

**THE GLOBAL INFORMATION WARS:
IS THE U.S. WINNING OR LOSING?**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

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

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

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THE GLOBAL INFORMATION WARS: IS THE U.S. WINNING OR LOSING?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3, 2023

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 2:42 p.m., in room 419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Cardin [presiding], Kaine, Booker, Hagerty, Ricketts, and Barrasso.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator CARDIN. The subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management, International Operations and Bilateral International Development of the Senate Foreign Relations committee will come to order.

Let me welcome our guests. We are here today to talk about global information wars. Is the United States winning or losing? This is our second hearing of our subcommittee, and I want to thank Senator Hagerty, my ranking member, for the help in putting together this important oversight hearing.

We believe that oversight is one of the most important functions of our subcommittee. Our first hearing was on the USAID, on localization and building up local capacity. This hearing will be on the U.S. Agency for Global Media, USAGM, and I might acknowledge this is the first opportunity that we have our new leader of the agency appearing before this committee, and we look forward to your views and a discussion as to how the recent changes in law has affected the ability of the agency to perform its mission.

Today, we will turn our attention to USAGM and the topic of global information wars, with the goal of identifying ways in which the USAGM and its affiliated organizations can operate more effectively in the context of competition for influence in global information space.

With malign actors like China, and Russia, Iran, and Cuba elevating their efforts to use disinformation and propaganda to basically try to co-opt the knowledge of their own people in their own country and around the world. Questions whether the peoples of the world can any longer tell fact from fiction, news from lies.

USAGM reaches 410 million viewers worldwide on a weekly basis through information sources from two federal organizations, the Voice of America, and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and four nonprofit organizations that are grantees, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, and the Open Technology Fund.

These organizations have spent decades earning the credibility of local audiences worldwide. Behind the USAGM brands are clearly established and strongly enforced rules that the information provided to the public is unbiased and honest. When propaganda and disinformation jam the information seers, populations worldwide know they can turn to USAGM outlets for valid and trustworthy information.

Countries, including Russia and China, deploy immense resources to wage global information campaigns, attempting to shape the narratives of their actions to their advantage, most often by twisting the truth or deflecting attention to distract the public from their true goals.

Russia's blatant disregard for the truth, including by conducting disinformation campaigns and spamming content feeds with narratives from the paid troll farms, creates a muddied information environment in which it is incredibly difficult for the average citizen to differentiate between fact and fiction.

Russia's state-directed media and diplomatic account online operated deliberative, coordinated effort to spread propaganda that aims to justify or deflect blame from their ongoing unprovoked violence against Ukraine. They continue to broadcast this propaganda worldwide, including in Latin America and Africa.

In many of these areas that contain both U.S. partners and friends of Moscow, public opinion about the conflict is still an unresolved competition area open for shifting influence. China's large scale propaganda campaigns spread by pro-Beijing content worldwide, dismiss its true intentions.

China regularly sets up alliances with international media organizations providing free content to feed to local populations, often with strings attached contracts that prohibit these organizations from using content from credible news sources. In exchange for kickbacks to corrupt individuals that sign these contracts, the citizens of these countries are denied access to quality and credible information.

It is at this challenging environment that we are here today to examine the critical role of USAGM, operating within the context in which global players like Russia and China are actively attempting to misinform the public for their own gain. It is through this hearing that we hope to better understand the global context in which the competition for influence is underway.

The challenges this presents to USAGM in disseminating its news products, and the way in which USAGM can improve its work. We look forward to the witnesses. We have two panels today. Let me first yield to Senator Hagerty.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BILL HAGERTY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Chairman Cardin. It is great to be with you today here, and I am looking forward to talking with our distinguished panel of witnesses. First, if I might, open by introducing for the record an attachment here.

It is going to accompany the written statement that Dr. David Stilwell, is a Fox Fellow for Future Pacing Threats, Institute of Future Conflict in the U.S. Air Force Academy, and a former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, as provided. I might enter that for the record. It will be useful later.

Senator CARDIN. Without objection. It will be part of the record.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in *ATCH 2* within the "Prepared Statement of Mr. David Stilwell" section of this hearing.]

Senator HAGERTY. Chairman Cardin, first of all, again, thank you for convening this hearing today. I also want to recognize our two panels of witnesses who graciously agreed to join us, and we look forward to hearing from them today. In the age of rapid technological change and digital connectivity, the United States faces unprecedented challenges, competing with formidable opponents such as China and Russia.

Today, our subcommittee is focusing on the topic of information wars. Is the United States winning or losing? The hearing title itself inherently prompts a series of related questions. What does winning look like? What are our adversaries' goals in promoting their narrative and story to a domestic or to an international audience?

How serious is the threat of disinformation from China and Russia to U.S. interests? What specific tactics are these countries using to spread disinformation? For the sake of this hearing, is the United States Government doing enough to ensure that there is efficient oversight and support of our public institutions to compete in this space?

U.S. Agency for Global Media is positioned to play a vital role in this fight by promoting American ideals across the world. However, USAGM and its affiliates in this regard have at times fallen short of its mission.

Additionally, USAGM faces external challenges, including the rise of new technologies and social media platforms that have made it easier for our adversaries to spread disinformation and sow division among our citizens. It is time that we think about the information space as a critical line of effort and strategic competition.

We need tailored messaging and programing developed from people who do not apologize for America and know that America is the most exceptional nation in the history of the world.

As ranking member of the subcommittee, I am committed to ensuring that the USAGM receives the proper oversight to effectively and efficiently carry out its work. Today's hearing provides an opportunity to examine the USAGM's operations, identify areas for improvement, and assess strategies for countering the information warfare tactics of our adversaries.

To put it bluntly, we cannot allow the United States to fall behind our adversaries in the information wars, and we must innovate and continue to support independent journalism and promote free and open sources of information.

We cannot afford to have a USAGM that is performing sub-optimally. The stakes are simply too high. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and working together to strengthen America's position in this space. Mr. Chairman, I yield back to you.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Senator Hagerty. Our first witness is Amanda Bennett, who is the CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media. She served as Director of the Voice of America from 2016–2020.

Previously, she was the Executive Editor of *Bloomberg News*, Editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Editor of the *Herald-Leader* in Lexington, Kentucky, and managing editor of *The Oregonian* in Portland, Oregon.

Ms. Bennett also worked as *The Wall Street Journal* reporter for 23 years. She is, in one word, a highly regarded professional journalists. It is a pleasure to have you here. Your full statement will be made part of the record. You may proceed as you wish.

STATEMENT OF HON. AMANDA BENNETT, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, and the other members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the U.S. Agency for Global Media's work on the front lines of the global information war. First, Chairman Cardin, on behalf of our entire agency, thank you for your steadfast support of independent media.

Throughout the years, your tireless advocacy has enabled our networks to continue their crucial work, and we wish you the very best and know that the Senate will not be the same without you.

As many of you know, through the work of our six entities, the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Middle East Broadcasting Networks, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Open Technology Fund, USAGM provides fact-based news and information to parts of the world that do not have a free and open press.

If I may, I would like to play a quick video that shows what we do.

[Video media playing.]

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you very much. Today on World Press Freedom Day, I would like to also extend our thanks to the Administration for the strong statement that was made in support of a free press, and also to advocate on behalf of imprisoned journalists around the world like Evan Gershkovich, in Russia right now, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

As all of this shows, we are at a critical moment in history. As we speak, the People's Republic of China, Russia, and Iran are making heavy investments to both control the flow of information inside their countries, and rapidly expand their malign influence abroad.

Equally troubling, they often work together to amplify this malign influence on a global scale. The reality is that if we miss this

opportunity to make strategic investments now, we may run the risk of losing the global information war. We should be alarmed about this, but still optimistic.

Alarmed because we are being vastly outspent, but optimistic because we still have the competitive advantage. We have measurable data showing that our networks are outperforming the PRC and Russia in many key markets. Make no mistake, this is a moment that USAGM was built for, as it was during World War II and the Cold War, to combat malign foreign influence.

In times of crisis, audiences seek us out from their closed environments, and they trust us to report the truth, especially when it is a truth their own governments would prefer to hide. The legislative firewall, which ensures the editorial independence of our broadcasters, is essential to our high trust and credibility. It is not too late for us to secure this competitive advantage.

In China, the PRC has built one of the most repressive information environments in the world, and it has been working hard to export this model to other countries, but despite the PRC's best efforts, VOA is still vastly outperforming the reach of PRC's local language brands in Latin America and Africa. Inside China, our audiences are willing to go to great lengths to reach our content.

Even in the context of the PRC sophisticated internet censorship, Radio Free Asia's coverage of the 2022 protests in China broke records for web traffic and social media engagement, and the Open Technology Fund is critical to the success.

Our newest grantee supports virtual public networks, VPNs, in China, which right now help over 4 million monthly active users securely access the internet and our journalism. When Russia invaded Ukraine, the Kremlin quickly silenced dissenting voices inside of Russia, while rapidly expanding its malign influence abroad.

Equipped with OTF supported tools and by translating coverage in real-time, USAGM was able to take the work of RFE/RL and VOA's brave journalists on the ground in Ukraine and expose the horrible reality of Putin's war for the rest of the world to see. Remarkably, we are also reaching a growing audience in and near Russia.

In fact, RFE/RL and VOA video content in Russian and Ukrainian was viewed 8 billion times in the year since the full-scale invasion, more than double the year before. The crucial reporting, however, did not come without grave risks, and tragically last year, RFE/RL's Vera Gyrych paid the ultimate price for her commitment to sharing the truth, no matter how dangerous.

In Iran, the government is escalating its crackdown of independent media and its own citizens as it continues malign foreign influence operations, but that did not stop VOA and RFE/RL journalists from fearlessly covering the historic protests that followed Mahsa Amini's death in 2022, with record audience numbers.

Even as the Iranian regime severely blocked the internet during these protests, one-in-four Iranian adults used OTF-supported circumvention tools to access information. Our true power lies in our ability to harness the reach of the entire USAGM network for greater global impact.

We know that even the very best journalism is of no use if people cannot see it or hear it. With the support of Congress for our Fiscal

Year 2024 budget request of \$944 million, USAGM will continue to find new ways to reach audiences, improve our infrastructure from digital security to physical safety, lead new forms of engaging content, and leverage this global reach.

Through a growing network of over 4,000 media partners, we are positioned to serve larger audiences around the world for just pennies per person. With our size and scalable impact worldwide, our work represents a powerful investment.

We are more committed than ever to delivering on our mission in today's dangerous world of information manipulation and heavy investment by authoritarian regimes, and we cannot do that without the support of Congress. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, and members of the subcommittee, thank you again. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bennett follows:]

Prepared Statement of Ms. Amanda Bennett

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM)'s work on the frontlines of the global information war as authoritarian regimes like the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and Iran deepen their efforts to block the free flow of information and spread malign influence.

Our agency provides accurate, objective, and professional news and information to parts of the world that do not have a free and open press. As a journalist by training, I often explain our mission by saying we export the First Amendment.

The history of U.S. international media spans more than 80 years, starting with the creation of Voice of America's first radio show during World War II. Since then, U.S. international media has evolved from its origins in radio to include a full spectrum of modern delivery methods. Whether on radio, television, or online—from satellite streams to Telegram accounts—we meet our audiences where they are. In fact, 410 million people in over 100 countries turn to us every week for news and information in 63 languages.

We meet our mission through the work of six entities: Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), and the Open Technology Fund (OTF). Each USAGM network contributes to our mission by fulfilling a unique role in their respective markets. VOA provides comprehensive regional and world news to local audiences, while also covering the United States in all its complexity. RFE/RL, RFA, and OCB act as surrogate broadcasters, providing access to professional and fact-based regional and local news in their markets. MBN serves as a hybrid of the two models, providing accurate and comprehensive news about the region and the United States. OTF, our newest grantee, works to advance internet freedom worldwide, enabling audiences to access and share independent news, and empowering our journalists to do their jobs in the face of repressive censorship and surveillance.

A CRITICAL MOMENT IN THE GLOBAL INFORMATION WAR

We are at an inflection point. Authoritarian regimes are using malign influence, disinformation, propaganda, and information manipulation to close the flow of information and undermine those seeking fact-based information about the world around them. The governments of the PRC, Iran, and Russia often work together to amplify their malign influence, obscure the facts, and cause confusion on a global scale.

If we miss this opportunity to target investments to counter inroads Russia, the PRC, and Iran are making, we run the risk of losing the global information war. Right now, we have a head start in many markets due to the credible and unbiased information we provide, but these next 2 years will be absolutely critical. We should be alarmed, but optimistic—alarmed because we are being vastly outspent, but optimistic because the quality and impact of our investments is great and we still have a chance to secure our competitive advantage if we act now.

This is a moment that USAGM was built for, as it was during World War II and the Cold War, to combat malign foreign influence. While the governments of China,

Russia, and Iran expand state-sponsored propaganda not only in their own countries but also into regions including Latin America, South and Central Asia, and Africa—USAGM, with over 4,000 media partners around the world, is well-positioned to counter this authoritarian influence offensive. We have measurable data showing we are outperforming PRC and Russian state-controlled media in many key markets. And USAGM's credibility and trust with our audiences are high because we tell the truth. It is not too late for us to secure our competitive advantage.

To stay competitive in the 21st century, USAGM will continue to find new ways to reach audiences, improve our infrastructure from digital security to physical safety, lead new forms of engaging content and build on what is already working, and leverage the reach of each individual network for greater global impact. By leveraging our global media partnerships, we can continue to expand the delivery of fact-based journalism to larger audiences around the world for just pennies per person. USAGM represents a powerful investment that continues to show an out-sized and scalable impact across the globe. By maximizing the best use of available resources and the talent of our journalists and staff, USAGM remains committed to meeting our mission at a time when it is more important than ever.

COUNTERING MALIGN FOREIGN INFLUENCE FROM THE PRC

Under the PRC's rule, mainland China's media environment is one of the most restricted in the world and the PRC Government has been working hard to export this model to other countries. Within mainland China, the government exercises near-total control over both mass media and the internet, through a sophisticated system of content blocking, filtering, and surveillance.

Outside its borders, the PRC is deliberately and effectively extending its reach far beyond the Indo-Pacific, and rapidly moving into Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. In Latin America for example, the PRC Government is conducting extensive marketing campaigns and offering media executives lavish trips to China to promote placement of PRC-controlled media content. In Africa, the PRC is installing low-cost satellite dishes to provide poor and rural citizens with limited, government-controlled programming. The energy with which the PRC Government drove its Belt and Road expansion a decade ago is now being replicated in the information space to spread malign influence broadly and deeply.

Despite operating with only a fraction of the budget of the PRC's state-controlled media, USAGM's networks have made significant gains in getting information to audiences in China and diaspora communities outside of the country, and bolstering media partners in regions targeted by the PRC. VOA and RFA broadcast in Mandarin, Cantonese, Uyghur, and Tibetan, providing a variety of news, political and cultural programming as well as English-language instruction. VOA's English-language fact-checking project, Polygraph, includes a website dedicated to producing videos and articles in Mandarin to confront PRC disinformation efforts and present evidence to debunk falsehoods. Similarly, in 2022, RFA launched the Asia Fact Check Lab, a project in both English and Mandarin that monitors and fact-checks the PRC's false narratives and misinformation campaigns.

VOA and RFA represent some of the only sources of credible information for people living in China, while OTF increases their access to information—and their combined impact is powerful. Audiences in China yearn for a comprehensive, uncensored view of China, the U.S., and the world. Chinese citizens often express gratitude when VOA and RFA cover events the PRC Government would prefer to hide or distort, including the 2022 protests against the PRC Government's zero-COVID policy. Last year, RFA's timely coverage of these protests broke records for web traffic and social media engagement. RFA experienced historic surges on social media, as RFA Mandarin gained 75,000 new followers on Twitter between November 24 and December 1, 2022 and saw a 233 percent increase in traffic from mobile Google searches. RFA Cantonese's Facebook video views increased by 10 times in 1 week alone. One RFA Mandarin Service video showing these protests was viewed over 4 million times on Twitter.

The PRC's state-controlled media presence is expanding across Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia, and RFE/RL's journalists increasingly witness and report on growing connectivity between disinformation from the PRC and Russia. From Serbia and Hungary, to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and inside Russia itself, they cover Beijing's growing military, technological, and investment footprint across the region. RFE/RL is also working with RFA to uncover the PRC's newest online censorship methodologies and find ways to counter them before they are widely adopted.

Audiences in China are also intensely interested in coverage of U.S.-China relations. When former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi traveled to Taiwan last year,

VOA Mandarin received over 4 million pageviews on their website in 1 week as the network live-streamed the speech, interviewed former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and several Senators from both sides of the aisle, and published articles with in-depth analysis. This type of coverage is a window into the U.S. and the world for many: one loyal audience member described how she started listening to VOA's Mandarin Service on a shortwave radio in 2001 and continues to listen to this day through the network's digital platforms.

Our audiences in China show that they not only prefer USAGM network content, but also that they are willing to go to great lengths to overcome the "Great Firewall" to reach that content. For example, last year VOA's Mandarin Service content on YouTube earned nearly double the video views as the PRC's CCTV. When thinking about our impact, we must consider that the PRC has the most sophisticated internet censorship in the world. OTF supports leading VPNs in China, which help over 4 million monthly active users protect their privacy while they access the internet.

COUNTERING MALIGN FOREIGN INFLUENCE FROM RUSSIA

Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine sparked the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II. The war's consequences reverberated around the world, bringing the global information war into sharp focus. For many in our audience, the full-scale invasion forced them to question their entire worldview. As the Kremlin consolidated power, eliminated opposition, and silenced dissenting voices inside of Russia, it also launched wide-ranging malign influence operations abroad, with a specific focus on Russian speakers in its immediate region. It is in this context that USAGM's role in providing fact-based, independent, and reliable reporting to the Russian public, to Ukrainians, and to people across the globe became even more important. Through coordination and collaboration to share and translate war coverage in real time, USAGM continues to leverage the combined reach of each network, equipped with OTF-supported circumvention tools, to ensure billions of people across the globe have access to the facts.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, which began in 2014 with the occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea, RFE/RL and VOA have been on the literal front lines of this war, reporting from the fields and trenches of heavily bombed towns of Ukraine, highlighting the horrible reality of Russia's invasion for audiences across the globe. When the full-scale invasion began, USAGM networks were uniquely positioned on-the-ground to deliver exceptional multi-platform breaking news coverage to millions of people in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and around the world. This crucial reporting did not come without grave risks. Vira Hyrych, a talented journalist and producer for RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, paid the ultimate price for her commitment to sharing the truth about Russia's aggression against Ukraine. On April 29, 2022, Vira was killed in Kyiv after a Russian missile strike hit the residential building where she lived. With great bravery, correspondents continue to report from the frontlines, drawing on their deep local knowledge to bring nuance and context to a fast-evolving historic moment.

As the brutal war grinds on, RFE/RL's fact-based news reaches larger and larger audiences every day. Ukrainian and Russian audiences are seeking out RFE/RL coverage of recent events in the war in unprecedented numbers despite extensive Kremlin attempts to block RFE/RL's websites and most social media platforms. Between February 24, 2022, and February 23, 2023, RFE/RL web and social media videos in Russian and Ukrainian were viewed billions of times. For example, RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service video views on Facebook alone were viewed 1.1 billion times, an increase of 119 percent compared to the same period the year before.

USAGM's networks are maximizing resources to reach an even larger audience in the Russian language. Despite the Russian Government's unprecedented censorship of independent media inside its borders, which forced RFE/RL to make the difficult decision to shutter its Moscow bureau and relocate to Riga, Latvia, there has been a surge in demand for VOA and RFE/RL Russian-language content. RFE/RL and VOA video content in Russian and Ukrainian was viewed 8 billion times in the year since the full-scale invasion—2.5 times the numbers from the year before. To put that number into context, just under 300 million people speak either Russian or Ukrainian. The RFE/RL Current Time project 'Footage vs. Footage' exposes Russian disinformation campaigns to debunk the lies behind propaganda and examines how falsehoods get constructed by Russian state-controlled media. "Systema," an RFE/RL Russian-language Investigative Unit conducts deep investigative journalism modeled after the Ukrainian Service's successful project "Schemes," which has uncovered Russian atrocities in Ukraine, filling a void left by Russian state-controlled media.

Launched in April 2023 and developed with USAGM's Office of Technology, Services, and Innovation, *Votvot* is RFE/RL's new on-demand Russian-language streaming platform for voices targeted and silenced by the Putin regime. As part of RFE/RL's comprehensive strategy to counter Kremlin disinformation, *Votvot* features cultural content inaccessible inside Russia from creators who are often banned because of their criticism of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. *Votvot* is a platform for uncensored, free expression for Russian-speaking audiences, including younger demographics, interested in alternatives to traditional news programming. Through documentaries, theater performances, concerts, satire, children's educational programming, and more, *Votvot* will make censored cultural content available once again to a wide audience. *Votvot* offers stories that unite and content that makes audiences think, such as exclusive access to the sold-out performance of FACE, an internationally-renowned 25-year-old Russian rap artist who can no longer return to Russia because of his denunciation of the Kremlin's full-scale war on Ukraine.

In the months following Russia's invasion, *Current Time*, the 24/7 Russian-language television and digital network led by RFE/RL in cooperation with VOA, signed over 50 new media partners in countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova—just as media outlets in those countries were dropping Russia's state-controlled channels. Despite significant censorship, between February 2022 and February 2023, *Current Time* Facebook videos were viewed 2 billion times, an increase of 163 percent compared to the year before. *Current Time* videos routinely trend number one on Russian YouTube, a sign that Russian-language audiences want access to trusted news. In a powerful on-the-ground example, we received evidence that activists inside Russia took it upon themselves to begin posting flyers with QR codes disguised as furniture ads; but when scanned, the QR codes direct Russians to *Current Time*'s YouTube channel. Together, RFE/RL and VOA reach 11.7 million Russian adults each week. Our research shows that our networks have a measured weekly audience of over 10 percent of adults inside Russia, an objectively high audience for a closed media environment dominated by state propaganda. For context, this is about half the audience that the most popular U.S.-based news outlets reach domestically, in a completely free media environment.

USAGM is providing a trusted alternative to Russia's malign influence in nearby countries by flooding the zone with fact-based news in many different local languages and in English. USAGM networks serve audiences in languages including Ukrainian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Serbian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Azerbaijani, and Georgian, among others. Through projects like *Polygraph*, VOA's English-language fact-checking website, we are confronting Russia's disinformation efforts in English for a global audience. VOA launched an Eastern Europe bureau to deepen coverage across a region vulnerable to Russian malign influence and military aggression. RFE/RL's 23 broadcast services are focused on bringing the truth of the war to their audiences, who are buffeted by Russian disinformation about the full-scale invasion and its costs. RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service is producing a special program stream with content designed for refugees and exposing alleged war crimes by Russian forces, while services reaching audiences across the Caucasus nations and Central Asia are investigating the plight of local residents sent by Russia to fight—and die—in Ukraine.

For Ukrainian and Russian-speaking audiences, VOA created new initiatives and a surge in programming, primarily focusing on breaking news complemented by official and expert perspectives from the U.S. including simultaneously translated official statements, major addresses, policy pronouncements, press conferences, congressional hearings, and U.N. Security Council sessions. To increase programming in Ukraine, VOA leveraged a new 24/7 satellite channel with targeted programming from VOA and RFE/RL.

In addition to its reporting for Ukrainian and Russian-speakers, VOA covered this story for the world. VOA showed the rippling effects the war had across the globe—the refugee crisis, interrupted energy supplies, threats to food security, and far-reaching geopolitical and economic fallout in many nations. Leading up to the full-scale invasion and to this day, Russia continues to deploy a variety of false narratives in Russia and around the world to justify an unjustifiable war. Much of this disinformation involves the U.S.—including the false claim that NATO and the West were the aggressors threatening Russia's security and escalating the war. This is where VOA comes in. Interest in VOA's trusted, holistic coverage of the war and the U.S. response was extremely high worldwide and in many target regions: places like China, Vietnam, Iran, Latin America, Indonesia, Georgia, Albania, and Burma. In the year since Russia invaded Ukraine, VOA's coverage of the war attracted more than 2.4 billion video views on social media and 144.4 million engagement actions across social media platforms, as well as over 83 million visits to VOA websites. With its measured weekly audience of 326 million people and thousands of media

partners worldwide, VOA tells America's story in all its complexity, so that authoritarian propaganda and malign influence cannot win by default.

OTF-supported circumvention tools have played a critical role in enabling people in closed societies around the world to access the uncensored internet and USAGM networks' coverage of the war. This became especially evident as Russia imposed unprecedented levels of censorship on its citizens. Use of OTF-supported circumvention tools surged in Russia from only 250,000 monthly active users prior to the full-scale invasion in Ukraine to over 8 million today. In addition, OTF-supported mirror sites have received over 200 million visits per month. With the help of OTF, both RFE/RL's and VOA's digital audience in Russia has grown significantly despite ongoing censorship of their digital platforms.

SUPPORTING THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION INTO IRAN

The Iranian Government continues to aggressively surveil and censor Iranian citizens in an effort to limit their access to the free flow of information and intimidate those who seek the truth. One key tool the Iranian Government uses to extend malign influence is the state-controlled media corporation, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), and its brands, including Al-Alam in the Arabic language, Press TV in English and French, HispanTV in Spanish, and Jam-e-Jam in the Persian language for diaspora audiences, among others. Despite the Iranian regime's escalating crackdown on independent media and the open exchange of ideas, USAGM networks continue to provide audiences in Iran and across the globe with independent, fact-based journalism as an alternative to IRIB's state-controlled content, while OTF-supported technology enables the people of Iran to access this journalism and the internet in the face of repressive censorship and surveillance.

MBN's Alhurra Television regularly reports on the fight against Iran's malign influence in the MENA region through its newscasts and programs focused on Lebanon and Syria, and it has a large audience for this type of reporting in the Palestinian Territories. MBN's fact-checking program and investigative reporting unit counter misinformation and uncover stories that are omitted in the local press related to malign influence from Russia, Iran, and the PRC in the region. The network regularly interviews human rights and international relations experts to counter Iran's narratives. Recent coverage includes the U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), human rights concerns after the number of executions in Iran rose 75 percent in 2022, and reports that Iranian police have installed cameras in public places to monitor and punish women who are not wearing the hijab.

VOA's Persian Service and RFE/RL's Radio Farda covered the historic protests that followed 22-year-old Mahsa Amini's death, documenting the number of demonstrators killed by security services and telling their stories. When Amini was arrested, RFE/RL's Radio Farda broadcast the first interview with her mother. After 16-year-old protestor Nika Shakarami was beaten to death by security forces, VOA's Persian Service provided an exclusive interview with her mother that garnered more than 1 million views on Instagram alone. RFE/RL journalists documented the truth about the regime's victims—including confirming the identities of 353 casualties—despite the Iranian Government's ongoing campaign to deceive the public and intimidate minority communities.

Coverage by RFE/RL's Radio Farda garnered more than 2.0 billion total video views between September 2022 and January 2023 on Instagram alone. VOA provided global coverage that attracted millions of viewers as raging protests in Iran sparked solidarity movements abroad in places like Istanbul, DC, New York, and Sulaymaniyah. By increasing live coverage, expanding special programming, and staffing a 24/7 digital presence, VOA's Persian Service accrued 380.5 million social video views, a 282 percent increase, between September 2022 and January 2023.

Because of their commitment to exposing realities the Iranian Government would prefer to hide, both VOA and RFE/RL have been targeted by Iranian leadership on multiple occasions. In October 2022, Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei took to Instagram to warn his 4.9 million followers that VOA and RFE/RL are threats to the Islamic Republic. In 2023, the government added RFE/RL President and CEO Jamie Fly to its sanctions list, which has included RFE/RL's Radio Farda since December 2022.

After the Iranian regime severely blocked the internet to prevent its citizens and the world from watching its violent crackdown on demonstrators, the number of monthly active users of OTF-supported censorship circumvention tools grew dramatically—one-in-four Iranians used these tools to access the internet. Over 90 percent of USAGM's Iranian audience uses OTF-supported Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access USAGM network content. Backed by OTF to reach users in Iran,

RFE/RL's Farda and VOA's Persian Service partnered with Toosheh, a U.S.-funded satellite file-casting app that does not need internet access. This one-way file distribution system can download content packages via satellite datacasting that can then be shared on messaging apps. This helped the networks maintain accessibility for audiences at key moments during protests. While these tools have a very economical monthly cost of only 7 cents per user, OTF's budget has been strained by the enormous demand for their tools in Iran, Russia, China, and other countries where it is increasingly dangerous to access the internet and seek out truthful information.

STRONGER TOGETHER: LEVERAGING THE USAGM NETWORK FOR GREATER GLOBAL
IMPACT AGAINST MALIGN INFLUENCE

Our true power lies in our ability to harness the reach of the entire USAGM network for greater impact. Through translation of war coverage into dozens of languages, USAGM takes the work of RFE/RL's brave journalists on the ground in Ukraine and shows the impact of Russia's invasion not only to nearby countries like Belarus, Moldova, and Kazakhstan but also brings this global story to audiences in places like Cuba, Iraq, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Nicaragua. USAGM takes VOA's footage of the protests in Iran, or RFA's exclusive reporting on Uyghur detention camps in China and brings this news to audiences all over the world who rely on us.

But even the very best journalism is of no use if people cannot see or hear it. As authoritarian regimes become increasingly sophisticated in blocking information, OTF is ensuring we become even more sophisticated in breaching those barriers. Over the last 3 years, use of OTF-supported circumvention tools has quadrupled globally, increasing from about 9 million monthly users to over 40 million monthly users.

Our research from 2022 shows that audiences are choosing USAGM networks' content over that of Russia and the PRC in a number of key target markets across Eurasia, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Through its extensive network of media partnerships, VOA is successfully reaching audiences in regions that are major targets of malign influence from the PRC and Russia, including Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. In Nigeria, for example, VOA reaches a third of all adults while Russia's state-controlled network, RT, reaches just 1 percent, and China Radio International, less than 3 percent. Last year VOA Spanish reached a measured weekly audience of more than 66 million adults in Latin America—for a price of just 8 cents per audience member reached for an entire year. Neither Russia nor the PRC's Spanish-language brands in Latin America comes close to the reach of VOA. For example, VOA reaches 47 percent of adults weekly in Bolivia, 24 percent in Colombia, 51 percent in the Dominican Republic, and 39 percent in Ecuador, all while Russia's RT Spanish reaches 5 percent or less in each market and the PRC's CGTN reaches 6 percent or less. In Cambodia, despite a government crackdown on the free press, RFA and VOA together reach 16 percent of adults, compared with the PRC's state-controlled network, CGTN, at less than 2 percent.

MBN is consistently competitive with and, in some cases, outperforming Russia's widely available RT Arabic channel. For example, MBN's Alhurra reaches more than twice as many adults weekly as RT Arabic in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. MBN's weekly digital series 'Did It Really Happen?' fact-checks prominent dis- and misinformation on social media in Arabic, including that being disseminated by Russia, Iran, and the PRC, while the television program 'Alhurra Investigates' focuses much of its investigative reporting on Russia, Iran, and China by fact-checking false narratives and shedding light on stories omitted by the local press.

Despite facing challenging circumstances, OCB remains committed to fulfilling its mission for the people of Cuba and staying competitive in the 21st century, especially as the governments of Cuba, Russia, and the PRC work together in an attempt to promote rampant disinformation on the island. The PRC and Russia's propaganda machines have been highly active in Cuba in recent years, and the PRC has grown its presence within the island's digital infrastructure. Since 2020, Russia's RT continues to broadcast around the clock, in high-definition, and on digital platforms to the Cuban public in the Spanish language. In May 2022, Russia's RT met with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, and held a workshop in Havana with his communications team. Six months later, President Putin welcomed Díaz-Canel himself in Moscow for a visit to RT headquarters. As an alternative to Russia's malign influence, OCB started a series of podcasts entitled "Witnesses of the War in Ukraine," which featured the voices of Ukrainians from several cities across the country. OCB was the only outlet that broadcast Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy's speech before Congress in December 2022 live, with simultaneous Spanish translations, to audiences in Cuba. That coverage achieved historic reach across Latin America—with 20 different media organizations across eight countries also broadcasting the signal of OCB's Radio and Television Martí. This year, OCB's Martí and the Ukrainian fact-checking outlet, StopFake.org, launched a joint project to counter Russia's propaganda circulating in the Spanish language in Cuba.

Our levels of credibility across all the broadcasters are objectively high—over 70 percent of our weekly audience considers our reporting to be trustworthy. Both our mission and the editorial firewall, which prohibits U.S. Government interference in the editorial autonomy of the broadcasting networks, underpin the worldwide credibility that USAGM's broadcasters enjoy. The legislated firewall is essential to that credibility, ensuring editorial independence and protecting USAGM and its journalists from government interference. This firewall is what sets us apart from state-controlled propaganda networks like Russia's RT and the PRC's CGTN. Audiences see our example of openness and candor in exercising press freedom in a democratic society as proof of our credibility. In so many countries, people yearn for the truth—even if it is a painful truth. In times of crisis, traffic to our networks' websites and social media often spikes as audiences seek us out. We have seen this again and again in recent years, from the coup in Burma to the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the recent protests in Cuba and Iran, and the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. In accordance with the legislated firewall, our agency is committed to continuing to work with interagency partners, with external stakeholders, with this Committee and all of Congress in a bipartisan fashion, to ensure USAGM has the operational support and resources necessary to fulfill its mission.

CONCLUSION

This is the most important time for this agency since the Cold War, and perhaps since World War II. USAGM must be positioned to be consistently competitive in today's dangerous world of information manipulation and heavy investment by authoritarian regimes and other bad actors. To do so, we will stay true to our agency-wide priorities: modeling transparency and accountability in everything we do; maintaining mission focus; expanding and improving access to USAGM content; ensuring journalistic independence for every broadcaster and entity; and bolstering journalistic safety, security, training and ethics.

USAGM remains committed to delivering on our mission to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy. We cannot do this without the partnership of Congress. We are confident that any increased investment you might consider making in our work will be crucial in our role on the frontlines of the global information war. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, we are deeply grateful for your support of and interest in our work and we value your oversight role.

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Senator CARDIN. Well, thank you very much for your testimony. We are going to start with Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Bennett, good to see you again. I was pleased to see that one of the panelists on the second panel, and I am going to duck out for a minute, but then come back for the second panel, Jessica Brandt, in her written testimony, urged greater resourcing for USAGM and VOA in Latin America.

Given the presence of over 40 million native Spanish speakers here and the inherent linkages we have with the region, given the increasing footprint of both Russia and Chinese efforts in the region, do we have sufficient resources dedicated to our needs in Latin America?

Ms. BENNETT. We do not. We do not. We have been severely under-resourced in both of those areas in particular, and as we are talking about—this is now a global problem. This is not a problem of the mis- and disinformation being just inside the countries. It is coming everywhere.

We actually need a lot more resources in order to reach these people. There are many, many ways in which we could be better resourced, including technologically, personnel, and also in terms of

journalists' safety as well, because we are increasingly putting journalists into harm's way.

Senator KAINE. I wanted to ask about the journalists' safety on World Press Freedom Day. How have we responded to repressive environments? In particular, I am going to stick with the Americas.

Independent media in Nicaragua have been severely abused and their resources cut, but there is also an increasingly dangerous environment for journalists in neighboring countries. El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico has had a horrible set of challenges for journalists.

What are we doing and what more can we do to try to provide safety for independent journalists in Latin America?

Ms. BENNETT. That is one thing we are really working extremely hard to make sure that we have basically whatever the state of the art protection is for journalists, and that includes equipment, includes physical protection, physical protection.

It includes protection in the buildings that they occupy. It includes training about how to handle themselves in very difficult situations. It also includes making sure that we have the resources to remove journalists from dangerous areas and to find other places to take them when they find themselves in danger.

Is something, as you have seen, we faced around the world, particularly in Russia. I just returned from a trip to see Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, where we had met with the Russian journalists who have had to move 4–6 times now because they had to flee from inside Russia.

Some of them with only a bag in their hand. One of them very plaintively said, I hope my neighbor is taking care of my dog and they have been gone for a year and they hope they will be back in a couple of months, and I leave it to you to decide whether that is the case.

Being able to support those people and find them other places to go, other places to live, help them deal with the trauma they have endured, all of those things are critical. Because of what we asked them to do, we are asking them to put themselves in harm's way, and we owe them at least the best protection we can give them.

Senator KAINE. Last question I want to ask is just an oversight question on internal management. Your agency is one that in employee surveys recently—but it has not just been recently—it has been ranked pretty lowly in terms of the morale of employees.

You are new to the position. You have a lot of experience in working at some very, very high watt news organizations. What are you doing as the CEO to try to bring up morale at USAGM?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I appreciate your discretion in talking about the lowest. We were actually dead last for a long time, and we probably deserved it.

Last year, however, we got an award from the Partnership for Public Service for being the most improved agency, I believe, in the entire Government under the leadership of the Acting CEO and the Acting Director of Voice of America, and of the returned heads of all the other agencies.

That shows that it can change, and literally giving people good equipment, giving people the proper leadership, giving people direction, making sure that we do the job of clearing away the red tape

that often entangles them and makes it difficult for them even to get plane tickets to get to the places they are trying to work, all those things are important.

We are really committed to basically increasing the communication and the engagement with our employees. Again, because whether or not they are in harm's way, we deserve to give them the best that they can possibly have. I think that is part of my responsibility.

Senator KAINE. Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator CARDIN. As you were saying, how much you improved, I was thinking, well, it must have been the actions of Senate Foreign Relations committee and the bills that we passed that allowed that to—

Ms. BENNETT. Very clearly. Must have been. No question about it.

Senator CARDIN. Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Well, I think there is a very astute answer, Ms. Bennett, that you gave our Chairman. Thank you again for being here today. I also want to thank you for bringing up the plight of Evan Gershkovich. That is a tragic situation, and I very much appreciate you raising that issue here, because I think the world needs to know what Russia has done in that circumstance.

Today, USAGM is before us requesting \$944 million. That is a \$59 million increase for Fiscal Year 2024, 7 percent above what we passed last year. As a lifelong businessperson, I have always had to justify any request for investments that I had to make to demonstrate that that is a good investment, that we are meeting stated goals and objectives, and that we are going to deliver value for shareholders.

I think that USAGM owes the same sort of accountability to the American taxpayers and, of course, to Congress. I wanted to put you in the shoes I have been in a number of times before, and to just ask you for the 1-minute elevator pitch, if you will, about how USAGM is a good investment for American taxpayers.

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, Senator, thank you very much. I am very much in line with your way of thinking. Remember my first half of my life was spent at the *Wall Street Journal*. I have a lot of respect for that way of thinking about things. Why is it a good investment?

Because we are in an information war. As we have seen, particularly in the invasion in Ukraine and watching how that unrolled at the beginning, information may be as powerful as tanks. The information that we all saw helped change the course of, I think, what was going to happen there.

We are seeing now how malign influencers are using their own information to help change the narrative and change the direction of things as well. By using the additional funds that we are hopefully going to be provided, we are going to be able to get more journalists, better technology, and basically reach more people. Reaching more people is what causes the impact.

Having people engage with an alternative to the malign influences and to the corrupt information that they are being given. We do not push back on their narrative. That is not an effective thing.

What we do is we provide alternatives in places where there are no other alternatives.

Senator HAGERTY. You have mentioned certain metrics in your opening statement about how we are outperforming competitors. Could you shed a little more light on what those metrics are?

Also, you mentioned that a specific metric in terms of per pennies, we are reaching people. Do you have any trend lines in terms of what it is costing us and how efficiently—are you gaining efficiency, are you flat? How can you sort of clarify that for me a bit?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I would be absolutely delighted to come and share in great detail those metrics, because we have all these things. I have just actually finished a paper on what the actual cost of each individual that we reach is, and I would be happy to share that with you right now. It varies in different parts of the world, but let me give you the—

Senator HAGERTY. I think what I am interested in is not only the absolute cost per person reach, but also what is the trend. Again, I am trying to get at where you are taking the agency and again, why this is a good investment for the American taxpayer.

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, the trend is towards greater efficiency. Again, I would be happy to get you the figures that can buttress that argument. I think the thing you asked originally was how do I know that we still have a chance, that we still have a foothold there? I just pulled a couple of things, this is about Africa and Latin America.

In Nigeria right now, Voice of America reaches a third of all adults. Russia state-controlled network reaches 1 percent. China Radio International, less than 3 percent. That is despite massive, massive investments on both their parts in those areas.

In Latin America, VOA reaches 47 percent of adults weekly, in Bolivia, 24 percent in Colombia, 51 percent in Dominican Republic, and 39 percent in Ecuador. While Russia's RT Spanish reaches 5 percent or less in each market, and the PRC, CGTN reaches 6 percent or less. In Cambodia, despite—

Senator HAGERTY. I would love to get maybe the full schedule that you are looking at—

Ms. BENNETT. I can give you the whole thing. I have got a great map with all—

Senator HAGERTY. Yes, I would like to see that—

Ms. BENNETT. —with all the pictures.

Senator HAGERTY. There are a couple of measures though, and this is what I am struggling with, as well. We talk about the goals being freedom and democracy. How do you think about metrics that assure us that you are obtaining the goals of freedom and democracy? If you had a way to get at that?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes. In fact, I do highly respect the use of the taxpayers' funds and to make sure that we are trending in the direction of greater efficiency. While I have not brought you a sheet with me to demonstrate all that, I do have it at hand, and I am able to give it to you in any form you would like.

Senator HAGERTY. I look forward to that. You can connect with my staff to do it. Again, it is beyond just the trend lines and volume of people reached, but I am very interested in metrics that you

have to demonstrate that we are achieving greater freedom and democracy as we do that.

Ms. BENNETT. We also developed a measurement under the previous, the second previous CEO, John Lansing, that was called an “impact measure,” which pulled together both the size of the audience, the growth of the audience, and things that we worked on that helped try and demonstrate the impact, such as, for example, you can say that it has got an impact when the Ayatollah personally denounces us in his Twitter feed.

There must be a good reason he is doing that. When defectors from Korea say that they and their families listen to Radio Free Asia and the Voice of America, despite the fact that they face very grave dangers in doing so. There are other impact measures you can see. For example—

Senator HAGERTY. I will be interested to see how you turn those anecdotes into measurable—

Ms. BENNETT. I have got all those things.

Senator HAGERTY. Okay, great. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[EDITOR’S NOTE.—The requested information referred to above can be found in the “Additional Material Submitted for the Record” section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Well, clearly, as you point out, your mission includes our National Security. We are seeing the growth of a new weapon that is being used against our democratic institutions, and it is called disinformation.

We see it deployed around the world. We recognize that we have challenges in order to be able to deal with that. You already mentioned with Senator Kaine that you could use additional resources in order to counter the influence in our own hemisphere.

I want to sort of talk about how you can adjust the priorities that are necessary as international circumstances change. Two years ago, we would not have predicted a war in Ukraine would be as challenging as it has been, and we did not know that Russia would actually invade Ukraine.

We were worried about it, but now it is reality. We did not realize that Russia would invest so much in news as they are investing and preparing to do more. They do not have to worry about appeasing appropriators or dealing with a Senate committee. They can just do what they want to do.

We have a very open system. We guard very carefully the journalistic independence of your agency, and we will defend that, but we, as policymakers, want to make sure that we are placing our resources and priorities in those parts of the world where we are the most vulnerable.

That is our responsibility collectively. Now, we have changed your structure a couple of times in the last few years. One of the issues I have always been concerned about with the local turf issues of the different grantees or organizations you have—are you as nimble as you need to be to respond to the current challenges?

We know what China is up to, and it is not in our National Security interests to allow their disinformation to move unchallenged. We know what Russia is—are you able to marshal the resources

to deal with the contemporary needs that we have on our National Security?

Ms. BENNETT. There is a lot of things to unpack in that question, Senator, and let me try it. First off, I think one thing that is necessary is in our own house, and I believe that we are all now rising to that challenge, which is we cannot operate as six different entities, each going their own way with their own strategies.

The world is now much more interlinked, and we need to restructure ourselves and also restructure our habits and our ways of thinking in order to use USAGM as a whole to fight the fact that this disinformation is coming from three primary actors and spreading out around the entire world.

When you talk about the fact that we get kind of caught on the wrong foot, you mentioned the fact there is—similarly, you mentioned the fact that the Latin America region is very underfunded. That is because for years and years it was kind of considered a reasonably—it needed information, but it was not the prime target of such amazing disinformation as it is now.

We have to adjust to meet that. That is true in other parts of the world as well. Let us see, the other question. Are we nimble enough and able to get our resources up quick enough?

Well, Congress has, in fact, been extremely responsive to these challenges and we appreciate that, but we need to be able to get funds and deploy them more quickly. Also, we need to think about different structures that will help us be more flexible and take red tape, take friction out of the system, help us get our work to the audiences.

They need to be much more efficiently, much more quickly.

Senator CARDIN. Do you have the legal authority to adjust the resources to meet the current priorities of our nation? Knowing that you have grantees, knowing that you have commitments of personnel around the world, can you adjust that under the authority that you have? Do you feel like you can do that in order to meet what may be the current priorities?

Ms. BENNETT. Technically, I believe that authority rests with me practically. The question is, do you have the authority and can use that authority? Congress does also pretty much lay out where they want those resources to be spent. If we want greater flexibility, we have to both learn to work together on how we—

Senator CARDIN. Which brings me to that point—and I understand that. We have our own political hurdles here that sometimes will make it less—we cannot move as quickly as our adversaries can move.

The question is, how do we work together? How do we get that information from you as to what we need to do in adjusting resources? We may not be able to add, but we may want to adjust where the resources are being placed. How do we make sure we have that information?

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, I am thrilled to hear your interest in that. That is something that we are always evaluating inside our own operation.

We right now have evaluations of what you know, where Radio Free Asia would like to go with its funding. Where Radio Free Europe would like to go with its funding. Where the Office of Cuba

Broadcasting, which is also the target of malign influence from the Chinese via Cuba into Latin and South America.

There is always ways in which we need to think about how to reallocate those resources, and certainly a greater flexibility and greater openness and willingness on the part of this committee to engage with us. We would be absolutely eager to rise to that challenge.

Senator CARDIN. I will just conclude on this. Every one of your partners are carrying out very important missions, and they are going to protect their ability to be effective in doing that, but if our priority is to shift to a different region, we may have to adjust resources in order to meet the current risks. That is sometimes difficult politically to do, but we have to have a way in which we can try to make those decisions.

Ms. BENNETT. In every budget, no matter how generous and large it is, you always have to make tough choices about the allocation of the assets to meet whatever the greatest challenge is.

Senator CARDIN. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Bennett, for being here today. The threat of disinformation, weaponizing information against the United States and our allies to divide us, divide our citizens is on the rise.

I think we all feel that. It is especially so because we all have access to one of these now, so citizens and policymakers all have access to that through social media or other sorts of platforms, but the idea that our adversaries would try to use disinformation to divide us is not new.

That was certainly something, for example, the Soviet Union prioritized during the Cold War, as an element of their statecraft to destabilize the United States and our allies at the time. I believe that in 1980, for example, there was a conservative estimate, the Soviet Union spent \$3 billion on disinformation campaigns as part of their overall strategy.

With an increasingly aggressive China and Russia, we have entered into what seems like—it feels like a new Cold War. Certainly, it is true that we have, for the first time in our history, two near-peer nuclear competitors that are competing against us, and we see the spread of this disinformation.

When you and I spoke in our office, in my office last week, you emphasized the need for more resources for USAGM to compete against China and Russia. I think you describe that China alone as outspending the U.S. 10 to 1 with regard to their campaigns.

How much did the U.S. spend back during the Cold War against the Soviet Union, if the Soviet Union was spending \$3 billion? Do you know, ballpark, what was the U.S. spending to be able to counter that?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes, Senator. As soon as I left your office, I went back, and we looked at our research department to see if we could figure out something like that. I do not have the exact figures here in front of me at the moment, but it was very similar to the ratio that we have today.

One of the lessons from that could be that the advantages that we have in terms of providing trusted, believable, independent news information is actually a great asset that enables us to do it

much more efficiently. I would suggest that we are now not just facing one powerful adversary in Russia.

We are facing several in Russia, China, and Iran. China and Iran in particular are very, very skillful in using technology to help both close off their own areas and reach into other areas. I think you get two results from that information, that the ratio is probably pretty close to what it is today.

One is that we have something to offer. We have a weapon that is worth using and deploying. The second is that we had certain ratios, the same facing one major adversary, whereas today we face at least three, and increasing technological hurdles to leap over.

Senator RICKETTS. What lessons can we draw from the previous Cold War against the Soviet Union that allowed us to be successful—and ultimately the Soviet Union fell apart, and we certainly worked on getting our message out then. What lessons can we draw from that to apply to today's scenario?

Ms. BENNETT. One of the things is, I am sure many of you have traveled around to various parts of the world, and one of the things I tell people, I would like them to have the opportunity 50 years from now to have people say about what we are doing today, what people say about what we were doing then.

Virtually any country you travel to, you will find people coming up to you and saying, "I got hope from Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, which are the two ones working there. We kept on believing we could win this. We could break out of this. I learned English. I moved to a different country. I had a career. We had the blankets over our heads." This was a tremendously powerful tool that we had in telling people objective news information. It was the fact that it was objective and believable, and the information they were getting from their own countries was not. We face that identical situation today.

Our critical advantage still remains our independence and our believability. I believe that 50 years from now, we are going to have people coming up to us and saying, you are the reason I believed that we were all going to get through this, and the information we were hearing from Russia and China was not correct.

Senator RICKETTS. Are there other tactics though we could learn from the old Cold War that we should be applying today?

Ms. BENNETT. One of the tactics is we should be working technologically extremely rigorously. Through our Open Technology Fund is one way we absolutely are doing that to get into closed environments.

The environments are closing rapidly around the world, and not just in China, not just in Iran, not just in Russia, but in many, many other markets, but the lessons we can learn from the Cold War, given the state of the technology available to us in those days, we were equally shut out of those markets.

As a matter of fact, I think in many places we did not even know if anyone was listening until after those countries fell, and people were able to get in and see it here. In Albania, for instance, I traveled to Albania a couple of years ago, and I do not think we had a very good idea of what our audience was.

It turned out that our audience was massive and very, very profoundly affected by it. My lesson that I would draw is that we

should not be afraid of the closed markets, that we still have something to offer, but we do need to do everything we can to get our news and information into those markets despite the fact that they are closed.

Senator RICKETTS. All right. Well, thank you, Ms. Bennett, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for this opportunity. Thank you to the ranker as well. How are you?

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Senator. I am fine, thank you.

Senator BOOKER. Good. I want to ask some questions that are more focused on Africa. As you know, it is home to about 1.46 billion people, the world's eighth—excuse me, the world's youngest population.

The continent has an average age of about 19.5 years old. In many ways, it is really important, as you know, for the United States to show up and provide a platform for fair reporting. Recognizing the success of Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia, what is the viability of a similar program in Africa?

Ms. BENNETT. I think that it is something we ought to investigate. I think we ought to investigate the best way of reaching into the African continent and into the Latin American, South America. I think we ought to look at it and see whether or not that is a viable way of operating. I am heading to Kenya next week.

What I am going to do is I am going to meet, thanks to USAGM and pulling them all together, 40 of the African continent largest media CEOs, and the purpose is to say, "What are you getting from China that you are not getting from us? Tell us what they are doing. Tell us if you are satisfied. Tell us what we can do to better reach you. Tell us how we can better reach you, how we can be better partners to you." I think we ought to investigate every possible means of reaching the continent.

Senator BOOKER. No, I appreciate that. Because what the PRC does on the continent is stunning. They use the media in Africa really to amplify and spread pro-China propaganda. According to a recent U.S. Institute of Peace report, China uses local outlets and influential African voices to disseminate and authenticate its Africa-focused propaganda.

This is really disturbing. I am wondering how closely does the USAGM work with local journalists to discredit this misinformation on the continent.

Ms. BENNETT. We have a large number of affiliates in both the continents that we are talking about right now, in Africa and Latin America. We have a large number of local affiliates, but part of the reason I am going down there is to make sure that I can see that we keep those affiliates and do not lose them to China and Russia.

Also, to see what it is we need to do to expand our partnership reach in this vital area, because getting our news and information through local partners is really efficient, and it gives us credibility in being able to do that.

We have a large number of partners right now. We need more.

Senator BOOKER. When you say partners, African journalists are extraordinary, but there is almost like a competition going on for their hearts and minds, right.

Ms. BENNETT. One of the things is we do train journalists.

The other thing we do is we work together with local journalists to do perhaps important investigations that they need to have done because we can provide the kind of safety and security, but the kind of distance that makes them more willing to take the risks of doing vital investigations.

They find that working with us gives them a little bit of security. We are in fact doing that quite a bit, is partnering with local journalists.

Senator BOOKER. USAGM, how is it working really on emerging technologies and digital platforms? Because this is a lot of the ways that young people are communicating. With such a huge youth bubble, it seems to me that we need to sort of find ways to communicate on those platforms effectively. What extent is the Open Technology Fund part of that kind of effort?

Ms. BENNETT. The Open Technology Fund incubates and develops and provides the kind of circumvention technology that enables people to get past the digital shutdowns in these areas and to reach out into other places where they can reach the information they want and need.

We had to, basically late last year as a result of the demonstrations that took place as a result of the young woman who was killed for being detained by the morality police, we basically ran through the entire circumvention, close to the entire circumvention budget in a little over a month, 2 months, because the demand for our circumvention technology was so great.

That is a really important thing, the Open Technology fund, its ability to provide means for people to get news and information through the vital technology.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, and to the ranker, I know there is no coincidence that you are all holding this hearing on World Press Freedom Day, and it has probably been mentioned already.

You cannot have a democracy without the free press. It is essential. It is not a luxury. It is vital not just for democracy, but also for human rights. I have a feeling this was already mentioned, but I just want to join the chorus of bipartisan senators calling on the Russian Government to immediately release American journalist Evan Gershkovich.

His wrongful detention is not only outrageous and unacceptable, it is an affront to the ideals of freedom and freedom of the press.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Senator. It has been mentioned by Senator Hagerty in his opening statement or his comments, and we all join you in those comments.

Senator BOOKER. I know you know that Senator Hagerty and I are aligned far more than people seem to know.

Senator CARDIN. We do know that. We are reporting on that every day. That is independent journalism.

Senator BOOKER. Rumors has it, I do not know if this is propaganda or not, but he is thinking about shaving has had to be more like me.

Senator CARDIN. I thought you were going to let your hair grow. [Laughter.]

Senator CARDIN. Exactly, exactly. You seem to get along in this committee. I want to thank Senator Booker for raising Africa from the point of view of having a physical presence of an organization, news organization in Africa, and your reply about Africa and also Latin America, our own hemisphere.

China is extremely active in both Africa and our hemisphere. It has been reported that they have 45 contracts with news organizations in our hemisphere. That is China. We know that their contracts many times exclude fair reporting of accurate information.

I think to have a physical presence is something that really needs to be explored. Senator BARRASSO.

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Bennett. It has been great to see you again. Thanks—I just wanted to congratulate you on the work you are doing, the men and women who work with you, getting the truth out.

It is harder and harder to do these days. In March, I think, of 2023, this year, the Russian court announced the bankruptcy of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty's operations for failure to comply with their foreign agent law.

Wonder how safe you feel your journalists are of being—potential for being detained. I do not know how many you have in Russia, and I do not—I am not going to ask you to display that number here today. Just give us your thoughts.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Senator. We talk about being flexible, being nimble. There was a situation that required the ultimate in flexibility and the ability to move fast because we had to very quickly work to get the majority of our journalists out of the country and to someplace safe, and neighboring countries were very accommodating.

The Czech Republic, for example, and Latvia were very welcoming in receiving those. We have had to turn to Congress to help us get funding to create new centers for these journalists to work out of in places on the Russian periphery. Yes, that had a tremendous impact on our work inside Russia.

As I say, being shut out of malign countries by forcible means is nothing new to this organization, and we intend to fully continue to do that. I would just like to say one thing. Radio Free Europe and Voice of America in Russian currently reach about 10 percent of adults inside Russia.

That may not sound like a lot until you realize that America's two most popular news-based programs only reach right about 20 percent, and that is in the freest media market in the world. So, in a closed environment, we are able to reach 10 percent of the adults there, despite what is happening.

Senator BARRASSO. We are also—you are dealing with the disinformation that comes out within Russia. January, their Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on social media claim that they had obtained 20,000 documents regarding a supposed secret U.S. biological weapons program in Ukraine.

This is not the first time Russia has made us a victim of disinformation campaign. What is our current experience teaching us about countering the kind of disinformation that comes out?

Ms. BENNETT. Two things: One is that each one of our major entities now has a very robust fact checking operation. That is one

thing that is very important. Checking the facts that provided to the people who consume our products.

On the other hand, I think a lot of our power comes from not countering and not pushing back, but providing alternatives. Because if the only thing you see and hear is the disinformation, then it is the only thing you see and hear.

For us putting out credible news and information—and again, I have a chart that I would be happy to show everybody that shows what happens to the audiences of each one of our networks when something happens inside the country, when the people inside that country are receiving news and information that they do not trust from their own government, and that is the headscarf—the headscarf protests, our Iranian audience went like this, or digitalized went like this.

I mean, it was that much of a thing. The same thing with the China COVID protest. People, during the time when they cannot believe their own governments, despite the volume of information they are getting, they turn to us, they come to us, they seek us out.

Senator BARRASSO. My final question is that China and Russia seem to be joining forces in a number of different things, and part of it this. In April, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty reported that they had received some leaked documents and recordings which confirmed reports of Russia and China collaborating on censorship and internet control tactics.

The information provided showed that officials from Russia and China shared strategies for tracking dissidents, for controlling the internet. They have asked each other for help in blocking what they call dangerous news, we might call the truth, and for advice on how to impede some of the technology that is coming.

What are the key elements that you are focusing on, the United States is focusing on, to counter the Chinese and Russian messaging?

Ms. BENNETT. Yes. No, that is absolutely true. We are seeing that on the ground. I am actually hoping that that is something I am going to get much more insight into when I make my trip to Kenya to meet with the media executives, because they are the ones that have the real foot on the ground because they are actually the targets.

The CEOs of existing news organizations in these continents are the targets. Finding out from them exactly what is happening and how we can defend ourselves against that, but make sure that we are providing good and reliable alternatives to give them the option.

Senator BARRASSO. Well, thank you for the great job you are doing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. BENNETT. Thank you, Senator.

Senator CARDIN. Let me thank you for your dedication to this mission. We are very proud of your leadership and thank you for your testimony today.

Ms. BENNETT. Senator, thank you very much. Thank you, all of you. I really appreciate your attention. Thank you so much.

Senator CARDIN. We will now turn to our second panel. Let me welcome our three witnesses. Our first is Jessica Brandt, who is

the Policy Director for the Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology Initiative at Brookings.

Her recent publication focused on foreign interference, disinformation, digital authoritarianism, and the implications of emerging technologies for liberal democracies. Ms. Brandt was previously head of Policy and Research for the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund and held fellowships at Brookings and the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University.

Our second on this panel is Christopher Walker, Vice President for Studies and Analysis at the National Endowment for Democracy. In this capacity, he oversees the International Forum of Democratic Studies at the Center for the Analysis and Discussion of Democratic Development. Prior to joining the NED, Walker, Mr. Walker was Vice President for Strategies and Analysis at Freedom House.

Our third member of this panel is David Stilwell, who has already been mentioned by Senator Hagerty, who is the Fox Fellow for Future Pacing Threats at the Air Force Academy's Institute for Future Conflict. In this role, he educates cadets and faculty on the growing military threat presented by the People's Republic of China, as well as PRC strategy of political warfare, especially in the use of information warfare to undermine democracies.

He served as the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2019–2021. Prior to that, he served in the Air Force for 35 years. He enlisted as a Korean linguist in 1980. Served as a fighter pilot and a commander for 25 years, then as defense attaché to Beijing.

He retired in 2015 as Brigadier General, serving as the Asia Advisor to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. A pretty busy guy. That is an incredible resume. It is impressive that all three of you here. We thank you for your dedication and service on this type of issue, and we will start with Ms. Brandt.

STATEMENT OF JESSICA BRANDT, POLICY DIRECTOR, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE, BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. BRANDT. Well, thank you. Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, distinguished members of the committee for inviting me to address you today. As you are aware, the United States is engaged in a persistent asymmetric competition with authoritarian challengers, and the information space is a critical theater.

As part of this competition, autocrats in Moscow and Beijing, but also elsewhere, have leveraged multiple asymmetries. Russia and China both deliberately spread or amplify information that is false or misleading. Both operate vast propaganda networks that use multiple modes of communication to disseminate their preferred versions of events. Both spread numerous, often conflicting conspiracy theories designed to deflect blame for their wrongdoing, dent the prestige of the United States, and cast doubt on the notion of objective truth. Both frequently engage in whataboutism to frame the United States as hypocritical while using a network of proxy influencers to churn up anti-American sentiment around the

world. For Putin and Xi, the goal of these pursuits is to tighten their grip on power at home and to weaken their democratic competitors abroad.

For the United States, like other democracies, an open information environment confers tremendous long-term advantages, but it also creates near-term vulnerabilities that can be exploited using low cost, often deniable tools and tactics. Where democracies depend on the idea that the truth is knowable, autocrats have no such need for a healthy information space to thrive. In fact, they benefit from widespread public skepticism that the truth exists at all. Strict control over their information environments affords autocrats a degree of insulation from critics, so they freely exploit Western social media platforms that they ban at home, and in doing so, face virtually no normative constraints online.

As a result of these asymmetries, autocrats have made remarkable advances. Distinguished members, the information space may be the most consequential terrain over which states will compete in the decades to come, and the United States needs a strategy to prevail, one that is rooted in considerable asymmetric advantages of our own.

What should such a strategy entail?

I think to start with, the United States can seize the initiative by harnessing truthful information to defend our interests and the integrity of the global information environment. To do this, Washington should undertake concerted campaigns, grounded in truthful messaging, to expose the failures and false promises of dictatorship.

It should also uphold freedom of information worldwide, not just because it is consistent with democratic principles, but because it puts Russia and China in a defensive position. We should support high quality journalism abroad, particularly in places where democracy is backsliding, since independent media keep citizens informed and hold power to account.

Ultimately, defending democratic interests in the information domain will require thinking beyond it. Washington should use the economic tools and cyber capabilities at its disposal—of course, where appropriate and within existing authorities—to deter autocratic regimes from conducting information operations and to undercut their capabilities.

We should do all of this in partnership with other democratic governments, recognizing that this is ultimately a contest over principles and that our strong network of partners and allies is perhaps our greatest advantage. There are numerous steps USAGM can take to advance this strategy and to position itself for success in an era of information competition. Let me propose five.

First, focus attention and resources on Latin America. Throughout the first quarter of this year, three of the five most retweeted Russian state media accounts on Twitter messaged in Spanish. Five of the 10 fastest growing ones targeted Spanish language audiences.

On TikTok, RT en Español is among the most popular Spanish language media outlets. It is 29.6 million likes makes it more popular than Telemundo, Univision, BBC Mundo, and El País. Like-

wise, on Facebook, RT en Español currently has more followers than any other Spanish language international broadcaster.

Others, too, are succeeding in the region. China's CGTN en Español has roughly six times more followers on Facebook than VOA Spanish, and Venezuela's Telesur and Iran's HispanTV have also amassed sizable followings. I think this reflects, at least in part, a resource prioritization problem. In 2023, the budget for VOA's Latin America division was slightly more than \$10 Million.

That is less than half of its Eurasia Division and less than a quarter of its East Asia and Pacific Division. Of the 12 overseas bureaus operated by VOA, none are in Latin America.

Spanish is the fourth most spoken language in the world, and content produced for Latin American audiences could have enormous reach. USAGM should increase investments in VOA Spanish and consider the feasibility of opening a bureau within the region. It could also do things like using public private, partnerships to create low-cost distribution agreements that would allow material created by Spanish speakers right here in the United States to reach audiences through local, trusted sources.

Second, USAGM should leverage 21st century digital tools, continuing to invest in social media analysis capabilities that enable it to understand the concerns of its audience. By doing so, USAGM can equip itself to develop tailored and compelling editorial positions. These are essential for staying relevant in a crowded, modern media market.

USAGM should also use analytics to evaluate the performance of its content, since success will depend on continuously identifying and prioritizing the most impactful materials. In addition, USAGM should continue supporting cutting edge, open internet and circumvention tools that enable journalists to provide independent news coverage. Doing so is a means of combating the censorship that enables autocrats to thrive, and it also facilitates reporting that speaks truth to power and promotes engaged citizenry, and therefore builds resilience against disinformation and propaganda in societies around the world.

USAGM could also consider whether AI systems, for example, could be used to translate high quality content for dissemination in multiple languages. Recent advances could make it possible to do so quickly and at low cost, boosting the reach of its most compelling materials.

Third, center authentic local voices. Moscow and Beijing frequently use local influencers to improve the reach and resonance of their messaging. Without wavering from its commitment to journalistic excellence or editorial transparency, USAGM could borrow an element of its approach and center the voices of local investigative journalists and civil society leaders in its content. Doing so may help that content strike a chord with local audiences, especially in places where the United States may not be inherently trusted.

Fourth, focus on themes that attract global audiences. The United States and other liberal democracies have struggled to develop a coherent post-Cold War message, and as a result, Washington has frequently defaulted to emphasizing support for human rights or efforts to root out corruption, narratives that may reso-

nate primarily with elites or be seen as—worse, be seen as hypocritical.

U.S. public diplomacy should focus on themes that appeal to broad audiences, including America’s incredible capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship, and its support for free expression. In its coverage of the United States, VOA should not hesitate to present the American experience in its full complexity.

This includes critical assessments of U.S. policy. It is a sign of strength, not weakness, for a U.S. Government funded entity to reckon honestly with its challenges. I think doing so may resonate with those who are struggling to nurture their own democracies.

Finally, do not try to be everywhere all the time. As it works toward impact, USAGM should focus on places where people get their news. In many countries, Facebook and YouTube, much more so than Twitter. Also drawing on the knowledge of professional content marketers and might also explore whether there are best practices for reaching audiences on WhatsApp, given its popularity as a source of news.

Ultimately, I think there is wisdom in USAGM’s acknowledgment that it cannot adopt every new platform in every target market.

Distinguished Members, the information space is a critical feature of the emerging competition between the United States and its authoritarian challengers, and we need a strategy to prevail.

One that meets the moment and draws on our considerable strengths. By taking these steps, USAGM can play a central role, positioning us and itself for success.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Brandt follows:]

Prepared Statement of Ms. Jessica Brandt

Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, and Distinguished Members of the Committee for inviting me to address you today. As you are aware, the United States is engaged in what I would characterize as a persistent, asymmetric competition (<https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/linking-values-and-strategy/>) with authoritarian challengers that is taking place across at least four, interconnected, non-military domains:

- Politics, and here I am thinking primarily, but not solely, about interference in democratic processes and efforts to denigrate democratic governments;
- Economics, specifically the accumulation and application of coercive leverage (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2022.2124016>) and the use of strategic corruption (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/rise-strategic-corruption>);
- Technology, which intersects with all other domains, but is a competitive domain in its own right; and
- Information, which may be the most consequential terrain over which states will compete in the next decades.

The last is where I will focus today.

It is within the information domain that autocrats—in Moscow and Beijing, but also elsewhere—have leveraged (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1970902>) some of the sharpest asymmetries. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping deliberately spread or amplify information that is false or misleading. Both operate vast propaganda networks that use multiple modes of communication to disseminate their preferred, often slanted, versions of events. Both spread numerous, often conflicting, conspiracy theories designed to deflect blame for their own wrongdoing, dent the prestige of the United States, and cast doubt on the notion of objective truth. And both frequently engage in “whataboutism (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/whataboutism>)” to frame the United States and its way of doing business as hypocritical, while using a network of proxy influencers to churn

up anti-American sentiment around the world. For Putin and Xi, the goal of these pursuits is to tighten their grip on power at home and weaken their democratic competitors abroad. For Xi, it is also about positioning China as a responsible global player.

For the United States, like other democracies, an open information environment confers tremendous long-term advantages, but it also creates near-term vulnerabilities that can be exploited using low-cost, often deniable tools and tactics. Where democracies depend on the idea that the truth is knowable (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1970902>) and citizens can discern it to govern themselves, autocrats have no such need for a healthy information environment to thrive. In fact, autocrats benefit from widespread public skepticism that objective truth exists at all. Because autocrats tightly control their information environments, they are more insulated from critics than their democratic competitors. Although Moscow and Beijing effectively ban many Western social media platforms at home, they are able to use them quite effectively to engage audiences abroad. In doing so, they face virtually no normative constraints on lying nor concern for commercial repercussions (<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/02/how-democracies-can-win-infor%20mation-contest-without-undercutting-their-values-pub-85058>). As a result of these asymmetries, autocrats have made remarkable information advances.

To date, the United States and other liberal democracies have been slow to appreciate the nature of the contest (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1970902>) and to develop a proactive strategy to push back on those advances. This is partially driven by the challenge of developing a coherent threat assessment when so much of the relevant activity is taking place on smart phones instead of traditional battlefields. But it is primarily a result of the hands-off approach that democratic societies have traditionally taken to dealing with information—and for good reason, given that they risk contravening George Kennan’s admonition not to become like those against whom they are “coping (<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>).” Those constraints make it hard for democratic societies to contend with this challenge, but they need not prevent success.

Recognizing that competition is ultimately about the pursuit and use of advantages, the United States should develop a strategy (<https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/linking-values-and-strategy/>) to leverage myriad asymmetric advantages of its own—both within the information domain and beyond it—to push back on Moscow and Beijing’s information advances.

AN INFORMATION STRATEGY FOR THE UNITED STATES

To start with, the United States can seize the initiative (<https://web-p-ebscobhost.com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=ec0e98ea-8760-40d2-9c80-9e5eb2aba080%40redis&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwLHNNoaWlmc2l0ZTl1aG9zdC1saXZlJnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#AN=142781666&db=asn>) by harnessing truthful information to defend its interests and the integrity of the global information environment. To do this, Washington should take the so-called persistent engagement (<https://www.cybercom.mil/Media/News/Article/3198878/cyber-101-defend-forward-and-persistent-engagement/>) approach that the United States has applied to cyberspace and carry it into the information domain (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1771045>). This would involve concerted campaigns that are grounded in truthful messaging designed to expose the failures and false promises of dictatorship, including corruption and repression. Such an approach would be in keeping with a strategy of exploiting Moscow and Beijing’s weaknesses (<https://www.lawfareblog.com/washington-needs-plan-pushing-back-autocratic-advances>), recognizing that competition is ultimately about the pursuit and use of advantages.

Importantly, the focus of these efforts (<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/02/how-democracies-can-win-infor%20mation-contest-without-undercutting-their-values-pub-85058>) should not be on refuting false information, but on affirmatively highlighting the strengths of democratic governance models and exposing the corruption and repression of autocratic challengers. There are at least two audiences for this content. First, individuals who live within repressive societies. Second, those in societies where democracy is backsliding or not fully consolidated, where truthful information can help build resilience against disinformation and propaganda.

To that end, recognizing that independent media keeps citizens informed and holds power to account, Washington should support high quality journalism abroad (<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/02/how-democracies-can-win-infor%20mation-contest-without-undercutting-their-values-pub-85058>), particularly in

places where democracy is backsliding. And it should promote freedom of information globally—not just because it is in keeping with democratic values, but because it puts autocrats at a disadvantage, given that their grip on power depends on strict control of information.

Ultimately, succeeding in the information domain will require action beyond it, since that is where some of the United States’s most valuable advantages lie. These include advanced cyber capabilities, global financial markets, robust rule of law, and a vibrant network of partners. Washington could, for example, use its cyber capabilities to undermine the ability of its competitors to carry out malign activity online—as it reportedly did by taking the Kremlin’s proxy troll farm operation offline (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-cyber-command-operation-disrupted-internet-access-of-russian-troll-factory-on-day-of-2018-midterms/2019/02/26/1827fc9e-36d6-11e9-af5b-b51b7ff322e9-story.html>) for a few days around the 2018 midterms, by conducting an operation that targeted Iran (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/03/politics/us-cyber-operation-iran-election-interference/index.html>) ahead of the 2020 presidential election, and by conducting “full spectrum operations” (<https://therecord.media/cyber-command-conducted-offensive-operations-to-protect-midterm-elections>) before, during, and after the midterms in 2022. Washington could also use the power and centrality of its economy to impose costs on those who carry out destructive, state-backed information manipulation campaigns.

The United States should do all of this in coordination with other democratic societies, leveraging what might well be its most important strategic advantage: a strong network of partners and alliances. This should include sharing information about threats and collaborating on responses that are rooted in democratic values, because those values are strengths (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2020-12-22/democratic-values-are-competitive-advantage>). Ultimately, the information competition is not just a contest between nations, but a struggle (<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/02/how-democracies-can-win-information-contest-without-undercutting-their-values-pub-85058>) over systems and principles.

ADVANCING THIS STRATEGY: THE ROLE OF USAGM

The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) has a critical role to play in advancing this strategy. As I have argued in a forthcoming paper, co-written with colleagues at the German Marshall Fund of the United States and elsewhere, there are numerous steps that it can take to update its strategy for success in an era of information competition with autocrats. These include:

1. Focusing attention and resources on Latin America;
2. Leveraging 21st Century digital tools to build a sophisticated picture of its audiences, assess the performance of its content, circumvent censorship, and boost the reach of its most compelling material;
3. Centering authentic local voices, borrowing an element of its competitor’s strategy while keeping its commitment to journalistic excellence;
4. Focusing on themes that attract global audiences; and
5. Avoiding the temptation to be everywhere always, instead prioritizing the platforms where people get their news while utilizing the State Department’s existing Content Commons.

FOCUS ATTENTION AND RESOURCES ON LATIN AMERICA

Through the first quarter of 2023, three of the five most retweeted Russian state media accounts on Twitter messaged in Spanish, and 5 of the 10 fastest growing ones targeted Spanish-language audiences. On YouTube too, RT en Español has also proven capable of building large audiences, despite the platform’s global ban (<https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/youtube-blocks-russian-state-funded-media-channels-globally-2022-03-11/>) on Russian state-funded media channels. On TikTok, RT en Español is among the most popular Spanish-language media outlets. Its 29.6 million likes make it more popular than Telemundo, Univision, BBC Mundo, and El País. Likewise, on Facebook, RT en Español currently has more followers than any other Spanish-language international broadcaster.

China too, is succeeding in the region. Its Spanish-language broadcaster, CGTN en Español, has roughly six times more followers on Facebook than the United States’ Spanish-language outlet, Voz de América. Venezuela’s TeleSur and Iran’s HispanTV also have amassed sizeable followings.

This at least partly, if not primarily, reflects a resource prioritization problem. In 2023, the budget (https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/USAGMBudget_FY23_CBJ_03-25-22-FINAL.pdf) for Voice of America (VOA)’s

Latin America division was slightly more than \$10 million USD. That is less than half of the budget appropriated for its Eurasia division and less than a quarter of the budget appropriated for its East Asia and Pacific division. Of the 12 overseas bureaus (<https://www.voanews.com/a/voa-around-the-world/4113370.html>) operated by VOA, none are in Latin America. This reflects broader trends. From 2015 to 2020, U.S. public diplomacy financing overseen by the State Department (educational and cultural affairs spending, excluding broadcasting) consistently deprioritized (https://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/pdfs/gf1_00_combined.pdf) the Western Hemisphere.

Recognizing the extent of Russia’s information manipulation efforts in Latin America (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/FP_20221216_russia_propaganda_brandt_wirtschaftler.pdf)—and that with Spanish the fourth-most spoken language in the world (<https://rubric.com/en-US/%20most-spoken-languages-in-the-world>), Kremlin content produced for Latin American audiences could reach far beyond the region—USAGM should focus attention and resources there. This approach should include increasing investments in VOA broadcasting in Spanish and considering the feasibility of opening a regional bureau within Latin America. To the extent possible, it should also include facilitating exchanges between Spanish-language journalists in the United States and their counterparts in Latin America, as well as public-private partnerships to create low-cost distribution and content sharing agreements that would allow for material created by Spanish speakers in the United States to reach audiences through local, trusted sources.

As a country with 40 million native Spanish speakers and whose national security interests are directly affected by events in the region, the United States cannot afford to cede the information space in Latin America to its geopolitical competitors.

LEVERAGE 21ST CENTURY DIGITAL TOOLS

What foreign audiences find appealing about the United States almost certainly differs from country to country and region to region. USAGM regional bureaus are best positioned to create and distribute material that resonates with their respective audiences—but not based on “best guesses.” USAGM should continue to invest in social media analysis tools (https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Strategic-Plan-2022-2026_74Y22-02-23-22.pdf) that enable regional bureaus to understand the interests and concerns of their audiences. Doing so can equip them to develop tailored and compelling editorial propositions, which are essential for staying relevant in a crowded modern media market. These tools should be coupled with market research and social media analytics to evaluate the performance of USAGM content, since success will depend on continuously identifying and prioritizing the types of materials that are most impactful. This approach is in keeping with the State Department’s commitment to data-informed diplomacy (<https://www.state.gov/data/>).

USAGM should also continue supporting cutting-edge open internet and circumvention tools (https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Strategic-Plan-2022-2026_74Y22-02-23-22.pdf) that enable its journalists, among others, to provide independent, comprehensive, and objective news coverage. Doing so brings two advantages. First, it is a means of combatting the censorship that enables autocrats to thrive. Second, by facilitating news coverage that speaks truth to power and promotes an engaged citizenry, it builds resilience against disinformation propaganda in target societies around the world.

Finally, Washington should also consider whether AI systems could be used to translate USAGM or other high-quality content for dissemination in multiple languages. Recent advances could make it possible to do so quickly and at low cost, boosting the reach of USAGM’s most compelling materials.

CENTER AUTHENTIC LOCAL VOICES

Moscow and Beijing frequently use authentic domestic voices—for example, those of local journalists and activists—to improve the reach and resonance of their messaging, recognizing that doing so lends their content a degree of credibility. Moscow has experimented (<https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/russias-maturing-information-manipulation-playbook/>) with a range of techniques, including co-locating (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/world/africa/russia-madagascar-election.html>) trolls within a target population, renting the social media accounts of local users (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/europe/ukraine-russia-election-tampering-propaganda.html>) with the goal of using them to publish political ads or plant articles, and hiring freelance journalists (<https://www.reuters.com/article/%20us-usa-election-facebook-russia/duped-by-russia-freelancers-ensnared-in->

%20disinformation-campaign-by-promise-of-easy-money-idUSKBN25T35E) to write political stories for an online publication secretly run by individuals linked to the Internet Research Agency (IRA), among others. Beijing, for its part, has long used foreigners in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda. “We have always attached great importance to ‘borrowing a mouth to speak’ and used international friends to carry out foreign propaganda,” proclaimed (<http://borrow/>) Zhu Ling, then-China Daily editor-in-chief, in a speech celebrating the newspaper’s 30th anniversary.

Without wavering from its commitment (<https://www.usagm.gov/our-work/strategy-and-results/strategic-priorities/>) to uphold journalistic excellence, report facts without bias, and prioritize editorial transparency, USAGM could borrow an element of this approach and center the voices of local investigative journalists and civil society leaders, including rights defenders, in its content. Doing so may help that content strike a chord with local audiences, especially in places where the United States may not be inherently trusted. It is an approach that is also in keeping with USAGM’s commitment to engaging and empowering local populations.

FOCUS ON THEMES THAT ATTRACT GLOBAL AUDIENCES

The United States and other liberal democracies have struggled to develop a coherent post-Cold War message. As a result, Washington has frequently defaulted to emphasizing support for human rights and efforts to root out corruption—narratives that may resonate primarily with elites, or worse, be seen as hypocritical. Instead, U.S. public diplomacy should focus on themes that continue to attract global audiences, including the United States’s capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship, its technological and scientific achievements, and its support for freedom of expression.

In its coverage of the United States, VOA should not hesitate to present the American experience in its full complexity. This includes critically assessing U.S. policy. It is a sign of strength, not weakness, for a United States Government-funded entity to reckon with its challenges. In fact, doing so may resonate (https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Strategic-Plan-2022-2026_74Y22-02-23-22.pdf) in societies that are struggling to establish or consolidate their own democracies.

As appropriate, USAGM networks and programs could highlight authoritarian efforts to undermine democratic societies and institutions, as well as stories of resilience and resistance to repression. When relevant and as prudent, they could consider calling attention to the information manipulation strategies of Russia and China—in particular, whataboutism—giving care not to draw attention to content from Moscow and Beijing that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. In the fact of whataboutism, they should resist the temptation to rebut each claim (<https://docs.aiddata.org/reports/gf01/gf01-06/Autocratic-Approaches-to-Information-Manipulation-A-Comparative-Case-Study.html>), recognizing that doing so only prolongs the conversation on the competitor’s terms.

DON’T TRY TO BE EVERYWHERE ALL THE TIME

As it works to disseminate content that audiences not only trust but use, USAGM should focus on the places where people get their news (<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/country-and-market-data>): in many countries, Facebook and YouTube, much more so than Twitter. Drawing on the knowledge of professional content marketers, it might also explore whether there are best practices for reaching audiences on Whatsapp, given its popularity as a source of news in many contexts. There is wisdom in USAGM’s acknowledgment (https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Strategic-Plan-2022-2026_74Y22-02-23-22.pdf) that it cannot adopt every new platform in every target market.

At the same time, USAGM could also share its originals within the State Department’s Content Commons (<https://commons.america.gov/>) so that they may be amplified by relevant public diplomats. The Content Commons is an important resource that provides public diplomacy professionals access to a searchable library of on-demand, cleared, license-free content. But users report that the current repository offers limited, and at times underwhelming, options—especially in video format. A sharing arrangement could help mitigate that challenge, while helping to facilitate the dissemination of USAGM material to new audiences.

LOOKING AHEAD

The emerging competition between the United States and its authoritarian challengers is asymmetric in nature, and increasingly taking place far from traditional

battlefields. Digital technologies are making it increasingly possible for autocrats to exploit the openness of democratic societies to disrupt them from within and to spread misleading propaganda around the world, to the detriment of U.S. interests. The United States needs a strategy for pushing back on these activities—one that meets the moment and draws on its considerable strengths. There are myriad steps such an approach could entail, some within the information domain, others beyond it. USAGM can play a central role. By focusing attention and resources on Latin America, leveraging 21st Century digital tools, centering authentic local voices, focusing on themes that attract global audiences, and avoiding the temptation to be everywhere always, USAGM can position itself for success in today's information environment.

Senator CARDIN. Well, thank you very much. Mr. Walker.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER WALKER, VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDIES AND ANALYSIS, NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. WALKER. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. If there ever were a time for the United States and its democratic allies to make competition in the information domain a top order global priority, it would be now.

Over a protracted period of time, authoritarian regimes have massively scaled up their capabilities to suppress unfavorable information and amplify authoritarian pro-regime messaging across the global information sphere.

Although there are differences in the shape and tone of the Chinese and Russian approaches, both stem from a governance model that privileges state power over individual liberty, and it is fundamentally hostile to free expression, open debate, and independent thought.

A picture of these regimes' intent can be found in their domestic media landscapes. It has long been standard operating procedure for Beijing and Moscow, among other regimes, to suppress dissent, smear or silence political opponents, and inundate their populations with propagandistic content.

Authorities in China, Russia, Iran, and other autocracies systematically intimidate, harass, and imprison their own media professionals. In an era of rising impunity, these regimes are more inclined to impose such harsh measures on foreign journalists. For instance, the Washington Post's Jason Rezaian was imprisoned in Iran for 544 days.

Russia's detention of the Wall Street Journal's Evan Gershkovich is the most recent, deeply disturbing case of this kind and deserves particular attention on World Press Freedom Day. In the quest for information dominance, however, nowhere is the manipulation of media and ideas more embedded in the system than in today's China.

Domestically, the Chinese authorities have built a formidable infrastructure of social management that increasingly relies on advanced technologies to surveil and engineer societal behavior. In recent months, the authorities in Beijing have effectively obscured the deaths of 1 million people who are believed to have perished due to the abrupt turnabout in the country's zero COVID policy.

The real-world impact of Beijing's controlling approach to the information domain was felt internationally through its manipulation of the WHO. The hobbled response of the world's leading public

health body at the outset of the pandemic was no doubt related to the PRC's furtive approach to the breakout of the virus, for which millions of people within and beyond China have paid a terribly high price.

This episode speaks to the situation in which we find ourselves today. In a globalized information environment, the media norms and behaviors of the authoritarians do not stay neatly confined within the borders of their own repressive systems. Let me take a moment to put into perspective the extent to which the global mobilization of media undertaken by Russia and China is impacting us.

Over the past two decades, Beijing and Moscow, along with like-minded regimes, have developed a diverse range of efforts to shape perceptions and project their preferred worldview, while contesting the ideas they find undesirable. Russia reportedly puts more than \$300 million annually into RT, which is one of its principal engines for content generation. One recent estimate places Moscow's outward-facing information related investments at \$1.5 billion.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, which functions as the Iranian regime's state propaganda agency, in 2022 saw its budget increase to an estimated \$1.2 billion. China has spent—and continues to spend—tens of billions of dollars to shape public opinion and perceptions around the world, including thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, and development of media enterprises with global reach.

In this new environment, authoritarian regimes have exploited trends to muddy the information space, create cleavages in our societies, and obscure their own actions. Ultimately, authoritarian information strategies seek to undermine trust in democratic institutions and ideas.

The autocrats have built out massive outward-facing strategic communications capabilities. The large and complex challenge posed by authoritarian regimes requires a response on multiple fronts. For its part, the National Endowment for Democracy supports independent journalism internationally to provide citizens with pluralistic and fact-based journalistic information.

In 2022, NED made \$51 million in grants to organizations working to protect democracy by strengthening independent media and freedom of information in some of the world's most repressive environments.

In this competitive and evolving context, the fact that the U.S. international broadcasters—the Voice of America and the surrogates—are doing their work according to a fundamentally different set of values is as important today as at any time since the end of the Cold War.

As part of a multifaceted response to today's global information competition, U.S. international broadcasters have an especially crucial role to play, including systematically providing accurate and uncensored news in a growing number of places where free media is hobbled or severely at risk.

The critical importance of such work can be seen in settings such as Xinjiang, Tibet, Russia or Belarus, where under extraordinarily repressive conditions, U.S. entities such as Radio Free Asia, Radio

Free Europe/Radio Liberty unearth and report on issues that the authorities work so hard to keep from public view.

Finally, the threats to democratic freedoms and security that arise from today's competitive global information environment require a shift in strategic thinking among the democracies, which should seize the challenge posed by the autocrats as an opportunity to level up our commitments in free media and democratic innovation so that we are not perpetually playing catch-up with the mal-intentioned autocrats. Thank you for your time and attention.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Walker follows:]

Prepared Statement of Mr. Christopher Walker

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee.

If there ever were a time for the United States and its democratic allies to make competition in information domain a top order, global priority, it would be now. This is because the contemporary information revolution touches nearly every aspect of life as we know it. And over a protracted period of time, authoritarian regimes—whose worldview is at direct odds with that of the democracies—have massively scaled up their capabilities to suppress unfavorable information and amplify distorted pro-regime messaging across the global information sphere.

Plainly said, we are in a fiercely competitive information environment, in which leading authoritarian powers, principally China and Russia, have mobilized in ways that are threatening the interests of the United States and its democratic partners—and more fundamentally undermining democratic principles and interests globally.

As my colleagues and I have written, although there are differences in the shape and tone of the Chinese and Russian approaches, both stem from a governance model that privileges state power over individual liberty and is fundamentally hostile to free expression, open debate, and independent thought.¹

A picture of these regimes' intent can be gleaned from their own domestic media landscapes. It has long been standard operating procedure for Beijing and Moscow to suppress dissent, smear or silence political opponents, and inundate their populations with propagandistic content. The paramount power holders in these countries brook no pluralism or dissent. Authorities in China, Russia, Iran and other autocracies, systematically intimidate, harass, and imprison their own media professionals. In an era of rising impunity, these regimes, which possess unchecked and arbitrary power, are more inclined to impose such harsh measures on foreign journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported in December 2022 that the number of jailed journalists had reached a 30-year high, with 363 individuals behind bars, and named Iran, China, Myanmar, Turkey, and Belarus, as the top five offenders, respectively.² The *Washington Post's* Jason Rezaian was imprisoned in Iran's notorious Evin prison for 544 days. Russia's detention of the *Wall Street Journal's* Evan Gershkovic is the most recent, deeply disturbing case of this kind—and deserves particular attention, given that today is World Press Freedom Day.

In the quest for information dominance, nowhere is the manipulation of media and ideas more embedded in the system than in China. Domestically, the Chinese authorities have built a formidable infrastructure of intrusive social management that increasingly relies on advanced technologies to surveil, coerce, and engineer societal behavior. This system incentivizes compliance with Communist party doctrine in daily life and punishes even minor forms of dissent or opposition. In the digital era, decision makers in China have constructed a powerful censorship architecture that is redefining the boundaries of information management and manipulation.

For China's governors such ambitions to dominate the information environment is a feature, not a bug, of the system. In one illustrative example of the studios

¹ Christopher Walker & Jessica Ludwig (Eds.). (2017). *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*. *International Forum for Democratic Studies*. <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Full-Report.pdf>.

² Number of jailed journalists spikes to new global record. (n.d.). *Committee to Protect Journalists*. <https://cpj.org/reports/2022/12/number-of-jailed-journalists-spikes-to-new-global-record/>.

authoritarian avoidance of sensitive domestic issues, China's state-run media did not report at all on the country's massive stock-market collapse in August 2015.³

In recent months, the authorities in Beijing have effectively obscured the deaths of some 1 million people who are believed to have perished due to the abrupt turn-about from the country's "zero covid" policy.⁴ The authorities in Beijing are rewriting the way "the pandemic is remembered in China by withholding data on its impact and censoring people who contradict the government line that its handling of the virus was a triumph."⁵

The real world impact of Beijing's controlling approach was felt internationally through its manipulation of the World Health Organization: the hobbled response of the world's leading public-health body at the outset of the covid pandemic was no doubt related to the PRC's furtive approach to the breakout of the virus, for which millions of people within and beyond China's borders have paid the highest price.⁶

This episode speaks to the situation in which we find ourselves today: in a globalized information environment, the media norms and behaviors of authoritarians do not stay confined within the borders of their own repressive systems. Let me take a moment to put into perspective the extent of the global mobilization undertaken by China and Russia in the realm of information and ideas.

THE AUTHORITARIAN GLOBAL MEDIA MOBILIZATION

Over the past two decades, Beijing and Moscow along with like-minded regimes have developed a diverse constellation of efforts to shape perceptions and project their preferred worldview, while contesting the ideas they find intolerable.

Authoritarian regimes are engaged in what my colleagues William J. Dobson and Tarek Masoud describe as a "hidden war on democracy," given the extent to which autocrats have leveraged the democracies' open systems, including media and information, to their advantage.⁷ China and Russia in their own malign ways are vibrant internationalists, and upped the competition in the global information arena at a time when the world's leading democratic states have tended to turn inward. This imbalance has played into the autocrats' hands and to their advantage.

Russia's propaganda machine reportedly puts more than \$300M annually into RT alone.⁸ One recent estimate places Moscow's outward-facing information-related investments at \$1.5 billion.⁹

The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which functions as the Iranian regime's state propaganda agency, in 2022 saw its budget increase by 46 percent to approximately \$1.26 billion.¹⁰

China has spent tens of billions of dollars to shape public opinion and perceptions around the world, employing a toolkit that includes thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, and the development of media enterprises with global reach. Writing in the *Journal of Democracy* in 2015, China expert Anne-Marie Brady observed that: "The scale and range of China's current annual investment in foreign-propaganda activities is so great that it would be impossible to come up with an accurate total budget." Brady went on to say that "international reports have cited figures ranging from \$7 billion to \$10 billion, but these numbers

³ Chris Buckley. (2015, August 25). China's Party-Run Media Is Silent on Market Mayhem. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/26/world/asia/chinese-news-media-largely-silent-amid-stock-market-turmoil.html>.

⁴ Michael Schuman. (2023, February 24). Can a Million Chinese People Die and Nobody Know? How China Can Hide a Million COVID Deaths. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/02/china-million-covid-deaths-communist-party/673177/>.

⁵ Wenxin Fan & Shen Lu. (2023, April 23). China Seeks to Write Its Own History of Battle With Covid-19. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-seeks-to-write-its-own-history-of-battle-with-covid-19-1f6f8939>.

⁶ Elizabeth C. Economy. (2022). *The World According to China*. Polity.

⁷ See *Defending Democracy in an Age of Sharp Power*, forthcoming July 2023 from the Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title/12791/defending-democracy-age-sharp-power>.

⁸ Christopher Paul & Miriam Matthews. (2016). The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model. *RAND*. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE198/RAND_PE198.pdf.

⁹ Aleksandra Michalowska-Kubś & Jakub Kubś. (2022). Coining lies. Kremlin spends 1.5 Billion per year to spread disinformation and propaganda. *Debunk.org*. <https://www.debunk.org/coin-ing-lies-state-budget-financing-of-russian-propaganda>.

¹⁰ Ali Fathollah-Nejad, & Mahdi Ghodsi. (2022). Raisi's shrinking budget cements the Islamic Republic's "trinity." *Middle East Institute*. <https://mei.edu/publications/raisis-shrinking-budget-cements-islamic-republics-trinity>.

include only the subsidies given to media targeted at non-Chinese foreigners.”¹¹ In the ensuing period, there is little to suggest the decision makers in China have scaled back such media investments, on the contrary.

But the fact is we do not really know with any real confidence the exact amounts these regimes spend on outward-facing media and information activities due to the non-transparent and unaccountable nature of these authoritarian systems.

This is an especially critical point in the context of today’s hearing. These authoritarian regimes operate with few if any institutional checks on their power and decision making; the media outlets that operate in service of these regimes also do so without accountable and transparent governance norms or structures. On the surface, these enterprises can appear to be like instruments of soft power. But China’s state media outlets, such as CGTN, and the Russian state’s RT are not the BBC or Deutsche Welle, which operate according to codes of conduct oriented toward freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These entities that operate in democratic settings, similar to U.S. international broadcasters, are subject to institutional scrutiny and accountability mechanisms.

A public hearing of the sort we are having today would be unimaginable in the Russian Duma or in China’s National People’s Congress, both of which are rubber stamp bodies that play no meaningful oversight role.

In autocracies, because editorial accountability for state media outlets ultimately rests with political leadership with unchecked power, the content that they produce is systematically compromised, through either editorial omission or commission. RT, for instance, slavishly follows the Kremlin line, rationalizing the status quo that the regime seeks to maintain by cynically portraying all systems, whether autocratic or democratic, as corrupt.¹²

Russian authorities have long prioritized the development of an elaborate apparatus for the dissemination of Kremlin-friendly narratives around the globe. Over the past year, this outward-facing communications machinery’s chief aim has been “to deflect attention from the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, blame Kyiv or NATO countries for the conflict, and dampen support for Ukraine’s cause.” The Russian Government’s investments in the information sphere have yielded significant results in regions such as Latin America and Africa where the Kremlin’s jaundiced messaging may go unchallenged. In Latin America, for example, the Russian Government has continued to intensify its manipulation of public opinion through the use of friendly local influencers on Facebook and Twitter.¹³

Authoritarian powers take information seriously and democracies should as well. The autocrats invest in international media because they appreciate that these are the arenas in which ideas take hold and today’s political battles are fought and won.

As part of its efforts to shape public opinion and serve the ideological aims of the CCP across the globe, the Chinese authorities are “training foreign journalists, buying space in overseas media, and expanding its state-owned networks on an unprecedented scale.”¹⁴ For example, with respect to Beijing’s evolving global media approach China expert Sarah Cook describes how China has “developed a wide-ranging toolkit that can distort democratic media environments through propaganda, censorship, disinformation, and control over content delivery systems.” Media partnerships between Xinhua or CGTN and both public and private media outlets around the world have yielded content-sharing and coproduction agreements that insinuate Beijing-friendly content seamlessly into local media outlets. As Cook observes, “Most news consumers in these countries are unlikely to note Xinhua’s presence in the byline of an article, and even if they do, they may not be aware of the agency’s subservience to the CCP.”¹⁵

While the autocrats take information and ideas seriously, they are not engaged in a form of communications and public diplomacy as democracies would understand it. Instead, they often are pursuing more malign objectives that associated with new

¹¹ Anne-Marie Brady. (2015). Authoritarianism Goes Global: China’s Foreign Propaganda Machine. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(4), 51–59. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0056>.

¹² Christopher Walker. (2016). The Authoritarian Threat: The Hijacking of “Soft Power.” *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 49–63. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0007>.

¹³ Adam Fivenson, Galyna Petrenko, Veronika Vichová, & Andrej Poleščuk. (2023). Shielding Democracy: Civil Society Adaptations to Kremlin Disinformation about Ukraine. *International Forum for Democratic Studies*. https://www.ned.org/up-content/uploads/2023/02/NED_Forum-Shielding-Democracy.pdf.

¹⁴ Sean Mantesso & Christina Zhou. (2019). China’s multi-billion dollar media campaign “a major threat for democracies” around the world. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-08/chinas-foreign-media-push-a-major-threat-to-democracies/10733068>.

¹⁵ Sarah Cook (2022). Countering Beijing’s Media Manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(1), 116–130. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0008>.

forms of outwardly directed censorship and information manipulation, which my colleagues and I have described as “sharp power.”

MEETING THE COMPETITION

In recent years, the proliferation of digital media globally has been one of the key drivers of deep, structural changes within the news industry, hobbling the production of fact-based news and leading to fragmentation and polarization. We need to acknowledge that the leading authoritarian powers have seized asymmetric advantages afforded to them by the modern media and information environment. Too often, observers in democracies have been complacent about the authoritarians’ designs and ambitions.

As NED President and CEO Damon Wilson recently observed (March 28, 2023) to this full committee, “with Russia and China at the vanguard, authoritarian powers have grown increasingly more assertive and ambitious . . . and in an era of global interconnectivity, [these autocrats] recognize that keeping their own citizens in check is no longer enough to cement their power, and so they’re partnering with other like-minded autocracies to share ideas, resources, and technologies.”

In this new media and information environment, authoritarian regimes have exploited trends to muddy the information space, create societal cleavages, and obscure their own actions. This manipulation of the media ecosystem can have the effect of corroding the environment for democracy by marginalizing civil society voices, weakening democratic norms around reasoned and civil debate, and amplifying local voices who exploit divisive narratives for their own ends. Ultimately, authoritarian information strategies seek to undermine trust in democratic institutions and ideas.

This large and complex challenge posed by authoritarian regimes in the modern information environment requires a response on multiple fronts.

For its part, the National Endowment for Democracy supports rigorous independent journalism internationally to provide citizens with pluralistic and fact-based information, as well as the dissemination and adoption of widely-accepted standards of journalistic practices and integrity. In 2022, NED made \$51 million in grants to organizations working to protect democracy by strengthening independent media and freedom of information in some of the world’s most repressive environments. NED grantees use a wide-range of approaches to address these challenges, including monitoring and documenting the actors and strategies behind information manipulation campaigns; leveraging research and analysis by contributing critical insights to policy discussions; and developing ways to mitigate the impact of authoritarian information manipulation through awareness-raising and public education initiatives that aim to build media literacy, proactively refuting harmful narratives spread through campaigns supported by China, Russia, and other such regimes.

NED supports cross-regional collaboration to compare research findings and discern patterns and trends in different parts of the world that have resulted in a shared understanding of threats emerging in the information environment. This is particularly important for democracy activists who are concerned about the role that foreign authoritarian disinformation campaigns play in their societies, where autocrats take advantage of weaknesses in the social fabric to undermine trust in democratic institutions.

NED has prioritized fighting for freedom of expression and media freedom for years, providing support for independent media and those who fight for a like environment that enables the full enjoyment of freedom of expression. This remains one of the most important contributions to a healthy information space globally.

But there is a good deal more that needs to be done, given the scale of the authoritarians’ media activities. According to an analysis by the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at NED, just 0.3 percent of official U.S. development assistance is dedicated to independent media. The U.S. can encourage its partners at the OECD to spend more on democracy support, including for the media sector. Furthermore, members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) could be encouraged to adopt a common set of principles to ensure that existing support to information ecosystems is guided by best practices and up-to-date knowledge on effectiveness. A draft of such principles is currently being developed by DAC members with input from CIMA, the Global Forum for Media Development, and other civil society partners.

In this highly competitive and evolving context, the fact that U.S. international broadcasters—and public service-oriented international media entities in like-minded democracies—are doing their work according to a fundamentally different set of values is as important today as at any time since the end of the Cold War. As part of a multifaceted response to today’s global information wars, U.S. international broadcasters have an especially crucial role to play, including systematically pro-

viding accurate and uncensored news in the growing number of settings where a free media is hobbled or at risk, including top order cases such as China, Russia, and Iran.

Given the standards being projected by the authoritarians in the global media context, it is all the more reason for the U.S. and other democracies to take a leadership role in modeling journalistic practices and standards that are grounded in trust, transparency, accountability, and integrity. This model stands in contrast to that of authoritarian regimes, which have built out massive outward-facing global strategic communications capabilities. To achieve greater leverage and surge capacity, these regimes increasingly align their anti-democratic narratives with each other. These narratives include a library of old lies that are often repeated and must be rebuffed again and again.

Meanwhile, international broadcasters, local independent media and NGOs are often doing the work of countering this media manipulation in isolation; those of us committed to democracy must identify ways to implement new forms of cooperation if we are to retake the initiative and counter the combined efforts of well-resourced authoritarians.

Finally, we cannot afford to suffer a failure of imagination. The threats to democratic development and security that arise from today's competitive global information environment requires a shift in strategic thinking among the democracies, which too often have taken a sluggish approach to competing in the modern information environment. Democracies should seize the challenge posed by autocrats as an opportunity to level up our investments in free media and democratic innovation, so that we are not perpetually playing catch up with mal-intentioned authoritarians.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Walker. We will now hear from Mr. Stilwell.

STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID STILWELL, FOX FELLOW FOR FUTURE PACING THREATS, AIR FORCE ACADEMY INSTITUTE FOR FUTURE CONFLICT, FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE BUREAU OF EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. STILWELL. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Hagerty, thank you for the opportunity. I am not going to repeat the problem. I think we are pretty clear on what the problem is. The solution, I think, is worth discussing.

We have talked about resources, a number of other things, but I do think we have—we are talking about a new Cold War today. I think there are a lot of lessons from the old Cold War. I am an old Cold War product, I think most of us are. I went to Air Force Academy, and again, thank you for the introduction.

Kind of lays out where I am going to go with this, but immediately after the Air Force Academy I picked up for the East-West Center in Hawaii, where I got my master's degree in Asian Studies. The East-West Center was funded by the U.S. Information Agency. The U.S. Information Agency, if you look at its charter, says it coordinates academic and cultural exchanges, international broadcasting, and other things.

America's brand sells itself. We do not have to necessarily sell it or put so much effort into it. We should look back at what we did during the Cold War in terms of getting our brand out there so people can take advantage of it, recognize it, and then let them decide which message they buy more.

I am telling you, when we get out there or when we bring our allies and partners or friends here to the U.S. and then they compare that to what they have seen in their other trips, we win. We cannot help but win in that case. An assessment we should make, though, is the difference in environments.

We look at the open information environment in the United States as a liability and the PRC is running roughshod in the attachment that Senator Hagerty put up. Thank you for putting that out there. You can see that the PRC has CGTN, China Radio National, putting China Daily inserts in the New York Times, have full access to American people.

Truth has a ring to it that everybody recognizes, but propaganda also carries a message as well, and the PRC effort here is to divide United States, is to make us fight ourselves so we are too weak to fight them when the time comes. Open information environment is a liability, but it is a massive advantage that they do not have.

The point here, and this is one of those contradictions that we should take more advantage of, is they need our information to innovate because you cannot do it inside of an authoritarian closed country. You cannot share information about Xi Jinping in China today unless you want to call him “Winnie the Pooh.”

They have to dance around these things. Innovation is tough in China. An example is in 1999 when a U.S. B-2 accidentally bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, the PRC routed—it got a bunch of its people out there to protest in front of the U.S. embassy, and they did for a time, but it did not take very long for them to all like gather their forces and go, you know what, let us next go down the Zhongnanhai, the leadership compound, and let us protest the authoritarian government in our country.

That is the end of those sorts of protests because they inevitably go against their government. That closed information environment where those people know that they are being lied to is an advantage for us, and we should take advantage.

We should also look at the contradictions and the paradox of a country that wants to control information because it is a direct threat to its continued leadership, but they also need it to compete with us.

Again, I think we can use those to, one, just talk about it because it is very effective. Two, we can also put it out there for others in other agencies to take care of. I will offer two more thoughts here. I think there is an offensive opportunity here and there is a defensive opportunity.

In the offensive opportunity, look at what Starlink did to Ukraine. If it were not for Starlink, remember the Russians cut off all fiber optic information access in Ukraine, Ukraine would have been forgotten about and it would be gone today, but within 48 hours of that cutting off information, Starlink and SpaceX put a communication on orbit, low latency 5G made it available for the President and for the Ukrainian people.

That is an approach we should definitely take, and it is a human right. It is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that people have access to information. China is a signatory to the Declaration of Universal Human Rights, and therefore we should insist that they allow their people to have access.

Where they do not, we should find ways to let their people have access. We talk about VPNs and other things. A second one is journalists in this country, and we worked really hard on this when I was in the previous Administration, was to make sure that there

was an evenness in journalists. They kicked out all the good American journalists and we were down to like 30 and they had 160.

We kicked out 60 of their journalists. I think you are going to have to drive down to zero journalists on both sides. Then you give me one, I will give you one. Then when they kick one of ours out, we kick one of theirs out. It is called reciprocity. It is the basis of diplomacy, and we should focus on that.

With my remaining 15 seconds, I want to point out that we have great advantages and we have yet to take advantage of them, but we had lessons from the Cold War and the U.S. Information Agency that we should look back on. Then Senator Cardin, I gave you that one book, Political Warfare. I think it is worth a look.

Then this book out of the Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies about China's global influence is definitely worth a look as well. With that, I thank you for your attention.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Stilwell follows:]

Prepared Statement of Mr. David Stilwell

BLUF: The U.S. disestablished its very capable United States Information Agency (USIA) at the end of the Cold War, leaving State Department vaguely in charge of coordinating external messaging. As the sole superpower without a serious challenger for the last 30 years, U.S. interests were supported by soft power and reputation. The rise of Xi Jinping's People's Republic of China (PRC) brings a challenge as serious as that of the Soviet Union 60 years ago, and a U.S. agency in charge of external messaging is desperately needed for the U.S. to compete effectively.

THE PROBLEM: THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA HAS BEEN AT WAR WITH THE U.S. SINCE 1950

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) strategy of Political Warfare reflects the Party's internal dialogue that has called the U.S. an enemy since the Korean War. Using its concept of Political Warfare, the PRC is actively conducting Warfare in the Economic, Information, Legal, Public Opinion, Psychological, and Technical domains. The only Warfare not actively employed today is Military Warfare (armed conflict), as it brings the highest cost and risk. Despite the evidence, most Americans have been led to believe that the U.S.-PRC relationship has been peaceful and cooperative. Yet, while successive U.S. governments have been trying to cooperate, the CCP has been competing, doing particular damage to U.S. Economic and Information interests, undermining America's global reputation and prosperity as Beijing seeks to "take the center of the global stage." A prime example of Information Warfare took place in 2019: after a severe weather event in our hemisphere, U.S. agencies immediately set about the big job of repairing a small country's key infrastructure—getting ports, roads, water and power up and running again. For its part, Beijing sent in Huawei to get cell towers working, then handed out free Huawei handsets. As soon as a port would open, or water service was restored, the PRC systems would broadcast "brought to you by the Chinese people." One can imagine the message to American diplomats in that country: "What have you done for us lately? Look at how much China has done," thus undermining our reputation and influence.

Until a few years ago, U.S. policy toward the People's Republic of China had been protracted patience in the hope that a steady supply of carrots would obviate the need for sticks. During my time as Defense Attaché in our embassy in Beijing a decade ago, I dutifully carried out the NSC strategy of Engage, Bind, Balance, even though it was obvious that the first two elements required the PRC to play along, and they were having none of it. All the time we've been trying to cooperate, Beijing has been competing, across multiple domains, none more so than the Information domain. This was made clear every time the People's Liberation Army's leaders rebuffed Secretary of Defense Austin's requests for a phone call during periods of escalating tensions. Rejecting requests for consultation is in itself an information operation, showing the U.S. as weak and worried, and the PRC to be calmly in command. The U.S. Government Information machine needs to once again gird up to compete in this New Cold War environment.

The PRC has perfected the idea "Entropic Warfare" against democracies. Entropic Warfare does not pick winners or losers, nor does it favor political parties. It simply seeks to use disinformation, trolls, bots, etc to create chaos, anger, and division in

other societies to weaken them. This form of Information Warfare is active today and requires immediate action to prevent further damage to our democracy. U.S. responses to Entropic Warfare and the many other forms of PRC Information Warfare require developing and employing Offensive and Defensive strategies, which are quite different.

U.S. RESPONSES IN THE INFORMATION DOMAIN

In the Economic space, the previous Administration began, and the current Administration continues, a long-overdue policy to bring the economic/trade relationship with the PRC back into balance, enacting punitive measures to change behavior, and where the PRC won't change, to punish their economy and protect ours. In the same way, in the Information domain, we started down a similar Public Diplomacy path to call out PRC disinformation activities (like those described at the beginning of this paper), employing transparency tools against a regime that is not bound by facts and cynically changes its story to suit current circumstances (ATCH 1). But the process of reestablishing U.S. Information dominance is in its infancy, and changing policies across administrations make the level of U.S. competition inconsistent. The outbreak of the COVID pandemic 3 years ago saw Beijing exert enormous effort to whitewash its culpability for failing to contain a pandemic that has caused 7 million deaths worldwide. It quickly became obvious that Beijing was going to try to shift blame for the global catastrophe, and we realized that a new, more muscular and more active approach to Public Diplomacy was needed.

Bland, anodyne official statements from the U.S. Government (USG) were clearly not going to work in the face of advanced PRC Information and Public Opinion Warfare (examples at ATCH 2). So, rather than talk ourselves out of "undiplomatic" messaging, we chose to go at PRC malfeasance directly, and we did it in creative ways at all levels. One particularly productive initiative was State Department messaging on Twitter to draw out PRC "Wolf Warriors" with the intent to get them to say something embarrassing. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Zhao Lijian accommodated us on 12 March 2020 (ATCH 3) when he accused the U.S. of bringing COVID to Wuhan China. A recent statement by PRC Ambassador to France Yu Shaye denying the sovereignty of former Soviet Union states (Ukraine and the Baltics) is the most recent example of the damage Wolf Warriors have caused—a significant vulnerability for the PRC, and an opportunity for State Department and others to exploit.

During the last Administration, initial steps at messaging coordination yielded positive results. Inside State Department, we established regular, informal coordination between the East Asia and Pacific Bureau and the R (public diplomacy) family, including the Global Engagement Center, to get away from bland public press releases and vague SPOX statements. Rather than dance around the question of culpability, Secretary Pompeo went directly at the most obvious source of the pandemic, saying "there is enormous evidence that the Pandemic originated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology." Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Feith laid out the rationale and the evidence for this more direct approach in his testimony to the House Oversight Committee on 18 April 2023.

But State Department Public Diplomacy can't do this by itself, so we reached out to the Department of Defense to establish Information coordination mechanisms. Simple steps like mutual awareness created synergies in Administration messaging; previous to that much of the messaging was done independently, sometimes at cross purposes. The synergies were obvious and required little additional effort making the initiative self-sustaining. At the same time we established an informal China Sync coordination mechanism to share information across State Department on each others' China initiatives, China Sync quickly grew to include voluntary representation from the Pentagon and other agencies. There is a demand for this sort of coordination but there is no acknowledged coordination agency (U.S. Information Agency) such as we had during the Cold War.

The SFRC and this subcommittee understand better than most the importance of telling America's story well and preventing our adversaries from telling it for us. But there is much work to be done. There needs to be Goldwater Nichols-like legislation for the Interagency (one aspect of what the National Defense Strategy calls "Integrated Deterrence") that forces messaging coordination and integration across government agencies—no two agencies are more important than State and Defense in this effort. Whereas we could once overpower any adversary with military force, the Information Age demands we take a more sophisticated and cooperative approach to using Information tools to coordinate with allies, incentivize potential partners, and to influence and deter adversaries.

Deterrence is all about messaging—wielding information as an instrument of national power to prevent an adversary from taking (in this case) military action. Since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the U.S. Information Agency in 1999, we have taken a passive/reactive approach to employing the Information tool at the national level, assuming American Soft Power would be enough to encourage friends and deter adversaries. Information passivity at this point is dangerous: Deterrence happens before an attack; waiting until the attack occurs takes us down a much more dangerous and costly path, as was seen with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The study of deterrence theory has until now mostly been applied to U.S. strategic forces; today it needs to be expanded across government agencies and the domains they represent. Deterrence does not reside exclusively in the Information domain, but Information is the tool that organizes and shapes the coordinated message for adversary consumption.

George Kennan, in his Policy Planning Staff Memorandum reminds us that political warfare measures (which rely heavily on the Information domain):

“... are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures, and ‘white’ propaganda, to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.”

Compared to what Kennan described, and the capabilities that were resident in the U.S. Information Agency, the U.S. Information machine has been sub-optimized for the last 30 years. We’ve been reluctant to acknowledge the threat from the PRC, while the CCP is very comfortable operating (unopposed) in the domains of Information Warfare, Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Influence Operations. With just a little effort, the U.S. can blunt the CCP’s attacks on Democracy (it has to undermine Democracy because it is always a better governance alternative to XJP’s new authoritarianism; for proof just look at the numbers of people immigrating to the U.S. vs the PRC). As long as democratic governments exist, they will present an existential threat to authoritarian government. This is an area of exclusive advantage for the U.S., but we have yet to take advantage of it.

GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE: RECOMMENDED USG INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

The U.S. response doesn’t have to be complicated; for starters we should demand and enforce strict Reciprocity in the Information domain. The U.S. should insist on reciprocal access to Chinese audiences and deny PRC Propaganda access to American audiences as much as the law will allow (including simply identifying the source of information as the CCP). As it stands, agents of the Chinese Government have unfettered access to American media; they spew carefully crafted disinformation from Twitter (banned in the PRC), they manipulate cognitive processes through TikTok (also banned in the PRC), they’re all over our traditional and social media, even spreading propaganda messages on Sunday morning talk shows. At the same time, the Chinese people are denied access to U.S. messaging in the PRC. In 2020, then-Ambassador Cui Tiankai denied responsibility for COVID and criticized the American response to the pandemic in OpEds, on talk shows, and in a public speech at Harvard. In response, State Department Public Diplomacy set out to demonstrate the lack of reciprocal access to Americans who assumed our diplomats enjoyed the same privileges. We drafted an uncontroversial OpEd for our Ambassador to have placed in the PRC’s version of the New York Times—People’s Daily. The People’s Daily editorial staff not only rejected the OpEd, they provided a rejection letter (ATCH 4). State Department Public Diplomacy released the OpEd and the rejection letter side-by-side to show the American people the CCP’s lopsided approach to diplomacy—an excellent example of the ease of going on the offensive in the Information realm if we would just start. What follows are two recommendations for employing Information on the offense: Reciprocal Journalist access, and giving PRC citizens unfettered access to the worldwide web as a human right.

RECIPROCAL ACCESS FOR JOURNALISTS. Beijing routinely harasses and expels Western reporters (17 were expelled in the first half of 2020 alone); in September 2020 Washington Post correspondent Alice Su was physically assaulted and then expelled for her reporting on the CCP closing Mongolian schools and preventing Mongolian language education. (ATCH 5) To address this abuse and to force Beijing to issue more journalist visas to American reporters, we sought reciprocity in PRC journalist access. In March 2020 there were 160 PRC “journalists” with journalist visas (when asked why we hadn’t seen any reports filed in China by these journalists, the PRC ambassador explained their job was to tell China’s story to the American people—I pointed out that his explanation defined diplomats, not journalists), with only 32 American journalists remaining in the PRC at that time. To dem-

onstrate our interest in balancing this relationship, we announced the removal of 60 of the 160 PRC journalists, with the intent of continuing to decrement PRC Government personnel (“journalists” all work for the CCP or take direction from the Chinese Government) until Beijing made access more reciprocal. (ATCH 6)

With the remaining imbalance in journalist access (100 Chinese, 32 American), we assessed that Beijing would likely respond in kind to expulsions. If we stuck with a tit-for-tat approach, there would still be some 60 PRC “journalists” remaining in the U.S. after all Americans have been forced to leave China. A solution here was for the U.S. to suspend all journalist visas, and then rebuild rosters on a one-for-one basis, with the PRC granting visas first. There are quantitative and qualitative aspects to this approach. As it stands, Beijing issues visas to foreign journalists who toe the Party line, expelling or arresting those who criticize the Party. The best reporters are often expatriate native Chinese speakers, and the PRC routinely cancels or denies the visas. In rebuilding the rosters, Beijing would get no veto authority—once an American journalist visa is issued, the U.S. would issue a PRC-selected journalist their visa. If the U.S. journalist is harassed or expelled, the corresponding PRC journalist visa will be cancelled.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT. A second Information-on-the-offense approach reflects Kennan’s quote earlier. The CCP recognizes the power of information and therefore tightly restricts its access by Chinese citizens, denying them a fundamental human right. The Chinese people have a right to know what’s going on in their own country and in the wider world. If the Chinese Government doesn’t think enough of its citizens to give them access, then steps can be taken to provide that access anyway. The SpaceX decision to deploy Starlink in Ukraine is a positive example of how to defeat an Authoritarians’ reflexive need to control information and keep its people in the dark. In a Chinese setting, Information access would have to be unattributable to the individual accessing it, since the CCP punishes those who tunnel under, through or over the Great Firewall. Starlink is just one option; there are other opportunities to allow Chinese citizens access to real information without setting them up for punishment. Some of these solutions involve international organizations like the International Telecommunication Union, which until January 2023 was led by PRC citizen and CCP member Zhao Houlin (2015–2022) who drove policies that protect authoritarian government and undermine free access to information, such as a rule that signals from space can only land in cooperating countries (denying PRC citizens access to Starlink).

... WHILE DEFENDING AGAINST PRC INFORMATION WARFARE

This is where it gets tricky. There is only so much the U.S. Government can do to protect citizens from foreign propaganda and disinformation. The National Security Agency does its part to prevent hostile cyber attacks, but the U.S. Government is not well suited to referee what’s Mal-, Mis- and Disinformation, versus unpopular opinions and points of disagreement. Filtering disinformation quickly runs into censorship, as was so clearly demonstrated with the Twitter Files. So as U.S. Government agencies do their part to protect Americans from external hostile forces, there’s only so much we want them to do.

Defending against PRC (and others’) Information Warfare starts in school (K–12). The surest way to discern the difference between fact and fiction, between foreign disinformation and domestic bots, or to understand when only one side of a complex issue is being presented, is to arm individual citizens with the tools to defend themselves while online. Training the next generation on Critical Thinking (or Thinking about Thinking—understanding cognition) has never been more important. It is primarily the responsibility of parents, then of our education institutions. The PRC has become quite adept at selling its twisted version of the truth on social media, oftentimes hiding behind non-PRC-looking persona to allay suspicion. The first rule of Critical Thinking is to cultivate a healthy skepticism of all information and then challenge assumptions. We don’t want to raise a generation of cynics, but developing a healthy skepticism is the best defense against PRC Information Warfare as well as the other threats emanating from modern social media.

Developing Critical Thinking skills will go a long way in defeating PRC disinformation while at the same time preparing young Americans for the divisive on-line environment. In this vein, all Americans need to get serious about assessing the reliability of their sources of information. Traditional media in the U.S. can no longer claim to be “the most trusted news source”—there is no Walter Cronkite who presents just the facts ... there’s no money in that. In the age of instant on-line breaking news, there is no penalty for being wrong, but there’s money to be made by being sensational. The PRC plays off of this trend to steer public opinion in directions favorable to the CCP or creating division, friction and chaos among Americans.

Meanwhile, the Great Firewall prevents the same public opinion warfare in China by blocking outside information and censoring domestic information.

CONCLUSION

We can't out-do the PRC in this contest to control and manipulate information. The short-term benefits of controlling information are many but there is significant long-term downside to the CCP denying the Chinese people access to the outside world. ChatGPT was initially welcomed by the CCP as a way to speed up decision making and out-think free countries, but since ChatGPT has yet to be sensitized politically, it often gives answers that undermine CCP authority and legitimacy. The CCP will limit the information AI tools can access, then filter the answers it provides, and in the end it will create programs that tell the CCP what it wants to hear—negating the utility of Artificial Intelligence. This is the PRC conducting Information Warfare against itself. So while we prosecute other Offensive and Defensive Information Warfare tools, blocking access by nefarious PRC software (TikTok, Weixin—ATCH 7) we should heed Napoleon's advice to "never interrupt your adversary in the commission of a mistake" and enjoy the show as the CCP struggles with the dilemma of needing to control information to protect its legitimacy, while accessing the wide world of information needed to compete effectively. The USSR faced a similar dilemma and failed to handle it properly.

ATCH 1
 Courtesy Professor Mark Metcalf, University of Virginia

China – the victim
 In Chinese media – for foreigners



Original Headline: 18 Jan 20

“Stealth Edited” Headline

Orwell's 1984:
 36 years too early

As Beijing sought to distance itself from responsibility for the pandemic, it began changing previous posts without acknowledging the change; this is the stuff of Orwell's 1984 where here Winston Smith's entire job is to change history to match current conditions. Other posts you won't find is a People's Daily article from January 2020 bragging that the CCP was sending PLA Biological Warfare expert Maj Gen Chen Wei to the Wuhan Institute of Virology to get things under control. Beijing later recognized this story was an admission of PLA involvement (later verified by the Trump administration in three declassified intelligence reports) and deleted it from the People's Daily website.

ATCH 2

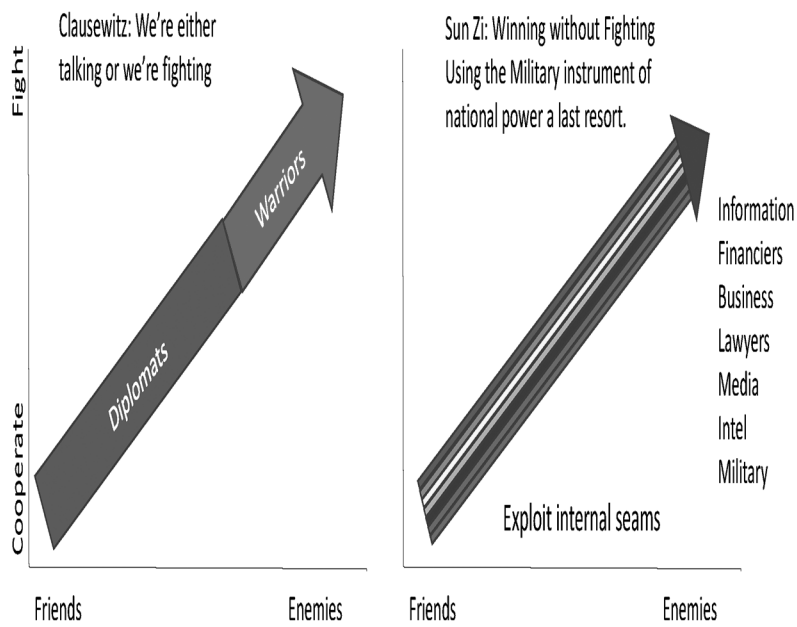


Beyond Cyber: Info War

It's not just the Public Affairs Officer's job

Clausewitz was Wrong

Interstate Conflict is a Constant



New Cold War: Information Warfare

How do we define war today?

- “War” to us means killing people and breaking stuff.
 - Even Cyber War suggests destruction: Stuxnet and Sony Pictures 2014
 - Use Force to Compel our adversaries to behave (diplomats Convince)
- Our adversaries define it more broadly: Political Warfare
 - Attacking the US in Economic, Information, Legal, Tech, whatever...DImEFIL
 - Objective: destroy us from the INSIDE, so they don't have to face US military
 - Economic Warfare called “the greatest illegal transfer of wealth in history.”

Even Econ Warfare has elements of Info



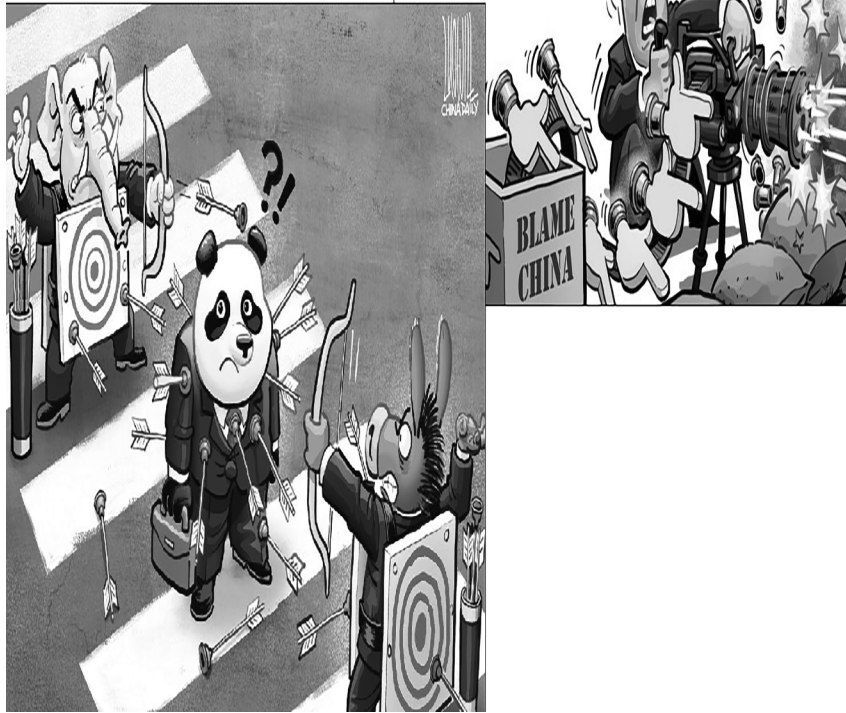
Words matter: Since 1950 CCP has called us the Enemy

CHINA
BRIC

Beijing understands the uses of Imagery
Their Bumper Stickers are hit or miss
OBOR becomes BRI
They're all over our media space







CHINA DAILY China Daily @ChinaDaily · 1h
China state-affiliated media
#ChinaDailyCartoon Equal rights

Freedom!
Equality!
Human rights!

So does that mean everyone can enjoy the same quality of life as every American?

You wish! Those noble words are for white Americans!

6 9 30

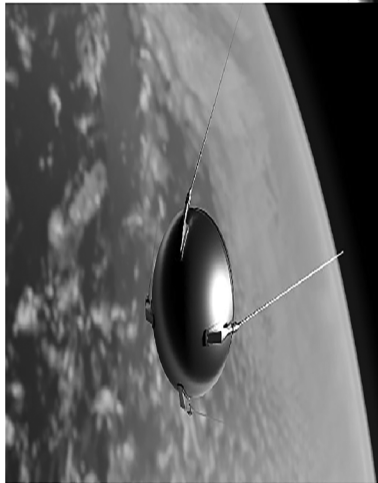
Enforcing the Foreign Missions Act: Lawfare



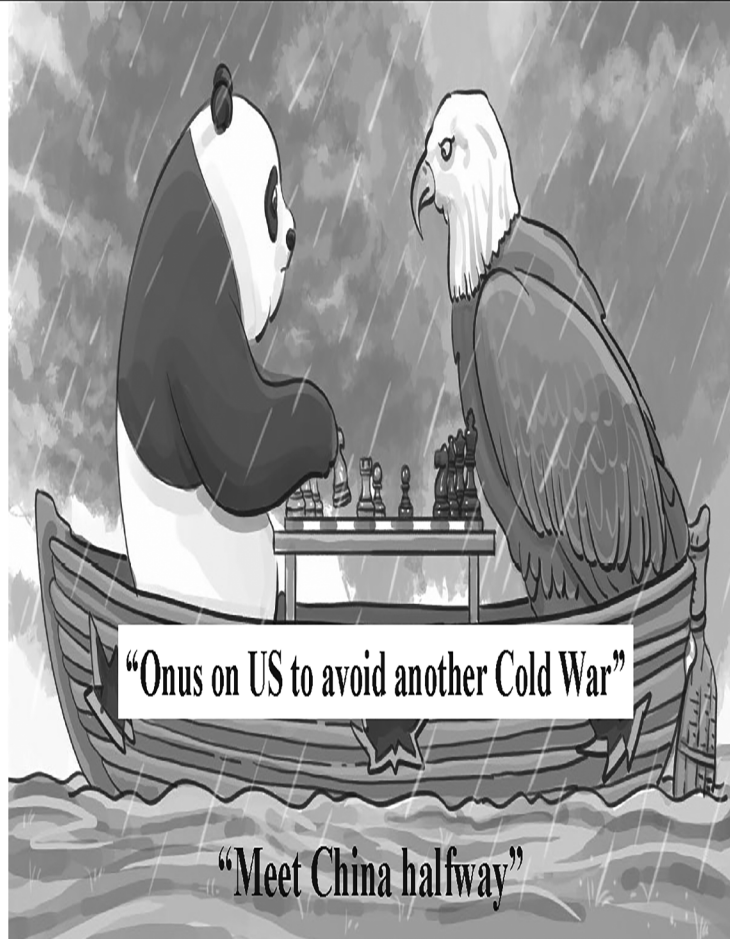
Sputnik Moment

- Americans now get it
- Beijing solved our problem
- Pentagon recognized the opportunity

"Just a weather balloon that's lost its way"

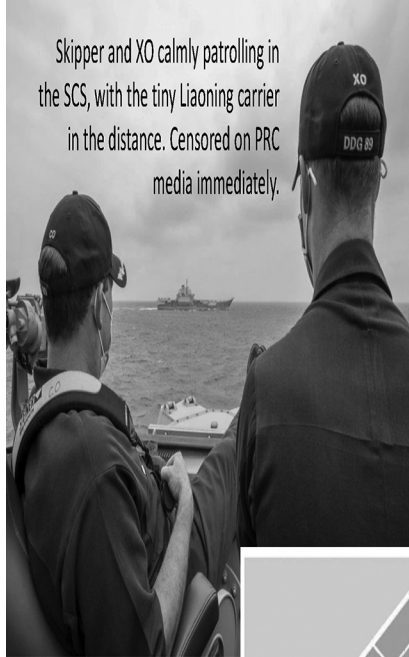


Mememes: Challenge Assumptions



Information Warfare: Defense

- We can't build our own Great Firewall; that would defeat who we are
 - Facebook and Twitter are trying to do just that; censorship is censorship
- So we have to teach Americans to defend themselves: Cognitive Security
 - Critical Thinking education used to be common
 - Consumers of information can't be so gullible—healthy skepticism
 - Algorithms ensure you only hear one side of any issue; free media must be fair
- Critical Thinking requires just a little training, discipline, and TIME
 - Look for one of the 15 Logical Fallacies (Ad Hominem being the most prevalent)
 - Tease out and challenge all assumptions
 - Ask what it is the other side isn't telling you

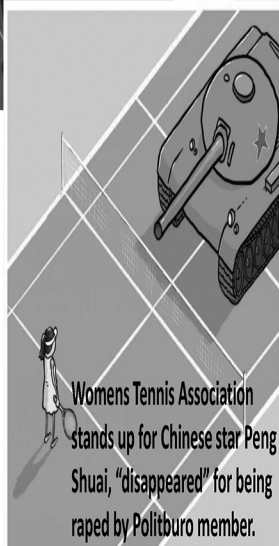


Skipper and XO calmly patrolling in the SCS, with the tiny Liaoning carrier in the distance. Censored on PRC media immediately.

This is what Winning looks like...



Not just words;
Images leave
indelible
impressions—



ATCH 3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Zhao Lijian tries to blame the US for COVID

← Tweet

 **Lijian Zhao 赵立坚** @zlj517

2/2 CDC was caught on the spot. When did patient zero begin in US? How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation!

 **3月11日，美国众议院监督委员会就新冠肺炎举行听证会**
3.9M views 0:04 / 1:03

From **Global Times** @
8:37 AM · Mar 12, 2020

6,300 Retweets 4,290 Quotes 13.4K Likes 674 Bookmarks

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Affairs

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ATCH 4: OpEd Wars

US-China relations: People's Daily defends decision not to run 'factually inaccurate' article by American ambassador

- 'We have told the US embassy that the op-ed in the name of Ambassador [Terry] Branstad ... is full of loopholes and seriously inconsistent with the facts,' Communist Party mouthpiece says
- Statement comes after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says newspaper's refusal to publish 'once again exposes the Chinese Communist Party's fear of free speech and serious intellectual debate'

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Kinling Lo

Published: 9:00pm, 10 Sep, 2020

Chinese state newspaper *People's Daily* has defended its decision not to publish an article submitted last month by the US ambassador to China on the grounds it was "full of loopholes". The mouthpiece of China's ruling Communist Party issued a statement on Thursday after Washington accused Beijing of being hypocritical for refusing to run the piece, titled "Resetting the Relationship Based on Reciprocity".

"We have told the US embassy that the op-ed in the name of Ambassador [Terry] Branstad we received this time is full of loopholes and seriously inconsistent with the facts," the newspaper said, without specifying the alleged inaccuracies.

It said the US embassy, which wanted the article to be published on September 4, insisted the piece be "published as submitted" and not be revised by the newspaper's editors.

"If the US wishes to publish in *People's Daily* ... substantial changes should be made," it said.

The paper also accused the United States of suppressing Chinese state media, including *People's Daily*, by effectively expelling Chinese journalists from America via its discriminatory visa system.

Despite its refusal to publish Branstad's article, *People's Daily* said it was open to manuscripts from "foreign friends", including the US ambassador, as long as they had a "fair attitude" towards China.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned the newspaper's decision to reject the piece.

"The *People's Daily's* response once again exposes the Chinese Communist Party's fear of free speech and serious intellectual debate – as well as Beijing's hypocrisy when it complains about lack of fair and reciprocal treatment in other countries," he said.

The United States' democratic system allowed Chinese government officials, including Beijing's ambassador to the US Cui Tiankai, to frequently have their views published by American media outlets, it said.

Meanwhile, China's foreign ministry said on Thursday that the article was rejected on the grounds it was defamatory to the Chinese government.

Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said the US embassy contacted *People's Daily* on August 26 and asked for Branstad's article to be published verbatim on September 4.

A day later, the US state department's top Asia official David Stilwell contacted the Chinese embassy in Washington to see if the piece would be published and was told the newspaper was "looking into it", Zhao said.

"Would you agree to publish a fact-twisting and defamatory article about your country without any revision?" he said.

"This move obviously has nothing to do with the freedom of press. It was designed to find fault [with China] and was a deliberate act of *peng ci*."

The Chinese phrase translates as "touching porcelain" but is used to refer to the practice of placing ostensibly expensive, fragile items (usually porcelain) in places where they can easily be broken, so as to scam the victim.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the aim of Branstad's article was to help build "more positive relations" between the US and China.

While Zhao did not identify those parts of Branstad's article that caused offence, the text was released by the US embassy in Beijing.

"We are two different nations with different pasts," it said. "The United States continues to learn from its mistakes and push forward to forge a better future. We hope that China can do the same."

He said the two countries needed to “build a foundation for understanding and true reciprocity ... [which] must start with the Chinese government being willing to address our concerns about the imbalance in the relationship and allowing our two peoples to build relationships through unrestricted engagement and uncensored discussion.

“Only then will I enjoy the freedoms to engage the Chinese people that we guarantee Ambassador Cui in the United States, and only then will we have genuine reciprocity and a genuinely balanced relationship.”

Earlier this week, several US news organisations, including Bloomberg, CNN and *The Wall Street Journal*, said Beijing had held off on renewing the press credentials of some of their journalists working in China.


Meanwhile, Chinese journalists employed by non-American news outlets in the United States are facing similar problems getting the documents they need after the US issued a new policy that limits their work visas to 90 days.

Also this week, the US revoked more than 1,000 visas issued to Chinese nationals in a move to stop students and researchers believed to have links to the Chinese military from entering the country.

Earlier this year, Beijing revoked the press credentials of several American journalists working for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*.

The *People's Daily's* refusal to publish Branstad's article came after Chinese state newspaper China Daily in May ran an edited version of a piece written by all of the European Union member nations' ambassadors in Beijing.

The published version omitted an insinuation that China was the origin of the coronavirus.

People's Daily spokesperson strongly protests Pompeo's statement
(People's Daily) 15:52, September 10, 2020  **Follow on Apple News**



On September 9, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made public remarks, unreasonably accusing People's Daily of refusing to publish an article by the US Ambassador to China Terry Branstad, and maliciously attacking the Chinese media. The move by the US was malicious and provocative, and seriously deviated from the facts. The spokesperson of People's Daily expressed strong protest and firm opposition to this, and believed it was necessary to offer an accurate account of the facts.

On August 26, the US Embassy in China contacted People's Daily and requested that Ambassador Branstad's article be published before September 4, hoping to get a reply on August 27, and clearly stated in the letter that "The US embassy feels it is particularly important that it be printed in full, without edits of any kind."

People's Daily responded to the US embassy, and stated that the article sent by the US embassy in the name of Ambassador Branstad was full of loopholes and seriously inconsistent with the facts. It also did not meet the standards of People's Daily, a prestigious, serious and professional media, for selecting and publishing articles. If the US still hopes to publish it in People's Daily, it should make substantive revisions based on facts in the principle of equality and mutual respect. On this basis, we are willing to maintain contact and communication with the US embassy.

Just like any other US media outlet, People's Daily has the right to decide whether or not to publish any submitted article and when to publish it, and is entitled to make necessary changes and edits to any article. It's also entitled to reject publishing an article with factual mistakes and filled with prejudice. This is in line with the professional practice of the journalistic industry, as well as international norms.

For a long time, People's Daily has held an active and open attitude to the submission of articles from international friends who are objective and impartial about China, including Ambassador Branstad. As early as April 15, 2013, Mr. Branstad, then governor of Iowa, published an op-ed titled The Unique Partnership with China on the third page of People's Daily, in which he expressed the hope to build a stronger economic partnership with China. With the proactive support of People's Daily, Ambassador Branstad published op-eds titled My First Year as US Ambassador and Our Global Response to Fight COVID-19 in Global Times, a publication affiliated with People's Daily, this year and last year. Former US ambassadors to China like Max Baucus and Jon Huntsman also published op-eds in People's Daily. Facts prove that we have always attached great importance to articles submitted by US ambassadors.

People's Daily is consistently committed to promoting better communication and understanding between the Chinese and American people. Recently, however, the United States has been escalating political suppression and persecution against Chinese press outlets in the United States with a Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice from having to register as "foreign agents", to being designated as "foreign missions"; from denying visas to Chinese journalists to de facto expelling Chinese journalists from the United States; and recently, the United States adopted discriminatory visa restrictions that limit the visa validity period to no more than three months for all journalists of Chinese media, including those based at the United Nations Headquarters. Up to now, it is still unclear whether all Chinese journalists' visas, which were due on August 6, will be renewed. This leaves multiple journalists with People's Daily in the United States and their family members, including young children, facing huge uncertainties, severely impacting the work and lives of Chinese journalists in the United States, and greatly restricting the freedom of reporting.

The US, on the one hand, claims that People's Daily and other Chinese media are the CPC's "propaganda machines", but demand that the "propaganda machines" do propaganda for the United States, which is illogical, overbearing and unreasonable. The US side also spreads rumors to confound the public, playing the guilty party blaming the victim by distorting facts.

People's Daily strongly opposes provocations made by the US, and is urging it to stop harming the safety and rights of Chinese journalists in the US, and attacking the Chinese press.

ATCH 5: Examples of US reporters being forced out of China for honest reporting

China Accelerates Its Crackdown on Foreign Journalists

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/09/china-accelerates-crackdown-on-foreign-journalists/>

By HELEN RALEIGH

September 30, 2020 6:30 AM

Where past Chinese leaders exploited foreign reporters to spread CCP propaganda, Xi Jinping's regime is ramping up its attacks on them.

THESE days, foreign journalists are facing unprecedented challenges in China.

A March report from the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) finds that in 2019, "82% of [foreign] reporters [in China] experienced interference or harassment or violence while reporting. . . . 43% said digital/physical surveillance affected reporting. And 70% reported interviews cancelled due to actions taken by Chinese authorities." The FCCC also finds that Chinese authorities continue to restrict foreign journalists' access to certain parts of China, including Xinjiang, where millions of Uighur Muslims languish in internment camps. The most striking finding of the report, however, is that not even a single foreign journalist said working conditions in China had improved from 2018 to 2019.

It seems that this state of affairs has only gotten worse in 2020. Just this week, the *Washington Post's* Anna Fifield published [a story](#) about the difficulties she'd faced as a foreign reporter in China. "Reporting in China increasingly feels like reporting in North Korea," she [tweeted](#). Beijing has expelled around 17 foreign journalists this year, including 15 Americans, and is threatening to expel more. Chinese authorities also continue to punish some foreign journalists by refusing to renew their visas.

The Washington Post's Beijing Bureau Chief leaves China

By Linda Mottram

Broadcast Wed 16 Sep 2020 at 2:30am

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/anna-fifield/12670970>

Foreign correspondents are the eyes and ears in far corners of the globe, for those of us who can't be in those places .. bringing us not just the big political and economic stories, or tales of conflict .. but also stories of people's lives, connecting us to them in ways the daily news often neglects.

That's how Anna Fifield has seen her role in many different postings, including in North Korea.

But now, she's closed the door for the last time on her posting for the last two years in China, as the Washington Post's Beijing Bureau Chief.

Anna's flying back home to New Zealand for a new role that she actively sought, but knowing that Xi Jinping's China is now a very hostile place for foreign reporters.

<https://twitter.com/annafield/status/1301739815998599168?lang=ar-x-fm>

[@annafield](#) Anna Fifield

Incredible and brave reporting from [@alicevsu](#) - who was grabbed by the throat and thrown in a police cell - about people in Inner Mongolia trying to resist new forced assimilation efforts from the Chinese government.



[latimes.com](#) China cracks down on Inner Mongolian minority fighting for its mother tongue.

Teachers and students have refused to comply with a new bilingual education program in Inner Mongolia. The state is cracking down in response.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-china-journalists-factbox/factbox-foreign-journalists-forced-to-leave-china-as-diplomatic-tensions-worsen-idUKKBN25Z0R2>

WORLD NEWS

SEPTEMBER 8, 2020 12:14 AM UPDATED 3 YEARS AGO

Factbox - Foreign journalists forced to leave China as diplomatic tensions worsen

By Reuters Staff
3 MIN READ

(Reuters) - Over the past year, numerous foreign reporters working for Western news organisations have been forced to leave China, mostly due to their work permits being revoked or not renewed.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China said on Monday a record 17 foreign journalists were expelled from the country in the first half of 2020.

The departures come amid worsening diplomatic ties between China and the United States and its allies over issues ranging from trade to technology and democratic rights in Hong Kong, with Washington and Beijing engaging in a tit-for-tat over journalist credentials.

Below is a list of key events involving foreign journalists based in China:

AUGUST 2019

China did not renew journalist credentials for Chun Han Wong, a Singapore national who worked for the Wall Street Journal in Beijing.

Wong had written a story about the activities of one of Chinese President Xi Jinping's cousins in Australia.

FEBRUARY

China revoked the press credentials of three Wall Street Journal journalists after the newspaper declined to apologise for an opinion column calling China the "real sick man of Asia."

The journalists were U.S. citizens Josh Chin and Chao Deng and Australian citizen Philip Wen.

Beijing's move came after Washington said it would begin treating five Chinese state-run media entities with U.S. operations the same as it does foreign embassies.

MARCH

China withdrew the press credentials of about a dozen journalists at the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post.

The expulsions followed Washington's move to slash the number of journalists permitted to work in the United States at four Chinese state media outlets to 100, from 160 previously.

AUGUST

Australian citizen and Chinese state television anchor Cheng Lei was detained by Chinese authorities.

Cheng hosted a business show and was a high-profile anchor on English-language channel CGTN. Videos of her were removed from Chinese state media websites.

SEPT. 7

China did not renew the expiring press credentials of journalists at U.S. outlets including Bloomberg, CNN and the Wall Street Journal.

Instead, the journalists were issued letters allowing them to continue working in China with their expired press credentials for about two months.

The move came as Chinese journalists in the United States wait for their lapsed work visas to be renewed. The Chinese journalists have been allowed to stay in the United States during a 90-day grace period that expires in early November.

Among the journalists at U.S. outlets were the Wall Street Journal's Jeremy Page, who is British, American CNN reporter David Culver, and two non-American Bloomberg journalists.

SEPT. 8

Two Australian journalists in China were rushed home after they were questioned by authorities.

Australian Broadcasting Corp.'s Bill Birtles and the Australian Financial Review's Michael Smith had been banned from leaving China until they answered questions about Cheng Lei.

Reporting by Beijing bureau and Kirsty Needham in Sydney; Writing by Sam Holmes; Editing by Richard Pullin

ATCH 6

<https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-with-senior-state-department-officials-on-the-institution-of-a-personnel-cap-on-designated-prc-state-media-entities/index.html>

Briefing With Senior State Department Officials On the Institution of a Personnel Cap on Designated PRC State Media Entities

SPECIAL BRIEFING

OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON
PRESS CORRESPONDENTS' ROOM

WASHINGTON, D.C.

MARCH 2, 2020

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: So again, just to remind you guys, [Senior State Department Official One]. I cover China, Mongolia, and Taiwan issues.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: [Senior State Department Official Two].

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I've got about four minutes here of topline points which I'll just read off to you guys, if that's okay, and then we can do the Q&A.

For years, the Government of the PRC has imposed increasingly harsh surveillance, harassment, and intimidation against American and other foreign journalists in China. President Trump has made clear that Beijing's restrictions on foreign journalists are misguided. He's also made clear that the U.S. will establish long-overdue reciprocity in our relations with China.

Today, the U.S. Government will cap the number of PRC citizens permitted to work for the U.S. offices of PRC propaganda outlets that were designated as foreign missions of the PRC Government on February 18 under our Foreign Missions Act. Just to remind you guys, those five entities are Xinhua News Agency, China Global Television Network, China Radio International, China Daily Distribution Corporation, and Hai Tian Development, which is the People's Daily distributor here in the States.

Their designations as foreign missions recognizes the fact that these entities are indeed controlled by the PRC Government, and of course, the Foreign Missions Act authorizes the State Department to establish terms and conditions on the operations of foreign missions like these five entities.

Today's cap will limit the number of PRC citizens who may work for these organizations in the U.S. at any given time. These entities together currently employ about 160 PRC citizens. The cap will bring this number to 100. PRC citizens working for other media organizations in the United States are not affected by the cap – not affected by the cap.

The U.S. is taking this action in order to clearly communicate the severity of our concerns about the abusive, unfair, and non-reciprocal treatment of international press in China. We urge the PRC Government to immediately uphold its commitments to respect freedom of expression, including for members of the press.

This administration seeks reciprocity across the bilateral relationship with China, particularly in areas where we have long suffered from lack of a level playing field. We note that even after this cap is implemented, these five PRC state media groups, which are – to remind everyone – explicit propaganda organs of the Chinese Communist Party, these five alone will continue to employ more Chinese personnel here in the U.S. than there are foreign reporters at all U.S. media outlets in China. And of course, unlike U.S.-based media organizations, these PRC state entities are not, in fact, independent news organizations. As I said, they are explicit propaganda organs of the Chinese Communist Party.

That said, this decision to institute a personnel cap was not based on the content produced by these entities. This stands in stark contrast, unfortunately, to the actions of the PRC Government with respect to the international press in China.

Secretary Pompeo has made clear that mature, responsible countries understand the essential value of a free press. The U.S. Government has long welcomed foreign journalists, including from China, to report the news freely and without threat of reprisal here in our country. Journalists in the U.S., regardless of their nationality, had and will continue to enjoy the freedom of expression that is not

permitted in China. This cap merely limits the number of PRC citizens that may work for these designated state propaganda entities at any given time.

I've got a couple of numbers here for you guys. For each of the past five years – that's '15 through '19, 2015 through 2019 – the U.S. has issued more than 11,000 I-visas globally for foreign media reps and their immediate family members. In 2019 alone, we issued 425 I-visas to PRC citizens. Meanwhile, the total number of U.S. journalists working in China on behalf of both U.S.-based and other foreign-based media is only around a hundred total. It is our hope that this action will spur Beijing to adopt a more fair and reciprocal approach to U.S. and other foreign independent press in China.

ATCH: It's not just TikTok; WeChat is organizing Chinese speakers in the US

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/the-ccp-messes-with-texas-and-florida/>

TRANS-PACIFIC VIEW | **POLITICS** | EAST ASIA

The CCP Messes With Texas (and Florida)

Recent cases in Texas and Florida illustrate how the Chinese Communist Party is using WeChat and other means to try and shape public policy outcomes.

By Seth Kaplan

April 29, 2023



The Texas State Capitol in Austin, Texas, United States.

Credit: [Wikimedia Commons/ LoneStarMike](#)ADVERTISEMENT

Russian attempts to influence American politics have dominated headlines in recent years. But Chinese efforts have arguably been more effective – in large part because they have been overwhelmingly conducted in the Chinese language on WeChat, an app ubiquitously used by Chinese Americans. Recent cases in Texas and Florida illustrate how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is using the platform and other means to try and shape public policy outcomes.

Shortly after the Texas legislature convened for its annual session on January 10, Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst, a Republican, [introduced SB147](#), a bill that would ban governments, companies, and citizens of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea from purchasing land in Texas. This legislation was triggered by a former Chinese military officer's 2021 [purchase](#) of 140,000

acres of land near Laughlin Air Force Base near Del Rio, Texas. On January 15, Texas Governor Greg Abbot signaled his support for the bill.

Starting the next day, WeChat, whose content is thoroughly regulated by the CCP, became flooded with misinformation about the legislation. Starting on 1point3acres (一亩三分地), a large [WeChat public account](#) and online [forum](#) and [website](#) managed from Shandong, China, [narratives](#) emerged describing SB147 as a “new Chinese Exclusion Act,” while avoiding any mention of what triggered it.

In the days that followed, additional new anti-SB147 groups emerged on WeChat. As is characteristic of other CCP-sanctioned campaigns on the platform, these WeChat groups had a singular narrative slant. They forbid balanced discussions, [kicked out anyone](#) who disagreed, and promoted the most radical (and in this case [anti-American](#)) voices. Those who supported the bill were called “[Chinese traitors](#).” Some posts encouraged users to [sabotage](#) pro-SB147 accounts by labeling them as spam, [reporting](#) them to the FBI as spies, or even [assaulting](#) the users behind them.

In parallel, organizations such as the Asian Americans Leadership Council (AALC), whose leader, Ling Luo, has [years of contacts](#) with high ranking CCP officials and [boosters](#) and often appears in Chinese state [media](#), mobilized opposition to the bill.

These efforts rallied other groups unattached to the Chinese American community to devote publicity, organizing, and advocacy efforts to oppose the bill. The anti-SB147 effort has found [supporters](#) among Democratic Party politicians such as State Representative [Gene Wu](#) and U.S. Congresswoman [Judy Chu](#), advocacy groups such as the ACLU, and the liberal media, all of which are unlikely to be aware that they are aligned with the CCP on this issue.

As a result of the CCP’s efforts to galvanize Chinese speakers to oppose the bill and enlist the support of non-Chinese organizations toward the same end, protests against the bill broke out on [January 29](#) in Dallas and [February 11](#) in Houston. The mounting public pressure led Kolkhorst to [modify](#) the bill on March 1 to ensure it did not prevent dual citizens or legal

permanent residents from buying homes near military bases. While this compromise alleviated the legitimate concerns of some opponents, such as Democratic State Senator Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (who is now a co-sponsor), it did little to assuage the CCP. Accounts on WeChat and certain Chinese American organizations with CCP ties such as the AALC, the Chinese American Legal Defense Alliance (CALDA), and United Chinese Americans are still calling SB 147 the “New Chinese Exclusion Act,” the “Texas Chinese Exclusion Land Act,” or the “Texas Discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Bill.”

More recently, when the first hearing on the bill was held in Austin on March 2, two pro-bill witnesses required a police escort to the hearing due to threats of violence coming from WeChat accounts. Simultaneously, the very same WeChat groups that are constantly flooded with pro-CCP and anti-democracy propaganda successfully mobilized over 100 opponents of the bill to attend the hearing as witnesses. Still, the bill has progressed to the point that it is now before the Texas State Senate for a vote.

A similar dynamic is also occurring in Florida, which is taking up legislation similar to Texas’ SB147. On April 11, Florida’s Senate unanimously passed SB264, which prevents China and six other “countries of concern” from buying or holding interest in land near strategic sites in the state. The next day, a slew of WeChat groups with names such as “anti-SB264” or “anti new Chinese Exclusion Act” have emerged to oppose the bill. These groups exaggerate the bill’s impact, claiming that “anyone with a Chinese last name will be discriminated against when buying a home,” even though the bill does not preclude any U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident from buying land. Some posts even claimed that “those who sold homes to Chinese would be thrown into prison.”

The first WeChat-organized Zoom meeting to discuss the bill brought together 300 people on April 13 and the first WeChat-organized protests were held in Tallahassee on April 19. Meanwhile, WeChat group administrators continue to mobilize a wide range of actors to petition, lobby, protest, speak to the media, and attend state hearings to work against the bill. Many of these WeChat groups are organized by Zuo Qian, secretary of American Chinese United

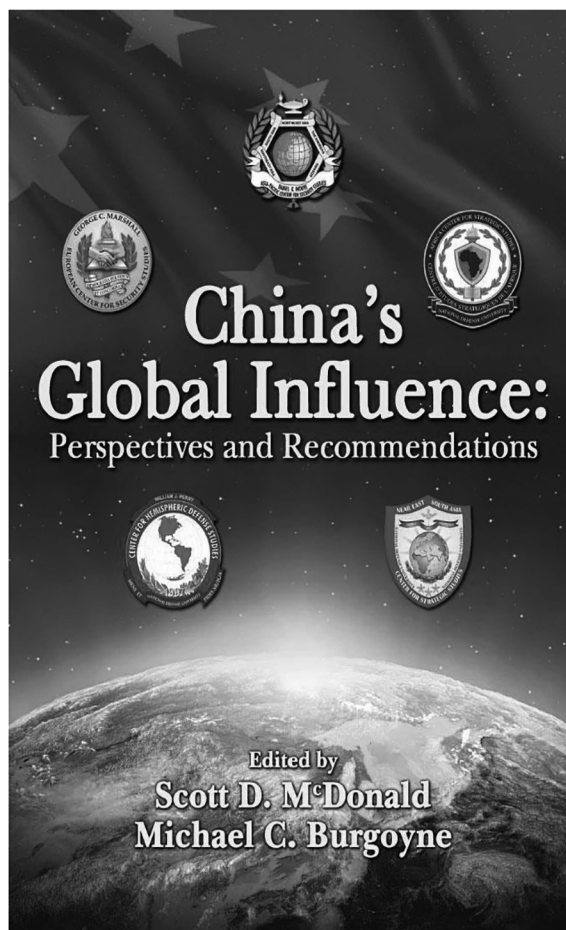
Association (ACUA) and head of [North American Economic Herald](#) (NAEH), both of which have close ties with the CCP.

Lawmakers in both states need to resist the pressure ginned up by the CCP and pass these bills before their legislative sessions close for the year (on May 29 for Texas and May 5 for Florida). The same goes for other states, which are entertaining a series of China-focused bills on issues such as banning state governments from entering into technology contracts with Chinese companies.

More broadly, state legislators across the country – indeed, all Americans – must be aware that the CCP is operating in the shadows to derail common sense security measures that run against its interests.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The document that follows can also be found at: <https://dkiapess.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CHINA-GLOBAL-INFLUENCE-revised-final.pdf>]

ATCH 8: China's Global Influence



PDF DOWNLOAD

DKI APCSS PUBLICATIONS

SUMMARY:

From 30 January to 1 February 2019 the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies hosted a Department of Defense Regional Center collaboration titled “China’s Global Reach: A Security Assessment.” The goal of the workshop was to leverage expertise and unique perspectives from all five Department of Defense Regional Centers to examine the actions and intentions of the People’s Republic of China. To understand how these global activities impact the United States, this analysis was conducted within the context of the PRC’s perspective of its own foreign policy and in an environment defined by strategic competition, as referenced in the *2017 National Security Strategy* and *2018 National Defense Strategy*. The workshop leveraged the insights gained from a broad range of experts to formulate policy recommendations for defending state interests in the face of growing PRC assertiveness. The scholarship, insights, and recommendations of the participants are collected in this volume for the benefit of policy-makers, practitioners, and scholars.

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Scott D. McDonald and Michael C. Burgoyne

Senator CARDIN. Well, let me thank all three of our witnesses. This has been, I think, a very healthy debate, or discussion, I should say. I want to start with the point that Ms. Bennett mentioned.

She gave us those numbers, which are pretty strong about the audience that our media outlets under the broadcasting have versus Russia and China, but I just happen to be concerned that if you look a decade from now, whether those numbers will hold. I see Russia and China just putting so much resources into our hemisphere, every time we travel, we see it.

We know that they are physically present and using propaganda and disinformation in our hemisphere, in Africa. It gets back to the question I raised a little bit earlier and Senator Booker raised earlier, we have Voice of America. I understand that, but we have the specific entities that are with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. We have Radio Free Asia. We have our office in Cuba.

We have our Middle East focus. We do not have in our hemisphere or in Africa. Should we be having a similar type of priority organization in those two regions of the world that might answer some of your questions about having local figures on our news media because you are there, and a more permanent presence, and you establish those types of relationships?

To your point, General, the—yes, we have an advantage, but we don't always playing on a level playing field. We know that China, for example, on their contracts with the media companies, exclude access to our products. Being personally present, having a more personal involvement in the region seems to me might be a worthy investment. Ms. Brandt.

Ms. BRANDT. Thank you. Yes, as I mentioned, I do think that there is considerable wisdom in considering the feasibility of opening a regional bureau in Latin America.

I mean, I think presence on the ground is essential to building out a network of stringer reporters, again, trusted relationships with local civil society members, activists, journalists, rights defenders in the community.

I think building out a presence on the ground, I think, is something we ought to consider.

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Walker.

Mr. WALKER. One point I would make is that the Chinese authorities—the Chinese Party state—put a wide range of resources into those entities, some of which may seem nominally autonomous, but in the end they are working in coordination with the paramount political authorities in the country.

It is a very different model. We are still grappling with the asymmetries posed by China. We can put additional resources into one of these regions, which I think is a wise idea, but that would be just one piece of a puzzle that would equip us to deal, for example, with information and broadcasting.

China is undertaking a wide range of activities, including people-to-people exchanges, building relationships, putting people on the payroll who work in media, and doing that for the long haul.

As you suggest, we should be in this for the long haul and think about ways to invest that are consistent with democratic values, but can compete in a meaningful way with this formidable challenge from China.

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Stilwell.

Mr. STILWELL. Senator, it is a great question. We have a lot of resources. They are just not coordinated. My time at State Department, I reached over to—four or five different agencies that were working on getting our message out in the region and then to the PRC, in visible and not visible ways.

They are scattered because after 1991 or 1999, when U.S. Information Agency was disbanded, we all kind of beat swords into plowshares. To stand up another agency is going to take a lot of time and negotiation. I am not saying we wait until that, but a mediocre plan executed with violence today beats a perfect plan tomorrow.

Let us get to the 80 percent solution or the 50 percent solution, but let us start to coordinate. I would start with Defense and State, getting them to coordinate more directly.

Senator CARDIN. Which is the point I was raising a little bit earlier about this organizational structure. Look, the Congress has tried to struggle with this over. We have changed it twice in recent years, but we should be nimble enough to adjust to current priorities. I do not really see that.

I do not see us adjusting, taking resources from one part of the world to another part of the world, because we see a National Security interest in getting information out, accurate information out because of the activities of our adversaries. I just have not seen that nimbleness.

Part of that might be our responsibility in Congress, the way that we appropriate, the way that we have set up the structure. We know that we cannot always put a lot more resources into a program.

If the resources are not being adequately used or are not being coordinated well, it is compromising our ability to accomplish the mission. It is something we need to take a look at.

Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Senator Cardin. I would like to come back to a couple of statements that struck me. First, Ms. Brandt, you said, and to use your own words, the information space is the most consequential, I think those are the words you used, modern day battleground where we encounter our adversaries.

Something Ms. Bennett said, and I am glad you are still here, Ms. Bennett, that really struck me was the fact that USAGM is a weapon to use and deploy. Those are the words that you used, a weapon to use and deploy. I agree with you. I think USAGM is a strategic asset of the United States.

As such, I think USAGM activity should be supportive of our foreign policy, and they should be aligned with our National Security interests. I just wanted to get that on the record. Your comment really struck me, and I look forward to following up with you again on some of the data that—and analytics that you have put together.

General Stilwell, I would like to turn to you. It is great to see you again. I would like to say it was an honor to serve with you when I was U.S. ambassador to Japan and you took over the realm—took over the reins, I should say, of the East Asia Pacific Bureau.

You are no stranger to communist China's malign influence and propaganda campaigns. When you served as the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, I know you worked very closely on closing China's consulate in Houston.

You designated 15 Chinese state-run media outlets as foreign missions and drastically reduced the number of PRC state backed so-called journalists operating in the United States due to reciprocity issues and National Security issues.

You touched on this earlier, but I would like, if you would General Stilwell, to go a little bit deeper into why you took the actions that you did when you were at the State Department and how important this is.

Mr. STILWELL. Senator Hagerty, thank you for that. I could go on forever. I will keep it tight, though. When I was a defense attaché, I could not call my counterpart on the Chinese military side. They would not give me the phone number. I had to fax them.

I asked the Chinese defense attaché here how he gets a hold of people, and he had every phone from the Department of Defense, every number on his phone. This is a problem of reciprocity.

Over 40 years of trying to win the PRC over with carrots, we forgot about sticks, and we forgot to enforce the standards and universal standards. They signed up for UNCLOS. They walked away from it. They signed up for the basic law in Hong Kong and they walked away from it. We called these empty promises. These were promises made with no intention of following through.

They just want the climate virtue with Paris and all the rest of that. Sir, with the help of great leadership from Secretary Pompeo and the Congress, we looked at those areas where the relationship was most out of balance, and we decided to take them to task not for the purpose of destroying the relationship, but to get them to see the benefit of reciprocity, to giving our journalists the same access in their country that theirs have in ours.

The same with the consulate. There is certain limits to what you can do as a diplomat stipulated by the Vienna Convention. They were violating that left and right. It was—we had to do that. They closed Chengdu in return, and that is what you would expect, but there is a lot more work to do.

We had other plans that we were going to execute that I am doing my best to work with the current Administration as well to enact.

Senator HAGERTY. Well, the term reciprocity, I think, really resonates with me, and I am sure that it does in many other cases. We have talked so often using other lexicon, free markets and that type of thing, but frankly, when you get down to it, reciprocity is a key operating principle. I appreciate you raising that.

I would like for you, if you might, to just expand on how we could take lessons from what you did here in the United States to a global context.

Mr. STILWELL. I think a coordinated effort across the interagency would be a great start. The current national defense strategy talks about integrated deterrence. That is integration across regions, but it really, the place we have to start as integration across agencies in the U.S. Government.

This body has the capability to do that, to get Treasury and State, and pick an agency to start working together more closely. Sir, I think in the topic we are talking about today, I know I am beating a dead horse, that we need to get some central coordination body going in terms of over worldwide information sharing, and then those other things that the law allows us to do, but coordinate it versus just trusting that we will find the right answer eventually.

Somebody has got to be in charge of information. If I could finish, in the military parlance, we talk about the levers of national power as the DIME: diplomacy, information, military, economic, and there are others, but there is an agency secretary, there is a cabinet level secretary for all of those except for one, and that is the “I.”

There is no cabinet level secretary for “Information.” I am sitting here today, I spent my whole life looking, studying war and bombs and bullets, and I am telling you, I am scared to death we are going to lose in the information space.

Senator HAGERTY. It is like what Ms. Brandt said, the most consequential competition that we have today. Thank you for raising that, General Stilwell. I look forward to continuing to work with you in terms of articulating a plan to coordinate, just as you say. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CARDIN. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of our panelists for being here today. The topic I would like to talk about is China’s use of AI to become a global leader in artificial intelligence.

They have been developing for a long time now something called “deepfake technology” and has progressed along to the point where they can be able to use AI to distort public figures. An example of how a public figure might be distorted is when Vladimir Zelensky was portrayed as announcing a surrender last year.

The software could not only be used to distort real people, but could also create people out of whole cloth. I believe the Chinese state-aligned influence operation use a GAI generated fictitious news anchors to promote China's global role in spreading disinformation around the world.

We have got this deepfake video technology that can create fictitious people. They can be used to really cloud even further people's ability to discern what is real information and what is not real information.

I would like actually both Ms. Brandt and General Stilwell, would you answer this question, how concerned are you about our adversaries' use of AI and the deepfake technologies for disinformation purposes? What is the best way for the U.S. to respond?

Ms. BRANDT. The recent advances in generative AI, both in video, but also text and audio, could have enormous effects on the health and strength of our information environment. I think we could see it meaningfully changing the actors that are using these techniques, the behaviors that they adopt, and also the content itself, how persuasive it is and also how discoverable it is.

I think it is something we ought to be paying attention to. Those are the first order consequences. There is a second order consequence. That is once we live in a world where we can no longer trust what we see with our own eyes—we call it the liar's dividend, right.

Those who are willing to say that actually truthful video of me, it is not me, right. We live—we begin to live in a world where we can no longer trust what is before us, and I think that erodes the very basis of the information environment that, as I have described, is essential for democracies to thrive.

Mr. STILWELL. Senator, the first one you'll agree with, the second one, you will tilt your head, but needs to be said. The first one is access to information. Information is the new oil, they say. We worked very hard to deny the PRC access to submarine cables.

Huawei is big on this, and it is subsidized by Chinese Government, so you would be stupid to build one with an American or a French company when the Chinese are offering it to you at half price. Well, it is not free, and it is not cheap. You are going to pay for that in other ways.

I think the first part and the first answer would be to deny—continue to deny them access to information freely, because that is the thing that makes AI work. The second part is just an observation that—we were reading. I kind of monitor what goes on the PRC fairly closely.

When they first brought in ChatGPT, they were just like, hey, this will help with decision making which in the PRC is difficult. This was going to make their decisions for them and algorithmize it, and speed it up.

Then all of a sudden, like next 2 days you hear all of a sudden, they shut it down. You can imagine they might have asked: "What is the solution to Taiwan?" The ChatGPT comes back with, "Well, you should democratize." Everyone is like, okay, all right, all right, enough of that.

[Laughter.]

Mr. STILWELL. Seriously. What they are doing right now is they are taking AI, ChatGPT and they are desensitizing it, so it does not give answers it does not want. In some cases, we can just sit back and watch because they will not be able—because they cannot allow free information, they are going to take this very good capability and reduce its capability.

The second one, though, that is not really relevant to this group, but we should all think about is we need to arm our kids to deal with the social media space. A healthy—and it comes in the form of critical thinking, media literacy, and a bunch of other things. We are working with at the Air Force Academy right now is to seriously—just take critical thinking seriously because we cannot filter that—allow the government to filter information.

We have tried filtering that. I am still banned from Twitter for suggesting that the virus, the pandemic began in Wuhan Institute of Virology. Two years ago, that was a conspiracy theory, and today we all see it as the most obvious answer.

The Government cannot sift that information. We have to arm every individual so when you get into this information space to apply simple critical thinking concepts, so you do not become a dupe and a victim of disinformation.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you for that, General. I appreciate that. In fact, I would say that applies to everything today you read in the media. I cannot tell you how many times I have read, having been a former governor and knowing that stories get printed that are just not accurate, and then I read a story and I believe it right away.

I said, why am I doing that? I should know that reporters, for a variety of reasons, do not always get it right, even in our most trusted sources. Now we are just going to have to take that to a whole new level when we have got AI that is going to be creating these fake stories. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Senator CARDIN. Let me just observe, first of all, that Ms. Bennett, you are still here. Thank you. That is not the normal—it is not normal for the Administration's witness to stay and listen to the second panel. We, thank you, and that is, I think, expected because of your desire to listen and to be part of a discussion.

I thank you very much for remaining in the committee during that time. The committee record will remain open through close of business Friday. If any member has questions for the record, I would ask that you all respond promptly as you possibly can. I want to just thank all four of our witnesses.

The purpose of our committee is oversight. This is a critically important weapon we have to get accurate information out where we have our adversaries trying to influence public opinion and influence action by their propaganda and disinformation.

I thank you, and I can assure you the information that has been used today, we might be getting back to you, will help us in carrying out our responsibilities. With that, the subcommittee will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:14 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF MS. AMANDA BENNETT TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Question. You have mentioned certain metrics in your opening statement about how we are outperforming competitors. Could you shed a little more light on what those metrics are?

Answer. USAGM monitors the performance of its networks with indicators linked together through a theory of social change. The Impact Model Framework tracks awareness and use of our content among a general population, engagement of our audience as individuals, as well as the use and coverage of our content by institutions and governments in other countries.

The keystone to the Agency's Impact Model is the concept of weekly reach, or the number of adults that access our content in a typical week. Our data shows that in 24 countries surveyed in 2022, USAGM's media brands typically reach and are recognized by substantially larger portions of the national population of other countries, than are PRC and Russian international media competitors. This is particularly true when accounting for the Agency's total measured audience on all distribution platforms, which includes less well-branded programs strategically placed on domestic affiliates. In contrast, Russia and the PRC champion a distribution strategy that offers international media content on fully-branded radio, cable, and/or satellite channels across multiple regions, in addition to placements with local partners.

Audiences are choosing USAGM networks' content over competitors in a number of key target markets. In Nigeria, for example, VOA reaches a third of all adults while Russia's state-controlled network, RT, reaches just 1 percent and China Radio International, less than 3 percent. In Cambodia, despite a government crackdown on the free press, RFA and VOA together reach 16 percent of adults, compared with China's state-controlled network, CGTN, at less than 2 percent.

However, we cannot be complacent in the face of rising adversarial competition. When focusing the comparison on the Agency's "brand" users—those who consciously know our brands and report using them in the past 7 days—the differences between USAGM and competitors are smaller, and in some cases suggest a tightening race for media market share. In many countries, when asked whether they recognize and use USAGM brands, the reach of adversarial competitors is similar to or even larger than USAGM brands.

In countries where USAGM content is strategically placed into the broadcasts of popular domestic affiliates, audiences may not recall accessing our brands, instead associating the program with the host name or the local station. To measure these audiences, surveys probe respondents further about their consumption of specific offering, using program and/or host names. Audiences who access USAGM programs, but do not always identify themselves as using our brands, are included in reach totals.

The chart below shows weekly total reach (percent of adults who accessed content in the past 7 days) and weekly brand reach for USAGM, Russian, and PRC international media. Green text indicates where our brand-only reach is measurably higher reach than competitor brands, while red indicates a brand-only reach that is lower than competitor brands. While the chart uses VOA and RFE/RL, it generally is a placeholder for the translated name of the brand in the local language.

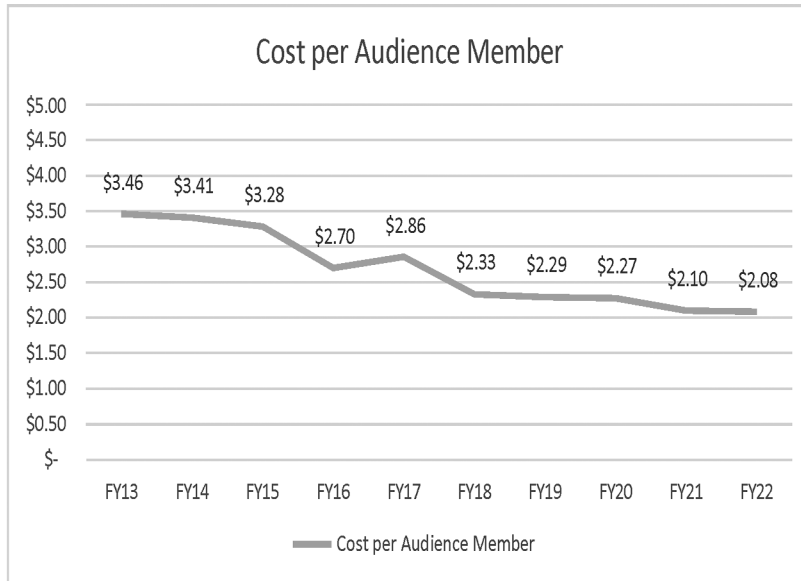
Comparing United States, Russia, and PRC International Media Reach¹

	USAGM Total Reach <i>includes brand and program users</i>	USAGM <i>Brand-only Reach</i>					Russia <i>Brand-only Reach</i>		PRC <i>Brand-only Reach</i>	
		VOA	RFE/RL	Current Time	RFA	MBN	RT	Sputnik	CGTN	CRI
Angola	9.4%	5.6%					1.2%		1.5%	1.1%
Argentina	24.2%	5.5%					5.1%		4.7%	
Azerbaijan	5.7%	1.4%	4.0%	0.4%				1.5%	0.0%	
Bolivia	46.9%	7.2%					5.0%		2.6%	
Brazil	1.7%	1.7%					1.1%		1.1%	
Cambodia	15.5%	10.1%			9.0%				1.5%	0.5%
Colombia	24.2%	3.3%					3.5%		1.7%	
Dominican Republic	50.5%	9.4%					5.0%		6.0%	
Ecuador	39.3%	4.9%					4.1%		1.7%	
El Salvador	48.9%	8.3%					4.0%		3.1%	
Guatemala	39.2%	6.9%					2.8%		3.7%	
Laos	4.0%	2.8%			2.0%				1.1%	2.1%
Lebanon	16.9%					9.8% (Alhurra) 3.8% (Sawa)	3.9%			
Montenegro	17.8%	7.6%	5.7%					10.1%		
North Macedonia	18.1%	8.6%	4.4%					0.9%		
Nigeria	33.2%	13.2%					1.1%			2.5%
Paraguay	40.0%	2.0%					2.3%		2.5%	
Russia	10.6%	1.0%	5.4%	4.0%					1.1%	
Rwanda	19.8%	10.5%					0.1%		0.1%	
Saudi Arabia	9.9%					6.1% (Alhurra) 5.4% (Sawa)	1.6%			
Serbia	13.7%	4.3%	4.1%					10%		
Thailand	5.9%	2.6%								2.4%
Uruguay	41.8%	5.1%					5.0%		1.9%	
Vietnam	6.4%	1.5%			1.2%			0.3%	0.6%	0.6%

¹ USAGM implements survey research continuously and in other countries. We will routinely update these comparisons as new data is available.

Question. Do you have any trend lines in terms of what it is costing us per person for USAGM to reach its audience?

Answer. Over the course of the last 10 years, the agency has benefited from substantial budget increases (from a budget of \$713 million in FY 2013 to \$854 million in FY 2022) and invested those increases to achieve even more substantial audience growth (nearly doubling in the same period, from 206 million people reached per week in FY 2013 to 410 million as of the end of FY 2022). The cost to U.S. taxpayers per audience member reached—always small—has declined steadily and significantly throughout that period, now just \$2.08 per regular audience member for the entire year.



Question. Is there a way you are showing how the cost is impactful for the American taxpayer?

Answer. Consistent with the American values of free speech and free expression, USAGM networks advance U.S. national interests by providing consistently accurate reporting and other content to large and growing audiences in closed societies, or where free media is not yet fully established, that opens minds and stimulates debate.

Free press and free expression are universally acknowledged as key to free, open, democratic societies. Expanding the number of free, open, democratic societies supports U.S. interests because democratic countries enjoy greater stability and prosperity, live in peace with their neighbors, reject terrorism and extremism, and make better political allies and trade partners for the United States.

Our work is guided by the principles of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act, USAGM’s enabling legislation. Congress mandates USAGM to provide accurate, credible, and comprehensive news; to represent American society; and to present and discuss U.S. policy—all consistent with the standards of professional journalism. Doing so, as the Broadcasting Act establishes, “contributes to international peace and stability” and serves “to support freedom and democracy—in a rapidly changing international environment.”

Question. How is the Agency measuring success in obtaining the goals of freedom and democracy with its news coverage around the world?

Answer. USAGM’s approach to impact evaluation is grounded in a Logic Framework that charts the conditions, inputs, and outputs necessary to achieve the stated mission, and a Theory of Change that lays out the causal chain of events leading

to a desired impact, including immediate outcomes but also short-, medium-, and long-term change. Over time, that framework has evolved into the current Impact Model utilized by the Agency to evaluate the effectiveness of its programming. The Impact Model is also the basis of the annual Performance and Accountability Report, which USAGM produces to satisfy Congressional requirements to assess the Agency's program performance, financial accountability, and managerial effectiveness. In addition, at the working level, each USAGM language service develops annual strategies that incorporate performance targets from the Impact Model.

The ultimate goal of all USAGM programming is long-term and transformational: achieving freedom and democracy around the world. Although it would be impossible to attribute such transformations solely and directly to USAGM, the Impact Model provides a holistic tool to assess USAGM's contribution to that endeavor, defining milestones that suggest progress toward the Agency's long-term objectives. The Impact Model includes over 30 indicators organized around USAGM's mission—in the categories of *Inform, Engage/Connect*, and *Be Influential*—as well as more specific goals of *Reaching Target Audiences, Providing Value, Engaging Target Audiences, Engaging/Connecting Media Markets, Creating Loyalty*, and *Being Influential with People, Media, and Governments*. The Model then operationalizes each of these goals by defining corresponding indicators to monitor the impact of USAGM networks' programming in each of the areas.

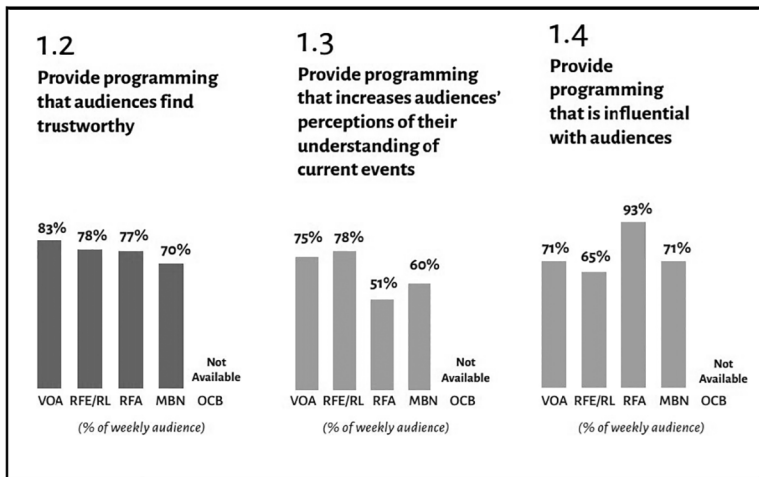
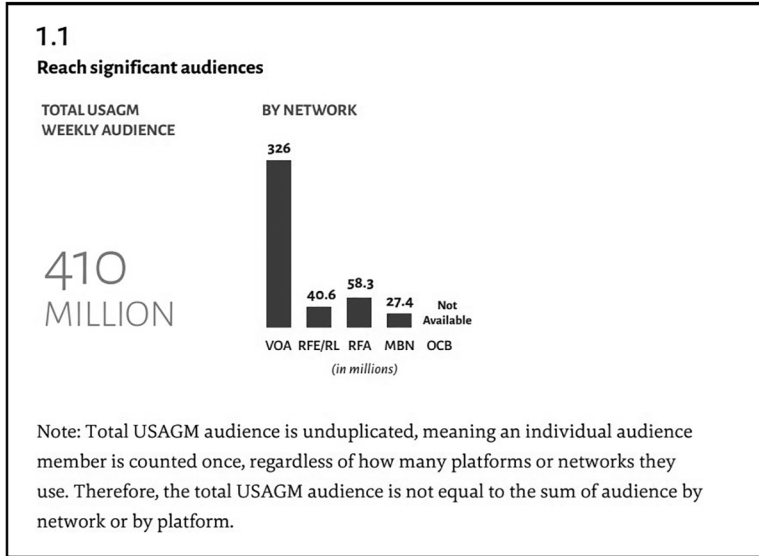
To assess programming performance, the Impact Model draws from a diverse set of evidence comprising quantitative, qualitative, and anecdotal data. Surveys serve as one of the key inputs, providing data on questions such as media brand awareness and use, perceived trustworthiness of the media brand, or the extent to which USAGM helps improve the understanding of world events or U.S. policy over time. The survey data are augmented by digital metrics, using data from website and social media analytics that help provide accurate and real-time measurement of the effectiveness of the Agency's digital assets.

To complement these quantifiable measures and provide a more comprehensive and holistic assessment of USAGM's programming, the Agency also collects structured anecdotal data that captures the impact of content produced by its networks, such as pick-ups of their coverage by other major news media, reactions from government officials, or visible policy change. Internal databases—for example, the list of partner media organizations and their standing in the target media market—as well as data such as the number of times USAGM content was downloaded by media partners for rebroadcasting or placement provide additional inputs for the Model. Taken together, this body of evidence provides the opportunity to evaluate and measure the success of USAGM programming in specific markets, as well as worldwide.

For example, foundational audience reach measures—from surveys and digital analytics—report on the goal of *Reaching Target Audiences*, while measuring audiences' perceptions of content trustworthiness or uniqueness go further, reflecting the goal of *Providing Value*. Over time, by establishing themselves as prominent and trustworthy media sources, USAGM networks create enduring relationships with audiences who value objective and independent journalism. For the *Engaging/Connecting Media Markets* goal, the Model tracks the number of affiliate media organizations in a particular country or region, as well as instances of content co-creation, training, and other capacity-building activities that help improve the overall quality of the media in the market. As part of its indicators comprising *Engagement with Target Audiences*, the Model considers audience-initiated dialogues around topics covered in programming and opportunities to expand internet access. These inputs contribute to greater freedom of speech and improved public discourse, which ultimately fosters higher civic engagement and democratic resilience. To address the *Being Influential with People* goal, the Impact Model monitors whether USAGM content helps to improve the audience's understanding of American society and foreign policy, and to inform audiences of current events in the country or the world—with the vision that increased knowledge empowers foreign populations to understand the workings of a democratic society, and advocate for similar approaches in their own systems of governance. Attention from foreign government officials, whether positive or negative, serves as an indicator for *Being Influential with Governments* and demonstrates independent journalism's potential to affect decision making or policy.

The Impact Model provides a comprehensive view of USAGM's impact over time by establishing benchmarks for each indicator while comparing the performance to previous years. USAGM continues to refine the model, incorporating best practices from other public service media institutions and updating metrics through internal process improvements in the collection of survey and digital data. The Agency plans to release an updated version of the Model later in 2023.

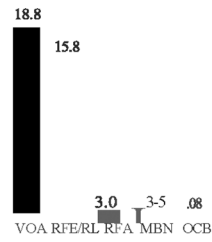
A few key indicators from the Impact Model, as documented in the Agency's FY 2022 Performance and Accountability Report, are included below for reference.



5.1

Increase web traffic

WEEKLY WEB AND MOBILE VISITS
in millions

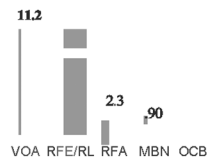


5.2

Increase audience interaction via social media

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT
in millions

Digital Reaction (likes/hearts) on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube & Instagrams



Select Digital Engagements (Comments/Shares) on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube Instagrams



