

**THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER: LEADING  
THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT'S FIGHT  
AGAINST GLOBAL DISINFORMATION THREAT**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE  
DEPARTMENT AND USAID  
MANAGEMENT, INTERNATIONAL  
OPERATIONS, AND BILATERAL  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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MARCH 5, 2020  
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**THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER: LEADING THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT'S FIGHT AGAINST GLOBAL DISINFORMATION THREAT**

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**THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2020**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE DEPARTMENT AND USAID  
MANAGEMENT, INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, AND  
BILATERAL INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:23 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Rob Portman presiding.

Present: Senators Portman [presiding], Young, Paul, Rubio, Booker, Markey, Merkley, and Udall.

Also Present: Senator Murphy.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROB PORTMAN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM OHIO**

Senator PORTMAN. Okay, let us get started. First of all, I want to thank my colleagues for being here.

Ranking Member Booker, thank you very much for being here, and I particularly want to thank Chairman Barrasso because he graciously allowed us to both have this subcommittee hearing and for me to be able to chair it. This is a discussion that is really important to all of us who are here and so many of our colleagues.

Information is power today, and we see it all over the globe and when it is used improperly, it is used as a weapon. Democracies like ours require a well-informed electorate to function properly, but our enemies are increasingly trying to undermine that principle through so-called disinformation campaigns designed to mislead voters and, in doing so, delegitimize our democratic elections.

Malign actors, like Russia, systematically exploit social media, radio, television, and print to twist facts to suit their needs and distort the truth to an unsuspecting populace. It is not just about elections. We see it today with regard to the coronavirus and misinformation that is being spread.

It is an interesting tactic because it is inexpensive and yet can be very effective. It has a high degree of deniability. It is anonymous almost always. And again, if left unchecked, it can be devastatingly effective.

In 2016, Senator Chris Murphy, who is here today, and I established this organization within the United States Government through legislation. The idea was to have an interagency group that could help lead this global disinformation effort and work with international partners for a unified response.

The bipartisan legislation, the Global Engagement Center within the State Department, is now law. It has taken a while, frankly, to get it up and going. We are going to hear a lot more about that today. But we are pleased that we are making progress.

The mission of the GEC is to, and I quote, “lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government in countering foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts.”

So it is a broad and important mandate. It is the central nexus of our work to create this effective shield against the falsehoods that threaten the integrity of our democracy and other democracies.

We are pleased to have Lea Gabrielle here with us as our first witness. She is the Special Envoy of the GEC. She is a former human intelligence operations officer, a Defense foreign liaison officer, a U.S. Navy program director, a Navy F-18 fighter pilot, and a national television news correspondent and an anchor. She has done all that within her short life. So it is very impressive.

She is well experienced in combatting disinformation campaigns. We are glad to have her leading in this initiative. We look forward to hearing how she has staffed the Center to meet the mission. We look forward to the assessment of the emerging threats we face and the budgetary requirements moving forward.

I think it is critical that we resource the GEC to meet this important mission, and therefore, I support the Fiscal Year 2021 President’s budget request of \$138 million. That is an increase of about \$76 million over last year’s budget. It is more than a doubling of the current funding. And I think that is important, and again, we will hear more about why that is so important.

Our second panel will have Dr. Alina Polyakova. I am going to try this again. I always call her Alina so I do not have to worry about the last name. But Alina Polyakova from the Center for European Policy Analysis, and then Dan Blumenthal from the American Enterprise Institute. Those serve as our expert witnesses as we have a frank and serious discussion about the global weaponization of information and the U.S. Government’s response.

Dr. Polyakova and Mr. Blumenthal have testified before this and other committees, and are highly regarded for their work. We look forward to hearing their insights.

Today, we will also aim to examine the threat posed to democracies by the deliberate and intentional state-sponsored spread of inaccurate information to inflame societies. There are numerous examples of this happening again in just the past few years.

Here in the United States, we have extensive documentation that Russia conducted a coordinated interference campaign in our 2016 elections, something we are working hard to prevent this election cycle. Elsewhere, Ukraine has been the subject of a sustained Russian disinformation campaign in response to its efforts to break free of Moscow’s influence since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity.

We are seeing a rise in these tactics from China, both in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe. This is truly a global problem, again, that requires an integrated global response.

I was recently at the Munich Security Conference with some of my colleagues here, and we had a robust discussion about this and about the U.S.-European partnership in fighting disinformation. Today, I want to dig deeper into that subject as well.

With regard to the Indo-Pacific region, there has been a strong relationship between the GEC and the INDOPACOM Command that is, I think, a model for others to follow. We look forward to hearing more about how this works and how the PRC manipulates or blocks information that does not meet their desired narratives.

Lastly, I think it is important that the U.S. continue to be a world leader in efforts to combat this disinformation. Where the United States goes, other countries tend to follow. Through the GEC and other agencies, we have established a close and effective relationship with some of our European counterparts, and our joint efforts are beginning to gain traction elsewhere.

The topic of disinformation is now a topic of discussion across the globe, as we saw at the conference in Munich. To continue our leadership on this issue, we have got to have an effective organization within the Federal Government to coordinate our response. This hearing will address how we can understand the issue better and also make the GEC even more effective.

The problems caused by deliberate state-sponsored manipulation of information are going to be here for a long time. They are not leaving us. The tactics are inexpensive, deniable, highly effective, and it is critical we understand the dangers they present and the best way to seize the initiative in this arena.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Rob Portman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ROB PORTMAN

Ranking Member Booker, fellow members of the Subcommittee, it is my pleasure to chair this hearing on the Global Engagement Center and its role in leading the fight against disinformation. I'd like to thank Chairman Barrasso for graciously permitting me to lead this discussion on a subject that is very important to me personally.

In today's world, information is not only power—when used improperly, it is a weapon. Democracies like ours require a well-informed electorate to function properly, but our enemies are increasingly trying to undermine this principle through so-called 'disinformation campaigns' designed to mislead voters and, in doing so, delegitimize our democratic elections. Malign actors like Russia systematically exploit social media, radio, television and print to twist facts to suit their needs and distort the truth to an unsuspecting populace. This tactic is inexpensive, has a high degree of deniability and, if left unchecked, can be devastatingly effective.

In 2016, my colleague Senator Chris Murphy and I recognized the need to establish an organization within the United States government to lead the interagency fight against these global disinformation efforts and work with our international partners on a unified response. The resulting legislation we passed through Congress on a bipartisan basis led to the creation of the Global Engagement Center within the State Department. The mission of the GEC is to "lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government in countering foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts." It's the central nexus of our work to create an effective shield against falsehoods that threaten the integrity of our democracy.

Today, we are pleased to have Special Coordinator of the GEC Lea Gabrielle as our government witness. Special Coordinator Gabrielle is a former Human Intelligence Operations Officer, Defense Foreign Liaison Officer, U.S. Navy Program Director, Navy F/A-18C Fighter Pilot, and national television news correspondent and anchor. She is well-experienced in combating disinformation campaigns and we're

glad to have her leading this important initiative. We look forward to hearing how Special Coordinator Gabrielle has staffed the Center to meet her mission, her assessment of the emerging threats we face and her budgetary requirements are moving forward. It is critical we resource the GEC to meet its mission and I strongly support the FY 2021 President's budget requested \$138 million dollars in funding for the center. That is an increase of \$76 million over last year's budget, more than a doubling of the current funding.

In our second panel, we will have Dr. Alina Polyakova (paul-YA-ko-vuh) from the Center of European Policy Analysis and Dan Blumenthal from the American Enterprise Institute to serve as our expert witnesses as we have a frank and serious discussion about the global weaponization of information and the U.S. government's response. Dr. Polyakova and Mr. Blumenthal have testified before and are highly regarded for their work on this issue, and I look forward to hearing their insights.

Today we'll also aim to examine the threat posed to democracies by the deliberate and intentional state-sponsored spread of inaccurate information to influence societies. There are numerous examples of this happening just in the past few years. Here in the U.S., we now have extensive documentation that Russia conducted a coordinated interference campaign in our 2016 elections, something we're working hard to prevent this election cycle. Elsewhere, Ukraine has been the subject of a sustained Russian disinformation campaign in response to its efforts to break free of Moscow's influence since its 2014 Revolution of Dignity. We are seeing a rise of these tactics from China, both in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe. This is truly a global problem that requires an integrated, global response. I recently attended the Munich Security Conference and we had robust discussions about the U.S.-European partnership in fighting disinformation—today I hope to dig deeper into that subject as well.

Regarding the GEC's efforts in the Indo-Pacific region, there has been a strong relationship between the GEC and the Indo/PACOM command that is a model for others to follow. I look forward to hearing about how this and also how the People's Republic of China manipulates or blocks information that does not meet their desired narratives.

Lastly, it is important that the U.S. continues to be a world leader in our efforts to combat disinformation. Where the United States goes, other countries will follow. Through the GEC and other agencies, we have established close and effective relations with our European counterparts, and our joint efforts are starting to gain traction. The topic of disinformation now a topic of discussion across the globe, when it was not only a few years ago. To continue our leadership on this issue, we must have an effective organization within the federal government to coordinate our response, and this hearing will address how we can understand the issue and ultimately make the GEC more effective.

The problems created by deliberate, state-sponsored manipulation of information are not leaving us. The tactics are cheap, deniable, and highly effective and it is critical we fully understand the dangers they present and the best way to seize the initiative in this arena.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and from the other members of this committee. I'll now turn it over to Ranking Member Booker for his opening remarks.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses in a moment and from the members of the committee. I now turn to Ranking Member Senator Booker for his opening remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CORY BOOKER,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It is incredible to be able to be sitting here today next to you. You, frankly, not only helped to get this hearing done, but you and Senator Murphy, your extraordinary leadership in drafting the legislation that authorized the GEC, if I understand it correctly, you took it from an executive order at the whims of a president to really something that was established.

And it is incredible that you are here, and I want to thank Senator Murphy for his continued leadership in many ways as a more junior member on this committee, in many ways just being a friend and a mentor.



I am disappointed, though. I just want to say this is a very bipartisan hearing. I mean, this is legislation that the two of you wrote together. It is something that bonds us all, the concerns and the mission of this organization. But the State Department refused to provide the committee with the witness it requested, and that is unacceptable to me. It is not the way we should be doing business.

We all have a shared interest and shared values and a shared understanding of the growing and more sophisticated threats. It is just unacceptable to me. It is not helping us to do business of the people of this country and protecting us and keeping us safe.

And that brings me to where my thoughts are for the moment, which is in the aftermath of September 11th, the U.S. created the GEC with the goal of reducing the influence and effectiveness of terrorist and violent extremist groups that were seeking to harm Americans. Today, the scope of the GEC's work is incredible to me. It extends beyond terrorists, violent extremist groups, and state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation. It is really growing to be an incredibly critical mission, given the complex challenges from our adversaries.

As we are sitting here in this hearing, there are actors seizing on widespread concern regarding the coronavirus to intentionally spread disinformation at a time when people are worried and vulnerable and willing to believe what they are reading, often. And we understand that in the context of this, FDR's words are very profound. "We have nothing to fear, but fear itself." Well, we have a real threat and then the additional threat of fear.

The Washington Post has been reporting on this, talking about the use of social media and the conspiracy theories being spread that put us at danger. The report revealed evidence of a coordinated inauthentic activity, which was responsible for pushing these dangerous falsehoods.

One conspiracy theory is seeking to attack people in this country, blame them. In this case, Bill and Melinda Gates.

As people in the U.S. and across the globe are turning to social media for information about this looming threat, they find these lies, the malicious actors who are trying to really prey upon our vulnerability and put us more at danger. And so this intentional desire to muddle the facts, to undermine our security and our safety, to make us doubt our institutions, to make us doubt each other, will weaken the bonds of our democracy, as well as put people at risk.

And this brings us to the GEC's work. Their work at getting to the bottom of disinformation around the coronavirus is exactly why it was created by Congress, led by the gentlemen on my either side. But I have some questions about why both the GEC and the State Department have so far refused to comment about the report and about the reliable news outlets that are seeking to expose this disinformation.

And so I hope to have that conversation as this goes on. I am also hoping to get to the bottom of important information that the GEC themselves have uncovered about those who are spreading the falsehoods, for what purposes they see, and what effects it is already having.

Russian interference in the 2016 elections demonstrated the dangers posed by this misinformation. And we now know that the Russians and other countries are trying to get better and better and more sophisticated at what they are doing. This is their playbook, targeting democracies, sowing discord through misinformation, and attempting to weaken relationships between allies.

There is no reason for us to believe that they are not going to continue to employ this playbook, to get better at it, to come at the coming elections and to seize any opportunities like the coronavirus to undermine our safety, security, and our very bonds here in the United States of America.

While the State Department does not have the authority over the homeland, through the data and analysis that the GEC collects on Russian techniques and practices, we know a lot more about what they may do to meddle in this year's election and to meet a lot of the challenges that they present. I want to know how this is being shared with relevant agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and more.

And while the U.S. recently has begun to see these Russian threats more broadly, Russia's democratic and pro-Western neighbors have had to contend with Russia's attempts to reverse democratic gains for years.

We also know these Russian efforts are not limited to Europe and the United States. As in Europe, we are seeing this now growing in Africa. Moscow's engagement enables autocrats and fosters corruption, especially in already-fragile African countries. We know the Kremlin's activities are designed in part to weaken the U.S.'s leadership in that region, but to undermine the very ideals of our democracy and others.

Last year, Facebook identified accounts targeting eight African countries, saying although the people behind these networks attempted to conceal their identities in coordination, our investigation connected these campaigns to entities associated with a specific Russian oligarch, who was described as the architect of Russia's interference in the 2016 election.

China, too, has rapidly increased the use of influence tactics in the information space. The near peer competition is clearly playing out in the misinformation space as well.

And so, to me, the GEC's task is considerable, to lead inter-agency efforts to counter propaganda and disinformation from international terrorist organizations and foreign countries. I look forward to hearing from both panels about how we, as Congress, can continue to strengthen our work to make sure we are meeting what I believe is a growing threat tactic and techniques being used by our adversaries to undermine this country, as well as critical allies, as well as the stability and strength of free peoples all around the country.

Thank you again for being here, and Mr. Chairman, I turn it back to you.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Cory Booker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CORY BOOKER

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.  
I want to thank Senator Portman for guest chairing this subcommittee's hearing.

Senator Portman along with Senator Murphy were instrumental in drafting the legislation that authorized the Global Engagement Center or GEC so there's no better person to lead this oversight panel and I'm thankful for his leadership in advocating for this hearing.

I also want to thank Senator Portman's staff for working so closely with my team in a bipartisan effort to bring attention to the threat posed by disinformation and how the United States must respond.

I am, however, disappointed that the State Department refused to provide the Committee with a witness it requested from the East Asia and Pacific or Europe Bureaus for this hearing despite having weeks of notice. It's just not the way we should be doing business and it's certainly not helpful to our efforts to strengthen and bolster the GEC.

Which brings me to the issue at hand today.

In the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, the sought to reduce the influence and effectiveness of terrorist and violent extremist groups that sought to harm the U.S. and its allies.

Today, the scope of GEC's work extends beyond terrorist and violent extremist groups to state sponsored propaganda and disinformation.

Right now, as we sit here in this hearing, there are actors seizing on widespread concern regarding the coronavirus to intentionally spread disinformation, at a time when people are worried, vulnerable, and willing to believe anything.

Over the weekend, the Washington Post reported that roughly 2 million tweets spread conspiracy theories about the coronavirus, based on an unreleased, unclassified GEC report it obtained.

That report revealed evidence of "inauthentic and coordinated activity" which was responsible for pushing these falsehoods.

One conspiracy theory suggested that the virus had been created by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Another claimed that the U.S. Department of Defense created the virus in order to target China.

As people here in the U.S. and across the globe turned to social media for information about this looming threat, they instead found lies from malicious actors preying on the vulnerability of innocent people.

What is the objective of peddling these dangerous false narratives? To muddle the facts, to make the truth so questionable that nothing can be trusted, and to create an environment that is ripe for exploitation.

The GEC's work on getting to the bottom of misinformation around the coronavirus is exactly why it was created by Congress in the first place—but I have questions about why both the GEC and State Department refused to comment about the report to a reliable news outlet seeking to expose the disinformation. Ms. Gabrielle, I hope you'll be able to speak to this issue.

I also am hoping to get to the bottom of the important information that the GEC uncovered, for example, who was responsible for spreading these falsehoods, for what purpose, and what effect has it had.

Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election demonstrated the dangers posed by misinformation campaigns.

We know now that this is the Russian playbook—targeting democracies, sowing discord through misinformation, and attempting to weaken relationships among allies.

And there is no reason to believe they won't employ this same playbook in the coming U.S. Presidential election. While the State Department does not have authority over the homeland, through the data and analysis that the GEC collects on Russian techniques and practices we know a lot more about what they may do to meddle in this year's election.

I want to know how that is being shared with relevant agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI and our intelligence agencies so that protecting our election is indeed a whole of government effort.

And while the U.S. just recently woke up to Russia's disinformation efforts, Russia's democratic and pro-Western neighbors have had to contend with Russian attempts to reverse democratic gains for years. I saw this firsthand when I traveled to Ukraine in 2017, which Russia has used as a testing ground to perfect misinformation methods and techniques and then used elsewhere.

We also know these Russian efforts are not limited to Europe and the United States. As in Europe, in Africa, Moscow's engagement enables autocrats, and fosters corruption especially in already-fragile African countries. We also know the Kremlin's activities are designed in part to weaken U.S. leadership in the region.

Late last year, Facebook identified accounts targeting eight African countries, saying "Although the people behind these networks attempted to conceal their identi-

ties and coordination, our investigation connected these campaigns to entities associated with Russian financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin” who is described as the architect of Russia’s interference in the 2016 election.

China, too, has rapidly increased the use of its influence tactics in the information space.

The near peer competition is clearly playing out in the information space.

A recent report by the International Republican Institute (IRI) says that China seeks to ensure a positive “China story” and protect its growing investments in developing countries by suppressing criticism of Chinese activities within their borders.

The GEC’s task is considerable—to lead interagency efforts to counter propaganda and disinformation from international terrorist organizations and from foreign countries.

I look forward to hearing from Ms. Leah Gabrielle, the Director of the GEC about how the GEC is poised to execute its mandate, and I hope you’ll be forthcoming with us about what additional resources you need or authorities you lack in order to carry out your mission.

I also look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses, Dr. Alina Polyakova and Mr. Daniel Blumenthal who will discuss the intent and methods of Russian and Chinese disinformation, emerging trends in state sponsored disinformation, and where we need to focus our energies.

Thank you all again for being here.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you. I appreciate those statements. We look forward to getting into more of those issues as we move forward.

And again, our first witness is Ms. Lea Gabrielle. We spoke about her impressive background earlier, but she is the Special Envoy and Coordinator of the Global Engagement Center for the U.S. Department of State.

And Ms. Gabrielle, all of your written record will be printed in its entirety in the record. We would ask you that you limit your oral remarks this morning to 5 minutes, and we look forward to your testimony and then the opportunity to ask some questions.

So, Ms. Gabrielle, your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF LEA GABRIELLE, SPECIAL ENVOY AND COORDINATOR OF THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. GABRIELLE. Thank you, Chairman Portman, Ranking Member Booker, and members of the subcommittee.

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. I am pleased to be here to talk about the Global Engagement Center’s work. This is an important topic with serious implications to U.S. national security, and I appreciate the subcommittee devoting this time to it.

The GEC is dedicated to the mission of leading and coordinating the U.S. Government’s efforts to decisively expose and counter foreign state and nonstate disinformation and propaganda. Secretary Pompeo has called upon the GEC to employ a broad suite of tools to stop America’s adversaries from weaponizing information and using propaganda to undermine free societies.

Since becoming the Special Envoy of the GEC just over a year ago, my team and I have made significant progress towards building international partnerships, executing dynamic programs, and deploying robust analytical capabilities globally to address foreign propaganda and disinformation. I have worked to ensure my team has the necessary tools and resources to do the job given to it by Congress.

At the State Department's recent Chief of Mission Conference, I spoke with our U.S. Ambassadors who represent us around the world. I shared our threat assessments on disinformation and propaganda, and I listened to their perspectives on how developments are playing out on the ground. We at the GEC recognize the crucial role that our missions and our public diplomacy officers play on the front lines of this information battleground.

My teams are working with embassies overseas and with the Department's regional bureaus daily to execute and to coordinate activities. Today, I will outline how we view the disinformation the Kremlin and the Chinese Communist Party are propagating, what we are doing to counter each, and the role that data and analytics play in our work.

I will also describe the GEC's role in coordinating a whole of U.S. Government effort to respond to foreign propaganda and disinformation. I am also available to answer any of your questions about how the GEC counters propaganda from terrorist organizations like ISIS, as well as disinformation from the Iranian regime.

Let us start with the Kremlin. The intent, scope, and style of disinformation and propaganda spread by the Kremlin and the Chinese Communist Party are distinct from one another. The Kremlin swamps the media environment with a tsunami of lies. Outside of Russia, the Kremlin seeks to weaken its adversaries by manipulating the information environment in nefarious ways, by polarizing political conversations, and attempting to destroy the public's faith in good governance, independent media, and democratic principles.

To counter the Kremlin's disinformation, the GEC is creating strategic partnerships with foreign governments to enable the information sharing and the coordinating that allows us to get ahead of the Russian government's information operations. The GEC is also providing support to our missions abroad and our international partners for a wide range of efforts to counter the Kremlin's disinformation.

These include supporting civil society groups in Central and Eastern Europe that build resiliency in their local communities. These also include running joint communications campaigns with allies to counter Russian historical revisionism and to empower fact-checkers in Latin America to stem the surge of Russian disinformation in that region.

With increased funding, we intend to provide more of this type of support to additional allies and partners globally so that they can increase their own ability to resist these Russian tactics. The investments we have made have also allowed us to expose elements of the Russian government's information operations ecosystem. This exposure inoculates audiences against this threat, and it is critical.

Now while Moscow wants to disrupt the current world order, the Chinese Communist Party seeks to shape it to Beijing's advantage. Beijing is pursuing a comprehensive and coordinated influence campaign to advance its interests and to undermine the United States. But when you take a closer look, it is clear that many of the CCP's actions in the economic, security, and human rights space are built on propaganda.

The GEC's programs are focused on puncturing those false narratives. Our efforts to counter CCP propaganda include increasing awareness of the problematic aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative, increasing awareness of the problematic aspects of human rights abuses in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China, as well as Beijing's abuse of open research in academic environments to achieve its military objectives.

We also have programs to build global resilience to PRC disinformation through media training and support to investigative journalists and to map PRC influence in the information environment to guide current and future approaches. Beijing also wants to shape third country perspectives of U.S. foreign policy. In order to restrict the space where CCP propaganda can take root, the GEC partners with our missions overseas on efforts that provide accurate information about U.S. policies and the contributions of U.S. businesses to the local communities.

In all of this, our success depends on leveraging analytical tools as well as networks of credible partners and local voices overseas, capabilities we are refining and expanding each day.

My team and I are committed to the mission that Congress has tasked to the GEC. In our modern age, the Russian government, the PRC, and other adversaries have clearly found ways to leverage new technologies to deepen and to accelerate the impact disinformation and propaganda can have. As has always been the case, free nations must unite and work together to defeat this threat.

I am here today to report that we are making progress. We are building up the GEC's capabilities for crafting strategies tailored to the specific approaches of our adversaries. And most importantly, we are regaining the initiative.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify here today. I truly appreciate the subcommittee's support for the GEC's mission, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Lea Gabrielle follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF LEA GABRIELLE

Chairman Portman, Ranking Member Booker—Thank you for inviting me to testify before your Subcommittee about the Global Engagement Center's (GEC) work to lead and coordinate U.S. government efforts to counter state-sponsored and non-state propaganda and disinformation. This is an important topic with potentially grave implications to U.S. national security interests which this Administration is prioritizing confronting. I appreciate the Subcommittee devoting time to it.

The GEC is dedicated to the mission of leading and coordinating the interagency to decisively expose and counter foreign state and non-state disinformation and malign propaganda.

Consistent with the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, and in support of the President's National Security Strategy Information Statecraft efforts the GEC works to "direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States and United States allies and partner nations."

We have the full support of Secretary Pompeo who is committed to deploying a broad suite of tools to stop America's adversaries from using disinformation, malign propaganda, and other tools to undermine free societies.

Since I became the Special Envoy and Coordinator of the GEC just over 1 year ago, my team and I have made significant progress towards building international partnerships, executing dynamic programs and deploying robust analytical capacities globally to address the serious threats we face from malign influence and prop-

aganda. To achieve this success, I have worked to ensure my team has the necessary tools and resources to do the job given to us by Congress.

Although this hearing is focused on countering Russian government and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) disinformation and propaganda, as well as propaganda from foreign terrorist organizations, the GEC also counters Iranian disinformation and I am happy to provide information on those efforts.

At the State Department's Global Chiefs of Mission Conference last week I had the chance to speak with U.S. Ambassadors representing us around the world. I shared updates on our threat assessments and listened to their perspectives on how developments are playing out on the ground. We at the GEC recognize the crucial role that our Missions and Public Diplomacy Officers play as our representatives on the front lines of this information battleground. My teams are working with Embassies overseas daily to execute and coordinate activities.

In my testimony today, I'll outline how we in the GEC view the disinformation the Kremlin and the CCP are propagating and what we are doing to counter each. I will also highlight how we use analytics and technology in our efforts, how we have approached resourcing issues, and the role of the GEC in coordinating a whole of USG effort to respond to foreign propaganda and disinformation.

#### THE THREAT

The intent, scope, and style of the disinformation and malign propaganda spread by the Kremlin and the CCP are distinct from one another.

The Kremlin often swamps the media environment with a tsunami of lies. Outside of Russia, the Kremlin seeks to weaken its adversaries by manipulating the information environment in nefarious ways, polarizing domestic political conversations, and attempting to destroy the public's faith in good governance, independent media, and democratic principles.

The Kremlin wants the world to think of Russia as the other global superpower, but those days are long gone. Lurking behind the Kremlin's bravado and rhetoric is a fundamental weakness across almost all measures of national power in Russia—a stagnant economy, a continuous brain drain, and a demographic shift that leaves the country vulnerable to its eastern neighbors.

Another reason the Kremlin spreads its lies is to try to hide the truth of its activities to enrich a small circle of cronies at the expense of the welfare of the Russian people. As part of this effort, the Kremlin seeks to create a fictitious "enemy"—the West more broadly, and the United States more specifically—of the Russian nation and Russian people, and to discredit the "enemy's" form of governance and actions at every turn in order to justify the system in place in Moscow and distract from any troubles inside Russia.

The Russian government directs and supports these propaganda activities globally, but especially targets and seeks to nurture the most extreme or divisive elements of society in the United States, Europe, and other regions in which they operate. We see in many Western Hemisphere countries the same tactics used by the Kremlin and its proxies. These include cyber-enabled disinformation operations; propaganda campaigns that seek to rewrite history; coordinated social media swarms that inflame existing fault lines of societies, and an array of other actions that fall within the scope of their malign information operations.

We have seen these tactics time and time again, from right here at home to the streets of the capital cities of our allies. The Kremlin does this to hide its own role in tragic events, such as the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) and the nerve-agent poisoning of UK citizens in Salisbury, England. They do this in support of the murderous Assad regime by smearing credible voices on the ground in Syria with false information. They do this to prop up the regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and suppress legitimate democratic voices, and they do this in attempt to weaken solidarity within NATO.

While the Kremlin seeks to chaotically disrupt the current world order to accomplish its goals, the CCP seeks to deliberately shape it to Beijing's advantage. Beijing is pursuing a comprehensive and coordinated influence campaign to advance its interests and undermine the United States. The CCP is employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, military, and information tools to advance its influence.

The CCP's propaganda apparatus is a critical component in promoting and maintaining the Communist Party's narrative domestically and globally. Its efforts to use censorship, intimidation, coercion, economic incentives, and propaganda to control the information space are a significant component of the CCP's attempts to expand its influence worldwide. This information control actively seeks to downplay con-

cerns regarding the PRC's state abuse and surveillance of Tibetans, Uighurs and members of other ethnic minorities.

It also seeks to downplay the risks of One Belt One Road Initiative projects, the dangers of CCP-entwined ownership structures like that of Huawei, criticism leveled against the PRC's provocations in areas like the South China Sea, and other examples which counter the pro-CCP narrative. Importantly, this effort to counter and silence criticism is paired with a push to portray the PRC as a benign, positive, and non-interventionist power.

CCP efforts to silence criticism can be seen in its influence operations targeting Hong Kong last summer. Twitter identified nearly 1,000 accounts originating from within mainland China that were "deliberately and specifically attempting to sow political discord in Hong Kong, including undermining the legitimacy and political positions of the protest movement on the ground." This was one of the first times Beijing had been identified as using techniques to manipulate information across mainstream international social media platforms.

Even more recently, the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Wuhan, China also provides an example of how Beijing attempts to censor the sheer extent of this global public health crisis—from downplaying the number of casualties, limiting criticism of the CCP's response, and silencing Dr. Li Wenliang's initial red flags about the deadly outbreak. These actions underscore Beijing's sensitivity to being portrayed as anything other than a responsible actor at home and abroad.

Over the last decade, the CCP has used its information tools to silence criticism and project a narrative favorable to Beijing and its interests. We know that the PRC spends billions of dollars developing and expanding its international information infrastructure and the global footprint of its state-run malign propaganda machine. The CCP also mobilizes front groups and leverages its economic influence to promote Beijing's global vision.

These efforts include the CCP's attempts to leverage ties to local businesses and businessmen to gain political advantage with regional and national governments. As you may know, Secretary Pompeo just spoke at the National Governors Association about these concerns. As he said, "the Chinese government has been methodical in the way it's analyzed our system, our very open system, one that we're deeply proud of. It's assessed our vulnerabilities, and it's decided to exploit our freedoms to gain advantage over us at the federal level, the state level, and the local level." This is not just happening in the United States. It is a tactic they are using widely around the world, often employing corrupt, coercive, and covert methods to gain that advantage.

Now, I will describe some specific examples of our work to counter Russian and PRC influence operations abroad.

#### OVERVIEW OF GEC APPROACH

The GEC's approach to taking on these challenges is focused on building an international network of partners best positioned to counter malign influence operations emanating from Russia and the PRC.

Broadly speaking, the GEC's initiatives include:

- 1) Deploying data analytics tools to provide early warnings of foreign disinformation to our Allies, partners, and domestic stakeholders;
- 2) Analyzing the attempts by our adversaries to target susceptible foreign audiences and sharing that information with stakeholders; and
- 3) Building the technical skills of civil society organizations, NGOs, journalists, and other local actors best positioned to shine a light on, and counter, the spread of disinformation.

#### SPECIFIC GEC COUNTER KREMLIN INITIATIVES

The GEC is actively working with Allies and partners in Europe to identify, recognize, and expose Russian disinformation, and to counter such disinformation with accurate messages about the United States and our Allies and partners in the pursuit of freedom, prosperity, and security.

The GEC has been working closely with the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) and the Bureau of European Affairs (EUR) and other partners via the Russia Influence Group on coordinated lines of effort to counter Russian disinformation, moving from "studying" the problem to actually "addressing" the problem.

We have also partnered with select European partners to establish an operational working group that actively shares insights on Russian disinformation tactics and coordinates on countermeasures.



The GEC has kicked off a number of initiatives related to Russia. These include:

- A 2-year project to build resistance to disinformation in the most vulnerable European societies by increasing direct person-to-person engagement on this issue.
- Creating strategic partnerships with foreign governments to enable the information sharing and response coordination that allows us to get ahead of Russian information operations.
- The GEC is providing support to our missions abroad and international partners for a wide range of efforts to counter Russian disinformation. These include supporting civil society groups in Central and Eastern Europe that build resiliency in their local communities, running joint communications campaigns with allies to counter Russian historical revisionism, and empowering fact checkers in Latin America to stem the surge of Russian disinformation in that region. With increased funding we intend to provide these types support to additional allies and partners so they can quickly and effectively increase their own ability to resist these Russian tactics.
- We continue to administer the Information Access Fund, utilizing the authority provided by Congress in the FY 2017 NDAA, via a capable implementing partner. Working with an established implementing partner allows the GEC to be faster and more flexible in executing grants to respond quickly to new priorities and opportunities as they arise.
- The investments we have made have also allowed us to expose elements of the Russian information operations ecosystem, helping inoculate audiences against this threat.

A good example of the synthesis of multiple lines of our effort came last fall, when we worked with other State colleagues and the UK and Baltic States governments on a joint campaign to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Way, a milestone on the road to the breakup of the Soviet Union. We knew that the Kremlin was attempting to re-write the history of this occasion. We worked with our partners to ensure that the truth was heard before the Kremlin could attempt to fill a vacuum with its messages. The GEC's ability to coordinate campaigns like this helps to drown out Russian propaganda and present a united front with allies.

#### SPECIFIC GEC COUNTER PRC INITIATIVES

The GEC has significantly expanded our work on the PRC problem set with programs to counter CCP influence over the last year. Not only do we compete in the information space in the East Asian and Pacific region, but our operations, activities, and investments are global in scope and continue to pick up momentum through FY 2020.

Our approach and priorities are driven by our ongoing collaboration with the NSC and regional and functional bureaus, all of whom have identified specific priorities in efforts to counter CCP information operations. We routinely coordinate with the China Desk in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP), regional and functional public diplomacy teams, our missions abroad, and relevant interagency partners to coordinate strategies and responses to this problem set.

Beijing has used direct and indirect methods to invest heavily in the global information architecture, whether that's underground cables or media outlets in third countries. It has matched those investments with a willingness to use economic coercion and political pressure to silence criticism and promote a narrative of its inevitable rise with "win-win" benefits for its partners.

Our efforts to counter CCP propaganda include increasing awareness of the problematic aspects of the One Belt One Road Initiative, human rights abuses in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China, as well as Beijing's abuse of open research and academic environments to achieve its military objectives. We also have programs to build global resilience to PRC disinformation through media training and other support to investigative journalists; and to map PRC influence in the information environment to guide current and future approaches.

Recognizing Beijing's efforts to shape third-country perspectives of U.S. foreign policy, the GEC also supports efforts to provide accurate information about U.S. policies and the contributions of U.S. businesses to local communities to restrict the space where CCP propaganda can take root. In all of this, our success depends on leveraging analytical tools as well as networks of credible partners and local voices overseas, capabilities we are refining and expanding each day.

## ANALYTICS &amp; RESEARCH

At the GEC, we have an emphasis on making sure we are data-driven. There is an increasing demand from our U.S. government and foreign partners for data analytics and targeted advertising technologies to counter propaganda and disinformation. To that end, the GEC created an Analytics & Research Team comprised of analysts, subject matter experts, and data scientists. I am pleased to report that the GEC's data-driven approach to understanding and addressing the problem of disinformation has been well received. The demand for GEC analytic support from the interagency community and our foreign partners has boomed.

Today the GEC's Analytics and Research team enables the GEC with some unique capabilities, such as:

- Capture disinformation-focused, threat-based analytics at the unclassified level of any given information environment;
- Discover coordinated adversarial campaigns;
- Analyze public opinion outside of the United States.

## INFORMATION-SHARING PLATFORM

To support and enable our work, the GEC has also been hard at work building an online analytics and information-sharing platform. This platform provides the GEC, the U.S. interagency, and select foreign partners with the open-source tools and capabilities they need to understand how foreign adversaries are pushing disinformation and propaganda in their countries. The platform also enables a coordinated response by international partners.

The Analytics and Research team has deployed this platform to dozens of foreign partners in the past 6 months. It has also provided training on how to utilize the platform's tools so that our partners can conduct their own data analysis and identify disinformation and propaganda in their local environment. These partners are now part of our analytic community—a community which is building a shared understanding of our adversaries' malign influence efforts through shared analytical approaches.

These capacity building measures enable a large number of our foreign partners to be increasingly self-sufficient and proactive in this fight, and that is no small feat. Recently one foreign partner used this online platform to analyze disinformation narratives in the lead up to their elections to help protect the integrity of their democratic process, a capability they did not previously have.

## TECHNOLOGY

The GEC also has a Technology Engagement Team (TET) which is tasked with facilitating the use of a wide range of technologies and techniques in our efforts. TET does this by fostering the sharing expertise among federal departments and agencies, leveraging expertise from external sources, and implementing best practices.

Since May 2018, the GEC has hosted 29 "Tech Demos" of more than 62 technologies aimed at addressing the problems of disinformation and malign propaganda and tested over 124 technologies. The GEC has implemented a technology Testbed, which enables the rapid identification and testing of particular tools to identify and counter disinformation and propaganda campaigns. The Testbed runs structured short-duration experiments to understand potential tech uses against specific operational challenges. Consistent with the GEC's mission to coordinate efforts of the federal government in this area, the GEC has run tests in support of the Departments of State and Homeland Security, the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), the Census Bureau, and other U.S. government departments and agencies.

To date, TET has evaluated and tested technologies including: blockchain-based content validation tools, counter censorship tools, web-enabled literacy training tools, dark-web monitoring tools, social listening tools, crowd-source content assessment tools, and web annotation tools.

The GEC has also run Tech Challenges, whereby the GEC convenes workshops with international partners, foreign tech companies, and other stakeholders to understand, assess, and implement tech solutions tailored to local environments in foreign countries. In 2019, the GEC held a joint Tech Challenge with the UK where the GEC awarded a grant to a Czech-based data analytics company advancing our work with the UK's counter-Russia efforts. Just last month, the GEC held a similar Tech Challenge in Taipei, Taiwan and later this year, the GEC is planning a Tech Challenge in Nairobi, Kenya.

The GEC has established the U.S. government's online repository for information about technologies for use against disinformation and malign propaganda, at [www.disinfocloud.com](http://www.disinfocloud.com). With over 335 government users currently, the GEC has brought together interagency partners, tech partners, private industry, and academics from around the world. In addition to U.S. government users, external pages have been viewed by audiences in more than 30 countries.

Finally, in December 2019, the GEC deployed a full-time liaison to Silicon Valley. The TET's strategic focus on Silicon Valley engagement will accelerate the implementation of the Global Engagement Center's overall mission. The GEC's aim is to identify novel technologies and approaches, in close coordination with other USG-Silicon Valley relationships. This effort seeks to leverage and utilize respective technical capacities and information streams in order to accelerate momentum for solutions around countering malign propaganda and disinformation.

#### RESOURCES

Fortunately, as we have made progress toward executing our mission we have also, in part, seen the GEC's resources increase in kind.

In FY 2016, the GEC's base budget was approximately \$20.2 million, in FY 2017 it was approximately \$35.8 million, in FY 2018 it was approximately \$55.3 million, and in FY 2019 it was approximately \$55.4 million. In addition to its base budget, the GEC received \$20 million from DoD in FY 2018, and \$5 million from DoD in FY 2019.

In a tight Public Diplomacy budget landscape, the GEC's FY 2020 budget has increased to \$64.3 million which represents an incremental but significant increase of \$8.9 million over FY 2019. With that said, the Administration is requesting a greater increase for the GEC budget in FY 2021 to a total request of \$138 million to match the growing challenge of countering foreign propaganda and disinformation. The Administration's request specifically provides funding to alleviate the need for future transfers from the Department of Defense. We hope that Congress will support this requested increase in the GEC's budget for FY 2021.

With additional funding, the GEC will be able to apply the best practices in countering Russian and PRC disinformation and propaganda from its existing programs and expand those effort to new countries and regions beyond where the GEC is already operating.

Additionally, the GEC seeks to leverage the resources and expertise of other State Department bureaus, including EUR, EAP, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), the Bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA), and interagency partners such as USAID and USAGM. For example, my team is also collaborating closely with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) which receives direct appropriations for programs specifically designed to counter disinformation. The GEC also works closely with the Department of Defense's Combatant Commands and components to inform and leverage their information operations efforts.

The GEC is seeing strong growth on the personnel front. In early 2017, the GEC had a staff of approximately 83 personnel, a mixture of Civil Service employees, Foreign Service Officers, detailees, and contractors. Today, the GEC employs 118 personnel, a roughly 40% increase from the 2017 levels. The GEC is also currently in the process of recruiting and hiring Personal Services Contractors within budgetary constraints, an authority granted to the GEC by Congress in the FY 2017 NDAA.

#### A WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Before I conclude my testimony, it is also important to note some of the many other activities the U.S. Government undertakes in relation to the overall effort to counter foreign malign propaganda and disinformation.

For example:

- The GEC, in coordination with the Department of State, works with Allies and partners to build collective resilience, share best practices, and communicate and impose costs on actors that carry out Russia's and the PRC's malign influence campaigns.
- The Department of Justice has aggressively pursued cases against PRC and Russian spies.
- USAGM's mission is to inform, engage, and connect people around the world with accurate, objective, comprehensive journalism in support of freedom and democracy, which is obviously a key component to all of this.
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) promotes informational integrity in its partner countries by designing activities that enable access to credible information and counter disinformation. USAID also supports

objective, fact-based media outlets, which produce credible news and information, and advances initiatives which increase citizen awareness of and demand for professional journalism, including media literacy programs which increase resilience to disinformation and propaganda.

- The Department of State’s suite of public diplomacy and public affairs activities and programs convey truthful information to foreign audiences daily about U.S. policies and values.
- The DoD conducts military information support operations and promotes fact-based narratives about U.S. military activities.
- The National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) advises and informs decision makers about foreign intelligence threats to the U.S. and, helps U.S. government partners to identify approaches to counter those threats.

This is just a sampling of the various efforts underway, and while a lot has been done, we can always do more.

The GEC also spends significant time working to ensure that these efforts are well coordinated across the U.S. government interagency. Our coordination efforts are focused on ensuring U.S. government activities are complimentary and align with the overall U.S. strategy to counter propaganda and disinformation. To that end, the GEC is expanding its footprint of interagency detailees who work to ensure the U.S. government’s counter disinformation efforts are streamlined across the interagency and duplication is minimized.

#### CONCLUSION

Both the Russian government and the CCP view censorship, media manipulation, and propaganda as appropriate tools to control public opinion. Both exploit open, democratic societies to further their own ends while tightening controls around their own countries.

In our modern age, the Russian government and the PRC have clearly found ways to leverage new technologies to deepen and accelerate the impact these tactics can have. As has always been the case, free nations must unite and work together to defeat this threat to our societies and institutions, including by coming up with new and innovative approaches of our own, while building upon the lessons of prior generations of public servants who faced novel challenges of their own from America’s adversaries.

Like any of the world’s great challenges, these ones are complex and constantly evolving, but I am pleased to report that we are making progress—in building up the GEC’s capabilities, in crafting strategies tailored to the specific approaches of our adversaries, and, most importantly, in regaining the initiative.

Working closely with the State Department’s regional and functional bureaus and across the interagency, the Global Engagement Center is honored to have a key role in this important effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Ms. Gabrielle, and appreciate your opportunity to share with us in more detail some of the things you have addressed in your opening statement.

I have got three colleagues here, all of whom have scheduling conflicts, and a couple of Republicans I hope will be able to come back. So what I am going to do is just take a minute now and then have the opportunity to ask some more questions after they have a chance to ask theirs before they have to leave.

And the one I want to talk about is coronavirus and that that is such a hot topic. In fact, in this very room, we had a hearing earlier today, a briefing I guess you would call it, with some of the nation’s experts on the issue.

There has been some discussion already in our opening statements about the fact that there is disinformation out there, unfortunately, including groundless conspiracy theories that are being promoted. And there is an analysis I saw that you all believe that there is “evidence of inauthentic and coordinated activity” concerning mostly the social media posts and tweets.

Can you just briefly talk about the work GEC has done on this subject already, the spread of disinformation on the coronavirus and the conclusions you have come up with regarding the role of state actors and others in propagating these falsehoods?

Ms. GABRIELLE. Absolutely, and thank you for raising this important issue.

The coronavirus is an example of where we have seen adversaries take advantage of a health crisis, where people are terrified worldwide, to try to advance their priorities. The GEC has a robust analytics and research capability, and we also work with partners so that we can use the highest level of technology and the latest data science tools to be able to assess the information environment. So we have been watching the narratives that are being pushed out, false narratives around coronavirus.

Unfortunately, we have been able to assess that accounts tied to Russia, the entire ecosystem of Russian disinformation have been engaged in the midst of this world health crisis. One of the best practices in countering propaganda and disinformation is exposing it. So decreasing the vulnerabilities in audiences that are targeted and increasing their resiliency requires exposing examples of disinformation.

This is an example where the GEC works with Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs at the State Department so that we could get the word out, and we actually engaged with a media organization to share some analysis that we had on what we were seeing in terms of coronavirus. We saw the entire ecosystem of Russian disinformation at play. Russian state proxy websites, official state media, as well as swarms of online false personas pushing out false narratives.

Exposing it by working with the media has built awareness around this issue that there is a lot of disinformation, and right now, I hope that all actors will act in the most responsible manner to support people who are scared around the world in the midst of this crisis.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you. Exposing it is obviously critical. Also providing the counter narrative, which is the factual narrative and the scientifically-based narrative.

So we thank you for that, and again, we will have opportunity to talk more about that and other issues.

Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. I am just going to defer to Senator Murphy again and express my gratitude for his leadership on this and looking forward to hearing his line of questioning.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Senator Booker. Thank you to both you and Senator Portman for convening this hearing.

And thank you, Ms. Gabrielle, for what I think has been very able leadership, and I congratulate you with a fairly skimpy budget having extended the reach of the GEC substantially during your time.

Listen, we have been complaining forever about the fact that we are fighting asymmetric wars all over the world, predominantly with Russia. That is where you hear that term used the most, but with China as well. And of course, asymmetry is a choice, right? It is not an inevitability. We have made a choice over the years to

not equip our forces and our foreign policy infrastructure overseas with the capacities they need to compete, and the GEC is an attempt to fill what for too long had been a vacuum, a vacuum on our side of the ledger with respect to the ability to fight and combat disinformation.

And yet the reach of the GEC is, frankly, meager compared to the need that is out there today, and I am glad to see an increase in funding being proposed by the President and hopeful that we can get that through.

Ms. Gabrielle, with respect to funding, I think it is important to note—and you can tell me if I am wrong—that the President’s budget request is requesting funding within the State Department for the GEC. At the very beginning, we were forced to do a transfer of funds from the DoD to the State Department in order to get the GEC up and running, but that is a cumbersome process that is unnecessary given the fact that we now all agree on the efficacy of your work.

So can you just speak to the importance of having the GEC funded through the State Department rather than through transfer funds?

Ms. GABRIELLE. Yes, Senator Murphy, and thank you very much for raising this important issue.

The GEC is focused on our mission of countering foreign propaganda and disinformation. So what we are requesting and what is reflected in the President’s budget request to Congress is an increase to allow us to expand the scope and the scale of our activities to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation and to bring all the different tools to bear and to focus our team on the mission rather on process.

We truly appreciate the work from Congress on finding mechanisms to assist in providing funding for the GEC in the past. Over the past year, we have seen the process of trying to obtain funding from a different agency to be extremely cumbersome. Although we worked very closely with the combatant commands and have built very strong relationships with the DoD, we do assess that the best practice and the best process would be direct funding for the GEC at the State Department.

Senator MURPHY. So your report on coronavirus misinformation has gotten a lot of attention. I am glad that you have produced it. Tell us a little bit about your ability to be able to communicate with the social media companies that are transiting a lot of this information, whether you have that capacity today, whether that is something that you envision being able to do more robustly and more effectively with additional resources.

Ms. GABRIELLE. So I think it is important to understand that right now what we are seeing are these ecosystems where disinformation and propaganda is being pushed out across platforms. The relationships are very important, and we are working to build relationships. We have an LNO from the GEC now in Silicon Valley, and we are doing a lot of outreach with tech companies to understand some of the technologies that are being developed to counter propaganda and disinformation, but also to be able to have those open lines of communications.

But I do want to be clear here. The GEC works for the American people. Social media companies are companies. So the GEC is going to be focused on best practices to serve the American people in countering foreign propaganda and disinformation.

So sometimes that means sharing information. Sometimes it means exposure through the media. That relationship is important, but I am going to be focused on the best practices and not looking at any specific individual accounts, but rather the overarching principle of what is happening and how we can counter it.

Senator MURPHY. So I also have a question, and maybe I am bleeding into this question about sort of what lanes different parts of the Federal Government occupy here. And maybe you are starting to give me an answer to this question.

There is this important question of identifying sources of propaganda, identifying foreign actors that are putting propaganda online. There are some platform companies that are more willing to take those actors off their platform. There are others that are not as discriminating.

Are you saying that that is not primarily your role to identify those sources and have that communication with the platform companies, that there are other elements in the Federal Government that are better suited to do that?

Ms. GABRIELLE. I think the social media companies have a tremendous challenge with protecting their consumers in terms of what is happening on their platforms. But the point I am trying to make is that it is not just about the individual platforms. It is the overall big picture that we are seeing develop and how adversaries are using the social media landscape to push out false narratives.

So we focus on—I think there is a misunderstanding out there about how to counter disinformation. There is an understanding that it is just taking down specific personas online or that it is point and counterpoint. And that is not best practices.

The GEC has put a lot of focus on working with our partners in the interagency, in the intelligence community, our partners worldwide, working with the academic community to really understand how you do this. And it is about sensitizing audiences. It is getting out in front of the problem rather than reacting to it.

Senator MURPHY. And also trying to focus on sources rather than specific content, right? Because it is hard to chase one lie after another. You have to actually go after the source and expose the source as illegitimate or untrustworthy. Is that right?

Ms. GABRIELLE. That is correct.

Senator MURPHY. And then, lastly, tell me about the relationship with the different State Department posts, right? You have got embassies all over the world that have political officers that are also working on this question of disinformation, have relationships with local objective journalists who are trying to do the right thing.

I imagine at current staffing levels, it is hard to be able to have a hand into all the embassies in the places that we care about on the periphery of China and Russia. Is that something that you can do more of with additional resources?

Ms. GABRIELLE. There is so much that we can do more of with additional resources. As my team has said to me, we would like to

really get the “G” in the GEC, meaning global. So posts are critical. Working with regional bureaus is critical, and we have been doing a good job of that.

Just to give you an understanding of sort of how the GEC is broken down, disinformation and propaganda is being used to undermine U.S. security and our best interests and that of our allies and partners worldwide every day, all the time. So we have to focus our resources on the adversaries that are having the most effect, and that is the way we have broken it down so far.

So we have divided into threat teams. Russia, China, Iran, and we continue to stay focused on the violent extremist organization threat. And then we have also built cross-functional teams. We have a tech engagement team that is out there working with tech companies to identify the best technologies being developed in this space to counter disinformation and propaganda.

And what is very critical is we have an analytic and research team that supports all of the teams. This is where we can put a lot of resources to make sure that we are staying up with the latest technologies so that we can do those assessments of the information environment and apply those best practices.

Our analytics and research team has around 25 data scientists who are experts in things like ad text, semantic text analysis, natural language processing, social media, and traditional media monitoring. They have all the tools. They know how to use the tools that are available on the market. They have also written their own algorithms and their own codes so that they can build programs that we can share with our partners and allies.

Another thing that we have done is we have built the first of its kind—I think that noise may be my mic too far away.

Senator MURPHY. No, that is votes.

Ms. GABRIELLE. Something different? Okay. So that is votes, all right.

So I want to talk about this information-sharing platform that our analytics and research team has developed. It is the first of its kind where we are sharing these tools and these capabilities to do analytics and research with our partners worldwide not just so that they can see our analysis and use our tools, but also so that they can be a force multiplier, and they can do their own assessments and be providing and feeding back into it.

So this large coordination is a big part of what we are doing. Resources will help, and we definitely need to take this issue global.

Senator MURPHY. Well, I am grateful to do this work with Senator Portman. Thank you for his leadership, and thank you for being here at the hearing.

Thanks, Senator Portman.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Senator Murphy. We look forward to continuing this conversation in a minute, but those were really important points you raised.

Senator MERKLEY.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much.

And I wanted to get a better understanding of how much work you are doing in-house and how much work you are contracting out. Do you have a way of kind of employee equivalence or funding



that goes outside, inside, so forth? Try and get a picture of how you are structured.

Ms. GABRIELLE. At the GEC, we have 118 people as of today. That is a 42 percent increase since we received the expanded mission in Fiscal Year 2017. But with this global problem that we are facing, I think it is clear that we have to be a force multiplier, and that is really what we aim to do.

So since I have been onboard, I have been very focused on building a team with the expertise that we need. That means regional expertise, analytics and research expertise, people who understand information operations, people who come from an advertising background. So expertise in building the team has been critical.

I have been focused on making sure that the team has the resources they need to be able to execute on this, and then we have been very focused on building a strategy. And our strategy really has three main lines of effort.

The first one is to lead and execute countering propaganda and disinformation campaigns. So that is bringing into alignment what we are learning from the experts, what we are doing within the interagency, what we coordinate with the NSC from a policy perspective and other policy guidance, and then what we coordinate with our international partners. So really being a force multiplier and taking countering propaganda and disinformation campaigns globally.

And then the other thing that we have been doing is we have been having the opportunity to put program funding where they can have high-impact solutions. So in building this big picture of essentially what everybody else is doing in this space, coordinating it, and bringing it into strategic alignment, we also can see where there is opportunities to have high impact, and that is where we put funding. And that is where we can work with third-party implementers who have unique expertise, ability, and know-how in different parts of the world.

But I think to give you a picture, we really see ourselves as a data-driven mission center that should be energizing the network worldwide of our partners and allies that counter propaganda and disinformation.

Senator MERKLEY. Okay. So my question was pretty simple, which was what proportion of your operation is in-house and what proportion is outside? And you have not answered that. Can you just give me an answer?

Ms. GABRIELLE. It is difficult to do an apples-to-apples comparison on that. Again, we have 118 people with a worldwide problem. So we are a force multiplier.

I would say that the work that we are doing worldwide and working with our allies and partners is much greater than the sum of its parts.

Senator MERKLEY. So your in-house vending, is it 20 percent of your budget? Is it 80 percent of your budget? Just trying to get a basic understanding here.

Ms. GABRIELLE. Well, the in-house spending, I want to get back to you with an exact number, but I would say it is closer to around 75 percent, maybe 70 percent. But I have to make sure that you

understand, a big portion of this is creating those analytics and research capabilities.

We are data driven. We do not want to be using anecdotal evidence to try to attack this problem. So to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign propaganda and disinformation, it starts with data. It starts with having the right experts in-house and having those capabilities to then drive and push out solutions.

[The Committee Received the Following Response From Ms. Lea Gabrielle]

RESPONSE FROM MS. LEA GABRIELLE

The GEC's total FY 2020 budget, which includes \$5 million from the Counter Chinese Influence Fund and American salaries is \$65 million. Of that amount, \$50 million (77 percent) is spent "in-house" and \$15 million (23 percent) is spent "outside." "Outside" spending includes contracts with third party vendors but the majority of these staff work physically on-site at the GEC's offices in Washington, DC.

Senator MERKLEY. So if I go back 2 years ago, it was reported that the in-house team that was working on Russian propaganda did not have any Russian speakers. I am guessing that by now that has completely been corrected?

Ms. GABRIELLE. Yes, it has.

Senator MERKLEY. How many Russian speakers do you have now?

Ms. GABRIELLE. I want to make sure I get you a correct number, and we will make sure that we report back to you on that, but I know that my Deputy is a Russian speaker.

[The Committee Received the Following Response from Ms. Lea Gabrielle]

RESPONSE FROM MS. LEA GABRIELLE

The GEC currently has nine employees who speak Russian. It is important to keep in mind that the bulk of the Kremlin's disinformation is spread in languages other than Russian, to include English, French, German, Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, and Arabic.

Senator MERKLEY. But if your team is working on Russian propaganda, are they all Russian speakers?

Ms. GABRIELLE. No, they are not all Russian speakers. And as a former human intelligence operative, I can tell you that oftentimes, when you are working in different environments, you use linguists and others to help you to understand the information environment.

Senator MERKLEY. Okay. But you are able to get the talent you need? You are pretty satisfied that you have the—yes, okay. You can follow up and get me details on that, if you would?

So, in 2019, one of the reasons I was asking about how much is done out of house is once you contract with outside groups, sometimes it is hard to keep control over exactly what they are doing. We had at least one case where I think things got a little out of hand with the Iran disinformation project and which they were putting out essentially disinformation rather than being the counter disinformation, including attacking and smearing some U.S. citizens.

And I know you cut off funding to them, or your predecessor did. I am not sure just when you came in. Can you just fill us in a little bit on that, and how are you developing strategies so we are not

funding groups that actually are engaged in disinformation rather than countering disinformation?

Ms. GABRIELLE. Thank you for raising that important issue. I was the special envoy and coordinator when that issue arose, and I will tell you that within hours of learning about the fact that one of our implementers had gone outside the scope of their agreement—it was never intended for them to be addressing U.S. domestic audiences. As soon as we found out that they had gone outside the scope of the agreement, I immediately suspended that particular project. And then we conducted an internal review and ultimately decided to end that contract—to end that agreement.

We did have some lessons learned from that. We have teams monitoring social media of our implementers. I have been very focused on implementing measures of effectiveness and monitoring and evaluation in all of our programs. We have an M&E team.

We follow the latest research as we are approaching these problems so that we can make sure that we are using respected organizations that are vetted. We have a vetting process at the State Department, and we have regular oversight as well as reporting from each of these organizations. So we have a very robust effort to put in place to make sure that any implementers are staying within the scope of work and that they are properly spending taxpayer dollars. That is critical.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

I am down to 30 seconds. So I wanted to ask you in regard to the specific efforts of Russia to spread the disinformation on the U.S. regarding the coronavirus that came out of our lab, you mentioned that there was a lot of messages being generated. How much are they now using people in buildings to tweet?

How much of those messages are being generated by botnets? What are we seeing in terms of the pattern of the technology they are employing?

Ms. GABRIELLE. What we are seeing, as I mentioned before, is an entire ecosystem. So if you look at the spectrum of Russian disinformation, it includes Russian state-funded media, official accounts, proxy news sites that spin conspiracy theories under the guise of journalism, and then legions of false social media personas. Many of those were not bots, but we saw thousands pushing out false information.

Senator MERKLEY. Thousands of people or false—

Ms. GABRIELLE. False personas.

Senator MERKLEY. That were not bots. So they were people generated? Okay. So we are seeing more reliance on human operations than on botnets in this regard?

Ms. GABRIELLE. It continues to be a mix.

Senator MERKLEY. Okay, thank you.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, thank you. I cannot express to you the kind of patriotic duty you are doing in our country, and as this whole area was not even imaginable 10 years ago, I am very understanding that this is something that we are all continuing to learn.

I have friends who founded some of these companies that you are working closely with, and a lot of things are moving fast. The chal-

lenges are oncoming, the developing and the like, and your presence, your leadership, your dedication, your commitment is incredible.

I just want to get to some specific understanding. So the report that you have on the coronavirus specifically, you did not make that public. Is there classified data in there? Is that what was a concern?

Ms. GABRIELLE. We have done a number of reports on coronavirus that are intended to inform our partners and our allies, both inside the interagency as well as the IC, as well as our partners worldwide, on what we are seeing around false narratives. Sometimes it makes sense to share those reports, and sometimes it does not. Again, this goes back to best practices.

I think the reports that you have been referencing, there are some that have been out in the press. There was an alleged report that was leaked to the media. I have not seen what it is that they are talking about, but it does talk about some of what we have been seeing.

The reporting I have seen accurately depicts what we have been seeing. We did actually share one of our analysis, one of our report analysis with a media organization, specifically around Russian disinformation and the narratives that we have seen, and that was specifically to address our best practices in countering disinformation, which is exposing it.

Senator BOOKER. And I guess that is my point. If we are trying to expose this, would it not make sense for all the reports, unless there is some kind of classified information, you are trying to protect sources, methods, et cetera, why not get that information out there? Does that not help to discredit the activities, in and of themselves?

Ms. GABRIELLE. I think what is important is exposing and showing enough supportive data or supportive analysis to expose the problem. But what we do not want to do is we do not want to share our tradecraft with our adversaries.

Senator BOOKER. And therefore, you are saying to me that the reports that you and I are talking about that are not public, were not intentionally public, have tradecraft in them that we want to protect?

Ms. GABRIELLE. That is true. And I am not saying that it is classified tradecraft, I am saying this is methodologies that we have been developing. We have intentionally made a lot of these reports at an unclassified level so that we can share them with our partners and allies, which is important in exposing.

But the zeroes and ones of how we are doing the work, that is not important in terms of best practices in countering disinformation and the exposure we are trying to do, and we do not want to give our adversaries the opportunities to get ahead of us.

Senator BOOKER. I respect that. And so do you see it as part of your mission, though, in releasing information that you are trying to dispel it, undercut it, kneecap what is going on out there?

Ms. GABRIELLE. Best practices are not point/counterpoint. It is rather to decrease vulnerability and increase resilience by exposing. That is what we are trying to do.

Senator BOOKER. Forgive me for interrupting. So, yes, I understand. I get that. But I guess also with this specific challenge of the coronavirus, there could be that dual purpose, right? Best practices helping to empower other folks, but when you are exposing this, it diffuses the strength of the misinformation as well. Am I correct?

Ms. GABRIELLE. That is correct, and that is exactly why we did it.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you. And to the extent that you are seeing this, you said here, which was one of my first questions is that specifically the Russians and their growingly sophisticated networks are trying to put out disinformation about the coronavirus that puts our country and our people at risk. Is that correct? Definitely correct?

Ms. GABRIELLE. We saw the entire Russian ecosystem of disinformation pushing out false narratives around coronavirus. That is correct.

Senator BOOKER. And you have released that officially in your reports?

Ms. GABRIELLE. We have shared the analysis of one of those reports with a media organization who accurately reported on that. We have answered questions that were provided to us through Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. I think it is well known at this point that there are false narratives out there around coronavirus, and that is very helpful for people who are scared right now in the midst of this crisis to understand that they need to go to accurate sources of information, like the World Health Organization and the CDC, for the accurate information on how to protect themselves.

Senator BOOKER. Right. And then I guess this is a big frustration I have is that we still have people in positions of authority in our country that are denying the growing sophistication of the Russians and their ecosystem, as you call it, which seems to give strength to them if we, in ourselves, are denying that the Russians are doing this kind of activity.

Is my concern that Government officials would be denying the strength, sophistication, the ecosystem, as you put it, that the Russians are using to try to undermine, whether it is this or election security, is that not problematic in itself? If the goal, as you said, is to diffuse this by exposing it, to have counter narratives coming from positions of authority, denying that the Russians are even doing this kind of activity, does that not just again make us more vulnerable and muck up the water, so to speak, with us, our ability to expose and diffuse those very Russian activities?

Ms. GABRIELLE. I can only speak to what I have seen and the support I have received. And I have seen full support from this administration to the Global Engagement Center and its efforts to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation reflected by the \$138 million budget request to Congress, which I truly hope Congress will support, sir.

Senator BOOKER. I appreciate that. And clearly, I do not—as a representative of the Administration, I do not expect you to say specifically. I just was saying to talk about any—this Administration specifically, allow me to do that, I have no problem.

But I am just saying to you as an actor, it is problematic if positions of authority are undercutting the very point that you have made, which is that this is a threat to the United States that the Russians are growing in sophistication. They have established an ecosystem.

That, in itself, in an academic way is a simple yes or no question. It is very problematic, yes or no, if we as a country are speaking with multiple voices, some saying that this is not a problem, that they are not doing this, and others are? It only gives strength to the Russians themselves. Is that correct?

Ms. GABRIELLE. The Kremlin's goal is to separate and divide us. It is classic subversion. So the more we can all work together, bipartisan, nonpartisan, working together on countering propaganda and disinformation, the better we will be as a country.

Senator BOOKER. Hallelujah, amen. That is exactly what their tactic is, which is to try to divide us, to try to undermine our trust of our agencies, trust of our intelligence apparatus to directly approach this, and it is very frustrating to me when you see folks that should be working in tandem publicly giving the same message undermining this—the truth and this simple truth that you are putting forward there, and I appreciate that response.

And I will yield to my chairman here, who has a much better haircut than me.

Senator PORTMAN. Well, first of all, it was dark hair before I got involved in this issue, disinformation.

Senator BOOKER. Well, Mr. Chairman, I used to have a big afro, as I was saying earlier behind there, too. So I pulled all mine out.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes. Listen, I am very encouraged with what I hear today, and I want to thank you for coming. I am going to follow up on a few issues, but I think Senator Booker is correct that the more information we can get out there, the better, in the context of coronavirus as to what some of the false narratives are. The exposure is part of the best practices you talked about.

And by the way, we have done it this morning. And what you said this morning is pretty powerful. What you have not done is provide any specific examples. There was a mention earlier of Bill Gates. I am not sure people understand what that meant, but I will give you a chance, if you would, to just play out maybe one or two of these false narratives that have been out there with regard to coronavirus, so people can be aware of them.

Ms. GABRIELLE. I want to be careful with my words here because repeating false narratives actually reinforces them. We have learned from social science that oftentimes people believe the first version of a story that they hear, and then it is an uphill battle to undo that.

If you would like for me to identify certain disinformation narratives, I can. I would prefer not to.

Senator PORTMAN. Okay. Well, let me do it since it was mentioned earlier, which is that somehow Bill Gates and his—and some lab started the coronavirus, which is an absolute falsehood, and there is absolutely no basis for it. Since it was mentioned earlier, I wanted to clarify that.

But that is an example of the kind of thing that for the person watching today who is not an expert on what disinformation and

propaganda means, that is an example of something that is meant to try to divide us. You mentioned polarization earlier. We are already a polarized country in so many respects, to further polarize us and to create, as you said earlier and my colleagues have said, distrust in our institutions, particularly our institutions of government here in a democracy like ours, so where that is so important.

So I think your role is incredibly important. You know, we talked a lot about the budget, and I just want to put a finer point on that, if I could. My understanding is that you requested \$76 million and were appropriated \$60 million for this fiscal year, and now you are asking for \$138 million, which is, again, more than a doubling of what you are currently receiving.

Fiscal discipline is important, but when you look at the mission and the importance of this mission and the fact that, increasingly, as a former military officer yourself, increasingly, our battle is not kinetic, it is, as some say, hybrid. But specifically, it is this battling of disinformation.

So my hope is that we can support the mission more strongly and be sure it is spent wisely. And I think Senator Merkley's question to you is an important one, to be sure that we do not have contractors who are misrepresenting what you want to do, and I am glad that you acted quickly with regard to the Iranian issue that had been in the media.

But if you could talk just a little more about our new approach here. The DoD transfer to you we thought was necessary to, frankly, get you up and going and to kick start. I agree with what you have said today and what was implied at least by what Senator Murphy said that that was not a successful endeavor.

It took, frankly, too much of your time and other people's time to try to work through the bureaucracy and the red tape, despite the fact that the Secretaries of Defense were always supportive, when they talked to me at least, and they were, I believe. But it took a while for the bureaucracy to respond to that, and also that your Secretary of State right now, Secretary Pompeo, and his previous Deputy, Deputy Secretary Sullivan, and current Deputy, Deputy Secretary Biegun, are very supportive. And I think that is why you see these bigger numbers being requested.

So we do not want to go back to the DoD focus. What we do want to do is be sure that we can justify the budget increase that you are asking for. So what would you say is the best way to do that?

You have a mix of Foreign Service officers, civil servants, contractors, some folks, we understand, are interagency detailees. You have got to have technical experts, as you talked about, who can do these algorithms, and these are highly paid individuals because you have got to get them from the private sector. I am sure you cannot compete directly on a monetary basis, but they are probably happy to serve their country in this respect.

What would you think is the main reason that we need to more than double the budget?

Ms. GABRIELLE. There is a very simple answer, and it is because we need more of everything to be able to execute this mission on a global scale. So I think you are wanting some specific examples of initiatives, and I will go further. I think that we need to be focused on the continent of Africa, and we should be shifting some

focus there. We are seeing Russian disinformation campaigns on the continent. We are also seeing Chinese malign influence there.

We have programs ready to go that could build capacity that work with local leaders across the board. We just do not have the resources to do that right now. We have got to continue to stay ahead in terms of the capabilities out in the tech industry.

Some examples of initiatives that we have are we plan and implement coordinated campaigns. That takes sending people to travel, building partnerships with other countries. It sometimes means bringing funding to the table and being able to lead on those initiatives.

We are developing repeatable tradecraft that we can share. I mentioned this platform, this online information-sharing platform that we are sharing with partners now as worldwide. That is critical.

We are conducting analysis to understand and craft solutions to be data driven in this approach. That takes money. Our analyzing the attempts of adversaries. Again, those tech solutions take money.

And then here is another place that it is really important. Supporting those non-U.S. Government efforts on the ground who have unique expertise in their regions to understand the problem and to push back with effective solutions. It all takes money. We have got to put the "G" back in the GEC and make it global.

Senator PORTMAN. Well, I think that is very helpful to have that list of specific priorities and initiatives that do require resources. And one I will add that you mentioned earlier is to be proactive, and I think this is something that, as you said, is consistent with best practices. It is also going to require some resources and not always U.S. Government resources, as you have indicated, including enlisting our allies, partners.

We talked about journalists earlier and objective professional journalists to counter. So I think getting ahead of the curve is more important than ever.

Thank you for mentioning Africa. I could not agree with you more. A trade agreement with Kenya, keeping some troops there to help the French and others in West Africa, this issue. I mean, I think there is a lot we can do right now with Africa to counter what is clearly a target for other actors, including Russia and China.

My final question has to do with keeping us up to speed. There was a briefing recently that was conducted with congressional staff, and this hearing itself is really an opportunity for you to brief us. We would like to do more of that, and I think, honestly, if we had done this a couple of years ago, it would have been difficult because you did not have your feet under you at that point. You did not have the resources. You did not have the personnel, and it takes a little while to get the organization up and going.

You are now up and going, obviously, with some interest in growing further. But would you commit today to continuing to send your staff up here on a more regular basis to consult with and brief interested staff and members and share the analysis of what you are doing?



Ms. GABRIELLE. Absolutely, Senator. I can tell you that my staff tremendously enjoyed the opportunity recently to come up and brief. We are very proud of the work we are doing, and I think it is a wonderful opportunity to interact and also to highlight the great leadership and the great thinking that is coming from my team at the Global Engagement Center.

Senator PORTMAN. Excellent. Senator Booker, any other questions?

Senator BOOKER. I just want to dig into Africa for a second. Just your general strategic approach. And by the way, I think that that was a great testimony to the need for more resources, and from what I have been reading, the expansive attempts of Chinese and Russians on that continent to engage in I think the global science term is “mishegoss” there.

So can you just give a little bit more description of your strategic approach to that problem?

Ms. GABRIELLE. I can tell you that this is a perfect example of where we really need more resources. Right now, we are launching a program that networks international China experts with local African voices to exchange insights and better understanding of CCP influence operations in Africa.

We are also really emphasizing technology. So we actually are sending a team to Kenya in a couple of months for what we call a “tech challenge.” It is where we are convening tech experts, local government experts, NGOs, as well as members of our team, to look at and assess different technologies that are being developed on the continent that counter propaganda and disinformation.

So it not only serves to provide an opportunity to give a little bit of funding to some of those companies that are trying to make their technologies work, and that could be effective in this space. But even more importantly, it is important in building resiliency and decreasing vulnerability in the populations by exposing them and bringing them together as a community of interest on this challenge.

But there is so much more that we could be doing, and so that is why I think it is really important that we have the funding and the direct funding that we are requesting.

Senator BOOKER. And besides China and Russia, are there other sort of powers that are at work there?

Ms. GABRIELLE. Well, of course, we can never take our eye off of violent extremist organizations and the terrorist threat. One of the ways that the GEC has really been executing on its mission is in the CT space. So I am a co-lead on the Communications Working Group of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and my team has built a resiliency campaign to counter ISIS ideology in the core that we have worked through the interagency. It has been supported by the NSC, and we have now taken it to the Global Coalition, working with S/SECI to sensitize the 82 members of the Global Coalition on this campaign to bring us all into strategic alignment.

This campaign would start in the core, but then it can also be applied to places in Africa where we are seeing the CT threat become hotter. So I think we have to continue to keep our eye on the ball. There is a number of threats there. China and Russia, of

course, are at the top and as well as the violent extremist organization threat.

Senator BOOKER. And the last thing real quickly, the power of diversity—I have seen this here in the Senate—how are you doing? Senator Menendez, Senator Cardin, and I have been talking a lot about diversity in general at the State Department.

But I would love to see some numbers as you build up your team about gender and race diversity in your department, and frankly, I just know from watching folks trying to deal with the misinformation on social media that might be targeting certain groups that having diverse staff with lived experiences can often pick up and notice things that others cannot.

Ms. GABRIELLE. I agree with you that diversity is very important. Bringing a number of different ideas, expertise, backgrounds to this is critical. I talked about the different levels of expertise that we have, and I know I have made the GEC more diverse as its leader.

Senator BOOKER. Great. Well, I would love to, if you can, help me get just a picture of where you are—you are probably not prepared to do that right now—on race, gender diversity within your agency, as well as religious diversity as well.

Ms. GABRIELLE. We would be happy to share that information with you.

[The Committee Received the Following Response from Ms. Lea Gabrielle]

RESPONSE FROM MS. LEA GABRIELLE

The following information reflects diversity information about the State Department direct-hire employees working in the GEC. There are a significant number of contract personnel, detailees, and liaison officers from other agencies who work for the GEC and for whom we do not have demographic data and they are therefore not included. Similarly, the Department does not collect religious affiliation information about its staff and so none can be provided in response to your question:

GEC Racial Diversity	State Department Racial Diversity (total percentages may be over 100% due to rounding)
White: 78% Non-White: 22% Unspecified: 0%	White: 71.2% Non-White: 26.3% Unspecified: 2.6%
GEC Gender Diversity	State Department Gender Diversity
Female: 52% Male: 48%	Female: 44.0% Male: 56.0%
GEC Disclosed Disability: 21%	State Department Disclosed Disability 12.4%

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much.

Senator PORTMAN. Again, I really appreciate your being here today, and it was reassuring to me. One of the challenges that I think is apparent to all of us from hearing you today is you have a very broad mandate, and the mission is critical. The resources are limited. And thus, having performance measures and understanding what the mission is, is important.

I am not going to ask you today to give us your specific measures of effectiveness, but that is something I would like to follow up on and just be helpful to you, including if we need to do anything on the legislative side in terms of reauthorization of GEC as, you know, how can we really focus on and target what is essential, given the broad mandate.

So thank you much, and we will stay in touch.

Senator BOOKER. And I just want to echo and just say thank you again. You are literally trying to do a startup operation in a sense, learn to build a plane and fly it at the same time. So I am just grateful for your commitment to country and the patriotism you have shown throughout your entire career.

Thank you very much for being here with us today.

Ms. GABRIELLE. Thank you very much. I am so proud of my team and the work they are doing, and we truly thank you for this opportunity.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Ms. Gabrielle.

We will go ahead with our second panel now. We have two experts, as I say, who are going to join us, and I will let them come up to the front.

First, we have Mr. Daniel Blumenthal. Mr. Blumenthal is the Director of Asian Studies and a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. As I said, he has testified before Congress before on this topic, and we are impressed with his testimony.

And then Dr. Alina Polyakova. Dr. Polyakova is president and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis. Again, she is a true expert in this area. I had the opportunity to see her in action at the Munich Security Conference, talking to some of our international partners and NGOs.

With her today is her mother, Irina. So I want to recognize you as well. I know you must be very proud.

Senator Booker is going to join us in a second. He has seen the testimony. So I am going to ask you all to go ahead. Your written testimony will be printed in the record in its entirety. So I ask you to keep your oral testimony under 5 minutes, and then we will have chance for some give-and-take.

And I will ask Mr. Blumenthal if you would go first?

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL BLUMENTHAL, DIRECTOR OF ASIAN STUDIES AND RESIDENT FELLOW, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Senator Portman and Senator Booker, when he comes back, for holding this very important hearing.

As you have heard, the disinformation, censorship, and propaganda threat is one of the greatest challenges we face. I think when you are talking about China and the Chinese Communist Party, you have to put it under the rubric of China is committing and engaging in political warfare against us, and information, disinformation, and censorship are one key pillar of that political warfare. They have been doing so for many, many years, and we have just started to engage that fight. Political warfare meaning trying to undermine our position in the world, our alliances, our

own democratic system through all means other than actual military warfare.

As I outlined in my written testimony, there are an unbelievable number of organizations in China that are involved in propaganda, censorship, harassment of media, Western and internal. At least 10 that I mentioned and even more than that. That is all to say that it is a feature of the Chinese Communist Party system. It is not a bug. The system is built on lies and is afraid of the truth.

So the truth, even when it comes to talking about the coronavirus, part of the reason I think that we are facing a greater virus is because there was a coverup in China for a matter of almost 2 months. And as we now know, people who try to tell the truth in China, doctors and journalists and so on, were punished, detained, and arrested.

China goes after these people because the Chinese Communist Party cannot live with the exposure of any kind of mismanagement or corruption or injustice. But the entire panoply of Chinese activities in the censorship space is just humongous. So they go after Western media. As we have seen recently, they have kicked out Wall Street Journal journalists who were—because of an op-ed that they did not like that was on the Wall Street Journal opinion page.

They have recently arrested the Hong Kong tycoon and freedom fighter Jimmy Lai because of an op-ed he wrote in the Wall Street Journal recently. I guess if you want to stay in China, do not write an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal is one lesson.

So that is on the media. In my testimony, I would say China has an innovative strategy because of the lure of the market to shut down the free speech of Westerners. So if you look at the case this year of the National Basketball Association, if you look at the case of Hollywood, there are at least six more organizations in China that censor content coming from Hollywood, and the themes are very clear.

Americans probably know very well that they have never seen a Chinese villain in a Hollywood movie. The themes are always the U.S. is decadent and cowardly and does wrong in places like Africa and so forth, and the Chinese are brave and ascendant and so forth.

There are, again, probably 16 organizations that go through the content of movies in China before they are allowed to be shown. So the free speech rights, they are trying to block access to the market and shut down people's ability even to say things like we support the Hong Kong protests.

As I say in my written testimony, Taiwan has been ground zero in terms of attempted election interference. But Taiwan actually fought back and gives us good lessons. It fought back in working with social media, in sending out memes right away, humorous memes to combat the kind of disinformation they were putting out.

Of course, the Taiwanese people went to the polls and resoundingly voted for the party that China did not want to elect. So a lot of lessons to be learned there.

In terms of what we should do about all this, I think we got some of it. But I would add that we need to be more on offense. So we obviously need to continue doing what we are doing and treating Chinese media personas as foreign agents because that is what

they are. There is no free media. They are foreign agents of the Chinese Communist Party. We need to keep kicking them out and putting caps on them and making them register as foreign agents.

But we could do a lot more offensively in terms of going into China with Mandarin speakers, telling our story, telling the story of successful places that are like Taiwan that are Chinese language speaking and culture that are democratic. Putting China more on defense because the people of China are, from what we know, extremely fed up with the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

We need to engage in political warfare in a much more robust fashion. I would love to see us go back to some kind of organization that the GEC could lead, like the USIA that we had in the Cold War, that actually creates a cadre of information warriors whose entire job it is, their entire network, their entire career path is in this space and engaging the fight against China and, of course, Russia and other places. And see their role and their job and their career paths developing into information warriors, information operators, taking it out of the realm of the military and putting it at the State Department.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Blumenthal follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAN BLUMENTHAL

Senator Portman and Senator Booker, members of the committee, thank you for your attention to this very important topic. Unfortunately, even as we speak we are witnessing the very real costs to global public health and safety of China's system of disinformation and global censorship efforts.

We must ask ourselves: How much more widespread is the coronavirus because of China's censorship? We know that Li Wenliang, Xu Zhangrun, Chen Qiushi, Fang Bin and countless other doctors, journalists, and activists who spoke out and tried to tell the truth about the seriousness of the virus and inept response were silenced, arrested and intimidated.

Not only did the CCP silence the truth, it also pushed false narratives about an influenza epidemic in the United States, criticized the United States for "[creating chaos] and [spreading] fear with travel restrictions, and lied about hospital construction.<sup>1</sup> Authorities have shut down WeChat groups and social media discourse, punished individuals, and removed articles that portray the government response in a negative way.<sup>2</sup>

The recent response to the virus shows us that censorship and disinformation is a "feature", not a "bug," of the CCP's system of government. A war on the truth is a central pillar of the CCP's strategy for survival. Let me try to illustrate by naming just a few organizations tasked with censorship within China:<sup>3</sup>

1. The General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP)—GAPP drafts and enforces restraint regulations.
2. State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT)—SARFT controls the content on radio, film, and TV aired in China.
3. Ministry for Information Industry (MII)—MII regulates the Chinese telecommunication, software industries, and Internet related services.
4. State Council Information Office (SCIO)—SCIO promotes Chinese media to a global audience and is also responsible for restricting news that is posted on the Internet.
5. Central Propaganda Department (CPD)—CPD is the Party organ that works with GAPP and SARFT to monitor content.
6. Ministry of Public Security (MPS)—MPS monitors and filters the Internet and punishes and detains those who speak out.
7. General Administration for Customs—Customs collects books, videos, and other information that China does not want in its borders.
8. State Secrecy Bureau (SSB)—SSB enforces state secrecy laws, which are often used to punish individuals who write undesirable content.

9. Judiciary—The Judiciary does not play a direct role in enforcing censorship, but it ultimately convicts and hands out the sentences for those arrested on censorship related charges.

As you can see, the CCP has constructed this massive propaganda and censorship apparatus because it considers the truth to be dangerous. It does not want its citizens to know the extent of its corruption, its repression, its mismanagement of the economy, and of crises such as the current virus, bird flu in 1997 and SARS in 2003.<sup>4</sup>

And, it seeks to shut about the true nature of democracy and freedom in places like Taiwan or here in the U.S. It relies upon its massive “lie-producing apparatus” in attempts to rally the party cadre and the people to support its plans to “rejuvenate China and march toward the center of geopolitics,” or in other words, to take back its perceived “rightful” place as the world’s leading power. This requires a narrative that the U.S. is an enemy that must be brought down.

Under Xi Jinping this has all gotten much worse. In February 2016 on a tour of Chinese media outlets, Xi announced “all the work by the party’s media must reflect the party’s will, safeguard the party’s authority, and safeguard the party’s unity.”<sup>5</sup> The job of Chinese’s media is not to inform the public and search for the truth. Rather, it is to “report” stories favorable to Xi and the party and censor those that are not.

#### “CONTROLLING” THE INTERNET

PRC censorship efforts can be highly effective. There are two major internet censorship programs: The “Great Firewall” and the “Golden Shield” program rapidly censor internet content produced within the PRC. The PRC seeks to assert new state prerogatives in the information domain, such as “internet sovereignty” and “data sovereignty.” The PRC has also proposed an International Code of Conduct on Information Security (with the support of the Russian Federation) to the United Nations that would put states in control of the Internet. These changes would significantly enhance the effectiveness of PRC control of the Internet.

#### THE CCP AND THE MEDIA

Chinese media portrays specific criticism that the West has, such as on human rights issues, as being “anti-China,” as if a story about human rights abuses is an affront to all Chinese people. Recently, the Chinese propaganda machine has started manipulating Western sensibilities by calling any criticism of Chinese government actions “racist” against all Chinese. The goal is clear: to shut down such criticism.

Chinese media have long deliberately misrepresented events. For example, during the 2008 Olympic Torch Relay, CCTV described all protestors in the West as “Tibetan separatists and members of other anti-China groups” who that “repeatedly assaulted” torchbearers.<sup>6</sup> This was simply not true. Almost all such protests were peaceful and joined by many different ethnic groups in the U.S. and other countries. The cause of religious and cultural freedom in Tibet has long been championed in the West.

More recently, China has accused the United States of “sinister intentions” after Congress passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019.<sup>7</sup> Xinhua published a statement from the Hong Kong Liaison Office accusing the U.S. of supporting violence and instability.<sup>8</sup> The truth that the Congress cares about the basic rights of Hong Kongers and about the CCP upholding its obligations is simply assaulted. The CCP wants its people and targeted groups around the world to think that Hong Kong (like Taiwan) is simply an internal Chinese issue and that the U.S. acts imperialistically and with an unrelenting anti-Chinese bias.

The Chinese government monitors, harasses, and bans Western journalists who publish content portraying China in a “negative” light. Examples include:

1. Recently, China kicked three Wall Street Journal journalists out of the country after the Journal published an op-ed about China that spoke the truth about the risks China’s system of government poses to the world.
2. China blocked access to the New York Times’s website after the Times published a piece on Wen Jiabao’s family wealth in 2012.<sup>9</sup>
3. Bloomberg self-censored an investigative report on the wealth of Princeling families to protect their journalists (or their bottom line).<sup>10</sup>
4. The recent arrest of Jimmy Lai, the founder of Apple Daily and a Hong Kong media mogul, ostensibly for participating in an illegal assembly during the 2017 anti-government protests was meant to silence him (he too had just writ-

ten a critical op-ed in the WSJ) and his paper as well as punish him for supporting pro-democracy movements.<sup>11</sup>

The CCP has always used access to China as a key point of leverage to shape perceptions. For years before these arrests China would blacklist scholars and analysts from entering the country if they were deemed to be “anti-China.” Recently they have upped the ante to try and change the way the Western media portrays the CCP or to force self-censorship. Time will tell how well this works. It will certainly be harder to investigate controversial stories within China or to seek the truth.

The CCP also uses physical intimidation to enforce censorship. 57% of respondents of a Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China survey reported some form of interference, harassment, or violence while attempting to report in China, and 8% have reported manhandling or use of physical force.<sup>12</sup> Twenty-six percent of respondents reported that Chinese government officials have harassed, detained, questioned, or punished their sources.

#### GOING AFTER U.S. POPULAR CULTURE

Not only does China target journalists and media in their territory, they have started to influence our pop culture abroad. Beijing knows that its people have great admiration for American sports and pop culture icons. It therefore believes it must control what such figures might say with an extreme intensity. Two examples highlight the level of Chinese interference: Basketball and Hollywood.

The case of the National Basketball Association in China is a case of China using its market power to make Americans curtail their free speech. It began when Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey tweeted an image that read, “Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong.” This was during Hong Kong’s demonstration over its basic human rights.

The Chinese response was fast and furious: Chinese tech giant Tencent and state broadcaster CCTV suspended broadcasts of Rockets games, while other sponsors suspended relations with the team. Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta publicly rebuked his general manager. All-Star James Harden apologized for Morey’s tweet. The NBA released a statement in Mandarin expressing disappointment in Morey.<sup>13</sup>

Like many American businesses, the NBA is making billions of dollars in the China market, on viewership, digital ownership rights, merchandising and individual player sponsorship. To be sure, the Chinese do not have absolute power in disputes like this. The Chinese people love the “product,” as they do so many American products, and the Chinese censorship apparatus backed off eventually. But still the episode shows the extent the high stakes of China’s censorship efforts. Indeed the lure of the China market is the most powerful weapon the Chinese have in their fight to stave off any criticism of the regime’s practices and abuses.<sup>14</sup>

Chinese censorship has also hit the heart of American entertainment in Hollywood. Americans have likely noticed the absence of Chinese villains or “bad guys” in American movies. No other country including our own is spared negative portrayals in film or television. Since China agreed to open their market to foreign films in 2012, Hollywood has had to make concessions to their Chinese censors. Producers and directors must coordinate with the Chinese government or lose access to the Chinese market.<sup>15</sup> Films with Chinese characters portrayed poorly, such as Christopher Nolan’s “Dark Knight,” are not even submitted for approval in China.<sup>16</sup>

As the writer Martha Bayles has chronicled China believes that films are also a tool of the state and their content should align with the CCP’s ideology. The forthcoming *Top Gun: Maverick*—a sequel financed in part by the Chinese firm Tencent—omitted the Japanese and Taiwanese flag from Tom Cruise’s jacket . . .<sup>17</sup>

According to Bayles, in addition to the many censorship and propaganda organizations mentioned above, films now also have to pass muster with the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Ministry of Public Security, the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and numerous other bureaucratic entities.<sup>18</sup>

China has also started to make their own blockbusters for their domestic market. Movies made for the China market are forthright in their portrayal of China as brave and righteous and America as weak and decadent. According to Bayles:

... The prime example is *Wolf Warrior 2* (2017), a nonstop tsunami of gun battles, massive explosions, wrenching hand-to-hand combat, and a spectacular tank chase, which hammers away at a single message: China is bringing security, prosperity, and modern health care to Africa, while the United States is bringing only misery. The film broke all box-office records in China and is still, at \$5.6 billion, its highest-grossing film ever.<sup>19</sup>

The influence over the content of films is consistent with China’s “ideological work”: its propaganda work in other forms. Hong Kong is not to be mentioned, Taiwan is to be wiped off the map as an independent entity, China is not abusing Uighur or Tibetan rights, and China is an ascendant power doing right by the world while America is weak, decadent and cowardly. As mentioned in the case of the NBA, the most powerful weapon China has to bend the West to its ideological agenda is the lure of the Chinese market. One cannot overstate how important these efforts are.

American pop culture is one of its competitive advantages, enjoyed by billions across the globe. When repressed populations really begin to ask why America is so dominant in entertainment, they find the answer to be its freedom—its free-markets, its innovative and creative culture. If China can co-opt cultural icons, people lose faith in the power of these ideas.

#### PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION TO SUPPORT FOREIGN POLICY

A key line of effort of Chinese grand strategy is to break U.S. alliances. Consistent with that strategy, Chinese state media attacks American allies as being economically dependent on the United States and highlights fragility in the relationships. Japan is a frequent target. China Daily has also described Britain as “currying favor” with the United States because it has no choice after it leaves the European Union.<sup>20</sup> Other themes include the loss of sovereignty to the U.S. and economic dependency on the U.S. These themes come up in both Chinese and English-language articles and op-eds in media outlets such as China.com, Xinhua, China Daily, and Global Times, and are shared on social media.

#### TAIWAN FIGHTS BACK

Taiwan is the primary target of PRC influence operations, most noticeably in the November 2018 elections where Nationalist Party (Beijing-friendly) candidates won an unexpected number of seats. However, PRC influence had less of an impact in the most recent elections in January 2020. The Taiwanese government worked closely with tech companies in order to counter the spread of disinformation. The Taiwanese government worked with Facebook’s “regional elections center” to remove pages that used fraudulent methods to boost the popularity of their content.<sup>21</sup> Twitter held training sessions for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the Kuomintang (KMT), and Taiwan’s Central Election Commission, and they set up a portal for feedback during the election. Google has partnered with volunteers and organizations like MyGoPen, Taiwan FactCheck Center and the Poynter Institute’s International Fact-Checking Network to increase awareness of disinformation and to flag fake news on its platforms, including YouTube.<sup>22</sup> In addition to these efforts, the Taiwanese government uses their own social media presence to counter disinformation through memes.<sup>23</sup> For example, Premier Su Tseng-chang debunked a rumor that he will punish certain hairstyles with a humorous meme depicting his baldness.

Taiwan has also passed legislation to counter political interference. The Anti-Infiltration Bill heightens penalties for Chinese-backed efforts to lobby Taiwanese politicians or participate in election campaigns.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Taiwanese citizens and civil society play a prominent role in identifying fake information. The Taiwan FactCheck Center is a Snopes-like organization that works with Facebook to check disinformation on Taiwanese social network pages. CoFacts is another crowd-sourced fact-checking organization run by volunteers.<sup>25</sup> Advocacy groups such as the Taiwan FactChecker center can help social media sites verify information.

#### WHAT TO DO

Strategic approaches to China’s mass use of censorship, propaganda, and disinformation can be broken up into two categories: China’s targeting of its own people and China’s external efforts. There are offensive and defensive measures we can take. Remember, the CCP relies upon lies to stay in power.

First, the U.S. should substantially ramp up its own Chinese-language efforts (we have the broadcasting institutions already) to tell the truth to the Chinese people about how they are governed. The truth about public health, the environment, corruption, and injustice. We should place ourselves on the side of the Chinese people and help them discover the truth that could better their lives. Obviously the Chinese will try to block all such efforts. But multimedia campaign in Chinese make their way into China. Censorship is a cat and mouse game, and the regime needs to spend ever-greater resources to stop their people from learning the truth. When we had the USIA, we had career paths for those who wanted to be “information officers” or even “information warriors”—we need that again. Simply put, China has



been engaging in “political warfare” against us for decades—all means other than actual warfare to undermine our global leadership. We have not engaged the political warfare fight.

The GEC can fill this gap if properly funded and staffed with Mandarin-speakers. Such efforts should also tell America’s story in Chinese. Public diplomacy together with multimedia campaigns should explain and persuade—we need to tell the story of why support basic democratic values in Hong Kong and Taiwan and how we would do so in China as well. We need not be defensive about our foreign policy. Relatedly, the special forces command should not be in this business unless tasked with very specific military-related functions. The GEC working with the State Department bureaus in charge of East Asia and public diplomacy should be the lead information operators.

Second, we should pass suggested legislation and amend it that so we can do a better job of highlighting the origin of political ads, particularly from foreign sources as well as advertising the origin of content of social and regular media from countries we have deemed rivals or enemies in our national security documents.

Third, we should set up a center for excellence in combatting disinformation in Taiwan. Taipei faced down an onslaught during its past election. Many countries including our own can learn from it. And it is a Mandarin-speaking country that knows what messages work in Chinese and in Chinese culture.

Fourth, congressional leaders and administration leaders can do a better job in our own country explaining the exact nature of Chinese abuses of human rights and its censorship activities. Pressure should be put on U.S. entertainment icons—they will likely face a backlash among their own viewership and customers if the public is more informed about China’s gross abuses.

Fifth, Congress can continue to help set industry standards and best practices that guide social media companies in facilitating information sharing with each other and with the private and public sectors, including disclosing automated accounts, providing the locational origin or content, and providing users with more context when they see certain content.

Sixth, the Administration should be encouraged to accelerate and broaden efforts to designate Chinese state controlled media companies as foreign agents who need to register as such and to make sure that “journalists” working for such entities are not credentialed as journalists. Congress could help by publishing and widely disseminating easily digestible information and the Chinese mass censorship and media control system. The American people should know exactly where their information from China is coming from and who is paying for it.

To summarize, disinformation, censorship, and propaganda are central to the CCP’s political strategy for survival. Under Xi Jinping, they have become even more important lines of effort. This is because the truth is dangerous. The CCP cannot allow its citizens to know that freedom and democracy work in Taiwan and the West, that Hong Kongers are demanding their basic freedoms, that the U.S. is force for good in the world. It cannot admit any failures of governance, from mismanagement of the viral outbreaks to a starkly slowing economy. The CCP has been struggling for legitimacy and a *raison d’être* since it began allowing markets to function (and thus undermined Maoism) and certainly since its violent crackdown on protestors in Tiananmen Square in 1989. It now coerces its people to accept its legitimacy and needs to protect itself in a web of lies. And, since Xi has also set very ambitious geopolitical goals for his country to rejuvenate and return to its “rightful” place as the Middle Kingdom, CCP propaganda targets the United States. It does so in its influence over movies in which the U.S. is portrayed as declining and decadent and in its media portrayal of the U.S. as greedy and overbearing.

While the CCP has a vast apparatus to control information, arguably its most powerful tool is its market size. The economy may be slowing but the consumer market is still very large. The CCP will threaten U.S. media and entertainment companies with loss of market and financing if they deviate from the CCP party line. We need to break down and publicize as much as possible the specific entities that propagate the CCP’s ideological line and stop treating Chinese “media” as anything but foreign agents.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Zhong, Raymond. “China Clamps Down on Coronavirus Coverage as Cases Surge.” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/world/asia/china-coronavirus-censorship.html?searchResultPosition=13>.

<sup>3</sup>“Agencies Responsible for Censorship in China.” Congressional-Executive Commission on China. Accessed February 28, 2020. <https://www.cecc.gov/agencies-responsible-for-censorship-in-china>.

<sup>4</sup>Richburg, Keith, “Bird flu. SARS. China coronavirus. Is history repeating itself?” STAT, January 27, 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/01/27/bird-flu-sars-china-coronavirus-is-history-repeating-itself/>.

<sup>5</sup>“Xi Jinping Asks for ‘Absolute Loyalty’ from Chinese State Media.” The Guardian, February 19, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/19/xi-jinping-tours-chinas-top-state-media-outlets-to-boost-loyalty>.

<sup>6</sup>CCTV, “Beijing Olympic Flame’s Overall Journey—Light the Passion, Share the Dream,” August 8, 2008, <http://www.cctv.com/program/sportscene/20080808/104347.shtml>.

<sup>7</sup>Grace Shao, Christine Wang, and Evelyn Cheng, “China Accuses U.S. of ‘Sinister Intentions’ after Trump Signs Bills Supporting Hong Kong Protesters,” CNBC, November 27, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/28/china-condemns-us-bills-supporting-hong-kong-protesters.html>.

<sup>8</sup>Xinhua, “Xianggang Zhonglianban Jiu Meiguo ‘2019 Nian Xianggang Renquan yu Minzhu Fa’an’ Qianshu Chengfa Fabiao Shenming” [Hong Kong Joint Office Issues a Statement on the Signing of the U.S. ‘Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act 2019’], November 28, 2019, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/2019-11/28/c-1125284253.htm>.

<sup>9</sup>Bradsher, Keith, “China Blocks Web Access to Times After Article.” The New York Times, October 25, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/world/asia/china-blocks-web-access-to-new-york-times.html>.

<sup>10</sup>Wong, Edward. “Bloomberg News Is Said to Curb Articles That Might Anger China.” The New York Times, November 9, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/09/world/asia/bloomberg-news-is-said-to-curb-articles-that-might-anger-china.html>.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3052789/hong-kong-protests-apple-daily-owner-jimmy-lai-arrested>

<sup>12</sup>The Foreign Correspondents’ Club, Hong Kong, “Censorship and reporting in China: New survey reveals increased harassment and physical violence,” <https://www.fchkc.org/correspondent/censorship-and-reporting-in-china-new-survey-reveals-increased-harassment-and-physical-violence/>

<sup>13</sup>Though commissioner Adam Silver backtracked, stating that the NBA is “not apologizing for Daryl exercising his freedom of expression”

<sup>14</sup>Myers, Steven Lee, and Chris Buckley. “American Basketball vs. Chinese Hardball: Guess Who Won.” The New York Times, October 13, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/13/world/asia/china-nba-censorship.html?searchResultPosition=11>.

<sup>15</sup>Cohen, David S., “‘Transformers’: A Splendidly Patriotic Film, If You Happen To Be Chinese (Opinion).” Variety, July 3, 2014, <https://variety.com/2014/film/columns/transformers-age-of-extinction-patriotic-for-china-1201257030/>.

<sup>16</sup>Bustan, Yuval, “Why are there no more Chinese villains in American films?,” Forbes Israel, November 18, 2018, <http://e.forbes.co.il/why-are-there-no-more-chinese-villains-in-american-films/and-How-China-Is-Taking-Control-of-Hollywood.”> The Heritage Foundation. Accessed February 28, 2020. <https://www.heritage.org/asia/heritage-explains/how-china-taking-control-hollywood>.

<sup>17</sup>Martha Bayles, “Hollywood’s Great Leap Backward on Free Expression,” The Atlantic, September 15, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/hollywoods-great-leap-backward-free-expression/598045/>.

<sup>18</sup>IBID

<sup>19</sup>Bayles, “Hollywood’s Great Leap Backward on Free Expression.”

<sup>20</sup>China Daily, “UK should try to have more than one friend: China Daily editorial,” September 6, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201809/06/WS5b911253a31033b4f4654a8e.html> and Chen, Yang, “Is the sun setting on the U.S.—Japan alliance?,” Global Times, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1162083.shtml>.

<sup>21</sup>Wong, Chun Han and Philip Wen, “Taiwan Turns to Facebook and Viral Memes to Counter China’s Disinformation,” <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-turns-to-facebook-and-viral-memes-to-counter-chinas-disinformation-11578047403>.

<sup>22</sup><https://techcrunch.com/2020/01/07/why-the-world-must-pay-attention-to-the-fight-against-disinformation-and-fake-news-in-taiwan/>

<sup>23</sup>Wong, Chun Han and Philip Wen, “Taiwan Turns to Facebook and Viral Memes to Counter China’s Disinformation”; Magnier, Mark. “West Studies China’s Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan Looking for Clues.” South China Morning Post, February 17, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3045648/west-studies-beijings-disinformation-campaign-taiwan-looking-clues-its>.

<sup>24</sup>Aspinwall, Nick, “Taiwan Passes Anti-Infiltration Act Ahead of Election Amid Opposition Protests,” The Diplomat, January 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/taiwan-passes-anti-infiltration-act-ahead-of-election-amid-opposition-protests/>.

<sup>25</sup>Su, Alice, “Can Fact-Checkers Save Taiwan From a Flood of Chinese Fake News?,” LA Times, December 16, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-12-16/taiwan-the-new-frontier-of-disinformation-battles-chinese-fake-news-as-elections-approach>.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Blumenthal. Look forward to following up on all that.

Dr. Polyakova.

**STATEMENT OF ALINA POLYAKOVA, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you, Senator Portman and Senator Booker, for hosting this important hearing.

I particularly wanted to thank you, Senator Portman and Senator Murphy, who could not stay for the majority of the hearing, for your bipartisan leadership work on this specific issue. I think without your efforts in expanding the role, the GEC would not be here today. So thank you for that.

It is a true honor and privilege to be able to address you here today. Before I begin on the substantive issues, I want to acknowledge that even though I am the president and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis, which is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent foreign policy thinktank here in Washington, my views are my own and do not represent those of the organization, which takes no institutional position.

President Vladimir Putin's Russia seeks to weaken Western governments and transatlantic institutions, discredit democratic and liberal values, and create a post-truth world. But first and foremost, Russian disinformation aims to undermine U.S. leadership across the world. You only have to watch a few minutes of Russian language state-sponsored media at home in Russia to understand the level of animosity that the Kremlin has for the United States, and it very much sees itself locked in a battle for world dominance with the United States.

I want to make it clear that these kinds of campaigns, as we have heard in our discussions of coronavirus, are not limited to elections. In fact, any disruptive world event, such as a virus spread as we are experiencing today, is an ample opportunity and fertile ground for disruption and for spreading these kinds of disinformation influence operations.

The spread of disinformation is just one part of a broader political warfare toolkit in Russia's arsenal, just as my colleague Mr. Blumenthal mentioned on China. I think we see a lot of similarity here in how disinformation fits into this broader foreign policy objective of Russia and China.

Of course, it is not new. I have been working in Russian disinformation long before it became the issue du jour. Likewise, Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic States have been the testing ground and the test labs for Russian disinformation campaigns for quite some time. And as a result, in some ways, they are far more resilient than us.

Unfortunately, the United States and Western Europe woke up late to the challenge. But I think the good news of the wakeup call we had in 2016 is that we have now moved from admiring the problem to entering a new trial-and-error stage where we are trying to new efforts, including policies, social media activities, and research to counter and build resilience to this threat.

I want to highlight three insights that have emerged over the last few years. One is that there is no silver bullet for addressing this problem. A whole of society, not just a whole of government approach is badly needed.

Second, as we, meaning democratic governments, tech companies, and civil society, have responded since 2016, their tactics have

evolved. My concern is that we are not keeping up with the evolution of the adversarial threat. In my written testimony, I detail that quite at length, but just to mention three ways in which the Russian information operations have evolved.

One, the Russian information operations have gone global. Not only in terms of its scope, but in terms of how other countries are copying this playbook. The Russian playbook is global. The Russian information has gone global and further afield to Africa and also South America.

The Russian influence operations are a full spectrum ecosystem approach. They operate across multiple platforms. They operate across multiple media platforms, not just social media platforms, and in direct concert and focus with their other tools of political warfare, including paramilitary groups, which you saw in Africa very recently.

Lastly, Russia is engaged in information warfare by proxy. This is important because, increasingly, they are using cut-outs, local groups and individuals, and local servers to mask their origins. This means that exposure, while incredibly important, is quickly becoming difficult, if not impossible.

And what we de facto see today is that the line between authentic domestic voices, which are protected in most democracies by free speech rights and certainly by the First Amendment here, and inauthentic behavior, foreign disinformation that we have been talking about here, that line has essentially disappeared.

Lastly, to get ahead of this threat, instead of reacting to disparate attacks in a whack-a-mole fashion, we have to invest in building long-term societal resistance at the same as getting on the offensive to deter future disinformation operations of this nature. Our response must be calibrated to meet these future challenges as Russia and other state actors will continue to use multifaceted influence operations to undermine U.S. credibility and global leadership.

I can go into quite a few details in terms of recommendations, but in the interest of the time, I will stop here.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Polyakova follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA

Senator Portman, Senator Booker, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: It is an honor and privilege to address you today on this critical issue for United States national security. Thank you for inviting me to speak.

I am the President and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent foreign policy think-tank focused on the transatlantic alliance and the study of Europe. My views are my own and do not represent those of the organization, which takes no institutional position. In addition, I would like to disclose that CEPA is a sub-grantee for a Federal Assistance Award from the U.S. Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC) for a 2-year project that aims to provide civil society actors with tools and capacities to combat Russian disinformation throughout Central Eastern Europe. The sub-grant agreement came into effect in February 2019.

THE RUSSIA CHALLENGE

President Vladimir Putin's Russia seeks to weaken Western governments and transatlantic institutions, discredit democratic and liberal values, and create a post-truth world. Its strategic aim is, first and foremost, to undermine U.S. credibility and leadership in the world. The United States, from Moscow's point of view, is Russia's greatest enemy—a narrative that is frequently voiced on Russian state-controlled media. Yet, Russia presents a unique challenge to the United States. It is

simultaneously a country in decline and a global power with proven ability and determination to undermine U.S. interests in multiple arenas. Russia has been particularly adept at using asymmetric tools of political warfare—information operations and cyberattacks—to project power, undermine democratic institutions, and influence public opinion. In brief, Russia’s great power ambitions supersede its capacity to act as a great power—militarily, economically, and politically. It is precisely because of this mismatch between ambition and ability that Moscow has sought out and developed low-cost but high-impact tools of political warfare to challenge the United States and our allies.

The spread of disinformation to undermine public confidence is one critical tool in the Kremlin’s broader toolkit of malign influence, which also includes cyber-hacking, illicit finance, support for radical movements and parties, and the use of economic warfare, primarily through energy exports. These elements work together in a concert of chaos, each amplifying the other in various degrees, depending on the target of attack.

Americans experienced Russian political warfare in the context of Russian disinformation and cyberattacks during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Then and now, Russian disinformation campaigns aimed to amplify existing social divisions and further polarize democracies by spreading content on divisive social issues, infiltrating social media groups, attempting to plant content to be shared by authentic users, and using automated accounts to amplify content.

But Russian disinformation campaigns do not stop when the ballot box closes. Elections may provide an ideal high-impact opportunity for a disinformation actor, but the barrage of disinformation against Western democracies, including the United States, continues between election cycles. The world’s democracies need to organize themselves now to address the challenge—the window for doing so is narrowing.<sup>1</sup>

One positive consequence of Russia’s brazen interference in elections has been to wake up Western democracies to the threat. Since 2016, European governments, the European Union, Canada, and the United States have moved beyond “admiring the problem” and have entered a new “trial and error” phase, testing new policy responses, technical fixes, and educational tools for strengthening resistance and building resilience against disinformation. As these efforts progress, three insights have emerged:

1. *A whole of society approach is key.* There is no silver bullet for addressing the disinformation challenge. Governmental policy, on its own, will not be enough. The private sector, specifically social media platforms, and civil society groups, including independent media, must be part of the solution.

2. *As we—democratic governments, social media platforms, and civil society—have responded since 2016, adversarial tactics have evolved along at least three threat vectors*

- *The Russian playbook has gone global:* other state actors are deploying info-ops at an increasing rate, and Russia is testing and expanding its operations globally, most notably in Africa. The Russians may be leaders in state-sponsored disinformation, but they will not be the last. China, Iran, and other state and non-state actors have already learned from the Russian toolkit and deployed it across the world.
- *Russian disinformation activities have adapted* to obfuscate their origins and avoid detection. De facto, it is now almost impossible to distinguish between domestic and foreign activities on social media platforms.
- *Russia is increasingly developing an ecosystem approach* to influence operations, of which disinformation campaigns are a key, but not the only, element.

3. *To get ahead of the threat rather than reacting to disparate attacks in a whack-a-mole fashion, democracies must invest in building long-term societal resilience while at the same time getting on the offensive to deter foreign disinformation operations.*

- The response must take an ecosystem approach to match Russia’s ecosystem strategy, which operates across multiple social media and traditional media platforms, has overt and covert elements, and increasingly works in lockstep with private military groups, illicit finance, and intelligence operations.

In this testimony, I draw on my recent research with my co-author Ambassador Daniel Fried,<sup>2</sup> in addition to my research<sup>3</sup> on emerging threats in the information space, and previous Congressional testimonies,<sup>4</sup> to:

- Provide an overview of Russia’s disinformation machine, including its evolution since 2016;
- Provide a progress report on U.S. efforts to respond to Russian disinformation since 2016;
- Recommend steps that the United States, and the U.S. Congress, in particular, should take to better defend against and get ahead of disinformation threats.

#### THE RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION MACHINE

Disinformation is the intentional spread of false or misleading information to influence public discourse and narratives. Russian disinformation against democracies is multi-vectored and multi-layered, consisting of overt state-funded propaganda, covert social media entities, and a constantly evolving repertoire of fly-by-night websites. These elements work in concert with each other to amplify and distribute content across traditional and social media outlets.

Overt Russian state-funded disinformation and propaganda includes RT, Sputnik, and other Kremlin-linked media outlets. Estimates suggest that the Russian government spends approximately \$300 million on RT annually,<sup>5</sup> and \$1.3 billion on all state media.<sup>6</sup> RT broadcasts in English, Spanish, Arabic, and German, and claims to reach 700 million people in 100 countries.<sup>7</sup> RT, as it proudly states, is the most-watched news network on YouTube, claiming over 8 billion views and 3.5 million subscribers.<sup>8</sup> YouTube statistics show 2.8 billion views, however.<sup>9</sup> On Facebook, RT has 5.6 million followers<sup>10</sup> and 2.9 million followers on Twitter.<sup>11</sup>

Covert social media entities include automated (“bot”) accounts, trolls, cyborgs, and impersonation pages, groups, and accounts used to carry out digital disinformation campaigns across social media platforms. The Department of Justice Special Counsel report,<sup>12</sup> the investigation’s related indictments from February 2018<sup>13</sup> and July 2018<sup>14</sup> against the Internet Research Agency (IRA) and Russian military intelligence (GRU), and the subsequent Senate Intelligence Committee reports<sup>15</sup> provide the most comprehensive assessment of the inner workings of Russia’s covert disinformation operations. The IRA’s information operations against the United States relied on impersonation accounts to infiltrate public discourse online; used non-political content and issues to build an audience on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and elsewhere; and purchased ads to prop-up content on platforms to reach more users. Over the course of the U.S. operation, the IRA purchased over 3,500 ads and spent approximately \$100,000—a small investment, which signals that advertising was a relatively small part of Russian disinformation operations in the United States. In mid-2017, the most popular IRA-controlled group—“United Muslims of America”—had over 300,000 followers. By the end of the 2016 election, the IRA “had the ability to reach millions of U.S. persons through their social media accounts” on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr, according to the report.<sup>16</sup> Facebook later estimated that IRA-controlled accounts reached as many as 126 million people,<sup>17</sup> and an additional 1.4 million<sup>18</sup> were reached through Twitter.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, Putin’s ally and agent, who has been sanctioned by the United States, is in charge of the IRA project as well as the private military group, Wagner (more on this below). Prior to the 2016 elections, the Kremlin significantly expanded the IRA. In early 2015, the IRA had a staff of 225–250 people, which grew to 800–900 by the middle of the year adding new capabilities such as video, infographics, memes, etc.<sup>19</sup> By 2016, the number of employees at the American department or translator project almost tripled to 80–90 people, representing approximately 10 percent of the total staff. The IRA’s monthly operating budget in 2016 was \$1.25 million (approximately \$15 million annually).<sup>20</sup>

Four years later, we still don’t know to what extent the IRA remains operational, the full scope of the IRA’s command structure, how far into the Kremlin the decision-making process reached, how the project continues to be funded today, and if the Kremlin has established other similar entities. While the IRA’s operations undoubtedly continue today, and other similar “troll farms” are also very likely operating in addition to the IRA, there is scant (if any) open source information about these entities’ activities and funding.

#### EVOLUTION OF RUSSIA’S TACTICS SINCE 2016

Since 2016, the Kremlin has stepped up its interference operations across the globe. Ukraine remains a test-lab for Russian information operations and the primary target.<sup>21</sup> During Ukraine’s 2019 parliamentary elections, Ukraine’s intelligence service arrested a man who confessed to being a Russian agent sent to Ukraine to recruit locals to rent or sell their Facebook account, which would then be used to spread false content or ads.<sup>22</sup>

Increasingly, Russia is aggressively deploying a combination of disinformation, private military groups, and corruption to exert influence in Africa, where it has been active in Libya, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Mozambique, Madagascar, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>23</sup>

Prigozhin's two projects—Wagner and the IRA—came together in Africa as well. In October 2019, Facebook took down several disinformation networks that affected Madagascar, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Congo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Sudan, and Libya. The broad disinformation campaign was linked to the Wagner Group, whose members were involved in setting up proxy media groups and contracting disinformation campaigns to local entities to obfuscate the link to Russia.<sup>24</sup> In some countries, Russian mercenaries worked to establish local media organizations that would employ locals hired to post false and misleading content on social media. The Russians would also hire existing media companies for the same purpose.<sup>25</sup> In Madagascar, the Russian operators carried out an expansive influence operation that included publishing newspapers in the local language, hiring local students to write articles in support of the president, buying television and billboard ads, paying people to attend rallies (and paying journalists to cover the rallies), and attempting to bully opposition groups to take bribes to drop out of the race.<sup>26</sup> The Madagascar case is the most prominent example of how the Kremlin deploys a multi-faceted influence operation of which information ops are one key but not the only element. Similarly, in South America, Russian influence operations aim to amplify and exploit unrest in Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and Chile.<sup>27</sup>

Tellingly, Russian mercenaries are present in many of the countries where social media companies, governments, and researchers are identifying active disinformation campaigns. Prigozhin's Wagner Group is the best known but not only such group active in Africa.<sup>28</sup> Wagner mercenaries have been pouring into Africa in recent months.<sup>29</sup> In Libya, some estimate that up to 2,000 Russian fighters have been deployed to support Khalifa Hifter in the country's civil war.<sup>30</sup> In Mozambique, an estimated 200 Russian mercenaries are thought to be active.<sup>31</sup> Russian PMCs and advisers have also been active in the Central African Republic, where approximately 250 Russian mercenaries are training recruits,<sup>32</sup> and allegedly in Venezuela.<sup>33</sup>

These recent Russian activities signal new threat developments to which the U.S. and our allies are not well-equipped to respond:

1. Russian information operations pose a global threat, no longer contained to the frontline states of Central and Eastern Europe.
2. Russian influence operations form a full spectrum ecosystem approach, in which disinformation campaigns work across digital and traditional media and in concert with other tools of political warfare.
3. Russia is engaged in information warfare by proxy—using cutouts, local groups and individuals, and local servers to mask their origins. This greatly limits our ability to identify and expose covert information operations and de facto erases the line between authentic and inauthentic actors or domestic and foreign content.

The U.S. response must be calibrated to meet these and future challenges as Russia and other state actors will continue to use multi-faceted influence operations to undermine U.S. credibility and global leadership.

#### HOW THE UNITED STATES HAS RESPONDED

The greatest challenge facing the U.S. government as it has sought to craft a counter disinformation strategy has been identifying the appropriate coordinating body able to carry out a politically empowered policy agenda. Coordination, both on operations and policy, has been slow. Some European countries, such as Sweden, identified the appropriate agency to coordinate and set policy and quickly established interagency communication. In the United States, responses have been decentralized across multiple governmental agencies, groups, and centers. As a result, it has been difficult to assess who in the U.S. government owns the problem. One reason for this is the sheer size, complexity, and compartmentalization of the U.S. government, which makes coordination slow and difficult for a problem that cuts across multiple regions and touches on issues of public diplomacy, election security, and foreign interference. This remains a problem for crafting a sophisticated and well executed response to the disinformation challenge.

#### THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER

The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) expanded the function and mandate of the State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC) to counter

state-sponsored disinformation. By design, the GEC, as a State Department center in the public diplomacy bureau, has no mandate to address disinformation attacks in the United States. While the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the appropriate agency to address threats to the United States, its main focus has been on securing the infrastructure of elections. U.S. Cyber Command began operations ahead of the 2018 congressional elections to deter Russian operatives from potential interference.<sup>34</sup> Cyber Command, together with the National Security Agency (NSA), reportedly developed information about Russian trolls and their activities, and alerted the FBI and Department of Homeland Security (DHS).<sup>35</sup> Cyber Command's mandate to develop offensive response capabilities<sup>36</sup> is a welcome shift in U.S. policy. But on the whole, the lack of a defined long-term strategy to counter disinformation abroad and at home will leave the U.S. vulnerable to future attacks.

The GEC, which has the mandate to coordinate operational interagency responses, has been hampered in carrying out its task in several ways:

1. The funding mechanism established in 2017 NDAA in which the Department of Defense would transfer GEC ear-marked funding to the State Department, while seemingly straightforward, led to bureaucratic wrangling between State and DoD, which slowed the GEC's ability to ramp up operations immediately.
2. The nature of U.S. federal guidelines for hiring personnel has also led to a lag in building capacity. The Russia team of the GEC only became strategically operational in the summer of 2019.
3. While the GEC has the mandate to coordinate operationally, there is no politically empowered (i.e. Congressionally confirmed) position in the U.S. government responsible for establishing the policy and ensuring interagency coordination to respond to disinformation. Such a position would need to be at the Undersecretary level.
4. Multiple seemingly duplicative interagency groups have been established within the U.S. government, which likely limit the GEC's ability to serve as the coordinating body intended by Congress. For example, there is an interagency group, the RIG, for coordinating Russia related responses. The 2020 NDAA authorized the establishment of a Social Media Data and Threat Analysis Center within the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to enable better information sharing between the government and social media companies to "institutionalize ongoing robust, independent, and vigorous analysis of data related to foreign threat networks within and across social media platforms [which] will help counter ongoing information warfare operations against the United States, its allies, and its partners." The Senate has reintroduced the Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act of 2019 (DASKA); while mostly devoted to sanctions, it also "calls for the establishment of a National Fusion Center to Respond to Hybrid Threats, a Countering Russian Influence Fund to be used in countries vulnerable to Russian malign influence, and closer coordination with allies" (sections 704, 705, and 706).<sup>37</sup> It is imperative that U.S. government efforts are led by an agency with a clear politically endorsed mandate rather than dispersing and decentralizing efforts across multiple task forces, fusion cells, or centers.

Still, despite the slow start, the GEC has been actively funding independent civil society groups on the frontlines of Russian information operations. It has also sought to coordinate efforts with allied governments, work closely with researchers to expose Russian disinformation campaigns, provide direct support, and develop the capacity to follow the threat as Russian operations have gone further afield. Most recently, the GEC worked to expose Russian disinformation around COVID-19 (the Coronavirus).<sup>38</sup>

The GEC should be the USG body that develops a threat assessment framework for the U.S. government. Such a framework would identify clear baselines and metrics for appropriate response. Not all disinformation campaigns require a governmental response, and in some cases, a response may serve the opposite function of amplifying a disinformation campaign. In cases that threaten national security and public safety, a USG response is not only warranted, it is essential.

The GEC should build information sharing relationships with social media companies. Recognizing that there is a trust gap between governments and the companies means that this will take time to develop, but the companies must be part of the process for USG efforts to counter disinformation campaigns. Precedent for such public-private information sharing exists in the law enforcement space and the counter-terrorism space.



## WHAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD DO

- *Ensure consistent and continuous funding for the GEC.* 2020 was the first year that the GEC was funded directly through the State Department rather than via the DoD transfer. This should continue.
- *Ensure scalability of GEC efforts to respond to a global, rather than a regional threat.* The GEC received approximately \$62 million in 2020. The President's proposed 2021 budget includes an additional \$76 million in funding for the GEC. An increase of this level would allow the GEC to scale up its operations.
- *Require regular reporting by the State Department on state-sponsored information operations* across the world, including sensitive information to be shared in a classified setting on the operational capacities, command-and-control structure, and funding for covert Russian operations including those carried out by the GRU.
- *Consider establishing an Undersecretary level position for information operations* to establish and coordinate the whole of U.S. government responses that is outside of the public diplomacy bureau at State.
- *Develop an ecosystem approach* to an ecosystem threat. The GEC should work in close cooperation with U.S. government agencies tracking Russian illicit finance, private military group activities, and support for disruptive political groups to identify high threat areas where the GEC should provide direct support and expand resources.
- *Invest in developing in-house expertise in Congress* on disinformation and digital media. Congress's capacity for detailed analysis, independent from social media companies, will be critical.
- *Consider mandating that media outlets determined by the Department of Justice to be acting as agents of foreign governments* be de-ranked in searches and on newsfeeds and be barred from buying ads. RT, for example, was required to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). Governmental assessments and FARA determination should be one of many variables considered in rankings for search engines. However, legislators should bear in mind that mandating de-ranking based on governmental assessments and FARA determinations could set a precedent which undemocratic regimes could abuse.
- *Continue to impose sanctions* on foreign officials, or officially controlled or directed, purveyors of disinformation and their sponsors, and to identify and prosecute violations of federal elections laws (prohibitions on foreign contributions).
- *Establish a USG rapid alert system (RAS)* to inform the public, allied governments, and social media companies of emerging disinformation campaigns that threaten national security. The European rapid alert system can help the USG judge the potential of this idea. Some of the challenges can be anticipated: given U.S. politics and traditions, issues will arise around a U.S. RAS mandate (e.g., the definition and attribution of disinformation) and its composition, credibility, and independence.

## GETTING AHEAD OF THE THREAT

The above recommendations are low-hanging fruit on which the U.S. Congress and the Administration should act. These steps will not turn the tide of disinformation attacks. Rather, these are the minimum actions needed to start to build resistance. The Kremlin's toolkit is out in the open and Russia has faced few consequences for its malign activities. This sends a signal to other malicious actors that they can act with impunity to destabilize democracies and distort public discourse. Other state actors with perhaps greater capabilities, such as China, and non-state actors, such as terrorist groups with a higher tolerance for risk, will adapt the disinformation toolkit to undermine democracies or are already doing so.

While the democratic West is fighting yesterday's war, our adversaries are evolving and adapting to the new playing field. First, innovation in artificial intelligence (A.I.) is enabling the creation of "deep fakes" and other "synthetic media" products. Using video and audio manipulation, malicious actors can manufacture the appearance of reality and make a political leader appear to make remarks that they did not. As these tools become more low cost and accessible, they will become perfect weapons for information warfare. Such technologies could drive the next great leap in AI-driven disinformation.

Second, disinformation techniques are shifting from the use of simple automated bots to more sophisticated interaction with (and manipulation of) domestic groups, extremist and otherwise, through various forms of impersonation and amplification of organic posts by domestic actors. Thus, it is already increasingly difficult to dis-

entangle foreign-origin disinformation from domestic social media conversations. Rather than trying to break through and channel the noise, the new strategy aims to blend in with the noise—obfuscating manipulative activity and blurring the line between authentic and inauthentic content.

The United States has fallen behind in addressing the challenge of foreign disinformation. But, it is not too late to change course toward a proactive rather than reactive approach. This critical issue concerns all democracies equally. Strong U.S. leadership could tip the balance toward ensuring that the digital space continues to facilitate and support democratic values of transparency, accountability and integrity. To do otherwise is to leave this arena open to authoritarians to set the rules of the game.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Alina Polyakova and Daniel Fried, “Democratic Defense Against Disinformation 2.0,” (Washington, DC, United States: Atlantic Council, June 2019), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/democratic-defense-against-disinformation-2-0>.

<sup>3</sup>See: Alina Polyakova, “Weapons of the weak: Russia and AI-driven asymmetric warfare,” (Washington, DC, United States: Brookings Institution, November 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/weapons-of-the-weak-russia-and-ai-driven-asymmetric-warfare/>; and Alina Polyakova and Spencer Boyer, “The future of political warfare: Russia, the West, and the coming age of global digital competition,” (Washington, DC, United States: Brookings Institution, March 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-future-of-political-warfare-russia-the-west-and-the-coming-age-of-global-digital-competition/>.

<sup>4</sup>“Five Years after the Revolution of Dignity: Ukraine’s Progress/Russia’s Malign Activities,” U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, 116th Congress, statement of Dr. Alina Polyakova, Director, Global Democracy and Emerging Technology, Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe, Foreign Policy Program, Brookings Institution, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/061819—Polyakova—Testimony.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>“Lessons from the Mueller Report, Part II: Bipartisan Perspectives,” U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary, 116th Congress, statement of Dr. Alina Polyakova, Director, Global Democracy and Emerging Technology, Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe, Foreign Policy Program, Brookings Institution, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU00/20190620/109668/HHRG-116-JU00-Wstate-PolyakovaA-20190620.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>Vladimir Milov, “Stop Funding RT: Better Ways to Spend the Budget Money.” Free Russia Foundation, August 5, 2017. <https://www.4freerussia.org/stop-funding-rt-better-ways-to-spend-the-budget-money/>

<sup>7</sup>“Figure of the Week: 1.3 Billion.” StopFake, October 1, 2019. <https://www.stopfake.org/en/figure-of-the-week-1-3-billion/>.

<sup>8</sup>Elena Postnikova, “Agent of Influence: Should Russia’s RT Register as a Foreign Agent?” (Washington, DC, United States: Atlantic Council, August 2017), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/RT—Foreign—Agent—web—0831.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup>“RT—YouTube,” <https://www.youtube.com/user/RussiaToday/videos?app=desktop>.

<sup>10</sup>“RT—YouTube,” YouTube. Accessed March 2, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/user/RussiaToday/about>.

<sup>11</sup>“RT—Home Facebook.” Facebook. Accessed March 2, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/RTnews/>.

<sup>12</sup>account, RTVerified. “RT (@RT—com).” Twitter. February 21, 2020. <https://twitter.com/rt—com?lang=en>

<sup>13</sup>Robert S. Mueller, III, “Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election.” (U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC, 2019), <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA v. INTERNET RESEARCH AGENCY LLC A/K/A MEDIASINTEZ LLC A/K/A GLAVSET LLC A/K/A MIXINFO LLC A/K/A AZIMUT LLC A/K/A NOVINFO LLC et al. 18 U.S.C. §§ 2, 371, 1349, 1028A (2018). <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>.

<sup>15</sup>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA v. VIKTOR BORISOVICH NETYKSHO et al. 18 U.S.C. §§ 2, 371, 1030, 1028A, 1956, and 3551 et seq. (2018). <https://www.justice.gov/file/1080281/download>.

<sup>16</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Intelligence. RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURE;S CAMPAIGNS AND INTERFERENCE IN THE 2016 U.S. ELECTION VOLUME 2: RUSSIA’S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITH ADDITIONAL VIEWS, 116th Congress, 1st session. <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report—Volume2.pdf>

<sup>17</sup>Robert S. Mueller, III, “Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election.” 26.

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<sup>19</sup> Polina Rusyaeva and Andrei Zakharov, “[Editor’s Note: Title is in Russian Language and can not be displayed],” RBC, October 17, 2017, <https://www.rbc.ru/magazine/2017/11/59e0c17d9a79470e05a9e6c1>.

<sup>20</sup> UNITED STATES OF AMERICA v. INTERNET RESEARCH AGENCY LLC A/K/A MEDIASINTEZ LLC A/K/A GLAVSET LLC A/K/A MIXINFO LLC A/K/A AZIMUT LLC A/K/A NOVINFO LLC et al. 18 U.S.C. §§ 2, 371, 1349, 1028A (2018). <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Jack Stubbs, “Facebook says it dismantles Russian intelligence operation targeting Ukraine.” Reuters, February 12, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-facebook/facebook-says-it-dismantles-russian-intelligence-operation-targeting-ukraine-idUSKBN2061NC>

<sup>22</sup> Michael Schwartz and Sheera Frenkel, “In Ukraine, Russia Tests a New Facebook Tactic in Election Tampering.” The New York Times, March 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/europe/ukraine-russia-election-tampering-propaganda.html>

<sup>23</sup> Shelby Grossman, Daniel Bush, and Renée DiResta, “Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa.” Stanford Internet Observatory, October 30, 2019. <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/prigozhin-africa>

<sup>24</sup> Craig Timberg, “Putin’s Chef, Architect of Interference in 2016 U.S. Election, Is Now Meddling in African Politics, Facebook Says.” The Washington Post. WP Company, October 30, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/10/30/putins-chef-architect-us-election-interference-now-meddling-politics-across-africa-facebook-says/>

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<sup>31</sup> Eric Schmitt and Thomas Gibbons-neff, “Russia Exerts Growing Influence in Africa, Worrying Many in the West.” The New York Times, January 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/world/africa/russia-africa-troops.html>

<sup>32</sup> Tim Lister and Clarissa Ward, “Putin’s Private Army Is Trying to Increase Russia’s Influence in Africa.” CNN. Cable News Network. Accessed 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/08/africa/putins-private-army-car-intl/>

<sup>33</sup> Maria Tsvetkova and Anton Zverev, “Exclusive: Kremlin-linked contractors help guard Venezuela’s Maduro—sources.” Reuters, January 25, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-russia-exclusive/exclusive-kremlin-linked-contractors-help-guard-venezuelas-maduro-sources-idUSKCN1PJ22M>

<sup>34</sup> Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Begins First Cyberoperation Against Russia Aimed at Protecting Elections,” The New York Times, October 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/23/us/politics/russian-hacking-usa-cyber-command.html>.

<sup>35</sup> David Ignatius, “The U.S. military is quietly launching efforts to deter Russian meddling,” The Washington Post, February 7, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-us-military-is-quietly-launching-efforts-to-deter-russian-meddling/2019/02/07/4de5c5fa-2b19-11e9-b2fc-721718903bfc\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1cbbaf8bf3ae](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-us-military-is-quietly-launching-efforts-to-deter-russian-meddling/2019/02/07/4de5c5fa-2b19-11e9-b2fc-721718903bfc_story.html?utm_term=.1cbbaf8bf3ae).

<sup>36</sup> National Cyber Security Strategy of United States of America, September, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2018/09/National-Cyber-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act of 2019, S 482, 116th Congress, 1st session, introduced in Senate February 13, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s482/BILLS-116s482is.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> AFP, “Russia-linked disinformation campaign fueling coronavirus alarm, U.S. says,” Radio France Internationale, February 22, 2020. <http://www.rfi.fr/en/wires/20200222-russia-linked-disinformation-campaign-fueling-coronavirus-alarm-us-says>

Senator PORTMAN. Great. Thank you very much. You have given us lots to chew on here because there is so much, and we are not going to have time today to go into every detail. But again, we appreciate your constant help on the legislation.

Specifically, both of you were helpful in developing it, and we appreciate the continued briefings, and as you say, this is an evolving

issue. And as it evolves, we have to be nimble and be able to change our strategies.

Let us talk about money for a second. Because we were debating earlier, you know, what should the budget be? Is it \$60 million or \$130 million? Can you put that in some context for us?

Mr. Blumenthal, you talked about Chinese state media. Dr. Polyakova, you have talked in the past about the amount that Russia is spending not just on state-owned media, but on media here within the United States and even within the District of Columbia. Can you give us some sense of what that would be and as compared to the \$60 million to \$130 million we are talking about?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I would be happy to start on the Russia question.

One, it is not such a straightforward question to answer because, of course, we do not know how much they are spending on the covert operations, and most of what they are doing in the digital domain is covert. It is these false personas. It is the bot networks. It is the obfuscation of the origins of the attack.

These are broad estimates because the Russians do not publish this budgetary information, as we do—is the latest estimate how much Russia spends on RT, which is their global foreign language, meaning English and other languages network, is at around \$300 million. But that number is several years old, and we have no updates since then.

That does not include a whole swath of other overt government media outlets. Sputnik being one of them, Tass, and many, many others. And so some estimates put that number well over \$1 billion. But again, this is an estimate. We know that in their local Russian language media, the Russians spend at least 1.3 billion in U.S. dollars.

So on the whole, it is very difficult to judge covert and overt ops, but most experts say it is upwards of \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year.

Senator PORTMAN. That is helpful, and I have heard the \$1.3 billion number just for state-run media alone, and the \$2 billion or \$3 billion, it seems me, is a conservative estimate, given, as you say, so much activity is covert. But again, let us compare that to what we are talking about in terms of \$60 million to \$130 million.

Now, Mr. Blumenthal, thoughts about that?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Yes, Chinese numbers are so opaque, and you just cannot trust a lot of the numbers. We do know that in the unclassified realm, that China now spends more on what they call internal security than on the People's Liberation Army's external missions, which, you know, they spend at least \$130 billion on external missions. So internal security is in the billions, if not over \$100 billion.

Now how much of that goes to censorship, propaganda, and disinformation is even tougher to know. I could just name some organizations that—so to get a movie into China, to get movie content from Hollywood into China, you have to go through not just the normal organizations that look at film, like the State Administration for Radio and Television and the Administrative Information—State Council Information Office. You also now have to go through the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. You have to go through the Ministry of Public Security, the State Bureau of Reli-

gious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other bureaucratic entities.

So I would say that we are looking at billions and billions of dollars spent on censoring content, and then within—for the Chinese people themselves to absorb and for the world to absorb. And then money spent on detaining journalists, that is police and internal security, money spent on kicking out journalists. And then I think what could be very helpful, perhaps even for Congress to do, is get the intelligence community to map out the actual funding of “state media.”

So Tencent, for example, which we consider a publicly traded tech company, funds a lot of the state media, which are actually Asian. So the government here in the United States and in Europe and in other places pushing the party line. So the money is gigantic.

And then, of course, there is how do you calculate the money of denying access to certain companies if they do not toe the party line in China?

Senator PORTMAN. Well, again, it is staggering, and what we are doing pales in comparison, and our effort, again, is about exposing and about providing an accurate narrative. It is not about disinformation. It is about information. But I think that was helpful to put that in some context.

On Ukraine in particular, Dr. Polyakova, you and I talked a lot about Ukraine, and you are expert on much of what has happened there. I think it might be interesting to talk a little about the focused disinformation efforts that continue. We talked about since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 that Russia has been very active.

I am the co-chair of the Ukraine Caucus, and along with Senator Murphy and others, we have been involved in these Ukraine issues. President Zelensky has got a lot on his hands right now, and one thing is this disinformation. Can you talk specifically about what the Russians are doing in Ukraine to try to sow confusion about the status of Crimea, about the Donbass, about the U.S. role there, and what we can do to help Ukraine in this disinformation battle?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you for that question, Senator.

As I mentioned earlier, Ukraine continues to be victim number one and target number one for Russian disinformation and political warfare efforts. And it does not just stop with disinformation. Ukraine has also been the primary target of some of the most damaging cyberattacks we have seen in history in recent years.

And I think what we have learned in this country is that what happens in Ukraine does not stay in Ukraine. All of these tactics eventually come to us, and they come to our other allies in Western Europe as well and the NATO alliance.

What we have seen the last few years is that the kind of proxy information warfare I mentioned was first tested in Ukraine, the first instance of that that we learned about an open source was around the Ukrainian parliamentary elections last year in 2019, where the Ukraine intelligence agencies arrest an individual who confessed to being a Russian intelligence officer who was sent to Ukraine to try to convince domestic Ukrainians to sell or rent out their Facebook accounts, which they would then use as zombie accounts to propagate all kinds of political disinformation and post different kinds of ads.

And then we saw them deployed at scale in Africa in the fall. So you see a very short timeline from the test you see in Ukraine in May. Then in October, we learned that they were carrying out this kind of proxy warfare at a large scale across, I believe, almost a dozen African countries that Facebook identified. So I think we need to follow these kinds of patterns.

Most recently, in the coronavirus case, you have been discussing the Russian disinformation in this country, which the GEC, as we heard earlier, worked together with media to expose. In Ukraine, we know that Russian language media has been trying to sow chaos and propagate kinds of attacks on Asian minorities in Ukraine that there have been a few instances of attacks in some Ukrainian towns on people of East Asian origin. And this kind of narrative has been propagated.

The other narrative that we see the Russian disinformation machine's overt and covert operators pushing out is that coronavirus was invented by the CIA, not just by Melinda and Bill Gates. And again, this is a pattern that we also saw back in the Soviet era and that we continue to see today. And first and foremost, that happens on Ukraine and Ukrainian soil.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you much. I will have a second round in a minute.

Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you so much.

So just I want to jump in. You guys can kick the tires a little bit of the GEC. You know, there is a whole bunch of stovepiping going on. I think you have got agencies—DoD, DHS, FBI, other intel agencies—trying to deal with the problem of disinformation, and there seems to be very centralized, highly funded, highly resourced state actors that we are going up against in this new order.

They are not matching us tank for tank, aircraft carrier for aircraft carrier. This seems to be one of their main ways to try to undermine Western democracies. And so just tell me, as an outsider, do you believe the structure that we have set up here, and that the GEC, is this the most effective way for us to counter this massive state-sponsored undermining of Western democracies, our country, at a time where I have never seen in my lifetime the suspicion that Americans have now for institutions, how well lies and conspiracy theories seem to take root in our culture.

This, to me, is weakening the bonds between us, our ability to come together. And meanwhile, China has built 18,000 miles of high-speed rail, and the busiest rail corridor in America, North America, from Boston to Washington, DC, runs half an hour slower because we cannot get together any more even as a society to work together and meet our common threat.

So I just want you from outsiders, tell us, is this the best way to match the threat that we see growing in influence and strength from our foreign adversaries?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I guess I have been at this for a while. I think we should never have gotten rid of the USIA as an independent agency, which was not seated in any one department, could coordinate with some real power across the CIA and across DoD, and not

only stop active measures that we used to call them from the Soviet Union, but take the active measures inside the Soviet bloc.

So the short answer to your question is no. We are where we are. And I think if the GEC is properly funded and does not have to fight with the Special Forces Command and others about who has the authority. They should be in the lead. I mean Special Forces Command is a warfighting command. Particularly on the China issue, which is a strategic national-level issue with the kind of things that I am talking about is kicking out of U.S. media, trying to control the content of what we say, trying to stop our free speech rights, going after our allies, going after countries we want to win over in Africa. So it should not be a military lead by any stretch of the imagination.

I think if they are given the proper authorities and can actually coordinate interagency action and have the power and authority to do so, have enough Chinese language linguists who know the culture well and not only can know the information environment in China well and not only can identify the disinformation and identify these so-called media people here in the United States and kick them out under the authorities they have, who can actually go into China and tell our story or tell the truth, I think we will—it will be better than what we have had over the last few years.

Senator BOOKER. Right. And I would say that the challenge I have with what you are saying is I understand the China propaganda machine, they are affecting our companies, our business, undermining fair play in the economy, so forth. But that is a little different to me, and maybe I am wrong, than China's efforts to undermine our democracy, their offensive efforts. And so could you just help me understand that distinction and because I get confused when you start talking about Disney, who does not—I have actually talked to people in those industries about how if you want to have a blockbuster global film, you no longer have a Chinese villain.

But that is very different than the Chinese insinuating fear around the coronavirus here or interfering within our elections so there is more chaos created.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Well, let me connect the two because I believe that once you start affecting the way Hollywood or the National Basketball Association—let us say Hollywood—does its content, it feeds back into the United States. And without noticing it, the American people are all of a sudden getting movies that are like *Top Gun* this summer, that are affected by what the Chinese think and not by what we think. They made people take off their Taiwanese and Japanese flight suits.

But I understand your point—

Senator BOOKER. That is a fair point.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Yes, yes. And getting NBA stars to kowtow on the Hong Kong issue. That is different than Russia. That is trying to affect our free speech rights here in the United States.

But in terms of the specifics that you are talking about, so the number one, two, and three ways they do it, which is different than Russia, is through—we have tolerated Xinhua and the Global Times and the Confucius institutes, and the reason I am conflating them all is because they basically all work for the same organiza-

tions. And that is to be here posing as news reporters, but really, you pick up your newspaper, the Washington Post. You get the China Daily out of it, and it is really just propagating the Chinese line about their ideological worldview, which, by definition, undermines our own worldview.

It is an authoritarian worldview. It is a deceitful worldview. And it just has no business being credentialed as media here in the United States.

Senator BOOKER. Please, please—

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I would say the big difference between Russia and China is resources. The Chinese no doubt have a far greater ability and capability to not just play at the margins, especially in the digital domain, which is relatively cheap.

It is very cheap to build a bot army. It is very cheap to have a troll that controls 50 accounts or so, et cetera. What the Chinese have been doing other parts of the world—and you know, Dan, please correct me if I am mistaken there—is actually co-opting local media organizations that are then putting out information in local languages that is a positive take on China in general.

And that insidious process is a long-term strategy, whereas the Russians are playing very much a short- or medium-term strategy. I completely agree with my colleague that we completely dismantled our ability to message and to reach vulnerable populations on front-line states.

We still have VOA and RFERL, of course. But these entities are set up to fight 20th century information wars. We are not in the 20th century anymore. So we may want to consider something like a USIA, but the USIA has to be a 21st century digital USIA because the place we are falling behind is in that digital space.

We do not have clear coordination, as we heard earlier, between the tech companies. At the end of the day, it is not just about content, as you said earlier, Senator, it is about the distribution system that enables the amplification and magnification of that content and the precise microtargeted delivery of that content to specific vulnerable situations. That is the beast we have to fight at the end of the day.

Senator BOOKER. And so the GEC—just to finish before I pass it back to the chairman, the GEC is not your ideal way of—it is important. They do important tasks. But given the looming threat, that is not your ideal—they are not fully equipped to deal with the modern crisis we are facing, both near term and far term?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. It is a good start, but we need to do so much more. I think, first and foremost, there is a funding question that we have been discussing, and second, there is a political mandate question. There needs to be an undersecretary-level position to own this problem. Until we have that, I do not think we are going to get the kind of interagency, whole of government response that we are looking for.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes, again, as I said earlier, I am reassured by what Ms. Gabrielle has done with that organization and particularly encouraged by the new budget request and her ambitious plans. But I think it is somewhat personality driven. In other words, she has been effective at getting things done at a higher level. So I do not disagree with you that having someone that has



the ability to work at the interagency level because they have responsibility and authority would be helpful. So kicking it up to a higher level.

I will say in the case of this Secretary of State, he testified in this room where you all are sitting about this very topic and was very supportive, and I think that has been one of the reasons again it has been successful. But that may not be the case in the future.

Just quickly, I think it is fascinating what you are saying about the different approaches. Now we need to be cognizant of that. One story I have heard recently, and it may be disinformation, but I do not think so, is with regard to China's activities in Africa. We talked about this earlier.

And I think this is one reason I am encouraged that, again, the GEC wants to get more involved in Africa. But it was on your question about media, and it was actually buying or acquiring media companies and then providing the people of these poor countries a network and nightly news and morning news and noon news that they did not otherwise have, but it was all based on China's interest in propagating their own narrative.

So on the one hand, great that these communities now, thanks to the Chinese government, have better infrastructure or, in this case, media infrastructure. But not if it is going to be disinformation, as opposed to what you are saying about Russia, which is not that long view, necessarily. It is more taking the coronavirus, immediately creating a distrust and disinformation around that.

Is that true, Mr. Blumenthal?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. It is true. And it is even worse than that in a sense that so companies that are well funded like Xinhua or the Global Times or other Chinese companies that we know here have training programs for African journalists and sometimes are the only source of information, even though it is disinformation, in these countries. They are going out, and I would say it is the entire spectrum, from being able to propagate the Chinese line to report the way the Chinese want.

CCTV is another one of those companies that is becoming even more prevalent in the rest of the world. They are purchasing other companies or they are providing, or they are just maintaining presences or opening up presences in some of the countries you are talking about. Training, supposedly training journalists and also teaching other dictators how to censor content is another big one.

Senator PORTMAN. So this is a huge challenge, and the GEC is not equipped to handle that. So let us take an individual African country that has this opportunity to have a network set up, and it is more partnering with, I would assume, those countries and regional organizations of countries to be able to understand what the threat is and to provide assistance so they do not have to rely on that.

Is that the answer there, and is that more of a State Department function?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Partly. We also have great NGOs who have been really very ahead of the curve. Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, I mean, they were the ones who came out with the first reports and analysis on this Chinese sharp power in these

countries that identified exactly what I am identifying, which is they are training generations of Africans and others to toe the Chinese Communist Party line or—I should say and/or to support dictatorships in their own countries.

So the National Endowment for Democracy has a role. Freedom House has a role. The State Department has a role. Some of the intelligence agencies have a role. If the American people could get a real sort of network map of which Chinese party organization is funding which media organization or which training program for journalists, that first level of transparency I think would help us a lot to see the scope.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes, and I think that is part of the broader issue that we are dealing with, with China, including here, with regard to Confucius Institutes and the talent recruitment programs that we have heard a lot about recently with Dr. Lieber and so on.

On the NGO issue, I know that both of you are very involved with the NGO community and civil society more broadly and the so-called “fact-checkers,” which I agree with you, if we can continue to support those kinds of organizations, some of whom may not be precisely aligned with the GEC on the way to approach this, the best practices we talked about earlier. But on the other hand, they are out there doing incredible work that we cannot afford to do as a country.

And often, they are state actors themselves. So a small country in the Baltics, as you talked about earlier, can play a big role here. Can you talk a little about that and how we can leverage more of that activity both in the NGO community and among these smaller democracies to get them to be more effective?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Yes, thank you for that question.

I think one of the elements of the GEC that we have not discussed is their funding capabilities to local organizations, and I think that has been critical in jump-starting quite a bit of work, especially in Central and Eastern Europe with the Baltic states, the Balkans, and elsewhere, to give these small groups that do not have funding otherwise to be able to carry out this important work.

And I think this signals the kind of advantage that we have as a democracy is that you look at Russia, you look at China. Their approach is top-down, at the end of the day, to any problem. Our approach will never be that way. So we have to rely on a bottom-up structure.

We empower local organizations in an organic, but decentralized way, who know their local context better than we do, to give them the running room, the independence, to be able to do their work. And I think the GEC’s ability to fund those organizations should be maintained and should be increased in the next budgetary request because it has been so critical in creating this kind of organic response to disinformation efforts, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

I will say one thing is that I mentioned earlier that these countries have been the target of these attacks, especially Ukraine and the Baltic states, have also built better resilience against them. And I would also point to the Nordic states. You know, RT Swedish tried and failed in Sweden for a reason. Nobody took it seriously because there was a generally very high level of public awareness

that this was a Russian-funded media outlet, and nobody paid attention to it.

That kind of resilience is something that we can learn from. It is something that I think Western European countries can learn from. So I would not just look at Central and Eastern Europe as a place we need to support and fund. We also should be looking at it as a place where we can take some lessons home.

Senator PORTMAN. Great points. We probably did not talk about that enough earlier in terms of what GEC is doing, screening, but then providing help to some of these NGOs, other members of civil society, particularly to build that resilience in some of these smaller democracies.

Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. So they have just called votes, Mr. Chairman, and that means at some point, we are going to have to leave here. So maybe I just want to ask just general, if you had a chance, you have got two Senators here. Are you guys concerned, worried, or alarmed at the American response as it stands now to what China, Russia, other foreign nationals?

You said, Dr. Polyakova, you said that the Russians' playbook is not just worrisome because they are getting better at their playbook, but also because their playbook is being copied by other countries. And so you can see more and more of these things spreading.

So I just really want you to know like you have a moment on the record to say you guys are concerned, given all that we are doing, or worried or just like sound the alarm, the modern-day Paul Revere. The Chinese are coming. The Russians are coming. Wake up because you are not doing enough. Where are you guys?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. If we are talking about worry, concern, alarm scale—I would say that I am between concerned and alarmed.

Senator BOOKER. Okay.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I do not think we should panic. We are the United States. We have the greatest economy in the world. We have the greatest alliance structure in the world. We are so capable of responding to this threat.

The reason I am concerned is not because I am concerned of our inability to respond. I think we are very capable as a country, as a government, to respond. But I am concerned that it has been such a polarizing, such a partisan issue that we have not been able to get the kind of momentum we would actually need to be able to respond in the way that we should.

So I would say my concern is less about Russia destroying our democracy, and I do not want us to go to that panic alarm mode. My concern is more that we need to get our act together at home to be able to respond effectively.

Senator BOOKER. Okay.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Senator, it depends on the day. I mean, sometimes concern, sometimes alarm. When I wake up in the morning and read that we are capping Chinese state media from being in the United States or using the Foreign Missions Act to kick them out of the United States, I am less alarmed.

When I see that the FBI is actually and the Justice Department's China initiative is actually going after both influencers, let us say political influencers, as well as espionage, I am happy we are slow-

ly waking up. But it is, I mean, the scope that I described is alarming also, and the idea that China is engaged in a comprehensive—it is not China as a whole, it is the Chinese Communist Party is engaged in this comprehensive effort to undermine our position in the world and undermine democracy and train others to be dictatorships and authoritarian and toe their line.

And in the 19th Party Congress Report to say they want a whole different world order based on Chinese CCP values, it is alarming, and we are getting started. But again, you look at just American even elite public awareness of the concerted effort to undermine content, to undermine free speech, to undermine basic values, you know, we are just not there yet.

Senator BOOKER. But it is fascinating to me, I am sorry, I know my history of the Cold War—

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Yes, yes.

Senator BOOKER. —where we took it very, very seriously. It seemed like a whole nation-state, bipartisan commitment to stopping the spread of the Soviet Union's influence. Now it is a different day.

But this is a great story for the chairman. Jeff Flake, with whom I chaired a subcommittee, the Africa Subcommittee, we are flying over because Mugabe has just been overthrown. Coons was on that trip. Bipartisan group, ready to put in sanctions, have free and fair elections to Emmerson Mnangagwa—we land in Zimbabwe—honor democratic principles and ideals. He is coming in from China, and their message to him was we do not care what you do.

And so I am alarmed, to be frank, that the Chinese are looking at this as a 25-, 50-year process. We are seeing this in election cycles. We are still not even having consensus on the breadth and the depth of the problem. We are still dealing with this with stovepiping.

But yet the planet Earth right now is in this battle between authoritarian governments and free democracies. And frankly, what is our scorecard in the last 10 years? I mean, I can go through Hungary. I can start naming countries that are shifting more towards authoritarianism.

Elections are being challenged. We have seen interference in everything from Brexit elections to EU elections to here at home, Madagascar, New York Times was reporting. So I do not know if our sophistications and capabilities are matching what the threat is, and as I see firsthand now, as having the incredible privilege to sit on this committee, from what I witness with my own eyes when I visit Africa or other places, I am really concerned about our ability to keep up right now.

And it seems to me, even though there are great patriots in the Administration and great committed folks, that we are not taking this threat as seriously as we should.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, unless you all would want to comment on anything I said for a final word in my 1 minute and 40 seconds left.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I agree with all that, and in fact, I would say it is even worse because the Chinese have been doing this since the end of the Cold War and since the Tiananmen Square massacre

and since they identified us as the main threat to the regime. This has been going on for an extremely long time.

The one positive note I would say is that the Taiwanese fought back successfully on a massive disinformation campaign, working with Twitter and Google and Facebook, and we helped them. The U.S. Government helped them.

And the Hong Kongers are still out on the streets protesting. The closer they are to China, the more they dislike the CCP, and they see the problem.

But in general, I agree with you.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Just very briefly, I agree with you as well. I think taking the combination of Russian and Chinese activities across the world, that is a cause for alarm in the long term of U.S. leadership in the world and the long term health of democracies in the world. And I think that also speaks to the point of why every country matters and why we have to be there before they are.

And that is where we are starting to lose ground is that we are not identifying vulnerable areas and forming a strategy as to how to reach vulnerable populations, those vulnerable countries. And it is not just about Ukraine. It is about a variety of countries across the world, but it is also why I think countries like Ukraine really matter a lot, just like countries like Taiwan matter so much and deserve continued U.S. support on a strategic level.

Senator BOOKER. And before I let you close this out, I think it is very important for the congressional record, for the senatorial record to hold it for all history to come that when Dr. Polyakova came here, she came serious because she brought her mother here to back her up. You thought this was so important you have generational strength here, and could you just say her name into the record? I think it is really nice that she is here. Irina?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Sure. This is my mom, Irina Polyakova, and she brought me here from the Soviet Union. I am always grateful for that.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much. It is wonderful to see you. What a great immigrant American story.

Thank you very much.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you.

Senator PORTMAN. Thanks to both of you for some very helpful, insightful testimony, and I am going to leave on a more positive note, which as I look around the world, and I see all of these sort of non-kinetic activities and the disinformation campaigns, and they are troubling, to be sure. But to Dr. Polyakova's point about democracies, we have an ultimate weapon here, which is the strength of people and voices being heard and bottom-up rather than top-down.

And I look at what has happened in Ukraine just in the last 5 years. I look at what has happened in places like Bolivia more recently. I look at what happened in North Macedonia, despite massive efforts. There are some success stories, and we should learn from those.

Not that we are done in any of those countries, by the way. We have lots of work to do. But we have to figure out how to better organize ourselves. That is why we started the GEC. It is not going

to solve all the problems. As you said earlier, there is no one solution, Dr. Polyakova, but your testimony today has been very helpful for us to get a better feel for that.

The one issue we did not address that I think we should have gotten a little deeper and which we will do more in response to questions I hope that we will have is with regard to the social media platforms. And you mentioned how Google and Facebook and Twitter and others have been helpful with regard to Taiwan, but they also have played a role that is not as helpful, and we have got to talk about that issue more honestly, I think, and figure out how to work together to push back and to ensure that the right information is out there for people to make decisions on their own and to promote more freedom and democracy.

Thank you all for being here today.

[Whereupon, at 12:10 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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#### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF MS. LEA GABRIELLE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY MANAGEMENT AND AUTHORITIES

The day after your hearing, the Department announced that Secretary Pompeo had “delegated R authorities to Counselor T. Ulrich Brechbühl.” The Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R) is a position that falls under the Appointments Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which requires nomination by the President and the advice and consent of the Senate. As such, the position of R is governed by the Vacancies Act, which is “the exclusive means for temporarily authorizing an acting official to perform the functions and duties of any office of an Executive agency . . . for which appointment is required to be made by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate” [5 U.S.C. § 3347(a)]. Section 3347 of the Vacancies Act states that a general statute authorizing the head of an executive agency “to delegate duties statutorily vested in that agency head to, or to reassign duties among, officers or employees of such Executive agency” will not supersede the limitations of the Vacancies Act on acting service [5 U.S.C. § 3347(b)]:

*Question.* Given that the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs is a senate-confirmed position, and Mr. Brechbühl is not a confirmed officials, please explain the legal and policy basis for the delegation of authorities, including any restrictions under the FVRA or other relevant statute?

*Answer.* The State Department Basic Authorities Act requires that there be an Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. 22 U.S.C. §§ 2651a(b)(1) and (b)(3). Under the Act, the Secretary has the authority to delegate any of the functions of the Secretary or the Department to officers or employees under his direction and supervision. 22 U.S.C. § 2651a(a)(4). The Secretary delegated the authorities of the Under Secretary to Counselor Brechbühl “to the extent authorized by law.” Because the position of Under Secretary is subject to appointment by the President and confirmation by the Senate, the Counselor would be unable to exercise certain types of authorities, which are therefore not covered by this delegation. The delegation does not include authorities delegated by the President pursuant to 3 U.S.C. § 301, including certain authorities under the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CCPIA) (19 U.S.C. § 2601 et seq., as implemented through Executive Order 12555 (March 10, 1986)). CCPIA authorities were previously delegated to, and are routinely exercised by, the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, a position which is subject to Senate confirmation and the Vacancies Reform Act.

Additionally, Counselor Brechbühl is not serving as ‘Acting Under Secretary’ for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R) in the context of the Vacancies Reform Act but, rather, as ‘Senior Official’ for R.

*Question.* Please cite the statute that allows the Secretary of State to delegate the authorities of R to another employee.

Answer. Section 1(a)(4) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act (22 U.S.C. § 2651a(a)(4)) states the following: “Unless otherwise specified in law, the Secretary may delegate authority to perform any of the functions of the Secretary or the Department to officers and employees under the direction and supervision of the Secretary. The Secretary may delegate the authority to redelegate any such functions.”

When the R and other Under Secretary positions have been vacant, their authorities have generally been exercised by an individual either designated by the President, pursuant to the Vacancies Reform Act, or delegated the authorities from the Secretary to the extent permissible by law.

In light of the sovereign nature of some of the duties of an Under Secretary of State, in addition to delegating certain authorities vested in the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to Counselor Brechbühl, the Secretary also appointed Mr. Brechbühl as an officer of the United States (pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §§ 301, 2104, 2105 and 3101, and 22 U.S.C. § 2651a(a)(3)(A)).

*Question.* Were all R authorities delegated to Mr. Brechbühl? If not, please enumerate specifically which authorities were delegated and which were not, and the disposition of any undelegated authorities. Given that the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs is a senate-confirmed position, and Mr. Brechbühl is not a confirmed official, please explain the legal and policy basis for the delegation of authorities, including any restrictions under the FVRA or other relevant statute.

Answer. The Secretary delegated to Counselor Brechbühl, “to the extent authorized by law,” “all authorities vested in the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, including all authorities vested in the Secretary of State that have been or may be delegated or re-delegated to that Under Secretary.”

Because the position of Under Secretary is subject to appointment by the President and confirmation by the Senate, the Counselor would be unable to exercise certain types of authorities, which are therefore not covered by this delegation. The delegation does not include authorities delegated by the President pursuant to 3 U.S.C. § 301, including certain authorities under the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CCPIA) (19 U.S.C. § 2601 et seq., as implemented through Executive Order 12555 (March 10, 1986)). CCPIA authorities were previously delegated to, and are routinely exercised by, the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, a position which is subject to Senate confirmation and the Vacancies Reform Act.

*Question.* Does the Administration plan to have the R authorities designated to Counselor Brechbühl indefinitely? (In *The Office of Thrift Supervision v. Paul*, 985 F. Supp. 1465, 1474–75 (S.D. Fla. 1997), the Court stated that it “does not hold that such a designation could be indefinite”.)

Answer. By its terms, the delegation will expire upon the appointment and entry upon duty of a subsequently appointed or designated individual to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, unless sooner revoked.

*Question.* Why has the administration not nominated someone to fill the position of R, which has been empty for nearly 2 years?

Answer. Addressing and filling vital senior leadership positions at the State Department is one of Secretary Pompeo’s highest and most immediate priorities. He continues to work with the White House and Senate to fill many top positions, including the position of Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The Department continues to employ strategies and programs to mitigate any negative impact of staffing gaps and remains committed to seeking out innovative strategies to expedite recruitment at the highest levels.

*Question.* Given the delegation of authorities for a senate confirmed position and his unconfirmed position, will Mr. Brechbühl commit to quarterly meetings with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, commencing immediately, to discuss his performance of delegated authorities as R? If not, why not?

Answer. Counselor Brechbühl will consider all requests to meet with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as appropriate.

#### STAFFING

*Question.* How many Senior Foreign Service Officers currently serve in the Global Engagement Center?

Answer. Of the nine total Foreign Service staff at the GEC, we currently have two Senior Foreign Service Officers.

*Question.* Given current authorization numbers, please describe efforts to recruit Foreign Service and Civil Service officers to serve in permanent positions in the GEC.

*Answer.* The GEC is vigorously pursuing many hiring options available in the Department and as authorized by legislation. The GEC now has 17 Foreign Service positions, 9 of which are currently filled. The remaining 8 new positions are expected to be filled during the summer 2020 Foreign Service transfer season. During the 2019/2020 Foreign Service assignments cycle, the GEC had 46 Foreign Service candidates apply for 12 available positions. Additionally, we have advertised our Foreign Service positions in a widely-distributed Department Notice and have had a global conference call to discuss our mission and answer questions from interested candidates during the bidding season. The GEC has regularly taken advantage of opportunities to bring on additional talented Foreign Service Officers via temporary 1-year domestic Foreign Service assignments (a “Y-tour”). Other efforts to recruit Foreign Service Officers, as well as Civil Service staff, include leveraging GEC staff professional networks to identify highly qualified individuals who could fill positions via lateral transfers or non-competitive appointments.

*Question.* Do you believe you have the necessary authorities and resources to fully operationalize your mission?

*Answer.* The GEC previously had a limited term hiring authority—known as “3161” authority—that allowed it to bring in experts from outside of government. That authority has since expired. If Congress could provide the GEC a similar authority to bring in experts for a temporary period, it would be a key improvement to the GEC’s authorities and operational capabilities.

In terms of funding, Congress wisely structured the new Counter China Influence Fund (CCIF) to provide resources to counter China globally. However, the resources in the Counter Russia Influence Fund (CRIF) can only be used for the countries in Europe and Eurasia still eligible for foreign assistance funding. This severely limits the flexibility of the interagency to address Russian influence operations as the global challenge they represent. For example, Africa and Latin America are major areas of concern. If the CRIF could be redefined to counter Russia globally that would be helpful to the GEC and the broader interagency.

#### OPERATIONS

*Question.* What standardized methods do you have for evaluating your effectiveness in fulfilling your mission?

*Answer.* The GEC follows the State Department’s 18FAM300 guidance and the Managing for Results Framework to develop and conduct evaluations on GEC programs. This guidance also provides a framework for incorporating the lessons learned and best practices from these evaluations into the GEC’s strategic planning.

The GEC’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) specialists conduct evaluations with academic rigor using methods such as focus groups, key informant interviews, desk research, and social network analysis to test the successful effectiveness of the programs toward achieving their objectives.

*Question.* How many staff are currently dedicated to evaluation and metrics?

*Answer.* Currently, the GEC has three full-time M&E specialists. These specialists work with the threat teams, implementing partners, academics, Department counterparts, and across the interagency. The GEC’s M&E specialists work with these stakeholders to identify and implement best practices, assess impact, and facilitate strategic planning by disseminating lessons learned and supporting program design.

Additionally, there is the Analytics and Research team comprised of approximately 20 individuals with expertise in data collection, analytics and research methodologies such as Social Network Analysis, polling, and artificial intelligence. This team produces rapid-response analytic products to help us understand emerging threats, current trends, and themes in ongoing campaigns.

Lastly, the GEC leverages third-parties for evaluation support. Third-parties can provide an unbiased assessment of GEC projects and programs and may have local language, knowledge, and resources that may be necessary for data collection.

*Question.* Is monitoring and evaluation built into your programs? Please describe the resources, tools, and staffing you dedicate to analytics. How are these metrics integrated into your strategic planning?

*Answer.* Monitoring and evaluation is built into GEC programs using a multi-layered approach. Over the last year, the GEC’s M&E specialists have worked to de-



velop standardized M&E processes within the GEC and with implementing partners. During the application for funding process, prospective implementers begin the framework of the project's M&E by submitting a theory of change (what change the project is meant to create in its environment—essentially the project's hypothesis), a logical framework (the logical structure of a project detailing activities, outputs, outcomes, objectives, and goals), an indicator reference sheet (the metrics by which the performance of the project will be measured), and the monitoring and evaluation narrative (the description of how the project will perform M&E). These tools help the GEC's M&E Specialists work with the implementer to design M&E in from the beginning.

*Question.* How do you share your evaluation and best practices with other bureaus in the Department and across the interagency?

*Answer.* The GEC endeavors to work with all bureaus whose area of responsibility intersects with the location or mission of a GEC program or project. In doing so, we maintain continuous communication on projects including weekly meetings, sharing field reporting, and providing briefs to bureau heads. The GEC shares its research, tradecraft, and best practices in designing, monitoring, and evaluating programs with the interagency through a central online sharing platform. Our tradecraft for analysis and reports are available to our partners also to help develop and employ proper techniques in analytics and research for shared responsibility.

The GEC's M&E specialists participate in a monthly Counter Disinformation Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group with colleagues from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the Evaluation Unit of the Office of the Undersecretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy (R/PPR), and the Bureau of Conflict and Stability Operations (CSO). The GEC's M&E specialists also work with program officers from other bureaus on projects with related missions to ensure data sharing and collection standardization.

Likewise, the GEC's M&E Specialists work with other bureaus on evaluations of programs that cover multiple lines of efforts by multiple bureaus. The GEC is currently participating in an evaluation of Department-supported media literacy programs led by the Office of the Assistance Coordinator for Europe and Eurasia (EUR/ACE).

*R/GEC*

*Question.* Your mission is to direct, lead, synchronize, integrate and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to combat foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation. Please describe how you work to facilitate interagency cooperation, what steps and processes you have in place to assert the Department's leadership in this space, and how you are not duplicating efforts?

*Answer.* The GEC's coordination efforts are focused on ensuring U.S. government activities are complementary and align with the overall U.S. strategy to counter malign disinformation and propaganda, which under our authorities includes propaganda and disinformation aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security or stability of the United States and our allies. To that end, the GEC is expanding its complement of interagency detailees and liaison officers who work to ensure the U.S. government's counter disinformation efforts are streamlined across the interagency and duplication is minimized. To manage this important function, the GEC has established an Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2).

The GEC facilitates interagency cooperation on efforts to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation through a number of interagency fora. For example, the GEC holds interagency secure video teleconferences every other week to identify and coordinate on key priorities in the information environment.

The GEC has been working closely with the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) and the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) and other partners via the Russia Influence Group on coordinated lines of effort to counter Russian disinformation.

In terms of its counter terrorism mission, in the wake of ISIS's territorial defeat, the National Security Council designated the GEC as the lead for coordinating and executing a U.S. government strategic communications campaign that includes the full spectrum of information capabilities in support of D-ISIS efforts. The GEC has completed the development of a strategic framework in support of this process and is now coordinating with the interagency and partners from the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in implementing the campaign. The first phase of this multi-regional campaign will target ISIS's geographic core in Iraq and Syria. The campaign adopts a population-centric approach that is designed to deny the resurgence of ISIS and restore dignity and hope to those vulnerable populations who have suffered under their rule.

For countering Iranian malign disinformation and propaganda, the GEC informs and coordinates regularly with roughly 12 interagency partners to include the Iran Action Group, the Bureau of Near East Affairs and CENTCOM. These close partnerships have enabled us to gain important indications and warnings about potential Iranian disinformation activity abroad or to respond in real-time to emerging or existing disinformation narratives from abroad.

*Question.* Please describe how you work with public diplomacy officers in HST and at Post to increase awareness about disinformation campaigns and malign foreign influence.

*Answer.* The GEC is actively engaged across the Department with public diplomacy officers as well as other professionals to increase awareness and understanding of disinformation and propaganda. A recent example was our participation in the Department's global Public Affairs Officers workshop, PD Next, last fall. Not only did I address our Public Affairs Officers from our posts around the world, but GEC representatives participated in four other panels. The GEC also provided recommendations for outside experts to brief the group and recruited Sarah Cook, a well-regarded expert on PRC media and propaganda, to speak at the workshop.

The GEC works with regional bureau public diplomacy offices and posts overseas to identify and refine programs funded through the GEC. This coordination serves to ensure that programs to counter state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda are aligned with broader State Department and post priorities and are responsive to the specific information environment contexts at the regional and/or country level.

The GEC regularly engages with overseas posts to provide them with advice and support. For example, the GEC Russia and Analytics & Research teams have worked intensively with our embassies in North Macedonia and Slovakia to help engage together in understanding threats to, and defending, democratic processes against Russian disinformation campaigns.

In terms of countering the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda, the GEC and the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) co-lead a monthly China Campaign Synchronization meeting to coordinate PRC-related lines of effort and provide policy guidance to all relevant regional and functional bureaus. This meeting also serves as a mechanism to align the Department's efforts to counter the CCP's malign propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

The GEC also routinely coordinates with the State Department's bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (China Desk and Office of Public Diplomacy), as well as other regional and functional public diplomacy teams, our missions abroad, and relevant interagency partners to coordinate strategies and responses to this problem set.

*Question.* Please describe your efforts to work with our embassies and consulates to help increase reporting on foreign influence and disinformation. How does this reporting contribute to your programs? Please describe in general how Post input drives your agenda.

*Answer.* We work closely with regional bureaus, sharing reporting and assessments as well as collaborating on future projects. For example, the GEC recently shared our assessment of PRC, Russian and Iranian disinformation around COVID-19 with State Department regional bureaus and China Watchers overseas to help them better assess what they are seeing within their regions.

The GEC's Russia Team is in constant contact with those posts dealing with serious Russian disinformation threats as they have first-hand experience of the issue. The GEC Russia Team's agenda is driven by a combination of what posts report to us they are experiencing and what our in-house experts find through in-depth research.

*Question.* Please describe your process for producing content and general procedures for moving content through the building and through posts (You may provide a classified addendum if necessary)?

*Answer.* When the GEC focused solely on countering propaganda from international terrorist organizations it had a team of staff—known as the Digital Outreach Team—with specific cultural, linguistic and technical expertise who operated online and on social media platforms to contest the false narratives that foreign terrorists groups use overseas to recruit new followers and fighters.

When the GEC subsequently transitioned to address its broader congressional mandate, the organization began approaching the task of undermining terrorist ideology and state-sponsored disinformation with the understanding that the people and groups closest to the battlefield of narratives are often the most effective in countering them. Moreover, as the GEC has incorporated new academic research

and social science into its work, it has become increasingly clear that responding “tit-for-tat” to each individual false narrative is often not effective.

Given this shift in emphasis, rather than continuing to produce its own content and conduct direct, attributed messaging as a primary tool for accomplishing its mission, the GEC has focused on working with foreign partners to build overseas awareness of, and resistance to, disinformation operations rather than specific counter messages to help inoculate against false narratives before they gain traction.

#### MIDDLE EAST

##### *R/GEC*

*Question.* Please describe the metrics that the GEC uses to determine success regarding Iran. To what extent are these metrics particular to Iran or scaleable for use across the other main lines of effort of Russia, China and Counterterrorism?

*Answer.* For FY18 and FY19, the GEC Iran Team invested resources in long-term efforts to inform Middle Eastern audiences about how Iran uses disinformation to create confusion, to distract publics from their malign, regional goals. As such, many of our metrics are dedicated to measuring the reach and engagement of our projects designed to provide fact-based, and positive narrative messaging to target foreign audiences.

Reach and engagement metrics are a common method of assessing the success of messaging campaigns. For example, one of our projects provides free and fair media with a local partner and has produced a total of 174 pieces of media content which included 68 written news stories, 33 edited videos, 31 TV interviews, 15 written exposes, 14 infographics, and 14 video exposes. This project, which focuses on audiences internal to Iran, has reached 9.7 million views on Facebook and had an 80% engagement rate. In less closed environments, we are able to conduct focus groups and opinion polling to determine attitudes regarding content.

In another, recent example a GEC-funded implementer produced an investigative report debunking Iran’s false narratives related to COVID-19. It reached over 245,000 people within days of being published in Farsi on social media and received over 300,000 impressions, including hundreds of comments. Most of the social media engagement condemns Iran and Russia for the spread of disinformation. Commenters indicated that they believe both Iran and Russia are intentionally misleading their people because they have been unsuccessful in managing the outbreak.

Each of the GEC’s three counter state-sponsored disinformation directorates have unique approaches to the unique challenges posed by China, Russia, and Iran.

*Question.* Russian disinformation is not limited to the U.S. and Europe. One glaring example is the ongoing attempt to paint the Syrian White Helmets as a terrorist organization. Please describe the steps the GEC is taking to counter Russian disinformation in the Middle East.

*Answer.* The GEC does not have the capacity to counter Russian disinformation in the Middle East given limited resources and other higher priority efforts.

In the past, the GEC, in coordination with USAID, has communicated with the leaders of the White Helmets in Syria. The GEC suggested engaging a professional marketing and communications firm to train the White Helmets to better identify and put out content to counter Russian disinformation. The GEC also suggested a pilot project to use a private-sector blockchain-based video verification technology to counter claims that White Helmet issued videos were faked. Ultimately, the White Helmets decided not to implement any of these proposals.

*Question.* Along with Europe, China has also recently pursued port and telecoms deals around the Middle East. Please describe the steps the GEC is taking to counter Chinese initiatives in the Middle East.

*Answer.* The GEC recognizes the China challenge is global in scope and, earlier this month, officially launched its first program to counter China’s malign influence in the Middle East and North Africa. A credible third-party is convening local influencers to document, analyze, raise domestic awareness, and offer solutions to the risks of Chinese malign activities in the region. We actively work with the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) and functional bureaus throughout the Department to coordinate and complement their programs in the region.

*Question.* Although jihadism is at the core of all three, ISIS, al-Qaeda and al-Shabbab are distinct groups that pose different threat. Please describe the different ways the GEC targets these groups.

*Answer.* While each threat is different, the goal of every GEC program is to address the grievances of local populations and provide relevant, convincing, and via-

ble alternatives to extremist narratives and/or activities. Depending on the language and/or culture, the program can take different forms. Some program content also exposes the heinous crimes and outright lies of each group. Exposing fallacies and providing alternative options can thwart recruitment.

For example, GEC supported counter-disinformation efforts in Somalia to target ISIS, al-Qaeda, and al-Shabaab in a similar fashion because each brings ideologies and agendas that are foreign to the people of Somalia. The groups falsely claim they're protecting Islam and Somalis against foreign invaders while at the same time indiscriminately targeting and killing innocent Muslim/Somali civilians in the name of Islam. They fight to destroy the culture, institutions, and the fabric of the society. The GEC therefore supports activities that amplify atrocities done by these groups, expose their destabilizing lies, promote peace and democracy, and build the capacity of local communities to create their own alternative messaging.

Although it is increasingly recruiting non-Somali Kenyans, Al-Shabaab's ideology has a strong pan-Somali nationalist component. Among Somali Kenyans, it argues that the Kenyan state is illegitimate and innately harmful to the Somali minority. GEC's programming, through its Somali Voices project, addresses the grievances that Somali Kenyans have and demonstrates ways Somali Kenyans can become more successful within the country.

The GEC's multi-pronged initiative in Mindanao, southern Philippines, is an excellent example of interagency coordination with both Embassy Manila and INDOPACOM. With a peace deal stalled on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, more militant Islamist groups are emerging and aligning themselves with the so-called Islamic State. Among the worst are the Abu Sayyaf Group and the ISIS-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). GEC programs identify and engage at-risk populations through messaging hubs, tech camps, hackathons, and other local skills-building activities.

#### RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

I am deeply concerned about the specter of Russian malign influence in sub-Saharan Africa. Russia has made it clear that it seeks to project its global power by increasing its influence in Africa—and will do so by any means necessary. This year, more than 20 African countries are due to hold national elections, and several countries are going through historic political transitions. These countries, many of which have fragile political systems, are prime targets for Russian disinformation campaigns:

*Question.* Does the Global Engagement Center have a strategy to confront Russian disinformation campaigns in Africa that might impact election outcomes or otherwise fuel radicalism?

*Answer.* The GEC is beginning efforts to examine Russian information operations in Africa and develop countermeasures. The recent finding of a Russian troll farm in Africa shows that this is an area of great interest for Russia, and we need to be able to look at it with the same amount of intensity that Russia does.

*Question.* Facebook has removed some fake news pages associated with Russian operatives, which targeted countries across the continent. Does GEC work with social media companies on issues relating to disinformation in Africa? Do you believe that social media companies are adequately engaged on this issue?

*Answer.* Most technology companies have terms of service that govern the use of their platforms. The U.S. government encourages companies to voluntarily, fairly, consistently, and efficiently enforce those terms of service.

*Question.* Messaging apps such as WhatsApp—where disinformation can spread differently than on traditional social media platforms like Facebook—are popular in Africa. Do Russian disinformation campaigns target messaging apps? Is GEC able to counter disinformation on messaging apps?

*Answer.* Our adversaries increasingly take advantage of messaging apps. The GEC is developing its abilities to counter this type of disinformation.

*Question.* Across the United States Government, what agencies and offices are involved in countering disinformation campaigns in Africa?

*Answer.* The GEC works with public diplomacy and other colleagues in the field, the Bureau of African Affairs, and interagency elements including USAFRICOM and USSOCCOM to prioritize acute risks and counter disinformation efforts in Africa.

## GEC SUPPORT FOR U.S. MISSIONS AND U.S. GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL

*Question.* U.S. missions such as those in Sri Lanka and Nepal are both facing anti-MCC compact rhetoric in local politics. Chinese propaganda is winning in influencing local politics—not the U.S. or our messaging. Please describe the scope and nature of the GEC’s direct support to U.S. Missions. Does every request for support from a Mission receive a response from the GEC? What ‘rapid response’ options and localized, targeted tools can the GEC provide our Missions?

*Answer.* Many of our missions overseas are facing complex information environments. Every inquiry from a Mission receives a response, however the GEC is unable to fund every request. The GEC focuses its limited resources on engagement with U.S. Missions in particularly vulnerable countries where our efforts can have the greatest impact. For example, the GEC’s China team is working with Mission Sri Lanka to roll out two specific projects aimed at countering disinformation locally as well as establish best practices in countering malign influence that may be used more widely. We are also coordinating across the interagency to identify other potential resources that can be used to counter propaganda and disinformation in South Asia.

The GEC’s Russia Team focuses its attention on requests from Missions in countries that are uniquely vulnerable to Russian disinformation due to their location, their political situation, and their ability to protect their populations. GEC support varies from sending Russia Team members overseas to assist a Mission during times of major events that may increase the threat of destabilizing disinformation, to connecting the Mission with NGOs working to counter disinformation on the ground, to offering advice on other U.S. Mission communications with local audiences. The GEC’s Russia Team is also developing a suite of programs to quickly increase the ability of U.S. partners and allies to engage with us in confronting Russian disinformation.

*Question.* Does the GEC train public diplomacy Foreign Service Officers to recognize and counter disinformation, as part of Foreign Service Institute training or otherwise? If not, why not?

*Answer.* The Foreign Service Institute (FSI), with the support of the GEC, trains Foreign Service Officers and other public diplomacy practitioners to recognize and counter disinformation. The GEC also has shared with FSI training resources employed by international partners to augment existing FSI courses. Additionally, FSI includes modules outlining GEC resources and programs in classes for Public Affairs Officers, Information Officers, and other public diplomacy practitioners. Meanwhile, the GEC engages not only with FSI but also with other Department entities to further the ability of Foreign Service Officers to recognize and counter disinformation. For example, GEC’s China team has partnered with regional bureaus to connect posts with regional and topical experts on PRC propaganda and disinformation efforts, and GEC’s Russia team worked with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to provide Missions with a toolkit of counter-disinformation resources and best practice.

*Question.* I understand the United Kingdom has provided its government and public sector communications professionals with a toolkit to help prevent the spread of disinformation, called the RESIST toolkit. Does the U.S. government have a similar toolkit for our government officials? If not, is there an effort underway to create one? What role is the GEC playing in that effort?

*Answer.* Rather than creating its own toolkit, the GEC leverages the RESIST toolkit as the best available resource for government officials. This allows us to conduct joint planning with U.K. colleagues from a common approach, and saved U.S. taxpayers dollars by utilizing a best in breed tool that was already available. The GEC has translated the RESIST toolkit into Spanish, Arabic, and Mandarin to make it available to additional partners, and shared these translation with the U.K. government as part of our partnership with them.

## WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

*Question.* Does the GEC subcontract its work to any private sector companies or organizations? If so, what are the names of the entities and, where applicable, what is the financial value of each contract? What criteria does the State Department use to assess an entity prior to contracting?

*Answer.* The GEC works through private sector companies and organizations to implement activities where engaging their expertise, credibility and networks is the most efficient and effective means of achieving our objectives. In terms of its programs and content development, the GEC works with NGOs and civil society organi-

zations that operate on the ground overseas. In terms of conducting data analytics to inform its work, the GEC works with private sector companies that have the needed expertise and capability. The names of these organizations and companies and any further details about the partnerships can be provided to the committee in a classified setting.

Additionally, the GEC established the U.S. Government's single dedicated effort to identify and assess private sector technologies to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda. The GEC uses a grant mechanism to support reviews and tests of technologies, in line with its statutory function to "facilitate the use of a wide range of technologies and techniques by sharing expertise among federal departments and agencies, seeking expertise from external sources." GEC reviewed about 100 technologies in the past year. Some of these technologies are selected for further tests in support of U.S. Government agencies, and those tests are funded at a standard amount through the existing grant. About a dozen tests have been or are being conducted on the GEC Testbed.

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SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CORY BOOKER

*Question.* Can you discuss the GEC's findings in this report—who is spreading the falsehoods, for what purpose, and what effect has it had?

*Answer.* The GEC has been tracking Chinese and Russian propaganda and disinformation related to COVID-19, as well as the overall impact of disinformation on global conversations about this situation. Preliminary findings highlight a key difference between Russia's and China's approach to messaging on COVID-19. As of early March, both Russian-linked and China-linked accounts are still spreading COVID-19-themed propaganda and disinformation as one of their top themes. Russian-linked accounts are messaging in Spanish, English, German, and Italian; China-linked accounts are messaging in English, Spanish and Mandarin.

The GEC's analysis indicates Russia's primary tactic has been to amplify disruptive disinformation narratives with no factual basis. Meanwhile, the data suggests China has largely sought to disseminate narratives that portray its reaction to the spread of COVID-19 in a positive light.

Determining precisely what effect these adversarial activities have had is difficult. That said, there are clearly conspiracy theories and falsehoods about the origin and nature of the coronavirus circulating online worldwide.

*Question.* Are these tweets part of a purposeful attempt to deliberately mislead the public and spread misinformation?

*Answer.* Yes.

*Question.* Previously, officials have signaled that some coronavirus misinformation on social media may be tied to Russia. But the report doesn't mention Russia's involvement. Is there any evidence to suggest that Russia was somehow involved in the spread of the misinformation this report identifies?

*Answer.* Yes. The GEC has seen both Russian-linked and China-linked accounts spreading COVID-19-themed propaganda and disinformation.

*Question.* Can you describe your methodology in this report—how did you identify what counts as a suspicious account? Why did you think that certain content was part of a disinformation campaign in the first place?

*Answer.* The GEC is careful not to reveal its methodology to adversaries of the United States. The report, which is based on open sources, is unclassified, but we are mindful that nefarious actors can and will use any information we make public to improve their tradecraft. We would be happy to provide your staff with a more detailed briefing in a secure environment.

*Question.* Did you pass along this information to the platforms hosting the misinformation (Facebook, Twitter, etc?) and have they taken any action to curtail the spread of what you've identified as content that is part of a disinformation campaign?

*Answer.* The GEC has shared key elements of the reports highlighted in recent media accounts with the platforms. You will have to ask them about any actions they've taken. We are in touch with the platforms and will continue to share relevant aspects of our unclassified research with them. It is worth noting that the major social media companies have unique access and considerable resources they can bring to bear in order to monitor their own platforms. They should not be relying heavily on data analytics conducted with U.S. taxpayer dollars.

*Question.* Was there a reason why the report was not published or made public? What was the rationale behind not commenting publicly on the findings of the report? Who made the decision not to make the report public?

*Answer.* GEC analytics are primarily intended to inform policymakers and our partners. As a rule, we do not make them public. When we believe the material contained in the reports has particular relevance to the public, we have worked with our colleagues in the Bureau of Global Public Affairs to inform the media. Given the interest in recent reports, however, we are consulting with our colleagues on the advisability of a more public product.

*Question.* There doesn't appear to be any classified information in the report. Why wouldn't this be made public? Can you commit to releasing the report?

*Answer.* See response to the question above.

*Question.* Election Security: While the State Department does not have authority over the homeland, the data and analysis that the GEC collects on Russian techniques and practices could be vital information for the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI and our intelligence agencies. How are you sharing this type of information with the relevant agencies?

*Answer.* We do share this type of information with DHS, the FBI, and other inter-agency partners. My staff also take part in several interagency fora working on a coordinated government approach to securing the U.S. primary and general elections in 2020.

*Question.* The FY2020 NDAA requires that The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, in coordination with several other agencies, develops a strategy for countering Russian cyberattacks against U.S. elections. What role does the GEC have in that group?

*Answer.* The GEC does not have any cyber collection, analysis, or attack capabilities. As such, the GEC is not involved with the group you are referencing.

*Question.* Since the Director Coats departed the post in August of last year, there has not been a confirmed Director to lead the DNI. In the absence of this leadership, has the GEC continued to feed into the specific efforts to counter Russian disinformation and cyberattacks against U.S. elections? Has acting director Grenell enabled these efforts to continue?

*Answer.* Yes, the GEC takes part in several interagency fora working on a coordinated government approach to securing the U.S. primary and general elections in 2020. That work continues under Acting DNI Grenell.

*Question.* To what extent are Chinese and Russian-origin disinformation campaigns in Africa aimed specifically at undermining U.S. influence or interests?

*Answer.* We agree that Russia is expanding its use of disinformation and propaganda on the continent. The GEC is beginning efforts to examine Russian information operations in Africa that undermine U.S. interests and develop countermeasures. At our current funding levels, this will be a very modest effort.

We have seen Beijing's economic and political engagement across Africa increase dramatically over the past decade, supported by China's propaganda apparatus. The PRC is leveraging its full suite of tools to gain support for its bilateral and multilateral priorities, build customers for its technologies and products, and establish permanent influence via strengthened military, political, development and cultural ties.

*Question.* What is the GEC's strategic approach to countering Chinese and Russian disinformation in Africa?

*Answer.* To fulfil its mission to "coordinate" efforts to counter disinformation, we are working with colleagues in the field, the Bureau of African Affairs, and other interagency elements, including USAFRICOM, to prioritize acute risks where the GEC can provide support.

The GEC is in the process of launching a program that networks international China experts with leading local African voices to exchange insights and understanding of Chinese Communist Party influence operations there. The GEC is also supporting a local pilot that will reinforce positive narratives of U.S. economic contributions in a specific country, to limit the space where PRC propaganda can take root.

*Question.* Besides Russia and China, are there other global or regional powers who are investing in disinformation ops on the continent?

Answer. In the wake of ISIS's territorial losses, the National Security Council has designated the GEC as the lead for coordinating and executing a U.S. government communications campaign to prevent ISIS's resurgence.

ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates are operating both in West Africa and on the Horn of Africa, to include spreading propaganda to recruit new followers. The GEC continues executing its original counterterrorism mission by executing counterterrorism programs in Africa.

*Question.* In the context of Russian influence and disinformation operations, on which African countries do you believe Russia is most focused on influencing?

Answer. While we cannot answer this question publicly, we would be happy to provide your staff with a more detailed briefing in a secure environment.

*Question.* How does GEC define Chinese and Russian "influence operations" within the African context? What does it consider to be within the scope of "influence operations"?

Answer. While "influence operations" include a wide variety of activities, the GEC's mandate is to focus specifically on foreign propaganda and disinformation.

*Question.* How is diversity and inclusion reflected in key leadership roles in your organization?

Answer. At the GEC, we draw our staff from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and talents. These staff include language and culture experts, data scientists, intelligence analysts, and people who worked to counter Russian disinformation during the Cold War as officials at the former U.S. Information Agency.

In addition to myself, we have a number of women and minorities who serve in leadership roles at the GEC, including our Chief of Staff, Team Directors, and Senior Advisors.

*Question.* Can you commit to hiring the most diverse workforce made of individuals from the civil and foreign service and detailees from the Department of Defense?

Answer. Absolutely. At the GEC we have a number of hiring mechanisms that provide us more flexibility than traditional State Department offices. One of those mechanisms is receiving interagency detailees at the GEC, including from DoD.

With these authorities we will continue to build up a staff that draws from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and talents so that we can effectively execute our mission. We will continue to keep diversity and inclusion as a key consideration in making hiring decisions.

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THE COMMITTEE RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM MR. DANIEL BLUMENTHAL FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BY SENATOR CORY BOOKER

CHINA

*Question.* Can you describe the difference between Chinese disinformation and Chinese propaganda and how China uses both to undermine U.S. interests?

[No Response Received]

CHINA'S PROPAGANDA MACHINE

In the past year, we have seen China's heavy handed and repressive responses to protests in Hong Kong and criticism regarding their treatment of the Uyghurs.

*Question.* As you have said, China has a sophisticated censorship apparatus to control information inside China, but how do they create alternative narratives about their disgraceful actions outside China?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* How should we push back on their efforts to rewrite the facts?

[No Response Received]

STATE-LED DISINFORMATION VS. TERRORIST GROUPS

When the U.S. first started looking at the disinformation threat after 9/11, we were focused on the threat posed by violent extremist organization and non-state actors. Today, the bulk of the work done by the GEC responds to state actors, like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.



*Question.* Do you see that trend reversing or do you think we will continue to need to respond to threats by state actors?

[No Response Received]

#### FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Both Russia and China try to control the message by buying media organization, paying off journalists, and restricting access to the Chinese markets for unfavorable reporting.

*Question.* What does it mean for the future of freedom of speech, the core principle of democracy, when the media is being manipulated in this way?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* What steps do we need to take either through diplomacy or through USAID to bolster the free media in the areas where China and Russia have vested interests?

[No Response Received]

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#### RESPONSES OF DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CORY BOOKER

##### IS THE U.S. ADEQUATELY SET UP

There is clearly a compelling case for why the United States government should pay attention to the threat posed by Russia's disinformation campaign.

And there has been a proliferation of organizations within our agencies, including DoD, DHS, FBI, our intel agencies, etcetera to deal with the information space.

However, these are all stovepiped organizations and theoretically, the GEC is supposed to be playing a coordinating function.

*Question.* As an outsider, do you believe that this is an effective structure?

*Answer.* The USG needs a whole of government approach to this problem, which includes an empowered interagency coordination function (similar to the NCTC) with a political and operational mandate to carry out and direct policy as it concerns U.S. national security at home and aboard. Currently, the GEC is not able to serve this function because: 1) it has no mandate over the homeland; 2) the head of the GEC is not a high level Congressionally appointed role; 3) there is lack of clarity as to who in USG owns this issue. We need an Undersecretary level position to own this issue and drive policy.

*Question.* Do you believe that the offices we have set up in each of these various agencies is able to effectively deal with the threat of Russian disinformation?

*Answer.* These functions are highly stovepiped. For an outsider perspective, it's very difficult to know who is doing what and how. The USG is not currently set up to effectively deal with the full spectrum of threats presented by disinformation and malign influence more broadly.

##### STATE-LED DISINFORMATION VS. TERRORIST GROUPS

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*Question.* Do you see that trend reversing or do you think we will continue to need to respond to threats by state actors?

*Answer.* State actors, especially China, have far greater resources than non-state actors. While we should not underestimate the threat posed by violent extremism and terrorism, China and Russia pose a far greater threat in terms of their ability to carry out multifaceted information operations against the United States and our allies.

#### FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Both Russia and China try to control the message by buying media organization, paying off journalists, and restricting access to the Chinese markets for unfavorable reporting.

*Question.* What does it mean for the future of freedom of speech, the core principle of democracy, when the media is being manipulated in this way?

*Answer.* Independent media are the frontline of defense and offense against disinformation in democratic societies. In many countries, including among U.S. allies, independent journalists and media organizations are underresourced and underdeveloped. It is these countries that are most vulnerable to the slow creep of Chinese and Russian malign influence in the media domain. Overtime, as such manipulations continue, free speech is effectively stifled and repressed. The threat to democracy is real, but the risk is that we will not notice the full effect until it is too late. For that reason, the United States should continue to support independent media in most vulnerable states.

*Question.* What steps do we need to take either through diplomacy or through USAID to bolster the free media in the areas where China and Russia have vested interests?

*Answer.* USAID should devote significant resources to supporting the operational capacities of independent media in vulnerable states, starting with U.S. allies. Reducing aid of this nature will do long-term damage to democratic resilience, thereby undermining U.S. national security interests and our alliance structure.

