

# Carnegie Council Lesson Plan for Disinformation in Global Affairs (90 minutes)

## Overview

This session will explore disinformation not only as a political or technological issue but as an ethical challenge to Carnegie Council's four guiding principles: international cooperation, defense of democracy, fidelity to truth, and the humanitarian imperative. Each case examined will be measured against these standards, helping us see how disinformation undermines them and what ethical responses might uphold them.

## Core Objectives

1. Introduce students to the definitions, actors, and consequences of disinformation in international contexts.
2. Examine the ethical dilemmas that disinformation poses for governments, journalists, and global citizens.
3. Develop students' media literacy and ethical reasoning through real-world case studies and interactive analysis.

Carnegie Council principles that the lesson addresses:

4. **The commitment to international cooperation** is a moral proposition because it goes to the essence of ethics—recognizing what is common for all, while managing the intrinsic and inevitable differences between and among people.
5. **The defense of democracy in the U.S. and globally** requires confronting autocrats who discriminate based on ethnicity, gender, and religion, and who deny basic freedoms to their citizens.
6. **Fidelity** means honesty, integrity, and a good-faith effort at serving the truth. Rhetoric certainly matters, and in an age of disinformation, leaders must fight against lies, willful deception, and deliberate misrepresentation of facts.
7. **The humanitarian imperative** is the duty to save lives and alleviate suffering through humane and equal treatment. As violence and cruelty abound in conflict zones around the world, mounting effective humanitarian responses remains the essential moral imperative of our time.

## 1. Opening Ethical Provocation (10 minutes)

**Prompt:** *Is it ever ethically justifiable for a democratic government to use disinformation in foreign policy or warfare?*

- Quick write + brief discussion.
- Elicit gut responses and revisit at the end of the class.

## 2. Conceptual Foundations: What is Disinformation? (20 minutes)

- Mini-lecture or guided discussion:
  - Distinguish disinformation vs. misinformation vs. propaganda.
- Define disinformation as an applied ethics challenge: It raises questions of truth, responsibility, and manipulation.
- Introduce diplomatic narratives, warfare narratives, and influence operations.
- Explore ethical questions regarding truth, manipulation, and trust.
- Outline how truth and facts can be manipulated differently across cultural contexts.
- Identify potential tactics of disinformation.
- Stress that disinformation is a transnational ethical issue that requires cooperation between states, civil society, and international institutions.
- Outline how disinformation can erode democratic values such as the existence of free elections and equal participation, and can lead to democratic backsliding.

## 3. Understanding How Disinformation Works and Is Created (30 minutes)

- Play the Bad News game online: <https://www.getbadnews.com/en/play>
- Discuss the different tactics of disinformation explored in the game.
- Connect how modern disinformation leverages behavioral data and AI-driven targeting.
  - Who sets the governance frameworks for AI-driven information systems?  
How can AI accountability be enforced globally?

#### 4. Case Study: The Ethics of Disinformation in Action (20 mins)

Choose one of the following Carnegie Council articles to analyze how the case examined poses acute ethical and geopolitical challenges due to disinformation. Provide a short briefing sheet or slides.

##### **Suggested Cases:**

[“Should States Use Social Media to Warn Civilians in Armed Conflict?”](#) Henning Lahmann, *Ethics & International Affairs* Online Exclusive, February 3, 2025

[“First Georgia, Then Ukraine: How Russian Propaganda Justifies Invasions,”](#) Juris Pupcenoks & Graig R. Klein, *Ethics & International Affairs* Online Exclusive, March 9, 2022

[“The Case for Foreign Electoral Subversion,”](#) Cécile Fabre, *Ethics & International Affairs*, Fall 2018, Issue 32.3

[“Book Review on Subversion: The Strategic Weaponization of Narratives,”](#) Kiril Avramov, *Ethics & International Affairs*, Spring 2024, Issue 38.1

[“Information Fragmentation and Global Governance in Hard Times,”](#) Julia C. Morse, *Ethics & International Affairs*, Summer 2025, Issue 39.2

##### **Ethical Questions to Guide Student Analysis:**

- Who is harmed—and who benefits?
- What are the ethical obligations of states? Platforms? Citizens?
- What norms are at stake—truth, trust, dignity, sovereignty?
- What tactics of disinformation are in place in this case?
- Which of the [Carnegie Council ethical principles](#) has been violated and why?
- How can international cooperation help mitigate disinformation campaigns that cross state borders? What challenges arise when countries have different norms about information control?
- How does disinformation undermine democratic processes? What duties do the leaders and people of democratic states have to counter autocrats and defend democratic freedoms?
- What humanitarian responsibilities are violated when disinformation is used in conflict?
- Which human rights norms are most endangered when disinformation spreads in war?
- Why does internationalism matter in countering disinformation, and how can states balance sovereignty with global responsibility?
- Is disinformation in war ever compatible with just war theory?

## 5. Ethical Reflection & Discussion (10 minutes)

**Return to the original question:** *Can ethical principles survive in the disinformation age?*

- Revisit students' earlier responses.
- Discuss trade-offs between national interest, democratic values, and global responsibility.
- Introduce the ethical framework developed by Corneliu Bjola in "[The Ethics of Countering Digital Propaganda](#)" and its six normative attributes: truthfulness, prudence, accountability, integrity, effectiveness, and responsibility.
- How can this framework help us in the cases discussed?

**Note:** if time is short, the ethical reflection and discussion can be done as an assignment for the next class.