



Nicole Gnesotto

lective security is based on the threat of the annihilation of humanity.' Moreover, atomic weapons, 'enshrine an unjust world order that accepts these unequal rights between countries.' But if nuclear weapons should be abolished, it must be

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borne in mind that 'conventional deterrence has never existed in history' she warned, 'that nuclear deterrence is such an absurd and real threat that it annihilates any desire to start war.' This is why 'Putin's actions came as a surprise to everyone.' He is implementing 'an aggressive sanctuarisation doctrine, which consists of using Russia's status as a nuclear power to guard against Western reprisal.' A 'strategy that's working' according to her.



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Disagreeing profoundly, Jean-Marie Collin insisted on the uncertain nature of this doctrine, which is merely a 'bet on the opponent's rationality, a rationality that can be questioned in the case of Putin, the Kim family or even Trump.' If today 'the majority of states don't want atomic weapons, it's because they know it's a bad defence system', he explained. What's more, the example of Colonel Stanislav Petrov in 1983 shows the fallibility of this doctrine in the face of mistakes or accidents. When the Soviet officer, in one of the 'hottest years of the Cold War', detected American missiles aimed at the USSR, he warned his hierarchy that he did not believe his computers and avoided a nuclear apocalypse.

Héloïse Fayet adds the Chinese question to the debate, a new major player in the nuclear issue with '350 warheads in 2022, 410 in 2023' and 'refusing any discussion on limiting its armament.' This 'change in the global nuclear balance must call for a great deal of effort if deterrence is to work and we are to avoid a nuclear Third World War.'

Nicole Gnesotto pointed out that 'European nuclear deterrence doesn't exist.' The European Union is 'disunited on this issue, between the countries that have renounced it and rely on the NATO umbrella and France, which only protects its vital interests.' Asked how the Russian-Ukrainian conflict might be resolved, the historian stated her belief that scenarios of Russian capitulation and disarmament are unlikely because 'the Russian nuclear arsenal will never be removed from the outside and it's unthinkable to force Russia to destroy it itself.' While Nicole Gnesotto acknowledged that 'there's no debate worthy of French democracy on this subject today', she asserted that 'if China and Russia are allowed to keep their atomic weapons, why would France give theirs up?'

DEBATE

## SOCIAL NETWORKS, WEAPONS OF MASS MOBILISATION?

Friday 29 September 2023, 2p.m. - 3.30p.m., Gold Room



Feurat Alani, Oxana Melnychuk, Julie Clarini and Gildas Leprince

### A potentially dangerous but essential tool

'The same conference organised ten years ago would surely have been more optimistic, showing that social networks are transforming movements, making them visible and giving them strength', said Julie Clarini in her introduction, 'whereas today we're more measured in the face of these vectors of disinformation and destabilisation, which were supposed to help fledgling democracies but in the end are attacking old democracies.'

MODERATOR:

**Julie Clarini**, Editor-in-Chief, Ideas Department, l'Obs

SPEAKERS:

**Gildas Leprince**, YouTuber 'Mr Geopolitix'

**Feurat Alani**, reporter and film-maker

**Oxana Melnychuk**, director of the political analysis and communication centre, United for Ukraine

### The fundamental thing is to always ask yourself what the level of deception is

Gildas Leprince

Oxana Melnychuk started by recalling the 'crucial role of social networks at the start of the war in Ukraine, while waiting for the traditional media to adapt.' Social networks made it possible 'for the President and the government to immediately reassure and organise 40 million people who were in the dark via Twitter.' Since then, 'President Zelensky has been speaking to Ukrainians every evening, in Ukrainian and English, talking to them directly on his phone, and that makes him human, which is part of our resilience.' The communicator explained that 'the government had to ask itself very



Gildas Leprince

## **Certification was used to authenticate people who were credible in their field, but now you can simply purchase it**

Gildas Leprince

Feurat Alani took up this argument from his point of view, saying that *'you can't do without the Internet and social networks, especially when you're a journalist'*, before going on to talk about his relationship with these digital platforms as part of his work in Iraq. *'I noticed that there were all sorts of things on Twitter that weren't cross-checked or verified, especially after the arrival of Isis'*, so *'I decided to go against the trend of the app, speed and superficiality, and I started to tell the story of Iraq in a different way.'* In concrete terms, *'I went against the cold, numerical analyses and told a subjective story, with colours and smells, over a long period of time, to take my readers by the hand' and 'from these texts my graphic novel was born.'* Today, the reporter believes that *'Twitter is an indispensable tool, for better or for worse, but you have to take the time to cross-check the information and not just stay on the social networks.'* Oxana Melnychuk went on to quote a Socratic principle that requires *'three filters to receive information: Is it true? Is it beneficial? Is it useful? And you have to be wary if one of the three is missing.'*



Watch the full debate on YouTube

Mr Geopolitix warned the young people present about the chang-

*quickly what channel to use' but also 'had to call on all its contacts in the media world where Zelensky came from to spread the President's messages to the whole world.'*

Gildas Leprince, aka Mr Geopolitix on YouTube, described his arrival on the platform *'at a time when it was booming, at a turning point when we were really starting to make a living out of it'*, but before *'deliberately misleading content began to proliferate'*. To understand fake news, the YouTuber explained that *'journalists have established a classification of all this information, ranging from content that is false for commercial rather than political reasons, to journalistic errors, to the soliciting of headlines, to manipulation and propaganda.'* *'The fundamental thing is to always ask yourself what the level of deception is, because it's better to learn how to protect yourself than to give up the Internet'*, he argued.

es at Twitter, where *'certification was used to authenticate people who were credible in their field, but now you can simply purchase it.'* On the other hand, *'the platform now specifies the origin of certain information, for example that Russia Today is financed by the Russian government, or notes the real dates of certain videos.'* The videographer then called on everyone *'to follow several fact-checking accounts and to always check whether a piece of information is mentioned in other media before taking it at face value.'* Moderator Julie Clarini noted, however, that *'fake news can also be a way of finding out about the propaganda techniques of one's opponents'*, adding that *'fake news say a lot about the situation in a country.'* Oxana Melnychuk returned to the link between information and military strategy, which led the Ukrainian general staff to *'withhold information about the war so as not to create panic and endanger its units.'* As a result, *'the Western media began to use Russian sources to make up for this omission, which contributed to disinformation on the subject, forcing the Ukrainian army to train official spokespeople.'*

Gildas Leprince went on to explain the issues involved in information warfare, when *'countries use false information to destabilise their enemies, pushing them to make bad decisions and causing people to lose hope.'* Some countries, such as Russia, *'have specialised in this, setting up troll farms.'* One example of *'this pernicious war'* is *'Wagner's alleged discovery of a mass grave left by the French army on its base in Mali, which France was able to deny with the help of drone footage showing Russian paramilitary forces digging the grave'*, he continued. Feurat Alani also pointed out that even *'the Islamic State has used social networks in innovative ways to attract recruits'*, which *'shows that information can be as much a blessing as a war-triggering weapon.'*

The French videographer then took time to explain the different moderation methods used by digital platforms: *'YouTube is pretty strict on nudity, even when it's nothing more than a Greek statue, while TikTok is pretty permissive, preferring to restrict violence, weapons and drugs.'* Returning to the original subject, the Ukrainian communicator pointed out that *'British intelligence admitted themselves at the last Paris arms fair that their primary source of information was social networks.'* In an attempt to offer some grounds for hope on this issue, Mr Geopolitix defended the analogy that *'social networks are a tool like a knife – you can cook and kill with them'*,

## **Fake news can also be a way of finding out about the propaganda techniques of one's opponents**

Julie Clarini

but we must not forget that *'you can do anything with the Internet; it's incredible.'* Even if *'the new generations face more challenges, they'll be that much stronger, they will question themselves more, develop their critical eye and find their cognitive biases.'* Oxana Melnychuk was keen to *'thank Westerners for their support on social networks, the wings of our victory and our resilience.'* Indeed, *'this solidarity is possible thanks to the immediacy of social networks, which enable financial support and the formation of humanitarian organisations.'* *'We must be careful not to fall into the trap of social networking'*, she concluded, *'but it remains a contemporary tool that's changing the world.'*