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## Former DHS disinfo chief says department can't even agree on definition of disinformation



Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, speaks during a hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday, May 4, 2022, in this file photo. In a letter to Mr. Mayorkas, several Republican senators said DHS had yet to turn in ... [more >](#)

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By [Stephen Dinan](#) - The Washington Times - Monday, May 20, 2024

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' pick for his disinformation chief said the department couldn't even settle on a good definition of "disinformation."

[Nina Jankowicz](#), who was director of the disinformation governance board for roughly three months before quitting in 2022 amid a firestorm of criticism, said in a newly released deposition to Congress that the department bungled the rollout of her job and then abandoned her when the going got tough.

She described dysfunction and confusion throughout. She said Mr. Mayorkas' communications advisers vetoed her plans to brief Congress on her role, allowing her job to become a target of misinformation. She said she faced "tens of thousands of death threats" and had to hire a security consultant who told her she needed to leave her home, just weeks before she was due to give birth, to protect herself.

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In the April 2023 deposition, Ms. [Jankowicz](#) told the House Judiciary Committee that neither she nor the disinformation board was ever meant to be disinformation cops policing what people said.

Indeed, she said one priority, cut short by her departure, was to get her colleagues to settle on a good definition of disinformation.

“I thought there was some pretty big gaps in terms of the understanding of the concept,” she said. “You can’t say that something is a bear if you don’t know what a bear looks like. So that’s where we were.”

Ms. [Jankowicz](#), who had studied foreign disinformation, was plucked by Mr. Mayorkas as head of his new disinformation board in early 2022. She served for about eight weeks in secrecy. Mr. Mayorkas revealed the board only in response to a question during a congressional hearing about what his department was doing to police disinformation against Hispanic and Black voters.

The announcement was met with fury and dismay from the right, where lawmakers and activists said they didn’t trust the government, much less Mr. Mayorkas, to judge truth and lies in the public debate. Some compared it to an Orwellian “Ministry of Truth.”

Roughly three weeks after he announced the board, Mr. Mayorkas suspended it and Ms. [Jankowicz](#) resigned. Months later, Mr. Mayorkas quietly disbanded the board altogether.

“I was thrown under the bus to some degree,” she said in the transcript of her interview, which the House Judiciary Committee released Friday. “I had spent my career and a large portion of my own kind of personal capital doing work that I thought was important for the American people, and I did not want to risk further damage to that for an agency that clearly didn’t have my — even my safety at heart.”

She said she fought to have the department roll out the board and her role as director in a more traditional manner, with briefings to Congress ahead of time and getting outside experts on board.

She said Mr. Mayorkas’ team rejected those ideas, forbade her from going to Capitol Hill and ordered her to be vague in congressional briefings.

The Washington Times has reached out to the Homeland Security Department for comment.

Ms. [Jankowicz](#), from her new role as CEO of the American Sunlight Project, said she fought to get Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan, Ohio Republican, to release the transcript.

“Chairman Jordan clearly knows this transcript destroys their conspiracy theories, which is why he withheld it for so long and released it on a Friday evening. In doing so, the Committee attempted to distract from the revelations contained within it that are embarrassing to Chairman Jordan, including that he shared a manipulated video of me in an attempt to scare American citizens into believing his lies,” Ms. [Jankowicz](#) said in her new statement.

She said the board’s purview was never supposed to be an arbiter of truth. Instead, it would act as a traffic cop within the government, coordinating ongoing work while insisting that privacy and other civil liberties be protected.

In her closed-door testimony to the committee, she portrayed the board as largely toothless. It lacked the authority to set budgets, had no permanent staff other than herself and had no authority to make operational decisions.

She also bristled at those who compared it to an Orwellian nightmare.

“We had no intention to take anything down,” she said.

She connected some of the threats she received to Mr. Jordan’s criticism of the board and of her.

She said he misled the country when he said she had cast doubt on Hunter Biden’s laptop and praised the “Steele dossier,” a compilation of anti-Trump rumors that helped fuel the FBI’s bungled investigation into then-candidate Donald Trump.

“I never commented on the Steele dossier publicly, and I’m not going to comment on it today,” she told the committee.

Republicans confronted her with her social media posts where she did comment on the dossier and its origins and where she suggested the Hunter Biden laptop story should be seen as “a Trump campaign” tactic.

She then told lawmakers she shouldn’t be judged by “cherry-picked tweets that have been used to defame me and frankly have led to significant threats to me and my family because they’ve been taken out of context and without nuance.”

At one point in the deposition, Ms. [Jankowicz](#) led the panel in a discussion about disinformation. She said the definition used by the Cybersecurity and Information Security Agency, which had been the department’s leader on the subject, didn’t track with what she or others in the research community thought.

“CISA has one definition, and one of the things that occurred to me while I was at DHS is that different entities were dealing with different definitions. So that was one of the things that I had hoped to work on,” she said, calling CISA’s definition “overbroad.”

CISA’s definition said disinformation, misinformation and malinformation are all types of false information. Ms. [Jankowicz](#) said malinformation can be true but is released with ulterior motives. She cited strategic leaks as a form of malinformation.

Ms. [Jankowicz](#) said her priority would have been combating what she said was disinformation about the border.

“Saying that you could get citizenship upon crossing the border, or that, you know, there were human smugglers who were promising wild things to people who were making that journey, we wanted to understand it better,” she said.

She said that was the top priority for her superiors.

She had little exposure to this issue, so she invited some academics specializing in migrants and disinformation to a roundtable. She told lawmakers she couldn't remember whom she invited and the meeting never happened.

Republicans said Ms. [Jankowicz](#) seemed to have clear recollections about her commitment to civil rights but was fuzzy about their interests.

She responded: "The past year of my life has been a really difficult one. I gave birth a few weeks after I left government, and over the past year I have been subject to threats, stalking, and a number of other really stressful and difficult situations."

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## **El exjefe de desinformación del DHS dice que el departamento ni siquiera puede ponerse de acuerdo sobre la definición de desinformación**

*El secretario de Seguridad Nacional, Alejandro Mayorkas, habla durante una audiencia en el Capitolio en Washington el miércoles 4 de mayo de 2022, en esta foto de archivo. En una carta a Mayorkas, varios senadores republicanos dijeron que el DHS aún no había entregado "todos los registros relacionados" con la junta de desinformación suspendida, como había prometido durante su testimonio ante el Comité de Seguridad Nacional del Senado a principios de este mes. (AP Foto/Mariam Zuhair, Archivo) \*\*ARCHIVO\**

Por [Stephen Dinan](#) - The Washington Times - Lunes, 20 de mayo de 2024

El secretario de Seguridad Nacional, Alejandro Mayorkas, elegido como su jefe de desinformación, dijo que el departamento ni siquiera pudo establecer una buena definición de "desinformación".

[Nina Jankowicz](#), quien fue directora de la junta de gobernanza de la desinformación durante aproximadamente tres meses antes de renunciar en 2022 en medio de una tormenta de críticas, dijo en una declaración recién publicada ante el Congreso que el departamento falló en el despliegue de su trabajo y luego la abandonó cuando las cosas se pusieron difíciles.

Describió la disfunción y la confusión en todo momento. Dijo que los asesores de comunicaciones de Mayorkas vetaron sus planes de informar al Congreso sobre su papel, lo que permitió que su trabajo se convirtiera en blanco de desinformación. Dijo que enfrentó "decenas de miles de amenazas de muerte" y tuvo que contratar a un consultor de seguridad que le dijo que tenía que salir de su casa, solo unas semanas antes de dar a luz, para protegerse.

En la declaración de abril de 2023, la Sra. [Jankowicz](#) le dijo al Comité Judicial de la Cámara de Representantes que ni ella ni la junta de desinformación estaban destinadas a ser policías de desinformación que vigilaran lo que decía la gente.

De hecho, dijo que una prioridad, truncada por su partida, era lograr que sus colegas se pusieran de acuerdo en una buena definición de desinformación.

"Pensé que había algunas brechas bastante grandes en términos de la comprensión del concepto", dijo. "No puedes decir que algo es un oso si no sabes cómo es un oso. Así que ahí es donde estábamos".

[Jankowicz](#), que había estudiado la desinformación extranjera, fue elegida por Mayorkas como jefa de su nueva junta de desinformación a principios de 2022. Sirvió durante unas ocho semanas en secreto. Mayorkas reveló la junta solo en respuesta a una pregunta durante una audiencia en el Congreso sobre lo que su departamento estaba haciendo para controlar la desinformación contra los votantes hispanos y negros.

El anuncio fue recibido con furia y consternación por parte de la derecha, donde legisladores y activistas dijeron que no confiaban en que el gobierno, y mucho menos en Mayorkas, juzgara la verdad y la mentira en el debate público. Algunos lo compararon con un "Ministerio de la Verdad" orwelliano.

Aproximadamente tres semanas después de anunciar la junta, Mayorkas la suspendió y [Jankowicz](#) renunció. Meses después, Mayorkas disolvió silenciosamente la junta por completo.

"Me arrojaron debajo del autobús hasta cierto punto", dijo en la transcripción de su entrevista, que el Comité Judicial de la Cámara de Representantes publicó el viernes. "Había gastado mi carrera y una gran parte de mi propio tipo de capital personal haciendo un trabajo que pensaba que era importante para el pueblo estadounidense, y no quería arriesgarme a sufrir más daños por una agencia que claramente no se preocupaba por mi seguridad".

Dijo que luchó para que el departamento implementara la junta y su papel como directora de una manera más tradicional, con sesiones informativas al Congreso con anticipación y la participación de expertos externos.

Dijo que el equipo de Mayorkas rechazó esas ideas, le prohibió ir al Capitolio y le ordenó que fuera vaga en las sesiones informativas del Congreso.