INFORMATION OPERATIONS AND DISINFORMATION

Definition
Use of social media and other outlets, in addition to traditional efforts to bolster the narrative of the state through propaganda and to sow doubt, dissent, and disinformation in foreign countries.

Examples of Gray Zone Threat vs. U.S. Interests
- Undermining of liberal democratic norms, values, and institutions in the U.S. and international system
- China’s use of Confucian Institutes, official statements, and “sympathetic” spokespersons to restrict speech to pro-Chinese narratives
- Iran’s deployment of information campaigns to restrict speech to pro-Iranian narratives and project power in the Middle East

U.S. Government Responses
The Players: Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State (DoS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Treasury, Department of Justice (DOJ), and the International Community (IC)

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<tr>
<th>Deterrence &amp; Resilience</th>
<th>Intelligence &amp; Investigation</th>
<th>Cost Imposition</th>
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<tr>
<td>• DoS’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) seeks to build international resilience to adversary information operations</td>
<td>• FBI’s Foreign Influence Task Force investigates foreign information operations that run counter to U.S. interests</td>
<td>• Naming and shaming (DoS, DoD, IC)</td>
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<td>• DHS’s Countering Foreign Influence Task Force (CFITF) seeks to build domestic resilience to adversary information operations</td>
<td>• GEC and CFITF investigate foreign and domestic information operations with help from the IC</td>
<td>• CYBERCOM shut down Russia’s Internet Research Agency day of 2018 midterm elections</td>
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<td>• U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) seeks to counter adversary narratives overseas</td>
<td>• USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives counters foreign narratives and implements resiliency programming in areas vulnerable to information operations overseas</td>
<td>• Sanctions and indictments enforced by DOJ, Treasury, and Commerce</td>
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<td>• DoD’s Operational Influence Platform amplifies accurate narratives overseas</td>
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U.S. Government Assessment

Bureaucratic Structure
- Few interagency coordination, regulation, and evaluation structures
- Public-private sector seams impede collective action

Policy Positions
- Weakened alliances and partnerships harm U.S. narratives and discourage collective action
- Insufficient development of offensive measures and advantages like transparency
- Misalignment of foreign and domestic agencies (GEC vs. CFITF)

Operational Limitations
- Over-classification of intelligence and weak partnerships limits information sharing between the private sector, allies, partners, and civil society organizations
- U.S. norms of free speech and privacy hamper social media regulation

Ineffective Tools and Tactics
- Few punitive or offensive measures
- Few inducements for private sector, especially for social media platforms
- USAGM is currently a weak narrative source to build international resiliency

Recommendations

Authorities and Resourcing
- Re-create the interagency active measures working group to develop covert countermeasures and expose disinformation
- Require and resource civic education and media literacy curriculum
- Broaden authorities for USAGM to operate in media-competitive regions
- Authorize DHS as the domestic lead for interagency efforts to counter information operations targeting U.S. institutions
- Increase appropriations for DoS overseas engagement

Organization
- Designate National Security Council senior director for gray zone challenges as lead coordinator for national security elements of strategic communications, among other duties

Policies
- Broaden DHS’s critical infrastructure definition to leverage interagency intelligence sharing and resiliency investments in U.S. businesses;
- Engage social media companies to develop more collective action with the U.S. government

Tools
- Boost DoS engagement on priority targets abroad and leverage proactive intelligence
- Develop stronger standards for GEC vetting and accountability for grantees to prevent misuse and mistargeting;
- Develop coordinated information operations from DoD and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to reinforce DoS overt messaging and in support of the active measures working group
- Increase FBI’s domestic counterintelligence efforts
- Promote states’ U.S. civic education and media literacy best practices via Department of Education

Read the full report here. For related CSIS gray zone analysis visit: csis.org/grayzone.