

WHAT NATO'S FRONT LINE CAN TEACH US ABOUT SOLAR GEOENGINEERING

Communicating SAI in a contested information environment

Dr Trish Lavery

Senior Fellow, Futures & Human Behaviour · Sympodium Institute for Strategic Communications

Solar Geoengineering: Protecting Democratic Deliberations in a Contested Information Environment

Trish Lavery

Keywords—*climate interventions, stratospheric aerosol injection, solar radiation modification, hybrid threat, strategic communication, NATO, disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)*

About the Author

Dr Trish Lavery is an internationally recognised academic and policy leader who integrates futures thinking, behavioural psychology, and structured analytic techniques into the design of future-ready and resilient policy and communication strategies. Trish has led significant projects on disinformation in both domestic and international contexts, including during her time as Strategic Foresight Counsellor and Senior Strategic Analyst at the OECD, and as part of her role as Senior Fellow of Futures and Human Behaviour at the Sympodium Institute of Strategic Communications. She is currently on secondment from Australia’s Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to the National Security College, Australia, where she is working on an international project that examines possible futures of decision-making pathways for the governance of solar geoengineering.

Abstract

Solar geoengineering interventions are designed to reflect sunlight and reduce the impacts of climate change. These are attracting increased



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Trish Lavery

Strategic foresight for emerging technologies, geopolitics and security.

Strategic foresight

Behavioural science

Strategic communications

Bridging strategic foresight, behavioural science and strategic communications

I integrate futures thinking, behavioural psychology and structured analytic techniques into the design of resilient policy and communication. My work sits where emerging science meets democratic governance and geopolitics.



Senior Fellow, Futures & Human Behaviour

Symposium Institute for Strategic Communications, London



Futures Council, National Security College

Development of Australia's national security capabilities



Honorary Associate Professor, Macquarie University

School of international relations; Geopolitical risk research centre



Seconded from Australia's PM & Cabinet

Former OECD Strategic Foresight Counsellor

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

Hybrid war is back on the front page

A hybrid threat blends conventional and unconventional warfare to manipulate a nation's decisions by shaping the behaviours and attitudes of its people.



Covert kinetic attacks



Cyberattacks



Economic coercion



Disinformation

Russia

Fri 4 Sep 2026 01:00 EDT

Share

Analysis

Europe calls out Russia's 'hybrid war' in public. But how can it make Putin pay? Pjotr Sauer

Governments are now quicker to point the finger at Moscow, but critics say their inaction invites more sabotage



Freight in front of a Ukrainian Antonov plane at Germany's Leipzig airport after a drone was spotted nearby. Photograph: NEWS5/AFP/Getty Images

Russia's suspected sabotage campaign across Europe appears to be gathering pace again, confronting governments with a problem they have struggled to solve since the start of the war in Ukraine: how to impose a meaningful cost on Moscow for attacks that remain deliberately below the threshold of conventional war.

THE DISCIPLINE, AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IT

Strategic communications on the front line



Strategic communications

A holistic approach grounded in liberal democratic values.

It holds space for evidence-based truth-telling and guards against manipulation. It claims no special right to be heard, and it recognises that everything communicates.

The people I teach

A NATO-sponsored postgraduate programme building the capacity of communicators in the Baltic and Eastern European states.



Postgraduate



NATO-sponsored



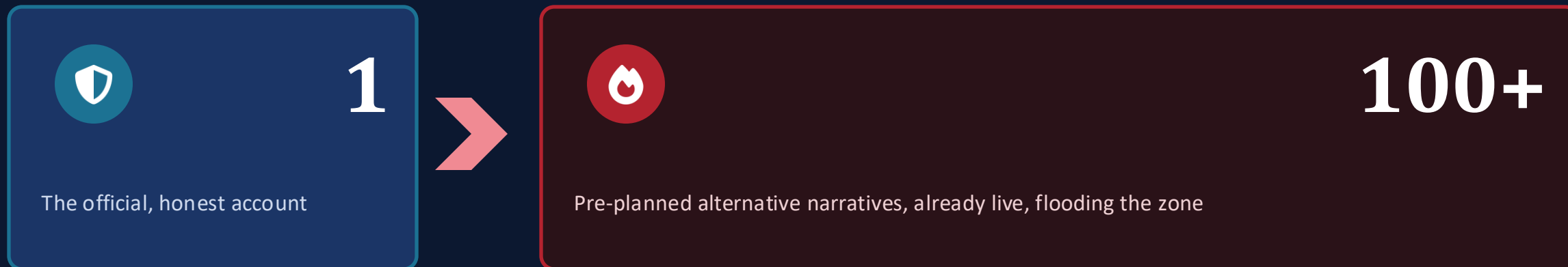
Baltic & E. Europe

Communicators keeping citizens informed from inside occupied territory.

WHAT THE FRONT LINE SHOWS US

Communicators respond in minutes. It's still not fast enough.

A kinetic attack is released in tandem with a disinformation campaign built around it. By the time the official post goes up, it is one honest article in a hundred alternative narratives.



A glimpse of our future. Today this is still largely manual. As AI scales the volume and speed, their reality today becomes everyone's tomorrow.

Disinformation as a masterclass in behavioural science

These campaigns exploit the shortcuts our minds make. In class we red-team each other's comms, asking how a bad-faith actor would twist the words.

One word, two meanings

“asylum”

a place of refuge

an institution for those with severe mental health conditions

Blur the two, and people seeking safety are recast as something to fear. Ambiguity is a manipulation tool.

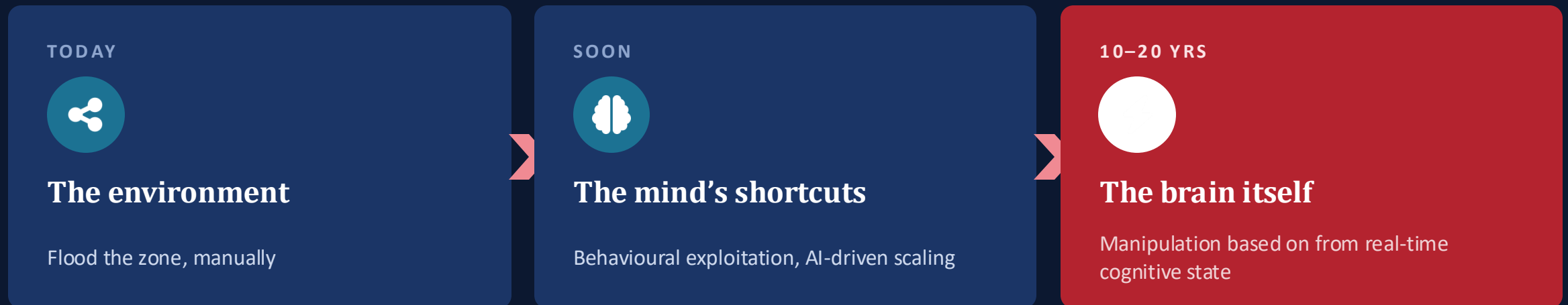


The same tool, turned to defence

Behaviourally-informed communications works within the bounds of how people actually think about and perceive information so it is more likely to resonate with them.

Behaviourally-informed communication is dual-use: the science an adversary weaponises is the science a defender uses to keep people safe.

If today it exploits how we think, tomorrow it reads how we feel



CFG's neurotech work: a cheap brain-sensing headband plus off-the-shelf AI can already infer emotional state. Imagine information manipulation personalised in real time to your cognitive and emotional response.

The threat is not opposition to or support for SAI. It is the sabotage of debate itself.



The same vulnerabilities can be steered in either direction, so a defence must protect the debate itself rather than pick a side.

SO I POINTED THIS LENS AT SAI

Solar geoengineering as a hybrid-threat target

The paper asks two questions: does SAI share the vulnerabilities that make a good disinformation target, and what tools from strategic communications can help protect the debate?

What makes SAI exploitable



Planetary scale, uneven effects

Everyone is affected, but not equally, which is fertile ground for grievance framing



Existing disinformation architecture

Extensive existing channels can be used to amplify disinformation



Deep uncertainty

Real scientific gaps are easy to inflate into false certainty either way



Low public familiarity

Most people first meet the topic through chemtrail conspiracies, not science



Not hypothetical. March 2026: unseasonal Delhi rain was recast within hours as a Bill Gates geoengineering plot, one reel hit 18M+ views. Flood-the-zone, aimed at a climate technology.

Three strategic communications principles for SAI

The aim is not to promote or oppose SAI, but to protect the conditions for evidence-based democratic debate.

01

UNDERSTAND THE THREAT



Structured analytic techniques

Map the threat landscape and citizen needs before campaigns land, rather than reacting after.

02

WORK WITH COGNITION



Behaviourally-informed communications

Design messages that work within the bounds of how human minds actually process information.

03

OPEN THE CONVERSATION



Strategic foresight

Use scenarios to shift from one-way messaging to a genuine two-way exchange with citizens.

Help shape what a broader programme should be

This paper is a starting point. I welcome the SAI community's view on what matters most. Three questions for your feedback:



What should it prioritise?

Which vulnerabilities and audiences most need attention first as field trials approach?



Who belongs in the room?

Which researchers, communicators and communities should co-create the framework?



What are we missing?

Where does this analysis fall short of how disinformation would really play out for SRM?



Let's build this together. Dr Trish Lavery · Symposium Institute for Strategic Communications · sympodium.net

Symposium Institute of Strategic Communications

Please connect with me

Let's continue the conversation on LinkedIn.



LinkedIn

[www.Linkedin.com/trishlavery](https://www.linkedin.com/trishlavery)

Scan the code with your phone camera to connect with me.

Solar Geoengineering: Protecting Democratic Deliberations in a Contested Information Environment

Trish Lavery

Keywords—*climate interventions, stratospheric aerosol injection, solar radiation modification, hybrid threat, strategic communication, NATO, disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)*

About the Author

Dr Trish Lavery is an internationally recognised academic and policy leader who integrates futures thinking, behavioural psychology, and structured analytic techniques into the design of future-ready and resilient policy and communication strategies. Trish has led significant projects on disinformation in both domestic and international contexts, including during her time as Strategic Foresight Counsellor and Senior Strategic Analyst at the OECD, and as part of her role as Senior Fellow of Futures and Human Behaviour at the Sympodium Institute of Strategic Communications. She is currently on secondment from Australia’s Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to the National Security College, Australia, where she is working on an international project that examines possible futures of decision-making pathways for the governance of solar geoengineering.

Abstract

Solar geoengineering interventions are designed to reflect sunlight and reduce the impacts of climate change. These are attracting increased

