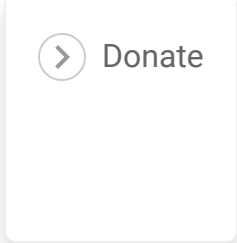
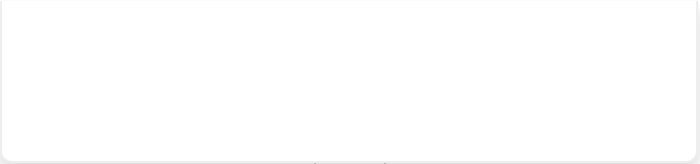




NEWS / NATION & WORLD

What are 'neuro-strike weapons,' and is Haley right that China is developing them?

PolitiFact | Scientists familiar with neuro-weapons, which affect people's nervous systems, say the weapons are technologically plausible and are being pursued by China and possibly the U.S.





...residential campaign stop at the South Carolina State House on Monday, Oct. 30, 20

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^ **Louis Jacobson** *PolitiFact Chief Correspondent*
Samantha Putterman *PolitiFact reporter*

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EXETER, N.H. — Nikki Haley, a contender for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, has repeated a line on the campaign trail that once drew “audible gasps” at a

She's said it in a CNBC interview, in Iowa speeches and during an Oct. 12 [town hall](#) in this New Hampshire village.


China is “the largest developer of neuro-strike weapons, weapons engineered to change the brain activity of military commanders and segments of the population,” she said during the town hall in [Exeter](#).

Weapons that can change people’s brains or thoughts might seem like science fiction. But we found that scientists believe such weapons are not only technologically plausible, but also something that China — and possibly the U.S. — is pursuing. Some say the technology could become reality within a decade.

The weapons are designed or adapted to affect the central and peripheral nervous system, said James Giordano, a Georgetown University Medical Center neurology and biochemistry professor and executive director of the Institute for Biodefense Research, a federally funded think tank.

and present reality in the current and future armamentarium of a
lano said, adding that China “has dedicated programs in the brain
ences that are directly applicable, and intended for national security, intelligence and
ense applications.”

Edl Schamiloglu is a University of New Mexico professor who studies high-power microwave sources, a subject area that overlaps with potential neuro-weapons. He [wrote in](#)

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The U.S. government is aware of brain weapon development and in 2021 sanctioned 11 Chinese research entities for using biotechnology processes to support the Chinese military, including “purported brain-control weaponry,” according to a [notice](#) in the Federal Register, where the government prints official notices.

The notice formalized export sanctions against China, citing the biotechnology’s potential as a tool of political repression against “members of ethnic and religious minority groups,” Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo [said](#).

Meanwhile, an unclassified 2023 Defense Department [report](#) to Congress described China as researching and developing Cognitive Domain Operations, which it believes to be the “next evolution of psychological warfare.” Although the report didn’t describe a weapon per se, it said the effort combines traditional psychological warfare with internet and communications platforms, hoping to affect “a target’s cognition and ... change ... the target’s decision making and behavior.”

led us several links to evidence, including the Federal Register
tment report and news clips.

How neuro-weapons might work

The research on brain weapons has produced little publicly accessible information. But Georgetown’s Giordano said the weapons would alter “the functions and structure of the brain so as to alter targeted individuals’ thoughts, emotions and behaviors.”

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A 2020 [essay](#) by Schamiloglu, updated in 2022, is one of the few articles to publicly address the technology. In the essay, Schamiloglu, who receives both U.S. military and industry funding for his work, wrote that the quest to build a neuro-weapon to disable military personnel was a staple of Cold War research for both the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

ote, by converting “energy from a power source — a wall plug in military vehicle — into radiated electromagnetic energy and focus

^ on a target,” either mechanical or human.

“The human head acts as a receiving antenna for microwaves in the low gigahertz frequency range,” he wrote. “Pulses of microwaves in these frequencies can cause people to hear sounds.”

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magnetic stimulation.” Health professionals place the device, which contains an [electromagnetic coil](#) and looks like a portable hair dryer, near the scalp to treat patients for depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and migraines.

The electromagnetic coil “delivers magnetic pulses that stimulate nerve cells in the region of your brain involved in mood control and depression,” according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). “It’s thought to activate regions of the brain that have decreased activity during depression.”

Beyond its therapeutic uses, there’s evidence that the device can temporarily garble human speech. In 2011, Roger Highfield, an editor with the British magazine *New Scientist*, [had himself videotaped](#) while being [treated](#) with the device. In the video, Highfield’s recitation of a nursery rhyme was interrupted by the device’s magnetic interference.

Another [video](#) from 2021 appears to show the same type of results. Scientific papers have also [confirmed](#) that the device seems to alter speech patterns.

ne and neuro-weapons

Discussion of neuro-weapons has been further muddied by controversy over “[Havana syndrome](#),” which emerged in 2016 when diplomats from the U.S. State Department in Cuba reported unexplained headaches, nausea, hearing loss, lightheadedness and cognitive problems. Other U.S. diplomats later reported similar symptoms while in China and other countries.

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have caused some of the symptoms.

A December 2020 [report](#) by the National Academy of Sciences and a February 2022 [report](#) by a [panel](#) of experts concluded that, despite a variety of uncertainties, a weapon using “pulsed radiofrequency energy” or “pulsed electromagnetic energy” plausibly caused some Havana syndrome cases. Pulsed power involves short but extremely powerful electrical pulses.

Complicating the understanding of Havana syndrome was a [third report](#) by U.S. intelligence agencies that rebutted the notion that a foreign nation had caused the illnesses, either by using a directed energy weapon or as an unintended consequence of other activity.

Following the Havana syndrome debate, neuro-weapons have attracted some attention among national security experts and media. This year, The Washington Times, a conservative newspaper, has [published](#) two [articles](#) about the technology and China’s role

own about how far along the research is, in China or the U.S. It’s

to unclear how much of the research is offensive or defensive.

Our ruling

Haley said China is “the largest developer of neuro-strike weapons” engineered to change brain activity.

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and China has pursued it for years.


In 2021, the U.S. sanctioned 11 Chinese research institutes for using biotechnology processes to support the Chinese military, including “purported brain-control weaponry.”

And an unclassified 2023 Defense Department report said China is developing a program it calls Cognitive Domain Operations that combines traditional psychological warfare with internet and communications platforms, hoping to affect “a target’s cognition and resulting in a change in the target’s decision making and behavior.”

We rate Haley’s statement Mostly True.

Louis Jacobson is the chief correspondent for PolitiFact and a staff writer for the Tampa Bay Times. He has served as deputy Call and as founding gislative wire pressNow. Earlier, he an a decade covering politics, policy and lobbying for National Journal magazine.

Samantha Putterman is the Florida government reporter for PolitiFact.

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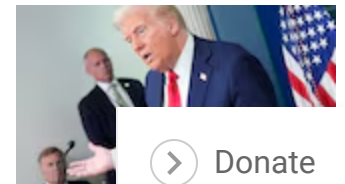
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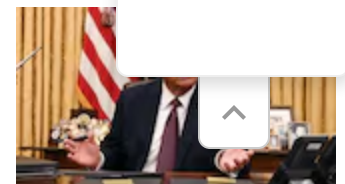
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