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14. ABSTRACT Since the Gulf War, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has worked to alter the status quo in the Western Pacific through strategies that integrate information to underpin its military modernization and "three warfares" campaigns. The PRC's aggressive use of information influences and coerces its targets by combining non-military means and backs them with aggressive military harassment. Since the end of the Cold War, information has been an afterthought as an instrument of national power because the United States Information Agency (USIA) was abolished as part of the post-Cold War "peace dividend." For the U.S. to be effective in this renewed era of great power competition, it must reestablish the USIA to plan, direct, and coordinate information as a primary strategic means alongside the other instruments of national power. A reinvigorated USIA would cultivate political warfare capability and serve as the NCA's executive agent for information operations.					
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Information:

Ways and Means in Competition

INTRODUCTION

Since the Gulf War, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has worked to alter the status quo in the Western Pacific through strategies that integrate information to underpin its military modernization and "three warfares" campaigns. The PRC's "three warfares," categorized as psychological warfare, media or public warfare, and legal warfare, use information as the primary means to influence and coerce audiences to accept new norms that competitors are unwilling or unable to counter.¹ Chinese strategic culture views competition and war as a continuum vice the binary of war and peace, and information is the means and the method it employs to keep the competition below the violence threshold. The PRC's aggressive use of information influences and coerces its targets by combining non-military means and backs them with aggressive military harassment.

In the United States (U.S.), the National Command Authority (NCA), Executive Branch Departments, and National Security Council (NSC) struggle to compete in the information environment because the information instrument of national power is not planned for and implemented in the same ways as the diplomatic, military, and economic instruments. Since the end of the Cold War, information has been an afterthought as an instrument of national power because the United States Information Agency (USIA) was abolished as part of the post-Cold War "peace dividend." For the U.S. to be effective in this renewed era of great power competition, it must reestablish the USIA to plan, direct, and coordinate information as a primary strategic means alongside the other instruments of national power. A reinvigorated USIA would

¹ Doug Livermore, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Theory and Practice in the South China Sea," *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2018/03/25/chinas-three-warfares-in-theory-and-practice-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

cultivate political warfare capability and serve as the NCA's executive agent for information operations.

POLITICAL WARFARE

The primary benefit of reestablishing the USIA would be its renewed emphasis on political warfare capabilities. During the Cold War, political warfare was a class of information operations directed and aligned with objectives designed by the USIA. George Keenan described political warfare as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.”² According to Keenan in his 1948 Policy Planning Staff Memorandum, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” political warfare includes covert and overt means ranging from political alliances and economic measures to what we now classify as foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare.³ Currently, the PRC, like the Soviets, employs similar information-based techniques. The U.S. and its allies are unprepared to counter them because they lack education, training, and strategic vision for political warfare operations. USIA’s return would primarily demand political warfare capability for use in great power competition distinct from intelligence and clandestine operations. The renewed demand for political warfare-trained and educated civil servants would lead to universities rekindling political warfare education programs. Finally, USIA’s professionalization of political warfare career tracks would improve political warfare competence in other Executive Branch Departments.

² George Keenan, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” *Policy Planning Staff Memorandum* (1948), 1.

³ Keenan, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” 1.

Capability Demand Leads to Specialization

The new USIA would demand political warfare capability to compete with the PRC and a career development continuum that would improve the U.S.'s messaging and influence capabilities. During Xi's rule, the PRC has built what amounts to a fifth column through its United Front Work Departments to "closely unite the Chinese living overseas in support of the Chinese Dream to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation."⁴ The PRC has used information as a "charm offensive" or to coerce and corrupt "to achieve its economic, military, and diplomatic aims" in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the United Front, leaving the West incapable of responding.⁵ If the U.S. had the USIA with trained political warfare specialists, career USIA professionals would propose asymmetric strategic solutions to counter United Front Work Department activities and the BRI charm offensive to deny the Chinese Communist Party its objectives by highlighting the PRC's nefarious intent through information campaigns across multiple mediums in the target countries.⁶ Establishing a career track for political warfare professionals with skills, capabilities, and focuses that are distinct from clandestine operators in the Central Intelligence Agency and intelligence and information specialists in the Department of Defense (DoD) would fill a capability gap and increase U.S. information operations' effectiveness in competition with the PRC and others that attempt to reset the international order in their near abroad.

⁴ Gershaneck, Kerry K. "Political Warfare: Strategies for Combatting China's Plan to 'Win Without Fighting,'" (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2020), 42-43.

⁵ Michael J. Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China" (speech, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 4 October 2018) in Gershaneck, Kerry K, "Political Warfare" *The People's Republic of China's Strategy 'to Win without Fighting'* *Journal of Advanced Military Studies, Vol 11, no. 1* (Marine Corps University Press, Spring 2020), 1. <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.j.2020110103>.

⁶ Derived from themes in Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-Chün Lee Sawyer, *The Tao of Deception*, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, and Samuel B. Griffin's translation of Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

Political Warfare Education

Once the USIA institutes a career continuum for political warfare specialists like during the Cold War, universities will reestablish political warfare education paths. To successfully confront the PRC threat, “the United States must relearn how to fight on the political warfare battlefield.”⁷ In his book on Political Warfare, Marine Corps University Professor Kerry Gershanek explained that since the Clinton Administration abolished the USIA, educational programs that educated government officials stopped offering political warfare-related courses.⁸ The absence of political warfare education resulted in a generation of national leaders that failed to recognize political warfare and when and how the PRC employs it to reach its aims. A political warfare career field in the USIA will incentivize the primary universities that educate political, military, and diplomatic leaders to offer political warfare degrees in addition to the now customary international relations specialties currently provided. Educating American elites on political warfare will enable them to identify when competitors employ political warfare properly, allocate resources to counter it, and plan and conduct operations to “deter, counter, and defeat it.”⁹ With a renewed emphasis on political warfare, the USG will incentivize institutions to offer political warfare curricula. Ultimately, the USG will be more capable of identifying, countering, and conducting operations to defeat it.

Political Warfare Competence Across Departments

Once the USIA establishes a career continuum for political warfare specialists, and universities begin educating those leaders, political warfare competence will increase in other Departments. Recent headlines highlight American political leaders coerced by Chinese

⁷ Gershanek, “Political Warfare,” 1.

⁸ Gershanek, “Political Warfare,” xiii.

⁹ Gershanek, “Political Warfare,” xiii.

Communist Party members because they are unprepared to counter PRC political warfare methods.¹⁰ Diplomats and DoD officials are equally susceptible, and Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) programs do not address the topic. They only recently began educating students on the threat the PRC poses to the international order, the United States, and its allies. Universities and JPME institutions educating current and future government leaders in political warfare are critical to increasing political warfare capability across the USG. This will improve the government's ability to identify competitors' use of political warfare, better align resources, and plan, coordinate, and direct activities to counter it in competition. Ultimately, increased political warfare capacity, education, and capability will prevent the PRC and other competitors from achieving their aims and contribute to sustaining the rules-based international order.

The principal value of reestablishing the USIA is its renewed emphasis on political warfare expertise. The USIA return would generate a demand for political warfare capability for use in great power competition that is distinct from intelligence and clandestine operations and is absent from the current strategic inventory of the U.S. The demand for political warfare-trained and educated civil servants would lead to universities revamping their political warfare education programs. Finally, professionalizing political warfare career tracks would improve political warfare competence in other Executive Branch Departments. The return of the USIA and political warfare competency would serve as force multipliers when identifying, undermining, and countering competitors' political warfare campaigns.

USIA: THE EXECUTIVE AGENT FOR INFORMATION

In addition to the U.S. losing its political warfare expertise when the USIA disbanded, it lost its knowledge and experience of competing with a peer under the threshold of violence.

¹⁰ Gershanek, "Political Warfare," xiv.

While the PRC and Russian Federation use information to support coercive strategies to achieve operational and strategic objectives without violence, the U.S. and its allies struggle to compete, only beginning to put the target in focus after the 2017 National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy refocused the USG. To effectively compete below the violence threshold, the U.S. and its allies must integrate the information instrument of national power into its strategies to achieve its policy aims and counter malign influences. The USIA would enable the USG “sow instability, division, and weakness” just as it did in Eastern Europe during the Cold War.¹¹ As the executive agent for information, it would integrate information into policy aims and strategies at the government and department levels. Additionally, the USIA would ensure the information instrument of national power is resourced, planned for, and directed similarly to other instruments. Finally, once it guarantees adequate priority for the information instrument, the USIA would modernize the U.S.’s media and broadcasting operations to reach 21st-century audiences.

Information Integration

The primary tasks of the modern USIA would be to integrate information objectives and operations into policy aims and strategies. During the Kennedy administration, the USIA Director, Edward R. Murrow, established the USIA as a “specific tool for achieving foreign policy objectives” and a “long-term instrument for inculcating universally acceptable American values in a dangerous and not always receptive world” by persuading audiences.¹² Currently, the information instrument of national power is addressed by multiple departments and frequently as

¹¹ Brands, Hal, "The Dark Art of Political Warfare: A Primer." *American Enterprise Institute*, 2020, 1. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24622

¹² The U.S. Information Agency Alumni Association and The Public Diplomacy Foundation, “The U.S. – Warts and All,” *Edward R. Murrow as the Director of USIA Presenting the U.S. to the World, A Commemorative Symposium*, (Washington D.C. 16 October 1961), 16.

a supporting effort to diplomatic, military, and economic objectives. The 2022 National Defense Strategy references “information” 28 times but embeds it with other capabilities, such as cyber operations or information sharing with allies and partners.¹³ The strategy does submit that information has a role in deterrence, but chiefly in operations in the information domain to ensure messages are effective and that the DoD avoids unnecessarily escalating to conflict.¹⁴ To integrate information, the USIA would develop information strategies that align with the National Security Strategy and coalesce information operations across the Executive Branch. Integrating information strategy would create positive effects for the U.S. in competition with regional and great powers by prioritizing information operations and aligning all information-related activities across the USG.

Information Upgrade

Once the USIA integrates information across the USG, it will elevate the information instrument of national power proportional to the diplomatic, military, and economic instruments. In 1999 when the merger with DoS was complete, “USIA’s activities were decentralized throughout the Department,” leaving the information instrument in a supporting role for the subsequent decades.¹⁵ Since then, information has taken many forms but is rarely resourced, planned for, and directed in strategies and operations as a primary method to achieve a political aim. Frequently, the DoD discusses information operations or operations in the information environment as an antecedent to intelligence activities or in support of special and general-purpose force operations because specialists in one field lack understanding and intricate

¹³ 2022 National Defense Strategy

¹⁴ 2022 NDS, 9

¹⁵ “The ACDA-USIA Merger into State — The End of of an Era,” *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, (Washington, D.C., 16 October 2016). <https://adst.org/2016/10/acda-usia-merger-into-state-end-of-an-era/#.Wd0vvdVSyJA>

knowledge of other fields.¹⁶ The 21st-century USIA would use information to “help achieve U.S. foreign policy objectives by influencing public attitudes among nations and advising the President, his representatives abroad, and the various departments on the implications of foreign opinion on present and contemplated policies and programs.”¹⁷ In this era of “informationized warfare” disaggregated, nonaligned, disparate information operations subordinate to the diplomatic and military instruments of national power will leave the U.S. and its allies at a disadvantage.¹⁸ Prioritizing the information instrument of national power as a primary means and method with a national strategy akin to the NDS and the National Military Strategy can help achieve national policy aims.

21st Century Media

The final benefit to the USIA is its ability to evolve the USG’s international multimedia operations. Using the optimal medium to reach and persuade audiences effectively is essential. Currently, the U.S. maintains its “five international broadcasting networks under its Broadcasting Board of Governors: The Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio and Television Martí, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks.”¹⁹ Most military professionals and foreign service officers have experience delivering hand-cranked transistor radios to villages so inhabitants could access these broadcasts. When recalled, these anecdotes typically include bewilderment because most villagers had cellular phones or satellite television.

¹⁶ Bishop, Donald M., “DIME, not DIME: Time to Align the Instruments of U.S. Informational Power,” *The Strategy Bridge*, (June 20, 2018), 3.

¹⁷ The U.S. Information Agency Alumni Association, “The U.S. – Warts and All”, 17.

¹⁸ Informationized Warfare is described as competition where the battlefield is everywhere and “information is omnipresent.” It includes the “integrated use of technology” to “obtain or suppress information. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Wuhan: Chongwen 2011).

¹⁹ The Acting Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs expressed the need for public affairs for both domestic and international audiences. See Heather Nauert, “Remarks for Foreign Affairs Day,” *Department of State*, (May 4, 2018), at:<https://www.state.gov/r/remarks/2018/282039.htm>, accessed June 8, 2018 in Bishop, Donald M., “DIME, not DIME: Time to Align the Instruments of U.S. Informational Power,” 3.

Upgrading the international broadcasting networks and coherently incorporating new messengers and mediums would reach more audiences where they routinely receive information. Generating themed short films, social media messages, and short and long-form interviews and stories across platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and podcast services would diversify the medium and maximize exposure. Centralizing the modernization, message development, communication strategy, and training the messengers are capacities that a modern USIA could deliver.

A 21st-century USIA would generate alignment, efficiency, and metrics for the information instrument in competition with peers. Serving as the executive agent for information would reinvigorate the U.S.'s information-related capability across the USG and its departments. Once established, the USIA should elevate information to the same level as the diplomatic, military, and economic instruments of power by generating national information strategies that direct the agency and provide continuity and alignment for adjacent departments and the National Command Authority. Finally, the USIA would upgrade the international broadcasting networks to improve the medium and message effectiveness and better align U.S. and ally strategic communication. Reestablishing the USIA would have immediate and broad positive effects countering competitor coercion, supporting allies and partners, and building resiliency in audiences on the front line of great power competition.

NO MORE BUREAUCRACIES: THE USIA IS UNNECESSARY

The time and cost required to build an agency for information is a significant concern. Even though the need for political warfare and prioritizing the information instrument of national power is clear, adding to the U.S.'s bureaucracy by reestablishing the USIA is not required to develop political warfare capability and modernize the information instrument of national power.

Building an agency with cabinet-level officials with the appropriate authorities and resourcing would take too much time and consume finite resources more appropriately allocated to maturing the political warfare career field. Additionally, an executive agent for information is not required to prioritize the information instrument of national power, nor is it critical to modernizing Washington's international broadcasting. The additional bureaucratic layer is unnecessary to improve the U.S.'s ability to conduct information operations and counter the PRC's use of information.

Political Warfare Capability Now

First, developing a modern USIA would detract from the attention required to create political warfare specialists. The USG should prioritize energy and resources to build political warfare specialists, training and education, and career track. In the RAND study "Modern Political Warfare," the authors suggest Special Operators are the optimal entity to adopt political warfare capabilities and responses.²⁰ If the USG spent time and resources reestablishing the USIA, the political warfare specialty would be an afterthought left under-resourced. Those in competition with the PRC and others need political warfare training and education now. Delaying would allow the PRC to continue conducting influence and coercion operations against allies and partners in key areas of competition with little opposition from the U.S. While it is likely true that the USIA should not have been dissolved, reestablishing it is not the priority when DoS, DoD, and other departments and agencies are in dire need of individuals with political warfare expertise.

²⁰ Robinson, Linda, et al., "Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses," *RAND Corporation*, (2018), 1.

Too costly

In addition to delaying the introduction of much-needed political warfare specialists, building an information agency would be too costly and time intensive. Comparison to establishing the Space Force and Space Command is appropriate, as both happened in the modern era and consolidated existing capabilities from across the USG. In the lead-up to establishing the Space Force, cost estimates ranged from \$5 billion to \$13 billion over five years “to stand up both the Space Force and Space Command.”²¹ While some items in these figures assumed the largest possible force with new infrastructure, it is worth noting that the current fiscal climate is not conducive to adding non-forecasted costs to the Executive Branch’s budget requests.

An Information Czar

Finally, reviving the USIA is not essential for there to be an executive agent for the information instrument of national power. The President could appoint an information czar or direct the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, or the Director of National Intelligence to lead the information instrument. Further, the President could direct the information lead to modernize America’s broadcasting agencies, and Congress could build resourcing into a Defense Authorization Act or other budget allocation legislation. While most would agree that it is true that the information instrument does need to be prioritized and adequately resourced and that Washington’s international broadcasting programs do require modernization, none of those reasons imply that there needs to be an agency for information.

The U.S. government is already bloated, and the interagency policy and strategy development process is too complicated. Reprising the USIA would overcomplicate a

²¹ Harrison, Todd, “Why We Need a Space Force,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (October 3, 2018).

cumbersome, slow, and expensive process. Instead of building another top-heavy bureaucratic agency, the time, energy, and resources should be spent building the political warfare continuum and correctly implementing the U.S. information policy and strategy for great power competition. Reestablishing the USIA is not required to develop the political warfare capability envisioned by Keenan when he explained the overt and covert conduct of political warfare should “be accomplished through the offices of the Secretary and Under Secretary of State.”²²

FUTURE INVESTMENT

Even though it may take a few years to reach full capacity, establishing an agency to lead information-related policy, strategy, operations, activities, and investments is critical to countering the PRC’s influence and coercion with allies and partners. The time and resources it will take to get the USIA fully operational are more of a reason to begin immediately. After the USSR collapsed, the Clinton Administration closed the USIA, and other government agencies considered unnecessary, especially since analysts, academics, and strategists agreed there was unlikely to be another great power competition or threat. The rise of the PRC and the new era of great power competition shows that even if they falter, other competitors will rise. An agency with institutional knowledge, opportunity for career progression, vision, and the ability to invest for the future is a critical component of sustaining and improving strength across the instruments of national power.

The solution to closing capability gaps with peer competitors can likely be found in asymmetries, novel approaches, or historical examples. The USIA will resuscitate the USG’s ability to conduct information-related activities at the strategic level by planning, directing, and coordinating information like other instruments of power. Its key competencies will include

²² Keenan, “Political Warfare,” 7.

promoting political warfare expertise and building resilience to competitors' coercion. As the executive agent for information, it will align resources and government efforts while modernizing technical capabilities. The USIA is a critical option for the U.S. to improve its effectiveness in great power competition.

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