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Peer Review

Review of: "Digital Security for a Nonviolent Defence System"

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This paper discusses an interesting concept in the form of shifting the responsibilities of national defense from the military to a nonviolent, so-called social defense system, and the consequences of such a shift with regards to the role of digital information security. The paper is well-written, provides many interesting and relevant examples, and makes a compelling and thought-provoking argument. There are, however, a few aspects that I remain somewhat unconvinced about.

First, I remain a bit confused with regards to what facet of the relationship between social defense and digital information security the paper emphasizes. The introduction discusses negative aspects of treating digital information security infrastructure as a comparative advantage within a system where the military is the (main) security provider, but it is not clear later in the paper how that will change in a social defense system. The section "Digital security in social defense" discusses the importance of resilience, adaptability, and repeated testing, which, at least to me, suggest that the incentives of secrecy and comparative advantage will feature also in such a system.

Second, although the paper presents numerous examples and aggregate statistics that suggest that nonviolent campaigns have as good, or better, chances of being successful as violent ones, most such research focuses on domestic/internal conflict rather than international. This is a relevant difference since this highlights two interlinked features that are cornerstones of the motivation for military defense but difficult for a social defense structure to replace. I am referring to the importance of "commitment" that influences the possibility of security forces to deter aggression from others. Assessing the commitment level of an adversary is a classic problem in international relations, as it is only after fighting has begun that the true commitment is observed (Mack 1975, Gartzke 1999). This is the situation when there are standing armed forces who are paid and/or prepared for a fight, but estimating commitment would be largely impossible for a system of social defense. What if the

citizens are unhappy with their regime and welcome the invasion? What if the majority of citizens are simply unwilling to take the risks that participation – even nonviolent – would imply?

The third, and final, question that arises is also how a national system for social defense would be able to keep up with both the constantly changing market of digital technology and activists' tactical repertoires. New platforms and forms of online communication are constantly being developed and gaining or losing popularity, while protesters from Tbilisi to Hong Kong and beyond keep modifying their tactics.

One way to improve the paper further would be to address these issues in a transparent manner, and whether these are scope conditions, assumptions, or relevant alternative explanations.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.