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Large Explosion near The Pentagon Complex in Washington D.C. - Initial Report



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It Has Started

It was recently reported that a “fake Pentagon ‘explosion’ photo sows confusion on Twitter” (<https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/05/ai-generated-image-of-explosion-near-pentagon-goes-viral-sparks-brief-panic>). That “photo” is reproduced above. Though brief, the chaos was real. Next time, it may not be so brief or contained.

Photography has taken many forms, but to the general public photography has primarily meant a one-to-one relationship between what was before the camera and what came out the other end. Photography can still represent the truth. A human (the photographer) is the key to establishing this trust, and there is a well-developed ethic to establish this trust. First and foremost is, “You had to bet there,” i.e., the photographer is a witness.

A “fake” photograph—like above—has no witness. Given that the rapid advances in and dissemination of artificial intelligence (AI) “photography” will only accelerate, that the tools are being used by interests that have no ethic to represent reality with any social obligation to verity (and therefore may implicitly claim witness status to an unknowing audience), and that public institutions will not be able to regulate the dissemination of “fake” photographs on First Amendment grounds alone, the ability of people to trust what we understand represented in a photograph is being seriously compromised.

Social relationships that have advanced during the co-evolution of democracy and photography can be quickly overturned for purely private political and financial gain, to the detriment of achieving universal democracy and freedom. Corporations developing artificial intelligence platforms, controlled by owners motivated only by more money, will never accept that the images their systems produce must be clearly marked as such (few rarely do now). Therefore it is incumbent on those of us who value authentic photography to take a proactive approach: visibly marking “real” photographs as such.

We should organize based on the Four Corners model (<https://fourcornersproject.org>) to quickly expand the practice of building social trust through photography. Essentially this would mean unobtrusively watermarking any “real” photograph with metadata that reflects the ethic of “real” photography. Instead of “real” photographs being used to train AI, the presence of this watermark will train people to trust that any photograph bearing this watermark is “real”—immediately verified by clicking on the Four Corners logo.

Of course, this approach would involve building new and improved technological platforms as well as scalable democratic institutions to assure the public that the watermark can be trusted. The necessary resources can be mobilized. The sooner we start, however, the better we will be able to realize photography’s promise to represent reality and prevent society from sliding into further chaos, toward the roots of fascism.

Whether you are an amateur or professional photographer, or simply interested in image democracy, let’s augment the conversation at <https://social.photography/about>. Registration is free and your attention will never be monetized or data sold.

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