

Science-Based Truth During Mis/Dis-Information Crises: Expanding CTBTO's Public Communication Role Post-EIF

Fer Avar

PhD Researcher
University of Antwerp, Department of Political Science




11 September 2025, Vienna

Social Media Commotion Regarding Alleged Nuclear Testing in Iran – October 5, 2024

BREAKINGS

Iran conducted a nuclear test moments ago, resulting in an earthquake measuring 4.6 ٪ on the reactor scale



4:40 AM · Oct 6, 2024 · **1M** Views

Update: Iranian Telegram channels claim that yesterday's 4.6 earthquake in Iran was actually a nuclear weapons test!

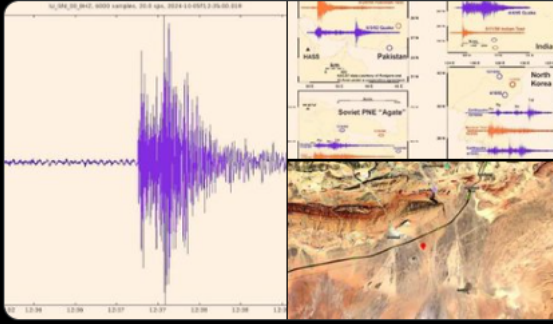
– Carmel News



11:34 PM · Oct 6, 2024 · **253.5K** Views

JUST IN: 🇮🇷

★ "Earthquake" in Iran fits the profile of a nuclear test explosion.



Readers added context they thought people might want to know

There is no evidence this earthquake was caused by a nuclear test.

The International Monitoring System (IMS) detects nuclear tests through seismic activity, and accurately identified all of North Korea's nuclear tests. It did not detect a nuclear test in Iran.

ctbto.org/our-work/detec...

armscontrol.org/blog/2009-12-0...

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Context is written by people who use X, and appears when rated helpful by others. [Find out more.](#)

11:31 AM · Oct 7, 2024 · **1.4M** Views

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Iran: An earthquake — or a secret underground nuclear test?

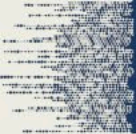


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By Ali Shamdanihagh
Published on 09/10/2024 · 13:30 GMT+2 · Updated 10/10/2024 · 11:33 GMT+2

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Days after news broke of the earthquake in Iran's Semnan province, speculation has continued on social media that the tremors were caused by Tehran's first nuclear test.



REPORT

doi:10.26443/seismica.v4i1.1512



The propagation of seismic waves, misinformation, and disinformation from the 2024-10-05 M 4.5 Iran earthquake

Benjamin Fernando ^{* 1}, Ross Maguire ², Brianna Fernandez ³, Saman Karimi ¹, Elizabeth Koenck ⁴, Göran Ekström ⁵, Tom Rivlin ⁶, Celeste Labedz ⁷

¹Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, ²Department of Earth Science and Environmental Change, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA, ³Department of Earth, Environmental, and Planetary Sciences, Brown University, Rhode Island, USA, ⁴School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., USA, ⁵Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Columbia University, New York, USA, ⁶Atominstut, Technische Universität Wien, Vienna, Austria, ⁷Department of the Geophysical Sciences, University of Chicago, Illinois, USA

Author contributions: *Conceptualization:* B. Fernando, RM. *Investigation:* B. Fernando, RM, B. Fernandez, GE, SK, EK, TR. *Writing - Original draft:* B. Fernando, RM. *Writing - Review & Editing:* B. Fernando, B. Fernandez, CL.

Abstract The 2024-10-05 Iran M 4.5 earthquake took place at a time of heightened tensions in the Middle East. We perform a discrimination and moment tensor analysis and identify a shallow-dipping, reverse fault source commensurate with the compressional setting of the Iranian interior. Nonetheless, the event's aftermath saw widespread dissemination of misinformation, and potentially active disinformation, concluding that it was in fact a test of an Iranian nuclear weapon. The 'evidence' for many of these claims was based on inaccurate interpretation of seismic data. In this paper, we analyse how geophysical 'fake news' propagated through social media (mainly Twitter/X) following this event, eventually gaining traction in mainstream, earned media. This event is an illustrative warning of how seismic data can be misinterpreted and/or manipulated in public discourse.

Persian زمین لرزه ای که به بزرگی ۵.۴ در تاریخ پنجم اکتبر سال ۱۴۰۲ در ایران رخ داد، در زمان بالاگرفتن تنش ها در خاورمیانه اتفاق افتاد. ما تحلیل تانسوری گشتاور انجام داده، گسل معکوس کم عمقی را به عنوان منبع این رویداد معین کردیم که با ساختار فشاری و تراکمی داخل ایران مطابقت دارد. با این وجود، در پی این حادثه اطلاعات نادرست (غیر عامدانه) و اطلاعات غلط (عامدانه) به صورت گسترده ای پخش شد با این نتیجه گیری که این حادثه مربوط به آزمایش سلاح هسته ای در ایران است. شواهد ارایه شده در بسیاری از این ادعاها بر اساس تفسیر نادرست داده های لرزه ای مربوط به این حادثه بود. ما در این مقاله و در تحلیل هایمان نشان می دهیم که چگونه اخبار جعلی ژئوفیزیکی مربوط به این حادثه در شبکه های اجتماعی پخش شد (علی الخصوص در توئیتر/اکس)، چطور مورد توجه قرار گرفت و در نهایت چطور به مطبوعات و رسانه ها رسید. این حادثه می تواند به مانند هتداری باشد که چگونه داده های لرزه ای می تواند به طور اشتباه و یا عامدانه دستکاری شده و وارد گفتوگوهای عمومی جامعه شود.

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Fer Avar

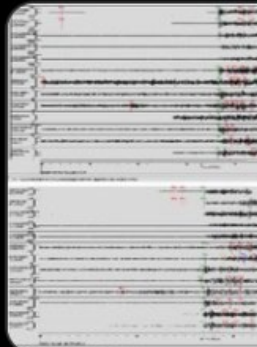
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CTBTO's Response (Oct 7 & 9 – 2024)

Robert Floyd re

CTBTO
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#CTBTO International
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03:29 and 19:15 U
previous earthqua



1:03 PM · Oct 7, 2024



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Home / News & Events / New Stories / CTBTO detects two earthquakes in northern Iran on 5 October

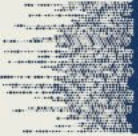


CTBTO DETECTS TWO EARTHQUAKES IN NORTHERN IRAN ON 5 OCTOBER

9 Oct 2024

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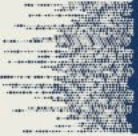




Building on this success story, my research asks:

(How) could the CTBTO institutionalize a stronger public-facing role in managing mis/dis-information in high-escalation-risk contexts post-EIF?

(How) could it do so while continuing to further enable public access and literacy to technical data and interpretation?



Political & Legal Hurdles in Institutionalizing Public Communication Role post-EIF

Political

- Public commentary on specific states may be perceived as interference
- Raw data outputs risk politicization in adversarial information environments
- State Parties may resist disclosure of technical interpretations prior to domestic response

Legal

- Mandate restrictions: Article IV (Clause 14 p. 22) restricts data-sharing for *State Parties*, not the public
- Confidentiality obligations: restrictions on data release without State Party authorization
- Governance delays: consensus decision-making can slow urgent communication
- Risk of overreach: engagement on state-specific incidents could be framed as exceeding the technical remit

(Starting) Strategies to Overcome Legal & Political Barriers



Formalize

science communication authority via treaty amendment;
(Article VII, Clause 2, p. 42)



Negotiate

standing agreements with State Parties for pre-authorized release of verified data;



Establish

SOPs granting the ES fast-track authority for public emergency response;



Create

a dedicated Disinformation Unit spanning OES, IMS, & IDC for rapid public communication;



Conduct

regular scenario drills to stress-test readiness & directly involve State Party input.

Strategies to Overcome Risk of Monopolization of Legitimate Data & Technical Interpretation



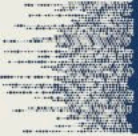
Implement Alternatives to

Reliance on public dissemination on commercial social media platforms;



Increase

Transparency by making visible how technical conclusions are reached in direct public crisis communication.



Proposed Public Communication Flow



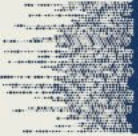
Immediate (minutes): Technical interpretation release based on standing agreements for crisis response via official website



Short term (hours): Live press briefings and webcasts by Disinformation Unit (publicly available) to increase literacy



Medium term (days): UN News and CTBTO Press Release



Takeaway

Recommendation

- Institutionalize (through amendment) a science-based public outreach role in fighting mis/dis-information post-EIF via concrete communication strategies and a dedicated Unit.

Strategic Impact

- Protect verification integrity from distortion,
- Enhance crisis stability through rapid public clarification,
- Position CTBTO post-EIF as a publicly-responsive verification institution in addition to being a State-Party responsive international organization.