

**GEC Principal Deputy Coordinator Daniel Kimmage's  
Testimony for the House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability  
on The Global Engagement Center  
Wednesday October 25, 2023**

Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Crow, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on the important work of the Global Engagement Center (GEC).

Foreign malign influence has become an integral part of the arsenal of our adversaries, challenging us in the information space. Confronting nations and malign actors that seek to undermine our interests and values with their disinformation strategies and tactics must be an integral part of the national security policy of the United States and its allies and partners.

We are seeing this now in the Middle East, where control over the narrative is of key importance between Israel and Hamas. This is as real as the danger confronting those engaged in the fight to protect democracy globally. Words matter. Messages matter. They incite and inspire those who would undermine our global interests and values.

The GEC is about engaging in the information domain. It is about America taking the leadership role in confronting those foreign actors who use disinformation and false narratives to undermine the security of the United States, its allies, and partners.

We have teams that follow the efforts of Russia, China, Iran, and terrorist groups to exploit the information domain. We have technology platforms that enhance our ability to understand and counter foreign disinformation strategies, which undermine our allies, our security and personnel, and our investments overseas.

We work closely with our U.S. government partners within the State Department, as well as at the White House, Intelligence Community and Department of Defense in developing and implementing a whole-of-government approach in response to foreign information manipulation. We engage our allies and friends to push back effectively against state and nonstate actors that want to tear down the U.S. government and the way of life that democratic nations have fought to protect and preserve.

I'd like to take a moment now to discuss some specific examples that I hope will give you a sense of the various approaches we utilize at the GEC in response to the malign foreign influence challenge and why the GEC is an important U.S. national security tool.

Once again, the terrorist threat has become a central security concern. We must remain vigilant in our fight against terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and ISIS, particularly as they take advantage of the turmoil in the Middle East by spreading toxic disinformation. The GEC has a team focused on the counterterrorism (CT) threat, and I want to share with you an example of our efforts to pushback against ISIS that underscores our work against terrorists.

The GEC led an effort to undermine ISIS leader Abdul Rahman al-Mawla. Al-Mawla was captured by U.S. Coalition forces in Iraq in 2008. In captivity, he provided actionable intelligence that helped eliminate his fellow terrorists in what was then Al Qaeda in Iraq, the precursor of ISIS. Years later, after al-Mawla's release from custody and after he started to rise in the ranks of ISIS, we worked closely with our allies in the U.S. Intelligence Community and Defense Department—particularly CENTCOM and SOCOM—to develop a campaign that spread the word that al-Mawla was a source for the United States and its allies in their battle against ISIS.

The GEC organized an interagency strategy to release 56 declassified tactical interrogation reports that exposed al-Mawla's betrayal of his ISIS colleagues as he rose in the ranks. More than 600 articles in several languages,

including Russian broadcasts, highlighted al-Mawla's betrayal and the turmoil in ISIS leadership.

This campaign, which began in 2020 and ended in 2022 with the death of al-Mawla, served three key purposes: it damaged al-Mawla's credibility and effectiveness within ISIS; it undermined confidence in ISIS; and it developed best practices to create GEC-led processes and structures that used information as a tool to respond to a range of threat actors. Our effort at developing and implementing a whole-of-government approach was so successful that it served as a model for other CT-related efforts.

While we continue to be vigilant about ongoing terrorist threats, the United States remains clear-eyed and focused on global competition with countries like Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

By publicly exposing Beijing's information operations, the GEC advances America's effort to compete with the PRC, making for a more even playing field in the information space. And that is exactly what we did with our new report on PRC efforts to reshape the global information environment.

As the report lays out, while every country has the ability to tell its story to the world, the PRC is unique in its intent and ability to use deceptive and coercive means to do so. Through its efforts in the information space, Beijing is gaining overt and covert influence over content and platforms, constraining global freedom of expression, and advancing an emerging community of digital authoritarians.

We can't let Beijing reshape the global information landscape. This groundbreaking GEC report is a key vehicle for pushing back against PRC efforts to distort the global information environment. It informs audiences targeted by Beijing and helps to empower governments, civil society, academia, and press around the world to more effectively collaborate in their efforts to protect the integrity of the information space.

Beyond publishing reports, the GEC has conducted – and continues to execute – a variety of programmatic efforts intended to illuminate problematic PRC practices and build foreign audiences’ resiliency to Beijing’s propaganda and disinformation. We also coordinate with partners across the State Department and the interagency on targeted efforts to counter the PRC in the information domain.

The PRC may be central to U.S. national security concerns, but so too is Russia. Russia actively and globally uses malign influence and disinformation as part of its national security strategy. Technology has allowed Russia to shift from old school propaganda to the full power of social media to spread malign influence content, overt and covert, more rapidly.

The GEC’s Russia Team monitors Russian activities in this space and works on strategies and campaigns to counter Russian information manipulation efforts.

We worked actively with our U.S. government counterparts responding to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. Before Putin launched missiles at Kyiv, he created and spread disinformation in an effort to shape perceptions before his invasion, underscoring his view of disinformation as an integral part of Russia's war-fighting capabilities. We track disinformation efforts against Ukraine daily. We recently exposed Russian disinformation in two reports on the Black Sea Grain initiative and on Russian kidnapping of Ukrainian children, which built on our comprehensive report “Russia’s Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda” that exposed Russia’s disinformation and propaganda ecosystem.

Putin has created a virtual Potemkin village using disinformation as a façade in an effort to get the Russian people and the world to believe his lies about the situation in Ukraine. By calling out Putin’s disinformation, we play a key role in the allied effort in support of Ukraine. That is what our Russia team does every day with colleagues in the U.S. national security community and allies overseas.

Technology is an integral part of the GEC arsenal. Let me give you a few examples.

**GEC-IQ** is an information-sharing and analytics platform that provides collaborative tools, a centralized data source, and a library of research on foreign disinformation and propaganda for the U.S. government and key international partners. GEC-IQ improves the ability of the U.S. government and its foreign partners to recognize, understand, and counter foreign efforts to disseminate disinformation and propaganda outside the United States. Utilizing this technology, we have authored several joint reports over the years with foreign partners, including a joint report earlier this year focused on Holocaust Denial and Distortion; technology enables us to apportion tasks and corroborate findings through a common operating picture of the information environment.

The GEC **Foreign Information Operations Network**, or **FION**, will assist with the development of a standard lexicon and understanding of the foreign information manipulation threat. FION helps create inter-operability and a common definitional understanding of this threat. A common understanding and approach is essential to successful collaboration within the U.S. government and with foreign partners.

The GEC is also involved with countering foreign malign use of artificial intelligence (AI) by sharing expertise among U.S. federal departments and agencies, seeking expertise from external sources, and synchronizing international efforts to counter use of these technologies for foreign disinformation purposes. The GEC works with interagency and foreign partners to improve our understanding of the threats we are all facing and identifies technological countermeasures. The GEC has tested technology to authenticate synthetic content and track its provenance, which allows us to improve our uses of technology against foreign disinformation, especially as deepfakes become more prevalent. For example, the GEC was an early tester and adopter of processes for watermarking, which lessens the impact of deepfakes and synthetic online content. The GEC has also leveraged

custom in-house detection algorithms and third-party capabilities to detect synthetic media leveraged to spread disinformation.

The GEC is the only part of the U.S. government that is singularly dedicated to directing and coordinating U.S. efforts to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation abroad. Unfortunately, a termination clause in the GEC's statutory mandate is set to take effect in December 2024. If that happens, the U.S. government will be without a statutorily empowered center that analyzes, exposes, and takes coordinated action against foreign information manipulation overseas that seeks to undermine U.S. priorities globally and negatively impacts our national security. This will likely result in policy and operational incoherence, degraded responsiveness to information manipulation by the PRC, redundant lines of effort across agencies, and signal to our adversaries that the U.S. government does not prioritize foreign information manipulation as a matter of national security.

Allowing the termination clause to take effect risks putting the State Department and the broader U.S. interagency back at square one in the fight against foreign information manipulation. There is no question that the GEC's work of identifying and countering foreign propaganda and disinformation abroad would have to continue. The threats our adversaries pose are too vast.

There is no substitute for Congress' endorsement of the GEC and its mission, and absent the statement of support that repealing or extending the termination clause would communicate, the United States risks falling irreversibly behind, while our adversaries and competitors double down on their power to manipulate the global information domain to their advantage.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the GEC's important national security work, and I look forward to answering your questions.