

Deepfakes mimic Ukrainian contractors as concern over AI in war grows

Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she is concerned about what the technology means for conflict.

SAN FRANCISCO — Pro-Kremlin actors masqueraded as a Ukrainian government contractor in a thwarted attempt to gather information about Ukrainian military movements, former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Monday.

The previously unreported attack involved a deepfake, or computer-generated digital imitation of a person, in an escalated application of the technology amid heightened concern over the future of artificial intelligence in war.

On Tuesday, a bipartisan group of Senate leaders announced a [forthcoming classified briefing](#) that will include U.S. intelligence surrounding adversaries' AI capabilities.

Military analysts have warned that deepfakes, which rely on a type of machine learning, present a new scale of threat.

“Never before has it been possible for nearly any actor in a conflict to generate realistic audio, video and text of their opponent’s political officials and military leaders,” four prominent AI and foreign affairs researchers wrote in [a January policy brief](#) for the Brookings Institute.

Rice, who was National Security Adviser and Secretary of State under former President George W. Bush, said the war in Ukraine has reflected these “new forms of warfare.”

“AI and deepfakes is one that we have to be concerned about,” she said.

Since the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022, deepfake videos of both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy have appeared on social media and television stations, falsely suggesting Ukraine [has surrendered](#) or Russia [has imposed martial law](#).

Experts quickly debunked the fabrications, suggesting the technology is still imperfect enough to make some deepfakes “clumsy and easily dismissed,” the Brookings researchers wrote.

The imitation of the Ukrainian contractor, Rice said, failed in part because “the person on the other side knew that my friend would not be asking those questions” about military movements — and because the computerized model couldn’t properly turn its head.

Still, during a virtual press conference with student journalists on Monday, Rice said AI will reshape military conflicts like the war in Ukraine.

“We really need to do a deep dive, once this conflict stabilizes, on how these technologies have changed the face of warfare,” Rice said.

As the U.S. grapples with the ethical and economic implications of more capable artificial intelligence, she urged AI development to continue unhindered by government regulation. The risk that AI could damage free speech when used for social media content moderation, she said as an example, pales in comparison to national security threats.

“There’s an even greater danger out there, which is how authoritarians will use it,” she said.

Rice’s pushback against restricted development — which some AI creators have called for — centered around the way foreign rivals are independently advancing their own technological capabilities.

“We have to remember that we are not in this race alone,” she said before comparing AI development to the creation of nuclear weapons in World War II.

“What if, in the race for the atom bomb, the Soviet Union or the Nazis had won?” Rice said. “This is a race that we have to win.”