Day One - Thursday, November 21, 2019

How Technology is Contributing to the Rise of Autocracy and the Decline of Democracy

All conference panel sessions are being held at Perry World House, 3803 Locust Walk

8:30am-9:30am Sign-In and Continental Breakfast

9:30am-9:45am Welcome Remarks

9:45am-11:00am Session One - Why Technology Favors the Autocrat

Moderator: Professor Claire Finkelstein

In his 2018 article published in The Atlantic, “Why Technology Favors Tyranny,” Yuval Noah Harari identifies four reasons why technology will contribute to the rise of autocracy: 1) the common person’s fear of irrelevance; 2) rise of job volatility and obsolescence resulting from automation and artificial intelligence; 3) loss of political power due to citizens’ loss of economic worth; and 4) transfer of authority to machines resulting in less personal decision-making. This session will delve into these ideas along with other tech-related factors contributing to autocracy recharge: more visible technology; today’s political tribalism; technology’s ability to centralize all information (and thus power); and democratic leaders’ failure to get disruptive technology on the global agenda.

11:00am-11:30am Break

11:30am-12:45pm Session Two - The Tech Tools: The Means to an Authoritarian End

Moderator: Clay Fuller

There are many technologies that are maturing or in development that will result in almost endless watershed moments in data collection, delivery, and analysis and processing. This session will review the technologies and how authoritarian regimes are using/will use them to mislead and monitor, including:

- Micro targeting to influence speech and thought and “social media 0.10”
- Surveillance cameras (online and real world) and sensors
- Artificial intelligence and its applications: “deep fakes” or digital audio, video, and image forgeries; lifelike bots; speech synthesis; facial recognition
- Neural networks that analyze massive data sets resulting in centralized, exploitable information
- Digital currency (“crypto-anarchy”) and blockchain

Participants will also assess the likelihood of and extent to which these tools may be used by U.S. actors (and actors in other democracies) to legitimize and advance autocratic doctrine domestically (e.g., via extreme nationalist messaging).

12:45pm-2:00pm Lunch in the Perry World House Solarium

2:00pm-3:15pm Session Three - The Case of China and its Progeny

Moderator: Professor Jacques deLisle
In May of 2018, Chinese president Xi Jinping said at an academician meeting that for the State to "achieve the great goal of building a socialist modernized nation and realize the Chinese dream of a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, [China] must have strong scientific and technological strength and innovation capabilities." China chose to innovate for itself, not source technology from the rest of the world, and it has made staggering progress. This session will examine China's developing technologies and their current and anticipated use for population and government control, as well as the country's exports of technology and management know-how to regime customers like Zimbabwe. The panel will address China's "social credit system," "smart" city plans, tech-driven policing in the region Xinjiang, and Huawei's security-threatening 5G communications network.

3:15pm-4:00pm Break

Public Keynote Presentation: How Technology Advances Autocracy and What Democracies Can Do About It - Michael Fitts Auditorium - Penn Law

Moderator: Professor Claire Finkelstein

Panelists:

David Cole, ACLU Legal Director, Hon. George J. Mitchell Professor in Law and Public Policy, Georgetown Law

Kara Frederick, Technology and National Security Fellow, Center for a New American Security

Richard Fontaine, Executive Director, Center for a New American Security

Marwan M. Kraidy, Professor of Communication, the Anthony Shadid Chair in Global Media, Politics and Culture, and the Founding Director of the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication (CARGC) at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania

4:00pm-6:00pm

6:00pm-7:00pm Public Reception - The Haaga Lounge (The Goat) - Penn Law

7:00pm-8:30pm Participant Dinner - THE STUDY HOTEL - 20 South 33rd Street, Philadelphia, PA

Day Two - Friday, November 22, 2019

How To Save Democracy and the Rule of Law: Responses in the United States and Abroad

8:30am-9:30am Sign-In and Continental Breakfast

9:30am-10:45am Session Four - The Role of Policymaking and Legislation, and the Global Stage

Moderator: Ms. Alexandra Meise

There is debate in the United States that legislating some form of government oversight of social media practices is anti-First Amendment, and regulation directed at other tech platforms raises privacy concerns. Some advocate eliminating the advertising revenue model of big technology companies. Others maintain that misinformation campaigns and data protection deficiencies are national security threats, and social media and other technology companies’ self-regulation is (and will be) inadequate, resulting in the need for government intervention or oversight. Is it possible to balance commercial enterprise values, free speech, and privacy issues against national security concerns to establish a workable regulated environment? What are the options? How have other democratic states addressed these issues? And is there a body to lead the placement of the autocrat-technology threat on the international political agenda?

10:45am-11:15am Break

11:15am-12:30pm Session 5 - Media Response: Transparency, Outreach and Collaboration with Tech's Private Sector

Moderator: Mr. Shawn Turner

In its report “Crisis in Democracy: Renewing Trust in America,” the Knight Commission on
Trust, Media and Democracy stated that “navigating the new media environment and separating truth from nontruth will be more challenging as emerging technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, bots and deepfakes, become more sophisticated.” This session will examine what publishers, journalists, and online news distributors can do to help defend against tech assaults, including using transparency to restore public trust, incorporating more diversity of views to fight polarization, educating the public on new aspects of digital literacy, and investing in and using new technologies to defeat disinformation via their solo efforts or through collaborations with technology companies or both.

12:30pm-1:45pm  Lunch in the Perry World House Solarium

1:45pm-3:00pm  Session 6 - The Role of Education: Civics and Media Literacy

Moderator: Dean Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker

This session will examine what is meant by civic engagement and participatory governance as well as the relevance of existing models to render autocratic tech-assaults ineffective. What role do we expect individuals to play (social contract, morality, and ethics)? In this country, many believe that there is a crisis in civic education. What steps can be taken to elevate the knowledge and critical thinking of both young students and adults to help guard against anti-democratic circumvention of the U.S. Constitution? Civic education arguably must go beyond constitutional checks and balances and the political process. Must it now incorporate lessons on misinformation and other tactics used by autocracies so persons become more media and digitally literate as well as civic literate? And what is the role of government, NGOs, and the legal profession in instilling this knowledge?

3:00pm-3:30pm  Concluding Remarks - A Blueprint for Protecting Democracy and the Rule of Law

What are the priorities for government leadership, policymakers, the press, the private sector, and individuals to address autocrats’ high-tech assaults? How do we corral and reconcile competing interests to form a united and effective front? How can we use the same technology to advance democracy? What is being done now? What is next?