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Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne



Ambassador Milton A. Wolf Seminar

on Media and Diplomacy 2024

Bots, Bombs, and Bilateralism: Evolutions in Media and Diplomacy

Vienna, Austria

APRIL 8-10, 2024

About The Milton Wolf Seminar Series

Launched in 2001, the Milton Wolf Seminar Series addresses developing issues in diplomacy and journalism – both broadly defined. The University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School for Communication, The American Austrian Foundation (AAF), and the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna (DA) have jointly organized this seminar since 2010. The Austrian Marshall Foundation has supported the Milton Wolf Seminar since 2017. Panelists include individuals working for state and multilateral organizations, journalists, civil society actors, representatives from media and internet companies, and academics. The Milton Wolf Seminar Series particularly emphasizes the contribution of young and mid-career scholars, and each year a select group of outstanding graduate students are invited to attend the seminar in Vienna as Emerging Scholar fellows.

The organizers envision the Milton Wolf Seminar as a meeting place for all participants to share their perspectives, formulate new ideas, and identify areas for further research and discussion. While the seminar incorporates various speakers and panels, we design it as a two-day continuing conversation in which all participants are encouraged to openly engage in dialogue and explore potential synergies and future collaborations. To encourage an open exchange of ideas, seminar attendance is limited only to invited participants and students. We also ask that participants and panelists attend all sessions and events, whenever possible.





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About the 2024 Seminar

The number of armed conflicts is higher today than at any point since World War II. Elections are increasingly contested by sophisticated disruptors. Migration, driven by conflict, climate change, and inequality, has pushed the limits of government capacity and human suffering. Trust in government, economic institutions, and the media continues to decline in countries around the world. Concurrent and antiparallel with this dislocation and civilizational entropy is the rise of evermore sophisticated AI on an unfettered trajectory seemingly out of sync with the global conditions in which it operates. Precise, creative, and algorithmically advanced, AI has the potential to catalyze both order and disorder in the international system.

While the long-term consequences of AI remain uncertain, AI is a paradigm-shifting, explosive tool sitting on a powder keg of war and unrest, irrational actors, and rogue states and operating largely in a regulatory vacuum. The Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and other social movements in the 2010s suggested that the internet was a tool of liberation and social connection. Advances in digital platforms promised the digitization of global communications, freedom from state control, improvements in freedom of expression, egalitarian control of communications flows, and enhanced ability for diplomats to engage with and elicit feedback from foreign publics. Fast forward to 2024, and discussions about the promise of new media technologies have taken a dystopian turn. Their double-edged affordances now conceal rather than reveal, create disorder and information overload, which states like Russia and China leverage by corrupting digital information flows and sabotaging platforms as companions to their international broadcasting and other overt propagandist activities. This mayhem and discord, disrupted elections, vaccine disinformation, surveillance of journalists, hacking, astroturfing, and the intensification of the fog of war, threatens the international order. Clarity and truth have become ever more critical to survival and social order amidst the rise of global authoritarianism and AI-enhanced information environments.

The 2024 Milton Wolf seminar will unpack the implications of these trends for human rights, labor, information production and access, journalism, diplomacy, and democracy. It will explore how these larger tech trends are manifesting in the state-targeting of journalists, AI-generated journalism, and increasingly fragile democracies. Discussions will focus not only on these dystopian turns but on potential solutions. Can social networks, organizations and institutions that make up the global order find new harmonies through renewed reliance on analog communication tools, trusted interlocutors, and networks, and revised and robust digital governance structures?



AGENDA

Monday, April 8, 2024

6:00 – 8:00 PM Welcome Reception and Registration (Diplomatic Academy)

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

9:00 – 10:00 Welcome Tea & Introduction

- **Katharine Eltz-Aulitzky**, Executive Director, The American Austrian Foundation
- **Emil Brix**, Director, Diplomatic Academy Vienna
- **Wolfgang Petritsch**, President, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation
- **Amelia Arsenault**, Chief Public Diplomacy Research Officer, US Department of State
- **Todd Wolfson**, Co-Director, Media, Inequality & Change Center, Annenberg School for Communication, UPENN

10:00 – 12:00 Session 1: Diplomacy on the Precipice: Realignment in Geopolitics

As geopolitical crises proliferate, diplomacy has never been more important or more challenging. Just as Twitter and Facebook became status quo public diplomacy tools, the landscape shifted, bots, deep fakes, ChatGPT, AI tools, the dystopian shift from Twitter to X, and platforms susceptible to state control, such as Tik Tok, emerged to complicate the paradigm. Diplomats, journalists, and social movements now simultaneously struggle with how to use these new tools to engage with foreign publics *and* how to ameliorate their effects. New conversations are emerging around internet regulation, what it means to have the right to connect, how to use new and historic means of countering disinformation, and the implications of AI for disinformation, freedom of expression, and democracy. Panelists in this session will set the scene for two days of discussion, exploring how the implications of these trends in journalism, activism, great power competition, multilateralism, and diplomacy are ushering us into a brave new world.

- **Emil Brix**, Director, Diplomatic Academy Vienna (Moderator)
- **Paul Kruchoski**, Director of Policy, Planning, and Resources for Public Diplomacy, US Department of State
- **Jacek Kucharczyk**, President, Institute of Public Affairs
- **Ishaan Tharoor**, Foreign Affairs Columnist, The Washington Post



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12:00 – 1:30 *Welcoming Lunch*

1:30 – 3:00 **Session 2: Disrupted Democracy and the End of Truth**

On social media platforms and in individual and group exchanges on private messaging applications, images of real and fake atrocities commingle. Separating truth from fiction has become increasingly difficult with every passing year, with real consequences for effective intervention and policy responses. Social media filter bubbles reinforce bifurcated public perceptions of events based on the intentional design and manipulation of algorithms. Efforts to identify and combat disinformation are continually confounded by changing computational propaganda efforts that bleed quickly into traditional media coverage, where twenty-four-hour news cycles and shrinking budgets leave little time for verification and correction. While the first session explored larger trends, this session will dig deeper into how these trends are manifesting in specific case studies, such as Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Congo, and China.

- **Wolfgang Petritsch**, President, The Austrian Marshall Foundation (Moderator)
- **Ulf Laessing**, Director, Regional Sahel Program, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
- **Edward Wong**, Diplomatic Editor, The New York Times
- **Thobekile Matimbe**, Sr. Manager, Partnerships and Engagements, Paradigm Initiative, Zimbabwe

3:00 – 3:15 *Tea Break*

3:15 – 5:00 **Session 3: Media in Jeopardy: Surveillance, AI Journalism, and Legal Frameworks**

Threats to journalism are manifold. New repressive media laws across a range of authoritarian and authoritarian-leaning states are proliferating. Press freedom has decreased in even the most historically open societies, strangling journalists' ability to report without fear of reprisal. At the same time, technical advances such as spyware, hacks, and AI-powered surveillance threaten the livelihoods and lives of journalists. On yet another front, AI-generated journalism threatens to imperil the entire industry, with consequences for organized labor, production of trustworthy information, and the further circulation of state-sponsored propaganda. Panelists in this session will take a deep dive into the contemporary journalistic landscape, exploring current and emerging threats to both the quality and





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veracity of news content and the physical safety and continuation of a healthy, professional media sector.

- **Amelia Arsenault**, Chief Public Diplomacy Research Officer, US Department of State (Moderator)
- **Mara Hvistendahl**, Investigative Journalist, The New York Times
- **Jim Albrecht**, Software Product Consultant
- **Scott Griffen**, Deputy Director, International Press Institute
- **Jennifer Cobbe**, Deputy Director, Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Law, University of Cambridge

6:30 – 9:00 Tour of the Exhibition, *Holbein. Burgkmair. Dürer – Renaissance in the North* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum and Flying Dinner

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

9:00 – 10:00 Coffee and Conversation with the 2024 Emerging Scholars

Supporting junior scholars is a key part of the Milton Wolf Seminar. Please join us for morning coffee and a lively roundtable discussion with our 2024 Emerging Scholar Fellows who will present their research and explain how it relates to the 2024 Seminar theme.

10:00 – 10.15 Tea Break

10:15 – 12:00 Session 4: From Arab Spring to Silent Spring: Unpacking New Developments in Social and (un)Social Movements

For the last 20 years, conversations around digital activism typically assumed that digital media facilitates and enhances social movements and activism. Social movement actors and activists all over the world welcomed the ability to deploy digital tools across their organizations and campaigns. Particularly in the early 2010s, INGOs and social movements developed sophisticated strategies for producing and circulating digital media content. More recently, Twitter revolutions have ended with a whimper rather than a bang. Cracks have emerged in the foundations of digital activism amidst the debris of failed social movements and minimal concrete gains, from the Arab Spring to the Green Revolution, to Occupy Wall Street, to Black Lives Matter, to protest efforts in Iran and Russia and beyond. This panel explores the rhetoric and the reality of social media activism, with a particular focus on the resurgence of analog organization tactics. Panelists will discuss the ways in which the digital turn has helped and





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hindered social movements progress, the current and potential use of analog tools, and where and how there is a role for AI in the next era of social justice movements.

- **Todd Wolfson**, Co-Director, Media, Inequality & Change Center, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania (Panelist and Moderator)
- **Lina Dencik**, Co-Founder, Data Justice Lab, Goldsmiths University
- **Oliver Dietrich**, Project Manager, IG Metall NRW
- **Ian Gavigan**, Researcher, Dept. of History, Rutgers University

12:00 – 1:15 Lunch

1:15 – 3:00 Session 5: Wither Free Speech? Free Speech Cycles and Theoretical Tensions

The Milton Wolf Seminar has historically included various discussions on the concept of free speech in the study, reporting and practice of international diplomacy. It has explored trends in Freedom of Expression in comparative global contexts, the rise of disinformation/misinformation, content and platform regulation, and the complexities of the right to connect. Panelists will examine how these paradigms are evolving in contemporary debates around journalistic freedom, platform regulation, free speech on campus and in the workplace. As we move into an era where the international system will be increasingly defined by social, political, and industrial engagement with AI, what kinds of free speech flashpoints can we anticipate and what are the implications for media and diplomacy?

- **Jillian York**, Director, International Freedom of Expression, Electronic Frontier Foundation (Moderator)
- **Felix Boellmann**, Director of European Advocacy, ADF International
- **Kian Vesteinsson**, Senior Research Analyst, Technology and Democracy, Freedom House
- **Eva Simon**, Sr. Advocacy Officer, Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- **Mila Bajic**, Research Lead, Share Fondacija, CEU Belgrade

3:00 – 3:15 Tea Break





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3:15 – 5:00 Session 6: Can Tech Save the Day? Analog and Technical Solutions to Dystopic Information Flows

- **Michael Freund**, Former Head of the Media Department, Webster University (Moderator)
- **Steven Lee Myers**, Foreign and National Security Correspondent, The New York Times
- **Seeta Pena Gangadharan**, Associate Professor, Deputy Head of Department (Research) LSE
- **Jillian York**, Director, International Freedom of Expression, Electronic Frontier Foundation

In 1955, Stanford professor John McCarthy coined the term AI to refer to “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines.” In the ensuing 74 years, both the technology and the usage of the term have evolved. Today, AI is used as shorthand for a host of new technologies that promise both dystopian and utopian outcomes. Debate abounds about whether AI can save the world from AI or if potential remedies lie in analog solutions. Panelists in this session will explore the utility and practicability of both analog and digital solutions to critical issues facing media and diplomacy.

7:00 Heurigen

Thursday, April 11, 2024, Departures

