



Kirsten Han ■■■■ @kixes Thu Mar 17 10:01:13 +0000 2022

.@JustinOngs' story points to how the chaos of information war has hit #Singapore, where the lack of press freedom is normalised and media literacy education is limited. If everything is propaganda then nothing is propaganda and people believe what they want. <https://t.co/CWqtGGvLlj>

Justin Ong
Political Correspondent

As thousands are killed, Mr Henry Tan, 48, feels sorry for the innocent civilian lives lost to Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. But he also sees it as a liberating act that will, in the long run, lead to better lives for the Ukrainian people.

He believes Moscow moved to rescue ethnic Russians from a genocidal neo-Nazi militant regime, to clear up biological weapons labs, to rescue children from one of the largest human trafficking networks in the region, and to ultimately free the country from corrupt Western influence.

These are allegations, conspiracy theories and ideologies that have been debunked and identified by Kyiv and the West as disinformation by Russia and its allies, like China, as a pretext for an unjustified, illegal act of aggression ordered by President Vladimir Putin.

Mr Tan, who works in retail, shuns Western news outlets, calling them "fake news media", where "reporting is always one-sided".

He gets his information from social media platforms such as Telegram and YouTube instead.

Beliefs and views like his are being circulated in Singapore on social media, and confidently upheld by some Singaporeans in interviews with The Straits Times.

While cognisant of Russian and Chinese propaganda forces that seed anti-West narratives, they say

the West is just as guilty of anti-Russia and anti-China rhetoric.

Closer to home, they question Singapore's condemnation and imposition of sanctions on Russia, considering it an unwise decision with negative repercussions.

Observers say it would not be surprising if actors opposed to Singapore's stance were trying to undermine it and manipulate public opinion to create fissures in society.

Among contrarian views aired by Singaporeans, one of the most noticed examples was from former foreign minister George Yeo, 67, who last Friday posted on Facebook a video pushing the unproven claim of an American-funded biological weapons programme in Ukraine. The clip featured right-wing TV host Tucker Carlson from American network Fox News.

Mr Yeo's post was later labelled by Facebook as "partly false information". He declined comment.

The next day, Dr Shashi Jayakumar – who heads the Centre of Excellence for National Security at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) – tweeted that the reposting of such allegations by influential figures was "regrettable". He added on Twitter: "It is likely, in my view, that these allegations are being used at the first instance by the Russian disinformation or propaganda apparatus. I take the view, with many others, that part of this is also linked to possible false flags by the Russian apparatus in the lead-up to the use by the Russians of chemical or biological weapons."

I was reading the print version, but there's a paywalled online version here: <https://t.co/RdC1y3Ldzh>
<https://t.co/IGmoqaVzHt>

Mr Tan, who works in retail, shuns Western news outlets - he calls them "fake news media" where "reporting is always one-sided".

He gets his information from social media platforms such as Telegram and YouTube instead.

Beliefs and views like his are also being circulated on Singapore social media platforms, and confidently upheld by some Singaporeans when pressed in interviews by The Straits Times (ST).

While cognisant of Russian and Chinese propaganda forces that aim to seed such anti-West narratives, they argue the West is just as guilty of spreading anti-Russia and anti-China rhetoric.

We still need a lot more independent research into the impact of information wars on Singapore, as well as which demographics have been susceptible so far (although anecdotally the working conclusion seems to be "all your Chinese uncles on WhatsApp")...

...but I agree w/ Linda Lim's argument that yrs of talk about "Asian values" & framing discussions about human rights, democracy & civil liberties as "Western" also created a foundation that made Chinese/Russian propaganda claims seem not that big a leap. <https://t.co/3X2vLvSYGd> <https://t.co/jRK9LO9bVQ>

Decades of anti-Western rhetoric from the ranks of establishment elites, including the government itself, labeling "liberal values" such as human rights and freedom of expression as "Western", and therefore alien to our "Asian values", have also left their mark. This of course is exactly what one hears from China's government, thus validating its pronouncements.

Singapore's government is right to take a strong position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As a small state it's dangerous to take any position that might suggest it's okay for bigger countries to invade smaller ones 'cos they don't like decisions the small countries made.

That there are so many SGeans are unhappy about the firm position we've taken show how absent values and first principles are from our discourse and thought processes. Everything is fed through some narrow cost-benefit analysis with a healthy dose of pandering to authority/might.

One thing I wish the ST article had dug further into (@JustinOngS pls treat this as a request for a sequel) is how we're dealing with this situation. Singaporeans are dumping media reporting in favour of unverified, poorly-sourced "evidence" from Telegram and YouTube. (cont.)

People, including high-profile ones like a former foreign affairs minister, are proudly and confidently amplifying Chinese/Russian propaganda, helping to organically propel these influence operations, full of skewed/false information, into the Singaporean public sphere.

The problem here isn't that these propaganda narratives conflict with the SG govt's position ('cos they do in the case of Ukraine, but not always), but that these narratives are usually misleading/flat-out untrue, and are being peddled to achieve aims that undermine democracies.

Isn't this *exactly* the sort of stuff that POFMA + FICA are meant to deal with? I'm not saying this 'cos I want these laws expanded and used more; what I'm pointing out is that this is exactly what the govt said they wanted these laws for, and we're hearing crickets ■■■

So we should be asking the PAP, what are you doing with your own former minister sharing Tucker Carlson and CGTN narratives, what are you doing when Singaporeans are openly and confidently helping to spread foreign influence operations about the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

One part of me is scared of asking them this question 'cos sekali they use it as an excuse to pass POFMA and FICA+++, but at the same time it's important that Singaporeans actually talk about how we want to react to such situations. <https://t.co/O85EzDMAbh>

And yes, I'm aware of how ludicrous it is that I was name-checked as a possible foreign agent during the FICA debate but I'm now the one trying to engage and correct boomer uncles sharing shit they saw on YouTube while the POFMA-empowered govt is silent <https://t.co/HMS3nQ4bm1>

It's almost like... POFMA and FICA were more about giving the ruling party more levers of control over domestic expressions of dissent, than actually addressing the very real issue of misinformation campaigns and influence operations ■ <https://t.co/WCCGmRIweg>

