







THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN CYBERSPACE: THREATS AND RISKS TO INTERNATIONAL (IN)SECURITY

THE CONTEXT

The private sector owns **over 90% of cyberspace**, giving tech firms **unprecedented power in geopolitical affairs** traditionally confined to the agenda of state actors;

-  Microsoft has opened a United Nations (UN) Affairs Office
-  Facebook has proposed a 'global digital currency'
-  'Geopolitics' was identified as Apple's most common theme in 2022 company filings
-  Big Tech have played an instrumental role in bolstering the Ukrainian cyber defense since the Russian invasion

THE PROBLEM

The blurring of responsibilities between nation-states and the private sector complicates public-private interactions required to tackle IS challenges, as the national interests of the state have to be balanced against the business imperatives of market-driven, ethically ambiguous, largely unregulated private corporations.

Will the role of the private sector in IS catalyse the splinternet? Be exploited to weaponize the Internet? Encourage technological decoupling? Heighten political, social and economic tensions? Increase techno-capitalism and/or the digital divide?

Such questions have motivated the RQ: **What are the threats and risks of the private sector's cyber agency for International Security?**

THE APPROACH

- ◇ Trace the geopolitical development of the private sector and identify the motivations behind their agency in IS.
- ◇ Assess the role of the private sector in IS and identify associated threats and risks.
- ◇ Evaluate current policies on the private sector's role in IS in relation to the risks identified.

The approach will be **interdisciplinary**, drawing on theory and thought from International Relations and Social & Policy Sciences, **qualitative-based**, likely utilizing document analyses, case-studies and interviews, and **policy-driven**, aided by engaging with relevant stakeholders such as the UK's National Risk Assessment (NRA).

THE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- ⇒ **Inform** methodologies for national risk assessment exercises
- ⇒ **Improve** our understanding of public-private partnership in cyberspace
- ⇒ **Inform** cybersecurity legislation and regulation for the private sector

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