Internet Freedom, Democracy Promotion & Political Warfare

December 16-17, School of Public Policy, Georgia Tech, Atlanta
Venue: Coda Building, Room C1315, 756 W Peachtree St NW, Atlanta, GA 30308
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Since 2008 US support for "Internet Freedom" has promoted the development and overseas deployment of "liberation technologies". Internet Freedom builds on long-standing US programs for "democracy promotion" and for cross-border news and information. Looking deeper in history, such programs may be understood in terms of George Kennan's earlier concept of "political warfare": the use of non-military means by one state to bring another state under its influence, often through regime change.

Programs such as "democracy promotion", which refers to states' support for social movements in other societies, and cross-border news, which often broadcasts public affairs information, especially dissent, to other societies, are often considered to embody and reinforce core liberal values such as freedom of association and freedom of speech, and they can contribute to good governance. Yet in international relations they can also be used destructively by states to delegitimate institutions, to promote destabilizing narratives, and to catalyze conflict. Seen as political warfare, "democracy promotion" and cross-border news can weaponize liberal values to destabilize regimes, allowing them to be replaced by client regimes or to collapse into civil war.

This workshop will consider today's policies of "Internet freedom" and "democracy promotion" in terms of Kennan's foundational concept of political warfare. The workshop will also consider how technology, in turn, affects political warfare, both by making possible independent, critical news outlets and by rendering governments dependent on technologist communities that are prone to anti-war sentiment.
Today a rich ecosystem of dissenting voices and critical publishers thrives on the Internet, and industry technologists in Silicon Valley are objecting to military projects – developments reminiscent of the 1980s founding of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR).

The purpose of this workshop is to promote dialogue between critical scholars, independent journalists, foreign policy experts, and ethics-oriented technologists. It will also diffuse critical perspectives on information warfare, which can complement today's uncritical policy narratives. The workshop may generate new collaborations.

(This workshop builds on two prior events, a session at RightsCon 2019, "Separating Human Rights from Regime Change," and a panel at the 2019 International Studies Association, "Media Independence, Cross-border News, and Propaganda." The workshop organizer is the former chair of CPSR.)

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PROGRAM

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Day 1: Monday 16 December   (Venue: CODA at 756 W Peachtree St NW.)

- 11:00-12:00   **Participants' Self-Introductions: "Political warfare from my perspective."**
- 12:00- 1:00   **Lunch**
  - Hans Klein, Georgia Tech, formerly Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR). **"Synergies from Heterogeneities or, What we all have in common."**
- 1:00-2:30   **Panel 1: "Democracy Promotion" and Human Rights**
  1. Robert Pee, University of Coventry, UK. Author of *Democracy Promotion, National Security and Strategy: Foreign Policy under the Reagan Administration*.
  2. Gerald Sussman, Portland State University. Author of *Branding Democracy: U.S. Regime Change in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe*.
  3. Clifford Bob, Duquesne University. Author of *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power*.
- Coffee Break
- 2:45-4:15   **Panel 2: The Freedom Agenda**
  1. Nathalie Maréchal, PhD, Ranking Digital Rights. Author of "Strange Bedfellows: Digital Rights Activism and the Internet Freedom Agenda".
  2. Courtney Radsch. Formerly Freedom House. Author of *Cyberactivism and Citizen Journalism in Egypt: Digital Dissidence and Political Change.*
  3. Ted Postol, MIT (emeritus).

- 4:30-6:00   **Panel 3: Independent Media**
  1. Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Bowling Green State University. Author of *The Globalization of News*.
  2. Joe Lauria, Editor-in-Chief, Consortium News.
  3. James Antle, Editor, *The American Conservative*.

- **Hotel check-in**. (Crowne Plaza Atlanta, 590 West Peachtree Street NW, Atlanta)
- **7PM Dinner**   (249 Peachtree Cir NE)

Day 2: Tuesday 17 December

- 9:00-10:45   **Panel 4: Policy**
  1. Nick Feamster, Dept. of Computer Science, University of Chicago
  2. Stephen Wertheim, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
  3. Milton Mueller, Georgia Tech & Internet Governance Project
  4. Katharine Trendacosta, Electronic Frontiers Foundation
- Break
- 11:00-12:30   **Discussion: Cross-cutting Conceptual Issues**
- Lunch
- 1:30 – 3:00   **Discussion: Practical Policy Implications**
- **End**