

STATEMENT OF
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON CYBERSECURITY

Introduction

Chairman Rounds, Ranking Member Nelson, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address you today as a private citizen and in an individual capacity on the topic of *Information Operations*. I trust my experience as a career special operations officer, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, and Special Envoy and Coordinator for the Global Engagement Center at the Department of State will be helpful in providing perspective on the current status of the U.S. government's strategy, capabilities, and direction in information warfare and counter-propaganda. The previous Administration and the 114th Congress demonstrated a clear commitment to this issue, as evidenced by the President Obama's Executive Order 13721 which established the Global Engagement Center (GEC) and the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that expanded the Center's mission. The 2017 NDAA expanded the GEC's mandate to include counter-state propaganda and disinformation efforts, well beyond its original charter which limited it to diminishing the influence of terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the information domain. This is a big step in the right direction, but the sobering fact is that we are still far from where we ultimately need to be to successfully operate in the modern information environment.

That said, I am very pleased to be joined here today by former Deputy Director of the National Security Agency John Inglis, Dr. Rand Waltzman from the RAND Corporation, and Mr. Clint

Watts from the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Collectively, I believe we are postured to address your questions on the issue at hand.

The Current Situation

Since the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which arguably was the last period in history when the US successfully engaged in sustained information warfare and counter-state propaganda efforts, technology and how the world communicates has changed dramatically.

We now live in a hyper-connected world where the flow of information moves in real time. The lines of authority and effort between Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, and Information Warfare have blurred to the point where in many cases information is consumed by US and foreign audiences at the same time via the same methods. To illustrate this fact, as this Committee is aware, it was a 33-year-old IT consultant in Abbottabad, Pakistan that first reported the US military raid against Osama bin Laden in May of 2011 on Twitter. This happened as events were still unfolding on the ground and hours before the American people were officially notified by the President of the United States' address.

While the means and methods of communication have transformed significantly over the past decade, much of the US government thinking on shaping and responding in the information environment has remained unchanged, to include how we manage US government information dissemination and how we respond to the information of our adversaries. We are hamstrung for a myriad of reasons to include: lack of accountability and oversight, bureaucracy resulting in

insufficient levels of resourcing and inability to absorb cutting-edge information and analytic tools, and access to highly skilled personnel.

Lack of Accountability and Oversight

To date, there is not a single individual in the US government below the President of the United States who is responsible and capable of managing US information dissemination and how we address our adversaries in the information environment. The 2017 NDAA mandated that GEC lead, organize, and synchronize U.S. government counter-propaganda and disinformation efforts against State and non-State actors abroad, but it fell short in elevating it to a position where it could fully execute its mission. The GEC operates at the Assistant Secretary level and lacks the authority to direct the Interagency. In practice, this means that the GEC is considered at best a peer to a half dozen regional or functional bureaus at the State Department and several disparate organizations at the Department of Defense, to say nothing of the other departments and agencies that have a stake in this fight. Furthermore, although the GEC is directed by law with the mission to lead the Interagency, its role is reduced to simply a “suggesting” function. It is then up to the respective agency whether to comply. This misalignment of responsibility, authority, and accountability will without doubt continue to hamper the efforts of the GEC until it is ultimately corrected by statute.

Before his departure as the Director of National Intelligence, Jim Clapper told this Congress that the United States needs to resurrect the old US Information Agency (USIA) and put it on

steroids. While I agree with DNI Clapper that we need to increase our focus and management of the information environment, I do not believe that resurrecting the USIA in its previous form will allow the US government to be relevant in the ever-changing information landscape. While the USIA had many positives, there were also many challenges which ultimately resulted in its disestablishment. That said, DNI Clapper was figuratively closer to a solution than even he may have thought. Elevating the GEC and its role of leading, coordinating, and synchronizing US government efforts to something similar to what the Office of the Director of National Intelligence does with intelligence would bring alignment between responsibility, authority, and accountability while minimizing significant bureaucratic tension and cost.

Such an elevation in stature would allow the GEC to advocate for resourcing levels for the Interagency as well as drive a single information strategy and bring discipline to the US government efforts. Many talented people in government are working this issue thoughtfully and diligently, unfortunately they are not always working in unison because they are answering to different leaders with different priorities.

The Limitations of the Truth and Bureaucracy

It is not unreasonable to think that the United States will always be at some disadvantage against our adversaries in the information environment. We are a nation of laws where truth and ethics are expected, and rightly so. Our enemies on the contrary are not constrained by ethics, the truth, or the law. Our adversaries, both State and non-State actors, can and will bombard all forms of communications to include traditional media and social media with their

messages to influence, create doubt of our actions or intentions, and even recruit people to their cause. We must ensure that we organize our efforts in such a manner that maximize desired outcomes through discipline, agility, and innovation.

When using the terms agility and innovation, the US government is generally not the first thing that comes to mind. This also holds true in the information environment. For example, it remains difficult to introduce new social media analytic and forensic tools onto government IT systems because of lengthy and highly complicated compliance processes. These tools are critical to understanding the social media landscape and are required to ensure the US efforts are hitting the right audience with the right message at the right time that influences thought or behavior. Analytic tools are advancing as fast ~~as~~ the information environment itself and time ~~lateness for~~delays in implementation can have a devastating effect.

These tools cost money and it takes significant resources to train on these ever-advancing capabilities. While budgets for US government information warfare and counter-propaganda efforts have increased significantly, they still pale to the resources applied to kinetic efforts. A single kinetic strike against a single high value terrorist can tally into the hundreds of millions of dollars when conducted outside an area of active armed hostilities (when adding intelligence preparation before and after the strike) and in many cases, only have short term affects. At the same time the GEC funding in FY17 is below \$40M. Again, please keep in mind that this is a significant increase from the GEC FY15 budget of \$5.6M. We are making progress just not fast

enough to turn the tide in our favor any time soon as many of our adversaries are putting significantly more resources into information operations than we are.

Even when fully resourced and masterfully executed, information warfare and counter-propaganda efforts can contain a high element of risk. While bureaucracy in government is necessary to standardize routine tasks, it cannot be left to control the totality of our efforts in the information environment. The bureaucratic standard operating procedure strives to reduce risk to almost zero which can ultimately lead to diluted messaging efforts that can result in missing the right audience with an effective message that shifts their thought and behavior to our desired end state. To be successful we must learn to accept a higher level of risk and accept the fact that sometimes we are just going to get it wrong despite our best efforts. When we do get it wrong, we must learn, adapt, and iterate our messaging rapidly to be relevant and effective.

Access to Trained Personnel

As mentioned previously, there are some talented people in government working the information environment challenge. There are, however, just not enough of them nor are they always able to keep up with the technological advances in this arena. Some success has been realized in using the Section 3161 hiring authority granted to the GEC by Executive Order 13721. This authority allows the GEC to hire limited term/limited scope employees directly into government based on their skills and capabilities. This has provided the GEC access to

experienced private sector talent that government service does not traditionally provide. Access to the talent of academia, Silicon Valley, and Madison Avenue now is possible for the GEC. Unfortunately, outside of the GEC, other federal departments and agencies do not have the ability to leverage the Section 3161 hiring authority to access top talent in the field.

In Conclusion

Recognition of the importance of US government's role in the information environment continues to grow as exemplified by the creation and expansion of the GEC. Indeed, significant progress has made. It is imperative, however, that the government's efforts be fully coordinated and resourced to be responsive and adaptive. The information environment and our adversaries' actions will continue to evolve and our means and methods need to remain agile and innovative to stay relevant and effective in the emerging security environment.