Establishing a New Framework for Assessing Contemporary Forms of Covert and Semi-Covert State Interventions in Foreign Information Spaces

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1.0 Introduction

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Chinese Communist Party was worried that, due to the increase in internet usage among the Chinese, it could lose significant influence over the domestic information space (Kalathil, 2017, p. 4). Their worry was that, if the information space was not controlled, a discourse surrounding the need for liberal values and democracy could develop in China, thereby questioning the legitimacy of the Communist Party. They wanted to avoid this at any cost. Since restricting access to the internet entirely was not considered a viable option by the leadership for economic reasons, the party launched the "Golden Shield Project" in 2000, later coined "The Great Firewall of China." The Great Firewall is known today as the most sophisticated internet censorship program and heavily restricts access to information the party deems inappropriate (Torfox. A Standord Project, 2011).

In 2012, Russia enacted the so-called „foreign agent" law. This legislation aimed to ban or curb the influence of Western organizations on Russian domestic politics. According to Russian scholars, the state passed this legislation to preserve its sovereignty, which was allegedly attacked by Western-backed NGOs that promoted liberal values throughout Eurasia, thereby trying to enhance the United States' (US) and European Union's (EU) geopolitical power in the region (Vijay, 2015).

In 2015, the European Union installed an "anti-propaganda" unit called "East Stractcom Task Force." The main goal of this unit was to combat interferences by the Russian state in the European information space, as the Kremlin sought to "weaponize information" and sow discord in the West (Rankin, 2017). Meanwhile in the US, the Obama-led administration initiated the "Global Engagement Center" (GEC) in 2016 (Lumpkin, 2016). The main goal of the GEC is to address foreign and non-state propaganda efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security or stability of the US and its partners (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

Following this list of historical events, two assumptions can be made: first, among major powers, both when it comes to authoritarian and liberal democratic regimes, there appears to be a concern about (lack of) control over the information exchanged among citizens. In particular, this concerns information that may threaten the perceived political stability in a given country. Second, since the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that states have

increasingly felt the need to re-adjust or newly establish their control over the information space as their threat perception has changed. Furthermore, there is a certain amount of agreement over the fact that the threat is not internally made but stems from external sources, mainly other state actors and foreign ideologies who are considered the perpetrators to be behind this threat.

Given that there seems to be a great number of attempts to influence information spaces within other states, one would assume that researchers have not only studied this topic but also established terminology that helps us to identify, compare, categorize, explain and describe this phenomenon. However, even though there is a plethora of different concepts, there is no satisfying theory that allows us to comprehensively fulfill such expectations, as will be explained in the literature overview section of this thesis.

This thesis seeks to address the shortcomings of existing concepts and establish a framework that allows us to identify, compare, categorize, explain and describe different forms of II. Hence, it will respond to the following research question: „Given that the US and Russia are executing Information Interventions to follow strategic or short-term political goals by deploying covert and/or semi-covert actions to exert direct influence in foreign political discourses, what are different modes of these actions and how can they be summarised in the form of a typology that aims to describe common contemporary types of Information Intervention beyond the means subsumed by the soft power and public diplomacy concepts?"

This text uses an adapted understanding of the term "Information Intervention", which was coined by Philip Arceneaux (2021), who used this term to refer to actions of states, which spread information to foreign audiences. The term II was adapted by the researcher to refer to *covert* and *semi-covert* state action meant to influence foreign information spaces *directly*. In other words and marking the difference to Arceneaux's approach, this definition excludes the social phenomena covered by the soft power and public diplomacy concepts, common definitions of these terms are provided in the literature review.

As the focus of this thesis are contemporary examples of II, its analysis will be centered on II practices that have occurred since 2010. However, to grasp the scope of these activities, the text also refers to practices which have taken place or started before this period. The results are specifically aimed at initiating an academic debate, which could lead to the creation of a comprehensive II typology.

To respond to this research question, this text will provide an overview of different forms of Information Intervention in the 21st century. This analysis will focus on II practices by the United States and Russia, as these two countries have been identified by the researcher to be the two most powerful II actors, who further represent a democratic and autocratic approach to II respectively. Based on the empirical observations described in the overview, types of Information Intervention are identified, which will form the basis for defining a novel Information Intervention typology. This analysis will be guided by Kluge's (2000) methodological framework for the empirically grounded construction of typologies in qualitative research.

2.0 Literature Overview

As stated in the introduction, the following literature review discusses various frameworks and concepts that have been used to cover acts of Information Intervention but fall short of systematically addressing the phenomenon. First, the text will set out overarching concepts that provide a comprehensive perspective for perceiving state-based communication and discuss these conceptual issues as well as their lack of scope for dealing with IIs. Then, labels which have sought to refer to IIs are presented. At the end of the section, Arceneaux's (2021) approach to II is described, which aims to address the literature gap discussed in this section, highlighting the need for a new II approach.

One of the commonly related theoretical concepts referred to in relation to II is the so-called "hybrid warfare" concept which aims to research interventions in information spaces. This conceptual understanding was formulated in response to the developments during the 2014 Ukraine crisis, in which Russia allegedly coined a new form of war by effectively extending the toolset used in warfare to achieve political goals. According to this theory, Russia has gone beyond the use of military force and deploys methods of war both in the spectrum of military and non-military means. Among other things, this understanding interprets confrontations between adversaries as a combination of hard and soft power (Fridman, 2018, pp. 106-107). This has also led to an extension of the term "warfare" and prompted scholars to interpret non-violent means of Russian state politics, like Information Intervention, as means of (hybrid) warfare. Georgii Pocheptsov (2018), for example, argued that Russian propaganda

interventions in the 2016 UK EU membership referendum (so-called “Brexit vote”) resemble the Russian application of hybrid warfare in Europe (Pocheptsov, 2018).

Related to the hybrid warfare (HW) concept, academics referred to actions of intervention in the information space as “information warfare” (IW), with some scholars like Thornton (2015) suggesting that IW is an aspect or form of HW (Thornton, 2015, pp. 42-43). Similarly to hybrid warfare, Western scholars implicitly portrayed information warfare as a Russian state phenomenon to achieve the Kremlin’s strategic goals and as a new kind of threat the West is insufficiently prepared for (Ajir & Vailliant, 2018; Blank, 2013; Čižik, 2017; Hellman & Wagnsson, 2016; Jaitner & Mattsson, 2015; Wagnsson & Hellman, 2018). In this context, this text refers to Ajir & Vaillant (2018), who provide a common definition of (inherently Russian) information warfare: IW is not only executed in the context of war, but also during what Western states would perceive as peaceful times, for it aims to influence events and behavior in foreign countries to affect the actions of its governments, giving them an advantage in so-called “political warfare.” For example, this objective can be achieved by introducing a false message to the opponent’s communication system (Ajir & Vailliant, 2018, pp. 72-74).

By defining the phenomenon as inherently Russian and anti-Western, scholars implicitly assume that the West itself is not conducting information- or hybrid warfare. This perception should be viewed critically as the West has engaged in similar actions to Russia, which could also be labeled as IW/HW. In fact, NATO StratCom, a strategic communication center of the Western military alliance NATO, states on its website that it conducts psychological operations “in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behavior, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives,” (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, no date) resembling what scholars have defined as “Russian” IW/HW. Ofer Fridman (2018) concludes that this perception of hybrid warfare being inherently Russian results from a politicization effort of NATO and other actors who have successfully established an interpretation of this term that is favorable to their policy aims (Fridman, 2018, pp. 122-123).

However, concepts that interpret warfare as increasingly hybrid are also highly contested in the academic discourse because including non-violent means in a warfare paradigm creates various conceptual issues (Caliskan & Liégeois, 2020, p. 301). As Carl von Clausewitz, one of the most influential theorists on war, established: war is an act of *violence* meant to force a particular will on an enemy (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 90). If we neglect this aspect, we risk that

the concept is inflated to a degree that makes it lose its value. If we assumed that war is not necessarily violent, foreign states' "hostile" actions, like interventions in information space or economic means, could be interpreted as war. Since foreign politics are frequently perceived as hostile, drawing a line between war and peace would become a never-ending and probably an unsolvable dilemma - that is, if these terms were to be accepted. Moreover, even if we put this issue aside, due to its vagueness, the hybrid warfare concept does not allow us to differentiate a specific (new) kind of warfare. Van Puyvelde (2015) correctly pointed out that any use of force can be defined as hybrid, except if it exclusively refers to one single form of warfare. Since almost every use of force can be defined as a multi-dimension approach, the concept loses its value (Van Puyvelde, 2015).

Furthermore, defining Information Intervention as warfare does not accurately reflect the described real-world process. When states intervene in each other's information spaces, they use public diplomacy, media or civil society cooperations and related means, as this text will highlight. Such operations are often not undertaken by militaries and, thus, do not reflect common practices of warfare, but rather everyday politics that do not necessitate military involvement.

A more promising approach to exploring Information Intervention is the strategic narrative concept developed by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013). The authors define narratives as particular structures, through which sense is achieved in political discourses, applying meanings or frames to various discourse elements (Miskimmon, et al., 2013, pp. 5-6). The concept assumes that states attempt to create a shared understanding of the past, present and future by employing strategic narratives, allowing them to pursue strategic policies in international politics (Miskimmon, et al., 2013, pp. 1-2). According to this concept, strategic narratives should be perceived as a powerful tool strategically used by political actors to influence political discourses. Strategic narratives are centered around notions of the state, the public system and define which order shall be achieved within international relations (Miskimmon, et al., 2013, pp. 1-2). The value of the concept, when used for analyzing interventions in the information space, is that it provides us with a background of *why* and *how* states intervene.

The strategic narrative concept is especially powerful if we employ a constructivist perspective and perceive that our social reality is based on narrated constructions. This would mean that

narratives are the primary/only way for states to intervene in the information space of states. Hence, it can be argued that the strategic narrative concept identifies the structural dynamics underlying interventions in information space. Notwithstanding, this framework does not allow us to systematically compare, categorize, explain, and, thus, sufficiently describe the phenomenon of states intentionally interfering in the information spaces of other states. While it may be true that states employ narratives to intervene in information spaces, this does not give us an adequate basis to, for example, differentiate how the Chinese and Russian II approach differs, to compare the success of European and Latin American Information Interventions, etc.

Finally, Joseph Nye's "soft power" concept also falls short of systematically addressing the II phenomena. Soft power refers to the ability of a country to frame situations in foreign information spaces so that other countries develop preferences or interests that are consistent with the interests of the given country. The resources of soft power are cultural attraction, ideology and international institutions (Nye, Jr., 1990, pp. 167-168). However, Information Interventions may not only be about defining common interests and policy goals. They could also be directed at weakening an opposing state by affecting economic structures, amplifying societal divides or fueling mistrust in state institutions. Furthermore, the means of II can be more direct than what Nye has defined, for example, by promoting a specific strategic narrative in a given political debate, which could be operationalized without the above-defined resources of soft power.

Due to the lack of a systematic framework that allows us to analyze different practices of II, scholars have used many labels to describe different practices that would fall into this category. Some concepts deal with the spread of factually wrong information, such as ("foreign state-sponsored") "disinformation" (La Cour, 2020), "misinformation" (Vraga & Bode, 2020) and "information disorder" (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Aiming to cover Information Interventions, these concepts cannot capture the full scope of phenomena as they mainly refer to the spread of allegedly wrong/misleading information. However, states could also feel threatened by the spread of information that is not necessarily factually wrong/misleading. On the other hand, concepts like "computational propaganda" (Wooley & Howard, 2019) and "social media influence operations" (Alizadeh, et al., 2020) can also not cover the full scope of phenomena as they only reflect digital avenues of Information Intervention.

Arceneaux (2021) has identified the shortcomings of the existing concepts and states that there is a need to develop terminology that captures the broad range of phenomena in the field of II and that is based on a more realistic, grounded understanding of state behavior. Therefore, he has created a taxonomy & typology of government communication to create an Information Intervention paradigm, which is supposed to shed light on "who communicates with what audience, in what manner, with what intent, and with what desired outcomes." Arceneaux contextualizes four behaviors of government communication: public diplomacy, public affairs, psychological operations and propaganda, resembling his taxonomy (Arceneaux, 2021, pp. 6-7). Public diplomacy (PD) is defined as "state-crafted messaging with audiences in publicly overt and attributable ways, […] aimed at advancing sociopolitical feedback." PD resembles "verifiably framed information, via rational-based arguments" and "gravitate[s] towards socially and politically constructive ends." Propaganda, on the other hand, "communicates in covert, non-attributable ways with fabricated or factually manipulated content." This form of government communication is non-attributable and disrupts political discussions (Arceneaux, 2021, pp. 21-23). Similarly, psychological operations include "the spread of inaccurate and damaging information, stressing emotive and primal instincts of identity (Arceneaux, 2021, p. 21)." Psychological operations (PSYOPs) are employed by military personnel (Arceneaux, 2021, p. 13) and are characterized as flexible tool, mainly to persuade, but also to inform and disrupt, societies (Arceneaux, 2021, pp. 18-19). While PSYOPs and propaganda are similar in many regards, PSYOPs rather tend to employ "objective verifiable truths," while propaganda uses "deceptive falsehoods" (Arceneaux, 2021, pp. 14-15). Finally, public affairs are characterized as a core function of political institutions within a government (Arceneaux, 2021, p. 13) to present and frame state affairs with a domestic audience focus (Arceneaux, 2021, p. 14). As shown in the graph below, Arceneaux connects this taxonomy to typological features, creating a system of different intervention types and a description of their nature.

Paradigm	Primary Level	Secondary Level	Tertiary Level	Who Engages	In What Manner	Target Audience	Through What Method	Appeal Type	Comm. Type	With What Intent	To What Policy End
Taxonomy				Typology							
Information Intervention	Information Operations	Propaganda	White	Collaboration across Political & Civil Society	Overt	All Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	One Way	Cognitive Modification	Promote, Support, and/or Change Public Policy
			Gray	Collaboration across Political & Civil Society	Mixed	All Audiences	Mixed	Mixed	One Way	Attitudinal Modification	
			Black	Collaboration across Political & Civil Society	Covert	All Audiences	Deception through Falsehoods	Emotional Appeal	One Way	Attitudinal/Behavioral Modification	
		Psychological Operations	White	Military and/or Intelligence Groups	Overt	Foreign Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	One Way	Cognitive Modification	Support National Security and Promote Foreign Policy
			Gray	Military and/or Intelligence Groups	Mixed	Foreign Audiences	Mixed	Mixed	One Way	Attitudinal Modification	
			Black	Military and/or Intelligence Groups	Covert	Foreign Audiences	Deception through Falsehoods	Emotional Appeal	One Way	Attitudinal/Behavioral Modification	
	Information Politics	Public Diplomacy	Traditional	Politial or Civil Institutions/Persons	Overt	Foreign Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	Mixed	Attitudinal modification	Support Foreign Policy and Promote National Security
			New	Politial or Civil Institutions/Persons	Overt	Foreign Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	Two Way	Attitudinal modification	
		Public Affairs	Government	Political or Military Institutions/Persons	Overt	Domestic Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	Mixed	Cognitive Modification	Promote, Support, and/or Change Public Policy
			Corporate	Civil Institutions/Persons	Overt	Domestic Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	Mixed	Attitudinal modification	
			Interest Group	Civil Institutions/Persons	Overt	Domestic Audiences	Framing Truth	Rational Appeal	Mixed	Attitudinal modification	

Arceneaux's taxonomy of Information Intervention (grey background), and typology of Government Communication Behaviour (white background) (Arceneaux, 2021, p. 22).

While the typology of Arceneaux does respond to the problem intially laid out in this text, it fails to adequately address it. The typology, which is supposed to describe the nature of the units described in the taxonomy, reveals that the construction fails to systematically address the nature of the ascribed phenomena. To highlight a few examples: public diplomacy must not be executed by the method of "framing truths." Psychological operations are not nessercarily restricted to a "one-way" communication type. Contrary to the assumption of the typology, propaganda can also be carried out by institutional political actors and public diplomacy can also be directed toward domestic audiences. These shortcomings to properly categorize and describe the phenomena, and, hence, the weak explanatory power of the taxonomy are explained by the methodological choice of Arceneaux.

Arceneaux's typology and taxonomy were based on conducting in-depth interviews with mostly Western experts dealing with various aspects relevant to Information Intervention and asking them about their opinion on the definition of certain concepts (Arceneaux, 2021, pp. 11-12). Therefore, the taxonomy and typology reflect a Western definition of certain concepts rather than an accurate encapsulation of empirical phenomena that has significant explanatory power for describing different types of Information Intervention.

In conclusion, there is no approach that allows us to identify, compare, categorize, explain and describe acts of Information Intervention. Most concepts discussed in this section, such as soft power, misinformation and information disorder, fall short of this condition because they only cover a fraction of the social phenomenon. While the approaches of information- and hybrid warfare could theoretically meet this condition, they should be neglected due to their ill-fated perspective that inevitably ties II to warfare and thereby blurs the definition of war, creating the conceptual issue of inflating the terminology to an extent that it loses its value. The strategic narrative framework provides the most coherent approach for analyzing acts of II. No arguments were found that would reason why the identification of Information Intervention acts through this framework falls short of addressing its main attributes. However, since the strategic narrative approach does not include any sub-forms or categories, it does not provide sufficient means to compare and categorize II acts. While Arceneaux's typology seeks to overcome this issue, it fails to generate a systematic and accurate account of Information Intervention types. Therefore, this text aims to establish a novel framework that will meet the above-stated conditions. The following section will explain how this framework is created by generating an II typology.

3.0 Method

As indicated by the research question, this thesis seeks to develop a typology of covert and semi-covert state Information Intervention. Typologies are a well-established analytical tool in the social scientific discourse, as they fulfill a range of functions, including forming and refining concepts to draw out analytical dimensions and creating categories for classification (Collier, et al., 2012, p. 217). They are particularly useful for structuring complex political communication processes and for comparing and interpreting units of analysis (Büchel, et al., 2016, p. 210). Therefore, constructing a typology corresponds to the above stated research interests.

A typology can be defined as a grouping process where a field of objects is differentiated into types based on attributes. The attributes of units within types are supposed to be as similar as possible, whereas the attributional differences between types should be as substantial as possible. Hence, the term "type" describes a specific constellation of attributes. However,

typologies do not have to nessercary reflect all potential constellations of attributes, as they may not be relevant to the research question or do not exist in reality (Kluge, 2000).

There are different modes for constructing typology types. The most famous type concept stems from Max Weber's notion of the ideal type. The ideal type is not supposed to reflect an empirical process perfectly, rather, it is used as a reference point to study the degree to which an empirical case differs from the ideal (Bailey, 1994, p. 17). Contrary to this Webrian conception, the typology of this thesis can be labeled as "constructed typology." The types of these typologies are rather a reflection of a common empirical form than an extreme type (Bailey, 1994, p. 22). The constructed typology reflects the research interest in categorizing common empirical phenomena forms. Related to this, the typology of this thesis can be described as an empirical typology. This kind of typology, as opposed to a heuristic typology, is mainly derived from data instead of theory, it is rather inductive than deductive. Observations are summarised to illustrate the existence of empirical processes (Winch, 1947, p. 68).

Susann Kluge (2000) has defined a method for the empirically grounded construction of typologies in qualitative research, which forms the basis of this work's methodological process. The four-stage framework can be flexibly applied to various research fields and refined based on the research project. The first step of this framework foresees that relevant analyzing dimensions and properties are defined. This allows us to construct a distinct field of inquiry, based on which attributes and attribute configurations can be identified and translated into types (Kluge, 2000). Following the research question and Kluge's framework, this text has identified an over-arching dimension that covers the social phenomena that ought to be defined by the typology: state actors covertly and semi-covertly intervening in foreign information spaces to follow strategic or short-term political goals. The main property relevant to this dimension is the information distributor needed that carries out the coveted intervention. The information distributor is defined by its capacity to reach a significant audience within the target country and its openness to being exploited by foreign state actors.

In the second step, practices are assigned to groups by means of their common attributes. They must be compared with each other to approve their "intern homogeneity". This is important as groups form the basis for constructing types which should be comprised of units that are as similar as possible. Moreover, groups must be compared with each other to check

whether there is a significant “external heterogeneity” to fulfill the ideal that differences between types are as strong as possible (Kluge, 2000). As stated above, the main property relevant to differentiate between intervention types is the information distributor. On a second level, we can define four different information distributor properties. It can either be an individual, a group/organization, a micro infrastructure or a macro digital infrastructure. A macro digital infrastructure is defined here as an overarching digital network, i.e. the internet or a social media platform that allows users to reach mass audiences. It is commonly perceived as information distributor that has comparably limited control over its content due to the massive amount of messages spread. States can directly intervene in information spaces of other states by using this distributor. On the other hand, they may refer to individuals or groups/organizations who have either established their own micro infrastructure/s or have the capacity to appear on (the) micro infrastructure/s of other actors. Furthermore, states can also establish their own micro infrastrcuture. A micro infrastructure is only used by a minor fraction of the population, it can be integrated into a macro infrastructure (e.g., internet pages, social media profiles), or it can be an infrastructure on its own (e.g., TV channels, newspapers).

We can differentiate between different distributor types, and thereby assign practices into groups/preliminary types, by relating to the following two questions: To which kind of distributor/s do foreign state actors refer (i.e., organization)? How is the distributor using (a) certain infrastructure/s to influence a foreign information space? II practices resemble the same type if the same kind of distributor or a similar cofiguration of distributors is used (individual, group/organization, micro/macro digital infrastructure) and if the distribution practices relating to the infrastructure can be considered sufficiently similar. For example, it has been proven that both states A and B have bribed newspaper organizations in foreign countries with the aim of the organization spreading political messages in their printed newspaper and online social media profiles. Practices resemble different types if they can only be exercised by distinct kinds of information distributors or if the use of the respective infrastructure varies significantly. For example, both states A and B have used social media platforms to exercise Information Interventions but state A exercised its intervention by building its own social media platform, which has the capacity to limit certain political messages, and state B intervenes in an existing platform by creating fake profiles that promote certain political messages.

As the empirical research was guided by analyzing the actions of the respective states, the construction of groups was executed twice, once for the US and once for the Russian case. This will allow readers to gain an understanding over the different nature of practices, or lack thereof, between autocratic and democratic II actors.

The third step entails an analysis of the empirical relation between preliminary types, thereby facilitating an understanding that goes beyond mere description and explains meaningful relationships (Kluge, 2000). This step is applied by exploring the reasons behind the the question why certain II types are chosen over other types and why certain types could or are not expected to appear in confluence during IIs by a given actor. For example, a certain type confiugration may be chosen over another during an II because it rather reflects the overall behaviour of a given state in international relations due its state form (i.e. democractic).

These three analytical steps are carried out iteratively to refine the creation of practice groups. In the final step, constructed types are established and described by means of their attributes and relationships with each other (Kluge, 2000). For this step, the preliminary types, which cover practices of the US and Russia, are confluenced, aiming to establish a typology that covers both democratic and autocratic practices of II. The grouping process described in step two remains the same, with the only exception that group construction is now guided by the practices of both states, not either Russia or the US. This may also implicate that practices, which have been attributed to the same group, are put into different types as new practice groups may be established, which cover a certain aspect that allows us to distinguish between the practices previously covered in a single group.

This thesis' core critique is that we need more coherent terminology to systematically identify and analyze acts of Information Intervention. Hence, it is no surprise that there is no sufficient database that covers all actions of Information Intervention, which could be used as the empirical foundation of this typology. A four-step keyword production and source interpretation process was created to solve this issue. During this process, keywords are used as prompts in the search engines Google and Google Scholar to a; identify sources that serve as the empirical foundation of the typology; b; identify more keywords that allow for a bigger volume of relevant sources. In the first step, the existing terms describing aspects of II (as mentioned in the literature review) are combined with the keywords "US/USA" and "Russia." This combination of keywords is expected to reveal II practices of the respective countries,

local terminologies to describe these practices and, further, the bodies and projects governing the practices. In the second step, the local II terminologies, the name of projects and bodies are used as keywords to generate more relevant sources. The volume of relevant sources stemming from steps one and two is increased in step three by analyzing the citations of the respective texts and thereby identifying further potential sources. Parts of the process are carried out iteratively since it leads to the continuous identification of new keywords and references that can be used to re-initiate steps two and three. In the final step, a thorough analysis of all sources is undertaken, allowing the researcher to comprehensively understand the II practices of each main actor. Since the configurations of keywords are distinct among the state actors, this four-step process is carried out two times based on the labels related to each Russian and the US.

In the following, an example application of this process is presented. If we combine the terms "social media influence operations" with "US" in a Google search, numerous sources are displayed that cite a Graphika and University Stanford study (2022) that describes US Information Interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia (Graphika & Stanford Internet Observatory, 2022). One of the reports links these actions to US military institutions, citing a thesis by Revie Roy (2015). Roy's thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the respective military institutions governing Information Interventions (Roy, 2015). Roy identified two US military bodies, SOCOM (United States Special Operations Command) and CENTCOM (United States Central Command), which execute extensive Information Intervention operations. He also mentions project names, for example, the "Trans Regional Web Initiative" (TRWI), which is led by SOCOM (Roy, 2015, pp. 135-136). Using the keywords "Trans Regional Web Initiative" in a Google search, a report by Peter Cary (2010) was identified, which describes how the TRWI was carried out using a network of online news websites to influence foreign audiences (Cary, 2010, pp. 31-21). Roy's and Cary's descriptions serve as empirical foundations to comprehend the nature of US Information Interventions.

It may be argued that this process for identifying the empirical basis is not sufficient for the creation of a (nearly) perfect abstraction of the phenomena that ought to be analyzed in this framework. However, given the bandwith of the analyzed phenomenon, the goal of this thesis is more modest. It aims to provide readers with a notion, containing as much explanatory power as possible, allowing them to get an understanding of the nature of the given field.

Providing this account may not be the end-solution to solving the ascribed research gap but it is supposed to guide future debates and create a basic form of understanding. To provide this notion, as much empirical evidence as possible must be considered. At the same time, due to the lack of a systematic academic discourse, this knowledge is spread across numerous accounts that can only be identified by an open research process that grants the continued identification of new sources, underlining the need for the given research design.

The following section will summarize the main insights generated from the methodological process guided by Kluge's framework, except for step one (defining an overarching dimension), which has already been fulfilled (see above). The insights generated from steps two and three are described below. In the final part of the main section, II types are presented and described, fulfilling the description of the application of the four-step framework.

4.0 Empirical Foundation of the Information Intervention Typology

As stated in the introduction, this text provides on overview of various II practices by the two II main actors, the US and Russia respectively, which is used as the empirical basis utilized for creating the II typology. The method used for inquiry cannot cover all practices of II by the respective states as it would not only extend the scope of this work, but also require the access to internal documents of the respective actors, which are not available to the public.

However, the following text provides a description of numerous practices as well as their embedded structures, allowing the reader to develop an understanding for the nature of IIs deployed by state actors. As elaborated in the prior sections, this typology and its empirical foundation should be viewed as starting point for further research, aiming to assess the most common contemporary practices of covert and semi-covert II.

The following section is structured into practice groups, which have been established by employing step two of Kluge's framework. First, practices are described, which have been sorted into groups based on their common attributes. Afterward, the attributes defining a practice group are presented. The following overview does not cover all cases identified during the research process, as this would extend the scope of this format, rather certain practices

are presented, which were considered to represent the nature of actions of the respective group.

4.1 USA

It is commonly known that the US state perceives itself as a world power, aiming to exert control over international relations. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the US is engaging in multiple forms of II which will be explained in the following section, giving an overview of various US II practices.

4.1.1 US Support of Civil Society

To describe the practices and their attributes which define this group, this section will start with presenting US II practices, which have occurred during the Arab Spring. The term "Arab Spring" describes mass-level uprisings in 2010 and the years following (Selim, 2013, p. 255) that took place in the Middle East and North Africa, challenging several authoritarian regimes. The wave of protests started in Tunisia and Egypt, leading to similar attempts in other Arab countries (Britannica, 2023). Before the start of the Arab Spring, since the beginning of the 2000s, specifically targeting the Arab world, the US established numerous so-called "democracy promotion" projects (Selim, 2013, pp. 256-258). Several leading Arab Spring activists argued that these projects were crucial to incite and sustain the mass uprisings (Nixon, 2011).

Under the umbrella of US democracy promotion, the state provided foreign citizens with pieces of training. Attendees, many of whom were directly involved in the Arab Spring, were given instructions on how to initiate political campaigns and organize through new media tools (Nixon, 2011). One of the US democracy promotion organizations involved in the training of Egyptian activists, the International Republican Institute, states that it is estimated that, in Egypt alone, more than 10 thousand nationals have participated in democracy and governance programs since 2005 (Hanley, 2011). Moreover, the US provided financial resources to certain political groups, which were expected to adhere to their democracy promotion agenda. In

Egypt, they were proven to collect five and six-digit US dollar funding from the US state between 2008 and 2013. Omar Afifi Soliman, for example, received US funds from 2008 until at least 2012. During this period, his organization “People’s Rights” was paid tens of thousands of dollars by the democracy promotion agency “National Endowment for Democracy.” Soliman did not only encourage the overthrow of the former government led by Morsi, but he also gave instructions for inciting violent aggression against it (Mekay, 2013). In a “Voice of America” report, Soliman takes credit for organizing anti-government protests in Egypt from his apartment in Washington D.C. where he helped facilitate the protests by “outsmart[ing] police” (Presutti, 2011). Saaddin Ibrahim and Mohamed Abu Hamed, two Egyptian opposition politicians linked to the US, independently confirmed that they were given the promise that the US would adapt its approach to the Morsi government if large popular uprisings against the regime took place (Daily News Egypt, 2012; Mekay, 2013).

Furthermore, the Obama administration has put special emphasis on what it termed “Internet Freedom” policy. The central proclaimed aim of this initiative was to ensure the free flow of information globally, thereby explicitly addressing non-democratic regimes, that seek to limit the freedom of expression. To pursue this agenda, the US supported the development of tools, allowing citizens to circumvent censorship by non-democratic governments. These tools were specifically given to actors that sought to advance democracy, human rights and other central policy goals of the US government (Clinton, 2010). This policy was applied in more than 40 countries where civilians were provided with the needed training to make use of these tools (Figliola, et al., 2011). Among other things, the US government funded the International Republican Institute to train over 1,000 Egyptians to employ social media during political campaigns (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011). The US state also supported projects that intended to increase the availability of the internet in developing countries (Figliola, et al., 2011). According to its own estimates, between 2007 and 2019, the US government invested more than $125 million in Internet Freedom projects, which include the support of innovative technologies, digital safety, policy advocacy and research programs (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

By considering the role of the internet and specifically social media platforms during the Arab Spring protests, the potential effect of the Internet Freedom policy can be showcased. The disintegration of at least two authoritarian regimes in the region (Tunisia and Egypt) can be

traced back to the use of the internet and social media platforms. While the protests were motivated by underlying political problems that existed prior to and independent of the networks, social media platforms were used as grassroots tools to mobilize opposition forces (Stepanova, 2011, pp. 1, 6).

4.1.1.3 Defining the Group of US Civil Society Support Practices

The practices covered in this group were labelled by the researcher as "US civil society support practices." They correspond with the following attributes: a; support is given to- or ties are established with a single or set of local actor(s), b; these actors are expected to influence the foreign information space in a way favorable to US policy. As the description above showcases, this support was given to various actors, both prominent opposition forces and regular citizens. However, it can be said that there was a certain emphasis on regular citizens, not high-level political figures, as indicated by the high number of people trained in the context of democracy promotion programs.

4.1.2 US International Broadcasting

In the following, another group of US II practices is described. To gain an understanding of the nature of these practices, the structures governing this group of IIs are presented. The US employs several international broadcasting channels, which produce content in 63 languages and reach more than 410 million consumers per week, according to its own estimates (U.S. Agency for Global Media, n.d.). Each of the broadcasters has its own history, culture and relationship with foreign audiences (Metzgar, 2013, p. 6). Below, a brief description of the most relevant broadcasters is provided.

Founded in 1942, Voice of America (VOA) is the oldest broadcaster and the flagship of US efforts in this area. It is the only US government-funded broadcaster required to present the perspective of the United States and its policies, while others are supposed to function as replacement media outlets in non-democratic societies (Metzgar, 2013, pp. 9-11). Radio Free Liberty (RL) was founded in the context of the Cold War and is credited for having played a

substantial role in the 1989 collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (Metzgar, 2013, pp. 11-12). Radio Free Liberty's reporting focuses on 23 countries located in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East (Radio Free Liberty, n.d.). The Middle East Broadcasting Network (MBN) was founded in 2002. Its establishment marked a reaction to anti-American sentiments across the Middle East in the wake of the War on Terror (Metzgar, 2013, pp. 16-17), its services are available in 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (U.S Agency for Global Media, n.d.)

These broadcasting services have been controlled by the "Broadcasting Board of Governors" (BBG), which was established in 1994. The agency is led by nine presidentially appointed members, with the Secretary of State providing guidance and policy information. In 2018, the name of the Broadcasting Board of Governors was changed to "United States Agency for Global Media" (USAGM) (Weed, 2021, pp. 4-5). The agency directs six entities, four of which were presented above. Officially, the USAGM is an independent government agency. It submits an individual annual budget request to the US Congress. In the fiscal years 2020 to 2022, the total USAGM annual budget was slightly above $800 million (Weed, 2021, pp. 13-14). US broadcasting services are displaying content on means of both, traditional (including radio and television) and new media (such as social media platforms and websites) (Jia & Lu, 2023, pp. 15-16). According to its own website, the broadcasting entities of the US Agency for Global Media jointly adhere to their mission of providing people with information to support democracy and freedom (U.S. Agency for Global Media, n.d.a). The Chinese foreign ministry described USAGM practices as US propaganda to mislead public opinion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023), scholars stated that the key aim of the agency is to enhance the US' global influence (Jia & Lu, 2023, p. 17).

The laws governing USAGM include a principle of journalistic independence and prohibit interventions by the US state department regarding the political content of the broadcasters. However, the USAGM broadcasters are also required to publish content consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the US, which may be perceived as contradictive to the principle of journalistic independence. Their reports are supposed to provide a balanced presentation of US political thought and promote respect for human rights (Weed, 2021, pp. 9-10). The effectiveness of these legal provisions to project balanced and independent news has been put into question by efforts of US presidents to influence the agency. Donald Trump

replaced leading USAGM officials with controversial political loyalists. Furthermore, USAGM journalists who wrote reports unfavorable to the Trump administration were forced to return to the US and give up their position. The effect of Trump's attempts to use the USAGM to promote his right-wing China skeptic policy was only marginally visible since he was not re-elected in 2020. If Trump had secured the election, it can be assumed that he would have gradually turned the agency into a propaganda apparatus reflecting his personal ideological spectrum. However, not only former President Trump but also President Biden might have used the USAGM's flagship VOA to advance his China skeptic policy. Such perception is confirmed by the style of news coverage of the Chinese branch of VOC (Jia & Lu, 2023, pp. 19-20).

Beyond the activities of USAGM, the US military has also employed international broadcasting efforts. In 2009, it established the so-called "Trans Regional Web Initiative" (TRWI) (Cary, 2010, pp. 4-5; 31-32). SOCOM, the US Special Operations Command, which is among the most important sites for II efforts by the US military, oversaw the TRWI (Roy, 2015, pp. 94-95). The TRWI was described as a key element of the DoD's (Department of Defense) propaganda apparatus (Roy, 2015, pp. 99). For this project, eight regional online news websites were set up. They specifically targeted foreign audiences in several regions, including the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia (Cary, 2010, pp. 31-32). The websites had the appearance of an independent news media outlet, featuring news articles uploaded daily (Roy, 2015, pp. 98-99). To strengthen the appearance of a credible information effort, most articles were not attributable to being connected to US interests as reports focused on topics such as sports. However, establishing the practice of II, some articles did frame events favorable to US interests (Roy, 2015, pp. 111).

Internal guidelines of the US military foresee that only "truthful" content may be spread during military operations. However, beyond this provision, the usual rules of journalistic integrity do not apply. For example, there is no strict obligation to provide attribution that the US military is financing and producing its respective publications (Roy, 2015, pp. 96-97). The TRWI initiative also established presences on social media and its news outlets amassed hundreds of thousands of followers (Roy, 2015, pp. 117). The TRWI and other US military propaganda efforts were discontinued in 2014 as the US Congress did not approve of them (Locker, 2014; Roy, 2015, pp. 102). However, in later years, the US military was proven to employ other media

outlets and social media accounts that spread online content favorable to the US military. In May 2022, several of these accounts were suspended by social media providers as they deemed that accounts did not comply with their guidelines (Fang, 2022).

4.1.1.3 Defining the Group of US International Broadcasting Practices

Broadcasting efforts were defined as a distinct group of II practices as they are confined to the following two attributes. First, the establishment and management of a media outlet, mimicking the appearance of regular media organizations by publishing news content on radio, television, internet pages and other media. Second, the reporting of these media outlets must follow US interests, in some cases they may even reflect the direct interests of a US administration. Notably, the US media efforts may entail certain safeguards for journalistic integrity, for example, if they are governed by the USAGM, but if they are overseen by the US military, IIs may not be restricted by any liberal or democratic standards that the US claims to represent.

4.2 Russia

As the Russian state seeks to restore its legacy as global power, it also employs IIs, which has a long-standing history in Russian foreign politics. Under the umbrella term “active measures,” the Soviet Union invested massive resources to influence public opinion domestically and abroad (Abrams, 2016, pp. 6-8). After the fall of the Soviet Union during the 1990s, such activities were re-established and adapted to modern means of communication, as the following section covering Russian IIs will show. Like the section on US IIs, the following description of Russian II efforts is divided into practice groups, which were created based on the attributes defining the practices.

4.2.1 Controlling or Influencing Opinion Leaders

The Russian state employs partnerships with political parties and/or their politicians. Europe is among the most prominent centers of this partnership network, where the Kremlin has ties with political parties both on the far-left and the far-right (Pomerantsev, 2015, p. 43). One of the potential foundations for establishing such partnerships may be monetary support. Among other things, the Kremlin provided €40 million to the French far-right party Front National (now Rassemblement National) (Futàk-Campbell, 2020, p. 33). Secret recordings prove it aimed to channel tens of millions of Euros to the Italian far-right party Lega Nord (Nardelli, 2019). Beyond monetary flows, the Kremlin and other actors may align on their political positions and decide to join forces to increase the effectiveness of their agendas (Pomerantsev, 2015, p. 43).

The impact of these partnerships could be observed in the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, where most relevant parties in Europe clearly denounced the actions of Russia. In contrast, parties that established ties with Moscow and received its financial support defended the annexation (Futàk-Campbell, 2020, p. 33). French Front National leader Marine Le Pen blamed the crisis in Crimea on the European Union (Martin, 2014) and later endorsed the highly controversial referendum that paved the way for the Russian annexation (Morice, 2014). The referendum was also endorsed by the Freedom Party of Austria (Die Presse, 2014) and by Italy's Lega Nord (Curridori, 2018), both of which have struck a partnership agreement with Putin's "United Russia" party (Spiegel, 2016; Seddon & Politi, 2017).

Moreover, Russia has also engaged in a practice of providing *former* politicians with high-paid jobs in its own apparatus or in state-influenced or state-controlled companies (Bullough, 2021). These politicians were also be used as tools for Information Interventions, as the case of the former Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl highlights. After her term as Minister, Kneissl was not only given a seat on the board of Russia's Rosneft, an oil company controlled by the state (Connolly, 2021), she also became a columnist at RT (ORF.at, 2020), a branch of Russia's II efforts, as described below. In the past years, she made numerous statements that closely align with the Kremlin's narratives, spreading them on Austrian, Russian and international media as well as posting pro-Kremlin statements on her Twitter account (Puls24, 2022; Kurier, 2022; TRT World, 2023).

4.2.1.1 Defining the Group of Opinion Leader Influence Practices

The following attributes have been identified to define opinion leader influence practices by the Russian state: first, partnerships are established with an opinion leader. An opinion leader is understood here as an individual or group that has the capacity to spread political messages to mass audiences in a given foreign information space. Second, by establishing ties and gaining the loyalty of these actors, the Russian state expects to use these politicians as content distributors to spread pro-Kremlin narratives and positions to foreign audiences, while often retaining the legitimacy of a locally or regionally accepted actor.

4.2.2 Russian International Broadcasting

According to Russia's 2016 foreign policy concept, one of its key aims is to "consolidate" its position "as a center of influence in today's world" (Russian Federation, 2016). Russian decision-makers believe that the media is a key policy tool, both in domestic and international politics. State-controlled or state-influenced media organizations allow the Russian state to present official perspectives and policies in foreign information spaces. However, Russian international broadcasting efforts also entail malign means such as disinformation and manipulation (Zakem, et al., 2017, pp. 16-17). The content of *foreign* Russian media reporting is determined by the state's foreign policy strategy. This policy aim materialized in efforts to discredit Western institutions, undermining the social cohesion among Western populations and delegitimizing the Western liberal order in general (Zakem, et al., 2017, pp. 18-19).

In 2005, Russia launched the media outlet "RT" (formerly "Russia Today"), specifically with the aim of promoting Russia abroad. Initially, the main goal was to highlight Russian culture. However, this goal was adapted, allegedly due to insights gained from the Russo-Georgian war, during which the Russian state was not able to exert sufficient control over narratives discussed in global media. In consequence, RT was turned into a political tool, focused on undermining the American position in global politics. It is central to RT's agenda to spread the narrative that Western "mainstream" media cannot be trusted. Beyond this maxim, anti-Americanism can be identified as the only consistent ideological perspective, in contrast to former Soviet II efforts, which stressed the capitalist socialist divide (Yablokov, 2015, pp. 305-

306). According to its website, RT is available in seven languages (RT, n.d.) and it claims its audience size surpasses half a billion people globally, but researchers claimed that RT's public audience estimates are inflated (Erickson, 2017). RT is officially presented as an independent organization funded by the Russian state. However, leading Russian officials themselves have stated that RT is an instrument to pursue the interests of the state (Backes, 2014).

In 2014, another Russian media outlet flagship called "Sputnik" was founded as a complementary media outlet to RT (Rawnsley, 2015, p. 278), which is owned and operated by the agency Rossiya Segodnya (Ennis, 2014), its head Dmitry Kiselyov was directly appointed by President Putin (Sindelar, 2013). Sputnik operates similarly to RT, presenting itself as a global news provider and alternative to mainstream media (Nimmo, 2016), which, according to its own website, publishes content in more than 30 languages (Sputnik, n.d.). Amplifying the operational similarity and the overall connectedness between RT and Rossiya Segodnya, both entities have the same editor-in-chief, Margarita Simonyan (Talmazan, et al., 2017; Rossiya Segodnya, n.d.). Regarding the channels' budgets, RT officially received around 20 billion Russian rubles of annual funding between 2015 and 2019 and more than 25 billion rubles annually between 2020 and 2024. Rossiya Segodnya officially received considerably less spending, between 6 and 10 billion rubles annually in the period of 2015 to 2024 (numbers from 2021 onwards are planned budgets) (Statista Research Department, 2023).

Beyond the two flagships, both RT and Sputnik employ various media organizations that focus on geographic or thematic sub-groups. Aiming to attract young, left-wing and environmentalist audiences, they established "In the NOW", "Redfish" and "Waste-Ed", gathering hundreds of thousands of followers, many of whom were not aware that these pages were connected to the Russian state (Wiebe, 2018). Other entities, such as Ukraina.ru (Ukraina.ru, n.d.) and Baltnews (Baltnews, n.d.), have a regional focus.

4.1.1.3 Defining the Group of Russian International Broadcasting Practices

Similar to US broadcasting efforts, the Russian group of practices in this area are confined by the establishment of a media outlet, which replicates the appearance of a regular non-state news outlet and the objective that the outlet's reporting reflects the Russian foreign policy strategy. Whereas the US retains some standards of journalistic integrity and upholds certain

rules of political non-involvement, the Russian media outlets can be considered as more direct application of state policy, which appears unrestricted from any values of independent journalism.

4.2.1 The Russian "Troll Farm" Industry

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Russian state finances companies, which are specifically established for information influence operations. Initially, these companies were focused on domestic audiences the scope of activities expanded in the following years (VSquare, 2019, pp. 11-13). The companies working in this sector became to be known as "troll farms." These "farms" can be described as coordinated efforts by professional groups to perform IIs via social media platforms through publishing mostly political and provocative content, aiming to build massive audiences (Hao, 2021). In 2013, the "Internet Research Agency" (IRA) was established and it became one of the most important companies of this industry (VSquare, 2019, pp. 15-17). The researcher has identified that most troll farm activities originating from Russia have been attributed, at least in part, to the IRA, which is nearly used synonymously with the term troll farm. Hence, to describe the structure and practices of troll farms, the IRA itself and other activities associated to similar organizations are presented.

By 2014, the IRA employed 600 people, most of whom were students, who were mostly concerned with writing comments in online forums or blog articles that reflected a pro-Kremlin narrative. Furthermore, the IRA paid well-known journalists and bloggers to aid their operations. The IRA was founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin who also financed the organization in the following years. In 2014, Prigozhin spent the equivalent of at least $1 million per month to finance the IRA. Prigozhin is said to have been one of the closest partners of Russian President Vladimir Putin, receiving the equivalent of several hundred million dollars in Russian state contracts (VSquare, 2019, pp. 15-17). Prigozhin, who is also the head of the Russian private military company (PMC) Wagner, admitted that he founded and managed the Internet Research Agency (IRA) for a substantial time. Prigozhin, also stated that the initiative was intended to counter Western narratives (Krever & Chernova, 2023).

According to a criminal complaint by US authorities, between January 2016 and June 2018, the IRA's budget was equivalent to more than $35 million. In the first half of 2018, the proposed operating budget totaled the equivalent of more than $10 million (U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia, 2018). While initial covert information influence operations by the Russian state were directed at domestic audiences, as described above, the IRA's activities clearly signify that such activities were also employed abroad. The IRA is said to have targeted the 2016 US election, its most well-known intervention. But it is also attributed to instigating numerous in interventions in Europe, influencing a series of elections and other democratic moments (Ymchwil & Diogelwch, 2019).

Among the IRA's main practices, employees created false account profiles, pretending to be a native of a target country. They posted content matching their fake identities and aimed to amass as many followers as possible. To increase the number of subscribers, social media followers were bought by third parties or accounts subscribed to other accounts, hoping they would follow back. Content-wise, the fake personas often began by posting uncontroversial themes. After an extended time period, they would gradually spread to more pro-Russian narratives. Posts were not only simply pro-Russian but flexibly switched between Russian operational priorities. Themes were also adapted to attract certain groups, such as the French yellow jacket movement (Dawson & Innes, 2019, pp. 247-250). As stated in the US II section, internal guidelines or laws governing US-based II demand that published content should reflect facts. This type of Russian II is not restricted by such rules. One of the tactics employed by the IRA to increase its reach was to amplify fringe conspiracy theories like QAnon or Pizzagate (DiResta, et al., 2019, pp. 69-70).

The IRA also aimed to infiltrate social media communities by employing a set of social media pages. At first, these IRA-administered pages published content that aligns with the community, such as ideological viewpoints of the black community in the US. These accounts then interacted with each other and with members of the community. Thereby, social media algorithms perceived that the IRA pages were part of the community and recommended them to genuine social media users with similar interests, allowing the IRA pages to gain subscribers. Similar to the other pages, content gradually shifted to pro-Russian narratives or other operational goals (DiResta, et al., 2019, pp. 45-47). These pages were partly presented as brands, employing an exclusive brand identity and social media pages across various platforms

(DiResta, et al., 2019, pp. 42-44). Social media communities were also specifically targeted by the creation, administration or usage of group creation features, most notably on Facebook. As explained on the Facebook website, its group function is meant to forge communities and bring users with similar interests together (Facebook, n.d.). According to Meta, these groups were a particularly successful tool to exercise Russian II ahead of the 2019 Ukrainian Presidential election. 25 Facebook groups were created that focused on Ukrainian domestic political issues, which were then targeted with pro-Kremlin narratives and more than 85 thousand users joined one of these groups (Meta, 2019). Even though these efforts were not linked to the IRA directly, they fall in a similar category of behaviour covered in this section.

While the above described brand-building efforts rather mirrored social organizations (DiResta, et al., 2019, pp. 42-44), the IRA also employed impersonated news enterprises (DiResta, et al., 2019, p. 66). For example, in 2010, Facebook took down a network of accounts and pages on its platform that were attributed to the IRA, aiming to promote an alleged global media news outlet. The accounts posed as journalists using AI-generated profile pictures to create a genuine impression, while the pages created the impression of a news outlet's social media presence. The network disseminated the articles from the alleged news website. The website itself published more than 700 articles in 2020, partly in English and Arabic. Some of them were original content, edited by freelance writers, others were copied from various sources. The target of the concerted effort were left-wing and progressive audiences, located in the US and United Kingdom. Articles thematized race protests, accusations of foreign interference, US war crimes, capitalism criticism and corruption among other things (Nimmo, et al., 2020, pp. 1-3). The IRA was also linked to Russian efforts, which were aimed at mobilizing *right-wing* social media users by establishing news outlet presences. In terms of structure, these efforts were highly similar to those aimed at left-wing audiences, as fake journalist profiles were created using AI-created profile pictures and various social media presences of the alleged news outlet were established (Graphika, 2020, pp. 1-2). Such network was identified by Graphika (2020). Together, these profiles and accounts managed to acquire several thousand followers. However, these followers were partly garnered by a follow-for-follow technique, implying that many of these followers may not have been interested in the page itself (Graphika, 2020, pp. 18-19).

The social media platform Twitter and others traced the use of so-called “bots” back to the IRA (Twitter, 2018; BBC News, 2017). Bots are automated accounts, used by the Kremlin to serve various purposes in domestic and foreign information environments (Center for Political Conjuncture, 2019). They can distort the displayed interaction rates on social media or other digital performance indicators and thereby create the impression that a certain publication or actor is important or popular (Alyukov, et al., 2019). Bots can also imitate the behaviour of accounts that comment on political themes, implicating that many individuals seek to amplify their beliefs (Allison, 2022). Bots were also be used to manipulate search engine rankings, potentially multiplying the reach of pro-Kremlin narratives (Stukal, et al., 2017, p. 311). Twitter stated that it has identified more than 50.000 automated accounts on its platform alone, originating in Russia and linked to the IRA, that had been employed to influence the 2016 US Presidential election (Twitter, 2018).

4.1.1.3 Defining the Group of Russian Troll Farm Practices

While Russia’s troll farms employ a series of methods to operationalize their IIs, there are certain attributes inherent to every practice, allowing the construction of a distinct practice group. Firstly, all reviewed troll farm activities used the internet as macro infrastructure and method of distribution for their content. Secondly, in the absence of a credible local or regional actor, these troll farms established their own group presences or individual profiles, which aimed to underline that they were an authentic non-state effort. In many cases, entities pretended to be natives of a given country to hide the true originator of the message.

4.3 Assessing the Relation between Information Intervention Groups

Following step three of Kluge’s framework, this section will discuss the relations between the groups identified through the empirical analysis of II practices, thereby allowing us to explore why certain II types are chosen over others and why certain types could or are not expected to appear in confluence during IIs by a given actor.

When comparing the actions of the US and Russia, one perhaps surprising insight is that the countries appear to employ similar groups of practices. Both the US and Russia have established their international broadcasting services and tried to infiltrate foreign information spaces by making up organization presences to hide the content's true originators. Furthermore, US civil society support practices are not highly dissimilar to Russian efforts of controlling opinion leaders, as both interventions entail coordination efforts with local actors, who become the distributor of the intervention. However, the political role of opinion leaders and the actors supported in the context of US civil society support, appear to be dissimilar. Whereas Russia clearly supports actors that have the capacity to directly influence foreign information spaces, the US aided actors that, at least initially, do not play a central role in political arenas, with notable exceptions observed during the Arab Spring.

Beyond this domain, it can be observed that the establishment of media outlets is a special tool used in several groups, not only when it comes to international broadcasting efforts, but also in the context of troll farm practices. It appears that media outlets have an exceptional appeal for states performing IIs. This is potentially explained by the fact that these efforts are comparably cost effective. Once a media outlet is established, it can reach mass audiences. Another explanation is that media outlets have been considered as trustworthy alternative by recipients compared to orthodox state-to-foreign-audience-communication. Future research will have to assess this question.

Moreover, it has been found that an important difference between groups and their practices is their relation to the distributor. During digital Information Interventions, states decided to establish a fictious presence which presented and framed its content. This comes with a lot of advantages. Among other things, a high amount of control over the appearance and knowledge of the fictious presence can be exercised as it may be created from the scratch. The absence of a local actor, which may reveal its affiliation in the wake of pressure or opportunities, may also help to disguise the true originator behind an intervention. On the other hand, civil society or opinion leader II practices employ local/regional partners that may be deemed more authentic.

Finally, another crucial metric to compare these groups is their resilience towards anti II-efforts. As indicated in the introduction, states appear to increasingly shield themselves from IIs. Hence, the resilience of II types will play a crucial role in future IIs. International

broadcasting, for example, appears to be highly vulnerable to counter-measures due to the centrality of few channels that can be attributed to foreign states and censored by states swiftly (see for example the EU banning Russian international broadcasting (Killeen, 2022)). Other practices, such as the use of several hundred employees publishing using fake personas, may be harder to curtail.

Based on these observations, it can be said that, even in the presence of many similarities, autocratic and democratic countries have a different approach to IIs. This allows us to formulate the expectation that certain II practices are more likely to be exploited in confluence with each other, while others are less likely to be used by the same actor. Combining these assessments with potential defensive capabilities of II actors may allow us to make predictions which type of practices certain actors may prefer if they perform IIs in specific regions.

4.4 Typology of Covert and Semi-Covert Information Interventions

Employing the fourth step of Kluge's framework for the construction of empirically grounded types, a typology of covert and semi-covert Information Interventions by state actors was constructed. To produce the typology, the above presented practice groups of the US and Russia were merged into II types based on their common attributes.

4.4.1 Opinion Leader Intervention

As defined in the methodology section, to perform IIs, states are dependent on a distributor, allowing them to covertly and/or semi-covertly spread political messages in foreign information spaces. Marking a case of what this thesis labels an "Opinion Leader Intervention" (OLI), this distributor is an individual or organization, which has the capacity to spread political messages to mass-audiences in a given foreign information space, marking the first crucial aspect of an OLI. Such opinion leaders can be political parties, (former) politicians or other publicly known figures. Their capacity to reach audiences can be fulfilled by two means, a; they have established their own communication channels, employing their own micro infrastructure, and b; by their ability to appear on the micro infrastructures of other actors.

For example, resembling the prior instance, political parties may have social media and other internet presences, which reach a certain target audience. Resembling the latter instance, a political party may regularly appear on other micro infrastructures due to their societal relevance, e.g., a political party being mentioned in a newspaper.

Secondly, the opinion leader must have a sufficient connection to the foreign state, allowing the state to adapt the message content of the opinion leader. Such partnerships can be established by several methods. Opinion leaders could, for example, be motivated to perform II by financial incentives. The existence of such OLI partnerships is highlighted by the cases presented above, both Russia and the US provided financial support to actors, which influenced information spaces in accordance with the states' respective foreign policy interests. However, such partnerships may also be driven by other factors. States could establish ties with foreign opinion leaders that share similar positions on a given political issue. To ameliorate the effectiveness of certain political messages, a state coordinates its communication strategy with one or multiple well-known foreign actors, resembling an OLI.

The Russian support of opinion leaders in Europe can be considered as typical example for the application of an OLI. Among other things, it financed foreign actors, which would later spread positions favorable to the Kremlin. Crucially, due to their prominence, these actors had the capacity to reliably influence foreign information spaces by appearing on micro infrastructures that reach large audiences.

4.4.2 Civil Society Information Intervention

The second type defined for this thesis has been labelled as "Civil Society Information Intervention (CSII)." In such cases, groups/organizations and individuals are supported by a foreign state and are expected to influence foreign information spaces in return. The scope of support modes potentially given to civil society is highly broad. They may receive concrete orders and training over a long period of time or they may only be loosely associated with a certain foreign state, but receive some minor form of aid, for example by getting access to anti-censorship software, allowing them to spread political messages. However, the kind of support is not crucial to defining this type. Instead, the researcher defined CSIIs based on the practice

of aiding *secondary* political actors, hoping they reach a critical mass that will significantly affect foreign information spaces. Secondary political actors are commonly *not* considered as highly relevant political actors, unlike, e.g., leading opposition politicians. Rather, they are politically interested citizens or social organizations that potentially seek to influence the domestic or regional information space. The use of secondary actors allows intervening states to hide the true intent behind an II.

This also means that what the US coined “democracy promotion” or “civil society support” Does not necessarily have to resemble a Civil Society Intervention. Under the label of civil society support, it also provided funding to major political figures in Egypt, which resembles an OPI due to the central political role of the given actors.

Practices by the US state showcase how CSII activities may look like. Aid was provided to foreign states under the broad label of “democracy promotion” or “civil society support” and training and funding was given to certain political actors and groups, which were expected to operate within US interest. These groups thereby gained the capacity to influence foreign information spaces in a way favorable to the US.

4.4.3 Social Media and Internet Intervention

The constructed type “Social Media and Internet Interventions” (SMIIs) is operationalized based on what this thesis has defined as macro infrastructure, which can be the internet or a social media platform. Due to the lack of a local/regional partner and the states’ decision to act covertly or semi-covertly, it must create replacement entities or individuals during such interventions.

Therefore, a SMII is defined by the following two factors: a; the state performs an II by publishing content on a macro infrastructure accessible to foreign audiences and b; the state creates replacement identities or entities as source of this content to hide the true originator of the published content.

To mark the differentiation between SMIIs and OLIs, it needs to be stressed that SMIIs are explicitly defined by the lack of a publicly known local distributor. Otherwise, many practices

could resemble both an SMII and an OLI. For example, if a foreign state pays money to a popular foreign social media actor to spread certain political messages.

The activities of the IRA resemble the application of a SMII, as the company instructed its employees to spread pro-Kremlin narratives among foreign audiences while pretending to be a national of the respective information space.

4.4.4 Media Outlet Intervention

Finally, this thesis led to the creation of the type “Media Outlet Interventions” (MOIs). During such interventions, foreign audiences are confronted with media organizations, which regularly inform their readers via articles and other means in the respective country and beyond. The consumption of content from media outlets is a common practice throughout the world, MOI’s appear to seek to make use of this pattern. At the onset, considering the name and overall appearance, these media organizations are *not* clearly associated with an intervening state. Furthermore, they mimic the appearance of orthodox global or local media outlet. In some cases, attribution to the state may be provided in less exposed sections of the media’s publications.

To gather a media audience, existing news outlets can be purchased or taken control over, alternatively the intervening state can also create its own outlet, the latter has been observed more frequently during the empirical analysis. Media outlets can establish presences on other macro infrastructures, similarly to opinion leaders, for example, in the form of an internet page. Media outlets sometimes further employ their own micro infrastructures, which are independent from the internet as macro infrastructure, such as a newspaper or TV-station. Explained by the high barriers that usually come with establishing such independent micro network, OPIs have *not* been observed to frequently employ these options.

To differentiate between SMIIs and MOIs, Information Interventions should be understood as Media Outlet Interventions as soon as the intervention is based on the creation of a media outlet. As the creation of a media outlet is a distinct pattern of behavior, which adheres to a specific institutional set-up and prompts distinct receptions by audiences, they should be differentiated from SMIIs.

The news channel “RT” (for details, read above) is an example application of an MOI. It presents itself as credible news source, mimics the behavior of other news channels in terms of content output and its reporting is clearly guided by the decisions of an intervening state.

4.5. Summary of the Typology

Finally, it can be summarized that the two main II actors, the US and Russia, have been observed to engage with four different II types, including Civil Society Information Intervention (CSII), Media Outlet Intervention (MOI), Social Media and Internet Intervention (SMII) and Opinion Leader Intervention (OLI). The types of interventions and their main attributes are summarized in the graph below. Some of the types can be attributed more to one actor, such as the OLI, others are employed by both, such as the MOI. Interventions were differentiated based on the distributor used, a distributor is either an authentic entity or individual, that/who was convinced to adhere to foreign influence goals or a fake presence that aims to mimic authentic units.

Typology of Covert and Semi-Covert Information Interventions				
Paradigm	**Intervention type**	**Intervention description**	**Tendency of State Form**	**Local Actor Needed**
Information Intervention	Opinion Leader Intervention	Partnerships with opinion leaders of foreign information spaces are established and maintained. Opinion Leaders spread content favorable to the intervening state.	Authoritarian	☑
	Civil Society Information Intervention	So-called "secondary political actors" (actors that do not play a primary role in everyday political debates) are supported, e.g., by training or funding, hoping that they will successfully exploit their capacities as information distributor to significantly affect foreign information spaces.	Democratic	☑
	Social Media and Internet Intervention	A state performs an II by publishing content on the internet and/or a social media platform, pretending to be (at least on the onset) an authentic non-state source by employing professionals or using so-called "bots."	Authoritarian	⊗
	Media Outlet Intervention	As media outlets are a popular and commonly accepted sources for gathering information, states create or gain control over a media outlet, allowing it spread content in foreign information spaces.	Democratic and Authoritarian	⊗

Graph summarizing the typology of covert and semi-covert Information Interventions

5.0 Conclusion

This thesis seeks to address the academic debate surrounding the intervention of state actors in foreign information spaces, as this discourse lacks a coherent framework, allowing researchers to identify, compare, categorize and hence explain acts of Information Intervention. To initiate a solution for this problem, this thesis aimed to create a typology of common contemporary types of covert and semi-covert state IIs beyond the means subsumed by the soft power and public diplomacy concepts. This process was facilitated by Kluge's (2000) framework for the empirically grounded construction of types and an empirical research process, which was based on the identification of sources by employing keyword configurations and the search engines Google/Google Scholar. Given the scope of this project and the public unavailability of certain II practices, it was not possible to cover all acts of II for the given typology. Rather, the goal of this thesis was to guide future research in the field of Information Interventions, by providing a notion of the dynamics in the given field, on which future research can be built on. Therefore, while the typology presented in this thesis cannot be determined as universal, it made the first step towards the establishment of such framework, allowing researchers to systematically analyze IIs.

To respond to the research question, the II actions the US and Russia were analyzed as empirical basis for the typology, as they represent the II behaviour of democratic and autocratic actors respectively, allowing us to potentially grasp the actions of a wider range of actors. For the construction of the typology, following Kluge's framework, the II practices of the US and Russia respectively were separated into preliminary types based on their attributes. Following this step, the relation between those types was explored. In the final step, the types from both countries were merged into a single typology, corresponding with the main research aim laid out in this text. The resulting typology featured the following types: Civil Society Information Intervention, Media Outlet Intervention, Social Media and Internet Intervention and Opinion Leader Intervention.

Two instructions are given for future research. First, based on the empirical research of more practices of II, the here presented typology must be refined, allowing us to come closer to the realization of a universal II typology. Second, the realization of an empirically grounded comprehensive typology will allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of this field of

state interventions. As indicated above, following contributions could analyze power disparities between II actors, assess their defensive and offensive capabilities, but also compare the effectiveness of specific II types and IIs in general.

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