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Karl Umbrasas

Henley-Putnam School of Strategic Security, kvumbrasas@yahoo.com

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Psychological Casualties as a Source of Friction During War and a Mediator of Coerced Peace Efforts

Abstract

The United States homeland does not enjoy sanctuary in the twenty-first century geopolitical environment. Near-peer rivals, such as China and Russia, have capabilities that can impact the United States homeland during a high-end war. Adversaries' aerospace capabilities have the potential to cause large volumes of psychological casualties among the United States population. Psychological casualties during a high-end war could serve as the basis for a mass call to end a war due to the altered information processing seen among traumatized people. Such a call to end a war could result in unfavorable peace settlements. The United States homeland must improve its ability to prevent cognitive hacking and it must insulate its population from epistemologies unfavorable to the United States.

Introduction

The United States faces a complex multi-domain battlespace in the twenty-first century.¹ The United States homeland is a part of that battlespace and is subject to the spectrum of operations leveraged by adversaries. Near peer adversaries have already penetrated the homeland with cyberattacks and information operations in competition short of conflict or disintegration work.² Despite the United States' vulnerability to methods short of open war, adversaries may nonetheless find it advantageous to use hard power to compel the United States to accede to certain demands. Adversaries engaging a high-risk scenario such as this would likely seek to maximize success by coordinating hard power with other operational domains, ultimately converging multiple lines of effort on the cognitive domain.

The simultaneous exploitation of hard power, cognition, and information dissemination would dramatically increase the scale and speed with which adversaries achieve their hostile objectives. The use of hard power would create new cognitive vulnerabilities that adversaries may exploit in conjunction with existing methods of influence operations. Specifically, hard power that traumatizes populations would alter information processing and increase tendencies toward individual self-blame. The altered information processing would make the population vulnerable to cognitive hacking that can change public opinion against American war efforts and stimulate political behavior detrimental to American interests. The United States requires public psychological resiliency efforts, improved information literacy, improved civics education, and increased ability to respond to catastrophic situations with psychological support.

Methodology

This article uses an interdisciplinary perspective to examine the implications of an attack on the homeland during a high-end war. Modern warfare does not distinguish combatant from non-combatant and battlefield from sanctuary. The dangers of grey zone conflicts elucidate the current threat's pervasiveness as seen in political warfare within population centers, cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, and economic maneuvering that impacts the global economy. Yet, the danger from conventional war still exists and may serve as a backdrop against which

grey zone and other hostilities occur. As warfare becomes one with the fabric of a society rather than merely a force applied against it, the social and behavioral sciences will play a more common role not only in understanding reasons for war, but also in preventing and mitigating the harm that occurs during war.

This article uses an intersecting lens from the social sciences, behavioral sciences, and strategic studies to examine the problem of manipulated mass behavior affecting wartime policy. This methodology is not new. Scholars have joined these disciplines to study problems such as nuclear war, genocide, high stakes diplomacy, and hostile information operations.³ These disciplines offer rich collaboration because of shared linguistic and methodological traditions. Thus, the scenario of a homeland attack by high-end adversaries is examined from social science, behavioral science, and strategic studies literature.

The possibility of a high-end attack on the United States is considered increasingly likely in the twenty-first century. The American investment in missile defense suggests that the United States either perceives credible threats from limited missile strikes by rogue actors or from near peer powers.⁴ Experts from the Department of Defense (DoD) and independent scholars assert that the United States does not enjoy the sanctuary it had from attacks on the homeland brought on by its prestige as a superpower and from the bipolar geopolitical arrangement during the Cold War.⁵ The current geopolitical environment hosts powers unrestricted by Cold War constraints seeking to challenge the United States for dominance. Alongside increasing multi-polarity is the fact that the United States has exposed vulnerabilities in its military, economic, and sociopolitical domains throughout the twenty-first century that may embolden adversaries to challenge American dominance.

The main hypothesis examined in this article is that traditional military methods of war, in conjunction with technology and information, can create synergistic effects harmful to American interests. Hard power delivered through aerospace systems may cause a change in information processing reflective of psychological trauma. The change in psychological processing intersects with pre-existing ways of thinking embedded within American culture and directed by information outlets. The effect may be

adversary dominance in the cognitive battlespace resulting in mass behavior driven by adversary influence.

No Longer a Sanctuary

Revisionist powers, such as Russia and China, seek change in the current international balance of power.⁶ Strategic ambitions may propel these actors into a high-intensity war with the United States to unseat American dominance in certain regional spheres of influence, or to alter the global balance of power altogether. Unlike previous hot wars, however, the United States in the twenty-first century does not enjoy sanctuary provided by its geography.⁷ Modern weapon systems can more easily defeat geographic-based defenses and threaten the homeland.⁸

It is worth noting that the United States did not enjoy geographic sanctuary against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Soviets possessed a range of capabilities that put the homeland in danger. A number of Cold War agreements and the relative simplicity of a bipolar world, however, provided a layer of security not enjoyed today. Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) may have helped prevent a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, but MAD is not a centerpiece of the current geopolitical environment.⁹ In fact, geopolitical competition has led to widespread application of hostilities that fall below the threshold for open war. Conventional strikes that fall below the threshold for nuclear war may be a logical extension of this approach that adversaries choose in certain high-risk situations.¹⁰

The homeland's main vulnerability to adversary hard power is from the aerospace domain. The homeland has a large industrial base that consists of manpower, material, and production that would fuel a major war. As such, the American industrial capability would be a prime target for enemies seeking to deprive American forces of material needed to win a war. Attacks on the homeland would also target governmental institutions and political processes with the aim of altering the conduct of a war by influencing decision making. A major influence on wartime decision making is the people's will. An enemy's attack on the homeland would fundamentally target the will of the people with the aim of breaking it to compel political leaders to end a war.

Targeting a people's will would not be surprising. Seventeenth century English settlers targeted Native American tribes to force capitulation, and certain Native American tribes waged total war on English settlements.¹¹ The 1622 surprise attack on English settlers in the Tidewater area resulted in loss of over 25 percent of the English population of Virginia and succeeded in stemming the settlers' expansion.¹² Furthermore, General Tecumseh Sherman purposely sought to increase the suffering of Southern civilians to hasten the Confederacy's surrender. Applying the lessons of the American Civil War, American General Philip Sheridan counseled Field Marshall Helmuth von Moltke and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck on causing the French population such a great deal of suffering that it demanded the government seek peace.¹³ In his 1921 treatise on air warfare, Giulio Douhet envisioned that air power should specifically target populations to achieve military-political objectives.¹⁴ Great Britain and Germany also targeted each other's population during World War II (WWII) for strategic effects derived from influencing the will to fight.

Adversaries may assume American society is intolerable of high casualties and seek high numbers of casualties, not only on the battlefield but also in the homeland, to alter the course of the war.¹⁵ American policy during the Vietnam War reinforced this perception. Partly influenced by images of American and civilian casualties, popular opinion turned against the Vietnam War, and the public's opinion became an important factor in the outcome of the war.¹⁶ Military theorists have elaborated on this perceived American weakness. Stephen Hosmer postulated that adversaries might prolong a war to increase casualties to force the United States' hand in capitulation. R.D. Hooker made a similar observation and asserted that adversaries may try to inflict high numbers of casualties early in a campaign to turn the public against the war.¹⁷ This assumption may be correct in certain cases but not others. Population centers faced with an existential threat may find perseverance and cohesion in adversity. If the American people face an existential threat, it is reasonable to assume that they will continue to fight. This would be consistent with other groups faced with existential crises, such as the British, Germans, Japanese, and Russians during WWII.

An American population that faces the trauma of war but is not existentially threatened may see no incentive to endure the hardships of war. The lack of incentive to remain in conflict may co-occur with high

incentive to leave conflict as when an adversary is successful in its high-end strikes. The incentive to leave conflict may be mediated by the altered information processing seen among traumatized people, who after sustained high-end kinetic attacks would manifest changes in the way they process information. Adversaries who employ influence operations concurrent with kinetic strikes to coerce peace settlements unfavorable to the United States may seek to exploit traumatized information processing.

Numerous examples demonstrate that hostile actors can exploit traumatically altered information processing. Hostage victims may grow to identify with their hostage takers and develop animus toward the authorities. Hostage victims who exhibit this set of attitude and behavior change experience Stockholm syndrome and engage in a set of self-defeating behaviors that supports their captors' aims.¹⁸ Statistical data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) suggests that behavior consistent with Stockholm syndrome occurs among hostages almost ten percent of the time.¹⁹ Large groups of people are also susceptible to hostile actors' exploitation of traumatized information processing. The German population after World War I (WWI) was susceptible to Nazi messages that directed mass behavior in a new political direction.²⁰ Radicalism in the Islamic world also demonstrates how hostile actors can exploit vulnerabilities and traumas among populations and move them toward a desired outcome.²¹ Hostile actors' ability to exploit traumatized information processing may have a different speed and scale when interfacing with high-end weaponry. In conjunction with other factors, such as pre-existing beliefs and access to information, adversaries may attempt to swiftly foster mass behavior change.

Seeking Capitulation Through Air War

Both Russia and China have invested in long range weapons systems capable of striking the U.S. homeland.²² Russian military doctrine emphasizes the utility of massive airstrikes early in a campaign to achieve strategic objectives.²³ Russian long-term procurement goals include precision-strike and other aerospace capabilities.²⁴ Russia possesses submarine-based and aircraft-based cruise missiles that can strike inside the United States.²⁵ Russian bomber patrols demonstrate they can aggressively fly within American airspace, and Russia is developing hypersonic glide vehicles that can circumvent air defenses and deliver a

payload well within the United States.²⁶ China also has weapons capable of reaching American population centers.²⁷ China has a robust research and development program directed at hypersonic weapons.²⁸

The literature shows that air attacks create large numbers of psychological casualties.²⁹ This article defines psychological casualties as those people whose cognitive, emotional, or social functioning is impaired because of war. Irvin Janis studied survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bomb attacks and offers a compelling description of psychological casualties.³⁰ The victims described by Janis initially believed they were attacked by conventional air power. Many bombing survivors described extricating themselves from collapsed buildings and searching for others through debris. Fires ravaged uncontrolled and there were a number of dead, dying, and injured people. The survivors experienced a double shock in that they first experienced the explosion and then they encountered the human devastation. Janis noted that acute anxiety and depression were the predominant psychological responses to the atomic blast and indicated that the symptoms did not differ from the British and German psychological response to severe air attacks. Civilians miles away from the explosion reported negative psychological responses to seeing casualties stream into their area. Janis' description suggests that the blast victims experienced a traumatic event and the people who received the displaced survivors may have experienced vicarious traumatization.

Traumatized people often have a predictable change in their outlook and the way they process information. Traumatized people often engage in self-blame in relation to their trauma and may conclude that they own a great deal of responsibility for the traumatic event. Adversaries may exploit this type of trauma-induced information processing during conflict with the United States. This psychological effect is more likely to occur during conflict that appears to the American people as elective in nature, unnecessary, or something not worth the cost.

Future conflicts with adversaries may occur for reasons that appear superfluous to the American people. The South China Sea (SCS) is one of the most contentious international security issues.³¹ The SCS has abundant reserves of oil and natural gas and numerous Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) overlap in the region causing disputes among countries, while inflaming nationalist tensions.³² The SCS is also an

important Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) for commerce. Although the SCS has great importance to the global economy, and therefore to the United States, a war that erupts over the SCS does not constitute an existential threat to Americans. An existential threat represents a danger to a group's survival.³³ A war in the SCS does not seriously threaten the United States' existence. This type of war may be tolerable to the American people insofar as it remains isolated to the SCS. Warfare in the twenty-first century, however, virtually negates the possibility that the United States would enjoy sanctuary during a large-scale war. This reality suggests that the American homeland would experience the adversity of war, even though the epicenter of the conflict is thousands of miles away from the homeland.

Information Processing

This article uses information processing theory to understanding traumatized information processing.³⁴ According to this framework, traumatic events lead to fear networks stored in memory and are accessible to conscious awareness. The fear networks are broadly generalizable and activated by approximate reminders of the traumatic event. Reminders of the trauma evoke escape and avoidance behaviors. People may also change their interpretation of the event to fit, or assimilate, pre-existing beliefs about themselves and the world. Self-blame is an example of such an attempt at assimilation and is a common occurrence after a traumatic event.

A traumatic event is defined as witnessing actual death, threatened death, or serious bodily injury, or personally experiencing near death or serious bodily injury.³⁵ A traumatic event is an individual experience, but a group of people can experience the same event as traumatic. A group of people near an explosion that causes death and injury will have been exposed to a traumatic event. This experience would be considered a mass trauma. A mass trauma is distinguished from a collective or cultural trauma, also known as a chosen trauma.³⁶ A cultural trauma passes across generations a collective memory that serves as a group's source of intense feelings. By contrast, a mass trauma is an acute experience that evokes alterations in individual information processing causally related to the traumatic event. A mass trauma may become a collective trauma, but because of its acute

nature, it has not developed a shared symbolic mental representation of the event within the cultural group.

The psychological response to a traumatic event is not homogeneous. People have risk factors and protective factors that make dysfunction more or less likely. People also have different coping styles that influence variable responses to traumatic events. Despite individual differences in responses to trauma, traumatic events evoke a predictable range of dysfunction within the population. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder occurs at a predictable rate in the general population at a rate of three and a half percent.³⁷ The percentage increases substantially when considering only the presence of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and not the whole disorder. Empirically speaking, the net psychological effect of a mass trauma will yield a predictable range of trauma symptoms, even when factoring individual differences in risk factors, protective factors, and coping styles. Indeed, some traumatic experiences are so intense that they obliterate adaptive predispositions and traumatize all exposed.³⁸ Furthermore, people may experience vicarious trauma, whereby learning about another's traumatic experience causes traumatic symptoms. For instance, seeing others respond fearfully to stimuli may result in associative learning by the observer who may come to associate the stimuli with fearful emotions.³⁹ Even the anticipation of a catastrophic attack can bring about significant anxiety. The 2018 false missile alert in Hawaii showed that merely the anticipation of a high-end attack could cause impairing anxiety to linger for days.⁴⁰

The September 11, 2001 attacks showed that a deliberate military-grade strike on the population could cause persistent debilitating psychological symptoms in a large number of people. Rescue and recovery workers and others present in lower Manhattan after 9/11 experienced symptoms of PTSD at a rate of twelve percent two-to-three years after the attack.⁴¹ A sample of adults living in Manhattan at the time of the 9/11 attacks showed that PTSD symptoms were present in seven and a half percent of the population one month after the attack.⁴² Two months after the 9/11 attacks, the entire United States reported post-traumatic stress symptoms at a rate of seventeen percent.⁴³ These rates are substantially higher than the expected three and a half-percent prevalence rate of PTSD common within a 12-month period in the United States.⁴⁴ For attacks that bring forth sustained high-end destruction, the psychological effect will be

worse. This suggests that a high-end war will greatly increase psychological casualties. The net effect of these casualties may be, among other things, a large number of people with altered information processing.

Information Processing, Just World Belief, and Motivation

People commonly hold fundamental assumptions that go unquestioned.⁴⁵ The fundamental assumptions people hold serve as the foundation for their understanding of day-to-day life. These assumptions provide a sense of order and stability for understanding the ways of the world. Basic ideas of justice and worth, for example, are undergirded by these fundamental assumptions. The Just World Belief is one such basic assumption. The Just World Belief is a belief widely found across cultures that provides the injunction of: Good things happens to good people, and bad things happen to bad people—or you get what you deserve. This belief is pervasive among moral codes and remains relatively unexamined throughout life despite serving as a backdrop for information processing.

The Just World Belief is prevalent in the United States.⁴⁶This belief may contribute to illusions of safety because people may expect to be free from malice or catastrophe as long as they act in ways approved by their moral codes or by society. Trauma challenges this belief and people lose a sense of safety when it is challenged.⁴⁷ Research suggests that trauma alters even some of the most deeply held beliefs about self and the world.⁴⁸ Since bad things happened, people whose Just World Belief is altered no longer have an orderly way of interpreting the world. In a search to regain order in understanding the world, people who experience traumatic events may engage in reverse reasoning with the Just World Belief by concluding that since something bad happened to them, they must be bad in some way.

This reverse reasoning among people who experience trauma often results in self-blame to make the trauma fit their pre-existing belief structure.⁴⁹ Rather than changing their understanding of the world, traumatized people may change their self-understanding. Self-blame provides a way for people to maintain their fundamental assumptions in the world by blaming themselves for some act that they perceive may have contributed to the trauma.

Although people maintain their fundamental assumptions by blaming themselves, their cognitive process potentially motivates new behavior. Attribution theory posits that inferences of responsibility lead to emotions, which then motivate behavior.⁵⁰ Self-blame is an inference of responsibility that may be perceived as internal and controllable. This may lead to anger.⁵¹ The emotion of anger generated from inferences of responsibility motivates self-protective or retaliatory behavior⁵² People who make an inference of responsibility to a negative outcome, and therefore experience anger, are motivated to protect themselves from further negative outcomes and retaliate. Policy that supports the war effort that led to the misfortune may be a target of the people's anger. Since policy support is seen as internal and controllable, people are able to act in ways that change the support. This may lead, for instance, to appeals to end hostilities.

Psychological Casualties Can Influence the Course of a War

The sustained traumatization of populations could evoke a change in perspective about the war effort that influences an end to the war. Air attacks from advanced high yield weapons systems will create psychological trauma among tens or hundreds of thousands of people exposed to the attacks. Changes in information processing may occur because of the psychological trauma, resulting in increases in self-blame among the traumatized population. Increases in self-blame creates a vulnerability to cognitive hacking by the adversary.

Express or tacit approval for a war, or even Americanism itself, may become the focus of self-blame. People who support certain policies, administrations, or actions related to the war may infer responsibility to themselves. This may occur in the United States because policies that emanate from elected officials are a reflection of the individual who voted for the officials. In an effort to maintain their fundamental assumptions about the world, people may blame their actions, such as voting for an administration or simply being an American, as the cause of the trauma.

The tendency toward self-blame in American culture already exists and can be amplified with enablers such as the media. Academia promulgates the narrative that the United States is a malignant empire.⁵³ This narrative promulgates views that the United States is unjust and immoral. Versions

of this narrative effects policy and have made way into basic education.⁵⁴ This narrative has deeply penetrated American society. For instance, the interrogator of American hostages at the Iranian embassy in 1979—Hussein Sheikh ol-eslam—studied at the University of California, Berkeley, where he was exposed to formal education hostile to the United States.⁵⁵

Psychological trauma from a perceived unnecessary foreign war may cause traumatized Americans to gravitate to, or more firmly acknowledge anti-American narratives. The anti-American narrative helps assuage the cognitive dissonance people experience after trauma. Anti-American self-blame is readily available and prevents the challenging of fundamental assumptions about the world.

The type of education Americans are exposed to do not help them see the necessity of American actions around the world. There is a dearth of education in geopolitics, intelligence, or security studies in the United States. In 2017, he fields of business, health professions, social sciences, and history conferred the most bachelor's degrees.⁵⁶ Academic majors that may provide greater perspective on security-related matters are relatively sparse.

The Council on Foreign Relations declared that the state of education in the United States has security implications.⁵⁷ Young Americans cannot identify strategically important countries on a map and the enrollment in government and civics classes is poor. In addition to the dearth of strategic understanding and civic awareness, young Americans also lack a firm grasp of concepts important to global leadership such as free market economy, democracy, and equality of opportunity. These concepts have strategic importance as the United States in its role as world leader works to maintain aspects of the global economy, such as freedom of navigation, which could become the basis for a conflict. Yet, freedom of navigation and other potential flashpoints for conflict with great powers may not make intuitive sense. The so-called Thucydides' Trap exemplifies the non-intuitive basis for conflict. A Thucydides' Trap occurs when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power.⁵⁸ The United States' competition with China is seen as ripe for this phenomenon to occur. This may not make sense to an American generation unfamiliar with realist thinking or one ready to view the United States as a bad actor.⁵⁹

The appeals to end war that are motivated by traumatized information processing would be more vociferous than past anti-war sentiment. The 2003 Iraq War evoked anti-war sentiment and corresponding appeals to end that war. However, traumatized information processing of large numbers of people did not mediate those appeals. In addition, although the anti-war sentiment was noticeable, it did not constitute a convincing effort to end the war precipitously. The counter narrative that of Support the Troops, was more widespread and effective.

The Vietnam War was the target of more effective anti-war efforts. Aided by the mass media, and an Administration that failed to make the case for war, the American public grew increasingly dissatisfied with the conflict in Vietnam. Not many Americans were even aware of American involvement in Vietnam in the 1950s.⁶⁰ By the time of major military involvement in Vietnam in 1964, two-thirds of Americans said they paid no attention to the Vietnam mission. By 1966, increasing numbers of Americans considered involvement in Vietnam a mistake but no concerted effort existed to end the war. Even considering it a mistake, many Americans supported escalation of the war through 1970. American opinion of the Vietnam War went through a series of phases—innocence, rally-around-the-flag, escalation, and withdrawal—that culminated in the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam.⁶¹

During WWII, a notable subset of the American public was also unsupportive of the nation entering the European theatre. In 1940, only 35 percent of Americans believed that the nation should go to war to assist Great Britain.⁶² This perception changed by April 1941, with 68 percent of Americans believing the nation should enter the European theatre.

Psychological casualties from a high-end war may result in massive calls to end the war all at once. The scale and temporal dimension of such dissent would be different from past anti-war sentiments because it would include a large number of the population appealing to the government at a single period with no phases. A massive increase in self-blame within the population would be subject to cognitive hacking by adversaries using the American media.⁶³ Messages that highlight a lack of necessity of the war and how the adversary is a victim of American aggression would intersect with epistemologies unfavorable to the United States widely promulgated in educational settings.⁶⁴ People with traumatized information processing

who, through increases in self-blame, may view the United States' actions as the threat to world peace may accept the express, or implied anti-American narrative easily. A direction of hostility toward the government would not be without precedent as the British population's response to air attacks during WWII revealed impatience and hostility toward the British government.⁶⁵ The impertinence at the U.S. government to end the war would conceivably be greater than past calls to end wars because of the simultaneous experience of trauma among large groups of people increasingly ready to see the United States as the bad actor.

The United States government may be ill prepared to deal with precipitous and widespread rejection of its policy. It may not have the luxury of phases of dissent, where the population moves from disillusionment to outright calls for an end to the war. Thousands or hundreds of thousands of people may be traumatized from war, many of whom may experience self-blame and a desire to end war irrespective of the costs to the United States' interests. American leaders may have difficulty appealing to its citizens' sense of patriotism or its understanding of geopolitical realities in such a situation. The result of massive precipitous calls to end war may result in the United States having to agree to peace settlements unfavorable to American interests.

It must be noted that a public's call to end war is highly desirable and a check on a perennial human problem. What is undesirable is a public's manipulation leading to decisions that places the public in a disadvantaged or harmful position. A public's call to end war that is the product of cognitive hacking would harm the people calling to end the war. A coerced peace settlement would represent a loss by the United States on the world stage. It may result in the occupation or oppression of American allies by adversaries. It may result in loss of control over the global economy, resulting in a range of economic hardships including an increase in economic disparities. A loss by the United States may ultimately result in a more illiberal world and make the homeland more vulnerable to future acts of aggression.

Policy Recommendations

The United States must improve its basic civic education and incorporate advanced topics into curriculum and public debate.⁶⁶ For instance, college

courses that examine geopolitics or security studies should be required curriculum to cultivate an understanding of world affairs and provide at least a basic, but ideally more advanced, understanding of these matters. This type of education should also expose students to realist epistemologies, which could better account for conflict that may emerge among great powers. Realism, for example, could most clearly describe why an aspirant power would seek conflict for hegemonic or worldwide goals. Furthermore, improved civics education would examine other foundational aspects of American thinking that may serve as the basis for foreign intervention. The promotion of human rights is a cornerstone of American foreign policy and has been associated with past conflicts.⁶⁷ Civics education that examines the United States' commitment to human rights may better illuminate the United States' role as world leader and must be incorporated into all levels of education. The United States must also improve its ability to convey its vital interests to its population. Leaders must inform the public about those scenarios that might lead to conflict to gain the public's consent when those situations arise.

Considering the hazards of the twenty-first century geopolitical environment, the United States must promote psychological resilience. A prolific lack of psychological resilience exists within American society as evidenced by, among other things, insults turning into mass shootings and increasing curtailment of freedom of expression on college campuses. A general lack of resiliency may lead to increased suffering among traumatized populations as the United States enters a more contested geopolitical landscape. In addition to public resiliency efforts, greater mental health capacity, such as increased number of Public Health Corps mental health professionals, should be ready to provide mental health care to population centers affected by high-end war. Mental health professionals ready to deploy around the country to support victims of war is important for humanitarian reasons and is good in itself, but it also prevents adversary narratives from exploiting the situation.

Future research should continue to examine ways to protect against hostile influence operations. Information outlets may be a natural referee of information, but the information outlets are subject to biases that may compound the issue or make them unwitting accomplices to cognitive hacking. For instance, social media outlets were accused of bias during the 2020 United States Presidential election for not posting news stories

believed important to one presidential candidate.⁶⁸ The United States must have a method of vetting information or allowing appropriate counter narratives to exist alongside information considered questionable.

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