Digital Sovereignty and Cybersecurity: why we should care more about the political than the digital

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~~Cyber~~security: why cyber is the adjective that does **not** matter

Cybersecurity is not about 0s and 1s

- We need a broader perspective if we want to tackle current and future issues

- Instead of looking at how (through vulnerabilities) any actor can attack, look at why they would want to attack (in pursuit of power)

Solely looking at it from a technical standpoint cannot answer this question. International relations, however, can answer it.

Sovereignty

- Internal

- External

- Ultimate legitimate authority over a polity

- International: exercise of power

What is security in IR?

- Security is *the alleviation of threats to cherished values*, especially those which, left unchecked, <u>threaten the survival</u> of a particular referent object in the near future

- Security involves the ability to pursue cherished political and social ambitions

What is security?

2 thoughts:

1. Security is virtually synonymous with the accumulation of power. Security is understood as a commodity. Power is thought to be the route to security: the more power actors can accumulate, the more secure they will be.

2. Security is based on emancipation, that is, a concern with justice and the provision of human rights. Security is understood as a relationship between different actors rather than a commodity. These relationships may be understood in either negative terms (freedom from) of positive terms (freedom to).

Strategic Dominance

Rational choice theory: focus on strategies of states/players in their interaction and how they strive to win. One of these strategies is strategic dominance.

- Strategic dominance occurs when one strategy is better than another strategy for one player, no matter how that player's opponent(s) may play.
- In other words, states want to deploy a strategy that delivers them what they want, regardless of the strategy of others.
- Why: rationality and self-interest

What about the digital?

- Is it something that needs security?
  - Why?
  - How?
  - Who?

Let's bring it together

Applying International Relations and rational choice theory to key technologies and why these have become such a hot topic recently.

- Key technologies are "technologies of the future that will have an enormous impact on how we live, learn, work and produce. These are technologies that will brush to one side our ideas about what is possible and lead to groundbreaking innovations" (NWO)

Public vs. private

- Expectations are that these technologies will have an enormous influence in our (future) daily lives, as well as in the functioning of governments. This also means that governments can use these key technologies to advance their geopolitical interests and potentially use them as leverage against its citizens, the private sector or other nations.

- "Companies can determine the nature and speed of change, but governments can control the direction of change. In this asymmetric dimension, sometimes states use domestic companies for political ends, to fight other states".

Strategic dominance & key technologies

- Whoever's products are used the most, arguably has the most influence over the international market. However, it does not stop there. When considering the question of who controls the information passing through the products, it is obvious that is also highly political and strategic.
- Whoever controls the market of key technologies, has some sort of control over the other → leading to strategic dominance in the ultimate form

Should we care?

First, power means control. If one nation has strategic dominance over another or over all others, it may used that dominance to exercise power over them and thus control them. According to Floridi, "control is the ability to influence something and its dynamics, including the ability to check and correct for any deviation from such influence". This control can be used for all sorts of means.

Second, know what you want (as a nation) and act according to it → not necessarily developing your own 'stuff' but rather making a conscious choice in what to do and what to use.

Q&A