The Role that Social and Media Platforms Played in the Events in Kazakhstan

With the rise of cell phones, the Internet, social media, and other forms of electronic communication, the ability to influence public opinions and the social and political life in a country has grown significantly. Furthermore, the speed with which information is made available through social media is unprecedented. Today’s social media spreads information in a few seconds, allowing the public to be well briefed in advance, whether it’s a news broadcast or a call to participate in “revolutionary activities.”

Therefore, it is not surprising that the military, the US National Security Agency, and many other Western intelligence services subsidize the development of the Internet, mobile phones, and software platforms.

The role and significance of social media in initiating “color revolutions” has received extensive media coverage. It turned out to be critical in the events in Kazakhstan as well. A query concerning the part the Internet and social media played in Kazakhstan events was answered by Dmitry Peskov, Russian Presidential Press Secretary, who noted that “the social networks bear just as much evil as good.”

Many users noted that recent news had been mainly covered by the NEXTA Telegram Channel, which was previously actively used to coordinate protests in Belarus and is under the external supervision of Polish special services. It has become the primary Telegram channel covering large protests in Kazakhstan. Former NEXTA editor Roman Protasevich, apprehended by Belarusian authorities last year, does not dispute that intelligence services monitor the channel’s operations. The majority of the authors of this media resource are based in Poland, as is the Central Group of Psychological Actions (Centralna Grupa Dzialan Psychologicznych), which oversees this channel and reports to the Polish Intelligence and Electronic Warfare Directorate. This military force specializes in gathering intelligence and influencing the enemy’s psychology. It is based in Bydgoszcz and is nicknamed “Black Spiders” due to its emblem. The Polish Military Center for Public Education’s report on “Strategic Communication and Public Affairs” expressly mentions that the Polish Army uses social media when conducting psychological operations “to initiate systematic changes of a political nature.”

This is how the official Polish sources describe the purpose of this military unit: “It is a separate military unit, which is directly subordinate to the command of the ground forces and is part of the special operations forces. Its goals are to indoctrinate the troops and residents of the enemy for achieving political, military, and propaganda gains. Institutionally, the Central Group contains, in addition to the headquarters, the Psychological Fighting Intelligence Center, which serves as the Central Group’s principal coordinating component and is comprised of four information collection and processing bureaus. (The first focuses on press analysis and other open information sources on Poland, the second targets English-speaking Western countries, the third focuses on Eastern Europe, and the fourth on states in “conflict situations”).”

It is quite natural that this structure prefers to stay under the radar. However, there is reason to believe that the Polish Internet resources NEXTA and NEXTA Life were actively injecting fakes to sway the situation in Belarus. Their work is controlled and led directly by the leadership of the Central Group of Psychological Actions.

As the situation in Kazakhstan raged on for several days, this information resource from outside the nation weakened the demonstrators’ original precise demands, focusing primarily on political requirements and their interpretation, involuntarily drawing similarities with the Arab Spring. It is worth emphasizing that the arsonists located on Polish territory did everything necessary to keep the battle going for as long as possible. So, on January 5, after the official announcement of the resignation of the Kazakh government, NEXTA Live continued to incite the rioters. In
particular, an inscription appeared: “Rumors about the resignation of the government are spreading on the Internet. Most likely, this is a tactical move to deceive the protesters. The protest cannot be stopped until the resignation of the government and dictator Nazarbayev becomes a fact. Don’t be fooled!” A little later, NEXTA unambiguously began to point out a new enemy to the Kazakhs - the Russian peacekeepers.

In addition, NEXTA Telegram Channel called to ascertain the identity of the fighters of the CSTO peacekeeping contingent sent to Kazakhstan, obviously to carry out malicious actions against them.

It becomes clear why, at the outset of the rebellion, the Kazakh authorities severely restricted Internet use in the country. Signs were beginning to surface that the protests were being conducted from abroad, including the assistance of the Polish NEXTA Telegram channel, which became well-known following the outcome of the Belarusian protests.

Messages defaming Russia and its CSTO partners in Kazakhstan are also being circulated in the international sections of Twitter, and Reddit, with botnets being used. The accounts, connected presumably from Lithuania, to distribute biased publications were noted. At the same time, Twitter revealed publications by presumably pro-Turkish anonymous authors about the alleged Russian intent to split Kazakhstan, as it was with Ukraine, about the need for NATO to intervene in the situation and the “genocide by Tokayev and Russia against the Kazakhs.”

Also, there is insider information that the political situation in Kazakhstan is being actively swayed using social media by representatives of Western intelligence services, primarily from the UK and the USA. Thus, a year earlier, the United States allocated more than $ 1.5 million to “protect the rights and freedoms” of citizens in Kazakhstan, most of which were received by some representatives of the blogosphere, who tendentiously covered the protest actions during the events in Kazakhstan.

And recently, it became known that the US Department of State intends to launch a program to develop democratic institutions and civil society in Tajikistan in 2022. The document published by the Department of State notes in particular that the primary target audience of the project should be the Tajik youth between 15 to 35 years of age. “The goal of the project is to strengthen the capacity of independent bloggers and social media influencers to create content that can effectively counter disinformation, propaganda, and extremism,” the document clarifies. The Department of State also aims to involve a wide range of moderate-minded people in creating “positive content.” What exactly is considered “disinformation and extremism” in the eyes of the US Department of State is anyone’s guess. However, there are reasons to believe that the United States is preparing for Tajikistan a destiny similar to what happened in Kazakhstan.

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