Research memo

FDD
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Much Ado About 'Somethings': China-Linked Influence Operation Endures Despite Takedowns

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Executive Summary

Beneath a video on Facebook about the war between Israel and Hamas, Lamonica Trout commented, "America is the war monger, the Jew's own son!" She left identical comments beneath the same video on two other Facebook pages. Trout's profile provides no information besides her name. It lists no friends, and there is not a single post or photograph in her feed. Trout's profile photo shows an alligator.[1]

Lamonica Trout is likely an invention of the group behind Spamouflage, an ongoing, multi-year influence operation that promotes Beijing's interests. Last year, Facebook's parent company, Meta, took down 7,704 accounts and 954 pages it identified as part of the Spamouflage operation, which it described as the "largest known cross-platform influence operation [Meta had] disrupted to date."[2] Facebook's terms of service prohibit a range of deceptive and inauthentic behaviors, including efforts to conceal the purpose of social media activity or the identity of those behind it.

This research report documents a previously unrecognized component on Facebook of Spamouflage, which operates over 450 pages and user profiles, including Lamonica Trout, as part of a coordinated effort to promote anti-American and anti-Western narratives.[3] One hub of this activity is the community page known as "The War of Somethings," which has around 2,000 likes and 3,000 followers — although many of those are likely to be no more real than Lamonica Trout.

The broader War of Somethings (WoS) network, so dubbed because all the Facebook pages and user accounts in the network are connected to "The War of Somethings" page,[4] behaves very similarly to previous Spamouflage campaigns. The WoS network has targeted Guo Wengui, a wealthy Chinese businessman in exile, who is also a frequent target of Spamouflage. Previous analyses named the group Spamouflage because it posts apolitical

[1] Lamonica Trout, *Facebook*, accessed February 12, 2024. (Archived version available at https://ghostarchive.org/archive/1f9ap)

[2] Ben Nimmo, Mike Torrey, Margarita Franklin, David Agranovich, Margie Milam, Lindsay Hundley, and Robert Flaim, "Second Quarter Adversarial Threat Report," *Meta*, August 2023, page 4. (https://web.archive.org/web/20240229145042...)

[3] The authors would like to thank Sophie McDowall and Daniel Siegel for their contributions to this paper.

[4] Note on methodology: Pages and user accounts that directly like, share, or comment on content posted by "The War of Somethings" have one degree of connection; pages and user accounts that like, share, or comment on content posted by pages and profiles with one degree of connection have two degrees of connection, and so on.

content to camouflage its political agenda, a tactic that the WoS network also employs. Like Spamouflage, the WoS network is active during the workday in China and uses inauthentic accounts, including invented personas and hijacked accounts, to promote its content. For these reasons and others, the WoS network is very likely a part of Spamouflage.

To date, the WoS network appears to have had almost no reach outside of its own echo chambers. Yet previous Spamouflage campaigns have broken out to wider audiences. Prominent individuals with a record of hostility toward the United States, such as Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza and British parliamentarian George Galloway, have shared Spamouflage content with their numerous followers.[5]

As of July 2023, and possibly earlier, the WoS network has posted content explicitly related to the upcoming U.S. elections, a sign that Spamouflage may be preparing to interfere in the elections.[6] To help prevent such manipulation, the authors have shared the data from this paper with Meta to facilitate enforcement of Facebook's terms of service.

Though Spamouflage operates on other platforms, this report focuses on its Facebook activity. Its Facebook network may actually be larger than what is documented. Leveraging the information below, social media companies with access to internal data can better assess the full scale and scope.

Spamouflage and other enduring influence operations demonstrate that social media takedowns are necessary, but not sufficient, to combat foreign malign influence operations. The federal government also has a role to play: It should send clear and consistent messages to China and other state sponsors of such operations that there will be a price to pay for attempts at manipulating U.S. public opinion.

Who is Spamouflage?

Social media analytics firm Graphika first documented Spamouflage in 2019.[7] Initially, the operation used primarily Chinese language content to attack Guo Wengui and Hong Kong protesters opposing Beijing's control.[8] In 2020, Spamouflage began operating in English and criticizing U.S. foreign policy, America's COVID-19 response, racial tensions, and U.S. scrutiny of TikTok.[9]

[5] Ben Nimmo, Ira Hubert, and Yang Cheng, "Spamouflage Breakout," *Graphika,* February 4, 2021. (https://www.graphika.com/reports/spamouflage-breakout)

[6] Note: The term "influence operation" in this paper will specifically refer to foreign influence operations and will be used in line with the FBI's definition of the term, namely, "covert actions by foreign governments to influence U.S. political sentiment or public discourse." However, the term may apply to operations targeting countries outside of the U.S. depending on the context. See: "Combating Foreign Influence," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, accessed March 5, 2024. (https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/foreign-influence)

[7] Ben Nimmo, C. Shawin Eib, and L. Tamora, "Cross-Platform Spam Network Targeted Hong Kong Protests," *Graphika,* September 25, 2019. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/graphika_report_spamouflage.pdf)

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ben Nimmo, Camille Francois, C. Shawin Eib, and Lea Ronzaud, "Spamouflage Goes to America: Pro-Chinese Inauthentic Network Debuts English-Language Videos," *Graphika,* August 2020. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/graphika_report_spamouflage_goes_to_america.pdf)

Spamouflage initially achieved little to no reach outside its own network.[10] That changed in the second half of 2020, when Twitter accounts of Chinese diplomats, Huawei Europe, Latin American news stations, politicians from Chile, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom, and a range of other influential figures and organizations began sharing its content.[11]

Since that time, social media platforms have repeatedly attempted to take down Spamouflage's networks. In January 2023, Google's Threat Analysis Group reported it had disrupted 50,000 instances of Spamouflage activity across YouTube, Blogger, and AdSense.[12] In the same year, as noted, Meta took down 7,704 Facebook accounts and 954 Facebook pages and called Spamouflage the "largest known cross-platform influence operation [Meta had] disrupted to date."[13] Despite these efforts, Spamouflage has endured and continues to push out new content.[14]

Researchers from Meta and reporter Adam Rawnsley of *Rolling Stone* helped unmask the people behind the operation, connecting Spamouflage to the Chinese Ministry of Public Security's "912 Special Project Working Group."[15] They observed overlapping content in Meta's reporting on Spamouflage and a U.S. Department of Justice criminal indictment filed against members of the Chinese working group.[16]

Casting America as a Nation in Crisis at Home and Reckless Abroad

The WoS network posts text, videos, political cartoons, photographs, and news articles criticizing U.S. domestic and foreign policy in a manner consistent with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) positions and posts content about the 2024 U.S. elections. The network seeks to portray the United States as a society in crisis whose government neglects the population while pursuing reckless foreign adventures.

[10] Ben Nimmo, Camille Francois, C. Shawin Eib, and Lea Ronzaud, "Return of the (Spamouflage) Dragon: Pro-Chinese Spam Network Tries Again," *Graphika,* April 2020. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/Graphika_Report_Spamouflage_Returns.pdf); Ben Nimmo, Camille Francois, C. Shawin Eib, and Lea Ronzaud, "Spamouflage Goes to America: Pro-Chinese Inauthentic Network Debuts English-Language Videos," *Graphika,* August 2020. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/graphika_report_spamouflage_goes_to_america.pdf)

[11] Ben Nimmo, Ira Hubert, and Yang Cheng, "Spamouflage Breakout," *Graphika,* February 4, 2021. (https://www.graphika.com/reports/spamouflage-breakout)

[12] Zak Butler and Jonas Taege, "Over 50,000 instances of DRAGONBRIDGE activity disrupted in 2022," *Google Threat Analysis Group*, June 26, 2023. (https://blog.google/threat-analysis-group/over-50000-instances-of-dragonbridge-activity-disrupted-in-2022). Note: Google's Threat Analysis Group and Mandiant refer to Spamouflage as Dragonbridge.

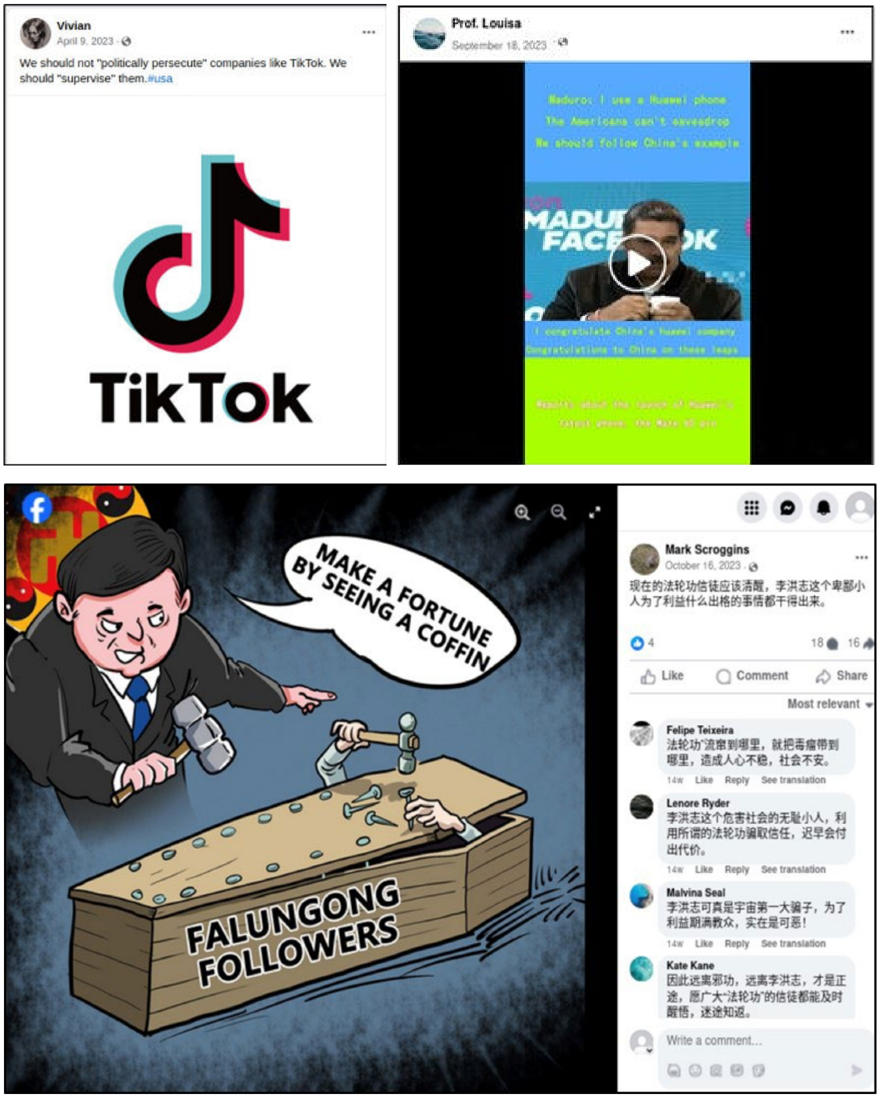
[13] Ben Nimmo, Mike Torrey, Margarita Franklin, David Agranovich, Margie Milam, Lindsay Hundley, and Robert Flaim, "Second Quarter Adversarial Threat Report," *Meta*, August 2023, page 4. (Archived version available at https://web.archive.org/web/20240229145042/https://scontent-iad3-2.xx.fbcdn.net/v/t39.8562-6/10000000_878173163681285_2523028760863660247_n.pdf?_nc_cat=100&ccb=1-7&_nc_sid=b8d81d&_nc_ohc=Bb8lSMQoacoAX_QkoSz&_nc_ht=scontent-iad3-2.xx&oh=00_AfBpYcCDRrGauwu7_vUo7q8ajPAk0KOsk6n-mk-k4EyX0w&oe=65E66C48)

[14] Ben Nimmo, Camille Francois, C. Shawin Eib, and Lea Ronzaud, "Return of the (Spamouflage) Dragon: Pro-Chinese Spam Network Tries Again," *Graphika,* April 2020. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/Graphika_Report_Spamouflage_Returns.pdf); Ben Nimmo, Camille Francois, C. Shawin Eib, and Lea Ronzaud, "Spamouflage Goes to America: Pro-Chinese Inauthentic Network Debuts English-Language Videos," *Graphika,* August 2020. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/graphika_report_spamouflage_goes_to_america.pdf)

[15] Adam Rawnsley, "Chinese Intel Officers Interfered in U.S. Election," *Rolling Stone*, August 29, 2023. (https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/china-facebook-instagram-propaganda-campaign-1234813762)

[16] Affidavit of Joseph Hugdahl in Support of Application for Arrest Warrants, *United States v. Bai Yunpeng*, 23-MJ-0334 (SJB), (E.D.N.Y. April 6, 2023). (https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-04/squad_912_-_23-mj-0334_redacted_complaint_signed.pdf)

Consistent with previous Spamouflage behavior, the WoS network often criticizes Guo Wengui and the persecuted spiritual group Falun Gong.[17] Even though Facebook is banned in China, this content criticizing Guo Wengui and Falun Gong is often in Mandarin, suggesting its target audience is Chinese speakers outside of China.[18] The WoS network also promotes Huawei while condemning the alleged "political persecution" of TikTok (see Figures 1-3).[19]



Vivian
April 9, 2023 ·

We should not "politically persecute" companies like TikTok. We should "supervise" them.#usa

Prof. Louisa
September 18, 2023 ·

Maduro: I use a Huawei phone
The Americans can't eavesdrop
We should follow China's example
MADU
FACE OK
I congratulate China's Huawei company
Congratulations to China on these leaps
Reports about the launch of Huawei's
latest phone, the Mate 60 pro

MAKE A FORTUNE BY SEEING A COFFIN
FALUNGONG FOLLOWERS

Mark Scroggins
October 16, 2023 ·

现在的法轮功信徒应该清醒，李洪志这个卑鄙小人为了利益什么出格的事情都干得出来。

4 18 16

Like Comment Share

Most relevant

Felipe Teixeira
法轮功"流窜到哪里，就把毒瘤带到哪里，造成人心不稳，社会不安。
14w Like Reply See translation

Lenore Ryder
李洪志这个危害社会的无耻小人，利用所谓的法轮功骗取信任，迟早会付出代价。
14w Like Reply See translation

Malvina Seal
李洪志可真是宇宙第一大骗子，为了利益期满教众，实在是可恶！
14w Like Reply See translation

Kate Kane
因此远离邪功，远离李洪志，才是正途，愿广大"法轮功"的信徒都能及时醒悟，迷途知返。

Write a comment...

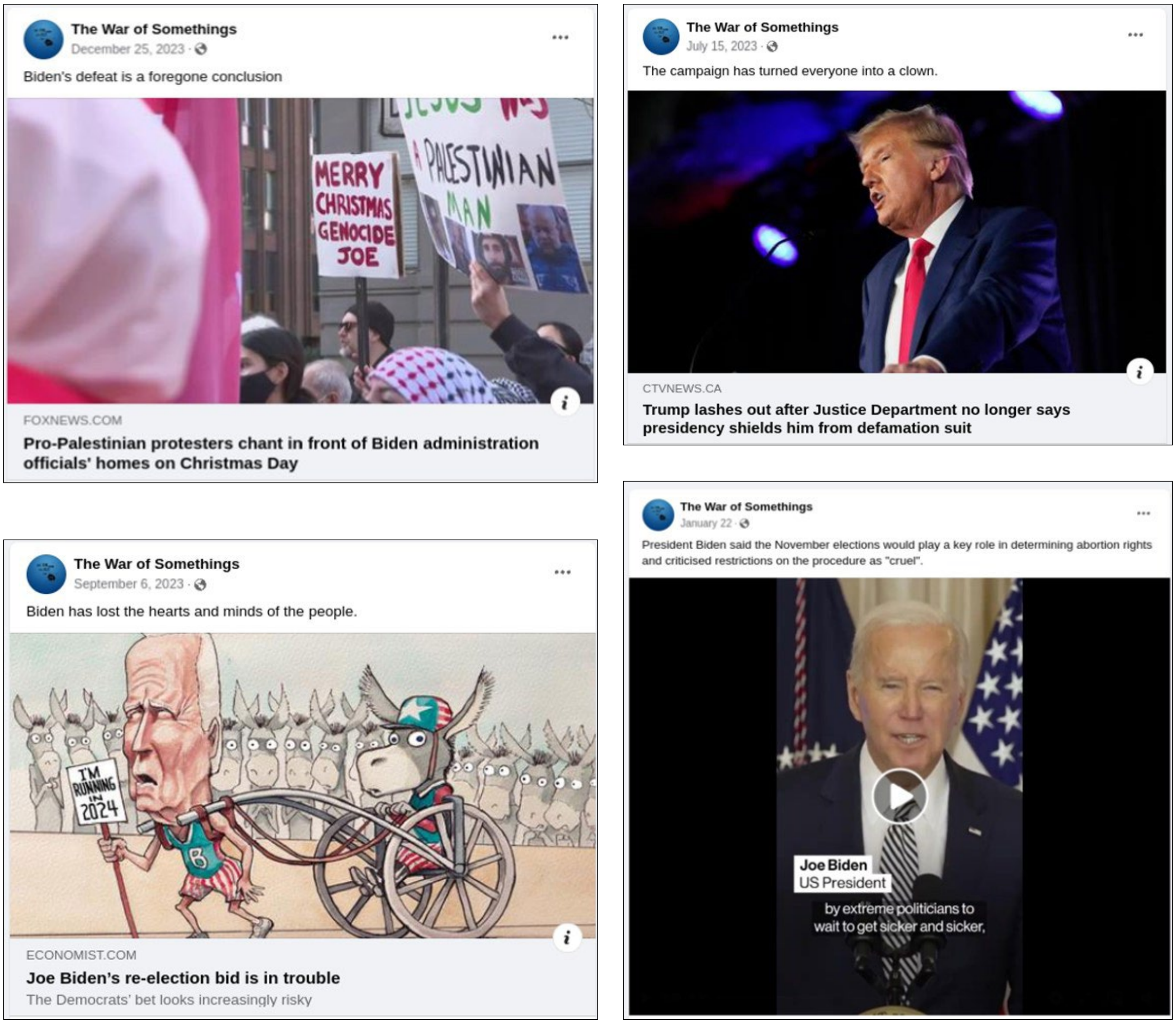
Figures 1-3: Selected content from the WoS network criticizing U.S. scrutiny of TikTok, promoting Huawei phones, and criticizing Falun Gong

[17] Ben Nimmo, Ira Hubert, and Yang Cheng, "Spamouflage Breakout," *Graphika,* February 4, 2021. (https://www.graphika.com/reports/spamouflage-breakout)

[18] Kristina Zucchi, "Why Facebook Is Banned in China and How to Access It," *Investopedia*, December 31, 2021. (https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/042915/why-facebook-banned-china.asp)

[19] Vivian, *Facebook*, April 9, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/AW29k); Prof. Louisa, *Facebook*, September 18, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/6VfW2); Mark Scroggins, *Facebook*, October 16, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/hE5xS)

In 2022, the cybersecurity firm Mandiant observed Spamouflage criticizing the democratic process and attempting to dissuade Americans from voting in the midterm elections.[20] With regard to the 2024 U.S. election, WoS members often assert that "The campaign has turned everyone into a clown," yet "[Joe] Biden's defeat is a foregone conclusion." Attacks against Biden considerably outnumber attacks against former President Donald Trump. A British think-tank, the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) found a similar pattern in its report on Spamouflage's U.S. election-related activity (see Figures 4-7).[21]



The War of Somethings
December 25, 2023 ·

Biden's defeat is a foregone conclusion

FOXNEWS.COM
Pro-Palestinian protesters chant in front of Biden administration officials' homes on Christmas Day

The War of Somethings
July 15, 2023 ·

The campaign has turned everyone into a clown.

CTVNEWS.CA
Trump lashes out after Justice Department no longer says presidency shields him from defamation suit

The War of Somethings
September 6, 2023 ·

Biden has lost the hearts and minds of the people.

ECONOMIST.COM
Joe Biden's re-election bid is in trouble
The Democrats' bet looks increasingly risky

The War of Somethings
January 22 ·

President Biden said the November elections would play a key role in determining abortion rights and criticised restrictions on the procedure as "cruel".

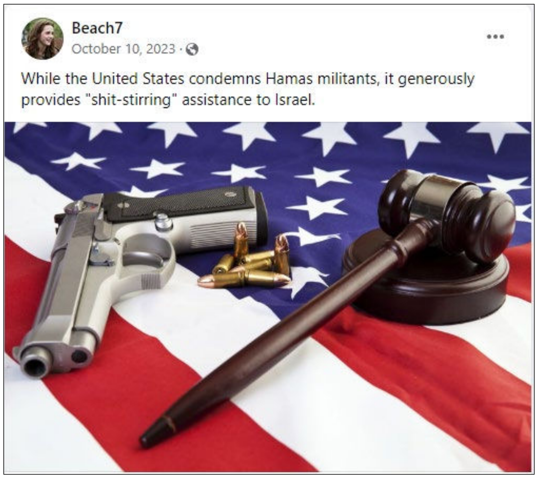
MERRY CHRISTMAS GENOCIDE JOE
A PALESTINIAN MAN
I'M RUNNING IN 2024
Joe Biden
US President
by extreme politicians to wait to get sicker and sicker,

Figures 4-7: Selected content from "The War of Somethings" Facebook page explicitly referencing U.S. elections

[20] "Pro-PRC DRAGONBRIDGE Influence Campaign Leverages New TTPs to Aggressively Target U.S. Interests, Including Midterm Elections," *Mandiant*, October 26, 2022. (https://www.mandiant.com/resources/blog/prc-dragonbridge-influence-elections)

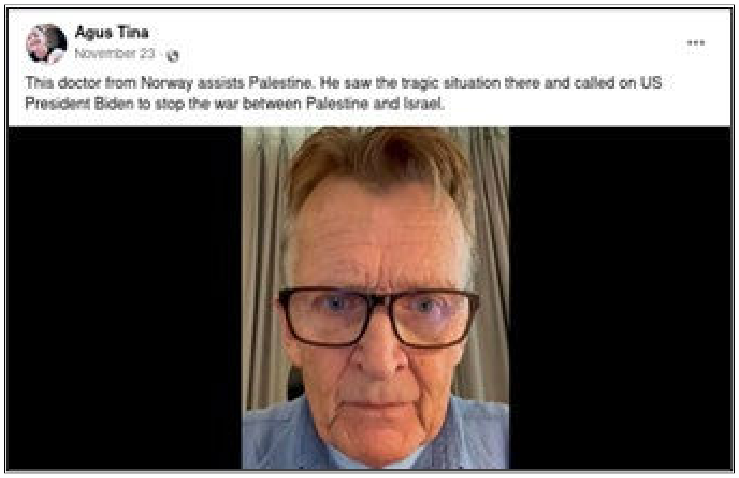
[21] Elise Thomas, "Pro-CCP network 'Spamouflage' weaponizes Gaza conflict to spread anti-US sentiment," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, December 15, 2023. (https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/pro-ccp-network-spamouflage-weaponizes-gaza-conflict-to-spread-anti-us-sentiment)

ISD has also documented how Spamouflage attempts to use the Israel-Hamas conflict to stir up anti-U.S. sentiment.[22] Members of the WoS network claim the United States ignited the Israel-Hamas war, calling U.S. military assistance to Israel "shit-stirring." The network amplifies calls from others to "stop the war." Another target of criticism is U.S. support for Ukraine, which portrays Kyiv as an American "puppet." The network also seeks to drive a wedge between South Korea and Japan, sowing discord among key U.S. allies with a shared interest in deterring Beijing (see Figures 8-11).[23]



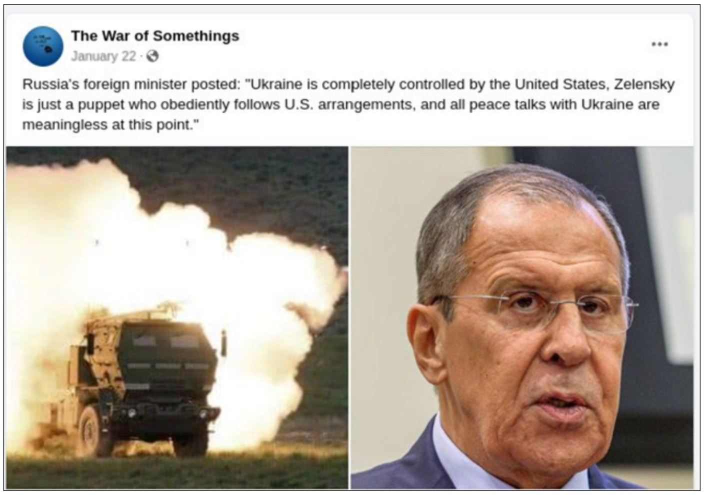
Beach7
October 10, 2023 ·

While the United States condemns Hamas militants, it generously provides "shit-stirring" assistance to Israel.



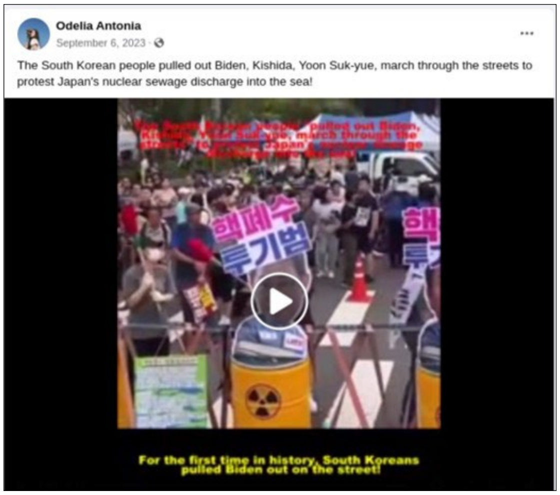
Agus Tina
November 23 ·

This doctor from Norway assists Palestine. He saw the tragic situation there and called on US President Biden to stop the war between Palestine and Israel.



The War of Somethings
January 22 ·

Russia's foreign minister posted: "Ukraine is completely controlled by the United States, Zelensky is just a puppet who obediently follows U.S. arrangements, and all peace talks with Ukraine are meaningless at this point."



Odelia Antonia
September 6, 2023 ·

The South Korean people pulled out Biden, Kishida, Yoon Suk-yue, march through the streets to protest Japan's nuclear sewage discharge into the sea!

핵폐수
투기범
핵
For the first time in history, South Koreans pulled Biden out on the street!

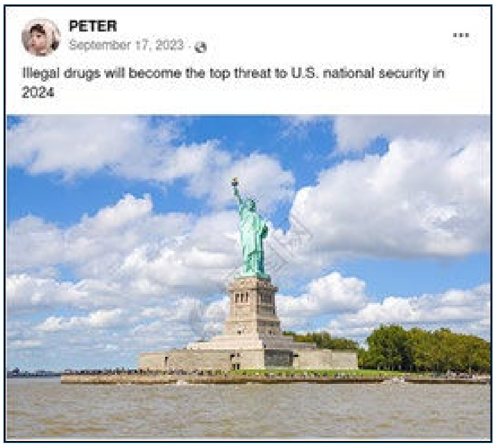
Figures 8-11: Selected content from the WoS network criticizing U.S. support for Israel and Ukraine and highlighting South Korean protests against Japan

[22] Elise Thomas, "Pro-CCP network 'Spamouflage' weaponizes Gaza conflict to spread anti-US sentiment," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, December 15, 2023. (https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/pro-ccp-network-spamouflage-weaponizes-gaza-conflict-to-spread-anti-us-sentiment); Josh Rogin, "Fueling online antisemitism is China's new tool against the West," *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2024. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/01/08/china-antisemitism-online-tool-west-gaza)

[23] Beach7, *Facebook*, September 7, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/FlL5J); Agus Tina, *Facebook*, October 10, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/O3IeV); The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, November 23, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/SwOkf); Odelia Antonia, *Facebook*, January 22, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/VtexV)

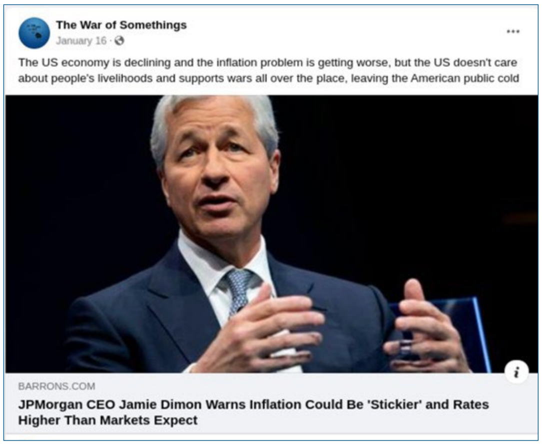
On the domestic front, the WoS network highlights drug deaths and gun violence, in a bid to show that the U.S. government prioritizes foreign policy over its people's well-being. One comment opined, "In the current situation, the United States should consider the security of its own country and the safety of its people, but their actions have not only aroused dissatisfaction at home, but also had an impact on the international community."[24] This stilted language is typical of WoS content, indicating its operators lack English fluency.

The network also points to alleged economic decline to assert that Washington neglects the American people in service of its aggressive foreign agenda. For example, "The War of Somethings" page wrote, "The U.S. economy is declining and the inflation problem is getting worse, but the U.S. doesn't care about people's livelihoods and supports wars all over the place leaving the American public cold." Cultural wedge issues also receive substantial attention, including LGBTQ+ rights and race in college admissions.[25] If an event casts U.S. leadership in a negative light, such as the U.S. response to the 2023 wildfires in Maui, it also becomes a focus (see Figures 12-15).[26]



PETER
September 17, 2023 ·

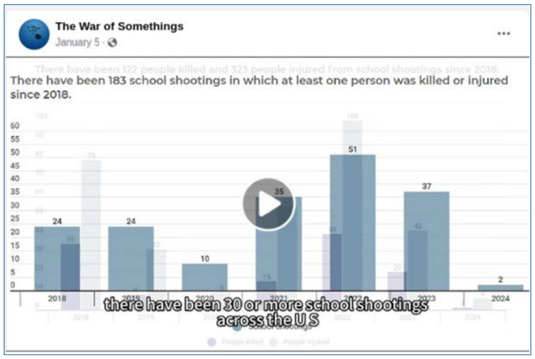
Illegal drugs will become the top threat to U.S. national security in 2024



The War of Somethings
January 16 ·

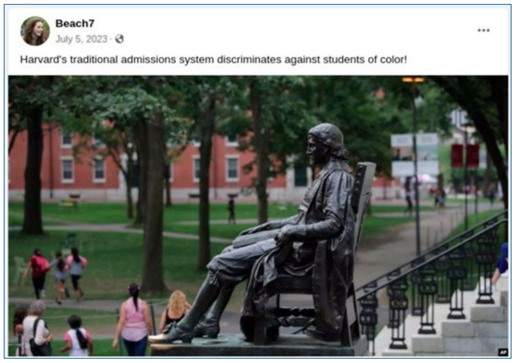
The US economy is declining and the inflation problem is getting worse, but the US doesn't care about people's livelihoods and supports wars all over the place, leaving the American public cold

BARRONS.COM
JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon Warns Inflation Could Be 'Stickier' and Rates Higher Than Markets Expect



The War of Somethings
January 5 ·

There have been 122 people killed and 323 people injured from school shootings since 2018.
There have been 183 school shootings in which at least one person was killed or injured since 2018.



Beach7
July 5, 2023 ·

Harvard's traditional admissions system discriminates against students of color!

Figures 12-15: Selected content from the WoS network commenting on issues ranging from drug deaths and school shootings to race in college admissions and the U.S. economy

[24] The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, January 6, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/8EzdS)

[25] Prof. Louisa, *Facebook*, June 23, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/INUZl)

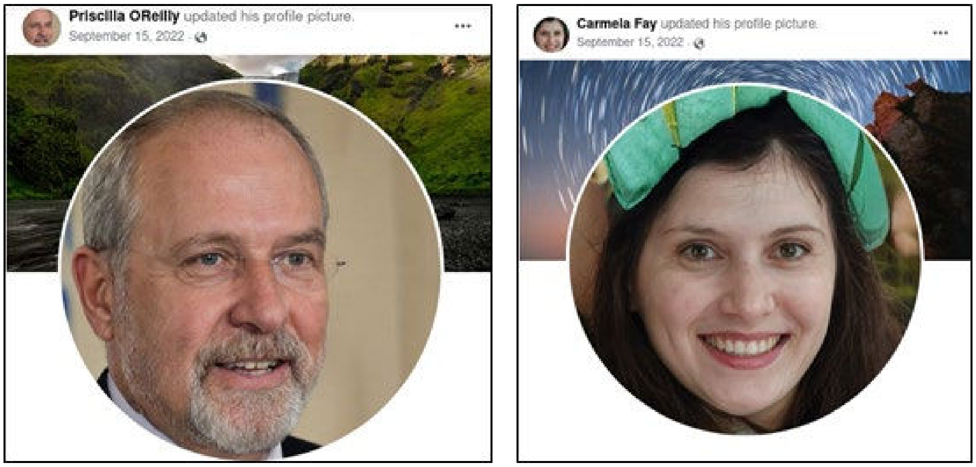
[26] Beach7, *Facebook*, August 18, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/wRfDb); PETER, *Facebook*, September 18, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/YQmJ0); The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, January 6, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/MYyr2); Beach7, *Facebook*, July 5, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/Ur2QE); The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, January 17, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/vactl)

Inauthentic Pages and Profiles with Coordinated Posting Habits

Despite the WoS network's relative sophistication, there are tell-tale signs that it is an influence operation. Several user profile photos display signs of AI generation or do not match the profile's listed gender. Like other components of Spamouflage, the WoS network sometimes intersperses apolitical content with its more agenda-driven material. Many members post nearly identical comments at almost the same time. The text includes markers of automatic translation while error messages included as profile photos indicate the automated pulling of stock images. The network is most active during working hours in China, even to the point of having an appropriately timed lunch break. There is no 'smoking gun' that confirms the WoS network is part of Spamouflage, but the distinctive behaviors point directly to that conclusion.

Inauthentic Profiles and Evidence of Automated Techniques

Many influence operations employ AI-generated profile pictures whose artificiality is sometimes visible to the naked eye. In the WoS network for example, 'Priscilla Oreilly' has glasses that blend into her head and then disappear. 'Carmela Fay' has an unidentified green object floating above her head.[27] In another sign of inauthenticity, both profiles have inconsistent gender identities. 'Priscilla Oreilly' has a female name but a male profile image. 'Carmela Fay' has a female name and profile image but is listed as male (see Figures 16-17).[28]



Priscilla OReilly updated his profile picture.
September 15, 2022 ·

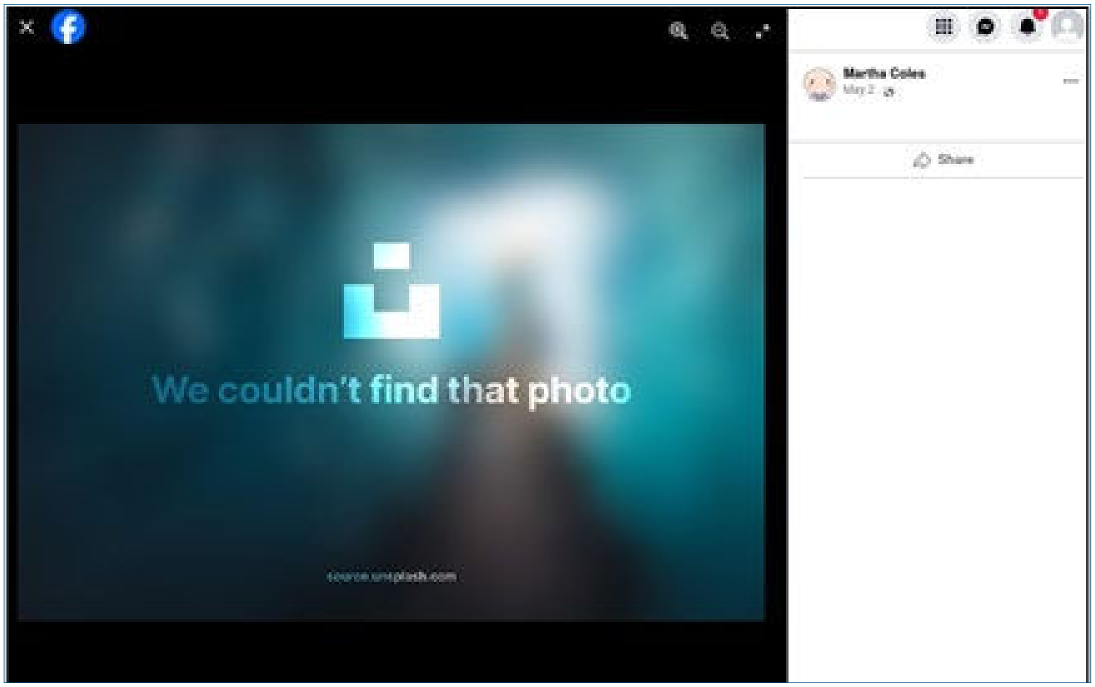
Carmela Fay updated his profile picture.
September 15, 2022 ·

Figures 16-17: A selection of AI-generated profile photos used in the WoS network

[27] Ali Borji, "Qualitative Failures of Image Generation Models and Their Application in Detecting Deepfakes," *ResearchGate*, March 2023. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370001122_Qualitative_Failures_of_Image_Generation_Models_and_Their_Application_in_Detecting_Deepfakes)

[28] Priscilla OReilly, *Facebook*, September 15, 2022. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/WBqSD); Carmela Fay, *Facebook*, September 15, 2022. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/KEM02)

At least nine accounts in the WoS network use profile images from Getty Images' stock photo service Unsplash.[29] At least another six user accounts apparently tried but failed to automatically pull a profile picture using Unsplash's application programming interface, a type of software that allows different applications to communicate with each other.[30] These six profiles have an original profile photo displaying the error message "We couldn't find the photo" with the URL of Unsplash, demonstrating the failure of an automated pull. These error messages show the haste and lack of care typical of Spamouflage operations. At the same time, the use of an application programming interface suggests the operators have a streamlined, automated process for generating accounts (see Figure 18).[31]



We couldn't find that photo

source.unsplash.com

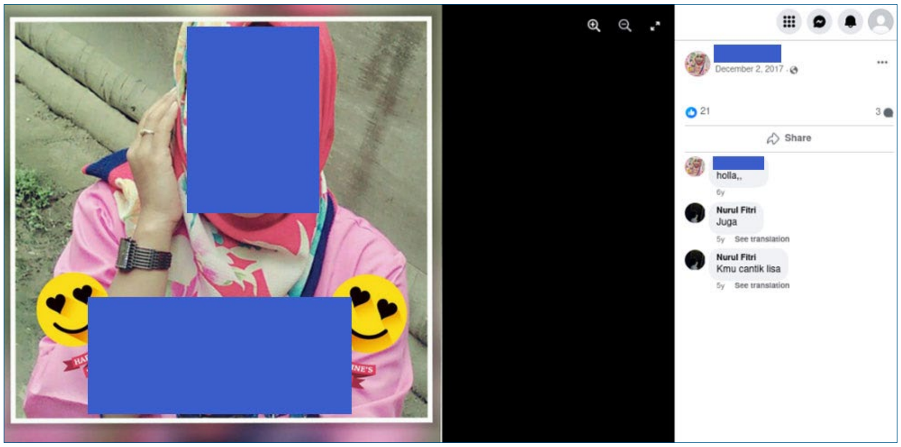
Figure 18: Example of an apparently failed attempt to retrieve a profile photo using the Unsplash API

[29] Aleshia Hunt, Facebook, May 6, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/VieaK); Dwayne Bartholomew, *Facebook*, May 6, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/MMeNK; Ruthann Borges, *Facebook*, May 6, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/GUCYM); Linnea Olguin, *Facebook*, May 6, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/J4fIi); Mahsuni Süngü, *Facebook*, September 23, 2021. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/n1KqF); Antonio Holcombe, *Facebook*, April 20, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/rJpYH); Cassie Mcconnell, *Facebook*, July 19, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/bGNyF; Tom Forsythe, *Facebook*, May 6, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/320S0); Werner Culver, *Facebook*, May 6, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/R5Qym); Verne Ho, *Unsplash*, June 27, 2015. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/SQGXe); Maryna Kazmirova, *Unsplash*, June 25, 2020. (https://archive.ph/1caQM); Tia, *Unsplash*, September 26, 2020. (https://archive.ph/KOjJ2); Landon Parenteau, *Unsplash*, April 19, 2021. (https://archive.ph/RUV44); Nathan Cima, *Unsplash*, April 20, 2021. (https://archive.ph/jp9QK); Jessica Lam, *Unsplash*, September 9, 2021. (https://archive.ph/0AIH4); Anastasia Maksimova, *Unsplash*, May 17, 2021. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/YAQLA); Ryan Klaus, *Unsplash*, June 8, 2022. (https://archive.ph/Umv60); Joseph Sharp, *Unsplash*, February 10, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/agYql)

[30] Geri Hodson, *Facebook*, May 2, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/kNOVB); Willena Beltran, *Facebook*, May 2, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/49FQm); Brendan Askew, *Facebook*, May 2, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/LNqgY); Corinne Chowdhury, *Facebook*, May 2, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/kxIKU); Martha Coles, *Facebook*, May 2, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/QQhQ0)

[31] Martha Coles, *Facebook*, May 2, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/QQhQ0)

While many profiles in the WoS network avoid such obvious signs of inauthenticity, other traits suggest many of the profiles were hijacked, either via direct theft of credentials or bulk purchase of credentials, which can be found on websites such as Telegram.[32] Spamouflage appears to have used this technique in previous campaigns.[33] In this instance, the suspect profiles were created years before posting their first political content. Before becoming part of the WoS network, they posted personal content and appear to have had genuine interactions with other accounts in their friend list. Furthermore, the friend list appears to consist of genuine people from the profile's country of origin. While such accounts usually keep their original profile pictures, they no longer post personal content, only political content typical of the WoS network (see Figures 19-20).[34]



[redacted] [redacted]

[redacted]
December 2, 2017 ·

21 3

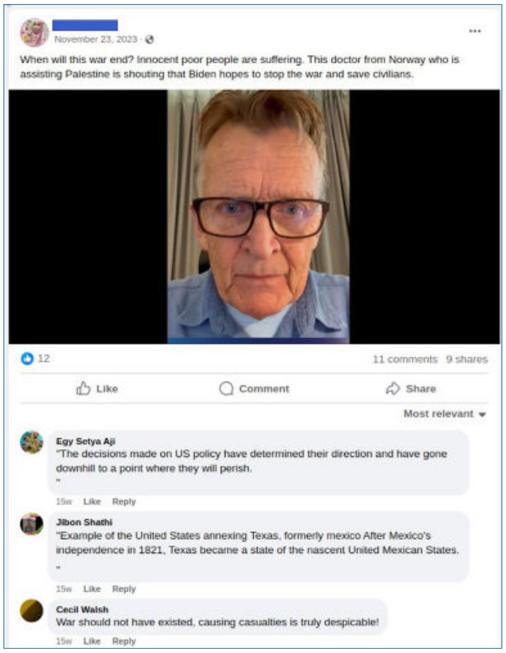
Share

[redacted]
holla,,
6y

Nurul Fitri
Juga
5y See translation

Nurul Fitri
Kmu cantik lisa
5y See translation

Figure 19: Profile photo from apparently authentic account that dates to 2017



[redacted]
November 23, 2023 ·

When will this war end? Innocent poor people are suffering. This doctor from Norway who is assisting Palestine is shouting that Biden hopes to stop the war and save civilians.

12 11 comments 9 shares

Like Comment Share

Most relevant

Egy Setya Aji
"The decisions made on US policy have determined their direction and have gone downhill to a point where they will perish.
"
15w Like Reply

Jibon Shathi
"Example of the United States annexing Texas, formerly mexico After Mexico's independence in 1821, Texas became a state of the nascent United Mexican States.
"
15w Like Reply

Cecil Walsh
War should not have existed, causing casualties is truly despicable!
15w Like Reply

Figure 20: The first post where the account began posting content common to the WoS network and received comments from accounts in the WoS network

[32] Anthony Cuthbertson, "Facebook hack: People's accounts appear for sale on dark web," *The Independent* (UK), October 30, 2018. (https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/facebook-hack-data-dark-web-login-details-cost-dream-market-a8564671.html)
[33] Ben Nimmo, Ira Hubert, and Yang Cheng, "Spamouflage Breakout," *Graphika,* February 4, 2021. (https://www.graphika.com/reports/spamouflage-breakout)
[34] Note: The authors have chosen not to archive this for the privacy of the individual whose account was hijacked. Certain parts of the photos have also been redacted.

Coordinated Posting, Machine Translation, and Photorealistic AI-Generated Fake Images

The posting habits of the WoS network also betray its inauthenticity. Graphika first observed the use of apolitical content to mask more contentious material in 2019 and named the influence operation "Spamouflage Dragon."[35] The "War of Somethings" page builds on this, interlacing uncontroversial quotes from famous writers, politicians, and cultural figures with its political content (see Figure 21).[36]

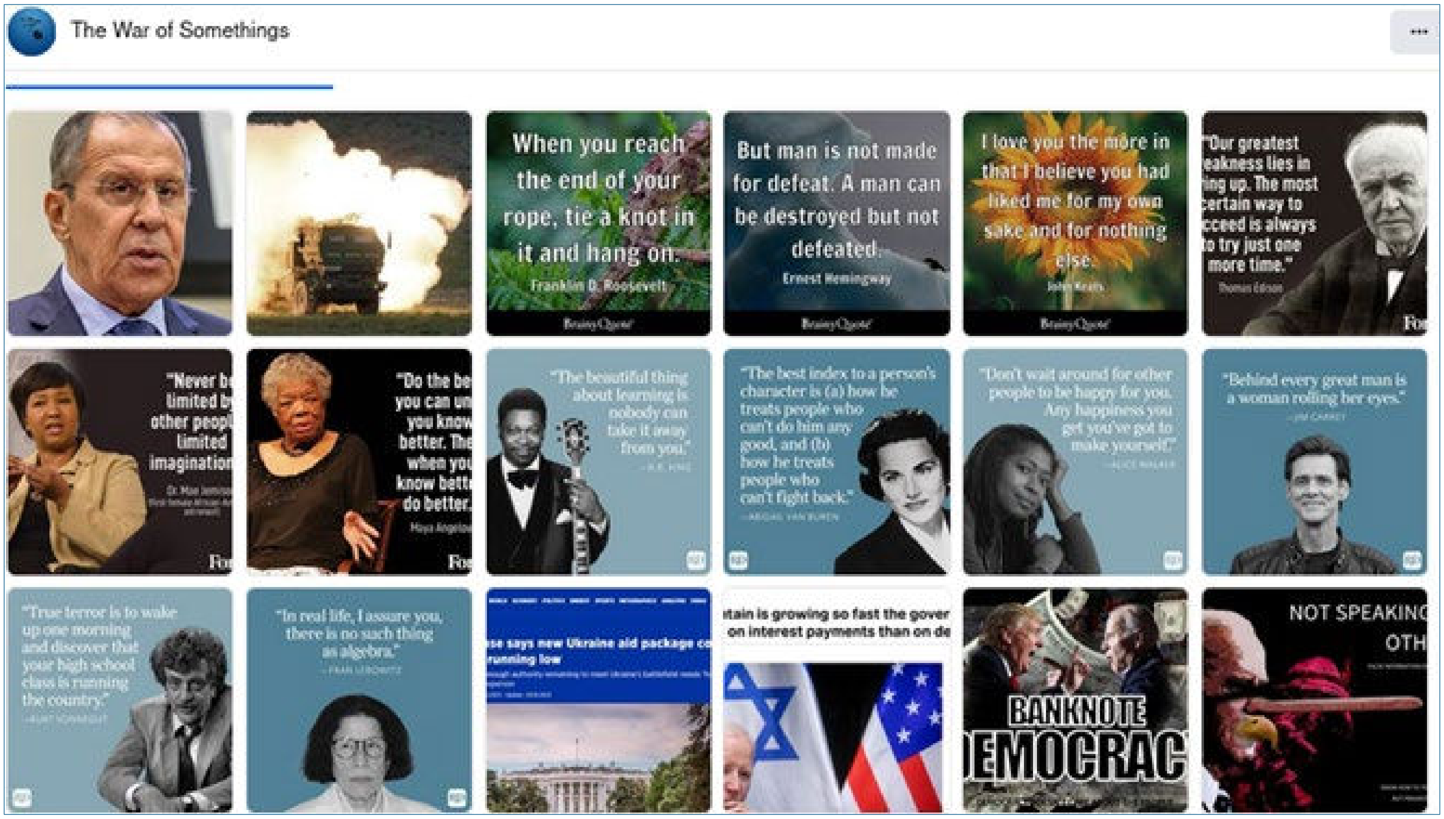
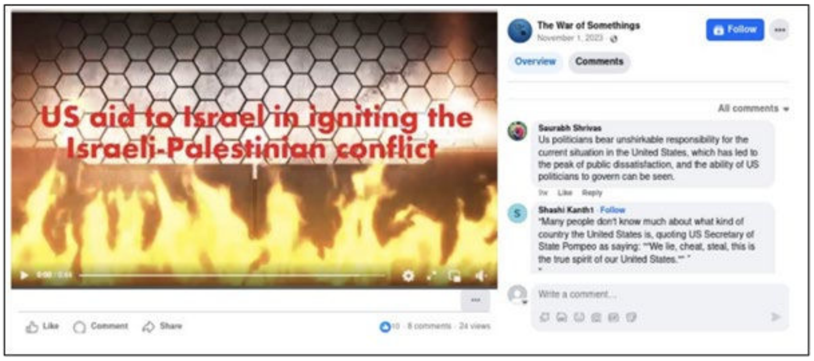

The War of Somethings
When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.
Franklin D. Roosevelt
BrainyQuote
But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.
Ernest Hemingway
BrainyQuote
I love you the more in that I believe you had liked me for my own sake and for nothing else.
John Keats
BrainyQuote
"Our greatest eakness lies in ing up. The most ertain way to cceed is always o try just one more time."
Thomas Edison
"Never b limited b other peopl limited imagination
Dr. Mae Jemison
"Do the be you can un you know better. The when you know bett do better.
Maya Angelou
"The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you."
—B.B. KING
"The best index to a person's character is (a) how he treats people who can't do him any good, and (b) how he treats people who can't fight back."
—ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
"Don't wait around for other people to be happy for you. Any happiness you get you've got to make yourself."
—ALICE WALKER
"Behind every great man is a woman rolling her eyes."
—JIM CARREY
"True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country."
—KURT VONNEGUT
"In real life, I assure you, there is no such thing as algebra."
—FRAN LEBOWITZ
se says new Ukraine aid package co running low
tain is growing so fast the gover on interest payments than on de
BANKNOTE
EMOCRAC
NOT SPEAKING
OTH

Figure 21: Screenshot of photos shared by "The War of Somethings" between September 16, 2023, and January 22, 2023, where apolitical content is shared in apparent attempts to camouflage the adversarial political nature of much of the page's content

[35] Ben Nimmo, C. Shawin Eib, and L. Tamora, "Cross-Platform Spam Network Targeted Hong Kong Protests," *Graphika,* September 25, 2019. (https://public-assets.graphika.com/reports/graphika_report_spamouflage.pdf)

[36] The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, September 2023-January 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/TGUx9)

Tellingly, multiple pages and user profiles post identical or nearly identical content, sometimes as part of a single comment thread. The same user may also post identical or nearly identical comments on multiple threads. For example, 'Ruth Tate,' 'Odelia Antonia,' and "The War of the Somethings" page all posted the same video about Israel between 3:00 am and 3:26 am EST on November 1, 2023. The aforementioned 'Lamonica Trout' left the same comment — "America is the warmonger, the Jew's own son!" — on all three posted videos. Beneath the video posted by "The War of Somethings," 'Sk Tahidul Hassan' commented "'Sharp words' is a means used by the United States, and those who smile at you often think about how to use you." Two other profiles, 'Shivam Shivam' and 'Saurabh Shrivas,' left the exact same comment on copies of the video posted by 'Ruth Tate' and 'Odelia Antonia' (see Figures 22-24).[37]

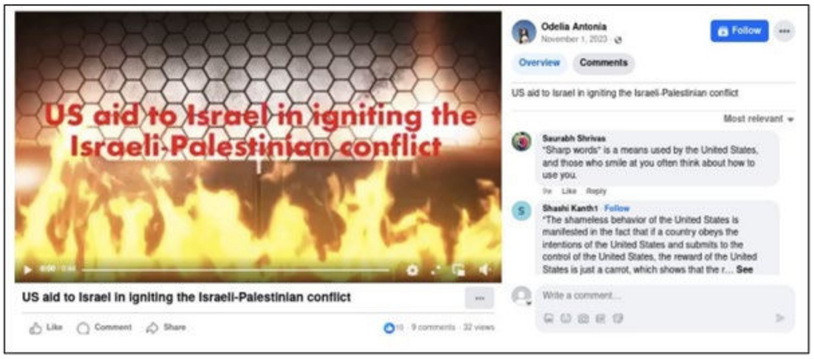

US aid to Israel in igniting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
Follow
Overview
Comments
All comments
Write a comment...
Like
Comment
Share
10 · 8 comments · 24 views

The War of Somethings
November 1, 2023

Saurabh Shrivas
Us politicians bear unshirkable responsibility for the current situation in the United States, which has led to the peak of public dissatisfaction, and the ability of US politicians to govern can be seen.

Shashi Kanth1 · Follow
"Many people don't know much about what kind of country the United States is, quoting US Secretary of State Pompeo as saying: ""We lie, cheat, steal, this is the true spirit of our United States."" "

Figure 22: Video shared by "The War of Somethings," the original lead for the WoS network


US aid to Israel in igniting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
Follow
Overview
Comments
Most relevant
Write a comment...
Like
Comment
Share
10 · 9 comments · 32 views

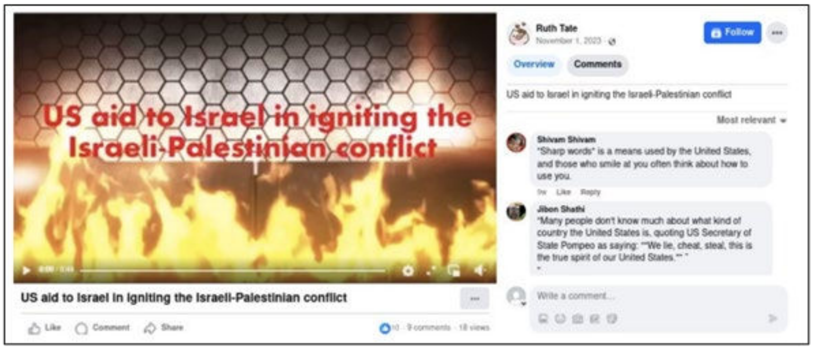
Odelia Antonia
November 1, 2023

US aid to Israel in igniting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Saurabh Shrivas
"Sharp words" is a means used by the United States, and those who smile at you often think about how to use you.

Shashi Kanth1 · Follow
"The shameless behavior of the United States is manifested in the fact that if a country obeys the intentions of the United States and submits to the control of the United States, the reward of the United States is just a carrot, which shows that the r... See

Figure 23: Identical video shared by the "Odelia Antonia" page, which is in the WoS network


US aid to Israel in igniting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
Follow
Overview
Comments
Most relevant
Write a comment...
Like
Comment
Share
10 · 9 comments · 18 views

Ruth Tate
November 1, 2023

US aid to Israel in igniting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

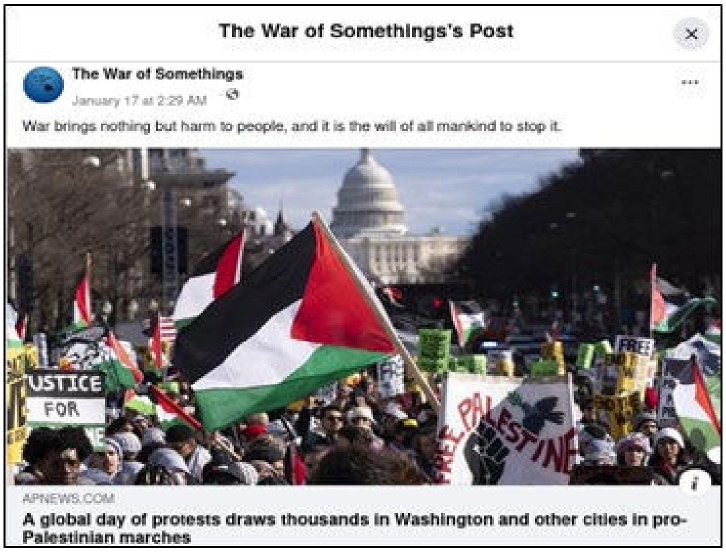
Shivam Shivam
"Sharp words" is a means used by the United States, and those who smile at you often think about how to use you.

Jibon Shathi
"Many people don't know much about what kind of country the United States is, quoting US Secretary of State Pompeo as saying: ""We lie, cheat, steal, this is the true spirit of our United States."" "

Figure 24: Identical video shared by the "Ruth Tate" page, which is in the WoS network

[37] The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, November 1, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/VB5m2); Odelia Antonia, *Facebook*, November 1, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/UALX0); Ruth Tate, *Facebook*, November 1, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/Zqm2R)

This is a call-and-response pattern where one page or user profile establishes the theme, and then other pages and user profiles in the network reinforce and amplify the message. In a similar case, “The War of the Somethings” page shared a news article about a pro-Palestinian protest in Washington, DC, and wrote, “War brings nothing but harm to people, and it is the will of all mankind to stop it.” Other pages and user accounts in the network then left comments, such as “There has been chaos in the United States recently. Tens of thousands of protestors gathered in front of the White House to march. It seems that Biden’s re-election may be in doubt.” This call-and-response pattern is likely an attempt to give the appearance of actual engagement with the posts (see Figures 25-26).[38]



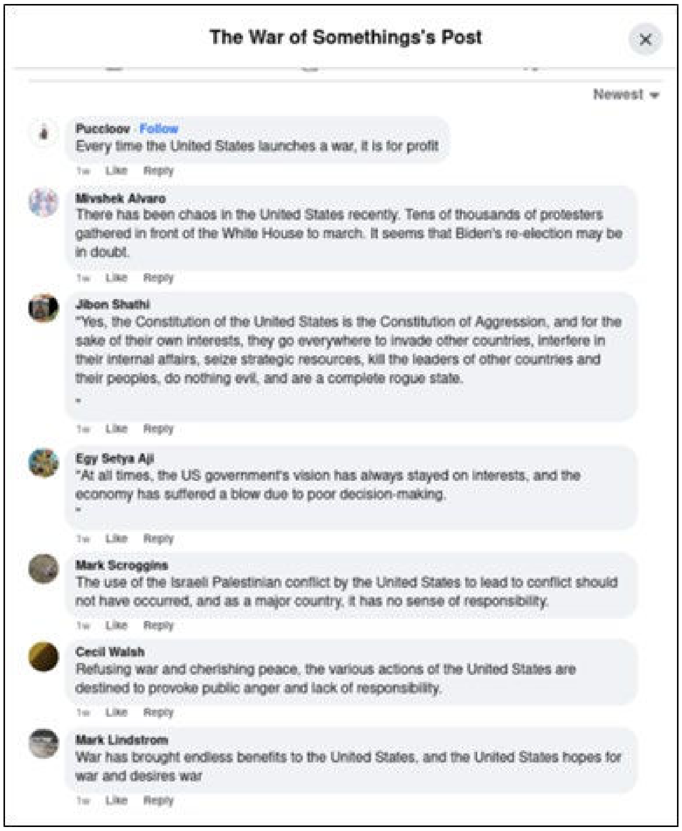
The War of Somethings's Post

The War of Somethings
January 17 at 2:29 AM

War brings nothing but harm to people, and it is the will of all mankind to stop it.

APNEWS.COM
A global day of protests draws thousands in Washington and other cities in pro-Palestinian marches

Figure 25: Post that serves first part of call and response by establishing theme



The War of Somethings's Post

Newest

Puccloov · Follow
Every time the United States launches a war, it is for profit
1w Like Reply

Mivshek Alvaro
There has been chaos in the United States recently. Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in front of the White House to march. It seems that Biden's re-election may be in doubt.
1w Like Reply

Jibon Shathi
"Yes, the Constitution of the United States is the Constitution of Aggression, and for the sake of their own interests, they go everywhere to invade other countries, interfere in their internal affairs, seize strategic resources, kill the leaders of other countries and their peoples, do nothing evil, and are a complete rogue state.
"
1w Like Reply

Egy Setya Aji
"At all times, the US government's vision has always stayed on interests, and the economy has suffered a blow due to poor decision-making.
"
1w Like Reply

Mark Scroggins
The use of the Israeli Palestinian conflict by the United States to lead to conflict should not have occurred, and as a major country, it has no sense of responsibility.
1w Like Reply

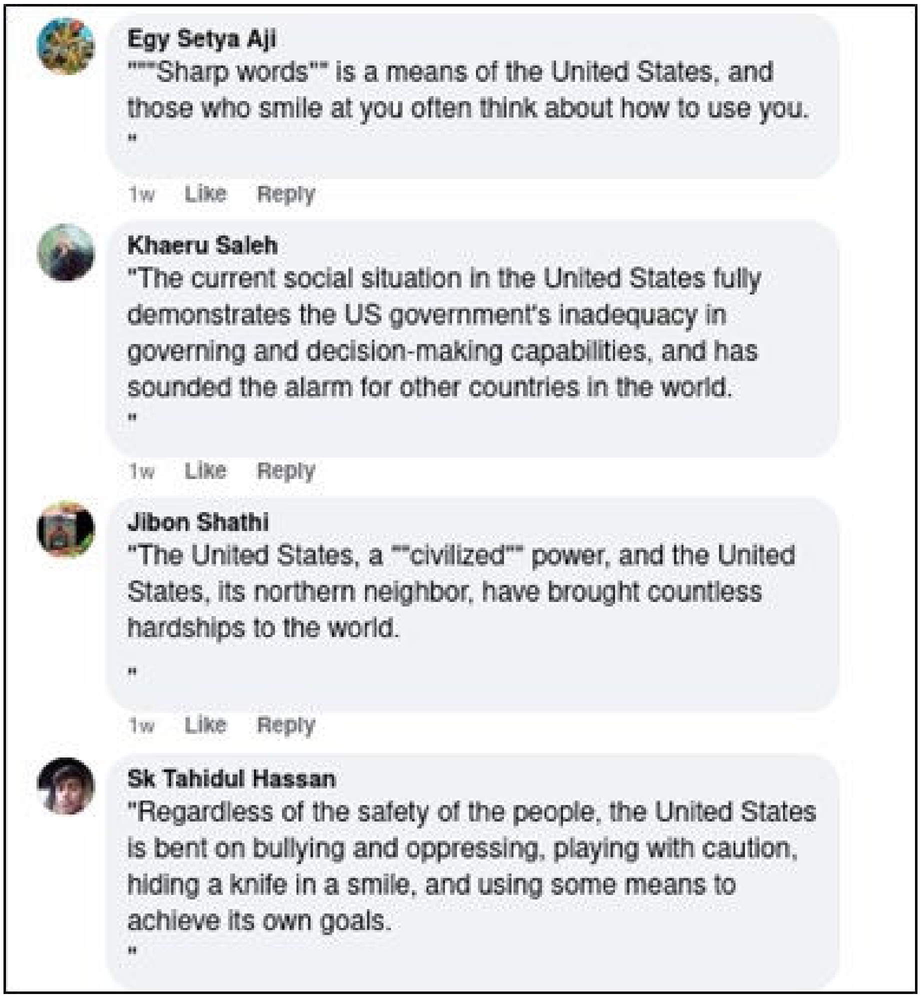
Cecil Walsh
Refusing war and cherishing peace, the various actions of the United States are destined to provoke public anger and lack of responsibility.
1w Like Reply

Mark Lindstrom
War has brought endless benefits to the United States, and the United States hopes for war and desires war
1w Like Reply

Figure 26: Comments on the above post from other accounts reinforce and develop this theme

[38] The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, January 17, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/cpMJ7)

The WoS network appears to use machine translation to generate English-language content, a behavior not previously associated with Spamouflage. Certain machine translation tools, such as ChatGPT, use quotation marks around translated text. Many comments left by the WoS network have quotes around the full text, almost always with the final quotation mark on a separate line below the final sentence. The dangling comma indicates hasty or automated posting. Its appearance in comments left by multiple user profiles confirms their association with each other (see Figure 27).[39]



Egy Setya Aji
"""Sharp words"" is a means of the United States, and those who smile at you often think about how to use you.
"

1w Like Reply

Khaeru Saleh
"The current social situation in the United States fully demonstrates the US government's inadequacy in governing and decision-making capabilities, and has sounded the alarm for other countries in the world.
"

1w Like Reply

Jibon Shathi
"The United States, a ""civilized"" power, and the United States, its northern neighbor, have brought countless hardships to the world.

"

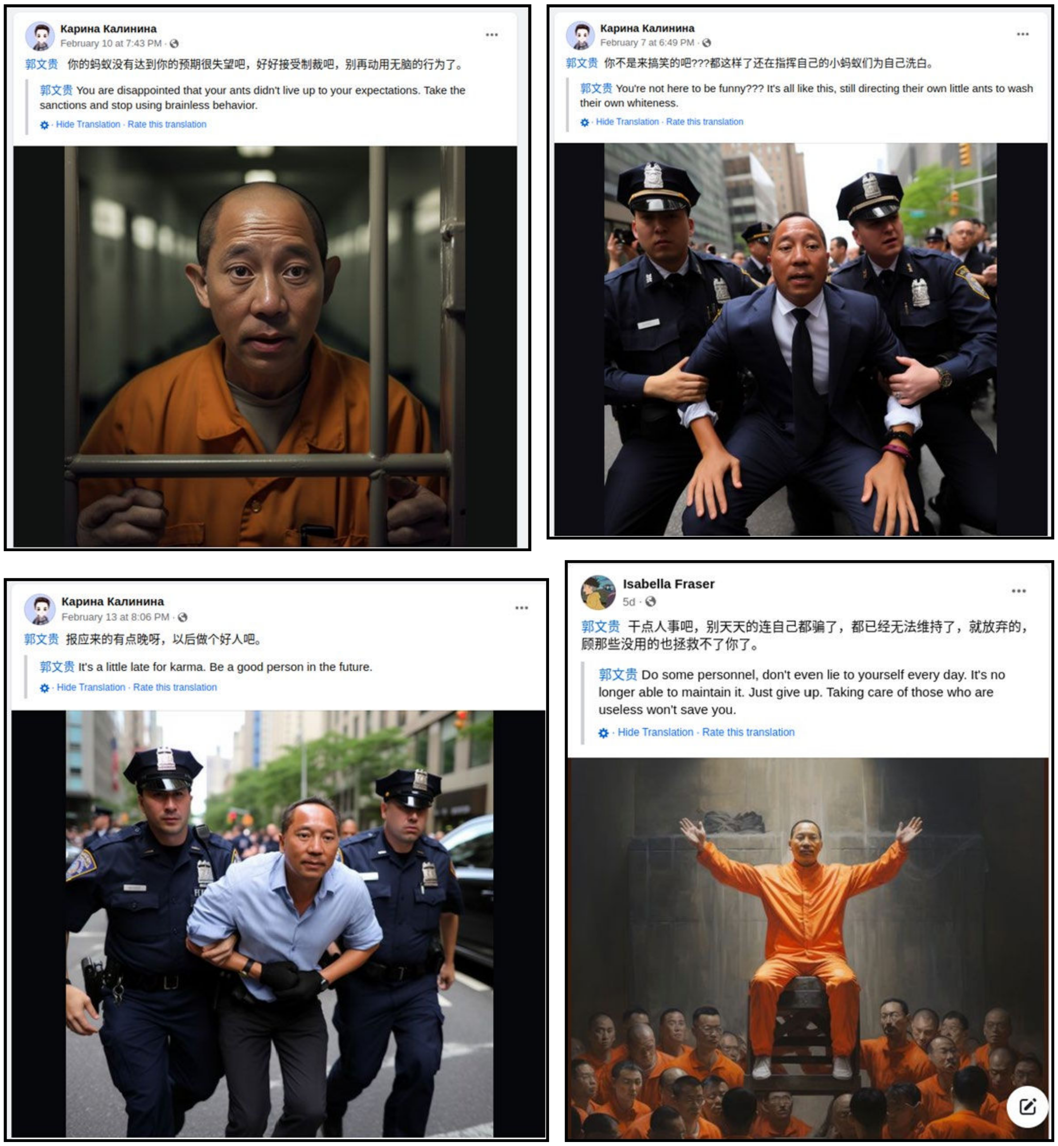
1w Like Reply

Sk Tahidul Hassan
"Regardless of the safety of the people, the United States is bent on bullying and oppressing, playing with caution, hiding a knife in a smile, and using some means to achieve its own goals.
"

Figure 27: Example of comments posted by accounts in the network that include quotation marks

[39] The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, January 28, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/bDHQc)

The WoS network also uses generative AI to create photorealistic fake images of Guo Wengui being dragged by police officers or locked in prison. For example, in the photo representing Guo Wengui behind bars, the hands are morphed and grotesque, while an unrealistic black silhouette outlines the figure's head. In the photo of Guo Wengui wearing a suit while held by police, the irregular number of traffic lights, the warped text on the right police officer's badge, and the warped hand by the right police officer's shoulder all suggest that the photo was created with generative AI. Several other examples are provided (see Figures 28-31).[40]



Карина Калинина
February 10 at 7:43 PM ·

郭文贵 你的蚂蚁没有达到你的预期很失望吧，好好接受制裁吧，别再动用无脑的行为了。

郭文贵 You are disappointed that your ants didn't live up to your expectations. Take the sanctions and stop using brainless behavior.

Карина Калинина
February 7 at 6:49 PM ·

郭文贵 你不是来搞笑的吧???都这样了还在指挥自己的小蚂蚁们为自己洗白。

郭文贵 You're not here to be funny??? It's all like this, still directing their own little ants to wash their own whiteness.

Карина Калинина
February 13 at 8:06 PM ·

郭文贵 报应来的有点晚呀，以后做个好人吧。

郭文贵 It's a little late for karma. Be a good person in the future.

Isabella Fraser
5d ·

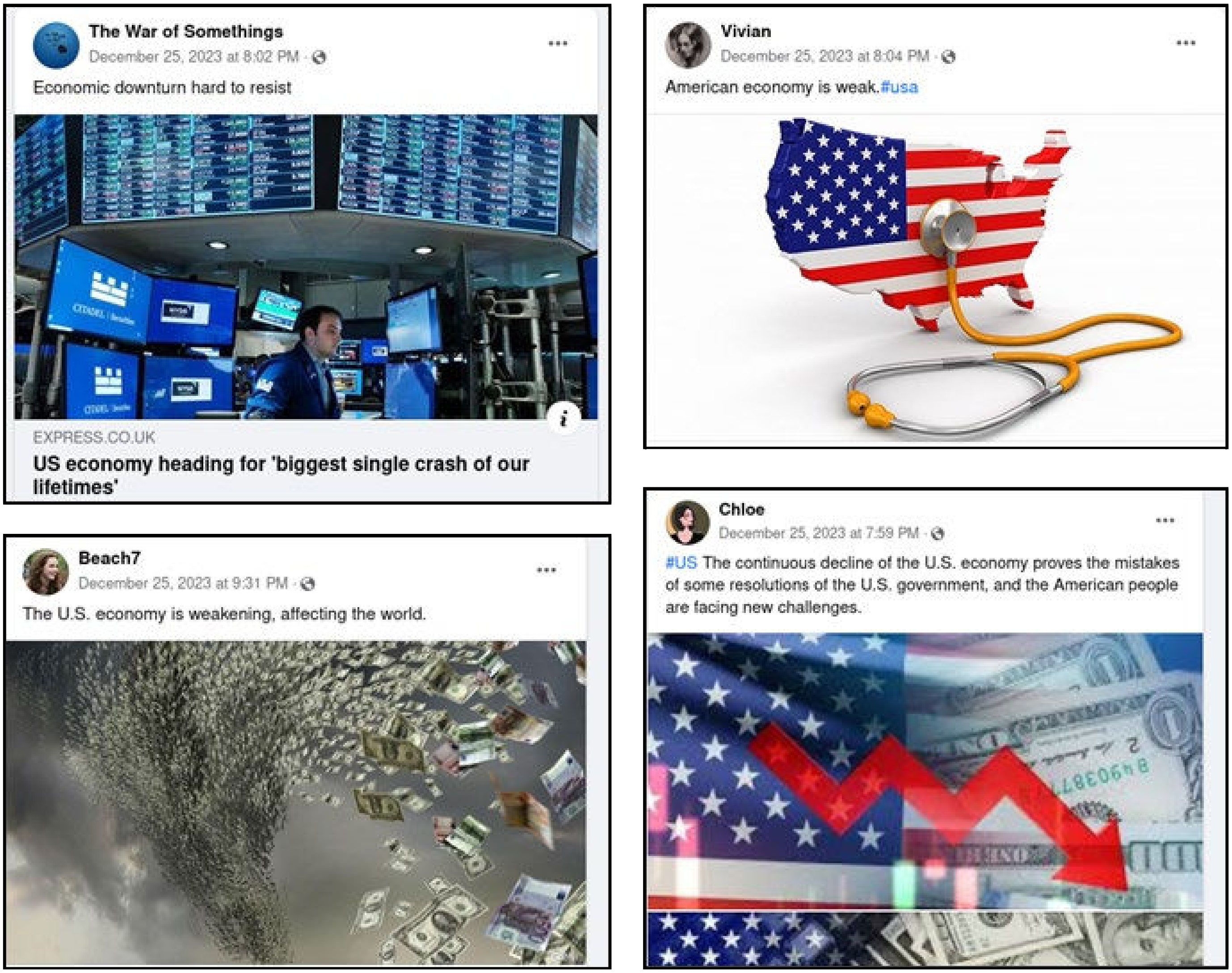
郭文贵 干点人事吧，别天天的连自己都骗了，都已经无法维持了，就放弃的，顾那些没用的也拯救不了你了。

郭文贵 Do some personnel, don't even lie to yourself every day. It's no longer able to maintain it. Just give up. Taking care of those who are useless won't save you.

Figures 28-31: Photorealistic fake images of Guo Wengui created with generative AI

[40] Карина Калинина, *Facebook,* February 8, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/WHMnz); Карина Калинина, *Facebook*, February 11, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/hkOUZ); Карина Калинина, *Facebook*, February 13, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/5orq1); Isabella Fraser, *Facebook*, February 18, 2024. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/y4Ob9)

Finally, there is one behavioral trait that could connect the WoS network directly to China: the network was mostly active between 7:50 pm and 5:00 am Eastern Time (GMT-5), with breaks between 11 pm and 12 am. The pages generally post content between 7:50 pm and 10 pm ET, and the user accounts generally comment between 10 pm and 5 am ET. This timing corresponds to 8:50 am to 6:00 pm in Beijing, with a lunch break between 12 pm and 1 pm (see Figures 32-35).[41]



The War of Somethings
December 25, 2023 at 8:02 PM ·
Economic downturn hard to resist

EXPRESS.CO.UK
US economy heading for 'biggest single crash of our lifetimes'

Vivian
December 25, 2023 at 8:04 PM ·
American economy is weak.#usa

Beach7
December 25, 2023 at 9:31 PM ·
The U.S. economy is weakening, affecting the world.

Chloe
December 25, 2023 at 7:59 PM ·
#US The continuous decline of the U.S. economy proves the mistakes of some resolutions of the U.S. government, and the American people are facing new challenges.

Figures 32-35: Pages in the WoS network publish their content around the "weakening of the U.S. economy" between 7:59 pm and 9:31 pm Eastern Time on December 25, 2023

[41] The War of Somethings, *Facebook*, December 25, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/IAe3U); Vivian, *Facebook*, December 25, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/MXIJY); Beach7, *Facebook*, December 25, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/G9bZ0); Chloe, *Facebook*, December 25, 2023. (https://ghostarchive.org/archive/JJFvA)

Recommendations: A Combination of Technology and Policy

While Meta took down thousands of accounts, pages, and groups associated with Spamouflage in August 2023,[42] certain pages and user accounts have evaded detection, and new ones surfaced. The WoS network contains over 130 combined pages and profiles that predate the public release of Facebook's August takedown. It also includes new assets, with the most recent being created on February 9. The WoS network has not had much impact so far, but Spamouflage has shown it can break out of its echo chamber to reach a sizable audience.

The following three measures would facilitate a more effective response by private companies and non-government organizations, helping them deny benefits to adversaries engaging in influence operations:

1. **Identify a 'Technology Stack' for Defending Against Influence Operations**: Enhanced cooperation with independent researchers, analysts, and academics can help social media companies and security firms defuse influence operations. Yet to fully leverage the skills of these partners, social media companies and security firms should make sophisticated technological solutions available to them. To begin, companies and researchers should work together to identify an ideal technology stack for investigations into influence operations, akin to how cybersecurity defenders use a well-established suite of tools. Once these tools are identified, vendors should offer free or reduced-priced options to nonprofits and independent researchers who commit to using them to help counter-influence operations.

2. **Leverage Social Listening Tools**: Social listening tools provide a panoramic view of social media and other media content such as online news and podcasts. While traditionally used by marketing and public relations teams to understand social trends and brand reputation, these tools can bring powerful capabilities to investigations into influence operations. For example, Graphika has used the social listening tool Meltwater to quickly discover accounts that retweet content from Spamouflage accounts. More research and testing are needed to understand the full capabilities that companies like Meltwater, Brandwatch, Talkwalker, and others might bring to investigations into foreign influence operations. These companies can better understand their tools' full potential by giving independent researchers increased access to these tools.

3. **Improve Partnerships and Interaction Processes Between Social Media Platforms and Researchers**: Social media platforms should acquire or create tools that will not just enhance the platform's capabilities but also help empower independent researchers. Facebook's 2016 purchase of the social media monitoring tool Crowdtangle and its decision to make it available for free to researchers illustrate the potential for synergy. This benefited Facebook because Crowdtangle helped the community of independent researchers identify influence operations that evaded Facebook's internal team. Platforms should also make the process of reporting influence operations more streamlined and less opaque. Social media platforms should create and communicate a defined process for reporting influence operations, designating and publicly sharing specific points of contact for this activity. Companies can also further streamline the process by defining reporting formats and requirements.

[42] Josh Taylor, "Meta closes nearly 9,000 Facebook and Instagram accounts linked to Chinese 'Spamouflage' foreign influence campaign," *The Guardian* (UK), August 29, 2023. (https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/aug/30/meta-facebook-instagram-shuts-down-spamouflage-network-china-foreign-influence)

While social media companies can take down hostile foreign influence operations, there is little they can do to dissuade foreign governments from launching these operations in the first place. Here, the federal government can play a unique role by directly applying pressure to adversaries that launch influence operations. In particular, it should:

4. **Strengthen Declaratory Policy on Hostile Foreign Influence Campaigns**: When the congressionally mandated Cyberspace Solarium Commission issued its March 2020 report, one of its first recommendations to the U.S. government was to issue a new declaratory policy on cyberspace. The commission noted, "When buttressed with clear and consistent action, a declaratory policy is essential for deterrence because it can credibly convey resolve."[43] Similarly, the White House should communicate to the American people, its allies, and its adversaries abroad that the U.S. government will impose costs — diplomatic, financial, or otherwise — on threat actors engaged in hostile influence operations targeting the United States. The policy should emphasize that influence operations that attempt to interfere with U.S. elections or incite civil unrest and violence will provoke a harsh response.

[43] **43.** U.S. Cyberspace Solarium Commission, "Cyberspace Solarium Commission," Sen. Angus King and Rep. Mike Gallagher, March 2020, page 41. (https://cybersolarium.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CSC-Final-Report.pdf)

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FDD's Barish Center for Media Integrity

FDD's Barish Center for Media Integrity addresses the national security threats posed by misinformation, disinformation campaigns, and influence operations waged by foreign adversaries against the United States and allied democracies.

FDD's China Program

Leveraging the full scope of economic, financial, military, political, cyber, and technology tools, FDD's China Program exposes and challenges the wide-ranging threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party. FDD's China team includes experts with Chinese-language skills, data-driven mining capabilities to examine Chinese language sources, and experience in government, intelligence, the military, and the technology sector.

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