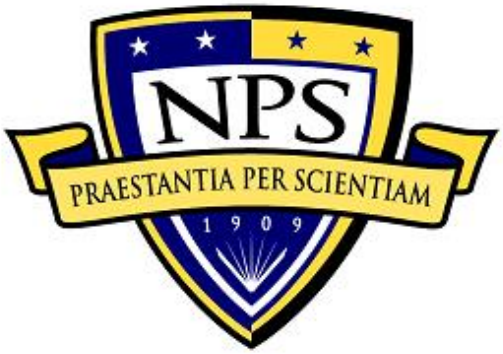
2019-09

REFOCUSING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER MISSION TO COMBAT MODERN ADVERSARY INFORMATION STRATEGY: APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY?

Stegmann, Benjamin W.; Gregory, Isaac J.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

REFOCUSING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER MISSION TO COMBAT MODERN ADVERSARY INFORMATION STRATEGY: APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY?

by

Benjamin W. Stegmann and Isaac J. Gregory

September 2019

Thesis Advisor: Ryan Maness
Second Reader: Bradley J. Strawser

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			*Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188*

1. AGENCY USE ONLY ***(Leave blank)***	**2. REPORT DATE** September 2019	**3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED** Master's thesis

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE REFOCUSING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER MISSION TO COMBAT MODERN ADVERSARY INFORMATION STRATEGY: APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY?	**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHOR(S) Benjamin W. Stegmann and Isaac J. Gregory	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000	**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A	**10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.	**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE** A

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Adversary activities in the information space represent a persistent threat to U.S. national security. This thesis claims U.S. information strategy lacks unity of effort and purpose and is also not optimized to adequately face modern threats. Case studies centered on Russian activity within the information environment will be explored and used to compare and contrast against current U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) information strategy. This provides focus for the core thesis question which asks: How can lessons learned from the United States Information Agency (USIA) inform modifications to policy and strategy for the Global Engagement Center (GEC) to formulate messaging and combat adversary information operations (IO)? Furthermore, the purpose of this thesis is to examine case studies of USIA during the Cold War and capture lessons learned in order to inform potential modifications to the Global Engagement Center, namely creating a fifth pillar within the GEC that will formulate and lead United States information strategy. This allows the United States to inform global audiences while highlighting negative actions committed by our adversaries. If the United States cannot achieve this it will be to the detriment of national interests. Furthermore, it will likely fall behind its enemies, forcing America to play a reactive role, and remaining unable to capitalize on opportunities or seize the initiative during times of conflict.

14. SUBJECT TERMS United States Information Agency, USIA, Global Engagement Center, GEC, messaging, combat adversary information operations, IO	**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 67
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE**	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT**	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	UU

NSN 7540-01-280-5500 Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89) Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.

REFOCUSING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER MISSION TO COMBAT MODERN ADVERSARY INFORMATION STRATEGY: APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY?

Benjamin W. Stegmann
Major, United States Army
BS, Lincoln University, 2002

Isaac J. Gregory
Major, United States Army
BBA, Jackson State University, 2007

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION STRATEGY AND POLITICAL WARFARE

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
September 2019

Approved by: Ryan Maness
Advisor

Bradley J. Strawser
Second Reader

John J. Arquilla
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ABSTRACT

Adversary activities in the information space represent a persistent threat to U.S. national security. This thesis claims U.S. information strategy lacks unity of effort and purpose and is also not optimized to adequately face modern threats. Case studies centered on Russian activity within the information environment will be explored and used to compare and contrast against current U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) information strategy. This provides focus for the core thesis question which asks: How can lessons learned from the United States Information Agency (USIA) inform modifications to policy and strategy for the Global Engagement Center (GEC) to formulate messaging and combat adversary information operations (IO)? Furthermore, the purpose of this thesis is to examine case studies of USIA during the Cold War and capture lessons learned in order to inform potential modifications to the Global Engagement Center, namely creating a fifth pillar within the GEC that will formulate and lead United States information strategy. This allows the United States to inform global audiences while highlighting negative actions committed by our adversaries. If the United States cannot achieve this it will be to the detriment of national interests. Furthermore, it will likely fall behind its enemies, forcing America to play a reactive role, and remaining unable to capitalize on opportunities or seize the initiative during times of conflict.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BBG	Broadcast Board of Governors
BPC	Beijing Party Committee
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CCP	Committee of the Communist Party of China
DAS	Defense Acquisition System
DIME	Diplomacy; Information; Military; Economic
DNC	Democratic National Committee
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigations
FY	Fiscal Year
GEC	Global Engagement Center
IO	Information Operations
IW	Information Warfare
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
JIATF-I	Joint Interagency Task Force—Influence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NSA	National Security Agency
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
RFE	Radio Free Europe
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Conventions Law of the Sea
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIIA	United States International Information Administration
VoA	Voice of America

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I. EXISTENTIAL THREAT

The integrity of the U.S. voting system is under a serious threat. In a recent briefing to Congress, U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller gave a stern admonition that the Russian election meddling portions of his report had not been given the national attention they merited, and that this meddling would have a lasting impact on America.[1] Mueller added, rather ominously, "they are doing it as we sit here."[2] This type of language is not political rhetoric. It is fact, and it is indeed ominous. The Russian meddling, a type of influence campaign, is a sinister and well-planned effort by a foreign power to strike at the very heart of the American democratic process. It was bold and daring, and it also is not over. House Intelligence Committee chairman Adam Schiff added during the hearing that "Russians massively intervened in 2016 and they are prepared to do so again in voting that is set to begin a mere eight months from now."[3]

If the American democratic process is not secure, or if it is perceived as insecure, then it does not function properly and that is a threat. To understand this threat, it is important to understand how it came to be and some of the methods employed. In a landmark collaboration among the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Security Agency (CIA, FBI, and NSA, respectively), top intelligence analysts assert with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence operation specifically to target the 2016 election.[4] The campaign aimed to "undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process," and it used "cyber operations, election board intrusions and overt propaganda directed at the American people to accomplish this.[5] Russia took advantage of its knowledge and understanding of deeply

---

1 Zachary Wolf, "Robert Mueller's Testimony: The Biggest Takeaway Is Russia's Interference in U.S. Elections," CNN, July 25, 2019, 1, https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/24/politics/russia-trump-election-interference/index.html.

2 Wolf, 1.

3 Wolf, 1.

4 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections," Intelligence Community Report, January 6, 2017, i.

5 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2.

rooted racial tensions, as well as class and party divisions, in the execution of its information campaign.

This sophisticated information campaign was described by the CIA, FBI, and NSA as the "boldest yet," a "significant escalation in directness," and as the "new normal in Russian influence efforts."[6] Russian interference did not affect votes outright, yet it managed to cut to the heart of something of fundamental importance to America, its democratic traditions and institutions. This alone constitutes a threat to U.S. national security. What Russia learned in the 2016 U.S. presidential election will be used again with more precision in other influence operations targeting the U.S. and its allies and partner nations.[7]

This "new normal" undermines confidence, weakens political processes, and imposes strains on the bonds that connect and hold much of the Western democratic world institutions together. The types of activities used by Russia aim to fracture and divide these institutions and relationships, which play right into Russia's strategy of undermining the West. The difference highlighted here between Russia and the United States is that Russia has a plan and a strategy, and this stands in sharp contrast to the current state of affairs in the United states. Russia is loud and deceptive, yet it is also deliberate, while its adversaries (at least for much of the time) are often relegated to playing a reactive role instead of seizing the initiative.

While some adversaries are satisfied with the theft of American intellectual property, or with asserting themselves in what they consider to be their regional or local spheres of influence, Russia is different. Russia goes beyond these types of activities. Russian influence in the 2016 U.S. presidential election sets it apart from other nations, or at least it did up to that point in time. Russia set a precedent, and while it is likely that others will follow, Russia has now demonstrated that it is more than willing and able to create powerful effects in the information space right here in the United States. Moreover,

6 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 5.

7 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, iii.

it has shown that it has the capability and the political will to target what many Americans regard as something which is all but sacred, American democracy.

This, however, was not always the case. The U.S. had an organization to counter Russian disinformation. This thesis will explore a time when America had a more coherent information strategy; it will explain the role of an agency that existed during much of the Cold War, and which told the American story. That agency was the United States Information Agency (USIA). The USIA was instrumental in making sure that foreign audiences knew about the good deeds of America and its allies, as well as the negative actions of America's adversaries. The USIA did not fabricate or spin information. It simply let actions speak for themselves, as it did during the Cold War when it published iconic images like that of the East German border guard jumping a fence to freedom and the West.[8] These efforts allowed viewers and listeners to draw their own conclusions. They also ensured that concrete, barbed wire, and confinement would be associated with communism, while the ideas of freedom and liberty would be associated with democracy. The Cold War is over. The Soviet Union and the USIA no longer exist. Russia's activities have evolved since the Cold War, as have those of the U.S. Yet, current Russian strategy, which appears to be so deliberate, consistent and unified, stands in sharp contrast to current U.S. strategy, which lacks consistency and unity of effort. Russian information warfare has re-emerged as an old threat in a new domain: a threat that represents a very real danger to U.S. national interests. The U.S. should redirect its efforts to meet this and other threats, or become content with foreign powers meddling in its affairs.

A. NEW METHODS

Much has been written about the Gerasimov doctrine, Russian new-generation warfare, little green men and the like, especially since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Many Western thinkers have a hard time coming to grips with these types of tactics and the overall Russian strategy. Mark Galeotti distills all of this down to what he calls "a form

8 Nicholas Cull, "'The Man Who Invented Truth': The Tenure of Edward R. Murrow as Director of the United States Information Agency During the Kennedy Years," *Routledge Taylor & Francis Group*, Cold War History, 4, no. 1 (2003): 9, https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740312331391724.

of guerilla geopolitics, a would-be great power, aware that its ambitions outstrip its military resources, seeks to leverage the methodologies of an insurgent to maximize its capabilities."[9] This is why Russian threats are so dangerous. Galeotti's use of the term "would-be world power" gets to the heart of Russian insecurity on the world stage. Russia desperately wants the world to take it seriously. "Guerilla geopolitics," combined with techniques and approaches to achieving Russian goals such as those seen in Ukraine and American elections are innovative and ever adapting and they are indeed, as Galeotti has said, very much like an insurgency. Insurgencies can be hard to understand, dynamic, and difficult to combat, let alone defeat. These same traits are seen in Russian threats today, and like insurgents, the Russians do not necessarily have to "win" all the time to achieve victory. They simply have to stay in the fight, or "not lose."

If Russia has turned to new methods to influence its enemies in the global information space, then the United States has to find ways to recognize, understand, and combat those new methods. America needs an agency to tell its story and to help formulate information strategy, and to leverage new technology and methods in the process. This is no easy task, but neither is it impossible. It requires leadership and direction on the part of an agency that understands the power of information, and knows how to deploy and manage it. A modified and more capable Global Engagement Center (GEC) within the State Department could be the agency to accomplish this.

This thesis uses case studies centered on Russian activity within the information environment to compare and contrast against current U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) information strategy. Further case studies focusing on USIA efforts in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, and also during the Chinese Tiananmen Square crisis, are included to showcase valuable experiences and best practices. This provides focus for the core thesis question: "How can lessons learned from the USIA inform modifications to policy and strategy for the Global Engagement Center (GEC) to formulate messaging and combat adversary Information Operations (IO)?"

---

[9] Mark Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New Is Russia's 'New Way of War'?," Small Wars & Insurgencies 27, no. 2 (March 3, 2016): 283, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129170.

B. THESIS PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine these case studies and capture lessons learned in order to inform potential revisions to the GEC, namely, the creation of a fifth pillar within the GEC that will formulate and consolidate United States information strategy. Currently, the GEC is comprised of "four core areas: science and technology, interagency engagement, partner engagement, and content production."[10] Adding a new core area or pillar will allow the United States to inform global audiences while highlighting negative actions committed by our adversaries. This fifth core area or pillar should be "lead information strategy." This additional capability will also help to thwart adversarial IO efforts. In addition to highlighting important lessons learned, the case studies will show the nature of some of the threats emanating from Russia. They will also demonstrate why a modified GEC is the correct answer to the dynamic challenges and threats facing the U.S. in the 21st century.

Moreover, while much of this thesis will focus on Russia, it is important to recognize that the lessons learned, and the new capabilities presented here, can be applied to any adversary. All of these efforts should be undertaken in a timely manner, which is appropriate for the velocity and volume of today's information space. If the United States cannot achieve this, it will be to the detriment of national interests. Furthermore, the U.S. will likely fall behind its enemies, forcing America to play a reactive role, and remain unable to capitalize on opportunities or seize the initiative during times of conflict.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter II will describe a brief history of the USIA and why it was important during its relatively short existence. It will also explain why the GEC is well suited to meet the challenges facing the U.S. in the 21st century information space. Chapter III will establish why Russia poses such a dangerous threat to U.S. national interests and national security. Examples and case studies will accomplish this. Chapter III will close with a thought experiment which shows the value of the GEC

[10] Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, "U.S. Department of State website," U.S. Department of State Global Engagement Center, 2017, https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-public-diplomacy-and-public-affairs/global-engagement-center/.

in its updated form in the face of Russian aggression in the Baltics. This will decisively demonstrate why the GEC is the correct choice for meeting modern threats like Russia.

Chapter IV provides a more in-depth look at the USIA, using case studies from the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the 1989 Beijing Spring and Tiananmen Square massacre. These case studies illustrate how the USIA supported U.S. national interests. They are also valuable in that they provide lessons learned that can be applied to the modern-day GEC. These case studies and lessons learned will be followed by Chapter V's examination of trust and credibility on U.S. information strategy. Understanding these impacts, and how the U.S. has built trust abroad in the past will help with crafting information strategy in the future.

II. HISTORY OF UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

The 20th century was a dynamic one, which saw the United States of America emerge as a world power, and eventually become a superpower. For much of the post-WWII era there existed an agency which told the story of United States to the world via the USIA. Its mission was "to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between American and U.S. institutions, and their counterparts abroad."[11]

U.S. adversaries and competitors created no shortage of propaganda and disinformation to cast the U.S.in a negative light, but the USIA was always there to counter these narratives. This chapter will explore its role throughout the last half of the 20th century, and examine what was good about the USIA as well as its shortcomings. In doing so, it will demonstrate how the USIA was able to help the U.S. maintain the information advantage over its adversaries through the darkest days of the Cold War and beyond with clear, timely and consolidated messaging. This stands in stark contrast to present day U.S. messaging across the government and even within the Department of Defense which lacks clarity and unity of effort. Reinstating the USIA by modifying the GEC will help the U.S. to flatten messaging, formulate information strategy to assist in foreign policy, and seize and keep the information advantage in the 21st century.

When the dust settled after the Second World War, U.S. leaders and policymakers understood the need to tell America's story around the world and to understand what other countries thought about the United States. If nothing else, this was perceived as necessary to counter the growing threat of Communist expansion. President Harry Truman laid the foundations for what would become USIA when he created the United States International Informational Administration (USIIA) in 1952.[12] Yet this agency was concerned largely

11 William A. Chodkowski, "American Security Project Fact Sheet, Reference 0097 The United States Information Agency," *American Security Project*, November 2012, 1.

12 Mark Haefele, "John F. Kennedy, USIA and Word Public Opinion," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 67.

with public opinion polling data and was consequently severely limited in its capabilities. That would change under the administration of the next president, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

President Eisenhower improved upon the former USIIA and also built upon the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, which declared the importance of public diplomacy, and culminated in 1953 when he called for the creation of an agency to strategically perform American messaging to foreign audiences.[13] Mark Haefele explains that by doing this, the president "announced his determination to make the U.S. information program an effective instrument of national policy."[14] This was the birth of the USIA, but it was also something more than just the creation of yet another new government agency. This was an American president who essentially put the "I" in what we know today as DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economics). President Eisenhower announced to the world that Information was absolutely an official instrument of national power.

A. COMMITMENT TO INFORMATION STRATEGY

This creation of the USIA was significant for several reasons. Outwardly, it played a valuable signaling function to our partners, allies, and enemies alike. It told them that America was committed to playing a dominant role in the information space. This also demonstrated U.S. resolve, especially when combined with other the instruments of national power (D, M, E). There were other implications as well, which will be explored in later chapters.

The creation of USIA also had additional significance. The president was saying that because information is so important to the U.S. global strategy, it had to have its own independent government agency. As Nye and Owens have already noted, USIA was there to "strategically perform American messaging to foreign audiences."[15]

The bulk of existing literature on the USIA typically lays out a chronology and highlights the successes and strengths of the agency. *America's Information Edge*, by

---

13 Joseph S. Nye Jr. and William A. Owens, "America's Information Edge.," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (April 3, 1996): 2–3.

14 Haefele, "John F. Kennedy, USIA and Word Public Opinion," 67.

15 Nye and Owens, 19.

Joseph Nye and William Owens, is perhaps one of the most compelling in regard to the USIA. Nye, the original soft power proponent,[16] along with his colleague Owens lays out a strong case for the power of information. Writing in the late 1990s they saw in America, for example, an ever-increasing reliance on military instruments of national power, and warned that dogmatic thinking had marginalized information as an instrument of power.[17]

Interestingly, Nye and Owens lauded the USIA for their early recognition of the importance and potential of the internet with the establishment of "Electronic Media Teams" and their creation of "World Wide Web homepages." Here was an agency that was looking to the future and innovating, despite shrinking budgets. Sadly, Nye and Owens also saw that the end was near, lamenting that Congress had the USIA on the chopping block just as the world was entering a new era when its utility was actually increasing.[18]

Indeed, the USIA would not live to see the 21st century. Congress closed its doors with the 1998 Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act, which called for its merger with the State Department (DoS) as of 1999, and left only the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) and Voice of America (VOA) remaining.[19] Not surprisingly, there seems to be no shortage of authors and experts calling to bring the USIA back. Carnes Lord is among this camp of thinkers. In *Reorganizing for Public Diplomacy* Lord argues that the merger with the DoS was a worthy but doomed experiment, and that it is unrealistic for the DoS to perform the myriad duties of the USIA.[20] Lord is not alone in his concerns.

B. REBRANDING OF USIA

In fact, the concern seems to be mounting. Carlos Roa notes in *The National Interest* that the U.S. is currently waging an ongoing information war with various

16 Nye and Owens, 20.

17 Nye and Owens, 22.

18 Nye and Owens, 30.

19 Chodkowski, "American Security Project Fact Sheet, Reference 0097 The United States Information Agency," 4.

20 John Arquilla and Douglas A. Borer, eds., *Information Strategy and Warfare; A Guide to Theory and Practice* (New York, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 119.

adversaries, and that a new USIA is needed.[21] Roa goes on to quote former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in his testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, "I do think that we could do with having a USIA on steroids."[22] These are strong statements of support for resurrecting the agency.

While a new and perhaps "revamped"[23] USIA would be instrumental in helping the U.S. consolidate messaging, it is important to recognize that the USIA is not an end all be all solution. If the USIA performs messaging, then it at least must know just what that message is. The United States has to know what it wants to say before it addresses target audiences. This is one of the key problems in U.S. policy today, and it was also problematic during the lifespan of the original USIA. The issue of unified messaging or unity of effort will be discussed in chapters IV and V, as will practical solutions of how to achieve it.

Matthew Armstrong diverges sharply from other authors and experts. He claims that "modern invocations of the USIA are based on a romantic notion of a simpler time."[24] He also asserts that those who propose to bring it back it do not understand what its original mission was.[25] These are interesting points, but his opinion that nostalgia and lack of understanding drive ideas surrounding a new USIA or similar agency are unfair to the myriad experts who have studied and commented on the topic. Additionally, the USIA existed for the bulk of the Cold War and weathered many volatile and dangerous international incidents to include the Cuban Missile Crisis, which, by the way, was existential and should hardly be categorized as a "simpler time," to use Armstrong's phrase. One could be forgiven for not granting much credence to this particular claim in light of the body of quality scholarship on the subject. Yet, Armstrong does find at least some

---

21 Carlos Roa, "Time to Restore the U.S. Information Agency," *The National Interest,* February 20, 2017, 2.

22 Roa, 2.

23 Roa, 2.

24 Matthew Armstrong, "No, We Do Not Need to Revive the U.S. Information Agency," War on the Rocks, November 12, 2015, 2, https://warontherocks.com/2015/11/no-we-do-not-need-to-revive-the-u-s-information-agency/.

25 Armstrong, 1.

common ground with other experts when he observes the "stunning lack of strategic vision in America today".[26] This lack of strategy will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

Some additional and very important points against resurrecting the USIA are brought up by Nicolas J. Hull. Writing for *Diplomatic History*, Hull broaches a very practical subject rarely considered by others. He describes what he calls a "historical problem"[27] that faces any type of information agency. He correctly points out that organizations like the USIA often have to compete with, yet still depend on other more heavyweight political agencies or departments (State, Defense, Finance, etc.) that often view them as encroaching on their own missions.[28] Hull finds more weakness, adding that "they frequently bring together internal elements with divergent cultures and expectations, and are hence prone to centrifugal strains".[29]

C. CHALLENGES OF USIA

Despite such challenges, there is still much to be said for resurrecting the USIA. Nye and Owens credit the USIA with "keeping the idea of democracy alive in the Soviet bloc during the Cold War."[30] That is no small claim, and even if that is all the USIA accomplished, it would probably be well worth its cost in the annual budget. Nye and Owens go on to say that an information operation led by the USIA in Rwanda could have thwarted Hutu radio propaganda and potentially avoided the genocide there.[31] Such an operation would, of course, require cooperation between the USIA and other departments such as State and Defense. In other words, it would require deft use of all the instruments of national power. The USIA performed admirably throughout its almost 50-year existence and served quite literally as America's voice. Coupled with a clear national strategy and

---

26 Armstrong, 3; Roa, 3.

27 Nicholas Cull, "Speeding the Strange Death of American Public Diplomacy: The George HW Bush Administration and the U.S. Information Agency," *Oxford University Press*, Diplomatic History, 34, no. 1 (January 2010): 17.

28 Cull, 15.

29 Cull, 17.

30 Nye and Owens, 34.

31 Nye and Owens, 32.

message, and augmented with new technology and capabilities that did not exist during its previous service, it could be America's voice again.

Yet there would be considerable challenges to standing up a new government agency. There could be a better way to improve U.S. information strategy. The central research hypotheses of this project is that the U.S. lacks a coherent information strategy and a modified GEC could help to correct the deficiency. Perhaps there is a better way. If existing tools and resources could be leveraged, along with lessons learned from USIA activities in the past, then an existing agency could be modified to develop a better information strategy for America.

Lieutenant Colonel Bradley M. Carr has some interesting thoughts on the need to formulate a clear strategy and how existing tools and resources could be used to do it. He notes that "even with current emphasis on grey zone conflicts, hybrid warfare, or third offset strategies, it is apparent that the U.S. does not have a construct to re-weaponize the 'I' in DIME as a part of any strategic vision, policy, or overall strategy."[32] There is much that is correct in this statement, and Carr's comments on strategy, or a lack of it, echo those of other scholars. Yet weaponizing information is a phrase which should be used carefully, if at all in relation to an entity such as USIA or a similar agency, particularly in light of what Carr proposes. He "recommends a DoD led Joint Interagency Task Force for Influence (JIATF-I) to replace the GEC." This means essentially that the military would take over the duties of the GEC, which is currently a part of the U.S. Department of State. This is a novel idea, but there are problems associated with it. One glaring problem is the name. Using a term like Joint Interagency Task Force for Influence, or even JIATF-I, outside of military circles will likely be problematic and cause confusion. Other items to consider are the various title authorities. For example, state department public diplomacy and external broadcasting efforts fall under Title 22, and 71, respectively, while the JIATF-I would fall under DoD Title 10 authority.[33]

---

[32] Bradley Carr, *Joint Interagency Task Force - Influence: The New Global Engagement Center* (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2017), 1.

[33] Ashley Boyle, "USC, Title 10, Title 22, and Title 50," August 2012, 1, https://www.scribd.com/document/101956577/U-S-C-Title-10-Title-22-And-Title-50.

Additionally, using information as a weapon is something that the U.S. military does when and where it is appropriate, but that use falls primarily within the "M" part of DIME. Writing for the Congressional Research Service, Catherine Theohary concedes that yes, much of the U.S. Information Warfare toolkit lives within the DoD, but she also provides a warning. Giving the Pentagon such leadership responsibilities concerning information could be perceived as "the militarization of cyberspace, or the weaponization of information that would counter the principles of global internet freedom."[34] This is an admonition that should not be taken lightly.

D. THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER

The GEC, like the USIA before it, relies on its cooperative relationships and its credibility with the private sector. It is a primarily civilian government agency, and must remain so if it is to be taken seriously and have any hope of effectiveness in the current and future information space. Dissolving the GEC and replacing it with a JIATF-I would make information strategy for America a purely military affair. This, right or wrong, would send the wrong messages to partners in the private sector, as well as partners and allies overseas. It could even interfere with U.S. diplomatic efforts. It is important to recognize at this point that the primary efforts of the modified GEC proposed here will be to remain truthful in its messaging and operations. This is critical in order to maintain trust and credibility on the world stage.

Carr also contends that the DoD is better at innovation and planning than civilian agencies, citing the Defense Acquisition System (DAS) as an example of this. This is a curious claim and must be disputed. The fiasco that accompanies the Army's recent acquisition of a new pistol leaps to mind. The late Senator John McCain, writing in 2015 as the then chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, asserted that the Army took "ten years and wasted potentially tens of millions of dollars in order to purchase simple

[34] Catherine Theohary, "Information Warfare: Issues for Congress," Congressional Report (Congressional Research Service, March 5, 2018), 7, https://crsreports.congress.gov.

handguns."[35] Senator McCain also called the process used by the Army as "byzantine".[36] An agency which deals with information must be agile and flexible. If the DoD took decades of debate and millions of dollars to buy Soldiers a pistol, how could it formulate information strategy in a timely manner?

If given a chance, using a JIATF-I may very well be an effective (if not always efficient) approach to formulating information strategy. Then again it may not. It is the contention of the authors here that it would be the latter. In any case, a JIATF-I, in addition to the objectionable aspects already mentioned, would also be subject to all the manning and turnover problems associated with any military unit. Leaders and staff typically come and go every 18–24 months. This will inevitably contribute to continuity of mission problems. Carr's approach is new and creative. It is also an admirable attempt to use existing resources (the military services) to solve the problem of U.S. information strategy. Yet ultimately, replacing the predominantly civilian GEC with a military unit, regardless of its name or title, is accompanied by a host of problems.

There is a great deal of scholarship on the subject of bringing back the USIA. This thesis aims to contribute to moving that dialogue forward, but in a new way. To do so, this thesis proposes something different and unique from what has been seen so far in the discussion to re-institute a new USIA, or even from Carr's thoughts on replacing the GEC with a JIATF-I. The USIA was a remarkable agency that achieved a great deal. It had high points and low points during its lifespan, and for better or worse it is no more. What will be proposed here is a slightly different approach. The idea here is not necessarily to bring back the USIA. Instead, what follows is a proposal to use the Global Engagement Center (GEC), which resides within the U.S. Department of State, and modify it in such a way as to allow it to formulate and consolidate U.S. information strategy.

---

35 Mathew Cox, "McCain: Halt Army Handgun Program, Choose the Bullet First," *Miltary.Com*, 2019, 2, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/10/31/mccain-halt-army-handgun-program-choose-the-bullet-first.html.

36 Kyle Jahner, "McCain Slams Army's Wasteful Plan for a New Service Pistol," *Army Times*, October 29, 2015, 2, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2015/10/30/mccain-slams-army-s-wasteful-plan-for-a-new-service-pistol/.

One of the main strengths of using the GEC is that it already exists, and perhaps most significantly, it prides itself on its relationships with the private sector. These relationships are crucial in order to leverage new technologies. Using the GEC to perform some of the duties of the USIA requires modification, of course, yet these modifications are fairly minor in comparison to the work, effort, and resources involved in standing up an entirely new agency like the USIA. The current mission, characteristics, as well as the short history and enormous potential of the GEC will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV, which will help to answer the central question of this thesis, which asks how can lessons learned from the United States Information Agency (USIA) inform modifications to policy and strategy for the Global Engagement Center (GEC) to formulate messaging and combat adversary Information Operations (IO)?

Yet, before this text explores more on the GEC, it has to first establish the need. To accomplish this, it will explain why Russia is such a dangerous threat to U.S. national security. Examples from recent events will be given which will explain the need for a GEC of increased capability, and justify why this new GEC is the right entity to counter the threats of Russia (among others) in the 21st century.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

III. ELECTION MEDDLING / RUSSIAN INFLUENCE CAMPAIGN

The National Security Strategy identifies Russia as an existential threat to the United States.[37] Addressing Congress, Robert Mueller warned that the Russians were interfering in U.S. affairs even as they sat in their hearing.[38] Elaborating on the danger, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats states "Russia's social media efforts will continue to focus on aggravating social and racial tensions, undermining trust in authorities, and criticizing perceived anti-Russia politicians. Moscow may employ additional influence toolkits, such as spreading disinformation, conducting hack-and-leak operations, or manipulating data in a more targeted fashion to influence U.S. policy, actions, and elections."[39] These are alarming claims that are put forth by credible and duly appointed U.S. government officials. Such attacks and activities represent a threat to American citizens and the American way of life, indeed to national security. Yet, the activities of 2016 were not an isolated incident or a one-time job. There is strong evidence that Russia is already planning its activities to disrupt the 2020 U.S. election, and continue its online operations to undermine U.S. institutions and alliances in order to further their own interests.[40]

"Russia aims to weaken U.S. influence in the world and divide us from our allies and partners."[41] They do this by targeting one of the most sacred and fundamental pillars of our democracy. What makes Russia's 2016 campaign to influence the U.S. election so significant is that it set a precedent for other countries to follow. The world was watching in 2016 as Russia seemed to be pulling the strings. It is still watching as America, on the

---

37 "National Security Strategy" (United States of America, December 2017), 25.

38 Madeleine Joung and Mahita Gajanan, "Robert Mueller Testified Before Congress for 7 Hours. Here's Everything to Know," News Media, Time, July 24, 2019, https://time.com/5629528/robert-mueller-testimony-live-updates/.

39 "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," Worldwide Threat Assessment (United States. Congress. Senate. Select Committee on Intelligence: United States. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 29, 2019).

40 "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," 7.

41 "National Security Strategy," 25.

eve of the 2020 election, is still arguing over the true nature of the meddling that occurred during the 2016 election. This illustrates the uncertain and confusing nature of the Russian influence campaign while also highlighting the danger of this type of Russian threat. That is, while some American citizens understand the threat, some of them, who could be victims of the next Russian influence campaign, do not recognize it at all. The trust the American people had in the government and specifically the democratic process has been affected. It is this aspect of Russia's influence activity that cuts to the heart of the U.S. electoral process and thus ultimately to U.S. national security. If the American people do not trust the process, or perceive that it is compromised, then they will not go the polls. If they do not go the polls, the American democratic process, which forms the bedrock of the U.S. political system, fails.

The 2016 election took place within a complex information space, which included impactful and heavily charged social movements and narratives. These narratives included the now familiar "Black Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter" movements, for example. These were not created by the Russians, but they were most certainly exploited by them. Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report highlights several key points or narratives which frame the stories Russians used during the 2016 election. "First, Russia showed favoritism to candidate Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton; second, Russia centered attention around the grievance of African Americans; third, Russia purposely concentrated on ongoing political and national security matters within the U.S."[42] Russia's social media campaigns amplified and exacerbated all of this, causing outrage and distrust among citizens.

Perhaps one of the most opportunistic and creative social media influence initiatives taken up by Russia concerns the story surrounding the murder of Democratic National Committee (DNC) staffer Seth Rich. Rich was a low-level DNC staffer who was murdered in an apparent robbery in the summer of 2016, but rumors quickly started circulating that he was actually killed by a hit man hired by the Hillary Clinton campaign.[43] These rumors

---

42 Alex Ward, "4 Main Takeaways from New Reports on Russia's 2016 Election Interference," Vox, December 17, 2018.

43 Mathew Ingram, "Getting to the Bottom of the Seth Rich Conspiracy Theory," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 10, 2019, 1, https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/seth-rich-conspiracy-theory.php.

were ultimately proven to be completely false. They were, in fact, started and initially spread by Russian intelligence.[44] What is remarkable, though, is that Russia was able to quickly recognize the potential of the situation, and act on it almost immediately. The ensuing conspiracy theory was quickly taken up and spread by Russian news such as Sputnik and RT, U.S. social media, and others.[45] The whole affair seemed tailor made to suit the Russian interest and illustrates both the sophistication and depravity of their activities.

Russian election meddling and influence campaigns represent perhaps the most up-front or immediate threat to U.S. national security, in part at least because they are happening right here in America. Yet these are not the only grounds for concern. While Russia has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to use information to achieve its goals, and will undoubtedly continue to do so, they have also shown their willingness to use it in war. First in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, and most recently in 2014 with their conflict in Ukraine, which is ongoing. The work here will focus on the latter conflict because it is the most current and comprehensive. These types of conflicts, which admittedly pose no direct threat to American sovereignty, still pose a real threat to U.S. national interests. They upset the balance of power, as well as the international world order by flagrantly violating international norms. They also serve to disrupt and undermine longstanding institutions to which the U.S. is a member, such as the United Nations and NATO. What follows is not an attempt to describe a blow-by-blow account of Russian action in Ukraine. Instead, it is a chance to examine when Russia chose to accompany its information operations with coordinated military violence. This will aid in showing the nature and gravity of Russian intentions in the 21st century, and will provide some idea of what future Russian operations, perhaps in the Baltic for example, might look like. This will be of particular

---

44 Sean Gallagher, "Report: Russian Intel Started the Seth Rich Rumor to Cover for DNC Hack," Ars Technica, July 9, 2019, 1, https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2019/07/report-russian-intel-started-the-seth-rich-rumor-to-cover-for-dnc-hack/.

45 Ingram, 1; Philip Bump, "Don't Blame the Seth Rich Conspiracy on Russians. Blame Americans.," *Washington Post*, July 9, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/09/dont-blame-seth-rich-conspiracy-russians-blame-americans/.

value in setting the stage for the Kaliningrad thought experiment, which concludes the chapter.

A. UKRAINE

Russian activity in Ukraine in 2014 illustrates yet another reason why Russia is such a dynamic threat in the 21st century. Beginning with the fall of the then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin was presented with an opportunity to reclaim former Soviet Russian territory.[46] What followed shocked the international community, and served as a source of confusion about Russia's true intentions. Much of the world did not understand the events that were about to unfold. Shortly after Yanukovych's departure, pro-Moscow / anti-Kiev protests sprang up across the region, which were likely instigated by Russian agents.[47] These protests, combined with other well-coordinated kinetic and information activities, ultimately resulted in a 16 March 2014 vote for Crimea to leave Ukraine and become a part of the Russian Federation.[48]

Astonishingly, and to the surprise of a shocked international audience; a portion of Ukraine's sovereign territory had been invaded and seized by Russia. This kind of territorial grab was the stuff of the 19th and early 20th century, and for most it was a totally unexpected move by the Kremlin. Consequentially, as what happened started to become clear for world leaders it was too late.

Much has been written in the aftermath of the opening days of the Ukrainian conflict. Many quality explanations exist which attempt to describe the many names which accompany Russian actions such as grey zone conflict, or new-age and hybrid warfare. What it amounts to, according to Kier Giles, is that the Russians have a unique mastery of

46 Galeotti, 283–84.

47 Galeotti, 284.

48 Galeotti, 28.

merging information related capabilities (IRCs) like electronic warfare and cyber, with deadly and conventional kinetic capabilities to achieve military and political objectives.[49]

While this may sound simple in theory it is not simple in practice. It involves a thorough understanding of one's enemy and of the information environment in which the battle or contest is set to take place. It also involves patience and precise timing of operations. Critically, it relies upon military commanders who appreciate the sometimes-subtler arts of information operations, and who understand the powerful synergistic effects that can be achieved when they are combined with more conventional capabilities.

Yet, the integration of IRCs with kinetic force was not the only reason for Russia's initial success in Ukraine. What was truly instrumental to their success, says Giles, is that they achieved almost total information dominance.[50] This means that essentially any type of media that the average Ukrainian citizen or soldier saw or was exposed to, from newspapers to radio or to the internet on their phones was controlled or manipulated by Russia. This helped Russia to control narratives and to establish legitimacy, while also allowing them to isolate Ukraine from the rest of the world.[51]

It is not hard to imagine how Russia might use these same methods to achieve similar goals elsewhere. What follows is a thought experiment scenario which shows the strength of a modified GEC in action against notional Russian action in the Baltics. This experiment will demonstrate how the GEC could serve American national interests by acting as an effective force to counter Russian threats in the Baltics.

B. KALININGRAD SCENARIO

Russia has a long history of activity in the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Russia even has sovereign territory of its own in the Baltics in the form of the Kaliningrad oblast. The city of Kaliningrad is geographically separated from Russia by

---

49 Keir Giles, "The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare," *NATO STRATCOM Center For Excellence*, 13, accessed August 1, 2019, https://www.stratcomcoe.org/next-phase-russian-information-warfare-keir-giles.

50 Giles, 12.

51 Giles, 12.

some 227 miles and populated by nearly 800,000 ethnic Russian citizens.[52] Its qualifications as a potential geopolitical hotspot abound. Yet, Alex Diener and Joshua Hagen wisely suggest that Kaliningrad, because of its unique location and circumstances in the Baltic could serve as a source of common ground and positive dialogue among Russia and the West, when instead it is usually used by Russia as a lever to create strife in the form of military arguments, airspace violations, and military and civilian transit issues.[53] Kaliningrad's very existence serves as a valuable diplomatic, military, and informational tool. The following scenario serves to illustrate how Russia might use Kaliningrad to its advantage, and how a new and modified GEC is the answer to the very real threat of Russian actions in the 21st century.

The issue of transit alone, since Russia is not contiguous to Kaliningrad, could be used as a pretense for conflict, potentially in the form of a territorial dispute using military force to seize territory in order to connect the two. Ingmar Oldberg notes that Russia can either access Kaliningrad by traveling across Belarus and Poland, or via Lithuania.[54] The latter is Russia's preferred method, as the most significant road and railway infrastructure transits Lithuania, but it is strongly opposed by Lithuanian government authorities, who view it among the highest threats to their national security.[55] Here lies a very volatile situation, or at least potentially so. If Russia decided to force its way through either Poland or Lithuania to create an overland corridor for the sake of transit or on the grounds of reunification with the hundreds of thousands of Russians living in Kaliningrad; it could mean open war in Europe. Or, more likely it could mean a state of confusion and uncertainty in Europe, not unlike what was seen in the immediate aftermath of Russia's 2014 Ukrainian invasion. In either case, such action would be a gross violation of not only the sovereignty of an American allied Baltic state, but also of international norms. Any such Russian attempt would also aid in fracturing the European Union (EU) and NATO,

---

52 Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen, "Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad Exclave and Enclave: Russian and EU Perspectives," *Eurasian Geography and Economics.* 52, no. 4 (2011): 568, 583.

53 Diener and Hagen, 577.

54 Ingmar Oldberg, "Kaliningrad: Russian Enclave, European Enclave," Scientific Report for Defense and Security Policy (Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish Defense Research Agency, June 2001), 23,22.

55 Oldberg, 22.

and therefore it would be contrary to U.S. national interests in Europe. The difference is that this time, world leaders would hopefully have a better idea of what was happening then they did in 2014.

As unpleasant as this scenario is to contemplate, it is without doubt an opportunity for the GEC, in the modified form presented here, to prove its value. Due to the fact that the Russian military action described in this scenario would be accompanied by no shortage of supporting information operations, the GEC would be required to formulate some kind of informational strategy to answer, and to counter the Russian noise in the information space.

It would be extremely important to reach the population of Kaliningrad and its Baltic neighbors with truthful information about what was actually taking place. In other words, to tell them that the Russians had broken the law, violated international norms, and another country's sovereignty in the process of their actions. Furthermore, telling this story in Russian would be the only practical and credible way to convey this message. Not only to the Russians in Kaliningrad, but also to the ethnic Russian populations residing in the other Baltic States. In short, the GEC could use local news stories and social media (i.e., Baltic and Ethnic Russian language stories) and possibly translated U.S. news stories and social media to boost awareness of Russian crimes, and to move forward the U.S. strategy which would essentially highlight the negative and unlawful Russian activities. If Russian information operations efforts in Ukraine are anything to go by, then there would be an abundance of negative material to use.

There is also an excellent precedent of where the U.S. has accomplished similar goals in the past. The USIA did this during the 1990–91 U.S. led Gulf War to great effect. The USIA created an inter-agency work group which was primarily tasked with "ensuring that the U.S. government spoke with one voice and that that one voice was sensitive to the delicate concerns of the Arab world."[56] The GEC would lead such an effort in dealing with any Russian Baltic crisis, and perform a very similar function. In 1991, the USIA had to counter Saddam Hussein, Iraqi propaganda and garner support from the Arab world. In

56 Cull, "Speeding the Strange Death of American Public Diplomacy" 11.

short, it had to deal with a determined totalitarian leader, state-sponsored propaganda and messaging, and generate support in the region. In the case of the scenario here, the GEC would counter Russian propaganda and boost support in the Baltics and Europe. Cull highlights some excellent examples of what the USIA and this working group did:

> The Inter-Agency Working Group produced papers channeling specific pieces of detailed research relating to the allied mobilization, investigating press reports collected in particular problem places like Algiers or Tunis, and tracking the path and impact of Iraqi propaganda gambits. The group monitored demonstrations against the coalition, paying particular attention to their size. By the same token, positive press would be rapidly relayed. If the committee noticed a helpful editorial in an Egyptian paper, this would be reproduced and hurriedly faxed to posts and distributed quickly. The Working Group knew that an indigenous voice had much more impact than the most eloquent U.S. spokesman relaying the same information.[57]

The GEC, empowered with its new capabilities and staff would be able to do what the USIA and its working group had done in 1991. But, instead of gathering up support for a U.S. invasion in the Middle East, it would gather support against a Russian one in the Baltics. It would produce and gather, as well as supervise distribution of fact-based stories and examples in social media and in the news much in the same way as the USIA had done before. The USIA's efforts made it possible for the U.S. to conduct a potentially unpopular war without generating dangerous repercussions from the Arab and Islamic world.[58] If the USIA did this as recently as 1991, then there is no reason why the GEC cannot do it today, or in the future. It would certainly require hard work and leadership, but in the face of ever developing Russian threats it is the most appropriate answer. Most importantly, the GEC would report objective truth, backed by facts, to counter Russian disinformation and propaganda.

This chapter has laid out Russia-centric information threats to U.S. national interests both at home and abroad. Understanding these threats, as well as Russian methods and goals has shown that it is necessary for the U.S. to have a more coherent information strategy. One that does more to highlight the negative actions of our enemies while

---

[57] Cull, 11.

[58] Cull, 12.

emphasizing positive American actions in the world. This chapter has also described some of the actions that the GEC could take to accomplish such tasks. Chapter IV will examine additional case studies in order gain knowledge from experiences and lessons learned. These are necessary to inform changes to the GEC and develop contemporary narratives and strategies that will be able to stand up to emerging threats.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

IV. UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER

So, how could a new and modified GEC improve U.S. information strategy? What does a coherent narrative and information strategy look like? To answer questions like these, and to find out what a new GEC might look like, we should first learn how the former USIA operated. Case studies, especially those from the Cold War, will capture lessons learned and best practices that can be applied today, and in the future. The enemy during this era was the Soviet Union and their client states of Eastern Europe. They had an ideology and a narrative, and so did the U.S. The strategies, narratives and messaging, compared to today, were relatively clear.

This chapter will examine the roles of a variety of U.S. messaging tools, to include USIA, Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe (RFE). USIA's overarching role throughout the Cold War will be studied in order to get a sense for how it functioned. This will also set the stage for more focused case studies. The case studies, starting with the events leading up to and during the 1956 Hungarian revolution and Soviet actions, and then the 1989 Beijing Spring and Tiananmen Square Massacre will describe the positive role played by USIA regarding U.S national interests. Importantly, they will also highlight failures, missteps, and obstacles encountered over the years. Identifying such things is of vital importance to any consideration of a re-institution of USIA like functions in a new fifth core area of the GEC, because they can help show policymakers and leaders how the agency could be improved, but also how it could build new and meaningful narratives within a new U.S. information strategy. Identification of these lessons learned can possibly give insights on how modern and emerging technology could be leveraged to exploit new opportunities in the information space.

A. ROLE OF USIA

After its creation in 1953 under the Eisenhower administration,[59] USIA was soon performing myriad tasks around the world. Historian Nicholas Cull explains that USIA ran "press offices at U. S. Embassies; it administered libraries; it taught English; it made and distributed documentary films; it ran the Voice of America radio; it printed and distributed books leaflets and magazines about American life and ideas; it created magnificent exhibitions that showcased American technology; some of which toured behind the Iron Curtain."[60]

USIA, working closely with the VOA and RFE, was quite literally telling the story of America, and the value of this story and activity was greater than merely the sum of its parts. Walking in to a U.S. library and borrowing a book, or taking part in an English language class meant meeting and interacting with the staff of an American institution, getting an impression of who exactly Americans were, and what they were like. These people then told their families, friends and colleagues about their experiences. USIA capitalized on human beings' natural sense of curiosity. Such experiences and encounters helped to build new and informed opinions as well as positive relationships. This was a vital part of the U.S. information strategy and an extremely powerful one.

Significantly, many of the countries in which USIA operated did not have a free press, so access to real news, or at least news that was not state sponsored, was difficult. USIA exploited this fact to U.S. advantage and took every opportunity to cast Soviet Russia and Communism in a negative light. Large parts of the Communist world, and even the developing world, learned about major news events such as the Berlin Wall, Soviet nuclear tests and later stationing of missiles in Cuba from USIA news stories and photographs.[61] Writing to President John F. Kennedy regarding Soviet missile testing, famous CBS newsman and USIA Director Edward R. Murrow said the "Soviet decision was a political warfare windfall. Khrushchev has become the focus of fear. The U.S. is…the repository of

---

59 William M. Chodkowski, "American Security Project Fact Sheet, Reference 0097 The United States Information Agency," November 2012. 3.

60 Nicholas Cull, "'The Man Who Invented Truth," 5.

61 Cull, 3.

hope."[62] Here was a narrative that practically spoke for itself as world events unfolded, and a strong reminder that even a powerful and politically astute enemy will make mistakes that present opportunities which can be exploited in the information space. USIA was often very good at recognizing these moments and capitalizing on them quickly. Yet the agency also made mistakes.

B. EASTERN EUROPE

Objectives in Eastern Europe were not always completely thought out by USIA. The mis-steps of USIA in that part of the world leading up to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution range from the comical to the tragic. One such embarrassing case is described by Granville and involved a load of leaflets which was mistakenly dropped on (in, to be more precise) a soccer game attended by U.S. diplomats.[63] Yet, it was not half as unfortunate as the January 1956 plane crash in the Slovakian Tatra mountains that killed 22 and was caused by a leaflet-dropping USIA balloon.[64] These events, which actually took place in Czechoslovakia, nevertheless were indicative of American information-related operations and of things to come in Eastern Europe, and Hungary, specifically.

Perhaps the most impactful actions of USIA leading up to the Hungarian Revolution were the broadcasts of RFE, or Radio Free Hungary (RFH) as it was known there. Pittaway contends that RFH broadcasts were rash and actually exacerbated conditions that stoked violence in Hungary, even undermining Russian confidence in the Hungarian Premier Imre Nagy and his ability to govern.[65] Indeed, it seems that these broadcasts simultaneously made Nagy (a reformist) nervous about U.S. intentions, created doubt about him among the public in Hungary, and in Moscow, which both sabotaged the revolution and precipitated the Soviet intervention.[66] U.S. messaging caused both Moscow

---

62 Cull, 11.

63 Johanna Granville, "'Caught with Jam on Our Fingers': Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," *Diplomatic History*. 29, no. 5 (2005): 815.

64 Granville, 815.

65 Mark Pittaway, "The Education of Dissent: The Reception of the Voice of Free Hungary, 1951–56" 4, no. 1 (2003): 98.

66 Granville, 812, 815.

and Hungary to lose confidence in Hungarian Premiere Imre Nagy, and helped set the conditions for an armed Soviet invasion. This serves as an example of a messaging arm of the U.S. government executing its mission while not being fully coordinated with U.S. policy. U.S. Army General and president of the Free Europe Committee Lieutenant General Willis D. Crittenberger, commented that, "the policy…is not to inflame Eastern Europeans…but to base our broadcasts on factual reporting of the news without any exaggerations, prediction, or promises."[67] Events in Hungary during this time show that execution of messaging in the field must be in step with overall information strategy and policy and be aware of possible unintended consequences.

All of this stands as an important lesson that an information strategy, and all supporting narratives, themes, and messaging that accompany it, must be thoroughly thought out. Things like target audience reception, interpretation and understanding, and perhaps most importantly second and third order effects must be thoroughly "wargamed." Additionally, what happens if the message is successful, as it was in Hungary? Another final question that must be considered is who else is listening and might be driven to some action as a result of your strategy and narrative? Anticipating these considerations is not easy, especially when one factors in cultural and linguistic variables.

The U.S. desire to undermine Communist leadership in Europe was so effective that party policy makers in Moscow felt the need to replace Premier Nagy, which was not exactly what U.S. planners envisioned or intended. In other words, an information strategy has to know what it wants, and to an extent be careful what it wishes for; when it all was said and done, USIA and RFH were heard loud and clear in Hungary. In fact, U.S. narrative and messaging was effective enough that leaders behind the Iron Curtain "viewed the broadcasts as a key source of anti-communist sentiment, hindering their ability to censor the masses."[68] These same leaders, from 1952 on—only a year after RFE was operational—did everything possible to disrupt and jam RFE on the airwaves.[69]

---

67 Granville, 823.

68 Granville, 819.

69 Granville, 820.

In the end, USIA efforts were at times misguided and clumsy. Objectives in Eastern Europe, Hungary specifically, were perhaps not completely thought out. Yet, though these efforts might not fit into the category of complete success, they should not be regarded as utter failures, either. They demonstrated U.S. determination to coordinate, or attempt to coordinate all instruments of national power, particularly the information instrument. Shaw notes that this determination was important and showed that "Western governments were prepared to spend considerable amounts of money, time, and energy creating and shaping the cultural landscape that acted as a backdrop to their diplomatic and military actions at home and overseas."[70] This is an extremely significant aspect of the overarching U.S. information strategy at the time. This coordination of all instruments of national power, in and of itself, adds another layer to the narrative, displaying U.S. resolve, and saying to domestic, international, and adversarial audiences alike that the U.S. is both committed and resourceful, but also that it has a sophisticated information strategy and apparatus that must be reckoned. Shaw adds that "by 1960 the Soviet Union was spending the equivalent of 2 billion dollars on Communist propaganda worldwide."[71] This represents a considerable sum of money and human resources that was not able to be funneled into other Soviet or client state military or government programs.

C. 1989 BEIJING SPRING AND TIANANMEN SQUARE

Many of us in the West have a mental image to associate with the events of Tiananmen Square. It is most likely the iconic image of a student protester standing bravely in front of an advancing column of People's Liberation Army (PLA) tanks. We have this image because it was broadcast to U.S. audiences via Western journalists reporting from Beijing. Images such as this, and the objective reporting that accompanied them, are often taken for granted in the West, but they were not offered up by the state-run Chinese press service.

Chinese citizens interested in the truth had to look elsewhere for their news. Enter the Voice of America. According to mass communication and journalism professors Zhou

70 Tony Shaw, "The Politics of Cold War Culture," *Journal of Cold War Studies.* 3, no. 3 (2001): 74.

71 Shaw, 2.

He and Jiangua Zhu, the VOA in 1989 consisted of fewer than 3,000 employees total, with well less than a third of that number stationed in 22 offices overseas.[72] He and Zhou also explain that in the 1960s VOA reporting had "improved tremendously and became more comprehensive and balanced…primarily as a result of a USIA internal directive that would later become the VOA Charter and public law."[73] So, although overseas offices were not always well staffed as far as quantity was concerned, there was no question as to the journalistic quality of their reporting. This journalistic capability was to become especially important as events unfolded in the spring of 1989, when the VOA spread the news in Chinese and English of the protests and uprising to the Chinese people.[74]

Kluver compiled a series of emergency reports issued at the time of the crisis by the Beijing Party Committee (BPC).[75] They are very telling, decrying the VOA's "extremely inglorious role for airing programs which added fuel to the fire and inciting turmoil."[76] Later on in the same emergency report, the Chinese State Security Ministry "confirmed that the U.S. engaged in ideological and cultural infiltration aimed at undermining socialism through multiple forms including political, cultural, and economic engagement."[77] Here were Chinese officials essentially blaming VOA for enabling the crisis, yet these same Chinese officials, throughout the ordeal, became so frustrated that they at times referred concerned citizens and inquisitive reporters to VOA broadcasts to keep pace with events as they happened.[78] One would be hard pressed to find or craft a more glowing testimonial to the power and efficacy of U.S. messaging and information strategy than this.

---

72 Zhou He and Jianhua Zhu, "The 'Voice of America' and China, Zeroing in on Tiananmen Square," *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*, February 1, 1994, 7.

73 He and Zhu, 4.

74 Craig Calhoun, "Revolution and Repression in Tiananmen Square," *Society.* 26, no. 6 (1989): 25.

75 Randolph Kluver, "Rhetorical Trajectories of Tiananmen Square," *Diplomatic History.* 34, no. 1 (2010): 82.

76 Kluver, 82.

77 Kluver, 82.

78 He and Zhu, 28.

He and Zhu once again offer another strong endorsement of VOA efforts during these tumultuous days, saying that of all the news media providing coverage of the Beijing Spring events, "the VOA was probably the most important to the Chinese people" and that "The most noticeable impact of the VOA was that it informed millions of Chinese of what they could not have otherwise known."[79] Here was Cold War U.S. information strategy, with USIA in the lead, arguably at its best. Much like the controversial nuclear tests of JFK's administration, which were viewed by the world with almost universal condemnation, USIA simply let our adversaries—this time China—tell their own stories through their actions. Nothing had to be fabricated or doctored, just reported and broadcast. China was viewed as a brutal, totalitarian regime, while the U.S. remained, comparatively at least, a beacon of hope.

Initially, this case study seems to cast USIA in a very positive light, but Cull brings up an extremely important point; "The problem is that the broadcasting is not necessarily tied into the wider structure of U.S. public diplomacy."[80] In other words, the messaging was not always in step with the overall information strategy. Cull explains that the Bush administration, shocked by the Chinese government reaction to VOA messaging, wanted very much to preserve good relations with China, and ordered then USIA Director Bruce Gelb to reign in VOA broadcasting there.[81] Gelb then issued instructions regarding the content of upcoming broadcasts and stories, which the VOA repeatedly ignored.[82] The situation with VOA in China highlighted problems between USIA and VOA, namely that a sitting USIA director did not seem to have the ability or authority to direct the execution of U.S. information strategy.[83]

It is hard to imagine that another Tiananmen Square could happen today. Yet, the world watches as China seems poised to repeat history and intervene in a series of Hong Kong protests that escalate with each passing day. The protests began as a response to the

---

79 He and Zhu, 2, 27.

80 Nicholas Cull, "Speeding the Strange Death of American Public Diplomacy," 9.

81 Cull, 9.

82 Cull, 9.

83 Cull, 9.

Chinese-leaning Hong Kong legislature's efforts to enact extradition of criminals to China.[84] Hong Kongers recognize the danger in allowing such laws to pass, and recoil at the thought of granting China more control. China's reaction to the protests so far has been rather blunt, with Beijing announcing flatly that "those who play with fire will perish by it."[85] This threat is a strong message coming from a regime that is notoriously heavy handed, but whose troops, so far, are not stationed in Hong Kong. Taking the Chinese statement at face value means that a Chinese troop deployment to the city of Hong Kong is not far beyond the realm of possibility. Thus far, there has been little in the form of strong messaging from the West. The GEC, in its modified form could call out the true nature of Chinese action, and it could provide valuable counter narratives to Chinese propaganda and messaging. By letting Chinese actions speak for themselves, and by seeking out and distributing pro-Hong Kong stories it would highlight positive alternatives to Chinese rhetoric. This would tell the true story of events on the world stage, and would also re-assure the people of Hong Kong with positive messaging from the West.

D. LESSONS LEARNED

It seems little argument exists that U.S. messaging was being heard in China during the Tiananmen Square crisis, and that it was hugely impactful. This messaging was not nested with the overall information strategy, however, and the USIA Director basically could do nothing about it. Similarly, the message in Hungary and other parts of Eastern Europe was also being heard, yet the message listeners received was essentially contrary to what U.S. strategists and policy makers intended. So, the case studies essentially show that some aspects of USIA were effective at telling the American story, while others were largely ineffective.

Looking back at the Cold War, and then in the final moments of the 20th century, which also amount to the last days of the USIA, it is easy to simplify history, or even to view it through rose-colored glasses. Or, in other words, it is easy to think that the USIA

84 Kristina Olney, "America Must Prevent Another Tiananmen Square and Stand for a Free Hong Kong," *National Review*, August 12, 2019, 3.

85 Olney, 4.

had a firm grip on narrative, messaging and U.S. information strategy. The case studies show that this was not necessarily the truth at all. In fact, it would seem that the old USIA actually made things worse at times, as seen in the Hungary case. So, perhaps posterity has given the USIA more credit than it is due. If the USIA was not as effective as previously thought, then is it wise to bring its functions back?

The problem sets facing U.S planners, strategists and policymakers in the Cold War era were no less complex or dynamic than those of today. It was a dangerous and difficult time, and the stakes were extremely high for obvious reasons. A foundational assumption of this thesis is that the Cold War was a time when the U.S. spoke with one voice. There was an overall information strategy, and that the USIA was important in telling the story of America, and that there was overall agreement on what that story or narrative was. The case studies show us that this does not seem to be the case, and that the USIA might not have been as effective as initially thought. Yet, this is not completely the fault of the USIA. It could be largely due to the fact that the U.S. was not in agreement on narratives. What has changed is the information environment, and the way information is shared and used today. It is said that "a lie can travel half-way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." Indeed, information has probably always been used as a weapon. Technology, whether it be Gutenberg's printing press or the internet, enables this function.

So, in addition to making sure that messaging and the overall information strategy are nested, any new incarnation of USIA, or addition to the GEC would, of course, have to incorporate new technology into its methods. This would be an outstanding topic for further research and exploration. It is possible, however, that re-creating a new USIA is not the only answer. There already exists in our government today an organization which could provide capability and answers to help U.S. information strategy.

This organization is called the Global Engagement Center (GEC) and it resides in the Department of State (DoS). According to the DoS official website, the GEC was created in April 2016 in response to an executive order, then passed in to law by Congress in fiscal year (FY) 2017 with a mission to "lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state

propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests."[86]

Additionally,

> The GEC operates as a forward-looking, innovative organization that can shift focus quickly to remain responsive to agile adversaries. The GEC leverages data science, cutting-edge advertising technologies, and top talent from the private sector. With detailees from across the interagency, the GEC coordinates messaging efforts to ensure they are streamlined and to eliminate duplication.[87]

If any organization in the U.S. government today understands stories, messaging and narrative, then it is the GEC, but being responsible for an overall information strategy as discussed to this point with USIA goes beyond its current charter. Its duties, however, could perhaps be expanded to incorporate such functions. The GEC's unique organization makes it an ideal candidate to pick up where the old USIA left off. Its operations involve "four core areas: science and technology, interagency engagement, partner engagement, and content production.".[88] A fifth core area would need to be added to the GECs operations. That fifth core area should be called "lead U.S. information strategy." The existing core areas which currently comprise the GECs operations lend themselves very well to contributing to this proposed fifth core area.

It has already been suggested in this thesis that incorporating new technology would be an appropriate topic for future research and essential for any new information agency and strategy. The GEC is already leveraging existing and emerging technologies. This fact, along with the GECs interagency and private sector partnerships make it uniquely suited to take U.S. information strategy well in to the future. Accomplishing these things, and expanding the GEC's operations to include a fifth core area would require additional resources, space, and staffing, just for starters. The requirements involved with incorporating a new core area would require additional study and research, yet it seems

---

86 Department of State Official website https://www.state.gov/r/gec/# Accessed on May 10, 2019.

87 Department of State Official website.

88 Department of State Official website.

that the GEC should, indeed, serve as a modern day USIA. Such things would, again, be excellent topics for future exploration and research.

What do the presented case studies in this chapter tell us about the effectiveness and utility of the USIA, and also what do they tell us about narratives and stories of the U.S. Cold War information strategy? What if the U.S. was not in agreement on narratives? For this unexpected turn we look to the innovative work of Ronald R. Krebs. He agrees that many people, historians even, would think of the Cold War in the way described above. He goes as far as to claim that "consensus is a mainstay of Cold War history," but notes that "scholars have not studied it rigorously.".[89] Conventional wisdom says that Cold War narrative was united, but Krebs says this was not always so. Krebs challenge to the conventional wisdom of Cold War narratives says that in the post-WWII years the U.S experienced an "emergence, erosion, and re-emergence of a dominant narrative of national security."[90]

Krebs' findings present significant food for thought for the prospects of re-imagining or modifying the GEC. One glaring question is that if the U.S. with an agency like USIA could not achieve information strategy consensus at critical times during the Cold War, when enemies and ideologies were comparatively clear, then how can the U.S. hope to accomplish a coherent information strategy in the 21st century when adversaries are so numerous and varied? In short, it will not be an easy or simple task, but that does not mean that it should not be implemented. The last portion of this chapter has not been an effort to discourage modification of the GEC mission. Yet, it is important to recognize the challenges and failures of the past, and to gain greater understanding of the challenges any new information related agency might face in the formation of new U.S. information strategy.

Fareed Zakaria captures the difficulty of crafting an information strategy today: "In today's multipolar, multilayered world, there is no central hinge upon which all American

89 Ronald Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of U.S. National Security*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 177.

90 Krebs, 179.

foreign policy rests. Policymaking looks more varied, and inconsistent, as regions require approaches that do not necessarily apply elsewhere."[91] In other words, the world is complicated and building a new information strategy, and or modifying the GEC requires thoughtful consideration and leadership. Messaging and narratives that work against a non-state actor, might not be suited for Moscow. Yet, the U.S. should not avoid doing these things because they are hard. They should do them because they are hard and they are worth the effort.

Anything less than the modification of the GEC mission amounts to forfeiting huge tracts of space in the global information environment, and this is something that the U.S. can simply not afford to do. The case studies show us some of the failures, mis-steps, and obstacles which faced the old USIA in its operations during the Cold War. They also show the power and potential of the USIA and the GEC. They serve as strong reminders of the challenges ahead, but more than anything they show us what not to do in the future. America has powerful enemies with ever increasing and more sophisticated capabilities. Only by harnessing and coordinating all the instruments of our national power, especially the information instrument, with a coherent information strategy can the U.S meet and defeat our enemies in the years to come.

In addition to coordinating the instruments of power and actually formulating a strategy, the United States must also tell the truth, and let the actions of adversaries such as Russia speak for themselves. The next chapter will demonstrate the importance of trust and credibility and show how the U.S. can tell an American story and shape perceptions in the information space by highlighting positive U.S. actions and the negative actions of adversaries.

91 Krebs, 290, 291.

V. IMPLICATIONS OF TRUST AND CREDIBILITY ON UNITED STATES INFORMATION STRATEGY

How important was trust in the operations of the United States Information Agency (USIA) during the Cold War? Did the credibility of the U.S government impact the reception of certain narratives and messaging, particularly those delivered by Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe (RFE), or Radio Free Hungary (RFH), as it was known there? The purpose of this chapter will be to help determine how, if a modern day USIA was re-instituted in the form of a modified Global Engagement Center, new U.S. messaging and narratives would be received by the rest of the world. Getting a feel for whether or not America is trusted could help in crafting information strategy.

This chapter will explore some of these questions, and return at times to the case studies and examples previously laid out in an attempt to answer some of these questions and to see how the U.S. was regarded during the Cold War, compared to current trust levels today. In addition to referring to the case studies, this will be accomplished through scholarly articles and some limited use of polling data. Further, the chapter will show how trust was absolutely essential in the successful operations of the USIA during its relatively short existence, and that no information agency can expect success without building trust.

So what is trust, and why is it so important? Many scholars have contributed their definitions and thoughts to the ongoing dialogue on trust from the organizational to the personal types. Adams and Webb acknowledge the different facets of trust, and the varying definitions that exist, but they also offer an elegantly simple definition themselves, writing that, "trust is based on our expectations of how others are likely to behave in the future."[92] They add that "trust develops as we become increasingly able to predict the actions of another, as a result of our experiences and interactions with that person."[93] Most readers will recognize this as a more personal definition of trust, but it applies to trust between states as well, because allies and partner nations, as well as adversaries, need to know what

92 Barbara D Adams and Robert D.G. Webb, "Trust in Small Military Teams," 2, accessed May 15, 2019, <http://www.dodccrp .org/events/7th_ ICCRTS/Tracks/pdf/006.PDF>.

93 Adams and Webb, 2.

to expect from America. Friends need to know that the U.S. will be true to its commitments and adhere to various trade and treaty agreements, while enemies need to understand U.S. resolve when it attempts to uphold U.S. policies and national interests. Trust in this way plays an important role from a deterrence perspective.

A. USIA BUILDING TRUST ABROAD DURING THE COLD WAR

Looking back to the Chapter IV case studies of Eastern Europe during the Cold War and Tiananmen Square, we shall see that trust was of vital importance to the messaging campaigns of USIA and American information strategy. It is important to recognize that U.S. messaging tools like VOA and RFE occupied a unique and important role during the Cold War, as they were often the only source of outside/foreign media available to some audiences. Writing in the journal *Diplomatic History*, Johanna Granville comments on radio programming in Eastern Europe. She says, "RFE credibility and popularity soared in March 1953 when it became the first medium to break the news of the Stalin's death to the Hungarian People."[94] She adds that Communist radio had to wait for permission from Moscow before it made its own announcement.[95] The Communists may as well not have bothered, because American messaging got there first.

This is significant because at this point in history, recollections of World War II were fresh in European minds, and the Cold War was new and developing. Stalin was a titanic figure in Soviet Russia and the wider communist world of satellite states. His death was not only front-page news, it was an opportunity for Moscow to demonstrate how it would handle the dissemination of news and information to the masses. Here was news that the people wanted and needed to know.

Moscow's delay in announcing the death of Stalin and having a rival, let alone an American, institution scoop them was more than just a loss of face. It was an event that showed Russians and other people living under Communist rule what they could expect from their governments in the future. These people knew that they would have to read

94 Granville, 820.

95 Granville, 820.

between the lines if they really wanted to know the truth about world events, or they simply could tune into the VOA and RFE. They learned that they could expect censorship and half-truths from their own governments and news outlets, while they would likely get timely and accurate reporting from the U.S.

USIA continued to build trust with audiences abroad, often by using local reporters. Cull notes that shortly after the Berlin Wall was erected, USIA "assisted the (West) German government in bringing 750 foreign journalists to Berlin to see and report on the Wall for themselves."[96] These reporters, who were themselves trusted individuals in their home countries, broadcast the news of the Berlin Wall back to their home audiences in their own languages. This cast Communists, namely the East German and Soviet regimes, in a negative light, and bolstered a positive U.S image.

Chapter IV tells the story of the 1961 Soviet nuclear test. Cull once again shows us how "USIA capitalized on world surprise and outrage by producing a map which showed the nuclear test origin, and an ugly stain representing the fallout zone spreading over the world and to Europe."[97] Cull points out, perhaps most consequentially, that USIA made sure this map was on the front page of newspapers worldwide, and that USIA had VOA broadcast the news of the unexpected nuclear test to a very surprised Russian population.[98] The U.S. highlighted negative stories to make Cold War adversaries look bad. Nothing had to be spun. No facts had to be bent, twisted, or fabricated. The events, once highlighted and properly disseminated by USIA, simply spoke for themselves. This serves as yet another example which gave the world reason to not only listen to and trust U.S. narratives, but also to doubt the Soviet Union and its satellite state allies.

Chapter IV has already established the impactful role played by USIA and VOA during the 1989 Chinese Tiananmen Square crisis. Even though the messaging was sometimes at odds with the Bush Administration and thus the overall U.S. information strategy, it cannot be denied that listenership numbers were huge. One hundred million

96 Cull, "'The Man Who Invented Truth," 9.

97 Cull, 10.

98 Cull, 10.

Chinese tuned in to VOA broadcasts throughout the Tiananmen Square ordeal.[99] Some estimates are even larger than this, but in any case, people listened. It is doubtful that tens of millions of Chinese citizens would tune in to programming from a source they considered non-credible or untrustworthy.

It is important to note that journalism and mass communication experts Zhou He and Jianhua Zhu maintain that it was high journalistic standards and quality content that brought in and kept listeners. They explain that the themes used by USIA during this troubled time in Chinese history were "America is democratic. Americans believe in freedom for other people."[100] Themes such as these resonate first of all with audiences whose government is not democratic and does not believe in freedom of peoples, but secondly they resonate so long as there is no glaringly obvious word and deed mismatch visible in U.S. actions on the world stage. These same narratives could help counter Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP) propaganda in Hong Kong, as Beijing intends to tighten its grip on the semi-autonomous region.

B. DOES THE WORLD TRUST AMERICA TODAY?

Much of this thesis has involved trying to determine whether modifying the GEC would help in establishing or consolidating U.S. information strategy. It has already been shown that many obstacles exist from the logistical to the political. What about credibility and trust? Is trust an obstacle to U.S. narratives, and could it impede information strategy? A huge question that has to be asked is whether or not international audiences even want to hear American stories and messaging. If the answer to that question is "no," and it is the opinion of this author that it is not "no," then what happens if the U.S. does not attempt to tell its story? This is obviously an unacceptable state of affairs. To use a hackneyed, but apt, phrase: if the U.S. does not tell its story, then someone else will. The U.S. cannot simply cede to others this portion of the information space and information environment. In other words, regardless of the level of trust, the U.S. has to keep beating the drum. It

99 He and Zhu, 3.

100 He and Zhu, 8.

must continue to tell its story and pursue its national interests via a coherent information strategy. Seeing itself will only aid in that endeavor.

Anyone who reads the news can get a sense that American status in the world has suffered. Trust in America, arguably, has also suffered. This possibly began with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Andrew H. Kydd posits rather ominously that after the Iraq war, "…the U.S. was seen, at best, trigger happy—exercising poor judgement and prone to violence—or, more sinisterly, acting on interests it failed to acknowledge: a desire to control oil resources, protect Israel, or even attack Islam in general."[101] Whether any of these things are true is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it does not matter. What matters is that perception is reality for most people.

It is highly likely that anyone reading this work has themselves, in the course of travelling overseas or working with foreign colleagues, heard claims like these from reasonable people the world over. Professor Kydd, writing in 2005, has captured and summarized a narrative which continues to resonate globally today. Kydd is not alone in his position. Scholar, ambassador, and former National Security Council member Nancy Soderberg writes that, "In the last few years, there has been a loss of trust between the United States and the rest of the world, including its closest allies."[102] She wisely adds that this is not just an issue of popularity, but one of national security.[103] This is despite plenty of examples of U.S. adversaries such as Russia and China committing unpopular acts of their own in places like Syria, Ukraine (Crimea), Western China, and the South China Sea.

Sadly, mistrust of the U.S. is not just an issue among culturally astute Ivy League scholars like Kydd, or worldly and experienced diplomats like Ambassador Soderberg. A quick search for polling data which describes world opinion of the U.S brings us to the Pew Global website, a reputable institution which offers some sobering revelations which ultimately depict something of an uphill battle for U.S. messaging and information strategy.

---

101 Andrew Kydd, "In America We (Used to) Trust: U.S. Hegemony and Global Cooperation," *Political Science Quarterly : PSQ.* 120, no. 4 (2005): 620.

102 Nancy E. Soderberg, "The Crisis of Global Trust and the Failure of the 2005 World Summit," *Ethics & International Affairs.* 20, no. 2 (2006): 235.

103 Soderberg, 236.

Pew researchers building the Pew Global Indicators Database in 2018 asked respondents in over twenty countries if they thought the U.S. considered their own country's interests. The results are somewhat shocking. In Canada, 82% of respondents replied that they thought the U.S. did not consider their country's interests at all. In Germany, 80%, The Netherlands, 86%, France, 81%, and in Spain, 90%.[104] Even more shocking was that in the United Kingdom (UK), perhaps our closest ally, 72% of respondents felt that the U.S. did not consider their country's interests.[105] Researchers for the same Global Indicators Database in 2018 asked the same countries to rate their level of confidence in the U.S. president. In Germany, the percentage of those confident in the U.S. president was only 10%, in France, 9%, and in Spain, 7%, and strangely, in Russia, the reaction was much higher at 19%.[106]

These data are certainly discouraging, but do they account for world opinion of the United States after years of unpopular wars and foreign policy, or simply the differences in the administrations and styles of presidents Obama and Trump? In any case, the GEC's 5th pillar as proposed in the previous chapter could potentially mitigate such negative numbers by deliberately highlighting negative actions of U.S. adversaries, and providing leadership in consolidating strategy.

C. MOVING FORWARD: AMERICA SEEING ITSELF AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

These numbers should, at minimum, give U.S. policymakers pause. Yet while these numbers may be discouraging, they at least tell the U.S. what it faces in the information space. They help America see itself. Yet, it must be remembered that the U.S has long been a symbol of hope and freedom for much of the world. Also, and this is very important, we still live in a world where our adversaries commit unpopular acts as well. The U.S. just has to get better at highlighting those acts. An agency like the GEC could take its pick from a

104 Pew Research, "Pew Center Global Attitudes and Trends," December 6, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/01/americas-international-image-continues-to-suffer/pg_2018-10-1_u-s-image_updated_1-11/.

105 Pew Research.

106 Pew Research.

variety of world events. The Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea is ongoing. This could be exploited to greater effect, for example. The Kaliningrad scenario, although notional, illustrates very well the potential for the GEC.

Another practical example of how the GEC could capitalize on enemy actions actually happening today to influence and shape world opinion is in the South China Sea. According to *National Geographic* journalist Rachael Bale, Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam all have competing claims in the South China Sea, but China's claim amounts to almost the whole sea and is not based on the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as are the claims of the other competing nations.[107] *National Geographic* makes a very strong case that overfishing and reef destruction through the building of artificial islands for military purposes, primarily from Chinese actions, threaten this huge, important and biodiverse ecosystem.[108]

Public concern and awareness worldwide for environmental stories like this are extremely high. The island-building by the Chinese is something that many audiences might already be aware of, but the extremely negative environmental effects of Chinese actions in the South China Sea could be better leveraged. The GEC could further expose this story and others like it in Europe and Asia to undermine Chinese interests and tarnish their public image. This is especially relevant today as customers in Europe contemplate investing in Chinese companies (Huawei, for example) for lucrative new 5G projects. Showing European audiences' evidence of Chinese environmental atrocities could have real negative financial impacts on China if Europe chooses to look elsewhere for its tech answers. It would reduce European trust in China and in Chinese firms, and it would serve U.S. interests.

The U.S. needs to capitalize on the misdeeds of its adversaries, show them to the world as USIA did during the Cold War, and simply let the events and deeds speak for themselves. If this is done effectively, then the U.S. will be cast in a positive light, and its

---

107 Rachael Bale, "The South China Sea Dispute Is Decimating Fish Stocks," National Geographic, National Geographic, August 29, 2016, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/08/wildlife-south-china-sea-overfishing-threatens-collapse/.

108 Bale.

enemies in a negative one. USIA, not always but often, did this during the Cold War, as seen in Chapter V. The GEC, working with a coherent information strategy, could do it again right now. Despite the discouraging Pew research, or other negative narratives floating around in the global information space, America is still a land full of people doing interesting and innovative things that the world still wants and needs to know about. It is still a force for good in the world. American arms, money, and industry helped to tip the balance of two world wars, and then with the Marshal Plan, rebuilt much of Europe. America also showed the world that it had the political resolve, and economic power to sustain a city and a people for as long as necessary during the Berlin Airlift of 1948–49.

The GEC can to tap into this history and spirit to tell a positive American story today. When a tsunami destroys a coastline or an earthquake devastates a foreign country, the U.S. responds with goodwill and generosity, not only officially with U.S. government humanitarian assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), or even U.S. military help, but also with donations by private American citizens. These are good stories that too often are not told enough. Some might say that it is inappropriate to "toot your own horn," but it is high time that the U.S. does precisely that. The GEC, empowered by a national information strategy with coherent and deliberate narratives tailored to targeted global audiences, can tell the American story and shape perceptions in the information space. In doing so, and by highlighting the positive actions of the U.S. and highlighting the negative actions of its adversaries, it will improve the U.S. global image, build trust and confidence, and further U.S. national interests.

VI. CONCLUSION

Russian activities in the information space are sophisticated and creative. They will continue to evolve and to pose a threat to U.S. national interests. They will also continue to both inspire, and be inspired by the activities of other actors who wish to harm American interests and diminish American influence in the world. These threats are real, and they tear at the very fabric of our democratic institutions and those of our allies. The USIA served well during the Cold War to counter a variety of threats to include those posed by the Soviet Union. The spirit of this agency must live on to stand against existing and emerging threats. This spirit, and at least some of the duties and leading functions which were performed by USIA live on in the GEC today. A re-tooled GEC, more than any other existing agency, is postured to tell the American story in a truthful and transparent manner. This agency, after the minor modifications described in previous chapters (namely adding the fifth core area of leading information strategy) will not only continue its current duties and mission to counter adversary propaganda, but it will also perform an extremely important role. It will, by telling the truth and highlighting the negative actions of Russia and other adversaries, begin to tell an American story in the world that will re-establish world-wide trust in America and its institutions.

This critical activity is the type of work that can help serve as a bulwark against a rising tide of authoritarianism throughout the world, and the influence campaigns and disinformation which accompany it. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2017 already lays out these types of tasks that would "discover, expose and counter foreign government information warfare efforts."[109] Yet perhaps the most impactful of the GEC's duties as described in the NDAA 2017 is to "proactively advance fact-based narratives that support U.S. allies and interests."[110]

---

109 House of Representatives, "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017," Conference Report (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 2017), 1209.

110 House of Representatives, 1209.

It is this fact-based type of messaging that must underpin narratives and information strategies put forth by the GEC, and it can only properly accomplish this by adding a fifth core area to lead information strategy. Furthermore, and crucially, the GEC, by leading and coordinating information strategy against adversary disinformation can remind oppressed peoples that America is still a city on a hill. It is still an idea and a dream and a source of freedom and hope. Only by telling the truth can something like this be accomplished. Only by telling the truth can we regain the trust of the world and reassure our partners and allies that it is America, not Russia, or China, in which they should invest their trust in for the future.

Currently, one could be forgiven for thinking that democratic voices in the world do not have the information initiative. Authoritarian regimes like Russia, China, and others are pursuing their interests loudly and with unity of effort. The fifth core area, or fifth pillar of the GEC will be instrumental in turning up the volume of the American voice in the world. This voice has historically spoken on behalf of freedom, and served as inspiration by spreading truth and light. The GEC can serve as that voice, and speak to oppressed peoples of the world to remind them that they are not alone and that their cause and plight is worth struggling or even fighting for.

Take for example recent events in Hong Kong as described in the previous chapter. The multitudes of protesters taking to the streets there are hearing one message from China. It is a threatening message of fear and negativity. Let them hear an alternative message from America. A message of hope and solidarity. One that reassures them that the world is watching and that their efforts are not for nothing. It is also important to recognize that these types of truthful narratives are not just heard by everyday citizens of other countries in the world. They are also heard by ally and adversary leaders and policymakers, and translate to powerful signaling that spells out U.S. positions and resolve on certain world matters. The GEC, by telling the truth and exposing enemy actions for what they are, will eventually regain trust, and recapture the narrative. That narrative, one of democracy, prosperity, and freedom will stand as an attractive alternative to the fearmongering and authoritarianism heard elsewhere.

Adding a fifth core area to the GEC will require leadership, expertise, and vision. In addition to these intangibles, it will require some physical assets as well. The GEC will need to grow in size. This will necessitate the hiring of new employees and leaders who understand the power of information, and the nature of how it flows, and how it is wielded in the information space. These people will have to manage country portfolios, and communicate with various agencies, civilian companies, and military commands. New personnel, depending on how much the GEC grows, may also require additional space in which to work. The GEC also maintains important relationships with other agencies, military services and commands as well as the private sector. The GEC may need to increase its liaison and touchpoints with these various institutions to ensure that the strategies it helps to build are relevant and tailored to the situation at hand. All of these things, and many more besides remain to be sorted out. Such items of consideration could be areas of future study and research. Yet, the GEC, in any case is a wise investment in soft power. Especially when one considers its relatively modest cost. The FY19 base budget request for the GEC in its current form was just 53 million dollars.[111] To put this in perspective, the flyaway cost of one new F-35 fighter jet, depending on the model is between 94 and 122 million dollars.[112]

This thesis has examined case studies that shine light on lessons learned and best practices, that can be used to improve the GEC. It has also provided a thought experiment that shows the potential of the GEC for responding to real world geo-political problems. It shows that leadership on the part of the GEC to coordinate information strategies and to leverage inter-agency and private sector capabilities is critical to facing future challenges. Just as importantly, it demonstrates that telling the truth will play a vital role in re-establishing American trust on the world stage. If the U.S. cannot achieve these two things, then it will likely fall behind its adversaries, and play a reactive role in the information space. This is something that America cannot afford to do.

---

111 "Global Engagement Center," accessed August 14, 2019, https://www.state.gov/r/gec/.

112 Nick Zazulia, "F-35: Is the Trillion-Dollar Fighter Finally Worth It?," Aviation Today, accessed August 14, 2019, http://interactive.aviationtoday.com/avionicsmagazine/august-september-2018/f-35-is-the-trillion-dollar-fighter-finally-worth-it/.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF REFERENCES

Adams, Barbara D, and Robert D.G. Webb. “Trust in Small Military Teams.” Accessed May 15, 2019. <http://www.dodccrp .org/events/7th_ ICCRTS/Tracks/pdf/006.PDF>.

Armstrong, Matthew. “No, We Do Not Need to Revive the U.S. Information Agency.” War on the Rocks, November 12, 2015. https://warontherocks.com/2015/11/no-we-do-not-need-to-revive-the-u-s-information-agency/.

Arquilla, John, and Douglas A. Borer, eds. *Information Strategy and Warfare; A Guide to Theory and Practice*. New York, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.

Bale, Rachael. “The South China Sea Dispute Is Decimating Fish Stocks.” *National Geographic*, August 29, 2016. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/08/wildlife-south-china-sea-overfishing-threatens-collapse/.

Boyle, Ashley. “USC, Title 10, Title 22, and Title 50,” August 2012. https://www.scribd.com/document/101956577/U-S-C-Title-10-Title-22-And-Title-50.

Bump, Philip. “Don’t Blame the Seth Rich Conspiracy on Russians. Blame Americans.” *Washington Post*, July 9, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/09/dont-blame-seth-rich-conspiracy-russians-blame-americans/.

Calhoun, Craig. “Revolution and Repression in Tiananmen Square.” *Society.* 26, no. 6 (1989).

Carr, Bradley. “Joint Interagency Task Force - Influence: The New Global Engagement Center.” Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2017.

Chodkowski, William A. “American Security Project Fact Sheet, Reference 0097 The United States Information Agency.” *American Security Project*, November 2012, 9.

Cox, Mathew. “McCain: Halt Army Handgun Program, Choose the Bullet First.” *Miltary.Com*, 2019. https://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/10/31/mccain-halt-army-handgun-program-choose-the-bullet-first.html.

Cull, Nicholas. “Speeding the Strange Death of American Public Diplomacy: The George HW Bush Administration and the U.S. Information Agency.” *Diplomatic History.* 34, no. 1 (2010).

———. “Speeding the Strange Death of American Public Diplomacy: The George HW Bush Administration and the U.S. Information Agency.” *Oxford University Press, Diplomatic History*, 34, no. 1 (January 2010): 1–30.

———. “‘The Man Who Invented Truth’: The Tenure of Edward R. Murrow as Director of the United States Information Agency During the Kennedy Years.” *Cold War History*, 4, no. 1 (2003): 23–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740312331391724.

———. “‘The Man Who Invented Truth’: The Tenure of Edward R. Murrow as Director of the United States Information Agency During the Kennedy Years.” *Cold War History*, 4, no. 1 (2003): 23–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740312331391724.

Diener, Alexander, and Joshua Hagen. “Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad Exclave and Enclave: Russian and EU Perspectives.” *Eurasian Geography and Economics.* 52, no. 4 (2011).

Galeotti, Mark. “Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New Is Russia’s ‘New Way of War’?” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (March 3, 2016): 282–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129170.

Gallagher, Sean. “Report: Russian Intel Started the Seth Rich Rumor to Cover for DNC Hack.” Ars Technica, July 9, 2019. https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2019/07/report-russian-intel-started-the-seth-rich-rumor-to-cover-for-dnc-hack/.

Giles, Keir. “The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare.” NATO STRATCOM Center for Excellence. Accessed August 1, 2019. https://www.stratcomcoe.org/next-phase-russian-information-warfare-keir-giles.

“Global Engagement Center.” Accessed February 11, 2019. https://www.state.gov/r/gec/.

Granville, Johanna. “‘Caught with Jam on Our Fingers’: Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.” *Diplomatic History.* 29, no. 5 (2005).

Haefele, Mark. “John F. Kennedy, USIA and Word Public Opinion.” *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2001).

He, Zhou, and Jianhua Zhu. “The ‘Voice of America’ and China, Zeroing in on Tiananmen Square.” *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*, February 1, 1994.

House of Representatives. “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017.” Conference Report. Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 2017.

Ingram, Mathew. “Getting to the Bottom of the Seth Rich Conspiracy Theory.” *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 10, 2019. https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/seth-rich-conspiracy-theory.php.

Jahner, Kyle. “McCain Slams Army’s Wasteful Plan for a New Service Pistol.” *Army Times*, October 29, 2015. https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2015/10/30/mccain-slams-army-s-wasteful-plan-for-a-new-service-pistol/.

Joung, Madeleine, and Mahita Gajanan. “Robert Mueller Testified Before Congress for 7 Hours. Here’s Everything to Know.” News Media. Time, July 24, 2019. https://time.com/5629528/robert-mueller-testimony-live-updates/.

Kluver, Randolph. “Rhetorical Trajectories of Tiananmen Square.” *Diplomatic History.* 34, no. 1 (2010).

Kydd, Andrew. “In America We (Used to) Trust: U.S. Hegemony and Global Cooperation.” *Political Science Quarterly : PSQ.* 120, no. 4 (2005).

“National Security Strategy.” United States of America, December 2017.

Nye, Joseph S., and William Owens. “America’s Information Age.” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (April 1996): 20–36.

Nye Jr., Joseph S., and William A. Owens. “America’s Information Edge.” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (April 3, 1996): 20–36.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence. “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections.” Intelligence Community Report, January 6, 2017.

Oldberg, Ingmar. “Kaliningrad: Russian Enclave, European Enclave.” Scientific Report for Defense and Security Policy. Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish Defence Research Agency, June 2001.

Olney, Kristina. “America Must Prevent Another Tiananmen Square and Stand for a Free Hong Kong.” *National Review*, August 12, 2019, 1–8.

“Pew Research.” Pew Center Global Attitudes and Trends, December 6, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/01/americas-international-image-continues-to-suffer/pg_2018-10-1_u-s-image_updated_1-11/.

Pittaway, Mark. “The Education of Dissent: The Reception of the Voice of Free Hungary, 1951–56” 4, no. 1 (2003).

Roa, Carlos. “Time to Restore the U.S. Information Agency.” *The National Interest*, February 20, 2017.

Roa, Carlos. “Time to Restore the U.S. Information Agency.” *The National Interest*, February 20, 2017.

Ronald Krebs. *Narrative and the Making of U.S. National Security*. 1st ed. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Shaw, Tony. “The Politics of Cold War Culture.” *Journal of Cold War Studies.* 3, no. 3 (2001).

Soderberg, Nancy E. “The Crisis of Global Trust and the Failure of the 2005 World Summit.” *Ethics & International Affairs.* 20, no. 2 (2006).

Theohary, Catherine. “Information Warfare: Issues for Congress.” Congressional Report. Congressional Research Service, March 5, 2018. https://crsreports.congress.gov.

Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. “U.S. Department of State website.” U.S. Department of State Global Engagement Center, 2017. https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-public-diplomacy-and-public-affairs/global-engagement-center/.

Ward, Alex. “4 Main Takeaways from New Reports on Russia’s 2016 Election Interference.” Vox, December 17, 2018.

William M. Chodkowski. “American Security Project Fact Sheet, Reference 0097 The United States Information Agency,” November 2012.

Wolf, Zachary. “Robert Mueller’s Testimony: The Biggest Takeaway Is Russia’s Interferance in U.S. Elections.” CNN, July 25, 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/24/politics/russia-trump-election-interference/index.html.

“Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community.” Worldwide Threat Assessment. United States. Congress. Senate. Select Committee on Intelligence: United States. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 29, 2019.

Zazulia, Nick. “F-35: Is the Trillion-Dollar Fighter Finally Worth It?” Aviation Today. Accessed August 14, 2019. http://interactive.aviationtoday.com/avionicsmagazine/august-september-2018/f-35-is-the-trillion-dollar-fighter-finally-worth-it/.

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1. Defense Technical Information Center
   Ft. Belvoir, Virginia

2. Dudley Knox Library
   Naval Postgraduate School
   Monterey, California