote

perhaps familiar to some diplomats and security advisors who are privileged to some classified documents, the text might be familiar.

"To undermine general, political, and strategic potential of major Western powers, efforts will be made in such countries to disrupt national self-confidence, to hamstring measures of national defense, to increase social and industrial unrest, and to stimulate all forms of disunity. All persons with grievances, whether economic or racial, will be urged to, it's felt (phonetic), redress not in mediation and compromise, but in defiant violent struggle for the destruction of other elements of society here. Poor will be set against rich, Black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents, et cetera."

Now, don't worry, Fiona. I'm not quoting from any really classified documents. It was once. This is February 2020 -- this is February 22, 1946. This is an extract from George Kennan's long telegram, which was, of course, classified at one point.

So, in a way the reason this is so -- and this is not just sort of a journalistic flourish and saying look how striking some of the similarities are. Kennan is writing immediately after the war when very few American or Western diplomats really understood what was driving Stalin's Kremlin. We're reading it now and it's not because, as I said, it's not because of some sort of coincidence or historical sort of flourishes because what Kennan understood about the set of drivers' objective in the worldview in the Kremlin has changed so little.

And to understand how little it has changed I'm not going to quote from that document, but suffice to read some of the recent writings by Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the security -- Russia's security council shortly before Vladimir Putin's constitutional or sort of pseudo-constitutional special operation of extending his term in power, where he talks very much in those terms of encirclement, of a great threat from the West to Russia, the need to confront it. And very interestingly, in that article published in the Rossiyskaya Gazeta, talks about the links between universal values, which are really Western values, and what threat they represent to Russia's sovereignty nonetheless, and why they pose an existential threat.

Again, I'm not going to quote, but, Fiona, you in your brilliant book on Putin, one of the striking things that you wrote and which stuck in my mind is rather than trying to dissuade the Kremlin or

your readers of the threat posed by the Western societies, you wrote that the traditional American foreign policy does indeed represent a threat to Vladimir Putin's Kremlin, to a one-man network which is bound together by corruption, which rejects any democratic principles, which is struggling to compete economically and, most importantly, institutionally with Western powers. It's not just struggling to provide similar living standards. Most importantly, it's struggling to provide things that cannot be imported easily into Russia: justice, education, prospects in life, et cetera.

So, that worldview of Russia being encircled, the West posing a threat is very much the foundation of Russian operations towards the West.

On the other hand, one of the doctrines which is sadly forgotten, and I think unjustly forgotten by Western thinkers, intellectuals, politicians, and diplomats is the doctrine that Andrei Sakharov has come up with in the post-Nixon years in his response to détente and why détente is ultimately a dangerous game.

And the principle idea being that if you want to ensure security (inaudible) hard security, nuclear security, you have to deal with Russia domestically. The issue of international and nuclear security has to be intricately linked to the idea of human rights. Because without some constraints, without whatever checks and balances for as long as the Kremlin, Soviet or Russian Kremlin, abuses human rights -- a phrase that's out of fashion now -- but as long as it has no constraints, it will act in the expansionist way because it always confuses, as Kennan wrote, defense and offense.

So, from Putin's point of view, and it's not worth going on with sort of his -- you know, it's been written by yourself and my book and by Catherine, he basically has a lot of grievances against the West and how he's been rejected, how he's been misunderstood, how the West is out to get him, how the West breaks every agreement that's been struck, and the latest situation we face in Belarus is just one of those, that you can't trust the European Union. You can't trust the West because there come the Poles and Lithuanians and they start staying something and the Germans can't constrain them, so not worth really negotiating. You have to show force. So, that's one sort of set of thoughts.

The other is just how important narratives and information has been in Russia's rule at home. And this is where the -- while the objectives are the same, the techniques, both in terms of technology, but also, very importantly, in terms of ideology have changed clearly. The legitimacy of the

Soviet rulers, whatever it was by the end of the Soviet era, was nevertheless grounded in the ideas of the Bolshevik revolution. People might not have believed the Marxist-Leninist ideology, but Brezhnev, Andropov, and certainly after Stalin's death, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Gorbachev up to a point, their legitimacy was in the fact that they were continuing the line of the Bolshevik revolution. Hence the importance of the national holidays, et cetera, October Revolution, et cetera, et cetera.

And that presented a problem because, both at home and abroad, because proving the supremacy of that ideology was very difficult, economically very difficult at the very least. And even though the West feared the spread of the Communist ideology because it was very attractive, because it was a millenarian sect ideology, the threat of it actually abroad catching up was probably greater than the chances of it succeeding at home. Because for a lot of the fellow travelers or useful idiots, however you want to call them, they didn't have the chack (phonetic) of the Moscow empty -- Russian empty shelves to check just how fake that ideology and how wrong that ideology is.

Putin's information machine and his key ideology, if you want to call it that, is based not on the idea of a supremacy of his system, but on the negation of everything else. It's an ultimate nihilistic system, which is why it's much easier to export. It catches abroad much more easily. It can be taken on by any leader who appeals to the past, who rides on the sentiment be it Viktor Orbán, Donald Trump, or even some of the Western leaders like Boris Johnson. The idea being that nothing is true, there is no such thing as truth, contradictions which seem so strange when looking outside.

You know, when Russia shot down -- or Ukrainian proxies together with the Russian forces shot down MH17, the number of explanations mushroomed and it really didn't bother us with the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, it really didn't matter. And what might have seemed as a weakness, how could they possibly propel all those contradictory theories, actually is a well-thought sort of strategy of showing that, you know, you create a fog, nothing matters, as been described a lot of times.

What is actually very interesting, and I think a link has not been made here, is that it's not just a tool of propaganda and disinformation aimed towards the outside. But it's also the principle mechanism of staying in power in Russia.

And what I mean by that is that Russia has a strange procedure, just to give one example, of elections. It has kind of trimmings of not a democratic regime, it doesn't pretend to be

democratic, but a regime that can organize acclimation of legitimacy through a ballot box. Whether you exclude others from it, it doesn't matter.

But the way that the Russian political system works, it's absolutely key element, is demobilization. You have to have very low trust in the electoral procedure to guarantee that you stay in power. You need very, very lower turnout of people, as low as possibly can be achieved.

You need to explain to your voters that politics is a dirty business and there is no truth and, therefore, it's not worth going to the ballot box. You need incredibly low turnout on which you can then mobilize and deliver the necessary result. Once that breaks, which is what in a way Navalny's strategy has been aimed at, and once people suddenly decided they are going to turn up and vote, that system starts falling apart.

So, negation, cynicism, and nihilism is not just the tools of propaganda. They're also the ultimate tools of a political system that Putin's built. The difficulty of that political system is that you need to achieve two things at the same time: you need to demobilize people, to tell them there is no truth, to tell them it's not worth coming to the ballot box; and you need to turn it on, you know, to mobilize people so that at a critical moment they can deliver the acclimation.

So, Putin works much more through information flows, through narratives, through that instilling the ideas of learned hopelessness much more than he does actually through sheer force and violence either at home or abroad.

I'm not at all sure that I answered your excellent question, but this is just some thoughts that were very much provoked by what you were saying and Thomas was saying and General McMaster was saying.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Arkady. That gives us a really kind of comprehensive overview of the use of information by Putin domestically and what he's trying to do abroad. And that actually ties into an awful lot of the questions that people have asked about what is the strategy here, you know, kind of what's Putin and others trying to do here?

And as you were saying, it's kind of pretty difficult to kind of try to demobilize and mobilize electorates at the same time. And obviously, we can see quite a few parallels with some of the things that we're grappling with at home.

I think another important point that both you and Thomas have made is that all of these efforts are documented. I mean, I really appreciated what Thomas said is that all of the conclusions that he has come to in his book come from his own research into documents. This is not just conjecture and analysis or judgment. But the fact is that a lot of these actors who were engaged in these disinformation campaigns in the past kept a record of what they were doing and that some of that was declassified in the Soviet context, certainly in Germany after the reintegration of Germany.

And so we actually have a lot of evidence, especially as in the case of Thomas and you yourself, Arkady, and we're going to move over to Catherine, have gone out and interviewed people who were participants in these operations and explained what they were doing. So, to the people who are listening out there, this is not just a bunch of academics or investigative journalists who have gone and made something up. They have actually interviewed and spoken to the people who were involved in these operations.

And, Catherine, I mean, you have basically, in "Putin's People," this is -- I mean, you're still very young, so I don't want to say it's your life's work, but this is many years of really interviewing people on the ground in London and Russia and elsewhere. You and I have met, also, when I met Arkady back in the 1990s. You've been at this a long time and I just really want to commend you and everyone else for really these incredible in-depth books which are bringing to light, as General McMaster said, through investigative journalism and scholarship sort of the kind of information that all of us have come to rely on.

And, Catherine, I know you've had a slightly different take, but you've also looked at what Putin has done at home and what he's done abroad, and also through the prism of money. It's not just been through information, but money that has also backed up, dirty money, these operations. So, I'll just come over to you now, as well.

MS. BELTON: It's great to be on the panel. And it's also great to read my colleagues' books because they really do spell out these decades of covert electoral interference and the active measures that have been going on over a really, really long time. And it's great to sort of read about their access to the archives and all the documents that they've been able to access.

And really it sort of goes back to what General McMaster said at the beginning, we really

should have seen 2016 coming because we had decades of all this covert warfare between East and West that somehow seemed to have been collective forgotten by the West at the end of the Cold War. So, it was as if the West sort of washed its hands of Russia and said, well, that's over now, we don't have to worry about Russia. It's pretty weak and we can sort of get on with the other threats that we face in the world.

And it seems that that has been an oversight which has allowed Russia, despite, as Thomas pointed out, its low standards of tradecraft. And a lot of people have kind of compared some of Russia's actions in 2016 as being kind of akin to Keystone Cops. It was almost as if they wanted to be discovered. But some of those actions were still successful to the degree that the West had been so relaxed and it didn't see it coming.

And I think really the West believed that after the fall of the Soviet Union that the only option Russia had was to integrate with the West and that this was really the only kind of channel that Russia was going to take. But that was really to forget the mindset of the KGB men that Putin brought to power with him that you've described, as well, in your book about Putin so well, that really that mindset was forged in an era in the '80s when active measures were still very much underway.

Putin himself was involved in sort of smuggling networks, using front companies to kind of funnel cash to political allies and to kind of support other political groups who might be sowing disruption in the West. And, you know, he's very much involved in kind of -- he's admitted himself in overseeing illegals and sort of this human intelligence that you've spoken of, too.

And as Arkady pointed out, these are KGB men whose mindset is very much kind of still steeped in Cold War paranoia. They very much and continue to fear what the West was up to on its borders. They very much fear this kind of doctrine of encirclement.

Vladimir Yakunin, who was one of Putin's closest allies from the KGB and he was head of the Russian state railways and quite a powerful figure for some time in Putin's administration, when, for instance, Viktor Yanukovych was toppled as president of Ukraine, he spoke immediately to me about how this was again the CIA trying to take Ukraine away from Russia because they knew by taking Ukraine away from Russia, that this was the way to destroy Russia's strategic capabilities. He said they had plans on the bookshelf and I know that they dust them off every now and then and they're trying to destroy us.

And this is how they viewed the Color Revolutions in many former Soviet republics, and it really kind of colored the way that they kind of built their own power.

And when I was writing my book I began sort of setting out to sort of write about how Putin and his KGB allies were taking over the economy. And when I set out writing it, it was more from the point of view of the crony capitalism, about how they were sort of taking over all these strategic sectors of the economy, essentially to line their own pockets. And that was also actually a mistake because, again, there's only so many tens of billions or hundreds of billions of dollars you can grab hold of to spend on mansions or yachts for yourself.

It always had kind of a bigger strategic kind of rationale behind it. In the beginning perhaps they wanted to take over the country's strategic cashflows beginning with oil, so that they could shore up their own power domestically. They wanted to eliminate any rivals who could use the cash independently against them. They needed cashflows that were recreating sort of black cash networks, so that they could buy off politicians, so that they could rig parliamentary elections in their own favor.

But as the West continued to kind of ignore the background and the past of Putin and his KGB allies, they were also kind of ever more deeply welcomed into Western markets and they became more and more integrated into Western markets. And as Arkady pointed out, during Putin's rule, this sort of parallel process was also underway in which Putin very much felt slighted by the West. He felt that his strategic interests were being ignored.

And that reached a zenith, of course, in his well-known speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2007, when he was railing against the ever-eastward expanding NATO. He was railing against the placing of the missile defense shields on Russia's borders. And he basically warned the West that you better watch out, there are other developing economies out there.

And I think this was the moment when he probably realized that there was another element in place, so he'd been able to take over strategic cashflows and the economy. He placed his loyal leftenants in charge of oil, gas, metals, and other strategic sectors. And he already had tens of billions, hundreds of billions of dollars at his command that were kind of already deeply, deeply integrated into the West. And then when you have your own loyal allies in place, then you can use these funds to begin to sort of pick off and corrupt your enemies.

So, I'm afraid Putin rather than having the ability to create a strong and competitive economy at home, what he did have the ability to do, with a historical memory of the KGB almost, was this kind of ability to kind of coerce other businesses into handing over their cashflows and then being able to use it to buy off and corrupt politicians abroad, to try to undermine democracies abroad, to try to undermine your enemies rather than compete as a direct rival, which Russia wasn't in a position to do. So, as Arkady pointed out, it's a nihilistic tactic rather than anything constructive at all.

And you only really had to look at who was benefiting from the asset grab of Putin's Kremlin to really understand some of the forces at play. The main allies of Putin who were taking over, all had some connection in one way or the other to the KGB. There was Gennady Timchenko, who Putin had known since St. Petersburg and some suggest since before then, who's, of course, denied any connection to the KGB, but three of his close associates have told me that's not the case. That he had been working with them in the '80s in Zurich and Vienna.

And there were other bankers. So, there was Yuri Kovalchuk, who had a connection with the KGB in St. Petersburg, who's bank, Rossiya, mushroomed in size in Putin's first two terms in power and it really became a great powerful force in the economy. And then there was another guy, Andrei Akimov, who was head of Gazprombank, who in the Soviet times had been one of the youngest ever heads of the Soviet foreign bank in Vienna, in Austria. And I'm told you don't get to such a position without having very serious ties in foreign intelligence circles. And so really Putin was reestablishing sort of old KGB networks.

And another very curious character who popped up in some of my research was a guy called Martin Schlaff. And he was a very active Stasi agent when Putin was in Dresden. Schlaff had worked closely with the head of Dresden Foreign Intelligence on their HVA. They've been siphoning cash through fake technology deals. And the head of the Dresden HVA ended up going to work for Schlaff after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and after the Soviet Union fell.

And so these -- and he ended up, Schlaff ended up being a kind of running a key network in the Gazprom empire, the Gazprom international empire. And he was someone who kind of really should have rung a lot of alarm bells because he'd already been criminally investigated for allegedly trying to bribe Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister.

He had close ties with Qaddafi. He had close ties with Bashar al-Assad. So, it was all these old patronage networks of the Soviet era and here you had a guy who was in Austria, he was running one of Gazprom's intermediaries which was benefiting from kind of gas trading deals to the tune of several billions of dollars. And there were some people who were sort of saying, look, these networks are really untransparent and they could be used to sort of funnel off cash for nefarious influence operations.

But I think the West just thought it was all over, but, I mean, obviously I'd be very interested in hearing what your view is on this and why it was that the West was sort of willing to kind of turn such a blind eye. And it wasn't just through having kind of loyal allies in charge of these sectors of the economy. The FSB, the successor agency to the KGB, had a department called Department K, which was overseeing and, in fact, I hear running some of the big money-laundering operations which have since been uncovered in which tens of billions of dollars in illicit cash has been bundled into the West and some through Deutsche Bank in the mirror trade scheme and others through the Moldovan Laundromat. And I am told that some of these FSB officers were kind of using these cashflows as a conduit to also kind of funnel their own strategic money into the West.

And just to kind of close off, I think that there is -- you know, it's a big problem that we have to kind of deal with in increasing transparency in the West. Because as one former senior KGB officer told me, he said black cash for us is now more of a potent weapon than nuclear weapons because we can use it every day to undermine and dismantle the Western system from the inside.

And that also goes a bit to Thomas' question. You know, we see the operations of the group, but there's a lot that we don't see that's still under the carpet that we still have to uncover on the kind of money flows that are going into our political systems.

MS. HILL: That's great, Catherine. I mean, I think that that does provide a great complement to Thomas. I was thinking as you were speaking, Thomas' question that he posed at the beginning, I mean, after he followed all of the documents and all of the interviews and found that kind of he was always being led to the GRU on the signals front, where was the A team? I think you're basically telling us that the A team became the cash team, the black cash team. And that they kind of were basically becoming officials and the leaders of kind of -- also working with oligarchs of big banks and in

Gazprom.

And, as you said, their focus was more insidious than obvious. It was dismantling the West from the inside. So, Thomas followed the documents and you've followed the cash. And we kind of are identifying where all of the people are. And, again, as you're saying, that we have to unpack all of this.

But all three of you, Thomas, Arkady, and Catherine, have basically pointed to the fact that we dropped the ball. We, you know, kind of writ large in the West and particularly the United States.

And David, this is how you ended up writing your book. You were kind of working actually on a Ph.D. dissertation at the time and also trying to understand how is it that we didn't see this coming in 2016? And you went out and actually interviewed people on the other side of things, more the Americans, not just the Russians, who were trying to kind of grapple with this, what should have been a rather anticipated attack in 2016, but which caught everybody off guard.

So, David, perhaps you could give us a quick overview of what you did. And then I'd like to get back to all of you. I've been trying to weave in questions as we're going along, you know, just in the last 10 minutes or so to also come back to Thomas again. And, David, if you could give us a chance just to see what you discovered in the course of your own inquiry about what the heck happened in 2016.

David, you need to unmute. I'm sorry, we're having to unmute ourselves. Go ahead.

MR. SHIMER: Sorry. There we go, okay. I'm not unmuted. Sorry about that. The challenges of Zoom. But anyway, thank you very much. It's really a great honor to be on this panel.

And I think something that's been said both implicitly and explicitly that really motivated my research is that it's impossible to understand what occurred in 2016 by just studying 2016. Because what Russia did to America, which was execute what I call a covert electoral interference operation, a covert operation to manipulate an electoral process, is a very tried and tested idea, a phenomenon really that has underlied the past century of U.S.-Russian relations as foreign actors.

Both the U.S. and Russia and the Soviet Union had interfered in electoral processes around the world, including in the United States. And so what I do in my book is try to restore or recreate that history of covert electoral interference.

And the latest phase of that history is 21st century Russian operations to interfere in

elections globally in support of authoritarian-minded and divisive figures and causes. And Russia's doing so for a couple of reasons, one of which is to show the world that the democratic model is penetrable, flawed, and unenviable. And otherwise, also, to delegitimize, to degrade, to discredit, and ultimately tear down democratic systems from within.

And I was struck in my research and interviewing figures in countries like Ukraine or Montenegro or the United Kingdom and France, how their elections are under siege, as well. A myth right now is that this is just an American problem and it's an aspect of U.S.-Russia relations, and that's just not so. And U.S. Government officials knew that.

I interviewed for my book more than 130 people, including 8 former CIA directors, but importantly is, as Fiona referenced, 26 former senior officials in the Obama administration. And what I found is that by 2016, the Obama team knew that Russia was interfering in elections in Europe, for example, with Ukraine being its testing ground. But there was a presumption that Russia might be doing it over there, as one advisor put it to me, you know, in Third World countries, but they weren't going to do it here in America.

And that presumption did have historical justification, which is that during the Cold War, the KGB tried to interfere in U.S. elections repeatedly, but they never were able to do so in a meaningful way. Those operations were extremely limited. But what our country didn't see coming is that two things have changed since then.

The first, obviously, was the rise of the Internet, digital connectivity, which it digitized our information ecosystem, digitized our actual infrastructure in many respects, and which made it so that for the first time Russians, hackers and trolls, sitting thousands of miles away could manipulate Americans at scale, our country at scale, in an accessible way and in a quick way with far-reaching consequences that was anticipated. And Obama's advisors readily say that they did not see that coming.

The second thing that it changed, as would become clear later on, was the deep polarization and division in American society that would make it so that when Russia did launch this attack against our democracy, we were unable to actually formulate a national response, a whole of nation response, where our country would view this as a threat to our sovereignty rather than as a threat to one political party. And so Russia then proceeded to execute its operation, which ran along two tracks

in 2016 and did catch our government off guard.

And I would say that across history any covert electoral interference operation can only really be one of two things. You can either seek to manipulate actual voters by manipulating public opinion or you can try to manipulate actual ballots by affecting systems, whether by stuffing ballot boxes or hacking into actual infrastructure. And Russia played along both of those lanes in '16 in that they sought to manipulate voters by spreading propaganda across social media, which the U.S. Government had a limited understanding of at the time; and they also stole and release sensitive emails, which the U.S. Government did understand at the time.

But at that same time, they were trying to penetrate, probe, target our election systems. Russian intelligence was doing this. And the Obama team was acutely aware of that and it gave rise to the fear that Russia intended to try to manipulate the actual voter data or vote tallies of U.S. citizens in order to cause chaos as the election unfolded and to delegitimize confidence in the outcome.

So, what I found in my research is that the captivation of our government four years ago was in responding to that second form of attack and seeking to prepare for, defending against the idea that Russia might try to sabotage our infrastructure. Each of the moves that President Obama and his team made in the summer and fall were in response to the possibility of that form of attack, to the point where on Election Day itself, DHS, the White House were running crisis teams bracing for a Russian cyberattack against our actual voting systems.

So, come Election Day, such an attack never actually manifested itself, but Russia had been playing along that other lane. They'd already influenced millions of Americans with its propaganda across social media, with the stolen emails, and suffered no consequences for doing so until after the 2016 election.

And so moving forward, this threat will persist. We know it's persisting. Vladimir Lenin saw when he interfered in elections what Vladimir Putin sees today, which is that elections are by nature penetrable. And for us as a democracy, and seeking to defend against this threat, you have to play across both of those lanes. You have to secure your infrastructure, but you also have to defend against efforts to manipulate public opinion. To defend an election is to defend against both forms of attack.

And you also have to do what you can to treat this issue as the national issue that it is.

Because something that history clarifies is that Russia has tried to help Democrats in the past. Now Russia is trying to help a Republican. But what Russia's after is to advance Russia's objectives, which is to influence who our leaders are, to sabotage our democratic processes, and to undermine the viability of the democratic model in the eyes of the world. And that should serve as a call to action for all Americans regardless of whichever party they happen to affiliate with.

And, yeah, that is what I found in my research and it remains, I think, extremely relevant as the election in 2020 approaches in the next few weeks.

MS. HILL: That's absolutely excellent, David. I mean, you brought everything together there and also set the scene for the next panel, as well. It's going to also take on the whole domestic front. And why was it that domestic actors focused in on the aspect of this that you point out, which was exactly the wrong one? But this was kind of all focused on one political party or one particular individual.

You know, we, in a way, allowed ourselves to be fools by the disinformation and to fail to see that we were being attacked nationally, as you said, because of the crisis in our own domestic politics. And by deeming the President illegitimate or by kind of calling out the other party for hoaxes, I mean, this all basically ended up feeding into the disinformation campaign. And I think you've really underscored for us how we have to be very careful on those three levels of infrastructure and opinion and making this a national security issue, not a domestic politics issue.

I also really appreciate the fact that you kind of really talked about not just focusing on the sabotage of the infrastructure, but all the other things that we need to do here.

And I'd like to go back briefly to Thomas, who set us all off this at the very beginning. And I wonder, Thomas, all of those old-timers from the security services that you talked to whether they could possibly have imagined how this all played out in 2016. I think we've had a really good overview of the situation from everybody else who spoke subsequently and, you know, David really put it all together for us.

But you spoke to these individuals who were really working on this in the Cold War. I mean, obviously the United States had a failure of imagination to think that what Russians have done very effectively back in the day in East Germany, you know, perhaps or also more recently in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and elsewhere, they could do in the United States. What do you think some of the

people that you were interviewing with would have thought about this?

MR. RID: Yeah. Great question. I think (inaudible) Ladislaw Bittman because we spoke after this story became public of 2016. And I think the one pattern that you see clearly in the archives and in memoirs of former operators is that officers working in disinformation and active measures tended to exaggerate their own effect because they were trying to influence something that was already existing, existing frictions, existing (inaudible) problem, as Bittman called it. Because what was your doing and what was happening organically anyway?

So, there's this inherent ambiguity that we cannot measure the effect of an active measure, they could easily exaggerate because they wanted more money, they wanted more influence, they wanted to look good vis-à-vis their own superiors. It's a natural bureaucratic thing to happen. We do it in academia, too, by the way.

So, the result is that -- so, the surprise is that now it's not just the operators themselves who exaggerate effect, it's the victim, the target that has joined them, so to speak, in exaggerating the effect. I don't know whether there's a historic precedence of the intensity of the disinformation conversation of the high impact visibility of the disinformation conversation that we have.

And I'm afraid, and this is going to be provocative to some people, that the way we talk about disinformation today has caused more harm and more erosion of trust than the actual disinformation operation in the first place.

I would just quickly pivot and point out something completely different that I think I would just like to mention. That is in late 2016, an operation began in the shadows literally called the "Shadow Brokers," a fake activist group or potentially real activist group -- we still don't know for sure who it was -- who started to leak NSA hacking tools, genuine NSA hacking tools. An extremely embarrassing operation that continued for a long time and caused extraordinary harm to the American intelligence community, especially NSA. Of course, the U.S. Government doesn't want to talk about this; NSA doesn't want to talk about it. There's an active FBI investigation.

But in the results, two things I want to highlight here. One, this could be the A team, but I doubt it. It could also be an insider. But more importantly, Shadow Brokers started a trend and we see now the gloves have come off. There's an escalating war of intelligence -- of counterintelligence going on

with several follow-on operations that reveal the hacking tools of foreign operators and the methods and personnel of foreign operators. It happened in Iran where somebody exposed uranium capabilities. It happened in China where an obscure website exposed Chinese capabilities.

(inaudible) this is a lead, this is for follow-on work, is that some Western intelligence agencies have learned from what happened in 2016, especially Shadow Brokers, and took the gloves off. So, some interesting stories to watch there.

MS. HILL: Thanks, Thomas. I mean, some of this will come up at the end I think in Panel 3, but I think it's very important. Because, you know, as everybody's saying, the West kind of let its guard down, thought the Cold War was over, was not actually seeking any kind of confrontation with Russia, was taking Russia for granted and thinking that perhaps Russia would, as Catherine and others were saying, just simply become part of Western institutions and would leave all of this aside. But in actual fact, as a result of what happened in 2016, I think we've laid out all of the reasons why the Russians decided to do this, you know, Arkady's talked about the domestic imperative, have opened up a whole new battleground, as General McMaster started off. And as you said, now the gloves are off.

And, you know, we've most recently seen the Russians also proposing now a cyber non-aggression pact. There may be a realization that perhaps this opened up a front that they didn't really want to let get out of hand. In 2017, during the G-20 meeting in Hamburg, which General McMaster and I were both present, the Russians first floated this idea of a non-aggression pact, a sort of 1930s style pact, which seemed particularly out of context. But the more that we talk now, the more that we see what's happening, we now see that they themselves may be having some worries.

So, even as you say the A team may not be there, all kinds of B teams, not just Russian actors and U.S. actors and Western intelligence operatives, but many others are in on this act now. They've opened up sort of a cyber Pandora's box, where many other, including non-state, actors may be playing, as well. And this is kind of raising concerns. We weren't prepared for 2016, but maybe even Russia itself and others are not now prepared for what might happen next as a consequence of this, not just between U.S. and Russia, but in a larger information battleground.

So, I just want to thank everybody for what were great presentations today. I do hope that everybody listening will have a chance to read everyone's books. I think they all fit together really

well. Although there's some kind of overlap at least in themes and some of the issues, I personally benefited, which is how I put this panel together from reading Thomas' book, you know, then going back and reading Arkady's which had come out much earlier, and giving us the whole sort of history about how we went from *Glasnost*, which was all about openness and transparency, to something that's very much, you know, as Thomas is saying, now in the shadows again.

Looking at Catherine's seminal work about how the money came out and, as we're saying here, how the GRU went off into cyberspace, but the SVR may have gone off into the financial space, and about how all of these issues have blended together. And then you need David's effort to really understand and put all this together in 2016 and by, you know, recognizing that some of our own officials didn't really see quite what was going on in real time and maybe got diverted by the concerns and discernible concerns about sabotage of infrastructure and missing some of these other attacks and the importance of that.

Well, thank you, everyone, for really a very enlightening effort. Again, I just ask people who would like to learn more to take a look at the books.

I want to turn over now to my colleague from Brookings, Chris Meserole, who is directing our whole effort across Brookings to really grapple with this new space of artificial intelligence and all the emerging technologies that we haven't even thought of yet that could influence the battleground that H.R. McMaster set us off into.

Chris has got a whole team of people here, many of whom are actually working with General McMaster, many colleagues out at Stanford. There's a heavy Stanford representation today, but that's no complete coincidence, of course. It's the fact that it's in Stanford, we have Silicon Valley and all the people who are actually driving many of these technological changes.

So, I'm going to pass over to you, Chris, thanking our previous panelists, General McMaster, and General Allen again for their participation. And the next panel is focused on the domestic drivers of this new and disinformation space. So, Chris, thank you.

MS. HILL: Chris, thank you so much.

MR. MESEROLE: Thank you, Fiona and thank you to all the panelists on the first panel

for such a rich discussion which added some clearly needed and vital nuance and historical perspective to the role in history of Russian propaganda in particular in the 2016 election.

What we're going to try and do in this panel is pick up where the first one left off by adding some nuance and understanding of the domestic drivers of this information. Immediately after the last election, there was a sense that disinformation was really a foreign policy problem and that it was something that happened to the U.S. as opposed to something that arose at least in part out of what was already happening within our domestic politics and society.

Yet if the last four years have revealed nothing else, I think most recently in the extraordinary and unprecedented presidential debate earlier this week is that we can no longer ignore the domestic trends and forces driving disinformation in the U.S. And fortunately, to discuss those trends and drivers, we have a genuinely extraordinary group of esteemed colleagues with us this morning.

Including Renee DiResta, the Research Manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory who has been doing cutting edge research on social media for many years now. For those who haven't read it, I would also flag Renee's article in The Atlantic last spring called, The Conspiracies are Coming from Inside the House. Which is easily one of the best pieces I've read on the confluence of factors driving the rise of disinformation in American politics. And one that I will be sure to flag online once the panel wraps.

In addition, we're also thrilled to be joined this morning by my fantastic colleague Elaine Kamarck who is a senior fellow in the Governance Studies program at Brookings and the Family director of our Center for Effective Public Management. Even more, I'll add that she's also one of the most keenest and most insightful observer of American politics out there as evidenced by her most recent book, Primary Politics which I cannot recommend highly enough. For those of you trying to understand how are presidential politics have arrived at this point.

And finally, we're also joined today by Dr. Kate Starbird, an associate professor at the University of Washington and director of the Emerging Capabilities of Mass Participation Laboratory. As with Renee, I would also add that Dr. Starbird has also been at the forefront of social media research for years and has written extensively on how disinformation emerges and spreads online. So, Renee, Elaine and Kate, thank you so much for being here this morning and for joining us for such an important

conversation.

To kick things off, I want to start off with some level setting on the issue by asking each of you this, starting with Renee. In your view, you know, what were the key drivers of disinformation in 2016 and how, you know, if at all, have they changed in 2020?

MS. DIRESTA: Thank you. Thanks for that great intro, Chris. So, I think what we saw in 2016 was a sustained operation that wasn't even focused on the election. I think that's one of the common misconceptions that it was election focused. It actually began back in 2014. And so, that desire to use this new tool to experiment with it to undermine American kind of societal cohesion really began much earlier. The election was, it happened to kind of fall into that timeframe but it wasn't the primary goal.

But I would say that four years ago, a lot of the messaging really had to do with driving a loss of confidence in democracy, the idea of democratic systems. And the Russian internet research agency had to work pretty hard at that, right. So, they segmented American society, they created a whole lot of different groups and then they inflected messages to each of these groups to try to drive division between them but really to entrench them in their own political or cultural identity.

And the common theme, one of the common themes between them was that the American society was rigged and it was always rigged against your group. So, if you were a White person in the South, there would be confederate statute debates that were happening at that time. The statutes were coming down, that meant that people were destroying your heritage. If you were African American, systemic racism meant that America was against you.

They even took it down to really like low key niche things. Football games where, you know, people cheating. The stock market was rigged against you. Primaries, poles, the media, everything was rigged against everybody at all times.

And what was interesting is when the 2020 primaries started this year, what we started to see was those narratives about rigging being spread by domestics instead. I think that was one of the really key changes and I imagine that we'll talk a little bit more about what we're seeing in 2020 later. But it was that idea of who is America for, what is American society, what does it mean to be American and then how is American society rigged against your group?

MR. MESEROLE: Thanks, Renee. I think that that's kind of one of the key challenges that we're still trying to grapple with, right, is what are the, you know, the kind of politics of grievance and marginalization and how they're kind of intersecting online. Kate, I want to turn back to you now with the same question. You know, what were some of the key drivers that you were observing in your research in 2016?

DR. STARBIRD: Yeah, I would love to actually show you all because I spend a lot of time in the social media data and I want to get a chance to maybe show you all a little bit about what that looks like and maybe give some insight about what might have been happening there. So, let me see if that's going to work.

This is actually a graph that we spent some time with in my research lab actually before the election we were starting to build this research to look at the Black Lives Matter conversation that was happening in 2016. And what we saw there was a very polarized conversation. So, this is a graph of Twitter, each little dot is a Twitter account and they're closer together when they retweeted each other and farther apart when they didn't. And what we actually saw were two very different spheres of accounts interacting with each other, very little action between them except yelling at each other.

And so, it was like a structural representation of polarization. The conversation was very polarized, in this case, pro Black Lives Matter on the left and anti-Black Lives Matter on the right. We also later learned that this conversation was one of the primary conversations targeted by the Internet Research Agency in 2016 and actually prior, they had started building up their intersections with the conversation.

And when we look at actually how they targeted it, these orange lines were actually accounts that were Internet Research Agency accounts and they were retweeted to show you how they were retweeted by others in other accounts that were likely real Americans, many of them in this conversation. And what we actually see is this polarization that we had in this space was something that they targeted. They didn't create the polarization but they were vulnerable inside that polarization and they integrated.

And you can actually, this is the representation, it may not be perfect but you can kind of see a metaphor here of them. They're not in the middle of these groups, they're on the outside kind of pulling

them apart. So, they sought to sort of amplify the structural loss of common ground that we already had and tried to pull us part in that way.

And so, we looked at why we're vulnerable. Part of why we were vulnerable is that sort of that polarization, that loss of common ground. Also, I think there is a vulnerability in our information systems. We have displaced gatekeepers, a new set of influences that people go to for information. And we're vulnerable for people kind of getting into those, becoming those influencers and sometimes people that have different kinds of motivations.

Another piece of that vulnerability we saw was the kind of alternative media eco system where people are turning to conspiracy theories and finding, you know, websites that look like something that they can trust that are coming from foreign groups, domestic ones a like that are spreading certain kinds of information that can lead people into this kind of distrust that Renee has been talking about.

And now the tools and techniques of disinformation aren't just available to foreign governments, they're also available to everyone and being picked up by domestic activists and foreign governments alike. One of the things I know Thomas has talked about a lot is how activism and active measures are kind of blurred. And we're seeing domestic operations resonate with foreign ones and self-motivated activists begin to echo and even seed and spread disinformation themselves.

And so, for me a lot of what we're seeing right now going into this election is that a lot of what we're seeing is domestic. Similar kinds of things and networks that we were studying that were related to Russia in 2016, what we're seeing now mostly I think is domestic and probably we were seeing mostly domestics back in 2016 but it was easier to problematize the Russian disinformation. When really, we have all these different kinds of information operations happening in our own space.

The disinformation is collaborative and participatory and networked. It's not just something that's happening to us, it's something in some ways that we're doing to ourselves. And the networks are sort of wired to spread disinformation. We can see these networks that have developed in some ways by gaming the system but now they're wired so, you know, a piece of information that's opportunistic for them it's the system and then all of the sudden it spreads very quickly and very far.

And we're seeing these two complimentary forces of things arriving from the margins of the internet and then coming out through the influencers. And so, we see this sort of margins in and top

down. We're seeing disinformation coming from our own political leaders, especially disinformation that seeks to further undermine trust in our democratic election process.

And so, I think kind of all of these integrating forces, foreign and domestic activists and active measures make it a very messy space to be studying and very complicated and something I think even as researchers we still don't have our heads fully wrapped around it.

MR. MESEROLE: So, we're going to come back to the point about the alternative kind of media ecosystem and how, you know, the fringes of the internet can work in tandem with some of those alternative sites and then kind of poured over into mainstream media. Because I think that's one of the key things that is really not as well understood as it should be and is a key factor in what's going on.

But before we go there, I want to bring in Elaine. You had a remarkable piece earlier this week after the debate which you kind of talked a bit about the strangeness of the debate. I'm curious, you've also provided a tremendous amount of commentary as well in 2016 and its aftermath about some of the strangeness of the disinformation there. And I'm just curious if you can talk a little bit about, you know, what you saw is happening in 2016 and how you see it playing out now.

MS. KAMARCK: Well, thank you, Chris, and it's great to be on. I can't wait to read some of your work, my co-panelists here, this will be fun. Listen, 2016 was the perfect storm, okay. What happened in 2016 was you had a brand new element in a political campaign that political campaigns themselves were not at all familiar with. Which is this massive amount of disinformation.

It was particularly effective in two dimensions. One with African American voters and two with supporters of Bernie Sanders. And it's clear from, we now know from the Mueller investigations and the indictments that the Russians were very conscious of wanting to focus on African American voters and Bernie Sanders supporters and tried to make sure that they were not united for Hilary Clinton. So, that's one part of it.

The second part of the perfect storm was that it was a very close race in three states and that nobody really saw coming. The polling did not pick that up at all, the polling got the national numbers just about right but they didn't get the three states right. And so, let me just give you a little bit of data on one of those states, Michigan.

In Detroit, okay, Wayne County, the Hilary Clinton vote was 70,000 votes short of what

Obama had done in 2012. Now initially everybody said oh, she wasn't Black, oh, you know, no wonder of course it dropped off et cetera. You know what Trumps margin was in the state of Michigan was 10,000 votes. Okay so something was happening there with the African American vote which has been very loyal to Democrats who aren't Black. Al Gore got a large African American vote, John Kerry got a large African American vote. Something else was happening there. So, that's the second piece of the perfect storm.

The third piece was that we had a Clinton campaign that had almost overlearned the lessons of the Obama campaign. Which was to use data, use data, make models, have algorithms et cetera. People with experience in campaigns who had no idea what a damn algorithm was were telling the campaign all along, you're in trouble in Michigan, you're in trouble in Michigan, you're in trouble in Wisconsin, you're in trouble in Pennsylvania. The three states that cost Hilary Clinton the election.

The campaign was a campaign that relied on data which, of course, all campaigns in this day in age do. But what it did is it did that at the expense of picking up something that was going on on the ground. There was not the traditional heavy person to person campaign being run, particularly in the Black neighborhoods of Detroit, Milwaukee usually.

So, in other words, all this silly nonsense out there about Hilary Clinton and Pizza gate and, you know, all this stuff that the Russians were pushing out, there was no counter, right. The people sitting in Brooklyn said, oh that's ridiculous, who would believe that. Well, guess what, some people did believe it.

So, you have this sort of perfect storm of not enough on the ground to combat it. First time as we know from war, right, the first time you use a weapon it surprises everyone it's the most effective. Looking forward, I don't think that people will be taken by surprise again with this quantity of disinformation coming out. And it's not surprising to me that they have switched their -- that the Republicans and then echoed by the Russians have switched the focus of their disinformation from trying to make up stupid stuff about Joe Biden to trying to confuse people about the vote and strike at the heart of the legitimacy of the election.

And I think that all the stuff the President -- the President tweets sometimes four times a

day about mail-in ballots, okay and that's an effort to kind of get people confused about how to vote and what's safe and is this really going to matter, et cetera, et cetera. So, I think that we've got a slightly different challenge this time but the challenge is still there.

MR. MESEROLE: I would certainly agree with you that the challenge is very much there. Renee, I want to come back to you. You know, you talked a bit about what you saw in 2016. Are there, in terms of what you're seeing now in 2020, are you seeing similar things to what Elaine was just describing or, you know, are there other trends that you're picking up on too?

MS. DIRESTA: So, you know, the adversarial tactics evolve, right. If you think about the internet as a system, if you think about the social network and the blogosphere and broadcast media which also now has internet as a channel. As the ecosystem changes, as platforms change the rules of the game, you know, now you have to verify ads in certain ways, it's a little bit harder to create a fake account, you know, there is a lot more attention paid to that.

When the platforms change the rules of the game, you see the tactics evolve in response so that there is always this kind of fluid new and exciting developments that come up. I'll point to Facebook live, for example, as a brand new product front that didn't exist four years ago. Live and the watch tab where you can just go and, you know, it will begin to stream videos at you. This has been a very interesting tool for people to livestream protest movements, right, and there are many, many channels that now kind of have a number of different twitch streams and they just kind of pick the most sensational one, push it out to Facebook live.

And so, if you turn on, you know, if you find yourself in that media ecosystem where you follow any of these pages, what you have is a nightly feed of unrest which is a really interesting dynamic. And what that allows an adversary to do is to amplify that idea that America is burning, there is absolute chaos in the streets everywhere. Even if when you actually go and click in, it's like 5 guys on a corner in Portland yelling at somebody.

All right, so the difference, you know, now that that watch tab is there, now that this video option is there you can again, create this sense of chaos at all times. And so, what we're seeing from Russia now is you have Ruptly which is their news service that is always broadcasting. Every single protest Ruptly is broadcasting and it's inflected a certain way if you're watching it through RT and it's

inflected a different way if you're watching it through Red Fish or through in the now or Soap Box.

RT is taking a much more right wing, you know, look at these protestors, they're looting, they're violence and Red Fish and In the Now are taking a left wing kind of tact to it which is look at these evil police officers. So, when you have that dynamic, depending on which channel you're watching, it's identical footage but it's being inflected in two different ways. And this is again, a feature set, a misinformation front that didn't exist four years ago.

So, the adversary is not only updating their narratives, they're updating their tactics. When it comes to the narratives though, what they're able to do is just take what we are putting out. And I would say that four years ago, we did see Russia, we did see the Internet Research Agency trolls finding every single incident they could in the week leading up to election day and on election day.

Here's a touchscreen voter machine that is misbehaving, right. Whoa, you know, voter fraud. Here is an allegation from a random individual on Twitter, amplify it, retweet it, you know, as much as you can to create the sense that the election is illegitimate. I think though at the time four years ago, the national, you know, or kind of where we were as a culture, weren't as receptive to that narrative. The idea that we could have a completely, you know, illegitimate election was not a thing that Americans believed.

Whereas, I think that now particularly with prominent influence or delegitimization feeding that narrative constantly creating it. What happens when you create one of these long term narratives is that people, you know, it's always in the back of their mind, they hear it. And so, when new information comes out, when a new ballot is found, you know, in a garbage somewhere there's a photograph of something. Or, you know, there's secret recorded video playing whether selectively edited or not.

People take those individual moments and they connect them together and to this broader narrative and so now we are receptive to this idea that the election is potentially going to be contested. That there is going to be, you know, certain segments of the American population have been hearing from extremely prominent figures that they trust in their media environment that the Democrats are stealing the election from them. And so, this is the mindset that they have going into it now as opposed to four years ago where that wasn't happening and that wasn't a thing that we felt was in the realm of the plausible.

So, what Russia has the ability to do now is rather than put out that content itself and try

to spark it, you know, from, you know, start the fire from sticks, the fire is already burning all they have to do is put oxygen on it.

MR. MESEROLE: That's a great analogy and I think hopefully at the end of the panel we can turn to how to put that fire out. But first, I want to talk a little bit more about why it's burning. And, you know, we got a lot of audience questions in advance of this event and they kind of all touched on different drivers that I think we've talked about already. Some of the political drivers, the media drivers, the tech drivers.

And I want to just try and tease them apart a little bit and starting with the kind of tech ecosystem that we have right now and what its impact is. And, you know, how much of this problem is it specific to, you know, individual platforms, is it bigger than that? I know Kate, like you had a great paper. It wasn't in American disinformation but I think it was on Syria and some of the cross platform disinformation that we had there.

But I'd be curious, you know, starting with you Kate and the Renee and Elaine can jump in. Like how much of this is a problem of the internet at large versus specific platforms? And, you know, what are the trends that we're seeing in technology that really are driving this?

DR. STARBIRD: This is a huge, I mean, it's actually a really huge question.

MR. MESEROLE: It's a huge question, yeah.

DR. STARBIRD: It has a couple different pieces, right. So, you know, when we go do research, we may be looking at one platform and it's often Twitter because the data is public and we're just getting this tiny piece of what's going on. The disinformation problem, it's foreign domestic, right? But when you think about what's mediating it, it's every way we get information. It's every social media platform is susceptible and shapes the disinformation in different kinds of ways.

Like YouTube is a place to put the content and then that content can sit there and then people on Twitter will mobilize that content opportunistically to distract from something or push a new narrative or resurface old video and make it look like it came from today. And then that goes through Twitter for a while and it reaches some influences and it might actually reach like, you know, accounts of presidents of different countries who will push it out. And then it goes into Facebook and it reaches, you know, everyday people who are using that thinking that they're getting their social interactions and so it

becomes wrapped in a social wrapper.

And so, we've got all of these different platforms working, functioning to mediate this in different ways. And on top of that, we try to think of like media is somehow separate. Well, journalism is all over Twitter, that is where they do a lot of their communicating, that's where they promote their articles and that's where they get a lot of their content that they're talking about. And so, that's shaping the conversation.

And then meanwhile, like cable news television other kinds of things, they're on Twitter, they're promoting things. We can show cable new pundits helping to amplify what turns out to be disinformation over and over and over again. And then that can come out of their Twitter accounts but often it comes out of their nightly news shows. And so, these things are all integrating where we have now this kind of system that's wired to spread disinformation.

And unfortunately, from the view that I could sort of see this as, it's not like we can go just take one system out of the equation or just change one feature of Twitter or add a label on Facebook. The way it's developed, because these groups and entities were able to game the system and because of the way it worked and the polarization and how people formed networks and who they began to look for as far as influencers and who has the larger crowd. This is now structured. The structure of the internet is wired to spread disinformation in all of these different ways.

And so, it makes the problem a lot harder. It's not like, if we went back to 2010 and redesigned the whole thing, we might be able to stop this from happening. But what we do here to make, you know, to make a change is very different than what it would have looked like to have designed something differently from the beginning.

MR. MESEROLE: Great point, Kate. I don't know if Renee or Elaine want to jump in.

MS. KAMARCK: Well, let me make a point to put it a little bit in context. We can track today's disinformation as Kate said, particularly on Twitter. There has always been disinformation in campaigns okay, we just didn't see it. So, for instance, it used to be that there were mass mailings unidentified, no source mailings that would go out to hundreds and thousands of people before the election sometimes printing scurrilous things about the candidate.

In the South Carolina primary where John McCain was running against George Bush

there was a mailing that went out. This was kind of a pre internet day, saying that John McCain had an illegitimate African American daughter and with a picture. And John McCain does have a Black daughter but she's Bangladeshi and she was adopted by him and Cindy McCain.

So, that went out, the Bush campaign said hey, we don't know anything about it and probably they didn't, in fact. It was just a group sending out this stuff. So, we've always had these things going on. Obviously, the extent of it and the ability to penetrate because of the internet is enormous. And the irresponsibility frankly of the mainstream press to pick up on these things.

And I think in some way, maybe some are irresponsible, I think a lot of them were just naïve and not understanding what was happening to them. And that they have to be really much, much more careful about looking at what they see reported over the internet. And again, I think that's a -- this is a maturation process. 2016 was the first election we had that was really influenced by the new technology in a major way. And I think that the voters or I hope that the voters will get a little bit more sophisticated as time goes on as will the press, as will mainstream press.

Now let me add one other thing I want to add here. Reality does matter, okay. Reality really does matter, okay. The internet is this world with a lot of nonsense in it. Reality does matter and let me give you an example told to me by a political consultant named Sergio Van Dixon a long time ago who worked in Latin America.

And he was on a panel that I was on and somebody asked him, well how did you (audio skip) conspiracy theories about it et cetera. But the fact of the matter is, people know people who are dying. People know people who are sick. Now the President of the United States also does.

And so, you know, there is a reality factor here that when it's so big a lot of this stuff is noise below the surface and I think that's sort of what we're seeing in this time. That doesn't mean if we ever get back to a normal life and a normal politics that these things won't matter at the margins as they did in Pennsylvania, as they did in Michigan, as they did in Wisconsin four years ago.

MS. DIRESTA: Can I make one point? I just want to touch back on one thing there and I think maybe tie a couple things together that are really interesting. So, reality is such a fascinating word in part because of the social consensus function, right. For non-falsifiable claims, reality is what you are seeing and do you trust the person who's saying it.

And if you're in your community and you're having a discussion about particular things and the information that you see there is coming from people who are just like you who believe the same thing you do. Who are reinforcing these claims, this is how we to quinone where for them, reality is the President is fighting a basketball of pedophiles, right?

And so, the thing that I have found fascinating and my background is in tech, it's not in sociology. So I, you know, the reality of social construct has been a thing that I've had mixed feelings about. But what I think is happening, in the early days of the internet there was disinformation, right. There's always been disinformation, we can just call it propaganda, a variant of kind of dark propaganda. And at the time though it was decentralized.

So, two things I think have happened that have really changed that, just technological structures. The first are the tools to facilitate virality which make people active participants in the propaganda process. Meaning you click the share button, you have just facilitated a message, you have just forwarded on a message. So, not only are you creating it but you are an active integral part in its spread. It's fundamentally participatory now. That has never been, you know, in mass, we've never had that power as individuals before.

The second is curation algorithms. So, when the internet went from this decentralization everybody had a blog to centralized on social platforms which we can, you know, it's a whole variety of reasons why that technology became so appealing to people. Ultimately, what happened was the glut of information meant that the platform had to curate it in some way which is how we got recommendation trending and curation features.

Which is to break through the noise and to capture human attention we created these systems that push content to people. So, even if you've never proactively sought it out, it finds you because there's a profile of kind of who you are. And the curation piece is really fascinating because it is, in fact, in my opinion, that process of recommending content proactively to people means that that's how you push people into certain what I call bespoke realities.

Right, you push them into communities where what they see, that they talk about, the media that they trust and the media has at this point fragmented as well, right. So, it's no longer just we're all seeing the same 10 channels or even just the channels on cable television. We have the rise of

the fifth estate and the kind of micro influence to have the reach of the media without necessarily the same commitment to journalistic integrity or responsibility.

And those are the people who have trust within these kinds of little tiny communities just like archipelago of realities if you will as opposed to one central consensus point. And that I think is what's really happening here as far as the intersection between the internet as infrastructure as communication infrastructure and how we receive propaganda today.

MR. MESEROLE: Kate, I know you had talked earlier some of those same trends. Like the participatory nature of disinformation today and the way that that's kind of intersecting with some of the new algorithms that we've seen like the recommendation algorithms, curation algorithms. Would you mind talking a little bit more about how you view that phenomenon?

DR. STARBIRD: Well, I think Renee described it really well and I kind of mentioned it in my opening statements but I went through it quickly. We tend to, you know, when you think about the stories of 2016 and Russian propaganda, we have this idea, this foreign adversary who's manipulating us and sending us messages and we're absorbing them.

And the reality of propaganda, the reality of disinformation is that it looks much different than that. Even in 2016, they weren't just sending the message, those messages were getting picked up, they were getting amplified, they were getting repeated and remixed by people in the U.S. who were spreading as their own thinking that they were their own as well, right.

So, and then for, you know, if you take Russia out of the system and look at some of the domestic propaganda we're seeing today, Renee mentioned it up front. We've been working on some projects in collaboration so maybe that's why we're converging on these same topics.

But if you look at the meta narratives about, you know, distrusting the election process especially on mail-in ballots, we can see a lot of like individuals who have bought into those meta narratives, they've heard them. And then when they receive something that doesn't look right at their house, they take a picture of it, put it on the internet. And the thing goes viral usually through, you know, kind of same similar set of accounts that are sort of wired to spread this stuff to support that meta narrative. And then they come back three days later and be well actually that wasn't actually a ballot, the ballots haven't gone out yet, that was an information card that I received or something else, right.

So, they're getting it wrong but they didn't even know that in the moment. So, they're motivated, they actually believe this stuff. They believe that this content is the stuff that they're seeing shows that there's evidence of this thing they've heard about, the massive voter fraud. And they're highly motivated and they're politically active.

They feel like this is the way that they can make change and they can help or whatever. And so, that becomes part of the disinformation ecosystem. And right now, I think that's a large part is sort of this organic participation and then these groups that are motivated to make that a big story, right.

And so, how it moves from the individual who is taking that picture in through sort of these minor level influencers that are mostly social media influencers and then into sort of hyper partisan media and eventually through cable news media. It's a pattern we're seeing over and over and over again.

But it's just kind of, it's just an example of what we think of as participatory propaganda, participatory disinformation. And I think when we start thinking about disinformation more along those lines, we're going to get a better understanding of the problem. It's not them, it's us.

MR. MESEROLE: That's a great way of putting it. And I wanted to pull, you know, you and Renee did such a great job of kind of explaining, you know, how the participatory nature of social media and online interactions kind of allows these things to spread. But then it eventually does reach this point where it kind of percolates into mainstream media or broadcast media.

And I know earlier in the initial session of this event, H.R. McMaster kind of spent a little bit of time talking about some of the failure and I think even used the word collapse almost of mainstream media in 2016. And, you know, Elaine I want to come back to you on that point. I know you had brought it up earlier too.

What to you is the role of the media in 2020? Like mainstream media, what does it look like to do that responsibly in light of the disinformation that's out there and in light of the fact that some if it's coming from elected officials that they have an obligation to report on?

MS. KAMARCK: Well look, I think the most difficult thing for all of us who try to do research on this and try to differentiate now versus what's the sort of permanent trend is Donald J. Trump, okay. We have never had a president who so consistently lies and picks up on conspiracy theories. I

mean, you just can't imagine, you know, Marco Rubio, you can't imagine Ted Cruz doing this. I mean Donald Trump is way out there.

And so, the question that I don't know the answer to is when Donald Trump is no longer president will the ecosystem of the internet have the same ability to traffic in disinformation that it does now? Will it be as powerful? What we have going on here is, you know, the press has to cover what the President says.

I mean, umpteen reporters have said to me, yeah, he's the president, we have to report what he says. And so, they're constantly giving, add to the ecosystem the uniqueness of this president. Just the other day there was a study done, and I can't remember by who, that the biggest source of misinformation on COVID-19, it's not the Russians, it's not Quinone it's Donald Trump, okay.

So, the question -- what makes it hard for researchers and I know I've written books on the presidency. My colleague at Harvard, David Gergin and I have had this discussion many times. Which is we don't what to write about this guy, right, because he so out of the ordinary. He is so on the extreme of behavior on every aspect of presidential behavior that we just don't know what to say about him because we don’t know if the presidency is going to be forever changed and we don't know what comes after.

So, I have a hard time sort of differentiating this whole discussion about disinformation from the extraordinary role that the President of the United States plays in promoting disinformation.

MR. MESEROLE: That’s a good point. I think that kind of leads into one of the questions that I was going ask, a little bit tongue in cheek. But it's, you know, if Donald Trump never gets The Apprentice on NBC, right, and he's never in a position to even kind of run for office, you know, early in last decade, do we still have the same problem?

And I'll start with you, Elaine but like, you know, Renee and Kate can jump in as well. Like how much of this is really kind of Trump driven and and how much of it is more about some of the other forces in our tech and politics?

MS. KAMARCK: Chris, I don't know, okay, I don't know.

MR. MESEROLE: Fair enough.

MS. KAMARCK: And I don't think we will know until it's over and we've passed into

something else, okay. Because as I say, look my colleague Darryl West and I, you know Darryl, we wrote a short e-book last summer called “Dirty Tricks in Cyber Space.” And we started that with a compilation of all the dirty tricks that's been in politics in the 20th century and there's been a ton of them, okay.

So, in other words, you don't need the internet to cheat, lie and steal, okay. And it makes it maybe cheaper, maybe a little easier but you really, it's not critical. And so, I don't know the answer to that and let me, this is a little bit off but since I have two great researchers here, I want to give you maybe a research project.

I am looking at the COVID-19 rates in North Dakota and South Dakota which are off the charts, okay. And those are two places that are hard core Trump states, they will go for Trump, there's lots of Trump supporters there and that was South Dakota was the site of that 250,000 person motorcycle rally dominated by lots of people with Trump flags and nobody wearing masks.

And, you know, you've got to think there might be some relationship to 250,000 people coming in from all over the country and the fact that not wearing masks and going into coffee shops and campgrounds et cetera and the spread that's going on now. I'm going to be very curious to see what the polling shows in North and South Dakota and what the deviation from the normal Republican vote is in North and South Dakota.

Because this goes back to Renee's question about reality, right, what is the impact of reality? And so, I'm thinking that that might be an interesting little test to have a look at.

MR. MESEROLE: Kate, do you want to jump in?

DR. STARBIRD: Yeah, I want to get back to some of the question here that you asked us. Kind of like what happens when Donald Trump is gone and is it just him? And I guess I have a little bit of a different perspective here. I think Elaine's right, we can't know, we're never going to know. This is some of the hard things is like we can't take this out of the system.

But in some ways, I've often thought someone like Donald Trump acquiring power in this media environment is almost a symptom rather than a cause. And that it reflects some of the weaknesses that we have related to how information began to spread and related to how someone could rise in a lot of visibility and the ways that sort of our -- ways of thinking about the world were turning into more conspiracy theorizing and how he took advantage of that and how he was able to reflect that back

to folks.

And I think one piece of evidence to support that is it's not just happening here in the United States. It's happening in other countries in India, in the Philippines and Hungary and Brazil. That leaders like this are acquiring power often using the same kind of tools of the media, populous figures are gaining power all over the world.

And maybe that's conditions of the underlying conditions of, you know, wealth disparities and other kinds of things that are happening but I do think that there's something there that I'm not convinced that this is a complete aberration of a single person as much as something more structurally wrong or something that's made us vulnerable to turning to leadership like this.

MS. DIRESTA: It may also have something to do with what narratives spread and what commands attention in the age of information glut, right. It's click bait it's sensationalism, it's conspiracy. It's things where you're like oh, let me go click on that, that's interesting sounding. You know, even those of us who write, you know, thinking about what headline do you put on your article? You can't put something boring (audio skip) crazy claim, you know.

And I think that that's actually quite destructive and I think that it lends itself in some ways to the way that, you know, that populous leaders have always operated throughout history. Just we have certain people who don't feel as constrained to huge facts, right. And that I think is again as Kate said, more of a symptom of what gets amplified in this type of environment as opposed to, you know, cause, I guess.

MR. MESEROLE: Kate were you doing to jump in again?

DR. STARBIRD: Yeah, just the ability of a populous leader to have that direct connection with their audiences where the audiences can actually feed them what the message is and they can so quickly reflect that back to the audiences. That dynamic just supports this kind of rise of the populous leader in way that I think. And these aren't just my ideas, I've read these kinds of ideas coming out of people who have been talking about the Philippines and the media environment there. But I still think it's reflecting of what we're seeing here.

This kind of information system just works very well to support populous leadership. And it's a theory, we can't completely prove it but it seems to have some support in some of the things that

we're seeing.

MR. MESEROLE: Thank you so much for bringing up a kind of global perspective to this. I can never kind of wrap my head around whether we should be, you know, whether I should feel optimistic or pessimistic about the fact that we're not the only ones going through this but I'm really glad that you brought that it.

I'm conscious of time and we've only got about 10 minutes or so left. And I think, you know, one of the things that we're keen to do with this event is, you know, really kind of walk through the full arc of the problem. So, we had the first panel on the history of propaganda and this panel has been focusing more on the drivers. The next panel will be on more on some of the solutions.

I kind of want to just move into that solution space a little bit as a way of segueing to the next panel. I'm sure you all have ideas about not just what's going on but what to do about it. And, you know, again, a lot of the questions we got were actually about this issue.

And, you know, one of the questions that I'll start with, there was actually a series of questions really related to kind of regulation and policy, right, which is kind of in the wheelhouse of kind of immediate places you would go. Although there's some concerns and challenges obviously with kind of easy regulatory fixes to this.

But I wanted to just open it up to the group if folks do have any kind of strong thoughts about, you know, is this a matter of just fixing section Q-30 whatever that might mean. Or is it, you know, like what are the policy options for dealing with this? Again, anybody can jump in.

MS. KAMARCK: Well, I'll start with one that is unrelated to the internet, okay. One of the reasons that Donald Trump is president is because the American political parties over the period of the last 50 years gave up their ability to control their nomination process. And they did that by what looked like increasing democratization and everybody kind of got behind it. Oh yeah, we should have primaries.

Well, in the old days which did give us with those bad smoke filled rooms but we did get Eisenhower and we did get, you know, Roosevelt and people like that. In the old days, people nominated the president who actually knew something about him or her. And when you move to a system totally of primaries and you take out the political establishment which we have done and this is a very unpopular thing to say, by the way.

Okay when you take out the political establishment, what you do is you leave the process open to demagogs. You leave the process open to reality television types. You open it up to all sorts of mischief. And one cannot imagine Donald Trump being nominated in the old system.

And, in fact, there's an analogy there. In the early 1900s, Henry Ford, very popular at the time, everybody in America was either had a Ford or was trying to buy one or wishing they could buy one. Henry Ford decided he wanted to run for President and the Republican party said no, go away, we're not going to nominate you, okay.

So, that is completely broken down. We have had in the 21st century, a bunch of bozos deciding that they were going to run for president with no apparent reason, no apparent public stature behind them or quality of public engagement et cetera. And the political parties gave up their role, both parties, Democrats and Republicans. Now that's a long history which is in my book which thank you for mentioning, Chris, but that's where we are.

So, one thing that we have to do is just like we need some kind of gatekeeper, frankly, back and that's what political parties have traditionally done. And we don't do it anymore and it's going to give us a lot of problems in the future.

MS. DIRESTA: I think tech on the, you know, sort of systemic issues we've been discussing, I'm a little bit skeptical of what kind of regulation would come through Congress right now. In large part because while everybody is talking about how we need to regulate tech, the Democrats and the Republicans are united in that but fundamentally believe in completely different outcomes that they want to see, right. Content moderation is the best example of that.

The fight over 230 says on one side, everybody wants to reform 230. One side wants more takedowns and more moderation, the other side believes that any takedown at all is on a front to free speech. So, I think that calls for regulation from Congress right now are not going to really return anything that is quality. The executive orders are even worse.

I do believe in self-regulation to some extent. I am out here in Silicon Valley and I think that particularly in the process I was describing where I said that any time a feature change happens it changes a state of play. I think that well, you need regulatory oversight. The entity best adept, you know, the entity is best adept at kind of keeping control over disinformation campaigns in real time are actually

the platforms.

And what I would like to see, I think as I mentioned, I feel like virality and curation are kind of the two major drivers in the problems that we have today. And so, with virality, you can introduce some friction into the system. Twitter put out something yesterday just saying that early pilots that they've done indicate some success in giving someone a prompt that just says, are you sure you want to retweet this, you haven't read the article, are you sharing the title or did you actually go and look at this and are you making a conscious decision that this is a message that you want to participate in facilitating?

So, I think that there are design tweaks that you can make that add in some friction and do a little bit to mitigate the impact of virality. And then on the curation front, that is, I think, really, I believe that curation, information curation is the problem facing us in the information environment today.

We used to have the gatekeepers doing it, as Kate alluded to, one that went away. Now it's kind of the sort of wholly algorithmic curation. You are starting to see, particularly for 2020, platforms beginning to layer on some human oversight at this point saying we can't just all for algorithmic amplification of the most wild and sane theories. We can't be promoting the most popular groups because oftentimes they're terrible.

And so, that's where I believe that solving, coming up with a framework to rethink how information is curated and pushed out to us is actually one of the most significant endeavors that we're going to make in our, you know, in kind of getting our hands around the new information technology.

DR. STARBIRD: I want to build off of that a little bit. And I think there's both solutions in the platform design and education that I think will be helpful. On the platform design and also, I think we're not going to solve this with one thing, we've got to solve it from multiple directions. I think there is a role of policy as well, moderation, curation, platforms working differently.

But for me when I look at what's happening with disinformation and how it's now wired into the systems, it's in the algorithms, it's in the recommendations, it's in how the information moves, it's in whose network to whom and who has big audiences. Changes that we make now are going to have a hard time fixing because we're coming from a point that's already so toxic and where disinformation is right now so pervasive that it's hard to actually -- it's so distorting what's happening in online spaces that it's hard to even figure out, you know, what the signal is.

And so, I really think that it's going to take profound changes to those algorithms starting over in some places and it's going to take dissolving some of those networks, taking away the connections. You don't want to have to drop the accounts but take away some of those connections, trim them and don't let them form back. Because they've been formed by gaming the system, by gaming the recommendation systems, by using automation.

All of these have formed a structure that now we can't just say we're going to fix it from here because, you know, it's wired in. So, I think you're really going to need some structural changes and it's not going to be just about the design or tweaking the algorithm or tweaking, you know, a label or something that we're seeing.

And I do think there's hope on the education side as well. Again, it's working with platform changes and other things. But I do see people becoming a little bit more savvy about what they're seeing, they're more aware of these things. I don't think they know yet what to do. And so, how do we educate ourselves and help ourselves become healthier, more productive participants in these environments. Be skeptical but not too skeptical. Figure out how we can trust and whom we can trust.

And I do think it's an education problem. I kind of I butt heads with others about this because I think folks in the tech industry really think of this completely as a technical problem. But I do think that we have agency as people and that we can do better. But it's not a K-12 and it's not a college course, this is a K-99 problem where we have to be educating across our population to help us become more resistant and resilient to these information toxicities.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, I couldn't agree more with Kate. I do think that, my hope is that over time, the public will get more sophisticated about what they see on the internet and more sophisticated. You know, SUNI at New York and Stonybrook, has been running a course for a while now on the internet on just news on the internet. And giving students ways to look at it, et cetera.

I'm hoping that just as we are, if you look at us on advertisements, right, I mean, we're very sophisticated consumers when it comes to advertising, right. We check things out, we don't just buy the car that has the best color or the prettiest people surrounding it. We're pretty good about, you know, looking through advertising. And my hope is that that sophistication will develop with the internet as well.

MR. MESEROLE: Thanks. Not to put Renee and Kate on the spot, but I'm glad we kind

of transitioned to some of the civil society things that we can be doing to try and tackle this issue. And I know that you're both involved with election integrity projects. Would you mind just sharing a little bit about what that is and kind of I think there's a sense out there and I've talked with Fiona about this too that there's all this disinformation online and nobody is doing anything about it.

And it's been really great to see some of the -- meeting the folks at the leading edge of the research community, you know, come together to try and at least draw and awareness to it. I don't know if one of you wants to take the lead or not but I just wanted to give you a chance to plug what you guys are doing.

MS. DIRESTA: Sure. So, one of the things that we've really felt for a long time in some of the reports that my colleagues at Stanford put out actually in 2018 believe that cooperation multi-stakeholder collaboration is really one of the ways that we have to combat this. And that's because everybody has visibility into different facets of the problem.

So, as outside researchers, we can see certain things, you know, we can look at information spreading across channels. We can look at narratives that are beginning to bubble up that, you know, we see indications that velocity is increasing, virality is increasing. Platforms have visibility very deep into their own stack but not necessarily broad across the ecosystem.

Governments, so secretaries of state (audio skip) will see narratives beginning to spread in their communities but don't necessarily have the technical capabilities to understand how they got there or why they're there. Or to what extent it's a tree falling in the woods versus a big deal. And then there is, of course, you know, FBI and DHS which have some visibility into money flows, information about foreign adversaries. And there are different scopes of understanding the problem.

And so, election integrity partnership was a vision of how could we build a collaborative ecosystem in which all of those stakeholders and civil society, I left them out. The extensive groups of people who see disinformation taking hold in their community and want to flag that to somebody to investigate to understand what's happening.

So, I think that what we've tried to put together is really this multi-stakeholder collaborative effort where it narrowly scoped to voting related misinformation and disinformation. We are evaluating narratives as they pop up, understanding their dynamics. And then working with journalists, fact checkers, platforms and local government to understand how to combat the specific instances that

are potentially having an impact. I'll let Kate maybe add to that.

DR. STARBIRD: That was just really exciting stuff, really heavy stuff and we're working on all cylinders. We have four teams at the University of Washington, four different analysts' teams working in parallel on some of these things. And I know Stanford's got a huge group of students and we've got some other partners at Grafica and the DFR lab. And just trying to identify misinformation, analyze it, figure out where it's coming from, how it's spreading and then communicate whether it's to the broader public or to the platform or someone else to how people understand the threats.

MR. MESEROLE: Well, no behalf of the rest of us in our democracy, we thank you for the work that you guys are doing. And Elaine, thank you for the reminder that reality matters. It's one of the silver linings I'm going to take from this conversation. And most importantly at all, just thank you to all of you for, you know, sharing your insight and perspective with us today, I know I've learned a lot.

And I'm kind of regretful that we only had an hour because there's so many other questions I want to ask you all. But with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Fiona Hill for the final panel looking at some of the solutions about what we can actually do in terms of policy, in terms of government to tackle this problem. So, back over to you.

MS. HILL: Thanks so much, Chris. We are busy bringing the next set of panelists on board, but I think you've already got us in this just completed panel, well started with some of the solutions, because clearly some of our panelists supported us as they described with the work that they are doing in their various institutions.

We've got today for the final panel, as Chris suggested, a representation of individuals who are spanning the spectrum of private and university-based solutions starting with Eileen Donahoe from Stanford who is coming on with us, who's looking at also the digital space like many of our colleagues who just wrapped up. And also people who are more engaged in the government institutions, or have been engaged in government institutions, and kind of thinking about some of the structures.

We have Thomas Kent, who is now at Columbia University, who has a long personal history in broadcasting, both as a journalist, but also as someone who is in charge of one of the mainstays of our efforts to counter disinformation from the Cold War period, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty. Thomas is also the author of a new released book, “Striking Back” on overt and covert options to

combat Russian disinformation that also came out of much of this exercise to kind of figure out what happened in 2016.

We are also thrilled to have Daniel Kimmage from the State Department, the Global Engagement Center, which was an entity that was set up initially to deal with counterterrorism and to some of the groups that had already taken over the information space on the internet, but were using this to drive up extremism, and in fact incite people to violence. And the State Department adapted, and Daniel will tell us about this when we get to him, these efforts to try to tackle the problems of disinformation and dealing with state actors, not just nonstate actors.

And we also have, and we are really delighted that she was able to join us today -- of course the internet makes this possible to bridge the differences -- Teija Tiilikainen from Helsinki. Teija is the head of the Center of Excellence looking at hybrid warfare, information warfare based in Helsinki. She is a longtime foreign-policy practitioner with a deep background in international affairs. But the Center in Helsinki is one of Europe's paramount institutions for tackling this issue of disinformation.

Eileen, you've just joined us. And I'm also very grateful to you and everybody who preceded us who've come in from Stanford. It's been an early morning for everyone. And Eileen, you've been doing a lot of pioneering work in the digital space, drawing on your own experiences as an ambassador and government official, many of the other things that you've done in the past to try to get everyone to think about how internet platforms and the digital sector can do more themselves on this frontier, the bridge really from the second panel into this panel from the kind of private sector into the public sphere as well.

And you wrote an op-ed quite recently for The Hill on the critical role that internet platforms play in both protecting free speech, but also democracy, so kind of digital responses and what the platforms can do to actually tackle these problems of disinformation. I wonder if you could share with everyone what it is you've been working on thinking about and then we will move on to the other panelists. And we got obviously a lot of questions related to this, as Chris already said about what can the digital sector do, what can we do to counteract some of the problems of disinformation on social media.

I noticed Kate and Renée and others were saying we are kind of doing this to ourselves. So Eileen, what are some of the tools that we can use?

MS. DONAHOE: Well first, thank you so much for including me. It has been a fascinating conversation and I've been a little stunned at the coherence and convergence of views. I did not anticipate that when I actually read the agenda, and yet I think we are all moving in the same direction. And in particular, I would underscore the starting place with General McMaster on the two big ideas I got from him is that we need to demonstrate competence in combating these information operations, foreign intervention, coordinated inauthentic behavior, which I think we are actually doing a much better job on. And here I would underscore the work of civil society and academic researchers and Renée DiResta, Kate Starbird. The best and the brightest have literally flooded to this zone and they kind of have us covered in that diagnostic space.

I would also say the private sector has done much better from day one after the election when Mark Zuckerberg said, you are all crazy if you think we had an effect on this election. And I remembered talking to a couple of folks from Facebook, policy folks at a conference right after the election saying, you guys are crazy. This was won on the margin. Everybody knows that. And how you can't see it was just so stunning to me. I have no diagnostic background and I could tell you we haven't been able to prove causality exactly in a social/scientific way necessarily, but it was patently obvious that it had an effect on civic discourse around the election.

Similarly, on the government front, obviously a lot of people have talked about the extent to which we were caught off guard, the national security community thinking about the hard infrastructure, not anticipating the potential potency of information as a weapon around the election. So we've made a lot of progress there, but the second point from General McMaster is the part I would emphasize is the real part we need to work on, which is the culture, the domestic side of the equation that you've been underscoring.

We lack unity and we lack confidence in who we are as a people. And we really need to be -- I would say we almost need to take -- I'm glad everybody is working on the diagnostic side, the foreign side, the platform side, but the real work ahead is on the domestic, political culture. And I would say mainstream media less than social media.

That said, I will actually answer your question and say the two things that I think that could be done with respect to the private sector, social media side; A, in terms of government regulation, rather than doing what we've seen in Europe, which I think is a big mistake, and focusing on the -- regulating on a content basis and in fact shifting liability to the private sector platforms for user generated speech which will lead them to actually squelch free expression, also shifting judicial function to the private sector for assessing criminality, I would not recommend that in the United States.

In the United States, if we can get past our political dysfunction, I would say focus on transparency and accountability. That is actually the first step for us in understanding what it really means to be living and working and engaging in algorithmically driven information environments. And obviously we need more transparency for users around the rules. That's one level.

We need more transparency for governments to assess whether platforms are doing what they promised in terms of executing on their rules. But also transparency with respect to the decision rules baked into the algorithms and how they further the deterioration of civic discourse.

Last piece here is, on the private sector side, I think they have fundamentally misunderstood the meaning of free expression on their own platforms and that there really are three different dimensions to free expression. One is the right to speak, which they get, and that's what they've been trying to protect, user speech. That's great. But users also have a right to seek and receive information. And the quality of that information really matters.

And part of free expression is expressing the democratic will of the people. And if the quality of civic discourse has deteriorated so much on these platforms that we undermine the real free expression to say who do you want as your political leaders or what do you want as the outcome of your election, that is not protecting free expression. And so I have emphasized their own free expression and their ability to say, no, we are choosing democracy. We are choosing a higher quality information over lower quality information. That is not censorship. That is a manifestation of their own speech and their own values and they should embrace it even more.

MS. HILL: That's great, Eileen. And actually, that provides a very good segue into turning over to Thomas Kent, because one of the purposes of setting up Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and the Voice of America back during the Cold War, was to actually counter disinformation with

quality information. It wasn't just designed to be a propaganda outlet. And we been grappling with how to tackle this in these ways that you've even described about transparency and accountability since the Cold War when we were obviously in a very different space. It wasn't digital and wasn't so individually consumer driven.

And Tom, I know that you've been thinking about this for some time and you were a journalists for many years teaching at Columbia, teaching journalists and other students, and you just written this book about how to tackle it, some of it looking at the old school methods both overt and covert. But I know as we hear what Eileen has had to say, what are you thinking about as you move forward from analyzing this issue and thinking about what to tell your students and other people who are listening in today?

MR. KENT: Right. Well, good afternoon, Fiona. And for some reason, my camera is a little fuzzy today. I apologize. I would like to -- let me start with the point that you made, Fiona. And I think it was an interview in July with the Wilson Center. You emphasized the importance of stabilizing the U.S. relationship with Russia, moving it beyond the current framework of geopolitical competition with the hope of regaining the ability that the U.S. and Russia had even in the Cold War, to work jointly on challenges that both countries faced.

To me, one of the things that make Cold War cooperation possible was the relative military balance of power between Washington and Moscow. Stability there created a mutual sense of safety, or at least a mutual sense of terror, that created space for the two countries to move forward on other things. Today, for all the reasons we've been discussing, we lack stability. And one reason is the information demand, the perception that Russia is assaulting democratic societies with disinformation while Western countries do very little in response.

If Russia feels it really has found in information, a magic bullet to advance its goals, there is no reason for it not to continue to press that advantage to the further detriment of the political climate. But if we learn to respond more effectively, there could be something of a balance of information power, like a military balance that could create what the Russians might call the objective conditions, to once again, cooperate on the kinds of issues facing humanity that you outlined.

I think it very much overstates things to say the West is inert in the information conflict. It's true that democratic governments aren't built to propagandize their own people or block their access to information. That's why in Western countries we do license Russia to have broadcasting operations, and we don't indoctrinate our children to believe everything that our government say.

But in many parts of the world, the West has not been idle. Some Western governments, especially in the Nordic and Baltic regions have extensive programs to inoculate citizens against Russian information operations. Democratic governments and foundations are supporting a growing number of pro-democracy, nongovernment actors in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, who are quite active in the information conflict.

Some of these groups focus on the positive values of decent government and informed voting. Others actively expose disinformation and local corruption. Some urge businesses to stop advertising on conspiracy sites. A few have developed tools to identify disinformation networks and then they work with the platforms to try to get those networks taken down.

There is also an increasingly transnational group of independent journalists and fact checkers, some supporting democratic values and clean government in general, and some very much to focused on Kremlin inactivity. Western countries also run international broadcasting in more than 60 languages, the BBC, Deutsche Welle, France's Ya Life, and of course the Voice of America and the other U.S. networks like Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty, where I worked.

As we know, the U.S. networks are currently in substantial turmoil over political issues, but their audiences remain very significant. I've proposed that there be a closer relationship between these broadcasters and local pro-democracy groups. Along with creating their own programming, it seems to me these networks can also serve as production houses and distribution outlets for local organizations that often lack skills and visibility.

There is also the question of covert information action. This is standard procedure of course for Russia, unattributed websites, false persona on social networks, bots to amplify messaging. Facing these tactics, some feel that we are fighting with one hand behind our backs if we don't adopt some of these tactics ourselves. Others very strongly resist this on both ethical and practical grounds. They say that's not who we are. But unquestionably, it is who we've been. Accounts of U.S. and British

covert action in the Cold War and since, suggests how capable and far-reaching Western information operations were and conceivably could be again.

The question is how existential a threat do we or don't we consider Russian information operations to be. And if they are existential, which less transparent means to fight them might we undertake, and which remain totally out of bounds. Maybe we would never do disinformation. But is using bots to rapidly spread true information, something that's utterly and morally beyond the pale?

In the conversations these days about responding to Russian information tactics, it's been rare for anyone to discuss the covert side. It's sensitive, obviously, but I think there should probably be more discussion of the subject. Government -- for one reason, government and nongovernment actors charged with repelling hostile information are entitled to know, at least in broad outlines, what their societies consider fair and ethical and what they demand in this domain.

So I guess I covered a lot of ground here. Let me stop then. And I look forward to the discussion.

MS. HILL: Thanks so much, Tom. There's actually one very specific question that looks like it was well designed for you here that I will ask you to respond before we go on. A lot of people are wondering whether in light of what you just said about the information, the kind of media landscape and your previous position, do we need some kind of legislation or special accreditation process for the free media in order to counter some of the disinformation as much as possible?

I mean, that's kind of in a way tying into some of the things Eileen talked about, some of the risks of what the Europeans have done that could actually stifle free speech by pushing liabilities onto private platforms or the judicial response that Eileen spoke about as well.

We already have media accreditation, and you went to school of journalism, you've been a journalist. What do you think about this idea of going much further? It would almost be creating a kind of -- it's sort of an official list of who's journalist and who isn't, which seems kind of difficult to put in place when you have an internet that's allowing all kinds of people to be bloggers and in effect, actors, purveyors of information, not just participants in propaganda and manipulation as some of our colleagues in the last panel said. What you think about that?

MR. KENT: Yeah, it bothers me a little bit, the idea. Any idea of creating gold star journalists, officially recognized entities, I think it just -- either, you know, Russia today will be the first to sign up and say we've got a code of ethics too and you are discriminating against us, or the world will sort of lineup as to the Goldstar journalists. You know, who are they stocking courses for. It's sort of like -- they tried to do this on Twitter with these blue dots of verification. But how that worked out for us? So I'm not that optimistic about how that might work.

MS. HILL: These are all good points because sometimes, as you and Eileen are saying, and as our colleagues in the last panel said as well, you create new instruments and regulations to solve the problem and it in effect start to create other ones that you hadn't necessarily foreseen. I will turn over Daniel because your organization, the Global Engagement Center, which you've been one of the pioneering people behind, started off doing something else and was then, given what happened in 2016, was retrofitted or adapted, taking on this idea of the ecosystem to dealing with these new challenges.

Perhaps you could tell us really about how you see instruments like the Global Engagement Center based at the State Department operating and some of the things that you've learned by looking at other actors that are useful for this conversation. And thanks for joining us, by the way.

MR. KIMMAGE: Thank you, very much. Thank you very much, Fiona. And thank you to everyone who was tuning into our panel today. As Fiona noted, Congress expanded the mission of the Global Engagement Center to fill a critical gap, which is the need to expose and counter disinformation from our foreign adversaries and competitors overseas.

More specifically, the GEC's mission is to lead and coordinate efforts of the U.S. government to counter foreign disinformation aimed at undermining the stability of the United States, our Allies, and our partners. And let me stress really that last word, partners. Renée DiResta on the previous panel talked about stakeholder collaboration. And that's absolutely essential to our work, as will be evident from the overview that I get.

We work with bureaus at the State Department and our embassies and our partners in the interagency, and worldwide, to build technical skills of civil society organizations, local influencers, and journalists, to expose and counter disinformation that may be used to undermine the democratic

process. We are developing partnerships with key local messengers who have the reach and the resonance to target audiences worldwide.

And we are deploying technology to help to provide early indicators and warnings for disinformation. We're building international networks and strengthening the technical skills of civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and other local actors, the people who are really best positioned to shine a light on the malign influence operations from Russia and China.

I'm pleased to say that we are seeing strong growth in the GEC's resource base. In fiscal year 2016, the base budget was around $20 million. By fiscal year 2019, it was about $55 million. In fiscal year '20, it was nearly $65 million. In the fiscal year '21, request is for $138 million to match this growing challenge of countering for them propaganda and disinformation.

So let me say a few words about Russia, which spreads disinformation with the goal of dividing societies and having citizens lose trust in democracy and democratic institutions. The disruption of society is Russia's main goal. Increasing their prestige on the world stage is a distant, secondary aim. They are really trying more to create disorder and break down existing order rather than building anything up.

Russia employs a collection of official, proxy, and unattributed communication channels and platforms create and amplify disinformation and propaganda. We recently detail this in our report, "Russian Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda," showing how this ecosystem functions as a collection of unofficial -- I'm sorry -- official, unofficial proxy, and unattributed channels that they use to amplify false narratives. We showed -- and I would encourage everyone to search for the report. You can find it on the State Department website.

This ecosystem has five pillars. There are official government communications. State-funded global messaging is the second pillar, third is the cultivation of proxy sources, many of them hidden, fourth is the weaponization of social media, and fifth is cyber enabled disinformation. The Kremlin invests massively in this. Its intelligence services and proxies conduct malicious cyber activity to support their disinformation efforts. And then it leverages outfits that masquerade as news sites or research institutions, to spread false and misleading narratives. I encourage you to read the report, which as I said, you can find on the State Department's website.

In short, the Kremlin tries to disrupt the current world order in order to accomplish its goals. So what are we doing about it? So the Global Engagement Center works to expose what Russia is doing with things like the report that we just released. We recognize that sunlight is the best disinfectant in this case. We work closely with our partners in the Bureau of European Affairs, our partners at U.S. European Command, and others, on coordinated lines of effort to counter Russian disinformation. We are also partnering with select European countries to establish an operational working group that shares insights on Russian disinformation tactics, and coordinates on countermeasures.

We've also kicked off some very concrete initiatives. For example, a two-year project to build resistance to disinformation in the most vulnerable European societies by increasing direct, person-to-person engagement on this issue. We are working with our State Department colleagues to find and quickly fund projects with local organizations on the front lines of countering COVID disinformation, Africa, South America, and Europe. We also support civil society groups in central and eastern Europe that build resiliency in their local communities, running joint communications campaigns with Allies to counter Russian historical revisionism, and to empower fact checkers in Latin America to stem the surge of Russian disinformation in that region.

A good example of the synthesis of multiple lines of effort came last fall when we worked with our colleagues in the UK and the Baltic states on a joint campaign to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Way, a milestone in the road to the breakup of the Soviet Union. We knew that the Kremlin was attempting to rewrite history of this occasion and we worked with our partners to make sure that the trick was heard. And the GEC's ability to coordinate campaigns like this, helps to counter Russian propaganda and present a unified front with our Allies.

Lastly, a couple of words on our broad approach, which is really to, as I said, work with partners and Allies, but also to utilize all the tools at our disposal. So for example, we make very active use of data analytics to provide early warnings of foreign disinformation to Allies and partners. We analyze the attempts by our adversaries to target vulnerable foreign audiences, and we share our information with stakeholders.

We look to build the technical skills of civil society organizations, NGOs, journalists, and other local actors, who are best positioned to expose and counter the spread of disinformation. And we

use our own domestic platforms and our diplomatic missions abroad to share fact-based and historically accurate information. I would note that our legislation specifically tasks us with circulating and promoting fact-based narratives.

Lastly, just the final point. Of course, a well-informed citizenry is key to the strength of any democratic institution and to building resilience to adversarial disinformation. Ultimately, countering foreign propaganda and disinformation is a long-term effort that requires working with international partner governments and organizations to build societal resilience and reduce vulnerabilities, to malign propaganda and disinformation. Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Daniel. I just want to actually put a quick question to you, which again, seems quite directed in the area that you've been working on. One of our audience was wondering, and given the fact that you yourself actually used to work on terrorism. Obviously, terrorists and all kinds of other nonstate actors use the same tools as states do. We've seen that the Russian state has used proxies and cutouts, hiring hackers and all kinds of others, so that when Putin says the Russian state doesn't do this, or his press spokesman recently, they have what we referred to before as a kind of implausible, but still plausible deniability here. I mean, you and others who've been tracking this can see the indicators that this is a state sponsored action. But by not using state agents, but proxies, there is kind of different layers here.

So people are wondering if you in your work and the work you've done before, can see evidence of formal relationships or proxy relationships between things like white supremacist groups and other extremists, I could say the left and right in the U.S. domestic circles and foreign actors.

MR. KIMMAGE: Well, let me start with the caveat that comes from our legislation and our authorities and where we are, which is that we are directed by our legislation to look at propaganda directed at foreign audiences. So we don't look at the U.S. domestic environment. We do have colleagues of course and the FBI's foreign influence task force, and DHS who do look at that. But we look at propaganda directed at audiences abroad because that's what our legislation tells us to do.

Now, I will say in terms of Russian disinformation and propaganda, they have a long and well-documented history of leveraging extremes, leveraging everything that can be divisive within society

so that something we have seen them do. We've seen them do it in the European context in other places. And it's something that I anticipate that they will continue to do.

MS. HILL: With that being said, that raises another question about really how to coordinate. You said about coordinating with partners on the foreign parts of disinformation, but when you get something -- this is really kind of another set of questions here -- that you see in a foreign arena when you're working with your partners that has a domestic U.S. or one of the -- you know, that really points in this direction that you can see foreign actors manipulating groups that are acting within the United States, what do you do. I mean, how does that coordination take place? Because a lot of people in the audience are clearly concerned that we might not be coordinating in a way that would be relevant to the U.S. domestic environment.

MR. KIMMAGE: Sure. With the caveat that government coordination is one of the things that doesn't have an exciting, visible component. It consists of emails and phone calls and meeting, but we are in close communication with our colleagues at DHS, with our colleagues at FBI. The Global Engagement Center has set up an interagency coordination cell, so we are in constant communication. So when we see something that has a nexus that would be appropriate for our domestic counterparts, we obviously pick up the phone, or write an email, and we are in touch with them. But just to stress, the Global Engagement Center's mission is focused on audiences abroad.

MS. HILL: Right. And that's a very important point and we're going to go and talk to one of the partners, in Europe. I know we were having some technical difficulties with Teija Tiilikainen on the video side, but I think that she has been able to join us by phone from Helsinki.

And Teija, I hope you were able to hear what everybody else was saying here. I mean, clearly when the Hybrid Center of Excellence was set up in Helsinki you had many of the issues that Daniel is just talking about in mind about this for an interference, all of these activities abroad by the Russians; other concerns about the nonstate actors, and how to tackle this hybrid information space, not just the kind of physical space that we've been used to of warfare. And of course the big impact this is also having on the European countries.

So in listening to what everybody else has been talking about today, and given the work that you have done with Daniel and the Global Engagement Center and others, what do you think a U.S.

audience should be mindful of from a European perspective?

Teija, are you still able to hear us? That's unfortunate, but hopefully, will get Teija back again.

Daniel, you worked with our counterparts. I mean there's a center in Helsinki that Teija represents and directs. There's also one in Riga, in Prague. In Riga in Latvia, Prague is in the Czech Republic. There are a lot of partners for you to work with. How does that cooperation work?

MR. KIMMAGE: So I would actually like this is one of the most exciting and productive aspects of our work, and it involves, obviously, some of the centers that you just mentioned. It involves governments, but really, ideally, if you look at what we are trying to construct, it is this network of networks that brings together the efforts of government, the efforts of civil society, et cetera.

So I brought together the -- I brought in the example of the Baltic Way campaign to counter Russian historical revisionism, but I think there are increasing examples of cooperation at multiple levels. And to go back to what Renée was saying in the previous panel, it's such a complicated problem and it has so many components, some of them are historical and cultural, some of them may be regulatory, some of them are technical. And then expertise is never going to be gathered in a single place under a single roof.

We recognize that at the Global Engagement Center we have a growing staff but even so, we're never going to be absolutely expert in every single thing. The only way that we're going to have a chance here is to bring together, and leverage sort of our collective capabilities. And just from the list that you've articulated, and there are many, many more now emerging that you see this in the research community. I think that compare to where we were three years ago, five years ago, there's been a huge amount of progress. Obviously there's more to be done, but this is, I think one of the unsung victories in this early stage, this emergence in sort of an efflorescence of partnerships.

MS. HILL: That's great. Thank you, Daniel. Thank you for filling in because I think we have Teija, now on the phone.

Teija, if you can hear us, you know, we'd like to hear a bit more about what you're doing at the Hybrid Center of Excellence in Helsinki, and how you're tackling all these issues of disinformation from a European perspective.

MS. TIILIKAINEN: Yes. Hello, Fiona. I had some problems with connection, but I hope I'm able to be with you now. Many thanks for inviting me to this discussion. We have been working hard in Helsinki in our Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats with these issues. And I haven't quite been able to listen to all of your discussion, but I will make a couple of points which, when we talk about disinformation, also election interference, as we have been discussing a lot this morning.

There are things that we want to stress from the point of view of our Center of Excellence, which is of course, a joint effort of EU and NATO, the NATO members to tackle this hybrid threat in its entirety, including disinformation. So from our point of -- disinformation is, and has to be seen as a part of hybrid threat operations and campaigns. So it is one of those instruments being used in a concerted manner against our democratic societies. So also the responses, and policy instruments must be such that they can tackle the whole set of instruments.

We talk about different stages of hybrid threats, and usually divide them into the priming phase, and then the operational phase. And it is exactly in this priming phase where we see disinformation used against societies. It is paving the way for a later operation, it is sowing discord in the society, weakening the trust of government, and so it needs to be seen as the first step. And then, of course, the final goal being, at a later state, to exert power and steer decision-making of an imperfect society in a more comprehensive manner.

So in our Center we have been trying to monitor, make the (inaudible), but also asking ourselves how do we counter this phenomenon of hybrid threats, and disinformation as a part of it. So we have been developing some tools that we have then been putting in the form of recommendations to our participating states, currently 28. We talk about detriments and ask ourselves how do we deter these phenomenon that are not traditional threats. How do we create resilience against those, and so these are, I think, questions that we all should tackle together and ask ourselves how can we deter in an environment where the threats are nontraditional.

Questions that we have raised, together with our partners, our participating states; how do we deny the benefits of disinformation from the adversaries? How do we increase the cost of these campaigns? And the solutions are not easy to find. We can say that attribution is an important tool, when we want to raise the cost, or deny the benefits, we can say that collective response is something that we

can do altogether in the EU/NATO context are always better than if we have to go to state-by-state responses.

We have to show that these threats to the adversaries are not as cost efficient as they are believed. And finally, I would also like to just stress the role of building resilience. So we both deter and build resilience, and here we have a couple of tools that I would like to mention that we have been pointing out and discussing together with our networks and participating states.

We need to improve our situational awareness. It's the key among decision makers in an environment where different types of hybrid tools are being used, and disinformation becomes more and more common. So we must ensure, as we have been hearing this morning, how healthy media environment is important as a tool here, independent fact-based reporting, journalistic media to be safeguarded as its role is vital in this context.

But also, more broader in the society the societal media literature developed. We heard in the previous panel a lot about cooperation with social medial platforms, and of course, this is an important tool in building resilience in our societies and preventing hybrid threats and counter them. So this is what I would like to say; we need cooperation, we need our networks, and our Center of Excellence is a network-based organization, so we try to share good practices, talk to each other, and act as collectively all together as possible in front of this news.

Thank you, Fiona.

MS. HILL: Thank you so much for this. And I'd like to use what you just said on social media resilience as a segue back to Eileen again.

Because I mean, Eileen, I think you know, part of the issue and many of the questions are directed at this about you know, is it possible to -- you know you were asked about adding cautions about how we should approach social media regulation. Is it possible to get social networks to -- private companies' platforms to work together in the same way that Teija is discussing about countries and institutions like NATO and the EU But to be able to tackle this problem as well? I mean is that an appropriate way?

What can this -- I mean obviously, we've heard through the other panels we heard from John McMaster the private cyber companies. Thomas Rid talked about Kaspersky, a Russian cyber

company that actually helped him unearth a lot of information about the active measures, but we've also talked about FireEye and those we know that cyber security companies are being very active. Well, what about the social media platforms? We hear a lot about Twitter and Facebook doing things individually, we've talked about this.

What are your thoughts on this?

MS. TIILIKAINEN: So mine?

MS. HILL: No, Teija, actually Eileen, and then I'll come back to you again, Teija. Thank you very much.

MS. TIILIKAINEN: Yes, please.

MS. DONAHOE: So two things occur to me. The first of which is what I emphasized earlier is that the platforms themselves have to make their own choices and declare what their values are, and be a little bit more straightforward about what their algorithms are promoting and demoting. And what they are choosing to emphasize and deemphasize, which is an aspect of their free expression. But, I would say they need to do a little better job of putting a stake in the ground and helping the culture on their platforms move in the right direction. By choosing higher quality and truthful information, et cetera.

It doesn't mean that they squelch the voices of politicians they don't like, that's not what I'm talking about. But I do think that there is a way to be more proactive about disinformation than they are. They are slowly moving in that direction as they talk about, you know, real world harm. They're starting to see that disinformation about COVID counts as real world harm, and I think the same could be said about disinformation around elections counts as real world harm, if you literally go to the point -- not only in the administration of elections, but if you are dissuading voters, that is eroding something that's very valuable to the society. That's the first thing.

On the coordination piece, I do believe the platforms are moving in that direction. There are some concerns coming from the civil society about that, or even sort of -- first of all, we don't want homogeneity, necessarily. We don't want the platforms to all have the same rules and the same personalities.

And, in fact, there is another initiative that is called the GIFCT, global internet forum to counter terrorism. It's an experiment that is -- it's an organization formed by several platforms. They are

now moving in a multistate holder direction, a cross sector working groups on a variety of different issues to combat the threat of terrorism online. And it really got energized post Christchurch where people came to see that we really do need global cooperation, cross platform cooperation, cross sector cooperation.

There's discussion about doing the same thing in the disinformation realm, but disinformation is even a tougher conceptual category to get your head around then terrorism. Terrorism content is hard enough to define, disinformation is even harder for all the reasons we discussed, especially because it's now -- the domestic dimensions of it certainly move you into free expression concerns. But directionally, yes, there should be more cooperation and coordination there.

MS. HILL: No, that's great. And obviously there are some parallels that terrorist like extremist groups often use the same tools and the same methods in their approach. And terrorist have also, obviously, in many cases spread disinformation. So I can see that that might be one method, I think you know, it's obviously a very interesting development. And in a way, probably the Global Engagement Center was coming from the same kinds of ideas, right Daniel, as this kind of GIF -- this global internet information forum.

Tom, if you could just give us a little bit of your thoughts on the whole, you know, world of international broadcasting because that's content. And you know, kind of information that's not supposed to be disinformation, but as you alluded to, and as I think many people tuning in here know, it's a very controversial issue at the moment. Sure things like the Voice of America, or RFU, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty are the same as they were in the Cold War, should they actually become more active arms of propaganda? Should they be more political? You know, how can we think about the -- kind of the state overseeing media space as opposed to the private media space in this context?

MR. KENT: Well, course, from the Russian standpoint they were propaganda, and they are propaganda. And if you look at the amount of coverage, for example, the U.S. international broadcasters have given to the Navalny case or to what's going on in Belarus, it certainly looks to the Russians as if what they do is to harp, and harp, and harp on these specific issues that are so sensitive from the Russian standpoint.

So you'll never convince the Russians that they're not propaganda. And from our standpoint, it seems to me that they need to do two things. On the one hand, certainly fair and accurate

news is absolutely critical. That's the core of it, and that's what some of the current stress is about, some of the political pressure that's being put on the broadcasters.

On the other hand, I don't think it's immoral to say that for $800 million a year U.S. taxpayers are entitled to broadcasting networks that do their best to emphasize what there is good about the United States, about democracy, about the UE and so forth. So that's an important mission as well. If you look at, for example, coronavirus, you know, is it propaganda? Would it be propaganda for the Voice of America, for example, to have every day on their homepage a rule breaker column about what the U.S. is doing to fight the coronavirus overseas. Everybody knows that the U.S. has pulled out, or is in the process of pulling out of the World Health organization. But what about, you know, all the embassies around the world, and all the private U.S. charities that, in various ways, are very active in this cause?

If the VOA made a point of this every day on page 1 would that be propaganda; is that something the State Department should be doing, not VOA, and not, you know, breaking news, or is it completely logical?

So I think in this issue of U.S. international broadcasting, at least, there really are two issues. One is the question of independence and political pressure where I come down very strongly on the side of the broadcasters.

At the same time, I think Congress really needs to decide, and it hasn't decided, it sort of plays both sides in the governing legislation about what it wants these broadcasters to be.

MS. HILL: Thank you. This is a very good point because I mean I think what we're all talking about on these several panels is how, suddenly our adversaries are pointing to our divisions rather than what's actually, in fact, united us. And the Voice of America could easily be the voice of Americans who are not state actors but are actually, you know, doing very positive things. And there could be a lot more attention paid to the things that are actually working in America as opposed to the things that are not working.

In fact, I mean, I recall when I was at the national Security Council a discussion with one of our ambassadors; our ambassador to Austria, for example, who had done a lot of research and came out of a public relations background, who was bemoaning the fact that we had lost that public information -- public diplomacy aspect of some of our State Department efforts. It was all there, but it wasn't getting

as much attention as it was in the past.

And that there were populations in places like Austria and elsewhere that used to have a very positive view of the United States based on activities of everything from cultural exchanges and civic exchanges and all the things that they knew, artists and other things that Americans were doing. Now, all they heard about was the bad news coming out of America. And this was obviously having a pretty negative effect on our international standing.

So there is very much, obviously, something to what you're saying there.

MR. KENT: Right, and to be sure, Voice of America does continue to report positive news about the United States. I guess the real question though is that when you have international audiences who are seeing on CNN and Fox, which is distributed to some degree internationally, you know, nonstop America in chaos, country falling apart, does U.S. international broadcasting have some obligation to affirmatively try to balance that, or not? Are they just independent journalists and they'll do what they'll do?

MS. HILL: I think that's a very important debate that we should be having, particularly in the context of the eyes of the world being on us in our election, and obviously the relentless drumbeat of seemingly bad news that is coming out of here.

I mean, I wonder, Teija, as you're listening to this from the vantage point of Helsinki, I mean how has the Center and kind of NATO and the EU grappled with this question about how you also handle countering disinformation with information? And, you know, obviously you have to counter in some ways a lot of the divisive commentary about the actions of NATO and EU, and individual countries as well. And I know that in Finland we've been no stranger too, to these information operations that's being trying to put Finland in a rather negative light as well by Russia.

MS. TIILIKAINEN: Yeah, this is really a tricky question. I think Russia and all the other adversaries are using efficiently every possibility to show that the European Union or the transatlantic community is not united. So we should really keep this in mind and not let the minor disagreements dominate our public image. We should, as you said, Fiona, be much more efficient with providing the good news and stress our unity, as there is a lot of that as well.

In Finland, this is a well-known phenomenon to us, disinformation, and it is -- these two

that I mentioned, first of all, the whole of government approach to disinformation and/or hybrid threats. We need to cooperate with the private sector actors with this, the media actors. We need to develop our media literacy in the society, more and more also.

And this is the message from my sense; this is not something any nation can do alone. We must find the good practices and we all must find our opportunity to be communicated to the world. So we must dominate disinformation in an environment with our messages from the EU and the trans-Atlantic community. Otherwise someone else is doing it for us and I think this is not so complicated, so strategic information released as a communication is something we should all pay attention to, and not let minor disputes dominate the global information agenda.

MS. HILL: So Daniel, how are you tackling -- I mean you mentioned a lot about data sharing best practices, but what about the strategic communications dimension that Teija was talking about? How much does that factor into your current work?

MR. KIMMAGE: Well, I mean communications in the end are everything. It's important to remember that the Global Engagement Center is really here to facilitate and to galvanize. We're not the ones outside of very limited forums like this, generally doing the communication. What we are doing is building that network for partners who are the right people, who are the right messengers with the understanding of the local context with the credibility to actually bring the message to the right target audience. And that's going to look different in each context and each setting.

So the sort of secret sauce on our side is both kind of a variety of the very traditional work of diplomacy and building bridges, but also making sure that we can bring all the technical tools and the whiz bang and the data science, et cetera. But in the end, it is a very, almost, face-to-face communications task, and that's going to happen through the partnerships once again because that's absolutely key to success here.

MS. HILL: Thanks, Daniel. I mean obviously this is a pretty multifaceted approach here. I apologize if there's noise in the background. Someone is actually mowing the lawn in my neighbor's yard and it's extremely loud, making my own strategic communications a bit more difficult than normal here.

Eileen, I mean you've been in the space of communications and also diplomacy, being an

ambassador. You know I thought perhaps, you know, you might be able to help us wrap this up with a few passing thoughts for the audience at home. Because each of us individually can be a strategic communicator about this problem, right, because as everybody made it very clear on the second panel, we're all in this together. We are participating in this communication space. We are as much the communicator and the purveyors of information as anybody else is. And it is the content that we often produce that others are using.

So Eileen, some final thoughts for us on how we can all do this better.

MS. DONAHOE: Yes. So first off to the comments that were made, absolutely democratic alliance needs to stress the unity between us, and we actually have to rebuild that unity. Second, whole of government approach. You know, it's almost a cliché, yes, absolutely, that is true. I fear that we are doing the opposite.

And I reflect -- you know, several people have brought up Peter Pomerantsev's book which I read right after 2016. I read it in December of 2016, and “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible. He did a remarkable job depicting the very neolistic culture that was post-Soviet Russia, the media culture, the political culture, and I literally felt sick. And I felt like, oh my gosh, it would be sickening to live in a culture like that, and we were so different. No wonder we were caught off guard.

My biggest fear is we have become a culture where nothing is true. And it is in the House, and it is in the culture, and it is in the political rhetoric. And so I hope we are not being caught off guard in terms of what happens post-election. We have to get through the election, I would emphasize the mainstream media, reporting on hacked docs material, beware. Janine Zacharia, Andy Ratto (phonetic) Stanford folks, fabulous guidance, 10 points on how the media should not be reporting on hacked material.

Think about election night, election week, election month, it's going to be a long time and we need to normalize the idea that we don't necessarily get the outcome immediately. And the media has to bring calm to help get us across this threshold, and then we can rebuild our culture, bring the public in, bring our Allies back together.

MS. HILL: These are very important messages, Eileen.

Thank you to all the audience members who sent in such great questions, and also, on

behalf of all of my Brookings colleagues, and all the fine work that they're doing as well. As you can see, this was also a shared enterprise with Brookings and Stanford and many other academic institutions to showcase some of the work that our colleagues are all doing on this point.

So thank you very much to everyone, and I hope everyone has a great weekend.

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