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Holbert, Scott, A, Major, USMC

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Information is everywhere. Due to the hyper-connectivity within the global framework, the rate and volume at which information is exchanged is increasing dramatically. With such a vast amount of data to filter, including false information put out by America's enemies, how the United States approaches the information dimension must be addressed.

How information will affect future diplomacy and ultimately future conflict, is also evolving. The United States lists information as an element of national power, but disbanded the department assigned to manage information in 1999. Almost twenty years later, and arguably in a world much more saturated with data, America has made little effort to manage its information-related efforts.

The United States currently has no legitimate management system for its information campaign. The institution designed to manage America's information is understaffed and underfunded. A confused narrative is the result of the nation's reliance on the disjointed and uncoordinated efforts of individual institutions managing their own respective information-related capabilities

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United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

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Coordinating United States Government Efforts in the Information Dimension

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AUTHOR:

Major Scott A. Holbert, USMC

AY 17-18

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: CHRISTOPHER S. STOWE PH.D.
Approved: [signature]
Date: 5/4/18

Oral Defense Committee Member: ERIC SHIBUYA, PhD
Approved: [signature]
Date: 5/4/18

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Executive Summary

Title: Coordinating United States Government Efforts in the Information Dimension

Author: Major Scott Holbert, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: After exploring information as an element of national power and how it is currently managed, it becomes apparent that the United States must reconsider its approach to the information dimension and understand its effect on the cognitive and physical dimensions, and subsequently take steps to reorganize the way the United States Government manages information in order to be effective in the information dimension as a global superpower.

Discussion: Information is everywhere. Due to the hyper-connectivity within the global framework, the rate and volume at which information is exchanged is increasing dramatically. With such a vast amount of data to filter, including false information put out by America's enemies, how the United States approaches the information dimension must be addressed.

How information will affect future diplomacy and ultimately future conflict, is also evolving. The United States lists information as an element of national power, but disbanded the department assigned to manage information in 1999. Almost twenty years later, and arguably in a world much more saturated with data, America has made little effort to manage its information-related efforts.

Conclusion: The United States currently has no legitimate management system for its information campaign. The institution designed to manage America's information is understaffed and underfunded. A confused narrative is the result of the nation's reliance on the disjointed and uncoordinated efforts of individual institutions managing their own respective information-related capabilities and narratives. If the United States hopes to maintain its position as the global superpower, it must prepare for future conflict—which will be inundated with information.

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Preface

Until recently, my scope on the how war begins—the events leading to war—was limited. While attending Command and Staff College at Marine Corps University, my scope broadened and I developed a profound interest in international relations theory and how important information is when dealing with global conflict. As an electronic warfare officer, I have had previous experience with non-lethal capabilities and information-related missions. The summation of these aspects led to my choosing of this topic.

With that, I would like to express my gratitude for the assistance and support received from my family and the faculty of Marine Corps University. I would like to thank my wife, Stephanie, who served as the backbone of our family while I conducted my research. Without her efforts, I would not have been able to succeed. I would also like to thank Dr. Christopher Stowe and Dr. Eric Shibuya for their assistance and insights provided throughout this research project. Their expertise in the subject area as well as their scholarly acumen in the research process enabled me to complete this project.

For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.[1]

~Sun Tzu

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that technology has dramatically increased the rate at which information is transmitted and has subsequently had a significant impact on the way human beings live. Some even compare the impact of the current "information revolution" to those of the Neolithic or Industrial Revolutions.[2] Granted, the pace of such a revolution depends on a multitude of factors, particularly when examining the revolutionary characteristics within specific countries or regions. For instance, seventy percent of the gross domestic product for the countries in the G7 group rely on information-related, intangible goods.[3] Assuredly, less-developed economies experience slower information-related development and produce fewer information-related goods. However, aside from the fact that information has changed the way humans live, the sheer amount of information has increased dramatically as well. According to researchers, in 2002 alone, humanity produced the equivalent of almost half the amount of information which had been previously produced in its entire history.[4] Information comes in all shapes and sizes and comes from numerous actors, such as biometric data from an individual, demographic information from a region, financial data from a corporation, to news about the global economy. Clearly, the information revolution is underway and the levels of information continue to rise, but what happens when information is used nefariously? In order to fully understand the role of information in national security, the current information-related state of affairs must be evaluated, the use of information to manage the foreign and domestic narrative must be

investigated, and the effect of information on warfare must be examined. After exploring these areas, it becomes apparent that the United States must reconsider its approach to the information dimension and understand its effect on the cognitive and physical dimensions, and subsequently take steps to reorganize the way the United States Government manages information in order to be effective in the information dimension as a global superpower.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the aspects in which the information environment affects the United States and how it conducts diplomacy and war, this study examines three aspects of the information environment. These include the structures and organizations within the United States Government responsible for the use of information as an element of national power, the role of information in the development of America's foreign and domestic narrative, and how actions in the information environment will shape future conflict. In essence, this study traces information's role from the domestic management of information through its effect on the conduct of war and future conflict.

This study begins by developing an understanding of information as an element of national power. The acronym "DIME" is commonly used to describe the elements: diplomacy, information, military, and economy. However three of the four elements have specific departments within the government responsible for their coordination and application. This paper will offer just three of many potential options for the development of a government entity which is responsible for the coordination and application of information as an element of national power.

Additionally, this paper also examines the far-reaching nature of information and its effect on the other elements of national power. During this discussion, the focus transitions from domestic information to its use in foreign relations and war. Information, whether positive, negative, or in absentia, will affect America's ability to both influence current, and gain new allies.

To investigate the role of information on future conflict, this study conducts case-study reviews of information's effect in recent conflicts. In some instances, information was obscured, leaving the underlying intentions of the actions in question. In other instances, information was withheld, preserving the anonymity of the actors or the context of their intent. The information aspects of these cases provide valuable insights into the future conduct of war. Although the future of warfare is unpredictable, it is important to develop an understanding about how the hyper connected exchange of information affects future conflict.

INFORMATION POSTURE OF THE UNITED STATES

As levels of information continue to rise, one must examine not only the information itself—where it comes from, how it is generated, and its credibility—but also how humanity interprets it and the effects it has on society. Because information is everywhere and touches just about everything, the term "information environment" has gained popularity.

According to the United States Department of Defense (DoD), the information environment is defined as the "aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information."[5] Operations within the information environment, or "information operations," are further defined as the "integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to

influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.[6] Lastly, information-related capabilities are the "tools, techniques, or activities employed within a dimension of the information environment to create effects and operationally desirable conditions."[7]

The National Defense Authorization act of fiscal year 2014 identified a requirement for an information-operations strategy. As a result, in 2016 then-Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter published a strategy for operations in the information environment. The rhetoric used in this strategy demonstrated that the DoD must recognize the effects information can have on its mission. Congress, having witnessed information-related actions during the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as information-related actions used by Russia against Estonia in 2007, Georgia in 2008, and Ukraine in 2014, used the strategy to emphasize that it was time to address the information revolution by developing goals, synchronizing efforts, and implementing change. In order for the United States to succeed at these aims, it must develop a better understanding of information as a national power.

The United States lists information as one of the four instruments of national power. These instruments must work in harmony, as "power is an indivisible whole; one instrument cannot exist for long in the absence of others."[8] That being said, it is interesting to note that, while the Department of State manages diplomacy, the DoD manages the military, and the Department of Commerce manages the economy (with regards to international trade), there is no department responsible for managing information. During the Cold War, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was responsible for the information programs utilized to support foreign policy and promote national interests.[9] However, Congress disbanded the agency and integrated its mission into the Department of State in 1999 following the Foreign Affairs Reform

and Restructuring Act of 1998. Did this leave a critical gap in America's ability to project national power?

SOFT, HARD, AND SMART POWER

According to Joseph Nye, the individual who coined the terms "hard" and "soft" power, national power equates to hard power combining with soft power to create smart power. He concludes that hard power primarily consists of a state's military power or its ability to levy economic sanctions or, as he describes, "sticks and carrots."[10] The purpose behind hard power is getting "others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences."[11] Conversely, he describes soft power as an attraction, seduction, or persuasion, which ultimately gets "others to want what you want."[12] Soft power is typically conceived as diplomacy, negotiation, and economic aid. Smart power is simply finding the appropriate balance of soft and hard power which allows them to reinforce each other, ultimately helping achieve a state's objectives.

As an advocate of soft power and a supporter of the concept of multinational economic interdependence, Nye claims that force, or hard power, in today's world might even jeopardize a state's economic objectives. For Nye, it is vital to understand that neither type of power can stand alone. Overemphasizing hard power can be detrimental, as exemplified by the Roman and the Ottoman Empires, which were states with strong militaries that eventually fell. In today's environment, smart power is what is often deemed important. For example, "countries like Canada, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian states have political clout that is greater than their military and economic weight because of their support for international aid and peace-keeping."[13] In 2002, Nye further supported his position when he proposed that multiple factors

have made war much less palatable for advanced countries, highlighting nuclear weapons, nationalism, and the unwillingness to send troops into battle as the most preeminent.[14]

Exercising smart power must be the focus of the United States. In his article "Grappling with the Fait Accompli: A Classical Tactic in the Modern Strategic Landscape," policy expert Van Jackson concludes that "if the threat of violence is the only [United States] recourse to revisionist challenges, then Washington is more likely to be boxed into an unsavory binary: either repeatedly risk war where the stakes suggest the United States should not, or simply show restraint, paralyzed by the pace and scope of first-mover aggressors."[15] This point also plays a factor in addressing faits accompli and gray-zone conflict, discussed later in this paper. Moreover, despite being a global superpower, the United States should avoid approaching conflicts unilaterally. Cooperation with partners and allies cannot be over-emphasized. In the 2003 documentary film "The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara," McNamara, who served as Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, stressed the importance of allied support in comments regarding the conflict, stating "We are the strongest nation in the world today. I do not believe we should ever apply that economic, political, and military power unilaterally. If we had followed that rule in Vietnam, we wouldn't have been there. None of our allies supported us. Not Japan, not Germany, not Britain or France. If we can't persuade nations with comparable values of the merit of our cause, we'd better reexamine our reasoning."[16] Even years later his argument still holds true: if the United States has trouble shaping the narrative behind its actions in a way that convinces its allies to support them, the goal of persuading enemies and neutral parties toward the desired end state is problematic from the start.

NARRATIVE MANAGEMENT

If attraction to a state's objectives is becoming more and more critical, then a state's management of the narrative surrounding its actions to achieve those objectives is paramount. This is where image is crucial. If the United States wants to achieve its global objectives, it must persuade other nations through its narrative. Global support for America's on-going wars on terror has long since diminished. Externally, it has been made more difficult as a result of an enhanced information campaign employed by its enemies. If narrative is so vitally important, it calls into question the current paradigm of the supported/supporting relationship between military and information operations. To emphasize this point, as previously stated, the United States defines information operations as "the integrated employment, *during military operations*, of information-related capabilities."[17] It is evident in the definition that information operations are meant to support military operations. Contrary to this principle, it is becoming more common that enemies of the United States are using military operations to support their information operations in creating a form of "slander campaign" against America.

It is undeniable that weaker state actors and non-state actors cannot match the military might of today's world powers. Instead they must rely on soft power and narrative management to gain strength. For example, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a non-state actor which is stronger in soft power than in hard power. Having a strategic objective of polarizing western society, ISIS has leveraged its online presence using social media and other communications websites to advance its narrative and gain support. It also uses other information-related capabilities such as presence, posture, and profile to intimidate, coerce, and recruit new members in its controlled territories.[18] ISIS's online campaign has been so extensive, the term "virtual caliphate" was coined to describe the fact that it is a "radicalized

community organized online."[19] Through its use of information-related capabilities in addition to strict management of its narrative, ISIS has been able to radicalize and mobilize Muslims and other supporters outside of its primary zone for military operations and create an extensive "forward presence" to aid in achieving its political objectives.

ISIS's anti-western narrative clearly targets the United States. However, a large part of what makes fighting ISIS difficult is that the United States is "organized to battle coherent enemy groups that operate in the physical [dimension]."[20] ISIS knows it must fight the west asymmetrically and therefore utilizes any means it can to support its information campaign in an attempt to achieve its strategic objectives using all three dimensions of warfare. This makes it a worthy belligerent in an "influence war" which will be "won by the actors who can mobilize visions and strategies that attract a global audience."[21]

The nation's global image can be affected by its domestic narrative just as much, if not more than its external narrative. For example, in his first year in office, President Donald Trump submitted a budget proposal which increased the military budget by fifty-four billion dollars, while reducing the budget of the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by twenty-nine percent, or roughly fourteen billion.[22] Nye asserts that it was a misunderstanding of smart-power strategy when "Mick Mulvaney, director of the Office of Management and Budget, described the proposal as a hard-power budget."[23] While having potential hard power is essential to balancing the smart-power equation, hard power alone is costly, inefficient, and unpopular. By reducing the amount of economic aid it provides, the United States runs the risk of appearing as an elitist society. Add in the effect on perception that actions such as a proposed travel ban have, and United States policy can seem

quite polarizing. As ISIS has shown, these types of actions can be incorporated into the enemy's information campaign and used against the United States.

WHY INFORMATION NORMS ARE IMPORTANT

In addition to managing America's narrative, it is also critical to establish its standards. This involves a nation mobilizing "international coalitions and build[ing] institutions to address shared threats and challenges."[24] While cooperation is difficult, such institutions are the entities that will establish laws and regulations which can then be used as a backdrop to influence others. Here Nye shares his position with Robert Keohane, who he helped co-author "Power and Interdependence in the Information Age." According to Nye and Keohane, "a set of networks, norms, and institutions, once established, will be difficult either to eradicate or drastically rearrange."[25] This essentially promotes a status-quo approach to global politics. The United States has played a large role in the creation and operation of many international institutions which has afforded it the opportunity to apply its national interests to a significant number of international laws, norms, and standards. According to Hal Brands, author of "Paradoxes of the Gray Zone," such international norms are vital when examining gray-zone conflicts. To him, "gray zone approaches reflect the fact that there are strong international norms against outright aggression and territorial conquest, and that even moderately revisionist powers often hesitate to pay the costs—from moral opprobrium, to economic penalties, to the potential for military response—associated with flagrantly violating those norms."[26]

Managing narratives while creating international norms is also important because it gives purpose and aids justification. For example, China defied the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea when it created the nine-dash line and referenced it when declaring maritime

rights in the South China Sea.[27] In this example, China used a tactic known as lawfare, which the Collins dictionary defines as the use of the law by a country against its enemies, especially by challenging the legality of military or foreign policy.[28] In essence, China determined that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea violated its claim to territory in the South China Sea and created the nine-dash line in response. The problem is that the nine-dash line, which challenges the international standard, was drawn by China with only the support of Taiwan, essentially meaning it was largely a unilateral effort against a global norm.

There is an ambiguity problem apparent in developing international norms. Which nations participated in creating the norm? Which nations are responsible for enforcing it? What is the threshold for an act to be considered a violation of the norm? While these questions may seem rudimentary initially, they actually are not, and simply represent the preliminary questions which eventually feed into the larger, more daunting issue: What constitutes an act of war in the information environment? If an adversary finds a way to operate in the gray zone and exploit this threshold, they have essentially found a "crack in the armor" of these international norms.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND THE CHARACTER OF FUTURE WAR

In order to better prepare for future war, the United States must become more adaptive to the changing character of warfare. In the article "Capturing the Character of Future War," Paul Norwood, Benjamin Jensen, and Justin Barnes define the character of war as "the co-mingling of the motives and circumstances governing the uses of force to compel an adversary to do one's will."[29] They also propose that macro-trends act in a "trinity-like manner" to produce a character of war. Specifically listed are the interaction of technology, the international system, and governance.[30] This trinity can be used to focus the efforts of the United States.

As discussed, technology has dramatically increased the rate at which information is exchanged. If the rate at which society interacts and communicates increases, the message becomes even more important. Information becomes the message and can come in a multitude of forms including truths, half-truths, or fiction, and can be manipulated with bias or misinformation to increase how provocative it is. Even a truthful message can be disastrous if it is presented in a way in which the audience misunderstands it. The key to the increased exchange of information is transparency. What are the honest details about the situation in question? What is the intent of the actors involved and why? That said, it is rare to find someone who believed that all information should be available and accessible, without classification levels.

Also discussed was the importance of establishing international norms. Expanding on this point, it is important to note that institutions inherently resist change. Perhaps this is an area where the United States can focus, which will allow it the time to adapt to the new character of war. This is, of course, a two-part issue. The United States can buy time to adapt by taking the lead on establishing international institutions and regulations, thereby slowing the ability of other state actors and non-state actors to change. However, in order to utilize the gained time to adapt, the United States must break free of the bureaucratic machine in which it operates, which itself creates resistance to adaptation.

The last portion of the trinity is governance. As discussed, information warfare and narrative management is beginning to play a larger role in global conflicts. If the objective of potential adversaries includes a type of "slander campaign," a strategy to disprove and overcome these claims is required. The United States cannot simply ignore this slander tactic because the increased volume and rate at which information is exchanged allows even the most ridiculous

claim to reach a large audience. Because of the larger audience, the buzz and likely belief of the information increases, making attempts to disprove it more difficult. This ties back into the importance of transparency. Yet, even transparency may not be enough. According to the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command's Force XXI Operations, trends such as rejection of the West, technological acceleration, and information warfare will shape the character of future warfare. Other trends listed include regional and subnational power shifts, nationalism, demographics, and environmental risks.

These trends also reinforce points within this study. The trend of rejection of the West emphasizes the importance of the global narrative. The trend of technological acceleration emphasizes the importance of the establishment of global norms around the technologically advancing fields. The trend of information warfare is, itself, the basis of this study writ large. Acknowledging that warfare is trending in this direction gives warrant to investigating the context of what future conflict will potentially resemble. However, should these trends drive the power away from the state, the drastic nature of the security dilemma and the subsequent change in the way which global societies interact are beyond the scope of this paper.

FAITS ACCOMPLI, RED LINES, AND GRAY-ZONE CONFLICT

The "crack" referred to above, was highlighted with the Russian invasion and subsequent annexation of the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine. In this instance, Russia took a fait-accompli approach in its actions in conducting a gray-zone action, which may be becoming more and more standard in the information age. Fait accompli is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a "thing that has already happened or been decided before those affected hear about it, leaving them with no option but to accept it.

In a composite paper written by Daniel Altman, an assistant professor of political science at Georgia State University, he identifies two important points about faits accompli—that they are typically limited and typically unilateral. He explains that actions are limited in that their goal must "target a gain small enough that the adversary will let it go rather than escalate."[31] In addition, he uses unilateral in this instance to describe that the "adversary does not consent to the change in the status quo, which is instead imposed upon that adversary to its detriment."[32] In essence he has expanded the definition to include that, while the adversaries of a fait accompli could theoretically defend, the strategy of a fait accompli appeals them to defer because the costs of responding are more than the adversary wants to pay. Having defined fait accompli, it becomes easier to recognize that the fait accompli concept has been exercised in several recent military actions, which were accompanied by information campaigns.

Before defining gray-zone conflict it is important to develop an understanding of what its limits are. What limits are aggressors trying to avoid because their violation would trigger an intervention? Such thresholds are called red lines. Altman defines a red line as the part of a deterrent demand that distinguishes compliance from violation. In essence, it represents a threshold set by a potential intervening actor who is attempting to deter the actions of the aggressor. The precision of the red line is vital. He refers to an article written by David Beard which appeared in the *Washington Post* that highlighted President Barack Obama's red line on the situation in Crimea. Obama stated that "there will be costs" for the Russian military actions in Crimea. However, those costs were never clearly defined, which rendered the red line ineffective.[33] Unprecise red lines are also detrimental to credibility and legitimacy because the aggressor has proven its ability to act without retaliation.

Defining gray-zone conflict will make it easier to understand its relationship with fait accompli and red lines. Unfortunately, gray-zone conflict is somewhat hard to define, which makes it troublesome to national strategists and military planners. Americans typically think in "binary terms—war versus peace, victory versus defeat."[34] In a white paper prepared by Captain Philip Kapusta for United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), gray-zone challenges are defined as "competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality," going further to explain that they are "aggressive, perspective-dependent, and ambiguous."[35] This interpretation makes responding to gray-zone actions very difficult. For example, because Russia has essentially annexed Crimea, is it more appropriate to punish Russia outright, or attempt to undo what has become the status quo? Russia successfully achieved its objectives while challenging existing norms, and did so without triggering an intervention. This proves to other potential adversaries that it is possible to achieve interests and chip away at the status quo as long as they avoid triggering a military response or escalating to the point of intervention. This aspect is also part of what motivates revisionist parties to conduct operations within the gray zone, spanning from global powers like Russia and China to non-state actors. However, the key principle is that gray-zone actors are able control the escalation of their actions and not trigger a response. This helps in determining which groups are and which are not gray-zone actors.

To further examine gray-zone actors, Dan Flynn, a gray-zone expert from the National Intelligence Council, considers capabilities more important than environment. He describes actors applying various elements of power but withholding some capabilities to remain below the threshold for war. This makes defining the gray zone easier for state actors, but more difficult for non-state actors. For example, a strategic objective of ISIS is to polarize western society to

create fear in anti-ISIS groups and strengthen pro-ISIS groups. ISIS's overall campaign is "unabashed, quasi-genocidal warfare that involves maneuver, combined-arms assaults, and theatrical atrocities designed to bring as *much* attention as possible."[36] According to Flynn, violent non-state actors, such as ISIS, must use whatever means they have at their disposal" in order to meet their objectives.[37] Because global attention is important in achieving their cause, ISIS is much less concerned about triggering an intervention, and even tries to spin the narrative of the intervention to its benefit.

As stated above, gray-zone conflict is also "perspective-dependent." This is yet another challenge, albeit a crucial one, for gray-zone conflict because it creates a point-of-view problem. For example, the United States views the conflict in Ukraine as one capable of being handled with soft power through economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure. From the Russian perspective, it seems to appear more within the traditional confines of conventional war, using military force in conjunction with information and deception. However, to Ukraine, the situation represents an existential threat and violation of its national sovereignty.[38] Organizing a suitable response to such an action becomes even more difficult, given the degree of varying interpretations of the intensity—or even the character—of the action.

RESPONDING TO GRAY-ZONE CONFLICT

The inherent ambiguity of gray-zone actions is what makes responding so difficult. Actions within the gray zone typically "feature unconventional tactics, from cyberattacks, to propaganda and political warfare, to economic coercion and sabotage, to sponsorship of armed proxy fighters, to creeping military expansionism. Those tactics, in turn, are frequently shrouded in misinformation and deception and are often conducted in ways that are meant to make proper

attribution of the responsible party difficult to nail down."[39] Here, Russia again provides another case study of gray-zone operations, in which cyberattacks were used in response to the relocation of a World War II memorial statue in Estonia's capital city, Tallinn.

In 2007, Estonia was the victim of a vicious cyber-attack allegedly initiated by Russia. During this attack, Russian hackers attacked Estonia's electronic civil and economic infrastructure, affecting the media, banks, and even the parliament, leaving the populace paralyzed and in a state of panic.[40] The term "allegedly" is used because, while there is consensus that the attack originated from Russia, no evidence exists which pinpoints the exact actor who carried out the attack. This fact highlights how anonymity can be maintained when dealing with information—in this instance, electronic information.

Even if the act can be traced back to an actor, whether state or non-state, it reverts back to the issue: is it an act of war? The cyberattack did not kill anyone. Russia allegedly used provocative yet false news reports and misinformation about the movement of the statue and destruction of war graves to instigate riots in Tallinn. During the subsequent riots, one thousand people were detained, one hundred and fifty-six people were injured, and one person died.[41] This case study demonstrates that if global norms are built around traditional military action, then determining which actions constitute an act of war within the information dimension becomes a particularly vague process.

Ambiguity of the actors involved is not required in gray-zone conflicts. For instance, Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea is a prime example of a gray-zone operation in which the primary actor is identifiable. China's actions are a "subtle campaign of pressure and expansion that seems carefully calibrated."[42] China's operations run the risk of international response, but so far have fallen short of causing military intervention. The information campaign

which has accompanied China's operations in the South China Sea has reinforced its proposal that its actions are peaceful and do not violate international norms, particularly with respect to the global commons. Would the United States prefer to see China cease its actions in the South China Sea? Assuredly so, but China knows that the United States is not willing to intervene under the current conditions in which China is operating, and has no reason to terminate its actions.

Ambiguity in general, whether about the action or the actor, is what makes deterrence difficult. As stated, red lines can create limitations on the actions within a gray zone. Not recognizing who the actors are makes creating red lines difficult. However, even if the actors in a conflict are known, it is still difficult to create red lines to a conflict where the context is unknown. As Jackson states, shaping "future decisions and bargaining situations in your favor…requires understanding context, which in turn requires understanding the problem."[43] This point ties back to the importance of establishing global norms. The United States must use soft power and diplomacy to get in front of gray-zone conflicts and set the standards in advance. Getting in front of any gray-zone conflict arguably starts with getting the elements of national power organized at home.

OPTIONS FOR ORGANIZATION

As stated in the USSOCOM white paper, "centralized government is becoming more expensive and less effective, while the tools available to non-state actors are trending the opposite way."[44] In addition, it points out that "unified control of the levers of power may be anathema in democracies, but it streamlines the speed of decisions and unity of effort in the gray zone."[45] This implies that the United States is behind the power curve from the outset.

However, by first examining how the United States government is structurally organized, and subsequently how it applies the elements of national power from that structure will aid in applying the *obsta principiis* principle to gray-zone conflicts.

Before offering a means to get better organized at information management, it is important to understand that the end state is what is key. According to James Wirtz, author of "Life in the Gray Zone: Observations for Contemporary Strategists," the challenges of gray-zone conflicts "will require not only adjustments in plans and force structure, but an overall change in attitudes and procedures leading to diplomatic and organizational dexterity in meeting developments that can emerge with little warning."[46] He continues by offering three courses of action. First, he offers that the United States must reduce bureaucracy in order to more rapidly react to emerging challenges. Second, he highlights the importance of using diplomacy to develop more proactive alliances in order to develop cohesion when reacting to gray-zone conflict. Lastly, he emphasizes strong deterrence through precision in defining the limitations and red lines.

Getting organized in the information environment and coordinating efforts using a whole-of-government approach will aid America's efforts to manage the national narrative, both domestically and abroad. The United States has several options to do this. For example, there are already departments within the government in place who exercise their respective elements of national power. A Department of Information would be beneficial to coordinate such a whole-of-government approach to future events as well as events unfolding in real-time. While this option would be the most beneficial in terms of ownership of the national narrative, the counter argument for this option is that it would be costly, expand the already difficult

bureaucracies, and require dedicated personnel within the other departments to liaise with the proposed department.

A second option would be to support an effort already underway. First mentioned in President Barack Obama's Executive Order 13721,[47] the Global Engagement Center (GEC) was created under the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).[48] The purpose of the GEC is to "lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and misinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests."[49] While the word "foreign" may seem limiting to the GEC's scope, the fact that the center already exists is a huge leap forward. However, according to the testimony of Michael D. Lumpkin, former leader of the GEC, the 2017 NDAA "failed to elevate the head of the GEC to a position of authority commensurate with its expansive mission."[50] He further states that the center "lacks the necessary authority to direct the interagency."[51] In order to utilize this agency effectively, it must be afforded the proper authorities to coordinate efforts, and be properly staffed and funded in order to facilitate its goals.

A third option is to expand the scope of the DoD's Joint Information Operations Warfare Center, allowing it to take a whole-of-government approach. This would more closely follow the example set by the Joint Interagency Combined Space Operations Center (JICSpOC), which was an agency created in 2015 by the Department of Defense and is now known as the National Space Defense Center.[52] The JICSpOC's original purpose was to "create a unity of effort and facilitate information sharing across the national security space enterprise."[53] It essentially aggregated the efforts of United States Strategic Command, the Air Force Space Command, and the space intelligence community and helps "streamline the communication between these

entities, thereby enabling more cooperation among them and potentially increasing transparency as well."[54] Transparency in the nation's information efforts will benefit the country's long-term objectives and conjure allied support of America's narrative.

CONCLUSION

America has a dilemma it must address immediately to protect the nation in the long-term. Information is already recognized as an element of national power, however the only organization tasked to manage America's information is currently understaffed and underfunded. Instead, individual organizations manage their own information campaigns with a coordinated message or consistent narrative left mostly to chance. This is problematic when either addressing global challenges and conflicts or cooperating with other partners and allies. Being certain that allies are aware of America's intentions and long-term goals is critical to the future of the nation.

Warfare as we know and understand it is changing fundamentally with the advancement of globalization, economic interdependence, and technology writ large. As this paradigm shift takes place, if the United States hopes to maintain its position as a superpower, it will be forced to adapt to the new global environment which will be dominated by the near-instantaneous exchange of information. In order to do so, the United States must use strategic thinking and foresight to ensure its national interests are represented in anything that has a role in future war, whether institution or legislation.

In conjunction with the paradigm shift within warfare, there must be a realization that the current organizational structure with which the United States exercises its national power is too slow and outdated. There are plenty of robust opportunities in multiple areas where America can

rectify these problems. This study merely serves to highlight that the environment has changed and the United States must hurry to catch up.

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