

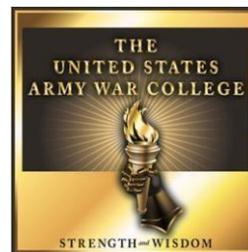
# Strategy Research Project

## Employing Information as an Instrument of National Power

by

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## Employing Information as an Instrument of National Power

(6,839 words)

### Abstract

The information instrument of national power, which has neither a recognized government lead nor a clear strategy for employment, remains the most misunderstood and underutilized element of D-I-M-E (Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economic). However, an examination of the application of information power from the First World War through the Cold War revealed that information has served as a potent instrument of national power. It is most effective when it is directed and supported by the President, guided by strategy that recognizes it as a fundamental component of official policy, coordinated across the whole of government, and implemented across the broadest spectrum of communication. Administrations should first decide whether the application of information power comports with enduring national values, their respective policy and national security objectives. Then, once the decision is made to employ information power, it must be adequately resourced to ensure its application aligns with the four key requirements.

## **Employing Information as an Instrument of National Power**

Many people think 'psychological warfare' means just the use of propaganda like the controversial Voice of America. Certainly the use of propaganda, of the written and spoken word, of every means to transmit ideas, is an essential part of winning other people to your side. But propaganda is not the most important part of this struggle. The present Administration has never yet been able to grasp the full import of a psychological effort put forth on a national scale.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower<sup>1</sup>

It is notable that President Eisenhower's criticism of the Truman administration's failure to fully realize the power of information to support national security remains surprisingly applicable today. Our adversaries are more numerous, and now include state and non-state actors who, like the Nazis and Soviets before them, hold no punches when it comes to manipulating information to accomplish their objectives. Meanwhile, the stated instruments of national power that the government relies on to combat threats and exert influence in pursuit of policy objectives remain unchanged. Commonly referred to as "D-I-M-E," diplomacy, information, the military, and economics enable the U.S.'s access and freedom of action around the world. Arguably, the diplomatic, military, and economic components of D-I-M-E are its most recognizable. Each of these elements falls under the purview of a distinct government agency or department, and the government frequently relies on diplomacy, the military, and economic strength to assert its influence. Conversely, the vital information instrument of national power, which has neither a recognized government lead nor a clear strategy for employment, remains the most misunderstood and underutilized element of D-I-M-E. In his 2001 editorial to the Washington Post entitled, "Get the Message Out," the late diplomat, Richard Holbrooke, revealed some of the controversy that exists regarding information power when he advocated for its use through, "public diplomacy, or public

affairs, or psychological warfare, or--if you really want to be blunt--propaganda.”<sup>2</sup> The information instrument has certainly suffered from vilification as propaganda, often making it a tool of last resort. However, in the information age, with countless adversaries using propaganda to manipulate American citizens and allies and to frustrate the government’s freedom of action and access, it is well past time to effectively employ information as a true instrument of national power.

In this light, the primary aim of this paper is to offer suggestions that may be useful in guiding the effective employment of information across the whole of government in support of policy objectives and national security. First, the paper examines the historic application of information power by the government, up through the dissolution of the United States Information Agency in 1999. This historic examination will illuminate trends associated with the successful employment of information power when it is directed and supported by the President, nested within policy, coordinated across the whole of government, and implemented across the broadest spectrum of communication. Next, the paper will highlight shortfalls in the application of information power since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Finally, pursuant to its purpose, the research collected, and subsequent analysis, the paper offers suggestions that may be useful in guiding the effective employment of information, across the whole of government in support of policy objectives and national security.

### Defining Information as an Instrument of National Power

As the quotation from Richard Holbrooke suggests, information as an instrument of power can elicit differing notions and perceptions. Therefore it is necessary to define information power as it is used in the context of this paper. Hereafter, information power means the deliberate communication of specific information, on behalf of the

government, to achieve a psychological effect that will influence behaviors, beliefs, and opinions in directions that support national policy and security. Communication should be accomplished through whatever method or medium will best sway the intended audience, which may range from a single world leader to an entire population, either foreign or domestic. Commonly, information power has been employed through strategic communications, public diplomacy, public affairs, information operations, psychological operations, propaganda, military deception, global engagement, and even public relations. Additionally, with the rapid expansion of social media and the ever-evolving means forms of human communication, information content may be transmitted through a variety of media. Examples include, but are not limited to, audio, visual, or audio/visual content conveyed as a text message, a public statement, a radio broadcast, or even simply a one-on-one conversation. Finally, it is important to note that information power spans a broad spectrum of communication that ranges from truthful information attributed to the United States on one end, to deceptive information on the opposite end. Given the information-saturated environment that exists today, the most defining characteristic of information power is awareness. It requires a conscientious decision to deliberately communicate, or withhold, specific information to a purposefully selected audience for a desired psychological effect.

#### America's Historical Employment of Information Power

While defining information power remains a topic of debate, identifying examples of its employment throughout American history seems simple by comparison. American history is rife with illustrations of the government's use of the information element of national power, frequently prior to and during times of conflict. In a fact sheet on propaganda produced for the American Security Project, Christian Mull and Matthew

Wallin identified Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" pamphlet, which advocated for independence from Britain, as one of the earliest examples of American propaganda designed to influence a domestic audience.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, in the book *War, Media, and Propaganda: A Global Perspective*, R. S. Zaharna noted uses of propaganda by Benjamin Franklin, who disseminated information pamphlets to encourage French support for American independence, and likewise by Thomas Jefferson who countered British criticism of U.S. actions during the War of 1812 both at home and abroad.<sup>4</sup> However, the U.S.'s uses of domestic propaganda and foreign propaganda during both World Wars and the Cold War garnered the most notoriety, and provide the clearest examples of effective application of information power in support of national security.

### World War I

At the commencement of America's participation in World War I in 1917, President Wilson directed the establishment of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to mobilize the American public behind the war effort, counter German propaganda, fracture Germany's alliance with Austria-Hungary, and degrade the morale of German soldiers.<sup>5</sup> He authorized and supported the employment of information power to bolster his foreign and domestic policy objectives, and the CPI developed and implemented the information strategy during World War I. The CPI was also referred to as the "Creel Committee" after its director, George Creel, an investigative journalist. Creel viewed his committee less as a government agency, and more as a "publicity proposition...a vast enterprise in salesmanship...the world's greatest adventure in advertising."<sup>6</sup>

The CPI had two sections, Domestic and Foreign, and each conducted activities that spanned the communications spectrum from truthful information clearly attributed to

the government, to deceptive information that was unattributed or even misattributed. CPI focused its activities on supporting the overarching strategy of promoting the ideal of American democracy.<sup>7</sup> Domestically, the United States was in a period of transition with mass migration of people from the frontier to cities, and a significant influx of immigrants from around the world.<sup>8</sup> To unify the nation, CPI promulgated the concept that Germany's autocratic regime was incompatible with, and actually threatened, the American way of life.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, they recruited volunteers from across the United States to support the war effort. The CPI successfully mobilized the American public around issues ranging from the draft and bond drives to victory gardens.<sup>10</sup> On the opposite end of the spectrum, CPI used misinformation to inspire domestic loathing for the Central Powers. For example, CPI famously promulgated a false news report of "German corpse conversion factories," where the German regime was rumored to make soap out of human remains.<sup>11</sup>

Overseas, CPI supported ongoing British and French propaganda efforts to splinter the Central Powers. Many of their efforts focused on fracturing Germany's alliance with Austria-Hungary, which they largely accomplished through the dissemination of surrender appeals via leaflets and newspapers. By the end of 1918, the high number of desertions suggested the allies' propaganda efforts had succeeded. In one case, 350 deserters surrendered holding upward of eight hundred pieces of allied propaganda.<sup>12</sup> While the CPI clearly led the United States' propaganda efforts, President Wilson's role deserves recognition. Historians have referred to his Fourteen Points speech, which strongly advocated for self-determination of minority populations,

as vital to fracturing the Central Powers' alliance. It was subsequently called "the most significant propaganda speech of the war."<sup>13</sup>

The United States' information activities during World War I clearly demonstrated the value of information power in supporting national security. President Wilson believed the Central Powers posed an existential threat to the United States, so he established the CPI to employ the nation's information power. The CPI ensured the government's information strategy supported the Wilson Administration's policy. They coordinated and synchronized all information activities, across the government, and with the Allies, to support national security. While information power alone did not win the war, it helped unify the nation, advanced U.S. foreign policy, degraded the will of the enemy, and ultimately established conditions favorable to an Allied victory. Although its value during wartime had been proven, President Wilson quickly ended CPI's domestic activities within days of the signing of the armistice, and terminated all CPI foreign activities within a few months of the end of World War I.<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that while Americans expressed disillusionment about CPI's more deceptive activities after the war, they also recognized the powerful role propaganda could play in supporting national security.<sup>15</sup>

### World War II

This glimmer of disillusionment quickly faded with recognition of the increasing threat from Nazi Germany before World War II. The administration once again recognized the need to counter enemy propaganda and promote U.S. interests. Consequently, President Roosevelt created a foreign intelligence and propaganda agency, which later formally became the Office of War Information (OWI).<sup>16</sup> Like its World War I predecessor, OWI conducted both domestic and foreign information activities; however, unlike CPI, OWI's activities were relegated to primarily truthful

propaganda attributed to the U.S. or other allies.<sup>17</sup> The OWI's foreign broadcasting was conducted through the newly established Voice of America (VoA) and the United States Information Service (USIS), and their activities aimed at the Axis forces were conducted by the Psychological Warfare Division.<sup>18</sup> President Roosevelt established a separate office, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), to conduct information activities that utilized deception and misattributed propaganda.<sup>19</sup> However, President Roosevelt firmly delineated between the opposite ends of the communication spectrum by designating separate offices to handle each. In his book, *Cool Words, Cold War*, Leo Bogart attributed today's deep-seated division between informing and influencing activities to the bifurcation of missions established between the OWI and OSS.

Like President Wilson before him, President Roosevelt valued information power's contribution to national security, and adeptly employed it through his famous fireside chats, which reassured the American public and substantiated his policy decisions.<sup>20</sup> The domestic front of the information effort also saw an unprecedented partnership develop between the government and Hollywood. President Roosevelt believed, "The motion picture industry could be the most powerful instrument of propaganda in the world," and thus the Bureau of Motion Pictures became an instrumental ally in support of the war effort.<sup>21</sup> OWI provided the Bureau five distinct themes to guide their productions: explain why the U.S. was at war, promote the United Nations, encourage support for wartime production, enhance home front morale, and portray the heroic actions of servicemen engaged in the war.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the War Department spent over \$50 million per year on movie productions, which included

famous films like, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, *The Battle of Midway*, *Corregidor*, *Destination Tokyo*, and *Objective Burma!*<sup>23</sup>

Since American films had influence on both overseas and domestic audiences, OWI focused specific information activities on foreign audiences. A special OWI committee based in London ensured military propaganda efforts corresponded with their civilian propaganda efforts. Additionally, they promoted a “Strategy of Truth” to clearly distinguish their efforts from the Nazi and Japanese propaganda of the period.<sup>24</sup> OWI extensively used leaflets, newspaper, and radio broadcasts throughout both the European and Pacific theaters to influence the enemy. The “Flying Fortresses” was a unique squadron that solely specialized in leaflet drops. At its height of activity, the squadron dropped over seven million leaflets per week throughout the occupied areas of Europe.<sup>25</sup>

The volume of information activities conducted during World War II demonstrated the evolution of information power on a grand scale across the whole of government, with multiple offices making their own contributions to the effort. Like information power’s application during World War I, it had President Roosevelt’s support and direction, and it was nested within his foreign and domestic policy. Additionally, OWI and OSS were established and empowered to develop and guide the employment of information power to ensure it maximized the entire communication spectrum in support of national security objectives. This precedent set during World War II eventually informed the development of distinct influence capabilities, which are now resident within the Department of State (DoS), Department of Defense (DoD), the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), and the Central Intelligence Agency. Immediately after the

war, the pattern of abruptly dismantling the war-time propaganda arms of the government ensued, and President Truman terminated the OWI on September 15, 1945.<sup>26</sup>

### The Cold War Period

Unlike before, the administration decided to retain vestiges of its information capability. The VoA and USIS were maintained and transferred to the State Department's Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs.<sup>27</sup> During this period, historians acknowledge a deliberate move away from the term propaganda, favoring public diplomacy as an alternative term.<sup>28</sup> The tension became evident between the need to apply information power and a growing perception of propaganda's incompatibility with the ideals of a democracy.<sup>29</sup> To distance itself from its war-time propaganda activities while still maintaining its ability to, "promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations," the administration passed the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948.<sup>30</sup> Also known as the Smith-Mundt Act, it allowed the government to disseminate information abroad, not domestically, and established a foreign exchange program in the fields of education, the arts, and science.<sup>31</sup> On April 20, 1950, just two weeks after President Truman was briefed on a National Security Council (NSC) white paper that promoted a containment policy toward the Soviet Union (NSC-68), he announced his "Campaign on Truth."<sup>32</sup> His words that day expressed the prevailing disdain for propaganda and the government's continued movement towards a greater reliance on truthful information, presented through credible sources, to counter adversaries' competing narratives:

The cause of freedom is being challenged throughout the world by the forces of imperialistic communism. This is a struggle, above all else, for the minds of man. Propaganda is one of the most powerful weapons the communists have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion, and lies are systematically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy. This propaganda can be overcome by truth—plain, simple, unvarnished truth—presented by newspapers, radio, and other sources that the people trust.<sup>33</sup>

Despite President Truman's advocacy of information power, his actions to counter Soviet propaganda fell short of incoming President Eisenhower's expectations. Consequently, within six days of his inauguration President Eisenhower announced, "It has long been my conviction that a unified and dynamic effort in this field is essential to the security of the United States and of the peoples in the community of free nations."<sup>34</sup> With his pronouncement, he convened the President's Committee on International Information Activities to improve the government's existing information-related programs.<sup>35</sup> Also known as the "Jackson Committee" after its two leading members, William H. Jackson, a prominent New York businessman, and C. D. Jackson, an executive at *Time-Life*, the committee published its findings within six months. It found that that government's existing information programs suffered from a, "Lack of coordination and planning in the past has resulted in the haphazard projection of too many and too diffuse information themes. No single set of ideas has been registered abroad through effective repetition."<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, President Eisenhower's 1953 Reorganization Plan and Executive Order 10477 established the United States Information Agency (USIA) to, "understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in promotion of the U.S. national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between Americans and U.S. institutions and their counterparts abroad."<sup>37</sup> Besides the establishment of the USIA to consolidate all foreign information activities under one government agency, the order also established the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) within the National

Security Council to coordinate the formulation of information strategies to support all national security policies across the interagency environment.<sup>38</sup> Empowered by the President, coordinated by a single government agency (USIA), and directed through the OCB, the strategy for applying information power became a fundamental characteristic of the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy and national security efforts.

Like President Eisenhower, President Reagan was a proponent of information power during the Cold War. President Reagan employed information strategy throughout his administration's foreign policy. Referencing his National Security Strategies, which were the first ever published, he described the United States' "Political and Informational Elements of National Power," and defined his informational strategy as one focused on inspiring "Freedom, peace and prosperity...that's what America is all about...for ourselves, our friends, and those people across the globe struggling for democracy."<sup>39</sup> To further amplify and enable his information strategy, he approved three instrumental *National Security Decision Directives* (NSDDs) during his first term.

The NSDD-45, *United States International Broadcasting*, prioritized the improvement of programming content and quality to ensure international broadcasts supported U.S. foreign and national security policy.<sup>40</sup> He also directed the modernization and expansion of VoA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to overcome jamming of broadcasts by the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> He specified that the budget for all improvement efforts be considered vital to national security.<sup>42</sup>

The NSDD-77, *Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security*, established the government's interagency structure for employing information power. In it, President Reagan designated the Special Planning Group (SPG) within the National

Security Council, much like President Eisenhower's OCB.<sup>43</sup> The SPG planned, coordinated and monitored the implementation of information activities throughout the government through four subordinate committees: the Public Affairs Committee, the International Information Committee, the International Political Committee, and the International Broadcasting Committee.<sup>44</sup> With NSDD-77, President Reagan strengthened the government's ability to implement effective information activities in a synchronized and mutually supportive manner, across the government to realize his national security objectives.

Lastly, NSDD-130, *U.S. International Information Policy*, further validated President Reagan's consideration that international information strategy was "an integral and vital part of U.S. national security policy."<sup>45</sup> The NSDD-130 assessed the progress his administration made since the publication of NSDD-45 and provided additional guidance on the conduct of information activities across all of the instruments of national power both in peace and war.<sup>46</sup> It specifically directed renewed investment in the Army's Psychological Operations (PSYOP) forces and it established authority for the Overt Peacetime PSYOP Program, which was designed to keep the Army's PSYOP capability trained, ready and integrated into the overall government information framework guided by the USIA.<sup>47</sup>

From its establishment in 1953 through its termination under the Foreign Affairs Agencies Consolidation Act of 1998, the USIA directed the employment of America's information element of national power. Other than the Korean and Vietnam wars, each of which had its own associated propaganda campaigns, the USIA's efforts during the Cold War represent the period of greatest harmony between U.S. foreign policy and the

government's employment of the information element of national power.<sup>48</sup> However, this time period also saw an increased partiality for public diplomacy terminology as opposed to propaganda, which coincided with legislation substantiating the government's clear preference for the prohibition on domestic dissemination of any USIA materials.<sup>49</sup> It is not surprising that shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and fall of the Soviet Union the government moved to dismantle its Cold War influence capabilities. In a speech to the American Security Project on September 16, 2014, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Richard Stengel recalled this time period, stating that people mistakenly believed "...that, basically the ideological battle had been won. Everybody would henceforth be living in democratic, capitalistic systems and there was no ideological tug anymore."<sup>50</sup> In keeping with the trend set after the end of both World Wars, and looking to gain economic efficiencies, President Clinton terminated the USIA in 1999. The administration established the BBG as an independent agency to oversee VoA and all foreign broadcasting and consolidated the rest of USIA's functions within the State Department.<sup>51</sup> The U.S. entered the new century opposed to the idea of propaganda, resistant to employing influence domestically, and with a bureaucracy to manage information power that was more diffuse than the 1953 establishment President Eisenhower inherited.<sup>52</sup>

#### Modern Attempts to Employ Information Power

In 1953, the Jackson Committee recognized that impediments to effectively employing information power often resulted from the, "misconception that 'psychological activities' and 'psychological strategy' somehow exist apart from official policies and actions and can be dealt with independently by experts in this field. In reality, there is a psychological aspect or implication to every diplomatic, economic, or military policy and

action."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the failure to appreciate the psychological impact of every word or deed stems from the U.S.'s general ambivalence toward propaganda. Or, it could also originate from the notion of American exceptionalism and the subsequent arrogant belief that the United States doesn't need to engender worldwide support because the American dream is enough. Regardless, the very real decline in world opinion towards the United States by the late 2000s forced policy makers to recognize the deleterious effect a negative worldview could have on American power.<sup>54</sup> In a 2013 interview with Michael Hirsch of *The Atlantic*, Samatha Power, then nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, espoused this concern admitting that, "Now we're neither the shining example, nor even competent meddlers. It's going to take a generation or so to reclaim American exceptionalism."<sup>55</sup> Since September 11, 2001, the growing acknowledgement of the need to promote American ideals and inspire support for United States foreign policy, coupled with the complex nature of the modern information environment and its exploitation by adversaries of the United States, have prompted countless administrative initiatives to wield information power more effectively. Regrettably, as numerous government, think tank, and academic studies published over the past decade have evidenced the United States government has repeatedly failed.<sup>56</sup> Explanations for the government's failure vary. However, as the historical record has illuminated, for information to serve as an effective instrument of power, four key elements are required:

- It must be directed and supported by the President
- It must be guided by strategy that recognizes it as a fundamental component of all official policy
- It must be coordinated across the whole of government

- It must utilize the broadest spectrum of communication.

This paper will assess the government's recent application of information power according to these four requirements.

### Presidential Direction and Support

Presidents have played a key role in developing and implementing information strategies that directly supported their official policies and national security. Most notably, Presidents Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and Reagan played prominent roles in their administrations' effective employment of information power. They were all effective communicators in their own right and ensured their personal communications supported their overall information strategies. Additionally, they established policies and government structures that enabled their administrations to effectively employ information in a synchronized manner across the government.

More recently, the National Security Strategies illustrate the importance of information power. The twelve National Security Strategies published between 1990 and 2006 feature information as an element of power, used to counter misinformation and promote American interests through public diplomacy, information operations, and global engagement.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in President Obama's 2010 National Security Strategy, strategic communications featured prominently as a tool of American power. However, in his 2015 National Security Strategy he did not mention information as an element of power. A word search of the 2015 National Security Strategy reveals the absence of the terms public diplomacy, 'strategic communication, engagement, and information, in reference to information's use as an instrument of national power. A more thorough reading of the entire strategy suggests that the administration had no plan to utilize information power to promote official policy or support national security. Not surprisingly,

given an apparent lack of presidential direction and support for information power, various government, academic, and policy think tanks have criticized the Obama Administration's failure to effectively employ information power.<sup>58</sup> In a report published by the Center for a New American Security, researchers Kristin Lord and Marc Lynch found that the Obama administration over-promised and under-delivered on major policy speeches, neglected to establish a coherent and feasible strategic public engagement strategy, failed to organize a whole of government approach to strategic public engagement, and relied too heavily on President Obama's personal popularity.<sup>59</sup> They sum up their assessment of the Obama administration's efforts by identifying that, "Presidential public diplomacy must be part of a concerted, full-spectrum engagement strategy in coordination with both the communications efforts and the policy instruments of the relevant agencies and bureaus."<sup>60</sup> History has demonstrated that presidential support and direction for the application of information power is vital for its effective use in ensuring national security. Without clear support from the president, information power's utility in promoting official policy and supporting national security is diminished.

### Strategy and Policy Alignment

Previous successful examples of the effective employment of information power have demonstrated that it must be conducted as part of a comprehensive strategy within a framework of official policy. Despite this obvious necessity, the government went almost ten years following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> without a comprehensive strategy for employing information power. Following a series of government, think-tank, and academic studies published in 2009 that critiqued the administration's ineffective strategic communications and public diplomacy efforts, Congress intervened.<sup>61</sup> Section 1055 of the Duncan Hunter *National Defense Authorization Act* for fiscal year 2009

directed the administration to publish an interagency strategy for applying information power. Thus, President Obama published his first strategy for the application of information power in March 2010, entitled the *National Framework for Strategic Communication*.<sup>62</sup> The strategy acknowledged the importance of strategic communications, recognized shortfalls in its existing efforts, and explained new interagency structures and processes to synchronize efforts to apply information power government-wide. The strategy, however, primarily focused on engagement with Muslim audiences, detracting from information power's broader support of all foreign policy. Consequently, the administration's announcement of its pivot to Asia, was quickly met with widespread criticism of the term pivot, which tarnished what Kenneth Lieberthal of the Brookings Institution referred to as, "Its biggest strategic framework statement in its first term in office."<sup>63</sup> Failing to develop an information strategy to support its Asian foreign policy shift resulted in several unintended consequences. First, it set unreasonably high expectations among Asian allies, which have gone largely unfulfilled due to fiscal constraints and the emergence of competing challenges in Ukraine and Syria.<sup>64</sup> Second, it eroded trust between the administration and its European and Middle Eastern allies who interpreted the pivot to mean the United States may turn its back on them.<sup>65</sup> Finally, the Chinese viewed it as a move to check their growing strength in the region, which countered the strategy's purpose to foster a constructive partnership with the Chinese.<sup>66</sup>

Since the administration's first published National Framework for Strategic Communication, it has published one update and reorganized several times within the NSC, DoS and DoD, yet its focus has predominantly remained on Muslim outreach, and

it has continued to draw criticism for its ineffective information strategy. As recently as January 2016, the White House announced another internal bureaucratic reorganization to establish a new Global Engagement Center. However, Greg Miller and Karen DeYoung of *The Washington Post* downplayed the effort as yet another, “Shuffling the deck chairs rather than introducing new, proven strategies.”<sup>67</sup> As with Presidential support, for information power to support national security, it must be guided by comprehensive strategy that recognizes the psychological impact of every word or deed, and thus establishes an information component for every official policy.

#### Whole-of-Government Coordination

Similarly vital to the effective application of information power is coordination of information activities across the whole of government. Now, however, there are fifty-two different departments, agencies or centers within the United States government that contribute to official public diplomacy efforts.<sup>68</sup> Given the lack of presidential support and direction for information power, and the absence of comprehensive information strategy, it is understandable that coordination of information activities among the disparate government departments and agencies is a struggle.

The administration’s 2012 update to Congress on the National Framework for Strategic Communications affirmed that the White House, DoS, DoD, BBG, U.S. Agency for International Development, the intelligence community, and the National Counterterrorism Center, all play leading roles in strategic communications.<sup>69</sup> The 2012 update further explains that the administration relies on “the National Security Council, Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, as well as Interagency Policy Committees,” and goes on to add, “Working groups on strategic communications issues in critical geographies, including interagency messaging meetings,” as various venues for

interagency planning and coordination of strategic communications.<sup>70</sup> Essentially, the administration seems to use every possible interagency coordination venue in existence to synchronize information power, rather than developing and implementing a distinct process specific to coordination of information power across the interagency.

Congress has demonstrated its frustration with the disparate information activities conducted by the DoD, DoS and BBG, as evidenced by various legislative proposals it has recently initiated to challenge the existing government structure, authorities and activities. For example, in 2009, the 2010 Defense Appropriations Bill included House Appropriations Committee concerns regarding DoD's PSYOP activities in support of DoS' public diplomacy.<sup>71</sup> Subsequently, Congress withheld DoD's PSYOP budget until the Defense Department reported on its support of public diplomacy. Similarly Congress amended the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, now known as the Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012.<sup>72</sup> Largely seen as supporting freedom of speech and government transparency, the act removed the prohibition on domestic VoA broadcasting, however the BBG and DoS remain restricted from conducting domestic public diplomacy.<sup>73</sup> More recently, the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed the bipartisan, United States International Communications Reform Act of 2015 (H.R. 2323), which proposes to clearly delineate different government information missions while enabling better coordination and planning through the establishment of a new United States International Communications Agency (USICA).<sup>74</sup> Upon its passage, Ranking Member Elliot Engel (D-NY) stated,

Today, America's rivals spend massive sums to spread violent messages and disseminate propaganda. Unfortunately, our ability to respond has fallen behind the techniques employed by Russia, ISIS, and others. This bill creates a new management structure to oversee our international

broadcasting efforts, streamlines our broadcasting organizations, and modernizes our tools for getting our message out.<sup>75</sup>

### Spectrum of Communication

Representative Engel alluded to the propaganda threat facing the United States by state and non-state actors. The reality is that anyone using the Internet or social media is routinely exposed to misinformation and propaganda from advertisers, cyber criminals, violent extremists, and even other governments. History has demonstrated that information power is most effective when it is employed in a synchronized manner using the broadest spectrum of communication, and when it is applied both overseas and domestically.

Since Truman's "Campaign of Truth," the government has sought to clearly distinguish itself from other regimes that employ the full spectrum of communication, ranging from basic public information to blatant deception. In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on "Confronting Russia's Weaponization of Information," Peter Pomeranzev, a Senior Fellow at the Legatum Institute, explained that Russia is conducting a "war on information" as opposed to an "information war," which seeks to obscure the truth and generate so much uncertainty that the public's trust in media erodes.<sup>76</sup> Mr. Pomeranzev noted that the Kremlin is exploiting the information environment globally in English, Arabic and various European languages, through *Russia Today* (RT), Sputnik (which is both a radio station and news website), and internet "troll farms" that are active on social media, news websites, and anywhere else public debate is conducted on the internet.<sup>77</sup> In the same hearing, Elizabeth Wahl, a former anchor for RT revealed that the Kremlin exploits the openness of debate that democracies foster by capitalizing on the "trend of thinking it is hip to believe in any anti-

establishment alternative thinking.”<sup>78</sup> Russia routinely promotes, “Several alternative realities--anything to deflect from the facts and confuse the public.”<sup>79</sup> Even more alarming was the testimony by Helle Dale, a Senior Fellow for Public Diplomacy at the Heritage Foundation. She confirmed that in 2014 the Kremlin shut down all VoA broadcasts into Russia, but the United States has, “Allowed Russian media to flourish within our own borders in the name of freedom of expression.”<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has also exploited the information environment for propaganda purposes on an unprecedented scale. MG Michael Nagata, then commander of Special Operations Command Central Command, described ISIL’s most concerning strength as, “Its ability to persuade, its ability to inspire, its ability to attract young men and women from across the globe, and its ability to create an image of unstoppable power and spiritual passion and commitment.”<sup>81</sup> The ISIL’s media center, al-Hayat, manipulates long-standing anti-Western grievances, coupled with battlefield footage, to create sophisticated content that it pushes through its English language magazine, *Dabiq*, and other social media platform and Internet source available.<sup>82</sup> Like Russia, ISIL uses fanboys, its Russian troll farm equivalent, to disseminate its content and engage in social media debate and online platforms, globally, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In response, the administration has attempted to counter adversarial Internet and social media propaganda through DoD’s Information Operations (IO) capabilities, BBG’s VoA, and the State Department’s Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication and Bureau of International Information Programs.<sup>83</sup> However, a recent Congressional Research Service report found that the methods were largely ineffective because of

competing agendas among the relevant departments and agencies.<sup>84</sup> Also, isolation of the activities from each other and from the overarching strategies being executed within the respective departments, agencies, and administration, contributed to the problem. Essentially, the government's attempts have suffered from a lack of presidential direction and support, a lack of a comprehensive strategy that places information in the context of official policy, and the general inability to coordinate the efforts to achieve a synchronized effect. Within DoD alone, a firewall exists between its Public Affairs (PA) and IO capabilities that has resulted in a failure to capitalize on the effectiveness that could be achieved from a synchronized effort to saturate the media environment with mutually supporting information and themes.<sup>85</sup>

The firewall between PA and IO exists because news reporting must be objective and not be tainted by any association with IO. Moreover the BBG and VoA must remain independent from political influence. As a result, Congress has criticized BBG and VoA for using government resources to promote anti-American rhetoric.<sup>86</sup> In her testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Helle Dale revealed how she had been invited to participate in a 2012 VoA foreign policy debate but was prohibited from discussing the upcoming Russian presidential election because the Kremlin had threatened to cancel its partnership with the BBG if the Russian election was covered. She captured the hypocrisy of the situation in her statement, "The management at VoA, the producers, followed orders from Moscow and it should be mentioned that this is the same management that often fiercely resists any editorial influence from the U.S. Government itself."<sup>87</sup>

Finally, despite adversaries' rampant exploitation of the domestic media environment to manipulate and propagandize to the American public, legal prohibitions remain preventing the government from actively countering propaganda domestically.<sup>88</sup> However, the administration's January 8, 2016 announcement of a new State Department Global Engagement Center (GEC) and the Department of Homeland Security's new Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Task Force may indicate a shift in the domestic communication prohibition stance.<sup>89</sup> With its Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012, Congress recognized the importance of the American public's access to the administration's worldwide foreign policy broadcasts. It stands to reason that the government has an equally important responsibility to expose adversary propaganda and inform the American public of malicious content being propagated within the United States. Further, the government should exercise its inherent right to counter misinformation by applying information power as a fundamental component of its official policy, across the government, with every tool in its arsenal, to ensure foreign and domestic audiences have equal access to the truth, as our government understands it.

### Recommendations

Given the above research and analysis on the historic and contemporary application of information power, this paper offers the following recommendations.

As one of the four instruments of national power in the D-I-M-E construct, information's historic application has proven effective, but occasionally controversial. Debate has existed since the period following the First World War, about whether information power truly comports with the nation's democratic values. The Obama Administration's failure to mention information as an instrument of national power in its latest National Security Strategy may be interpreted as its decision that information

power does not align with its values. However, its recent announcement of the State Department's new GEC and Homeland Security's new CVE Task Force seem to indicate the Administration's desire to more effectively employ information power. This conflicted approach to the application of information power has proven ineffective and has consequently wasted limited government resources. For its effective employment, information power requires a conscientious decision to deliberately communicate, or withhold, specific information to a purposefully selected audience for a desired psychological effect. Therefore, it is recommended that the current (and all subsequent) administrations formally assess, and decide for themselves, whether the application of information power is in line with enduring national values and their own respective policy and national security objectives.

If an administration decides to employ information as an instrument of national power, then it should commit adequate resources to ensure information power's application aligns with the four key elements:

- It must be directed and supported by the President,
- It must be guided by strategy that recognizes it as a fundamental component of all official policy,
- It must be coordinated across the whole of government, and
- It must utilize the broadest spectrum of communication.

As the primary strategic communicator for the nation, the president must establish the policy that provides necessary embedding and reinforcing mechanisms to guide information power's application. Additionally, presidential engagements and communications efforts are integral parts of the government information strategy, and thus must be orchestrated to reinforce national security policy. Subsequently, with

presidential direction and support for the application of information power, information strategy may be developed as a fundamental component of all official policy. Given the ability for information to propagate worldwide almost instantaneously, the risk for various audiences to misinterpret information is probable. However, through a comprehensive strategy formulation approach, the risk can be mitigated through calculated choices to ensure information power is applied clearly and consistently in support of national security. To facilitate information strategy development and consistent application across the whole of government, the president should direct the establishment of an appropriately empowered advisor and staff within the National Security Council. The staff must be able to direct application of information power, in line with published information strategy, across all agencies and departments to ensure it aligns with and supports national security objectives. Finally, the full spectrum of communication must be employed, domestically and overseas. This will require elimination of the current public dissemination prohibitions, but is necessary to counter misinformation and ensure foreign and domestic audiences have equal access to the truth as the administration understands it.

### Conclusion

History has demonstrated that information has been an effective instrument of national power when it is directed and supported by the president, guided by strategy that recognizes it as a fundamental component of all official policy, coordinated across the, and implemented across the broadest spectrum of communication. However, modern application of information power has suffered as a result of the government's failure to apply it in accordance with the four requirements. Therefore, it is recommended that the Administration should first make a conscientious decision as to

whether the application of information power is in line with enduring national values and its own respective policy and national security objectives. Once an administration decides to employ information as an instrument of national power, it should commit adequate resources to ensure information power's application aligns with the four key requirements. In his remarks before the American Security Project, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Richard Stengel expressed his belief that the modern information era makes information power more relevant than ever before.<sup>90</sup> He explained that modern communications technology allows our government to engage in a conversation with audiences and in that conversation, the administration should seek to, "Tell people what our policies are, to explain why we have come up with these policies, and then engage in a conversation."<sup>91</sup> Facing adversaries like Russia and ISIL, who adeptly manipulate and publish misinformation to suit their agendas, it appears that Secretary Stengel is right. Our government should exploit the advantages provided by the modern information era to apply information power as a fundamental component of official policy, across the whole of government, with every tool in its arsenal, to ensure foreign and domestic audiences have equal access to the truth, as the government understands it, in the interest of national security.

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