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Security in a Communications Society: Opportunities and Challenges

Velichka Milina *

Information can often provide a key power resource, and more people have access to more information than ever before. In this world, networks and connectedness become an important source of relevant power.¹

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Power always depends on context.² The year 2011 has made Joseph Nye's statement starkly visible concerning all actors in the realm of security policy. The Arab Spring uprisings (still ongoing in Syria) and the protests that have erupted in nations around the world of ineffective government policies regarding the global financial and economic crisis have categorically proven that political stability (security) cannot be considered and achieved only in the context of traditional institutions and norms of representative democracy, or through inspiring fear and beliefs in a closed society. These events have demonstrated new forms and scales of political activity, and have called for competent political participation. What unites them, in spite of their widespread geography, is that they were organized and conducted with the help of new communications technologies.

The current context of security policy is the communications society. The phenomena that fall under the rubric of "Web 2.0" have radically changed the characteristics of the objects of security (individuals, society, state), as well as the problems facing security—starting from Twitter revolutions, going through the protests of "the indignant," and culminating in the key role of social media as tools of "soft power." This article is an attempt to assess and analyze the parameters of these changes as challenges and new opportunities for security systems in a communications society.

The Communications Society

Until recently, we used to define the world that we live in as an "information society." But if we carefully analyze the trends of the past decade, we could argue that this statement does not reflect well enough the specifics of the present anymore. Although the quantity of accessible information continuously increases, today it is more appropriate to say that we are witnessing a revolution that provides new alternative instruments for *communication*. These communication technologies focus not on increasing the volume of accessible information, but on developing various innovative and effective forms of mass communication from central points to large numbers of people, and also on creat-

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¹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 116, xvi.

² *Ibid.*, xiv–xviii.

ing new modes of information exchange between individual actors. The phenomenon of “communication” is moving toward obtaining the status of the main explanatory principle in many of the social sciences.

The evolution of the Internet at the beginning of the twenty-first century saw the development of a variety of technologies that combined to create what is known as Web 2.0. This stage in the Internet’s evolution is characterized by social networks, social media, and user-generated content – by the granting of creative agency to individual users, not just traditional media outlets. A vital feature is the use of the Internet not only as a “communication medium” but also as a “platform.”³ These platforms can be created and improved upon both by designers and users. One of the most significant outcomes of Web 2.0 is the creation of social (“new”) media as a new means for online mass information, where every Internet user—even those without any special programming abilities—can take part in the process of creating, storing, and disseminating socially important information, addressed to a wide audience.⁴

The widespread dissemination of these “new media” has turned them simply into “the media” for a large number of people. The following are considered the “traditional” media: printed material (newspapers, magazines, etc.), radio, television, cinema and video programs, and digital editions (so-called Web 1.0) of newspapers, information, and news feeds. Although no official “scientific” definition exists yet, the notion of “new media” characterizes Internet-based (Web 2.0 format) digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies, such as blogs, wikis,⁵ social networks, file sharing sites, etc.

In the span of only a few years, social media have changed the world we live in. As a result, neologisms like “electronic state 2.0,”⁶ “democracy 2.0,”⁷ “revolution 2.0,”⁸ “public diplomacy 2.0,”⁹ “civil society 2.0,”¹⁰ and “policy 2.0”¹¹ have come into popular use.

³ Tim O’Reilly, “What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software” (30 September 2005); available at <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>.

⁴ See M. Budolak, “Social Media Concepts,” in *Petersburg School of PR: From Theory to Practice*, ed. A.D. Krivonosov (Saint Petersburg: Roza Mira, 2009), 18.

⁵ Wiki is a Hawaiian word that means “quick.” Wiki-media implies that a given site’s content can be quickly modified by users via a simple Web browser.

⁶ Soon Ae Chun, Stuart Shulman, Rodrigo Sandoval, and Eduard Hovy, “Government 2.0: Making Connections Between Citizens, Data and Government,” *Information Polity* 15:(1&2) (2010): 1–9.

⁷ Anand Giridharadas, “Democracy 2.0 Awaits an Upgrade,” *New York Times* (11 September 2009); available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/12/world/americas/12iht-currents.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.

⁸ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

⁹ Lina Khatib, William H. Dutton, and Michael Thelwall, “Public Diplomacy 2.0: An Exploratory Case Study of the U.S. Digital Outreach Team,” *The Middle East Journal* (2012); available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1734850.

Communications Technology and Security

How does the communications revolution change the security environment, and what are the new challenges and opportunities for security systems in the context of the political stability of societies? The most fundamental consideration when answering such questions is the fact that Web 2.0 communication technologies have radically changed traditional modes of creating and disseminating information. It is generally held that political communication encompasses a range of processes, including information exchange and the transmission of political information that shapes political activities and attaches new meaning to them. In the information age, digital media are becoming the main—and, for a growing number of young people, the only—channel for political information and communication. They are the primary space for political activities where citizens receive political information, shape their political views and beliefs, and have the opportunity to influence the processes related to functioning of power. According to Lucian Pye, political communication is not made up of unilaterally directed signals from the elite to the masses, but includes the whole spectrum of informal communication processes in society, which have various impacts on policy.¹²

It is an indisputable fact that in the past few years the Internet has become the place where political positions are claimed, disputes and discussions are led, communities are established around specific political occasions or long-term political causes, political information is received, and (last but not least) the society communicates with those in power. The most applicable outlets among the “new media” for the purposes of this discussion are blogs and social networks.

Circulating Information in the New Media Landscape

In what are called “new media,” information is created and disseminated in a method completely different from the one that characterized communication for much of the twentieth century. In traditional media, even in the feedback system, the information tool is the source of information and plays the leading role in communication. In other words, the world of traditional mass media is a world of one-way communication that is first filtered and then broadcast. With “new media,” the audience creates and spreads information online; only later it can be filtered or blocked. This circumstance radically changes the answers to the question, which is vital to every security system, “Who owns, controls, and spreads information?”

“New media” have radically changed the speed at which political information circulates. There is no question that online information on political events and processes has

¹⁰ See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/nov/131234.htm>.

¹¹ Orlin Spassov, “Social Networks and Politics 2.0,” available at <http://www.seminar-bg.eu/spisanie-seminar-bg/broy1/item/198-%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%B8-%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0-20.html>.

¹² Lucian Pye, “Political Communication,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Institutions*, ed. Vernon Bodganor (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1987).

far outstripped that provided by traditional media in terms of its topicality and dynamic nature. In addition, new media also provide users with the opportunity to share different points of view on the same event practically simultaneously with its development. More and more often these are the points of view of eyewitnesses, provided via Twitter or a blog. There are many examples in this context, from the suicide bombing at the Moscow airport in January 2011 to the events of the Arab Spring.

Social media change our perception on how to communicate with the rest of the world. This type of communication has become extremely democratic. It is not necessary to be a skilled IT professional or to be rich in order to communicate with large numbers of people around the world. Anyone with access to a computer connected to the Internet can create a blog or a social network, write on a wiki site, post an audio or a video recording – and can then receive thousands of comments, and potentially become an influential person who can shape opinions and attitudes on different political, social, and cultural events or issues. As political consultants say, in new media information goes “from door to door,” or more precisely “from account to account.” This is a network that is created from person to person, from group to group, and it cannot be covered vertically in any way. That is the reason why systems based on the vertical distribution of communication signals (in the direction towards citizens and coming from citizens) are not effective today. It is necessary to change the mechanisms of political influence using new means of communication in order to become effective.

New media have aggravated and made visible the crisis in traditional mass political communications. The very notion of the “masses” has gained a different meaning. In the context of a traditional media approach, the “masses” are perceived as an amorphous body, lacking structure and of a vague composition. If, however, we look at the modern Internet community, we will see that in spite of its audience size of hundreds of millions of people, it can not be defined as a “mass.” The community of Internet is clearly structured horizontally. The functioning of numerous online communities in the Internet space has formed groups of users who in most cases could be clearly differentiated according to their social, demographic, religious, or other characteristics, but nevertheless are tied together by the virtual connection created by online communities. This turns the Internet community into a specific phenomenon, totally different from an amorphous mass and the models used by classical theories of political communication.

In addition, in the new communications environment it is no longer possible to ignore the presence of minority points of view. The reason is that, due to the communications revolution, according to Marshall McLuhan’s words, “too many people know too much about each other...”¹³ This entirely new circumstance will change the ideology of how mass communication takes place.

The positive potential of new social media is that they offer governments a powerful instrument for direct communication in a way that is more organic and consistent with local realities. Social networks provide politicians with a very clear and precise profile

¹³ Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Agel, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

of society in terms of geography, age, occupation, income, and interests. It is already a common practice to compare social networks with a GPS system in the context of social geography. This is a very powerful tool for effective and beneficial political communication.

What is new in political communication is that the average citizen is not just a “mailbox” for political information, passively receiving messages distributed from a central location. Individuals already have the opportunity to immediately express and spread their opinion or attitude on a certain issue as participants in a forum or a social network through voting, “liking” or “disliking,” recording and posting video clips, etc. The larger the number of such acts around a particular event, the faster information travels, and the wider the scope of audience. In the Internet’s evolutionary phase known as Web 1.0, this circulation could not happen with similar speed and scale, despite the use of chat rooms, e-mail, and instant messaging.

The trend toward using social media to distribute political information will grow with the new generation for whom new media are as natural a place for receiving information as television was for the previous one. Effective leaders of this type of communication will be those who “think of themselves as being in a circle rather than atop a mountain”¹⁴ and who have understood “that two-way communications are more effective than commands.”¹⁵

New Media and the New Social Reality

Social media have made communications inherent in all aspects of the modern world. The main value added by such media for the modern person is the ability to receive, process, create, and transmit information, as a result of which people live today not so much in an environment of people and objects but rather in a world full of images, messages, myths, and stereotypes. Political communication is also characterized by a predominantly symbolic character. It is represented by millions of signs, symbols, and images, shaping a separate type of reality that is being subjectively perceived by participants in the communication network as the only one available.

For the individual, this symbolic environment is no longer a mediator between the self and the real world where events are happening or certain phenomena exist, but rather it functions as a replacement of the real world. The new reality is moving further away from existing real (mainly political), relationships and at the same time exerts an increasing influence upon them.

This paradoxical interrelation is explained with the help of the so-called “Thomas theorem,” which states “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” We are witnessing the renaissance of the “Thomas theorem” (first articulated in 1928) thanks to one of the most influential sociologists of the past fifty years, Robert

¹⁴ Nye, *The Future of Power*, 101.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Merton, who is famous for his works on self-destructive prognosis.¹⁶ In his research, he analyzed the impact of the rule formulated by Thomas: when people believe in something, they act according to their beliefs – whether constructively or destructively.

Today, the new reality of symbolic images and pictures unconditionally dominates political life. Politics in the communications society “may ultimately be about whose story wins.”¹⁷ In this sense, the key question is, What is truth in the twenty-first century?¹⁸ Traditionally, the political truth is produced by experts based on real practices, empirical facts, science, and knowledge. Today, when even meritocratic elites have collapsed, power is no longer legitimized through expertise. There is a new understanding about truth, characterized by the notion that there are no traditions and no experts. The truth is moving away from expertise. The opinion of any blogger-amateur could be “liked” more than that of a university professor. Whoever tells a better story gains the most trust.

This new reality raises a number of questions that have as yet received no answers. These questions are connected to the essence of politics as a means of rationalizing conflicts and the responsibility of political leaders to play a role in ensuring political stability in their society.

New Media and the Orchestration of Real-world Events

“Revolutions of social networks” today is the notion that summarizes new radical forms of political activity. Media and experts have defined the events that took place in 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt—the so-called Arab Spring—as “Twitter Revolutions” or “Facebook Revolutions,” because it was through these social networks that the mobilization and organization of active participants took place. In these cases, an alternative to official media outlets became widely known, and information was spread about what was happening on the ground, not just in the ether. In other words, social media played informational, organizational, and mobilization roles in the Arab Spring uprisings. As a result of this, can we accept the statement of Hilary Clinton’s advisor for innovation, Alec Ross, that social media are “the new Che Guevara of the twenty-first century?”¹⁹

As a matter of fact, uprisings in Belarus (2006), Moldova (2009), Iran (2009), the Arab Spring (2011), mass protest movements against ineffective fiscal policy in a num-

¹⁶ Robert Merton, “The Thomas Theorem and the Matthew Effect?,” *Social Forces* 74:2 (1995): 380; available at <http://garfield.library.upenn.edu/merton/thomastheorem.pdf>.

¹⁷ John Arquila and David Ronfeldt, *The Emergence of Noopolitik: Toward an American Information Strategy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), ix–x; available at www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1033.html. Quoted by Nye, *The Future of Power*, 104.

¹⁸ Peter Faber, “Power and the Westphalian System: Goodbye to All That,” *International Relations and Security Network Podcast*, 2 April 2012; available at www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Podcasts/Detail/?ots591=40db1b50-7439-887d-706e-8ec00590bdb9&lng=en&id=138980.

¹⁹ Alec Ross and Ben Scott, “Social Media: Cause, Effect, and Response,” *NATO Review* (2011); available at http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2011/Social_Medias/21st-century-statecraft/en/index.htm.

ber of Western countries (2011), and Russia (2011) present illustrations of the potential of large-scale, high-intensity political mobilization through social media. “Twitter Revolution” fans believe that the reason for these movements’ relative success is the technology itself. Protesters are able to coordinate their operations via social networks; a message on Twitter or Facebook gives people a feeling of belonging, while posting pictures or video clips guarantees the effect of presence. As a result, events become known by millions of people around the world, and they can participate in “naming and shaming” campaigns and shape a global public opinion in support of a cause, insisting on an active response from their governments. Global Internet servers allow for revolutionary spirits to move quickly from one country to another. One might think that, even if the revolution will not be televised, it could be broadcast on Twitter.

The Liberatory Limitations of New Media

This view of the role of social media, however, is strongly exaggerated and one-sided. According to Evgeny Morozov of Stanford University, who was the first scholar to introduce the term “Twitter Revolution” after the events in Moldova in April 2009, revolutions do not happen because certain technologies exist. They are based on political, economic, and social factors. This claim is proved by the fact that, in spite of some expectations that social media would play the same progressive role in China and Russia, this has not happened. One possible explanation, according to Morozov, is that governments are also able to work successfully with new technologies. In China, Russia, Iran, and Sudan the authorities are actively using social media to identify and neutralize the organizations of oppositional activists.²⁰ Technologies are neutral; they are simply a means and a tool, and the success derived from their implementation is defined by specific factors: awareness of the sociology, the existence of genuine social and political contradictions, and the presence of oppositional feelings in a given society. These processes can be easily manipulated, amplified, or mitigated via social media, but in all cases real political activity should be present. Very often the distance between “liking” a cause on a social network or a blog and genuine involvement is insurmountable, especially in the context of an inactive political culture.

“The new Che Guevara” of Twitter revolutions turned out to be impotent in the period after initial political victory was achieved, when organization and momentum are needed at the next constructive stage. The lack of political ideology, programs or organization—as well as the fear that some leaders will usurp the “victory” or turn a political outcome to personal advantage—could result in chaos and uncertainty.

Today, it is difficult to argue whether all these massive political activities—starting in Tunisia and ending in Russia—would have happened if Web 2.0 had not existed. It is clear, though, that they would not have happened in this way, on this scale, and with this range of participants.

²⁰ Evgeny Morozov, “The Price of the Issue,” *Kommersant* (9 March 2010); available at <http://forum.democrator.ru/index.php?topic=662.0>.

Participants in these events were the so-called “smart mobs.” This notion was introduced by Howard Rheingold, and it sounds like an oxymoron if we think of the mob in the context of the pre-communications era where it was a synonym for irrational and instinctive behavior.²¹ “Smart mobs” consist of individuals who communicate through wireless links and for whom the means of mobile communication have turned into a kind of “electronic prosthesis, the absence of which threatens their personal identity.”²² Nowadays, this notion “is applied to every fast forming and demonstrating collective intelligence community in the Internet.”²³

According to a number of analysts, it is likely that “smart mobs” will either become a key resource for the formation of a civil society or they will become a destructive force. Today, after the events of 2011, we go back to Rheingold’s idea regarding the new way to engage people in the communications age with group or collective activities – he calls them “ad-hocracies” (from the Latin phrase *ad hoc*, meaning “for specific purpose”).²⁴ This is a new type of social community, resulting from the convergence of mobile communications and computers when people have the opportunity to get together temporarily to share information, common interests, and activities. In an “adhocracy” there is no hierarchy, no legitimate leader, and no clear division of labor.²⁵ We have noticed these characteristics in protest movements where participant mobilization and organization were conducted via social media. As of today, the results of adhocracy are not promising.

Enhanced Communication and Changes in Modern Democracy

So far, most of the political activity that has been fomented using new communications media has been oppositional in orientation, and thus has generated insecurity and political instability. In 2011, we witnessed mass protest movements against the futile work of politicians to overcome the economic crisis in a number of liberal democratic states – starting with Spain, and extending to Belgium and Germany, and to the United States and Australia. What these movements had in common is that the protests were organized through social networks and were extremely broad in scale. The culmination was reached on 15 October 2011, when the global movement of the discontented used social networks to call for protests in over 700 towns in more than 70 countries with hundreds of thousands of participants.²⁶

This new model of political involvement based on social networks provoked the journal *Foreign Affairs* to publish a comprehensive analysis on how new social movements are changing the classical political process, written by the political scientists Mi-

²¹ Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

²² Viktor Buriak, *The Global Civil Society and the Network Revolutions* (Simferopol, 2011), 90; available at <http://www.bazaluk.com/book/files/211.pdf>.

²³ Hristo Prodanov, *Digital Politics* (Sofia, 2011), 170.

²⁴ Rheingold, *Smart Mobs*, 80–82.

²⁵ See Prodanov, *Digital Politics*, 168–74.

²⁶ See http://bnt.bg/bg/news/view/62253/protestite_na_nedovolnite.

chael Hardt and Antonio Negri.²⁷ According to the two researchers, the most surprising finding is that what is happening during the protests has very little in common with the debates going on between politicians. The two seem to exist in parallel realities, which raises the question of whether the political system of modern democracy is still capable of expressing and representing the interests and vital claims of many of the voters.

In fact, the protest movements that shook liberal democracies (Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Washington, Occupy London, the Movement of the Discontented, etc.), as well as the right-wing populist Tea Party movement in the U.S. call into question the effectiveness of today's political model. Until recently, security and political stability in consolidated democracies seemed unconditional. Modern representative democracy has been in place for over two hundred years, with citizens periodically electing their representatives and, if they are displeased with them, replacing them during the next vote a few years later. However, in the age of the Internet, social networks, and Wikileaks, delegating your vote to an elected representative and searching for alternatives at the end of that representative's term seems increasingly clumsy and ineffective. When protesters gather in the streets of Manhattan and shout "This is what democracy looks like!", they insist on people's direct involvement in political processes.²⁸

The post-modern age has posed the crisis in political representation as the main factor of public instability in democratic states. In the new atomized social structure of super-symbolic economic societies, people are grouped together in numerous dynamic minorities and often do not see political parties, reflecting the status-quo of the past industrial age, as representative of their interests.²⁹ On the one hand, this has led to increases in political corruption and political populism, and on the other hand to political mistrust and mass reluctance of citizens to participate in politics.

As early as 1994, Alvin and Heidi Toffler in *Creating a New Civilization* commented on the parameters of democracy in the twenty-first century and spoke about the

²⁷ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "The Fight for 'Real Democracy' at the Heart of Occupy Wall Street: The Encampment in Lower Manhattan Speaks to a Failure of Representation," *Foreign Affairs* (11 October 2011); available at www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136399/michael-hardt-and-antonio-negri/the-fight-for-real-democracy-at-the-heart-of-occupy-wall-street.

²⁸ See http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/sviat/2011/10/14/1177444_ulica_protestna/.

²⁹ This argument is proved by the quick rise in the popularity and success of so-called pirate parties. Starting from the first one, established in Sweden in 2006, pirate parties exist in more than twenty democratic countries, and they participate in the Pirate Parties International (PPI), which will take part in the elections for the European Parliament in 2014, where they already have two Swedish members. Pirate Party Germany has captured 12 percent of the vote in recent elections, and has representatives in the parliaments in Berlin and Saarland. The key issues for the pirate parties are transparency, open state procedures, and better communication with citizens. See "Germany's Pirate Party: The Ayes Have It," *The Economist* (28 April 2012); available at <http://www.economist.com/node/21553484>. See also Sarah Marsh and Hans-Edzard Busemann, "Pirates Party's Rapid Rise Upsets German Landscape," *Reuters.com* (30 April 2012); available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/30/us-germany-pirates-idUSBRE83T08G20120430>.

necessity of changing the relationship between the government and the “unstable and multiplying minorities” that were dynamically emerging after the collapse of the centrally-planned societies of the Communist East.³⁰ In their opinion, democracy based on the principle of majority rule is ineffective in the information age, and has to be replaced by a “democracy of minorities” via “methods whose aim is to uncover the difficulties and not to obscure them through declaring forced or false majority, achieved by means of excluding some groups from voting, complicated problem formulation, or discredited election procedures.” Instead of focusing on the formation of coalitions of groups to achieve a majority, the Tofflers claimed that “the role of various minorities should increase, allowing them to grow into majorities.”³¹

Against the backdrop of the mass protests around the globe in 2011, which made explicit the crisis in official democracy, the arguments of the two futurologists sound like a prediction come true. They come to the conclusion that, in order to be effective in the new age, democratic political systems will have to go through a transition from representative to “semi-direct democracy,” which means a transition from “dependency on representatives to self-representation.”³² Semi-direct democracy is a formula that does not oppose but rather includes the use of procedures of both direct and representative democracy.

Until now, two main obstacles have impeded the realization of the idea of the extended use of direct democracy mechanisms in political governance: the technical challenges of participation and the problem of competency. The communications age based on Web 2.0 technologies offers solutions to both problems. Social media constitute a technological solution to the challenge of mass political involvement, presenting a platform for the articulation of opinions and for generating communities around a declared position. New media enable citizens not only to say “yes” or “no” on a certain governance problem but also to argue about an issue, to offer solutions and policies, to formulate problems, and to arrange the agenda and priorities of political governance.

The second and more serious issue, regarding the competency of political involvement, has new dimensions in the communications society as well. New technologies have made knowledge a specific power resource, with several important characteristics. First, knowledge is a democratic resource, because to own it one only needs access to new sources of information. Second, knowledge is a universal resource, because it can be used to multiply other sources of power: wealth, reputation, organization. Third, knowledge is an inexhaustible resource, because when you give knowledge (or someone takes it), it does not diminish. The outcome is potentially revolutionary: educated people who for the first time in history can start making their own decisions.

Actually, there are still no clear models for how semi-direct democracy can function, for what procedures and technologies will best combine the mechanisms of representa-

³⁰ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave* (Sofia, 1995), 108–09.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

³² *Ibid.*, 111.

tive and direct democracy. But the resolution of this challenge is clearly necessary, due to the unambiguous impotence of traditional representative democracy to generate security and to effectively solve the problems of social development in a new era.

From the perspective of political stability, the great potential of new social media—which are most often referred to in the context of negative, or oppositional, campaigns—actually lies in the technological capabilities that could enable direct constructive, creative, and mass political involvement. One of the most promising prospects is the use of wiki sites. Wikis are a medium based on software that allows regular users to “freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser.”³³ Wikis have an advantage for group communication in that they allow many people to participate in content creation and development and spread it across wide circles of readers.

There are examples that have shown the useful capabilities of Wiki sites for public participation in the design of and debate on draft programs of political parties, policies, and laws. These practices were initially used by non-government organizations; however, state institutions (in Russia and New Zealand) have implemented them as well.³⁴ This type of political activity has given birth to additional neologisms, like “Legislation 2.0” and “Expertise 2.0.” The positive effect of such methods of political participation with respect to political stability is mainly in the increased sense of partnership that they help create, and hence of people’s loyalty to and respect for the legitimacy of policies and laws. And this is not all. Of no less importance are effects like expanding the circle of experts, increasing social capital, and reporting and balancing significant social interests, which can mean yet more stability and security for the public.

Another positive effect on the political stability of democracies generating Web 2.0-based new media is that these media are a tool for mitigating the modern social conflicts summed up in the shorthand “Us vs. Them,” or “the 1% vs. the 99%.” This happens from both ends. On the one hand, the public can use new media to easily communicate with politicians, to ask them questions, to express their opinions or attitudes towards their work. On the other hand, politics is becoming more “human” with the help of social media. Today, every modern politician has an account in social networks and/or in the blogosphere, and can use those platforms to reach out to their constituents and communicate more directly about decisions and issues. Undoubtedly, the political model of representative democracy, as we know it, will soon undergo significant changes, and these changes will be related to the capabilities of Web 2.0-based “new media.”

Whoever Controls Web 2.0 Controls Reality

When we talk about security in the context of Web 2.0 technologies, information security only represents a small portion of the issues that are under discussion. We are talking about a radically new phenomenon: the transformation of social media into the most

³³ “What Is Wiki,” available at <http://www.wiki.org/wiki.cgi?WhatIsWiki>.

³⁴ “NZ Police Let Public Write Laws,” *BBC News* (26 September 2007); available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7015024.sm>. For the Russian case, see www.brainity.ru/society/trends/11051/.

powerful instrument of soft power. Just eight years have passed since the foundation of the world's largest social network – Facebook.³⁵ In that short time, we have witnessed how new social media have become the most effective tool for influencing the minds of huge communities, even whole nations. This explains the fact that all aspects of the colossal cybersphere—from issue-specific blogs to huge social networks including hundreds of millions of people—are now the focus of focused attention from governments and corporations, security services and terrorist groups, political parties and think-tanks.

Web 2.0 technology itself is neutral. Social media are a tool that gives power to the people who want to push their governments to support a particular cause,³⁶ want to correct the way their government functions, or to change the political regime entirely. But new media also allow for the creation of platforms that can be deployed against public interests.³⁷ They can be used to disseminate information where it is needed, but also to spread misinformation. Networks offer new opportunities for criminals and terrorists. They can be used by governments to conduct operations disguised as civilians.

In the communications society, “legitimacy is a power reality.”³⁸ Narratives become the currency of soft power. Governments compete with each other and with other organizations to enhance their own credibility and weaken that of their opponents.³⁹ Therefore, public diplomacy is becoming an important instrument for foreign policy to generate soft power. “Public diplomacy 2.0” is based on a bilateral dialogue, leaving unilateral communications in the past.

The United States has the most active and the most successful strategy for using new media in public diplomacy. Since 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been promoting the policies of “digital diplomacy” and “Internet freedom.”⁴⁰ The U.S. State Department has spent some USD 28 million to enhance its own digital outreach and innovation and support Internet freedom elsewhere in the world. U.S. Ambassadors and senior diplomats are now authorized to use Twitter and Facebook in order to explain and advocate U.S. policies abroad. Altogether, the State Department hosts 288 Facebook pages, 125 YouTube channels, and tweets in nine different languages, including Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and Chinese. U.S. military personnel, including those deployed in opera-

³⁵ As of April 2012, Facebook had more than 900 million active users; see www.facebook.com/pages/Facebooking/114721225206500.

³⁶ The thirty-minute amateur film “KONY 2012” by Jason Russell had received nearly 90 million views on YouTube as of late April 2012. The filmmaker’s goal was that the world should know about the Ugandan guerilla leader Joseph Kony—the head of the Lord’s Resistance Army, who has been accused of numerous crimes against humanity—and that he should be arrested by the end of this year. The “weapon” of this mission is the Internet and social networks. “Kony 2012” is the fastest growing community in social networks. At the end of last year, the U.S. sent 100 military advisers to Uganda to help arrest Kony.

³⁷ The street riots in England in 2011; the creation of an anti-immigrant wiki site in the Netherlands.

³⁸ Nye, *The Future of Power*, 81.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁰ See Hillary Clinton’s initiative “Civil Society 2.0,” available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/nov/131234.htm>.

tions abroad, have also received “Social Media Guidelines” that allow them (within certain limits) to participate in social networks as well. All this makes the U.S. government’s social media efforts very robust.⁴¹

According to the U.S. State Department’s definition, “Digital Diplomacy” focuses on applying modern technological tools, approaches, systems, and information products to the missions and tasks of diplomacy and development. This goal will build on “current efforts to use Facebook, Diplopedia, Twitter, LinkedIn, Communities@State, and other social media, collaboration, [and] information sharing platforms...”⁴²

All this makes the issue of supervising networks particularly significant. Taking into consideration the fact that over 90 percent of the Internet’s physical infrastructure is privately owned and the lack of functional legislation in this sphere, national security systems are facing a serious challenge.⁴³ According to the Open Net Initiative, at least forty countries use highly restrictive filters and firewalls to prevent the discussion of controversial materials. Eighteen countries engage in political censorship, which the initiative describes as “pervasive” in China, Vietnam, and Iran, and “substantial” in Libya, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia. More than thirty states filter for social reasons, blocking content related to topics such as sex, gambling, and drugs. Even the United States and many European states do this “selectively.”⁴⁴

Political practices regarding control over network access in times of crisis over the past several years have taught us several lessons. First, private Internet firms, such as Google, can play a political role, creating alternative opportunities for overcoming blocked access, as happened in Egypt. The practical implication is that big companies like Google, Facebook, and Twitter could find themselves in times of crisis in the position of “gate-keepers” to information in a given society. Second, blocking of access is quickly resorted to as a tool to contain unrest by non-democratic governments (Belarus) and is at times seriously considered as a possibility by democratic governments (England). Third, national security crises can be both aggravated and resolved with the cooperation of the world community through social media (as was the case in Tunisia, with the hacker group “Anonymous”).

It is clear that cybersecurity is becoming a key issue of strategy and security policy in the communications society. The new age of the Internet revolution has led to unprecedented scale, speed, and access to information and communication, and has redefined

⁴¹ See Stefanie Babst, “Security Policies 2.0: Can Facebook, Twitter and Co. Make an Impact?,” *Atlantic-Community.org* (6 September 2011); available at http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/Open_Think_Tank_Article/Security_Policies_2.0%3A_Can_Facebook%2C_Twitter_and_Co_Make_an_Impact%3F.

⁴² U.S. Department of State, “IT Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2011–2013 – Digital Diplomacy,” 1 September 2010; available at <http://www.state.gov/m/irm/rls/148572.htm>.

⁴³ Tobias Franke, “Social Media: The Frontline of Cyberdefence?,” *NATO Review* (2011); available at http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2011/Social_Medias/cyber-defense-social-media/EN/index.htm.

⁴⁴ As documented by the Open Net Initiative. Richard Waters and Joseph Menn, “Closing the Frontier,” *Financial Times* (29 March 2010); quoted in Nye, *The Future of Power*, 130.

the primary risks and threats to security. When we talk about security today, we understand cybersecurity in all of its aspects – from defense in cyberwar through guarding critical infrastructure from cyberattacks to the protection of personal data to the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals in cyberspace.

Due to the diffusion and atomization of power, cybersecurity can be achieved only if policies involve non-state actors, if “public-private sharing of information regarding cyber threats and incidents in both government and Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources (CIKR)”⁴⁵ is in place, and if effective partnership between public and private sectors is established. It is interesting to mention the Estonian experience with the Cyber Defense League, which unites volunteer IT professionals interested in contributing their skills to the national defense effort.⁴⁶ The United States, Germany, and Estonia are leading countries in the establishment of cybersecurity policies. In the coming security environment, where the impact of new information technologies will become only more apparent, it is necessary that NATO and the EU elaborate effective common cybersecurity strategies.

Conclusion

The communications revolution has posed profound new challenges to established security systems. As Joseph Nye, Jr., who we have quoted already, wrote, “Power always depends on context.” Effective and strong security policy must be contextual, and must make use of the new capabilities and instruments of communications technologies. These technologies are neither “good” nor “bad,” and they do not automatically contribute on their own to creating more security or more insecurity. Innovative and smart policies can turn them into instruments for enhancing the political stability of democracies and the level of security within societies. Successful security strategies are those that meet the challenges of the communications society. Challenges can always be regarded as opportunities. Whether they will be realized is a question whose answer we are about to learn.

⁴⁵ The White House, National Security Council, “The Comprehensive National Cybersecurity Initiative,” available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/cybersecurity/comprehensive-national-cybersecurity-initiative>.

⁴⁶ “Ilves in Washington: All NATO Allies Must Contribute to Cyber Security,” *ERR News* (13 April 2012); available at <http://news.err.ee/politics/6c3ff429-93d2-4979-81d2-3de29e42d763>.