



D-RAIL: DIRECTING RESPONSES AGAINST ILLICIT INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

Date: November 19, 2024

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KEY EVENTS

On November 19, 2024, Mr. Carl Miller presented *D-RAIL: Directing Responses Against Illicit Influence Operations* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed included the strategic disruption of influence operations, as well as the importance of asymmetrical responses and coordination and contextual approaches.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Miller presented the D-RAIL framework to address the multifaceted challenges of countering influence operations, highlighting the need to disrupt key infrastructures leveraged by adversarial actors, such as the Western tech stack, financial systems, and criminal technical resources. He outlined a three-dimensional disruption framework, incorporating factors such as timeline, geography, and risk to inform more targeted responses. Mr. Miller argued for non-militarized, asymmetric strategies that prioritize maintaining trust in democratic spaces while making influence operations more costly and difficult for adversaries to execute. Influence operations can have significant, far-reaching impacts on democratic processes and public trust, with effective and coordinated countermeasures being necessary to minimize their harm and deter further actions.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Mr. Miller centered his discussion on the strategic disruption of adversarial infrastructures as a core element of the D-RAIL framework for addressing influence operations. He emphasized that a focused and deliberate approach to targeting critical infrastructure—such as the tech stack, financial systems, and criminal networks—can significantly hinder the capabilities of adversaries engaging in influence campaigns. By disrupting these systems, such as targeting app stores or illicit payment processing channels, the operational complexity of executing influence operations can be raised, deterring adversaries from continuing their campaigns. Mr. Miller argued that these interventions are vital because adversaries rely heavily on these infrastructures to facilitate the spread of disinformation and manipulation tactics. Disrupting their access to such resources not only increases operational costs but also significantly limits their ability to reach and manipulate large audiences, making it a powerful strategy for undermining their influence.

Another critical aspect of the D-RAIL approach included asymmetrical responses and the use of non-traditional tools like economic sanctions, commercial pressure, and investigative journalism, in contrast to conventional, military-centric responses to adversarial influence. These tools allow governments and organizations to impose significant costs on those responsible for influence operations without escalating to direct military conflict. By targeting the financial resources, media channels, and operational networks that influence actors rely on, D-RAIL seeks to create a challenging environment for adversaries to operate in. Mr. Miller highlighted that these asymmetrical responses are not solely focused on retaliation, but rather on proactively raising the stakes for adversaries, making influence efforts too costly to be sustainable. This approach aligns with a broader understanding that influence operations are not only a geopolitical issue but an economic and social concern that requires creative and diverse countermeasures.

Mr. Miller stressed the importance of coordination and contextual approaches in effectively implementing D-RAIL, noting that responses to influence operations must be adaptive and sensitive to the local context in which they occur. A one-size-fits-all approach would likely fail to address the unique challenges presented by different adversarial operations. Mr. Miller advocated for a multi-pronged, coordinated effort that involves not only governmental agencies but also private sector actors, civil society, and international partners. These various entities must work together to assess the specific context of each influence operation and tailor their responses accordingly. By aligning strategies with the particular political, legal, and cultural dynamics at play, D-RAIL can ensure that interventions are

effective and appropriate for the situation. This approach, Mr. Miller argued, is essential for mounting a flexible and responsive counteroffensive against the growing and evolving nature of influence campaigns, making it a critical component of modern defense strategies.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- **Strategic Disruption of Influence Operations:** Mr. Miller highlighted the importance of targeting key infrastructures that facilitate influence operations, such as payment systems and technology networks. This approach is crucial because disrupting these resources raises operational costs for adversaries, making their influence campaigns less effective and weakening their ability to manipulate public opinion and destabilize societies.
- **Importance of Asymmetrical Responses:** D-RAIL advocates for unconventional responses like economic sanctions and investigative journalism to counter influence operations. These methods allow for significant deterrence without escalating conflict, reducing the risks of broad conflict while still imposing costs on adversaries.
- **Coordination and Contextual Approaches:** Mr. Miller stressed the need for tailored responses to influence operations, shaped by the political, legal, and cultural context of the target, as coordination across sectors allows responses to be relevant and effective. This avoids one-size-fits-all solutions, ensuring that countermeasures are aligned with local realities and increasing the chances of long-term success in neutralizing influence efforts.
- **Role of Technology in Influence Operations:** While technology like AI amplifies influence operations, D-RAIL integrates real-time countermeasures, using tech to track, disrupt, and neutralize disinformation. Effective countermeasures are necessary to keep pace with evolving threats and prevent further harm to democratic systems.
- **D-RAIL Framework and Adaptability:** The framework focuses on flexible strategies that adjust to the changing nature of influence operations. This adaptability allows for long-term resilience, ensuring that countermeasures can stay ahead of malicious actors and continue to disrupt influence operations effectively.

FURTHER READING

Miller, C. (2018, October). *Who commands the internet?* UnHerd.

<https://unherd.com/2018/10/who-is-in-charge-of-the-internet/>

Miller, C. (2024). *Directing Responses Against Illicit Influence Operations (D-RAIL)*. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/directing-responses-against-illicit-influence-operations-d-rail/>

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