

Media and Foreign Policy

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Media has significantly evolved since the Sept. 11 attacks. The first facet of its evolution is through its utilization in the perpetuation of terrorism. In 2001, the use of live broadcasting with the explicit intention of having the entire world witness the deaths of thousands was a new horror. Today, media covers terrorism with 24/7 reporting, on-the-scene interviews, photographs and videos, some of which are from social media. Unfortunately, coverage of terrorist attacks serves to not only publicize the tragedy, but allows terrorists to strike fear in their targets and increase their ability to acquire new recruits. In combatting this challenge, the United States intelligence community is viewing the future of threat assessment in foreign policy through cybersecurity initiatives and artificial intelligence (AI).

It is also evident that social media has become increasingly powerful in influencing public opinion and, consequently, politics. Democracies rise and fall on the public opinions of their citizens. Such influence is most recently seen in the 2016 U.S. presidential election through Russia's use of disinformation in exacerbating existing frustrations many Americans experienced towards immigration, race, and religion through social media outlets. This kind of false information will only continue to have terrifying implications for democracy and policy making.

In 2007, aware of the extraordinary influence media has on international affairs and foreign policy, the U.S. State Department created a new website, *America.gov*, as a way of encouraging communications with the public as well as individuals overseas. In 2011, under President Barack Obama's administration, the State Department diverted its focus to social media assets such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Despite this implementation of social media platforms under the Obama administration, the administration tried to intimidate and control the press through the spying of journalists and the use of the 100-year-old Espionage Act to prosecute whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning.

Social media has become increasingly used by the Trump administration with the creation of a "Real News" TV program which airs on President Donald Trump's Facebook page as well as the president's active use of Twitter. President Trump's unfiltered use of social media has also increased tensions among allies and adversaries as seen with tweets made towards North Korea leader, Kim Jong Un. President Trump has continued to distrust the media, being dismissive of First Amendment protections and the constitutional reasons for a free press. President Trump has also threatened media outlets, threatening the licenses of TV networks and recommending that the Senate Intelligence Committee investigate various news networks.

In the 21st century, social media has become the platform of choice for foreign ministries, heads of state, and governments to project their policy messages to the public. Cautions remain, however, about using social media platforms for statecraft due to how social media circumvents the norms and subtleties of traditional diplomacy. It is also evident that media can exacerbate the anti-democratic forces at work in today's world. While the freedom of press and expression has fallen under attack in recent years by the U.S. government, the government needs to continue to uphold the rights and standards of the First Amendment as our nation tries to navigate the changing role of media in the perpetuation of democracy and the lives of the people.