The elimination of Russian media across the West and to a greater extent from across US-based social media platforms used worldwide, is a stark demonstration of the power the West still wields within global information space.

It is a wake-up call for nations around the globe regarding the threat of leaving a nation’s information space not only completely undefended, but entirely dominated by foreign interests.

Southeast Asia, for example, counts Russia as a close ally and an important counterweight to maintain a balance in global relations and even as a means of protection against Western influence and even interference.

Yet because Southeast Asian countries are overly dependent on US-based social media giants like Meta (Facebook/Instagram), Google (including YouTube), and Twitter, their respective information spaces have been flooded with anti-Russian sentiment and even outright hostility. Moreover, voices within each respective Southeast Asian country critical of Western claims and sympathetic toward Russia are being suppressed if not outright censored and permanently silenced.

The torrent of disinformation flowing out of US-based social media networks - targeting anyone across the global public dependent on these networks for a lack of local alternatives - is shaping opinions and helping generate support for Western foreign policy objectives even within nations directly threatened by the West and its foreign policy.

Thailand, for example, enjoys a longstanding and positive relationship with Russia. But because the nation has
categorically failed to secure its information space, allowing it to be utterly dominated by US-based social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, the Thai public is subjected to a daily barrage of anti-Russian propaganda forced onto users through features like Twitter’s “Twitter Moments” and its “Ukraine: latest news” section.

The feature consists of a stream of content from 55 “members” drawn from US and European government-funded media platforms including (at the time of writing) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office-funded Eurasianet, the EU-funded “EUvsDisinfo” project, and “First Draft” funded by European governments and American corporate-funded foundations like Open Society, the Ford Foundation, and Google.

The Twitter stream also features content from government-funded think tanks like the British government-funded Chatham House, the Center for European Policy Analysis (funded by armed deals, the US NED, and US military), the US government-funded Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) as well as other obviously bias media sources including the Kyiv Independent based out of Kiev, Ukraine itself.

What Twitter pushes into the face of its users worldwide as supposed “experts and on-the-ground sources” couldn’t be more overtly one-sided and politically-motivated - or in other words, such blatant propaganda.

That Western audiences would be subjected to such propaganda is a given - but the failure to secure the information space of nations around the globe far beyond the West and whose interests do not necessarily benefit from Western foreign policy objectives have now put their populations in danger and opened an otherwise easily avoidable vector of influence on each nation’s respective foreign policy decision making processes.

For Thailand, the population is under threat of being grossly manipulated in favor of adopting Western perspectives and demanding action from the Thai government to support Western foreign policy objectives regarding Russia’s ongoing special operations in Ukraine at the cost of Thailand’s long standing relationship with Russia and even at the cost of Thailand’s own long-term security and best interests.

On the other hand, China has fully secured its information space - leaving China not only in complete control of what comes in and leaves Chinese information space, but what takes place across it. China has developed a diverse ecosystem of platforms ranging from internet search engines, to social media networks, to e-commerce services and online news portals - all working in relative harmony with China’s interests and the interest of China’s allies.

Despite what seems to be the late hour of the West’s growing conflict with both Russia and China, it may not be too late for nations - including in Southeast Asia - to import Russian and Chinese platforms and tools for protecting Southeast Asia’s information space in the same way Southeast Asian nations import weapons from Russia and China to secure their physical domains.

Whether or not it is too late to make a difference regarding ongoing conflicts - such a move made either individually by nations or as a bloc such as through ASEAN - efforts can be made today to prevent the widespread sweeping propaganda campaigns of tomorrow we see today related to Russia and Ukraine.

It is the 21st century. Information space today is as important to protect as a nation’s land borders, shores, and air space. Any nation that is not protecting its information space is a nation that is not protecting itself at all.

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