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Hed: Former Secretary Rice: Artificial Intelligence, Private Sector creating new war in Ukraine

Deck: Online misinformation wars could be next frontline

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The Ukrainian-Russian conflict has ushered in a new age of technological warfare, where private sector companies using artificial intelligence dominate new strategies like the first real “social media war,” according to a previous head of the State Department.

Condoleezza Rice, who served as the U.S. Secretary of State from 2004-2009, told reporters Monday that the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sparked a massive campaign of private companies, which break information blockades to cause confusion and demoralization.

“I do think that Ukraine is showing us new forms of warfare,” Rice said. “AI and deep fakes is one that we have to be concerned about, but this may also be the first conflict in which the private sector is playing a huge role.”

Rice cited billionaire Elon Musk’s Starlink, a network of internet service satellites that has provided Ukraine internet and even allows the country to send information through Vladimir Putin’s internet blockade.

Efforts to spread misinformation has made it to Russia’s front door. On Monday, several Russian TV stations reportedly played a fake video of Vladimir Putin ordering an evacuation of Russian-held Ukraine. The video was later denounced by Putin’s chief spokesperson.

Last week, hackers successfully aired a Ukrainian-made video about a potential offensive onto TV stations in Crimea. It is often unclear who are behind these mysterious cyberattacks, but Rice said much of the recent technology has been done by private contractors.

“The ability of privately held technologies to do things that we used to rely on the government to do, and that they can do so much more quickly and so much more efficiently, is one of the stories that we read need to really study about this Ukrainian conflict,” Rice said.

Politicians in Washington D.C. have also debated the militant use of artificial intelligence. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-West Virginia, said in April at a Senate Armed Services cybersecurity subcommittee that the U.S. must integrate AI into the military before its adversaries.

“The applications deployed must be more secure and trusted, meaning we (must adopt) more rigorous policy enforcement mechanisms to prevent misuse or unintended consequences,” Manchin added.

Rice, raised in Birmingham, Alabama, found a passion for politics while taking an international relations course in Colorado. Her political work got her noticed by a professor at Stanford, which helped propel her career into national security.

She kept rising ranks, earning the title of National Security Advisor in 2001. Rice then served as the U.S. Secretary of State before retiring from politics.

Rice, 68, now leads the Hoover Institute at Stanford, a political thinktank. She said she believes the Biden Administration has correctly supported Ukraine through the process, although supplies sent to the eastern European country could be streamlined

“I don’t know if winning means taking back all the territory,” Rice said. “But an independent, democratic Ukraine free of Russian pressure and better integrated into the West and able to rebuild itself; we have got to make sure that that happens.”