



INFORMATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

Date: April 20, 2023

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KEY EVENTS

On April 20, 2023, Dr. Patrick Neal, Senior Research Fellow at the Canadian Centre for Identity-Based Conflict and Vice President of Cyber Research at CASIS Vancouver, presented *Information Through the Lens of Safety and Security* at the April 2023 CASIS Digital Roundtable. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience. The key points discussed were how information has shifted to shape culture, the future evolution of Public and National Safety, and transformations in technology from language analysis.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Neal discussed the difference between information and data, as well as how information can be used to create violent individuals. Dr. Neal also discussed the future issues that may arise concerning data and information, such as the reliability of utilizing quantum mechanics, and the level of human judgment in the analysis of data and information.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Dr. Neal began by stating that information and data are often used interchangeably; however, there are important differences between the two. Data is the observation of something that is put into a dataset—and therefore has no meaning—whereas information is the interpretation of the data and is reflective of the culture surrounding the data. Dr. Neal asserted that information is no longer a by-product of culture, but rather influences the culture around it. Information now has the potential to be manipulated to oppress movements or to instigate change.

Dr. Neal then discussed a potentially new direction for Public and National Safety using the NABLA model – a model created by CASIS Vancouver that can outline how information is utilized to create violent individuals and Violent Transnational Social Movements (VTSMs). Dr. Neal explained that as an individual progresses through the NABLA model's levels, they require more violent information to progress; thus, creating a positive feedback loop. To approach this, Dr. Neal suggested changing the current definition of what violence is—as opposed to the outcomes of violence defining what violence is. The renewed focus should include the creation and process of violence. Though current tools cannot assess the vast amount of languages spoken—as well as each language's regional slangs, dialects, and pidgins—Dr. Neal asserted that the technology will evolve.

Dr. Neal stated that future considerations will revolve around the nature of the data gathered, and the rationale behind dataset coding. For example, will data, mined and created by machines, be used to create information by machines, or will a human perspective still be needed to convert the data into information to guide policymakers? Furthermore, one must also ask, with the recent developments in quantum computing, a rapidly emerging technology that utilizes a new way of processing information rather than data, can information found through the use of this new technology still maintain its integrity?

Question And Answer

When asked about his thoughts on ChatGPT and other AI software, Dr. Neal asserted that we must embrace the new developments in technology in order to understand what advancements have been made and face the consequences if we choose to ignore it.

Regarding the role of the Intelligence Commissioner of Canada in providing oversight of the intelligence community over datasets information, Dr. Neal stated that the Intelligence Commissioner would be involved in creating guidelines and regulations regarding datasets, but the Privacy Commissioner and constitutional lawyers would play a larger role in terms of intervention. In addition, Dr. Neal put forth Bill C-51, the bill to broaden information sharing between federal agencies, as an example of a bill that was created without consulting the RCMP, even though they were in possession of the datasets of interest.

When asked whether technology could prevent individuals from progressing through the NABLA Model, Dr. Neal stated that technology was already utilized on private platforms to filter through hate speech and create a border between the

general population and those spreading hateful rhetoric. Dr. Neal asserted that the primary challenge was the constitutionality of implementing these technologies, as one could argue that their freedom of speech is being restricted. Furthermore, violent actors could become more careful of what information they choose to spread, thereby making themselves harder to identify.

When asked about the strengths of the federal government in protecting federal level intelligence, Dr. Neal pointed to the role of the joint committees of the National Research Council and the National Security Integrated Committee in creating a set of standards for contracting information and data products. Additionally, ongoing debate on the topic only serves to strengthen the protection of federal level intelligence.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Data is the observation of something that is input into a dataset and, therefore, has no meaning; whereas information is the interpretation of data and is reflective of the culture surrounding it.
- Information is now influencing culture, rather than being a by-product of culture.
- Further developments to how we view Public and National Safety must include language, and how individuals use information in the process and creation of violence.
- Advancements in technology, such as quantum computing, have potential risks associated with data and information processing, and analysis.



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Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

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