

## US-led Information War Targets Southeast Asia (and China)

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Asia-Pacific Research, August 09, 2021

[Land Destroyer Report](#) 8 August 2021

Region: [Asia](#), [China](#), [South-East Asia](#)

Theme: [Media](#), [Politics](#)

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*Protests have spread from Hong Kong, to Thailand, and now to Myanmar and Malaysia. They began long before the COVID-19 crisis began, but the driving forces behind them are cynically taking advantage of the current crisis to draw more people out into what were otherwise unpopular, artificial opposition movements.*

The protest leaders in each respective nation openly reference what they call an “ASEAN Spring” or “Asian Spring,” and have adopted symbols and slogans common across the regional protests. Protest leaders refer to this collective, regional movement as the “Milk Tea Alliance,” propped up by several common pillars.

The BBC in its [article](#), “Milk Tea Alliance: Twitter creates emoji for pro-democracy activists,” would claim:

*The alliance has brought together anti-Beijing protesters in Hong Kong and Taiwan with pro-democracy campaigners in Thailand and Myanmar.*

“Anti-Beijing” is the key takeaway.

There are also several common threads between these movements that were deliberately unmentioned by the BBC including US government funding behind each and every opposition movement. It is no secret the US seeks to encircle and contain China – sponsoring “anti-Beijing” movements across Asia obviously fits into that strategy.

The fact that a US-based social media corporation – Twitter – has as a matter of company policy decided to endorse and promote the movement should raise immediate concern. Twitter, along with other US-based tech giants like Facebook and Google (which owns YouTube) have openly worked with the US State Department in helping to advance US foreign policy objectives for over a decade now.

The 2011 “Arab Spring” provided a stark example of not only US interference and even

military intervention ushered in by engineered uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), but also an example of US-based tech giants' role in helping.

The New York Times in its [article](#), "U.S. Groups Helped Nurture Arab Uprisings," would note the role of US government funding in building up and unleashing opposition movements across MENA.

The article reported:

*A number of the groups and individuals directly involved in the revolts and reforms sweeping the region, including the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and grass-roots activists like Entsar Qadhi, a youth leader in Yemen, received training and financing from groups like the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute and Freedom House, a nonprofit human rights organization based in Washington, according to interviews in recent weeks and American diplomatic cables obtained by WikiLeaks.*

The New York Times would also mention the role of US-based tech giants in helping train, organize, and unleash unrest across MENA, stating:

*Some Egyptian youth leaders attended a 2008 technology meeting in New York, where they were taught to use social networking and mobile technologies to promote democracy. Among those sponsoring the meeting were Facebook, Google, MTV, Columbia Law School and the State Department.*

Then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would address the "technology meetings" in prerecorded messages played in front of participants. In one address, recorded in 2009, Clinton would claim:

*You are the vanguard of a rising generation of citizen activists who are using the latest technological tools to catalyze change, build movements, and transform lives and I hope this conference provides an opportunity for you to learn from each other and discover the tools and techniques that will open new doors for activism and empowerment when you return home all over the world.*

Of course, upon returning home to MENA – and amid regional economic turmoil – these US-funded, trained, and equipped opposition groups drew dissatisfied people into the streets to serve as cover for US-sponsored regime change across the region.

A portent of just how far the US sought to take its "Arab Spring" was revealed by late US Senator John McCain. In The Atlantic's 2011 [article](#), "The Arab Spring: 'A Virus That Will Attack Moscow and Beijing'," McCain would be quoted as saying:

*A year ago, Ben-Ali and Gaddafi were not in power. Assad won't be in power this time next year. This Arab Spring is a virus that will attack Moscow and Beijing.*

Had Russia not intervened in Syria in 2015, the nation may have fallen. The US' proxy militant force would have moved onward to Iran and then to southern Russia and into western China where US efforts were already long underway to spark violent separatism in both regions.

The blunting of Washington's "Arab Spring" campaign meant that attempts to light

additional regions on fire – Eastern Europe to Russia’s west and along China’s periphery in Southeast Asia – were slow-going. Attempts to install client regimes in Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand were blunted over the years by a combination of short-term political concessions and domestic military intervention.

Today, however, like before the “Arab Spring” transformed into regional war, economic crisis looms over the region and dissatisfaction among the population driven by a crisis ASEAN governments were not responsible for and have little ability to control is being eagerly exploited by US-backed opposition groups.

ASEAN governments and policies of lockdowns have caused dissatisfaction. But this would not be enough to create dangerous destabilization. It is instead ASEAN’s failure on the information battlefield that risks making the crisis worse.

ASEAN has failed to secure its information space. Each individual ASEAN member save for Cambodia and Vietnam, have had their information space entirely monopolized by US-backed media platforms and US-based social media networks.

Facebook and Twitter have openly involved themselves in the internal political affairs of both Thailand and Myanmar in recent months in support of US-backed protests. After Myanmar’s military took power in February, Twitter and Facebook swiftly moved to remove the accounts of the new central government.

Facebook for example would [exclaim](#):

*Today, we are banning the remaining Myanmar military (“Tatmadaw”) and military-controlled state and media entities from Facebook and Instagram, as well as ads from military-linked commercial entities.*

In Thailand, Twitter in an official [announcement](#) would claim:

*Our investigation uncovered a network of accounts partaking in information operations that we can reliably link to the Royal Thai Army (RTA). These accounts were engaging in amplifying pro-RTA and pro-government content, as well as engaging in behavior targeting prominent political opposition figures.*

The use of the term “reliably link” means Twitter had no evidence. In reality, it was simply purging accounts retweeting and liking posts made by official Thai military accounts. Meanwhile, Twitter not only allows the open abuse of its platform by the US-backed opposition to carry out actual coordinated inauthentic behavior, it also openly encourages Thai Twitter users to break Thai criminal defamation laws.

In an [announcement](#) made in May 2021, Twitter would tell Thai users that its regulations did not recognize Thai defamation laws and would even provide a special hotline to link those charged under Thai law with organizations providing free legal aid. These included US government-funded “Thai Lawyers for Human Rights” and “iLaw.” The goal is to undermine both Thai law and the social stability Thai law seeks to maintain.

While US-based social media networks have been quick to suspend accounts questioning Western COVID-19 policies or Western pharmaceutical corporations and their vaccines – these same networks allow disinformation to spread like wildfire across ASEAN especially in regards to claims involving China’s Sinovac vaccine and disinformation aimed at inflating

the health and economic impact of the crisis.

The goal is to fan the flames of fear, hysteria, and more importantly, anger, to help boost attendance at wavering street protests backed by the US and to redirect national energy from overcoming the current crisis toward destabilizing the region further.

Partly because of COVID-19, the opportunity for an otherwise unlikely US gambit of destabilizing ASEAN and encircling China with either hostile US client regimes, or destabilized failed states now exists. But it is also partly – and perhaps mainly – because ASEAN has utterly failed to secure its information space. A war is now raging on a battlefield ASEAN governments have no soldiers on, and it is losing.

ASEAN nations have increasingly turned to Russia and China to meet more traditional national security threats, purchasing military equipment like tanks, warplanes, helicopters, and naval vessels. However, Russia and China – who have successfully defended their own respective information spaces – have the human and technical resources to potentially “export” the means for ASEAN states to defend their information space as well – not only in the form of “information warfare,” but also in the form of helping build local social media alternatives to US-based corporations – breaking the monopoly these foreign corporations hold over ASEAN’s information space, and giving the power to govern and protect it back to the region itself.

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