DETECTING AND COMBATING FOREIGN MALIGN INFLUENCE IN UGANDA

A HANDBOOK

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A·C·M·E
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About this handbook

This handbook was developed in response to the emerging threats posed by and the complexities around the increasing levels of Foreign Malign Influence (FMI) incidents across the world, but Africa in particular. As FMI actors and their agents adopt more sophisticated tactics and pathways, aided partly by new and emerging technologies such as the Internet and Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), it is critical that stakeholders involved in detecting and countering FMI become more aware and equipped with the trends, patterns and strategies on how to effectively respond to these new threats. This handbook is designed to provide actors with the some tools and tactics that will enable them appreciate and effectively respond to the challenges posed by foreign malign influence in today's interconnected world.

I. Introduction

Foreign Malign Influence (FMI) has existed before, as developed countries jostled to exert their influence and ideology on the less developed, mostly within the third world. However, the emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and more recently Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) has accelerated the rate at which FMI actors and their agents intrude upon the internal operations of their target countries. Gone are the days when "aggressors" needed to have a physical presence within their target countries.

Through the deployment of sophisticated strategies such as disinformation, propaganda, cyberattacks, and social engineering, FMI agents can influence, interfere with, or manipulate political, social, economic, or cultural processes, including public opinions of another sovereign country. Other strategies used have included economic might, such as through loans with stringent conditions, such as high interest rates leading to defaults, especially in countries with poor financial discipline. Defaulting countries have been left in such vulnerable positions that they end up accepting any conditions set by the donors, including dictating the country's development priorities and national interests.

Recognising the dangers of FMI, more developed countries such as the United States and other European countries have invested heavily in efforts to detect and counter foreign malign influence to protect their democratic values. In Africa, the majority of the countries that are prone to FMI are still struggling to understand what FMI is and how to detect and counter it.

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In developing this handbook, the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) seeks to provide a comprehensive guide for policymakers, journalists, analysts, and practitioners involved in safeguarding national interests and democratic processes against foreign malign influence. The handbook can serve as a valuable resource for individuals and organisations seeking to understand, detect, and effectively respond to the challenges posed by foreign malign influence in today's interconnected world.

II. Understanding Foreign Malign Influence

Foreign Malign Influence (FMI) has been defined as any hostile effort undertaken by, at the direction of, or on behalf of, or with the substantial support of a foreign country with the objective of influencing, through overt or covert means, the political such as elections, military, economic, or other policies, activities within another sovereign country.[1] In addition, FMI aims to shape public opinion, destabilize democratic processes, sow discord, and advance the interests of foreign actors.[2] The main tactics used include the use of disinformation, cyber-attacks, economic coercion, political interferences, and propaganda and FMI activities frequently involve multiple actors and pathways aimed at influencing public opinions and perceptions.[3] In many cases, FMI agents may include foreign government officials, intelligence services, cyber actors, criminal groups, state-run media organisations, social media actors, and businesses with close ties to the target country's government officials.[4]

Foreign Malign Influence in Africa

In Africa, FMI dates to the late 1880s when mostly European nations sought to capture a piece of the African continent, mainly for slaves and raw materials for their growing industries. To achieve this, the colonial masters embarked on massive infrastructure developments, including the construction of railroads that would enable them to penetrate the interior of

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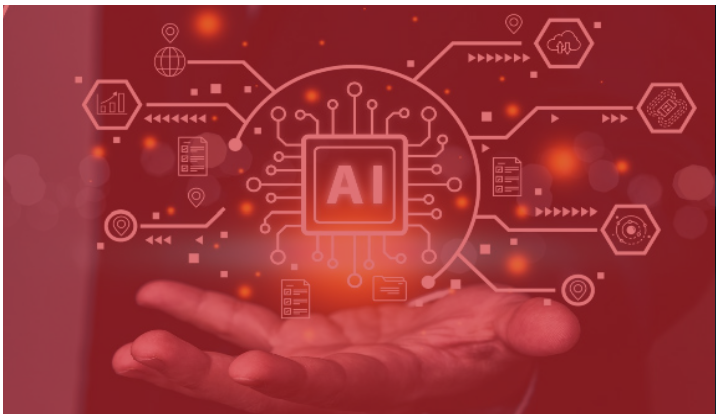

what was then known as the Dark Continent. The takeover was formalised during the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 in what came to be known as the 'Scramble for Africa,' where the European powers arbitrarily divided Africa among themselves and started administering their new colonies.[5] Indeed, "by the time direct colonialism was rolled back after 1945, the African leaders inherited colonial economies where Africans participated as providers of cheap labour rather than owners of the economies."[6] Africa as a continent had significantly changed in structure, administration, cultural orientation, and ideology. Like colonialism then, FMI is "epochal in its impact as it was and is a system of power that is multifaceted in character. It is a power structure that subverts, destroys, reinvents, appropriates, and replaces anything it deems an obstacle to the agenda of colonial domination and exploitation."[7]

In recent history, FMI in Africa has become more subtle and sophisticated

5 Colonialism and Development in Africa https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/colonialism-and-development-africa
6 'Moral evil, economic good': Whitewashing the sins of colonialism https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/26/colonialism-in-africa-empire-was-not-ethical
7 Colonialism and Social Structure. An Inaugural Lecture https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271134410_Colonialism_and_Social_Structure_An_Inaugural_Lecture

as various superpowers continue the "scramble" for the continent, that it is sometimes hard to distinguish between genuine development interventions and those geared towards interfering in or manipulating the internal political, economic, military or cultural processes of individual countries or regional blocks such as the East African Community, African Union, South African Development Cooperation, or Economic Community of West Africa. This lack of clarity has given leeway to autocratic statesmen to pick and choose which entity to work with to advance their personal agenda. For example, in 2023, the government forced the closure of the Democratic Governance Facility on allegations that it was financing subversive activities within the country.[8] Yet, at the same time, it was welcoming and signing "development cooperation agreements" with the People's Republic of China to develop the country's digital infrastructure, which is mainly geared towards advancing its domestic control on civic spaces.[9]

Recent contemporary examples of malign actions close to Uganda include:

In 2013, Uganda expelled Sudanese diplomat Jad-el-Seed Mohammed Elhag from Uganda on suspicion of espionage.

At the height of the tensions between Rwanda and Uganda, Ugandan security arrested scores of Rwandans. Rwanda had a police attaché to the Uganda police. He too was forced to live.

8 Democratic Governance Facility exits, leaving thousands jobless https://observer.ug/news/headlines/78087-democratic-governance-facility-exits-leaving-thousands-jobless

9 Is Foreign Malign Influence Inspiring Digital Authoritarianism in Uganda? https://cipesa.org/2024/07/is-foreign-malign-influence-inspiring-digital-authoritarianism-in-uganda/

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In 2018, Le Monde reported that confidential data on the IT network of the Chinese-built African Union headquarters in Ethiopia was being siphoned off to Shanghai every night between 2012 and 2017.

In a 2018 confidential letter to Museveni, finance minister, Matia Kasaija, raised concerns that given what was happening in peer countries as regards to Chinese debt, Uganda needed to protect its assets "from possible takeover."

Disinformation and Propaganda as Tools of FMI

For many years, FMI agents and actors have deployed the use of disinformation and propaganda to deliberately manipulate and influence public opinion, particularly during periods of contestation such as elections and protests or demonstrations.[10] As noted earlier, the advent of technological advancements, especially the Internet and Gen AI, have transformed and provided more ammunition to FMI agents and actors to up their game. The PRC has particularly been singled out as having mastered the art of using disinformation and propaganda campaigns to advance its agenda on the African continent.[11] Taking a cue from other superpowers such as the United States (Voice of America), Qatar (Aljazeera), and the UK (BBC), China has been on a media offensive of partnering with media companies in Africa to carry Chinese programmes that report favorably on its activities.

However, both disinformation and propaganda thrive most in countries with shrinking civic spaces where freedom of expression and that of the media is stifled. Coupled with high levels of media and digital illiteracy, Africa has provided a fertile ground for disinformation and propaganda campaigns to thrive unhindered. FMI-inspired disinformation, such as AI-generated deep fakes and texts targeting specific audiences have often been used to "amplify misinformation (and) pose risks to (a country's) national security and defense and hinder attribution of manipulated media."[12]

10 Disinformation Pathways https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/briefs/Disinformation_Pathways_and_Effects_Case_Studies_from_Five_African_Countries_Report.pdf
11 China's Media Propaganda in Africa https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/chinas-media-propaganda-africa-strategic-assessment
12 https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-09/23_0906_oia_GAI_ForeignMa-

III.Detecting Foreign Malign Influence

Over time, FMI has evolved and become more sophisticated, and it is complex to detect with the "naked eye." In most cases, it has taken on the form of social media manipulation, disinformation campaigns, undeclared intentions, cyberattacks, covert funding, subversion, and espionage. As noted earlier, technology has been a big factor in the spread of FMI as it has afforded the agents and actors with an array of arsenal to use in achieving their objectives. For example, "while disinformation operations continue to use traditional social media, such as Twitter and Facebook," the agents have "expanded to new social media platforms such as TikTok, as well as more targeted messaging apps like WhatsApp, Discord, and Telegram."[13]

Given the complexities of detecting FMI brought about by advances in technology, actors, including the media, can use any of the following approaches.

1. Monitoring and analysing Social Media Platforms and Online Forums
2. Analyzing Disinformation and Propaganda Techniques
3. checking Financial Flows and Funding Sources

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lignInfluence_508.pdf
13 Countering Foreign Malign Influence Social Network Manipulation https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/KIQ%205%20-%20Emerging%20Trends%20Technologies.pdf

In most cases, it has taken on the form of social media manipulation, disinformation campaigns, undeclared intentions, cyberattacks, covert funding, subversion, and espionage.

The analysis needs to be guided by the following research questions

1. Who is behind the operation?
2. What activities are being carried out?
3. What is their probable motivation?
4. Who is the target audience?
5. What is the level of transparency of their activities?
6. What channels are being used to communicate?
7. What is the level of transparency?

While not exhaustive, these leading questions provide an opportunity to scrutinise the purpose and authenticity of any suspected FMI schemes being examined.

The malign actors present in many forms, these examples could be helpful in efforts to detect malign influence. Foreign governments (USA, Russia, China, Iran etc.), Intelligence services, Cyber actors, State aligned media, Social media actors, Business aligned to government.

IV. Strategies for Countering Foreign Malign Influence

At the international level, nation-state sovereignty has been recognised under several international laws that also prohibit all forms of Foreign Malign Influence, especially the use of force against sovereign states. Specifically, Article 2 (4) of the 1957 United Nations Charter states that "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."[14]

Because of its multifaceted nature, countering FMI requires a multi-pronged approach involving different stakeholders with shared goals and interest in protecting and safeguarding national interests, especially the quality of information available to the citizens.

Governmental Responses

National governments have the primary responsibility of detecting and countering FMI within their jurisdiction. There are several ways that they can do this.

Enacting and full implementation of laws and policies that guarantee the sovereignty and democratic processes of their countries. These laws include those that provide for the sanctity of democratic elections, constitutional provisions on the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, privacy and personal data protection, and the right to freedom of assembly and association.

Governments should endeavor to strengthen and insulate democratic institutions such as parliament, the judiciary, executive, and electoral commissions, among others, against any form of FMI, especially economic coercion and blackmail. One way of doing this is by providing for their political, legal, and economic independence.

14 United Nations Charter 1975 https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text#:~:text=Article%202,and%20justice%2C%20are%20not%20endangered.

Governments should promote a culture of transparency and accountability around any government procurements and dealing with foreign-based entities, including other national governments.

Governments should proactively work towards strengthening their cybersecurity preparedness, particularly during periods of contestations such as elections, protests, and demonstrations, as these are prime incidents when FMI agents and their actors are likely to attack and engage in disinformation campaigns.

Civil Society Initiatives

Civil society organisations (CSOs), such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), the media, and academia, are critical players in detecting and countering FMI.

First, CSOs should initiate collaborative programs geared towards promoting media literacy and empowering the masses on issues of disinformation and misinformation. As the primary gatekeepers of news and information, the media should be trained in conducting investigations, fact-checking and verifying suspected FMI schemes.

The academia should interest itself in researching and documenting suspected schemes of FMI and developing training modules that address the FMI and its impact on national sovereignty, and promote critical thinking among students and faculty.

VII. Conclusion

FMI is as old as nation-states, especially in Africa, where more developed countries have always been on a quest to conquer and control the continent's destiny. Buoyed by recent technological developments such as the Internet and Gen AI, FMI actors, and their agents have adopted more sophisticated tactics, including launching disinformation and propaganda campaigns aimed at influencing the internal political, military, cultural, and sometimes

public perceptions of issues within their target countries. As noted, these disinformation and propaganda campaigns are particularly prevalent during periods of contestation, such as elections, demonstrations, and protests.

Because of its multifaceted nature, detecting and countering FMI requires concerted efforts by both governments and civil society actors, including the media and academia, to develop programs and initiatives aimed at safeguarding human rights, particularly the quality of information as FMI agents more often than not engagement in disinformation campaigns.

Appendices

- Glossary of terms
- Tips for journalists investigating and reporting FMI in Africa
- Checklist for Journalists Covering Foreign Malign Influence
- Additional resources (websites, reports, organizations)
- Checklist for detecting malign influence

Glossary of terms

ACME - African Centre for Media Excellence

FMI - Foreign Malign Influence

Gen AI - Generative Artificial Intelligence

CSOs - Civil Society Organisations

FBOs - Faith-Based Organisations

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organisations

UN - United Nations

AU - African Union

PRC - People's Republic of China

ICTs - Information and Communication Technology

Tips for journalists in investigating and reporting FMI in Africa

Investigating and reporting on foreign malign influence in Africa requires careful research, ethical considerations, and strategic reporting to ensure accuracy and impact. Here are some tips for journalists:

1. **Understand the Context**: Familiarize yourself with the geopolitical context of the region you're reporting on. Understand historical relationships, current political dynamics, and economic ties.
2. **Identify Stakeholders**: Determine key stakeholders involved, including governments, multinational corporations, NGOs, and foreign entities. Investigate their interests and activities in the region.
3. **Follow the Money**: Trace financial flows and investments. Investigate whether foreign funds are being used to influence local politics, media, or institutions.
4. **Use Open Source Intelligence**: Leverage publicly available information such as government records, corporate filings, and international agreements. Tools like satellite imagery and digital mapping can also provide valuable insights.
5. **Build Local Contacts**: Establish relationships with local journalists, activists, and experts. They can provide valuable insights, contacts, and on-the-ground perspectives that are crucial for accurate reporting.
6. **Verify Sources**: Cross-check information from multiple sources to ensure accuracy and avoid misinformation or bias. Use reputable sources and verify claims through independent verification.
7. **Protect Sources**: Safeguard the anonymity and safety of sources who provide sensitive information. Understand the risks involved and take necessary precautions to protect their identity.
8. **Ethical Considerations**: Adhere to ethical guidelines and standards of journalism. Avoid sensationalism and verify information before publishing to maintain credibility.
9. **Tell Human Stories**: Highlight the impact of foreign influence on local

communities and individuals. Personal narratives can make complex issues more relatable and understandable to your audience.

10. **Consider Regional Perspectives**: Africa is diverse, and impacts of foreign influence can vary widely across different countries and regions. Consider how geopolitical shifts affect different communities and nations uniquely.
11. **Monitor Digital Influence**: Investigate how foreign actors may be using digital platforms and social media to influence public opinion or manipulate political discourse.
12. **Report Impartially**: Maintain impartiality in your reporting. Present facts objectively and provide context to help your audience understand the broader implications of foreign influence.

By following these tips, journalists can contribute to transparent and informed public discourse about foreign malign influence in Africa, helping to safeguard democratic processes and promote accountability.

Checklist for Journalists Covering Foreign Malign Influence

- □ Before Reporting:
  - Verify sources and information.
  - Consider potential biases or agendas.
- □ During Reporting:
  - Document findings thoroughly.
  - Seek expert opinions when necessary.
- □ After Reporting:
  - Monitor responses and corrections.
  - Reflect on lessons learned for future reporting.

When looking for reference materials on foreign malign influence, you'll want to explore various sources that cover geopolitics, international relations, cybersecurity, and intelligence studies. Here are some types of resources and specific references that might be helpful:

1. Books:
   - Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare by Thomas Rid
   - LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media by P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking
   - Cyber War: The Next Threat to National Security and What to Do About It by Richard A. Clarke and Robert K. Knake
2. Reports and Studies:
   - Reports from organizations like the Center for Strategic and

International Studies (CSIS), Brookings Institution, RAND Corporation, and various think tanks focusing on national security and international affairs.

- Academic studies on cyber operations, information warfare, and political influence strategies.

3. Government Publications:
   - Reports from government agencies such as the FBI, CIA, NSA, and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding foreign interference, cyber threats, and disinformation campaigns.
4. Journals and Articles:
   - Articles in academic journals such as International Security, Journal of Strategic Studies, and Foreign Affairs.
   - Articles in popular magazines and newspapers that cover geopolitical developments and international relations.
5. Online Resources:
   - Websites of organizations like NATO, European Union External Action, and the United Nations often publish reports on international security threats and disinformation campaigns.
6. Courses and Lectures:
   - Online courses on platforms like Coursera, edX, or university websites that cover cybersecurity, international relations, and intelligence studies.
7. Documentaries and Podcasts:
   - Documentaries or podcast series that delve into cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, and foreign influence operations.

Checklist for CSOs while detecting and countering malign influence

Indicators and Warning Signs: Provide guidance on recognizing signs of foreign malign influence, including sudden shifts in public opinion, coordinated misinformation campaigns, unusual cyber activity, or unexplained political disruptions.

Case Studies and Examples: Analyze historical and contemporary examples of foreign malign influence operations to illustrate tactics and strategies used by different countries.

Legal and Policy Frameworks: Discuss relevant laws, regulations, and international agreements that govern responses to foreign influence operations, including diplomatic, economic, and legal measures.

Response Strategies: Provide guidelines for developing and implementing effective response strategies, including public awareness campaigns, diplomatic protests, economic sanctions, and cybersecurity measures.

Coordination and Collaboration: Emphasize the importance of coordination among government agencies, private sector organizations, academic institutions, and international partners in countering foreign malign influence.

Training and Education: Offer training modules and educational resources for policymakers, law enforcement, journalists, and the general public to enhance awareness and resilience against foreign influence operations.

Ethical Considerations: Address ethical issues related to countering foreign malign influence, such as protecting civil liberties, avoiding censorship, and maintaining transparency in governmental actions.

Future Trends and Challenges: Explore emerging trends in foreign influence tactics, such as advancements in technology and changes in geopolitical dynamics, and anticipate future challenges in countering these threats.