

RESISTING INTERFERENCE

28 September, 4:30 p.m. – 6 p.m., Gold Room



Oliveira Injac, Gaïdz Minassian and Frédéric Charillon

Disinformation, power and influence games

'Can you give your definition of interference?' It was with this question that Gaïdz Minassian launched the debate. Nancy Snow chose a broad definition, including the many influences in our lives, from advertising to disinformation. She recommended that we *'find moments of calm and meditation'* to distance ourselves from the constant noise and retain our critical faculties. Oliveira Injac focused on political interference. Since the end of communism, Montenegro, a country with a population of 600,000, has suffered a great deal of foreign interference: *'Serbian politicians interfere in elections using a variety of methods, from online disinformation to corruption'*, she explained.

Frédéric Charillon drew a parallel between the terms *'power'* and *'interference'*: *'In the same way that we speak of "hard power", "soft power", "smart power" (combin-*

ing coercion and seduction) and "sharp power" (making others doubt), we can speak of "soft interference", which consists of seducing an external audience by inviting elites to visit the country or take part in business conferences, or "hard interference", which can range from intimidation to invasion. "Smart interference" is a mixture of the two, consisting of making another country understand that it has an interest in changing the course of its internal affairs, without necessarily using threats. Finally, "sharp interference" corresponds to the disinformation currently being organised by foreign regimes, which focus on internal dissent to create doubts among their populations and thus destabilise their countries'.

In our globalised world, interference is becoming a multifaceted reality. *'While the*

threat of possible escalation through the use of nuclear weapons is the ultimate form of interference, we now have to reckon with the threat of climate and environmental change,' said Nancy Snow. *'There are so many possible disaster scenarios that we need to think about how we can keep a cool head and move towards sustainable change with optimism and hope'.*

Interference is therefore a preferred method of action, which 'enables the major powers to interfere with the weakest, by implementing strategies of influence

Frédéric Charillon

In this multipolar world, no state stands to gain from the collapse of its rival; for example, the American and Chinese economies are mutually dependent. Interference is therefore a preferred method of action, which *'enables the major powers to interfere with the weakest, by implementing strategies of influence'*, noted Frédéric Charillon.



Oliveira Injac

MODERATOR:

Gaïdz Minassian, journalist at Le Monde and teacher of international relations at Sciences Po Paris

SPEAKERS:

Frédéric Charillon, French academic and political scientist

Oliveira Injac, mayor of Podgorica (capital of Montenegro), doctor in international relations.

Nancy Snow, Professor Emeritus at California State University, specialist in propaganda and public diplomacy

'Faced with the interference of authoritarian states, aren't democracies vulnerable?' asked Gaïdz Minassian. Frédéric Charillon pointed out that democracies are vulnerable by definition. But while authoritarian regimes believe themselves to be stronger by blocking debate, democracies believe, in spite of everything, that a regime that allows freedom of expression remains superior because freedom will, in time, do damage to authoritarian regimes. The outcome of the conflict between these two ways of thinking remains unknown. *'Whereas in the Clinton years, the "information superhighways", provided by the Internet, were seen as an extraordinary asset for democratic and liberal regimes, today we see the way in which authoritarian regimes are turning them upside down, to use them for disinformation and destabilisation purposes'*, the researcher noted. But he also pointed out that these regimes don't have a monopoly on interference. Indeed, the Radio Free Europe and Voice of America media can also be regarded as bodies seeking to interfere in third countries. Western NGOs, for their part, are sometimes perceived as forms of interference in certain societies, particularly in Africa.

Gaïdz Minassian then asked Oliveira Injac about the process of empowering civil societies in transition, such as Montenegro. The Mayor of Podgorica believes that her

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Gaïdz Minassian

country remains a vulnerable democracy, where it is difficult to resist disinformation: 'Social networks are used extensively by our fellow citizens. What's more, most of them trust everything they see or hear. Conspiracy theories really came into their own during the COVID-19 crisis. Because people weren't aware of the risks, we suffered a high mortality rate'. She also pointed out that, in her country, most of the information channels come from Serbia, where the media broadcast Russian propaganda. 'That's why it's important to make all citizens of the world aware of the need to double- and triple-check information, because some of it is malicious and has toxic objectives'. Frédéric Charillon added a nuance: 'We need to be demanding about sources while remaining vigilant, without falling into paranoia and thinking that everything is a conspiracy'.

This critical spirit is undermined just about everywhere, not least because of the useless information that overwhelms us. Nancy Snow also emphasised the predominance of individualism, with influencers seeking, above all else, to have as many

followers as possible as a means of becoming famous. 'I think we would have a lot to learn from more collective cultures, to find a happy medium in the way we establish our social contract,' she asserted.

Gaïdz Minassian then turned the debate to wars of influence. Frédéric Charillon cited the example of the war in Ukraine, which he sees as totally anachronistic: 'Although Vladimir Putin's Russia had established a system of influence that was working rather well, with diplomacy that spoke to everyone in the Middle East, and had regained a foothold in some Central and Eastern European countries, he tried to gamble. However, the last major military interventions around the world ended



Gaïdz Minassian

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in fiascos, while at the same time, the influence strategies of Qatar and China were proving their worth', he pointed out. He noted that in the Ukrainian war, Russia chose to use both force and psychological weapons. The Western camp, on the other hand, has opted not to enter the war directly but to activate its networks and sanctions. 'We don't yet know the outcome, but I think this clash of methods will lead to a unique approach to conflict, combining the right mix of force and influence', concluded Frédéric Charillon.



Watch the full debate on YouTube

DEBATE

INDIA: A NEW GLOBAL SUPERPOWER?

28 September, 4:30 p.m. – 6 p.m. – Azur Room



Christophe Jaffrelet and Archana Chaudhary

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India, a non-aligned power

Philippe Le Corre initiated the debate by highlighting the ambivalent position of Narendra Modi's India, a major economic power that is both a member of the G20 and the Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), which is caught in the middle of the Sino-American confrontation.

'Give us another fifty years, there's no question of us being a premature superpower,' replied Deng Xiaoping to Henry

MODERATOR:

Philippe Le Corre, university lecturer and researcher at Asia Society France

SPEAKERS:

Archana Chaudhary, Indian journalist

Christophe Jaffrelet, political scientist specialised in the Indian subcontinent

Raja Mohan, Indian academic, journalist and foreign policy analyst

India must, above all, learn to use its size to maintain its economic growth

Raja Mohan

ry Kissinger in the 1990s, when the American diplomat told him that China would soon become the second world power. It was with this anecdote that Indian academic Raja Mohan began the discussion regarding India's place on the world stage. As the fifth economic power, capable of developing a space programme while the average annual income *per capita* doesn't exceed \$2,000, India must, above all, learn to use its size to maintain its economic growth, the largest in the world today, and strengthen its position, he explained. While relations between India and the Western powers have been complex throughout the 20th century, the subcontinent has ma-