A Special Report by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy

THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW 2001-2021

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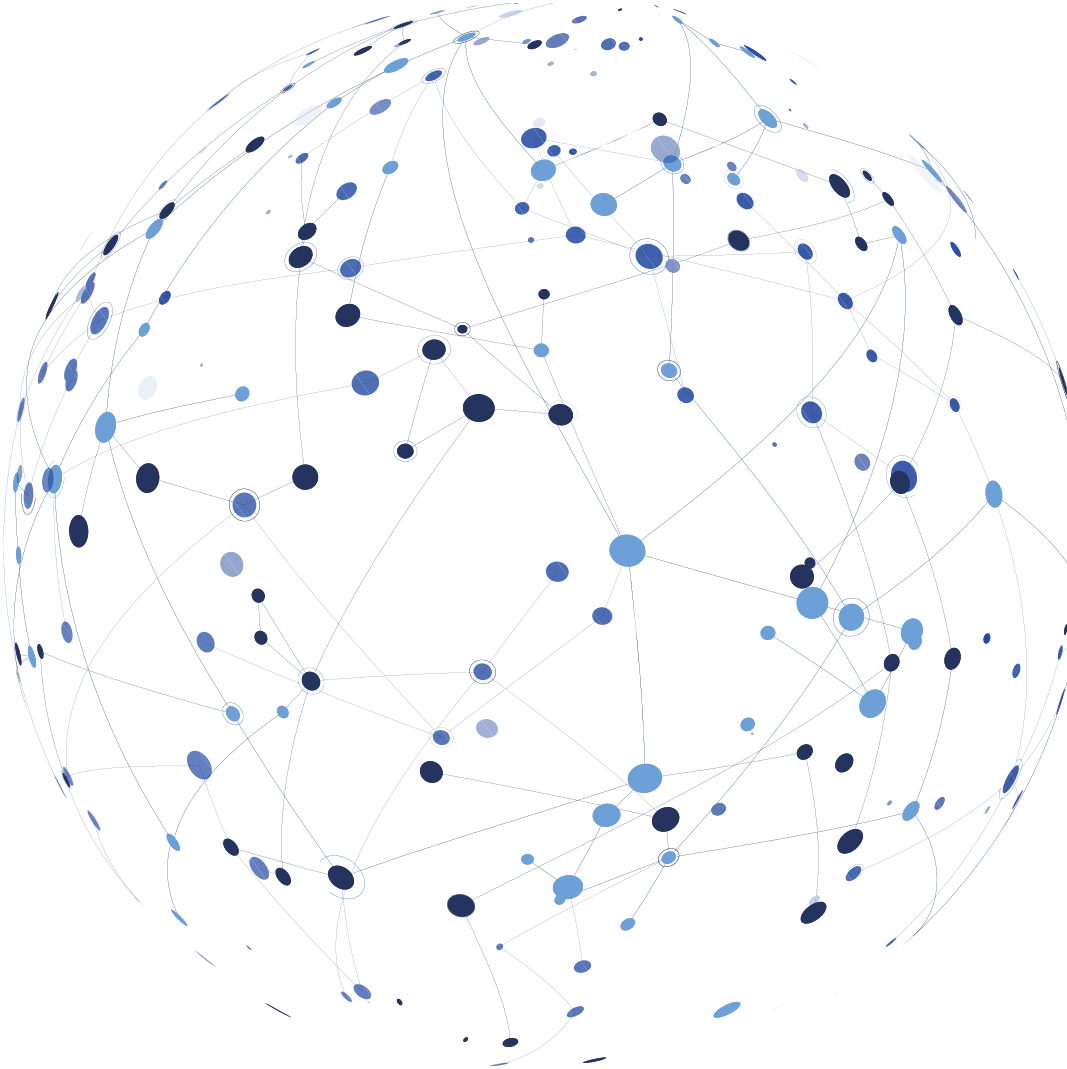

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To the President, Congress, Secretary of State, and the American People:

The United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD), authorized pursuant to Public Law 112-239 [Sec.] 1280(a)-(c), hereby submits the following special report: *The Global Engagement Center: A Historical Overview 2001-2021*.

The ACPD is a bipartisan panel created by Congress in 1948 to formulate, assess, and recommend policies and programs to carry out the Public Diplomacy (PD) functions vested in U.S. government entities, to include the Department of State. This special report focuses on the Global Engagement Center (GEC), which is tasked with countering foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation targeting the United States and U.S. interests.

Although the GEC and its multiple antecedents have played a crucial role in the defense of U.S. national security interests in the global information space since the 9/11 terror attacks, its inception and periodic transformations have not been well understood. This report fills a critical knowledge gap, offering an account of the GEC's origins, development, principal objectives, programs, tools, and impacts.

The report is further meant to explain the GEC's unique functions and capacities, identify areas of institutional overlap or competing interests, and compile a set of lessons learned for future U.S. government counter-disinformation initiatives. By providing a historical overview of the role of the GEC, this report intends to lay the groundwork for informed and objective assessments of its future relevance.

Respectfully submitted,

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California

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METHODOLOGY

This report provides an overview of the historical evolution of the Global Engagement Center and its antecedents from September 11, 2001, to January 2021.

From December 2022 to August 2023, ACPD Senior Advisor Adele Ruppe conducted interviews with twenty-two former and current government officials from the State Department, Department of Defense, White House, National Security Council, and Congress.

Interviewees included former Under Secretaries of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, former senior leaders responsible for public diplomacy efforts in the Department of State, current and former GEC and predecessor Center directors and coordinators, and former interagency officials who worked with or within the Centers during the two decades covered by the report.

To guarantee confidentiality, individual interviewees are not identified in the body of the report. We should note that the ACPD encouraged interviewees to express their own personal views and experiences on the Centers and the impact they have had on U.S. government efforts to counter disinformation and propaganda.

Questions to interviewees focused on four issue sets: how each Center was established and the drivers influencing its evolution over time; each Center's mission, structure, staffing, and activities; the internal and external factors affecting each Center's ability to advance its mandate; and impacts on and lessons learned from U.S. government efforts to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda.

The report also draws upon Congressional hearing transcripts, oral histories, unclassified State Department and White House archives, ACPD reports, media interviews, public remarks, legislation, and other publications as relevant. The Ralph Bunche Library and the Office of the Historian in the Department of State provided invaluable assistance in identifying and collecting relevant historical documents.

It is important to note that many historical records related to public diplomacy have not been preserved, making it difficult to find key documents related to the Centers and to reconcile conflicting accounts of events. This was particularly true for the post-9/11 period and the relatively short-lived Counterterrorism Communication Center (CTCC) and Global Strategic Engagement Center (GSEC).

This report attempts to track each iteration of the Centers to provide the first historical overview of the GEC and its antecedents. We hope it will serve as a primary resource for scholars and policymakers, and provide a basis for further research on and analysis of USG counter disinformation efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The threat to us today is not from great armies anymore....Far more important is the struggle for the war of ideas.

> **GOVERNOR THOMAS H. KEAN**
> **Chairman, 9/11 Commission, August 23, 2004**[1]

The Global Engagement Center (GEC), an essential component of the Department of State's public diplomacy infrastructure, is tasked with countering foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation targeting the United States and U.S. interests. Although the GEC and its multiple antecedents have played a crucial role in the defense of U.S. national security interests in the global information space since the 9/11 terror attacks, its inception and periodic transformations have not been well documented.

To fill this knowledge gap, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD) has prepared a historical overview of the GEC from 2001 to 2021, which provides an account of its origins, development, principal objectives, programs, tools, and impacts. With this report, the ACPD aims to improve public understanding of the GEC's role in the support of USG information and influence activities over the last two decades.

The report is further intended to explain the GEC's unique functions and capacities, identify areas of institutional overlap or competing interests, and compile a set of lessons learned for future USG counter-disinformation initiatives. By filling the considerable gap in public knowledge about and understanding of the role of the GEC, this report intends to lay the groundwork for informed and objective assessments of its future relevance.[2]

Based on extensive interviews with current and former senior public diplomacy leaders and practitioners and unclassified internal reports and assessments, this report shows how the GEC and its predecessor organizations or "innovation hubs" have played and continue to play an important role in Department of State and interagency efforts to combat foreign disinformation and propaganda.

Beginning with an overview of its several previous iterations, this report details the GEC's evolution from the early days of post-9/11 initiatives to counter violent extremism to its current mandate to "direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the federal government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States and its allies and partner nations."[3]

Today, the Global Engagement Center is a unique entity housed within the State Department with ties to the office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R). The GEC leverages data science, insights from the academic community, and private sector tools and expertise combined with USG reporting to counter propaganda and disinformation. With staff from across the Civil Service and Foreign Service, USG interagency, and private sector, the GEC is further charged with assuring that federal government efforts are coordinated while minimizing duplication of effort.

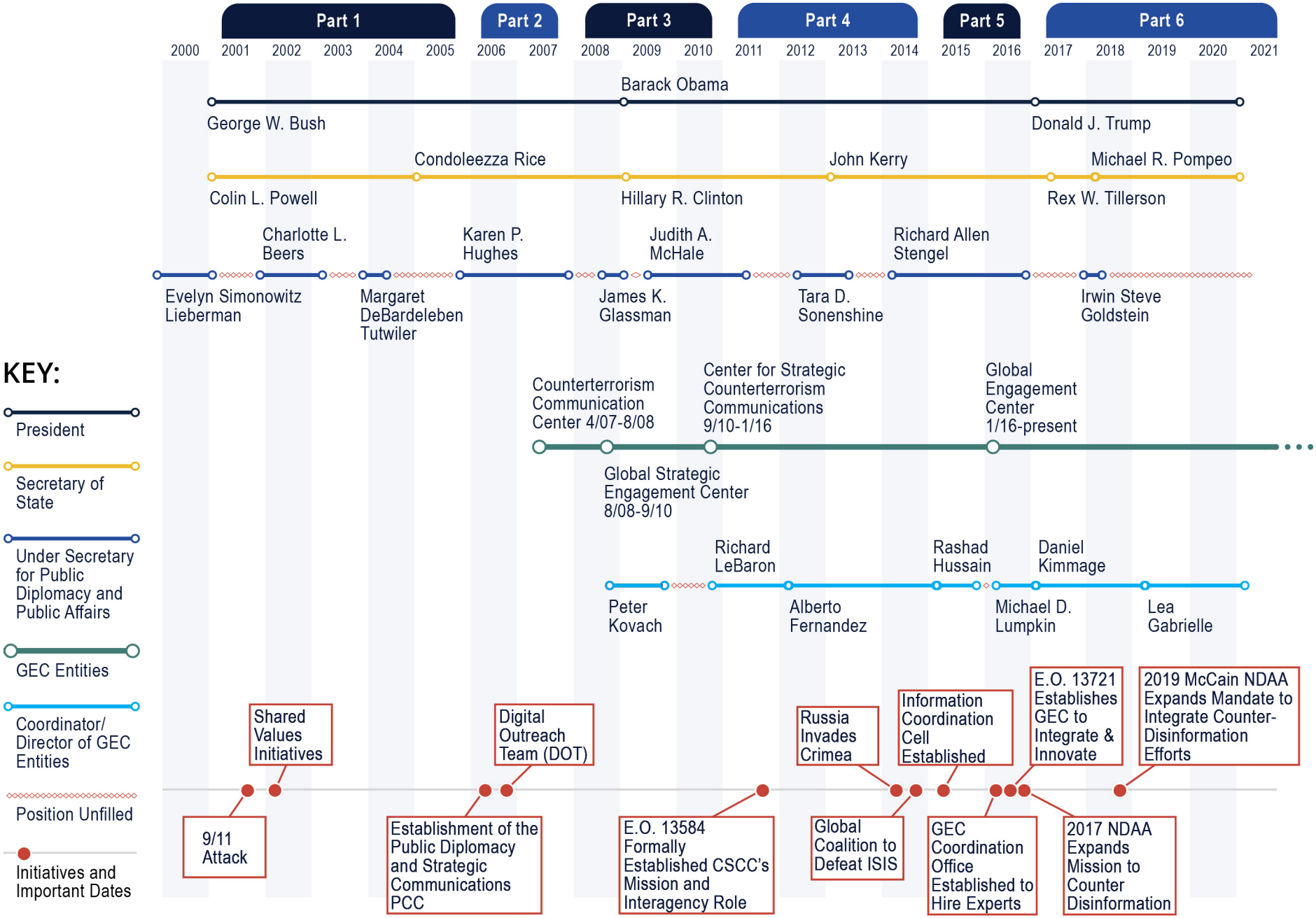
The GEC's highly specialized mission to counter foreign state and non-state disinformation threats to U.S. national security is an outgrowth of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which established the GEC's current legislative mandate and authorities. The 2017 NDAA legislation reflected strong bipartisan consensus in both the House and Senate that the GEC was solely capable of countering the foreign disinformation threat and that Congress needed to direct and empower the State Department to fully support the Center.

The 2017 NDAA legislation also marked an important milestone in the evolution of the GEC from previous post-9/11 iterations, which largely focused on countering violent extremism (CVE). These precursor entities include the Counterterrorism Communication Center (CTCC), the Global Strategic Engagement Center (GSEC), and the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication (CSCC). The CTCC, the GSEC, and the CSCC were all products of their time. Driven by then current White House and State Department foreign policy priorities, their missions reflected the prevailing interagency consensus regarding the need for the State Department to take the lead on countering foreign disinformation and influence activities.

As White House and State Department foreign policy priorities shifted with successive administrations, so too did support for each Center's mandate. The Centers' complex missions were often poorly understood and perceived as cumbersome relics of the previous administration. As a result, incoming political leadership did not always provide the continuity of support usually afforded to established public diplomacy regional and functional bureaus. In addition to leadership transitions, lengthy gaps in R and Center leadership had a disproportionate impact on each Center's ability to function, making it difficult to maintain continuity of staffing and operations across administrations.

Nevertheless, each successive iteration of the GEC's predecessors has contributed substantively to U.S. government efforts to defend and promote its foreign policy agenda, demonstrating the value of housing a resilient, innovative GEC-like entity within the State Department. As this report will demonstrate, the lessons learned from each iteration have informed future efforts and shaped the mission of each successor organization, leading to the GEC's present status as the State Department's primary resource in countering foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation targeting the U.S. government and its interests.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF GEC AND PREDECESSOR ENTITIES

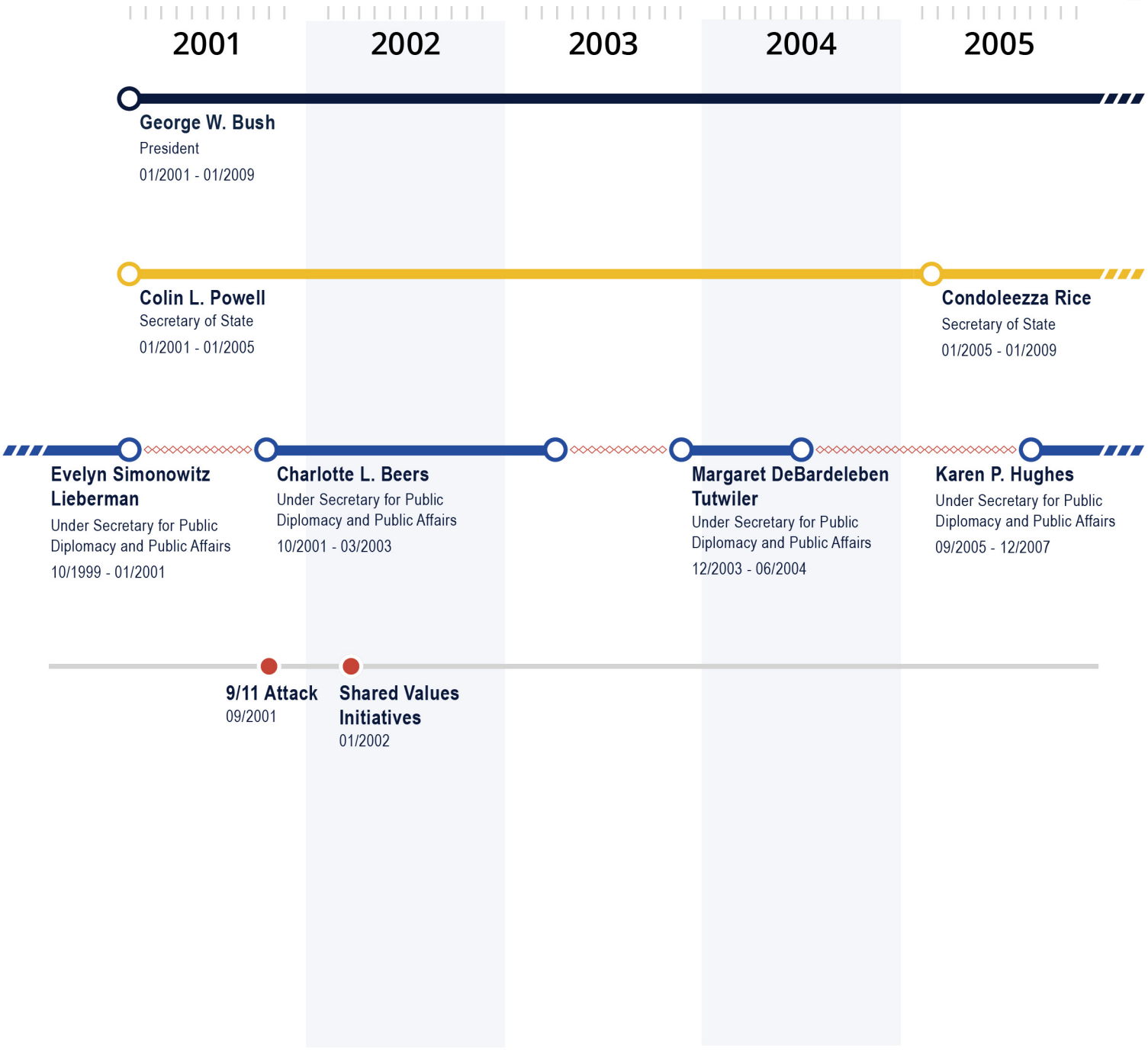


PART 1

"The New War of Ideas"

The Origins of the Global Engagement Center: 2001-2005

PART 1: TIMELINE



KEY

- President
- Secretary of State
- Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs
- GEC Entities
- Coordinator/Director of GEC Entities
- Position Unfilled
- Initiatives and Important Dates

PART 1: THE ORIGINS OF THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER 2001-2005

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks marked a critical inflection point in U.S. public diplomacy (PD). The nature and scale of the deadly strikes on iconic financial and government institutions in New York and Washington, DC, shocked the nation, triggering overwhelming demands for immediate government action to address this unprecedented national security threat. U.S. public diplomacy, de-prioritized in the aftermath of the Cold War, suddenly became vital to formulating foreign policy strategies and initiatives to safeguard the homeland from further terrorist attacks. Seeking to address a central question in the aftermath of the attacks – "why do they hate us?"[4] – policy makers turned to the State Department's public diplomacy practitioners for answers.[5]

However, State's public diplomacy corps had been part of the Department for less than two years when the attacks took place. Formerly housed within the stand-alone U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the public diplomacy workforce and functions had been officially dismantled and consolidated into the State Department on October 1, 1999, as part of a government-wide effort to realize post-Cold War peace dividends. The then incomplete restructuring of public diplomacy functions, further exacerbated by years of declining budgets prior to consolidation, meant that State's public diplomacy platform had neither the resources or capacities to immediately and effectively address the Bush administration's post-9/11 messaging and outreach priorities.[6]

The initial public diplomacy response to the 9/11 attacks was also complicated by a gap in leadership. Charlotte Beers, nominated by Secretary of State Colin Powell in the spring of 2001 to be the Under Secretary (U/S) for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, was not confirmed until October 2, 2001, three weeks after the attacks. By then, the rationale driving Beers' original nomination—that the U.S. had won the Cold War and could now turn to other public diplomacy priorities—was obsolete, and the job now expected of her, radically different. At the same time, as Beers has noted, "no one at State was comfortable with the work [of public diplomacy]. It was like a barnacle on the ship of State."[7]

Believing that the State Department could do a better job of communicating with the American people, Powell recruited Beers to modernize State's messaging and outreach activities with a focus on domestic audiences. Like many others, Powell saw public diplomacy as essentially public relations work, and believed Beers' prior success in the realm of advertising made her a perfect fit for the R job.[8] As it turned out, not only was Beers asked to manage the complicated, unfinished merger of two distinct foreign affairs bureaucracies without prior experience in government, she had to do so during the greatest challenge to national security in recent history.

Despite the volatility of the post 9/11 communications environment, and her lack of government experience, Beers made progress in the effort to rebuild U.S. public diplomacy capabilities and established a foundation for future efforts to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda. Though lacking a knowledgeable interpreter to advise her, she navigated internal bureaucratic battles over resources while simultaneously making the case for public diplomacy engagement to the skeptics in the building.[9]

Beers worked to manage stakeholder expectations about the degree to which PD programs could shape Muslim world attitudes toward the U.S. and its values and policies. Notably she used her tenure to attempt a more realistic and nuanced approach to Muslim outreach such as the "Shared Values" initiative. Beers also began the slow process of expanding PD budgets and staffing to meet the demand for enhanced engagement with audiences vulnerable to extremist influence.[10] She testified regularly on the Hill and received consistently strong bipartisan Congressional support for substantive increases in PD funding, although ultimately the need to enhance embassy security measures took precedence over support for PD programming.[11]

Beers was also able to tap her private sector connections for support, demonstrating the value of public-private partnerships to expand audience engagement efforts. She recruited colleagues from the advertising world to explore the application of branding techniques to manage public perceptions of national image and character, laying the groundwork for future efforts to counter extremist narratives with positive messaging about USG values and institutions.[12]

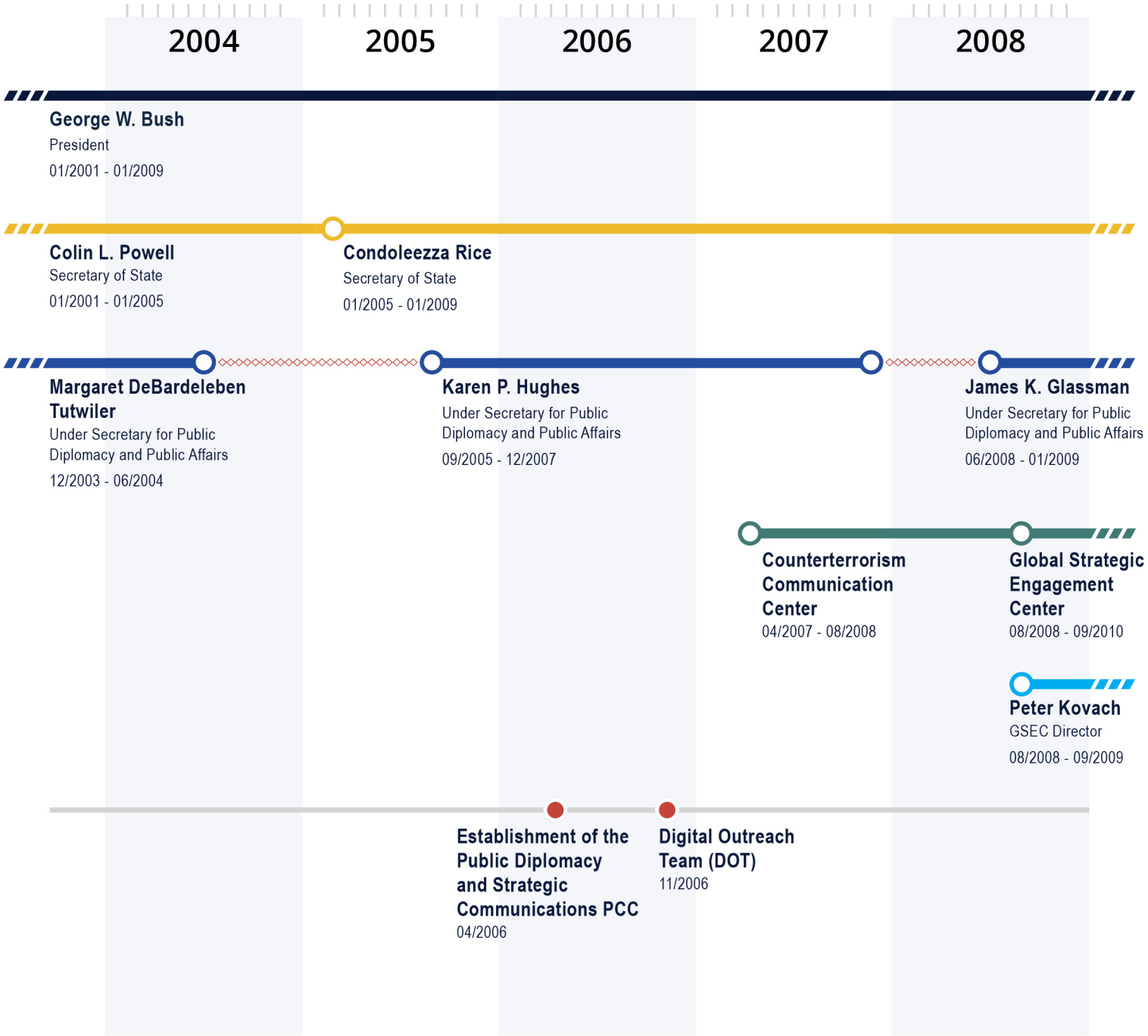
Beers served as Under Secretary for eighteen months. From her departure on March 28, 2003, until Karen Hughes' entry on duty on September 9, 2005, the R position remained unfilled except for a short, six-month stint by Margaret Tutwiler from December 2003 to June 2004.

PART 2

"A 21st Century Communications War"

The Counterterrorism Communication Center: 2006-2007

PART 2: TIMELINE



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PART 2: THE COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATION CENTER 2006-2007

By 2006, consensus emerged across the political spectrum that while public diplomacy was essential to winning the war against terror, the USG was fighting a 21st century communications war using 20th century tools and platforms. Sustained White House deliberations, interagency discussions, and high-profile stakeholder analysis consistently highlighted the urgent need to modernize U.S. public communication strategies and tactics; increase Internet and non-traditional media engagement with global youth; and develop public diplomacy programs that effectively delegitimize terrorism and mobilize public opposition.[13]

It was clear that the White House needed to "fix" public diplomacy, and so in 2005 Karen Hughes, President George W. Bush's former White House Communications Director, was asked to return to Washington to take the R job. Hughes had the President's ear and his full support for her PD reform efforts. Moreover, a White House Memorandum immediately granted her the authority to lead the first official whole-of-government strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communications.

As the head of this new interagency policy coordinating committee (PCC),[14] Hughes convened partner agencies at the senior leadership level and secured their buy-in and support for a comprehensive strategic plan meant to address deficits in current PD approaches to countering violent extremism. Under Hughes' leadership, the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication established the first precursor organization to the GEC, the Counterterrorism Communication Center (CTCC), in April 2007.[15]

The CTCC was initially envisioned as a formal structure and mechanism for coordinating interagency public diplomacy efforts to undermine terrorist ideologies, counter extremist rhetoric and disinformation, and advocate American values and policies to foreign audiences. The PCC focused the CTCC's mission on three key priorities: messaging development and delivery; interagency leadership and coordination in the war of ideas; and USG counterterrorism communication integration and enhancement.[16]

The CTCC had a mandate to (1) develop and deliver effective messages to undermine ideological support for terror and to counter terrorist propaganda, especially in the Arab and Muslim worlds but also in Europe and elsewhere; (2) provide leadership and coordination for interagency efforts in the war of ideas, building on earlier initiatives such as the Rapid Response Unit and Media Hubs in Europe and the Middle East; and (3) integrate and enhance the U.S. government's diverse public counterterrorism communication efforts.[17]

To achieve these objectives, the CTCC was expected to establish a comprehensive framework and mechanisms for developing and coordinating public diplomacy counterterrorism campaigns; develop, deliver, and evaluate effective counterterrorism messaging and PD programs; deconflict and maximize the effectiveness of programming; and coordinate public opinion analysis and research in the relevant areas.[18]

Situated within R's International Information Program's (IIP) Bureau,[19] the CTCC reported directly to the PD Under Secretary. Though housed within the Department of State, it was structured and staffed for its interagency role. A senior State Department Foreign Service Officer (FSO) served as director, while the deputy director came from the Department of Defense (DoD). The small core team was made up of State Department employees and detailees from the major interagency stakeholders, particularly DoD, NCTC (National Counterterrorism Center), and IC (intelligence community) analysts. Extended interagency liaison support was to be provided by offices in State and other agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). When necessary, these liaison officers could also be tapped to provide surge capacity to meet urgent challenges.[20]

Following its soft start in March 2007, the CTCC team focused on establishing requirements, setting up operations, and securing and developing staff. When full operations began in June 2007, the CTCC put together strategic communication plans, developed effective narratives and themes to undermine and counter terrorist messaging, and produced specific messages for use by State and DoD communicators. It also provided public talking points for breaking events and worked closely with the Rapid Response Unit to put out regular anti-terrorism messaging.

The CTCC developed and distributed a weekly counterterrorism "Themes and Messages" product for the foreign policy, defense, and security communities. The first iteration of "Themes and Messages," which provided counterpoints to a taped message from Ayman al-Zawahiri, then Al-Qaeda's most prominent spokesman, was issued in May 2007. Ultimately it reached more than 2,000 subscribers, who drew on the material for use in internet forums, public engagements, speeches, media outreach, and private discussions. The CTCC also launched Internet initiatives and digital outreach programs on Arabic, Persian, and Urdu websites, podcasts, video productions and distribution, and other communication tools such as cell phones and low-bandwidth video tools.[21]

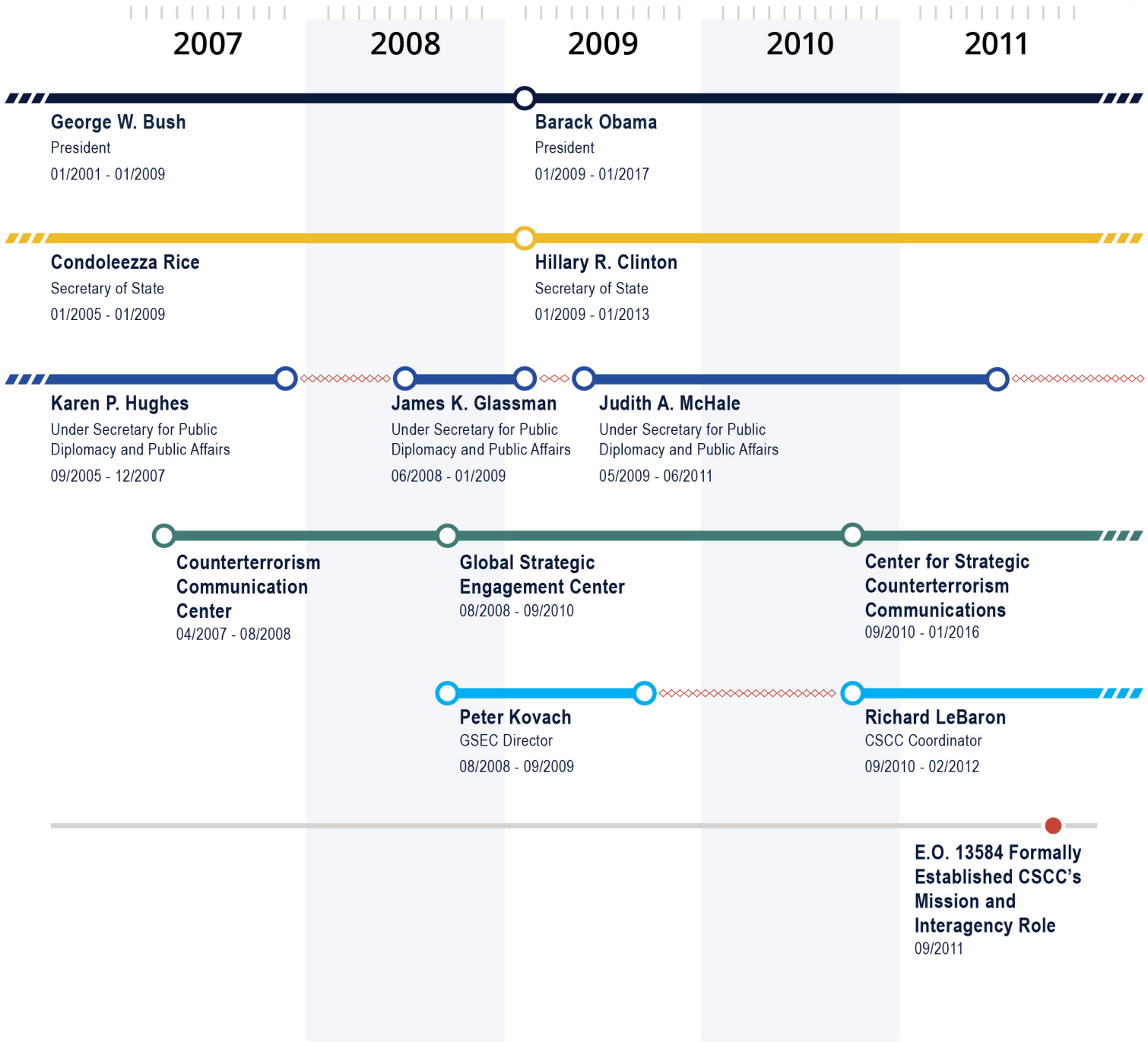
Building on the efforts of her predecessors, Karen Hughes drove innovative advances during her sixteen-month tenure that benefited the CTCC and contributed to its success. These included the establishment of the "Brain Trust" advisory group, Regional Bureau PD Deputy Assistant Secretary/Senior Advisor positions comma the expansion of the Rapid Response Unit and the Media Outreach Hubs in London, Brussels, and Dubai, the Public Diplomacy Working Group on the Internet, the Pilot Countries (19) program, and the Digital Outreach Team (DOT), an early iteration of direct, on line engagement initiatives.[22] Hughes also strengthened coordination with the joint military combatant commands, which contributed to greater cooperation between State and DoD on information outreach and influence activities.

PART 3

"The Use of Soft Power Against Terrorism"

The Global Strategic Engagement Center: 2008-2010

PART 3: TIMELINE



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PART 3: THE GLOBAL STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER 2008-2010

The White House's April 8, 2006, Memorandum establishing the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications under Karen Hughes' leadership was crucial to the success of the CTCC, ensuring buy-in and support from interagency partners.[23] Karen Hughes's close ties to the White House, her prior experience working with the National Security Council (NSC), and her tenure and leadership in the R role also contributed to the CTCC's success.

Hughes' departure in December 2007, and the ensuing six-month vacancy in the R position, made it difficult for the CTCC to sustain its initial momentum. Many of its intended deliverables, such as a baseline survey of USG strategic communication counterterrorism activities, could not be completed or sustained in the absence of the support and advocacy of a confirmed R.[24] Interagency engagement and staffing support gradually waned. The CTCC continued operations on a much-reduced scale, and its visibility both within the Department and across the interagency declined significantly.

The June 2008 appointment of James Glassman as the new Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs reinvigorated State's public diplomacy efforts. Prior to his confirmation, Glassman spent considerable time at the NSC, building good relationships with key leadership and engaging in discussions regarding the administration's foreign policy requirements and the best way to advance them within the interagency. As Glassman noted, "Right from the start it was clear to me that the White House wanted me to spend my time focused on soft power and specifically the use of soft power against terrorism."[25]

Armed with this experience and anticipating a relatively short tenure as R given the upcoming (2009) change in administrations, Glassman acted quickly to establish a more tactical, operationally focused approach to countering terrorist ideologies, beginning with the rebranding of the CTCC as the Global Strategic Engagement Center (GSEC).[26]

The GSEC mission, in Glassman's view, was to provide more visibility into the strategic communications work being done to achieve goals related to the "war of ideas" throughout the interagency, including the Department of Defense, the intelligence community, USAID, and Treasury. Glassman conceived of the GSEC as a day-to-day information operations center, working with the NSC to assign specific agencies to perform specific duties in support of strategic goals.[27] Rather than attempting to change foreigners' perceptions of the United States and its policies, the GSEC focused on undermining, and ultimately isolating, the ideology behind violent extremism. At the same time, the GSEC sought to cut off the flow of new recruits to extremism by advocating for alternative solutions, especially among youth audiences.[28]

Like its predecessor organization, the CTCC, the GSEC reported directly to R from its home in the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). It also retained its interagency coordination role, with a senior State Department FSO director and a deputy director from the DoD. Owing to Glassman's government-wide focus on strategic communications and his direct engagement with other agencies to secure their support, the GSEC was better staffed than the CTCC.

By the end of 2008, the GSEC team included personnel from IIP, the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Air Force, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Counterterrorism Center, and serious discussions were underway to expand the staff with detailees from USAID, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG),[29] the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the National Institutes of Health, and the Smithsonian. Glassman also brought in Adnan Kifayat to serve as a Senior Advisor in the R Front Office. Kifayat drew on his own experience as the Director for Combating Terrorism at the NSC from 2006 to 2008 to oversee the GSEC's day-to-day operations, serving as the lead coordinator for the PCC and the GSEC's signature "war of ideas" program.

The GSEC essentially acted as the operational arm of the PCC, assigning roles to agencies, and reporting to the NSC to keep the White House informed of emerging trends and responses. On behalf of the PCC, the GSEC ran three sub-PCCs focused on harnessing expertise, metrics, polling, and evaluation, and countering violent extremism at the grassroots level.

The Center also developed and disseminated products concerning counterterrorism messages for the PCC. For example, the "Counterterrorism Communication Alert" highlighted and assessed public actions and statements that could be used to counter Al-Qaeda and other violent extremist ideologies. Finally, GSEC teams worked with embassies and interagency stakeholders to produce "war of ideas" plans for key countries such as Pakistan.

Among its most notable activities, the GSEC established the "Small Table Group" (STG) to coordinate informally with key DoD and IC colleagues. Led by Adnan Kifayat, the STG met informally on a weekly basis to plan and deconflict operational activities. As Kifayat noted, the STG served as a "demonstration of the trust that the intelligence communities had in State."[30]

Much of the GSEC's success during Glassman's seven-month tenure derived from his prior communications and government experience, including his tenure as the Chair of the Broadcasting Board of Governors from June 2007 to June 2008. Glassman also served as a member of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World that produced the influential "Changing Minds, Winning Peace" report (aka "The Djerejian Report") in October 2003.[31]

Thanks to his active engagement with the NSC and interagency leadership, Glassman was able to secure staffing and resource support early on. He also brought a clear sense of White House priorities to the GSEC mission, especially with respect to conducting the "war of ideas" and using soft power to combat extremist ideology.[32] The GSEC additionally benefited from strong bipartisan support on the Hill, although the 2008 global financial crisis resulted in significant budget cuts across the federal government, to include GSEC funding.

Glassman's departure in January 2009 had a direct impact on GSEC capabilities. The four month gap between Glassman's tenure and the May 2009 swearing in of his replacement, Judith McHale, created a leadership void and allowed vital NSC and interagency coordination mechanisms to atrophy. At the same time, the shift from a Republican to a Democratic administration meant a near complete turnover in NSC and interagency leadership, as well as substantive changes to foreign policy approaches and priorities. The newly restructured NSC, along with its recently hired staffers, had no prior experience of working with the GSEC and therefore little understanding of its mission.

While McHale initially shared the view that the GSEC should take the lead on countering extremist messaging in addition to its interagency coordination role, the documented global decline in support for Al-Qaeda ideology and violent extremism also led to a deprioritization of the GSEC's mission.[33]

Unclear as to how the GSEC aligned with the administration's new priorities, McHale did not immediately engage with the interagency as vigorously as her predecessors to advocate for the GSEC.[34] Consequently, the GSEC's previous leadership of the PCC devolved into a supporting role for the newly established Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) for global engagement and strategic communication. The GSEC also lost its leadership role in the interagency strategic communications planning process, functioning as a support to rather than a guiding influence on the work of others within State and counterparts within the DoD, NCTC, intelligence community, USAID, and other departments and agencies.

In addition to executing R taskings, the GSEC's scaled-down mission included the dissemination of IPC decisions and objectives to departments and agencies, as well as undertaking special projects at the request of the IPC for global engagement and strategic communication. The GSEC also provided interagency working groups and sub-IPCs with data and analysis to inform recommendations on global engagement and strategic communication and alerted interagency partners to emerging and long-term issues and trends. Finally, the GSEC coordinated McHale's efforts to rebalance overseas communications responsibilities between State and DoD.

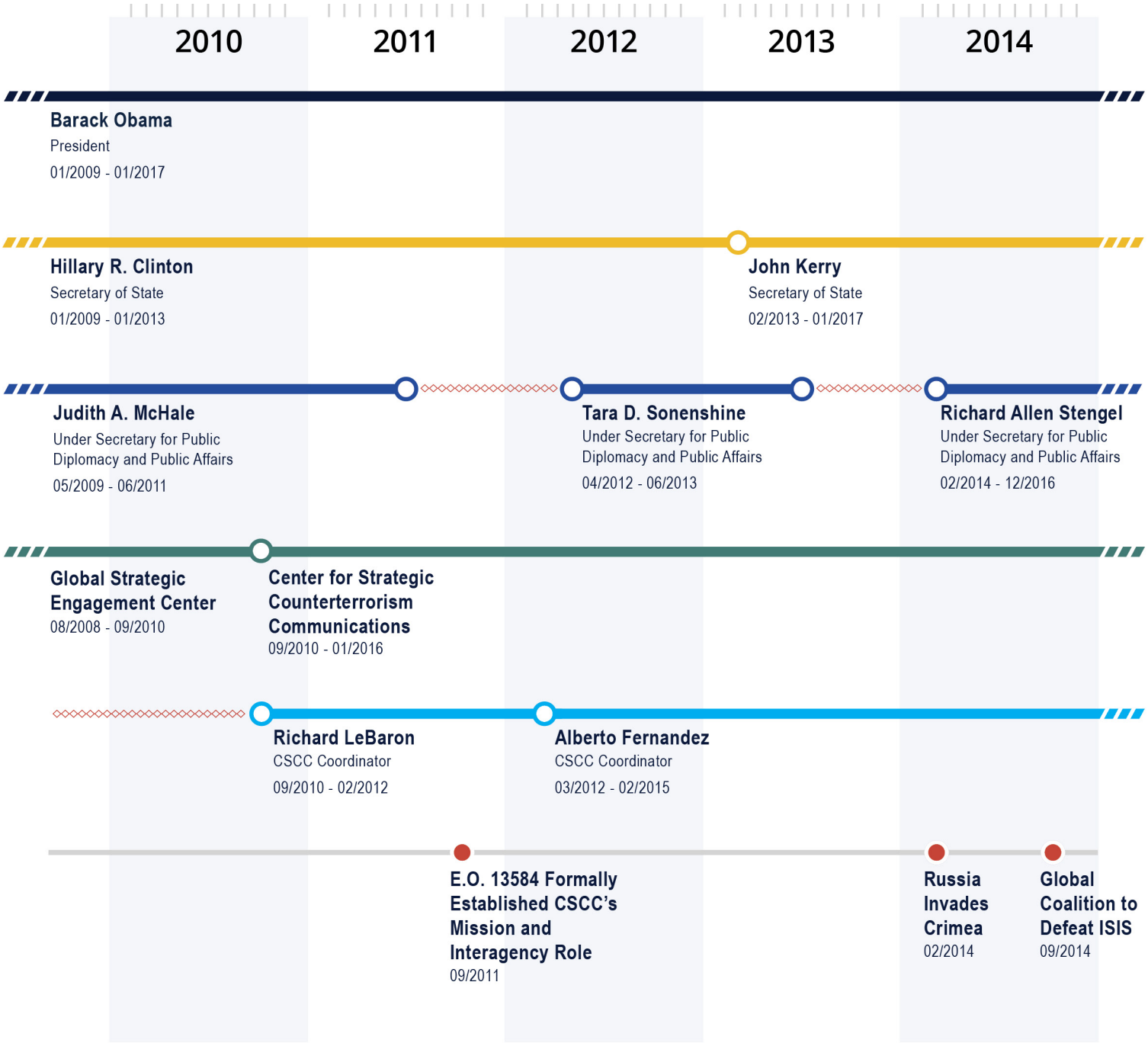
McHale did not however secure staff from other agencies, particularly DoD and the intelligence community, to support the work of the GSEC. The resultant personnel deficit left the GSEC less than fully equipped to engage and coordinate with its interagency counterparts, which not only fueled perceptions of GSEC's ineffectiveness but also allowed DoD to dominate information and influence efforts. For example, although directed by McHale to take control over interagency messaging and media engagement following Haiti's devastating earthquake in 2010, the GSEC did not have the resources and personnel to do so, effectively ceding the crisis communications function to DoD and USAID.[35]

PART 4

"Coordinate, Orient, and Inform"

The Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication: 2010–2014

PART 4: TIMELINE



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PART 4: THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATION 2010-2014

In September 2010, U/S McHale dissolved the GSEC, replacing it with the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication (CSCC), pledging to expand "efforts to respond rapidly to terrorist and violent extremist messages and proactively counter the narrative that has allowed them to disseminate misinformation and recruit new followers" by "aggressively harnessing new and traditional media."[36]

White House attention and senior-level engagement by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were crucial to establishing the CSCC and ensuring it had the necessary resources and authorities to successfully execute its mission. Additionally, the State Department's Coordinator for Counter Terrorism, Dan Benjamin, provided critical support for the CSCC, helping to deconflict the work of the CSCC and the Department's counter terrorism efforts. In standing up the CSCC, McHale also worked closely with the NSC and interagency representatives to determine the CSCC's updated structure, mission, and mandate.

While the CSCC benefited from the significant progress made in rebuilding the State Department's public diplomacy capabilities in the decade since 9/11, McHale's prior experience and strong leadership in the R role were essential to its initial success. As former President and CEO of Discovery Communications, General Counsel for MTV Networks, and board member of numerous global affairs and development organizations, she brought extensive international strategic communications experience to the development of the CSCC. Additionally, U/S McHale's close working relationship with Secretary Clinton, including participation in the Secretary's daily 8 am small group meeting, allowed McHale to brief the Secretary as needed on CSCC progress and flag issues requiring high-level attention.

In a move that proved to be important to the success of the CSCC and its subsequent iterations, McHale also introduced the practice of recruiting experienced senior diplomats and functional experts to lead the Department's strategic counterterrorism communication efforts. In September 2010 she appointed Ambassador Richard LeBaron, a career senior foreign service officer, as the CSCC's first coordinator. His skill in successfully establishing the CSCC within R and the State Department demonstrated the vital importance of identifying and empowering leadership with equivalent expertise to lead such a new, innovative organization.

U/S McHale departed in June 2011, just three months before President Obama signed the executive order that officially established the CSCC's mission and mandate. In this critical period for the future of the State Department's strategic counterterrorism communication efforts, the position was filled by two successive acting Under Secretaries, Anne Stock, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and career FSO Ambassador Kathleen Stephens.

In March 2012, a full nine months after her predecessor's departure, Tara Sonenshine assumed the role of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, a position she held through June 2013.

On September 9, 2011, President Obama signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13584 to formally establish the CSCC's mission and define its interagency role, making it the first of the State Department's counterterrorism communications centers to be instituted by presidential directive.[37] As conveyed by E.O. 13584, the CSCC's mission was to coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide public communications activities directed at audiences abroad and targeted against violent extremists and terrorist organizations, especially Al-Qaeda and its affiliates and adherents. The E.O. further tasked the CSCC to use communication tools to reduce radicalization by terrorists and extremist violence and terrorism that threatened the interests and national security of the United States. The E.O. also stipulated that the CSCC take the responsibility for driving a true interagency counterterrorism communication effort, drawing on whole-of-government knowledge, skills, and resources.

The E.O. required the CSCC to draw from the intelligence community and other subject matter experts to identify current and emerging trends in Al-Qaeda and other extremists' communications and to request additional data collection and analysis to fill knowledge gaps. The CSCC was further tasked with developing U.S. strategic counterterrorism narratives and public communication strategies to confront and discredit extremist messaging. These counter-terrorism (CT) narratives were then to be provided to U.S. government officials to rebut and preempt extremist messaging and narratives when communicating with audiences outside the United States.

Additionally, the E.O. stipulated that the CSCC facilitate the use of a wide range of communications technologies, including digital tools, by sharing expertise among agencies, seeking expertise from external sources, and extending best practices. At the same time the CSCC was expected to identify shortfalls in U.S. capabilities in areas relevant to the Center's mission and recommend necessary enhancements or changes.[38]

Finally, E.O. 13584 provided a detailed map of CSCC's organizational structure. The coordinator was to be a senior State Department FSO. While the coordinator reported directly to R, with a strong dotted-line connection to State's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, the E.O. also directed the establishment of an Interagency Steering Committee to provide the CSCC with the White House and interagency oversight and policy direction. The CSCC itself was split into two major units: Integrated Analysis and Plans and Operations.

PART 4: THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATION 2010-2014

By January 2012, CSCC Coordinator Richard LeBaron had a full staff in place.[39] The Deputy Coordinator for Integrated Analysis oversaw a team of liaisons for intelligence community members, DoD intelligence elements, the Open Source Center, academic institutions, the NGO community, and metrics and evaluation. The Deputy Coordinator for Plans and Operations oversaw a team consisting of plans and operations officers and specialists, strategic planners from DoD and SOCOM, SOCOM Information and Psychological Operations specialists, a coordination and integration officer, public diplomacy and communications officers and specialists, and a U.S. Army Fellow.

Roughly half of the CSCC staff, to include both Deputy Coordinator positions, were drawn from across the interagency. In addition, a Director for Digital Presence oversaw the Digital Outreach Team, a former IIP entity now entirely integrated into the CSCC. The DOT's online efforts consisted of overt interactive engagements, directly attributed to the U.S. Department of State, and fully informed by the National Strategy for Counterterrorism as well as the best analysis available from the intelligence community.

Working closely with the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, the CSCC focused on the development of programs that specifically addressed the factors contributing to radicalization in communities overseas susceptible to terrorist recruitment. In accordance with the E.O., the CSCC developed three related lines of effort (LOE).[40]

The first LOE focused on confronting Al-Qaeda's rhetoric through direct digital engagement. The DOT engaged online in Arabic, Urdu, and Somali to challenge extremist messages on a wide range of fora, blogs, media, and social networking sites. The team produced and disseminated targeted, attributed videos seeking to undermine Al-Qaeda's propaganda and terrorist ideology.

The second LOE focused on providing tools to U.S. government communicators working with foreign audiences, including CVE communications templates and toolkits. The CSCC also developed a CVE online interagency community to draw together CVE-related content; conducted research and analysis to codify Al-Qaeda master narratives; created a Resilient Communities grants initiative to support communities responding to terrorist attacks; and sponsored seminars in which academic and other experts shared relevant knowledge with government practitioners.

The third LOE focused on direct support for a select group of U.S. missions abroad to strengthen their CVE communication strategies, capabilities, and activities to counter attempts by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates to recruit new members. Within the first year, the CSCC stood up a support team of 25, including 10 Arabic and Urdu speakers, and established working relationships with posts in critical countries such as Pakistan and Somalia. Then, in October 2011, the CSCC created the Public Diplomacy CVE Communications Core Group to improve coordination between overseas missions and Washington elements and provide "best practices" in CVE communications.[41]

In 2012 thirteen posts were selected for the Core Group based on the following host country criteria: the presence of al-Qaeda senior leadership, affiliate, or partner organizations; the presence of key audiences/communities vulnerable to violent extremism; or a host government that has served as an important CVE partner/leader.[42] CSCC staff worked closely with each post to highlight and refine existing programs and activities that impact CVE communications and engagement; identify potential areas for further development; and determine appropriate interagency means for supporting and assisting the mission in strengthening its capabilities and operations.[43]

CSCC Core Group Initiatives 2011-2014[44]

- Provided posts with "standard templates" for responding to Al-Qaeda messages.
- Expanded and strengthened capacity for online engagement to confront AQ sympathizers.
- Trained global network of diaspora Somali bloggers to confront al-Shabaab online.
- Developed research capacity to determine the best platforms to engage with target audiences.
- Developed performance metrics to measure impact.
- Launched the "Resilient Communities" initiative to highlight the impact of terror attacks on victims through oral and video histories.

In March 2012, Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, a career senior foreign service PD officer, replaced LeBaron as Coordinator. During Fernandez's tenure, the CSCC concentrated on contesting Al-Qaeda's efforts in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, narrowing its overseas focus to five priority issue areas: Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa; AQ senior leadership and its affiliates and allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan; AQ in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb and its associations in North and West Africa; AQ in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and the broader Arabian Peninsula; and AQ in Iraq (AQI) and its offshoots in the Fertile Crescent. The focus on the most important AQ affiliates and adherents positioned the CSCC to better confront AQ and related groups operating in regional security vacuums and defined by common cultural characteristics rather than national borders.[45]

PART 4: THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATION 2010-2014

By December 2012, the CSCC was functioning as a "war room in a political campaign" to disrupt AQ propaganda in the media and digital space by highlighting the enemy's shortcomings,[46] anticipating Obama's call in 2014 to "contest the space that terrorists occupy, including the Internet and social media."[47] In addition to its regular messaging in Arabic, Urdu, Somali, and Punjabi, the DOT launched an English language YouTube channel with four videos in June 2014. The first video posted, "The Manhaj of Fitna," featured in a blog post on *The Telegraph* website.

On February 14, 2014, seven months after the July 2013 departure of Tara Sonenshine, Richard Stengel assumed the position of PD Under Secretary. The former managing editor of Time magazine and a veteran journalist, Stengel brought a wealth of experience in high stakes, high visibility communications to his new position. One of Stengel's early mandates was to supervise CSCC efforts to update and adapt its operational approach to address the alarming rise of ISIS.[48] In September 2014, when President Obama established the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Stengel was designated as the U.S. lead in the effort to expose Daesh's true nature.[49]

Under Secretary Stengel focused on coordinating U.S. government communication efforts and building a parallel messaging coalition to degrade and destroy ISIL's image building and recruiting capacities while building support for an international non-sectarian anti-ISIL coalition.[50] Under Stengel's guidance, the CSCC created a Counter-ISIL International Coordination Cell (ICC) to counter Daesh's ideology through targeted content. The ICC coordinated counter-messaging, provided thematic guidance to U.S. government communicators, and hosted regular video conferences to synchronize efforts.[51]

The ICC produced a weekly product called the "Anti-ISIL Weekly Messaging Update" to highlight key efforts against ISIL's terrorist messaging. The update provided an overview of the latest developments and trends in online and social media, key anti-ISIL messages by USG officials, and special efforts and engagements by CSCC and other USG entities. A sensitive but unclassified (SBU) version was distributed to USG stakeholders and an unclassified version to Coalition partners and third partners.

Meanwhile, the DOT continued its active online engagement activities. A January 2015 weekly messaging update, for example, highlighted DOT's work producing and widely disseminating videos and banners on its various online platforms to enhance key messages. The update also noted DOT's recently posted Arabic-language video, "The Reality of ISIL Fighters," which highlighted ISIL falsehoods and earned a relatively large number of views.[52]

To "expand international engagement and partnerships to counter violent extremism and to develop strategic counterterrorism communications around the world,"[53] the State Department announced the appointment of Rashad Hussain to be the new CSCC Special Envoy and Coordinator during the White House Counterterrorism Summit in February 2015. Hussain brought extensive experience in coalition building to this appointment, having served since 2010 as the U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In this capacity Hussain worked with the OIC, Muslim-majority countries, and civil society to deepen and expand engagement on U.S. policy and build partnerships with Muslim communities around the world.

In addition to broadening international collaborative efforts to counter violent extremism, Hussain's appointment may have also been intended to establish a new, more nuanced approach to counter ISIL messaging in the wake of the fallout over the CSCC's 2014 "Welcome to ISIS Land" English language video. Criticism of this video's aggressive tone triggered a public debate over just how far the U.S. government should go in engaging with ISIS online.[54] Hussain's appointment could be seen as an attempt to "rebrand" CSCC messaging as a fact-based, objective effort to push back against extremist ideology.

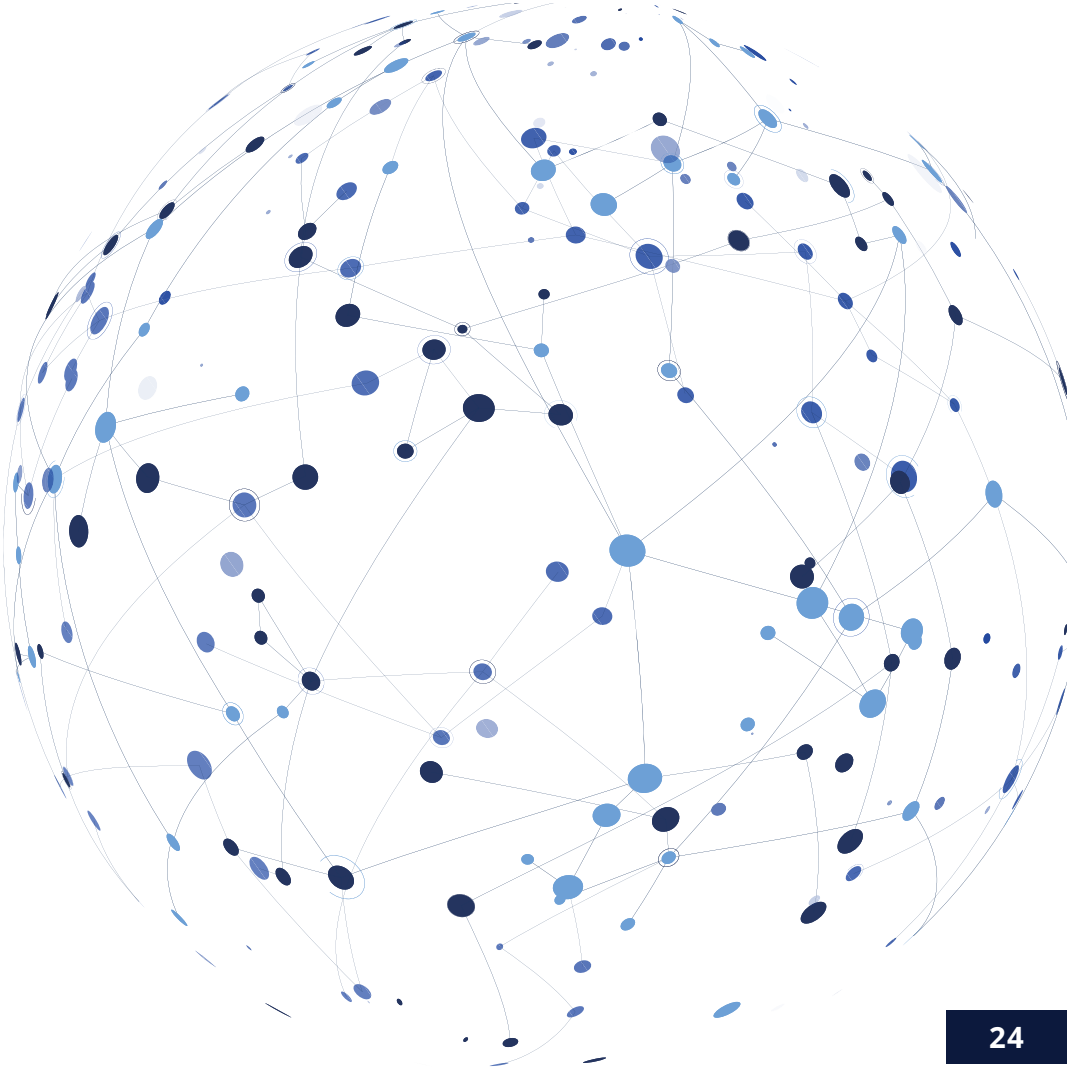
During Hussain's tenure, the CSCC expanded targeted messaging and outreach efforts through greater use of original content on social media platforms. Specifically, the ICC provided information in Arabic, Somali, Urdu, Hausa, and English about the social, political, and economic costs associated with ISIL influence. These stories amplified the experiences of ISIL defectors and former fighters, poor living conditions under ISIL rule, ISIL battlefield losses and internal divisions, and atrocities committed by ISIL against Muslims, who make up a vast majority of ISIL's victims. The ICC also produced positive narratives emphasizing USG values and providing examples of young people around the world who have embraced non-violent approaches to political and economic challenges.

In this period the CSCC also significantly expanded partnerships with foreign governments and NGO partners to directly counter ISIL's messaging, such as the SAWA Center in Abu Dhabi, in addition to enabling other countries to establish their own counter-ISIL messaging centers. Finally, the CSCC developed a messaging content-sharing platform that issued daily guidance on counter-ISIL themes and topics to nearly 3,000 US government officials as well as Coalition partners.[55]

PART 4: THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATION 2010-2014

While the CSCC effectively strengthened collaborative approaches to countering ISIL messaging, ISIL's communications capabilities were evolving faster than the CSCC's ability to address them. Moreover, it became clear that more credible voices across the region and within vulnerable communities were necessary to effectively confront the propaganda of Daesh and other extremist groups. Yet, the CSCC possessed neither the capacity nor the resources to fully empower and enable partners, governmental and non-governmental, to speak out against extremism and provide alternatives to Daesh's nihilistic vision.

Finally, the expansion of CSCC counter-ISIL messaging operations into English produced mixed results. After prominent TV host John Oliver and others in the Western media lambasted the Digital Outreach Team's English-language messaging campaign "Think Again, Turn Away" in 2014, the resulting criticism and embarrassment damaged the CSCC's reputation and, for a time, limited further effort to produce English language content.

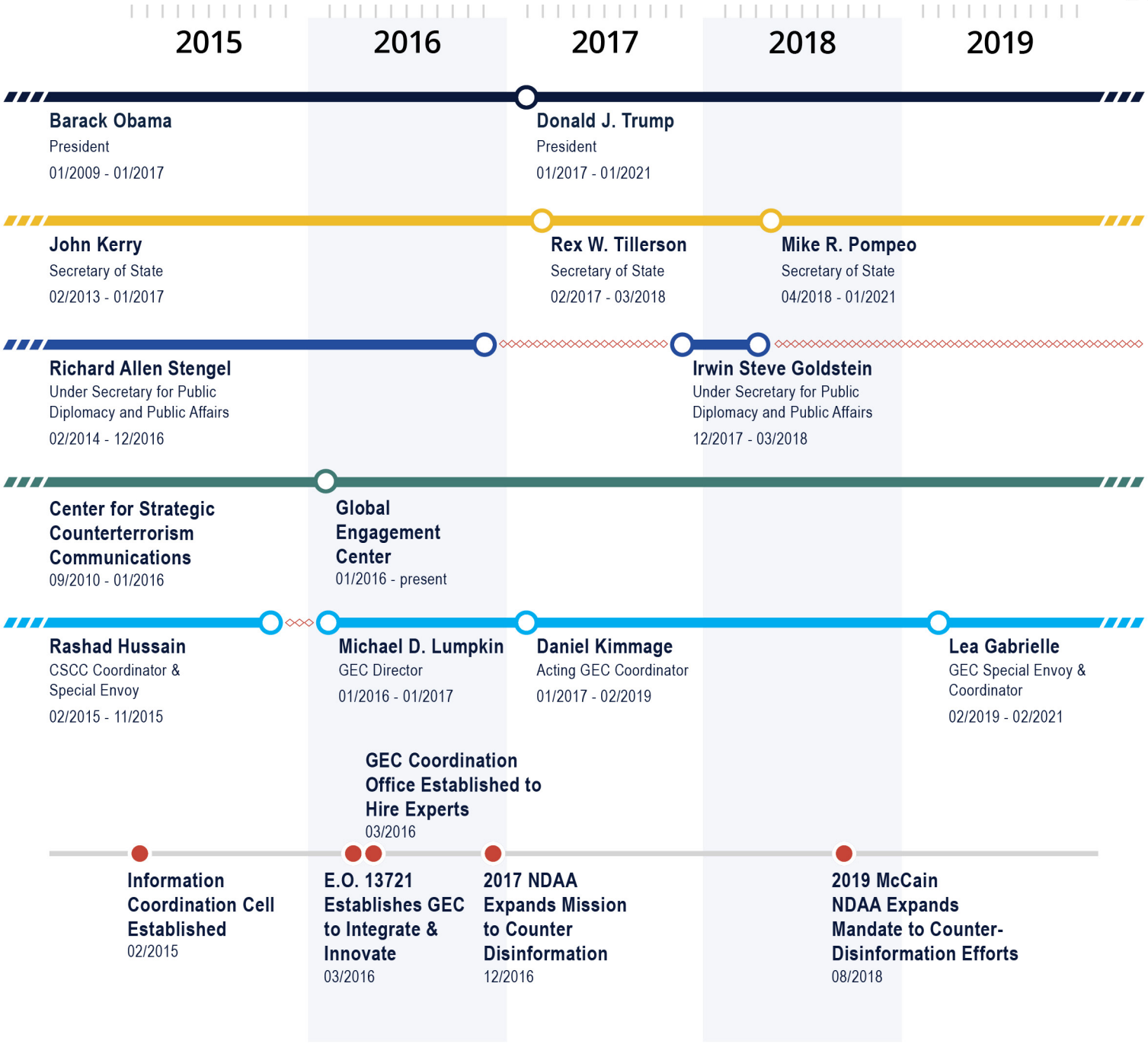


PART 5

"Something New in Government"

The Global Engagement Center: 2015–2016

PART 5: TIMELINE



KEY

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- Secretary of State
- Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs
- GEC Entities
- Coordinator/Director of GEC Entities
- Position Unfilled
- Initiatives and Important Dates

PART 5: THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER 2015-2016

To reinvigorate the Department's global counter terrorism messaging efforts, in November 2015 the White House commissioned a "Sprint Team" composed of six private sector tech and outside experts to conduct a three-week assessment of the CSCC. The report concluded that undermining the power of the ISIL brand would require the amplification of credible non-governmental voices from the region. It also made the case that the CSCC needed to adapt to a changing digital battlefield, build more flexibility and creativity into its operations, and better capitalize on synergies with the interagency and NSC.

Among other findings, the 100-page report advocated for a new strategy based on four principles: the creation of a data-driven analytical culture; a focus on driving third-party content; message development around theme-based campaigns; and the establishment of a global network of anti-ISIL networks. The report ultimately endorsed the establishment of overseas messaging centers and the reconfiguration of DOT direct messaging to focus more narrowly on specific topic areas.[56] The report's analysis and recommendations ultimately informed the decision to establish what subsequently became known as the "Global Engagement Center."

In early January 2016, the White House announced a renewal of focus on countering violent extremism, to include the creation of the Global Engagement Center, the appointment of Michael Lumpkin as the new GEC Special Envoy and Coordinator (replacing Rashad Hussain who left in November 2015), and the establishment of an interagency task force for domestic CVE. On March 14, 2016, President Obama signed Executive Order 13721 ("Developing an Integrated Global Engagement Center to Support Government-wide Counterterrorism Communication Activities Abroad and Revoking Executive Order 13584") to define the GEC's mission and establish its interagency role.[57]

Both the White House and the Department of State saw the newly-created GEC as a significant boost to the USG's capacity to push back against extremist ideology in the global information space. Fresh from his role as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, and a former Navy SEAL, Michael Lumpkin also brought strong ties to the military and intelligence communities as well as experience in building operational teams in both the government and private sectors. At an inaugural town hall meeting with GEC staff, Lumpkin compared the launch of the GEC to the establishment of the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor of the CIA) during World II, saying that the GEC "could be something new in government."[58]

E.O. 13721 authorized the GEC to "lead the coordination, integration, and synchronization of Government-wide communications activities directed at foreign audiences abroad in order to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaeda, and other violent extremists abroad." Designated as both Special Envoy and Coordinator for Global Engagement Communications, the GEC's executive director would report to the Secretary of State through the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

The GEC's Six Specific Responsibilities and Functions as Mandated by E.O. 13721

1. Coordinating, integrating, and synchronizing all public communications of the United States Government directed toward foreign audiences abroad to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations and other violent extremists abroad;
2. Developing and promulgating throughout the executive branch, based on rigorous research and modern data analysis, the U.S. strategic counterterrorism narratives, guidance, and associated communications strategies directed toward foreign audiences abroad to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations and other violent extremists abroad;
3. Consulting and engaging, in coordination with agencies and the Countering Violent Extremism Task Force, as appropriate, with a range of communications-related actors and entities, within the United States and abroad, including governments, private sector and civil society entities, in order to contribute to U.S. government efforts to counter the communications related radicalization to violence and recruitment activities of international terrorist organizations and other violent extremists abroad, while also building the capacity of partners to create resonant positive alternative narratives and to diminish the influence of such international terrorist organizations and other violent extremists abroad;
4. Identifying, engaging, employing, or acquiring the best available talent across the U.S. and from global private sectors, academia, and elsewhere to support the Center's mission;
5. Identifying shortfalls in any U.S. capabilities in any areas relevant to the Center's mission and implementing or recommending, as appropriate, necessary enhancements or changes; and
6. Developing, supporting, and sustaining networks of governmental and non-governmental partners, to provide original content and disseminate messaging products to foreign audiences abroad and to create, develop, and sustain effective positive alternative narratives consistent with U.S. policy objectives.

PART 5: THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER 2015-2016

In establishing the GEC, E.O. 13721 recognized "the need for innovation and new approaches to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations, including ISIL, Al-Qaeda, and other violent extremists abroad," in order "to protect the vital national interests of the United States." At the same time, the E.O. endowed the GEC's CVE role with a human rights dimension by "recognizing the importance of protections for freedom of expression, including those under the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and international human rights obligations."

GECCO—The GEC's Specialized Hiring Mechanism

Staffing the GEC with the necessary technical expertise to advance such a highly specialized mission required additional hiring authorities not normally available to agencies. The E.O. therefore included language enabling the GEC to use the "3161" flexible hiring mechanism by establishing an additional, temporary organization within the State Department.

The sole purpose of the Global Engagement Center Coordination Office (GECCO) was to hire "3161" personnel to provide technical, marketing, management, and operational support to the GEC.

The GECCO enabled the GEC to rapidly expand its capabilities to meet growing demand. 3161 personnel could perform core government functions and supervise other employees. They could be hired outside the competitive process, which also facilitated capacity building. While the authority to employ 3161s expired after three years, the GECCO could extend appointments for up to two additional years beyond March 14, 2019, provided that "the conditions for [their] extension are related to the completion of the study or project."[59]

The GEC's Emerging Interagency Role—2016

To ensure strong interagency support for and substantive engagement with the GEC's mission, the E.O. established a steering committee composed of senior representatives of agencies relevant to the work of the Center. Chaired by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, this Steering Committee included a senior official from each of the following agencies: the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of the Treasury, the Small Business Administration, the National Counterterrorism Center, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Counterterrorism Center of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the United States Agency for International Development. Other agencies were invited to participate in the steering committee at the discretion of the chair.

The E.O. also directed greater interagency support to the GEC "upon request by the Secretary... to the extent permitted by law," with the caveat that this support be consistent with "budget priorities and mission constraints" and "the need to protect intelligence and law enforcement sources, methods, operations, and investigations." Within those constraints, agencies were directed to provide to the GEC, and the GEC was authorized to use, support for the purposes of carrying out the GEC's responsibilities. This support could include details or assignments of personnel based on reasonable requests for specific domain expertise; the use of physical premises, equipment, and logistical or administrative support; relevant information, research, intelligence, and analysis; and such other resources and assistance as the coordinator might request.

The GECCO's Six Specific Functions as Mandated by E.O. 13721

1. Provide technical, marketing, management, and operational support for the management of contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements;
2. Assist the Center in building and maintaining partnerships with private sector entities, non-governmental organizations, and others as appropriate in support of the Center's mission;
3. Design and develop sustained campaigns, in coordination with and primarily for use by private sector entities and non-governmental organizations, on specific areas of interest to foreign audiences abroad in support of the Center's mission;
4. Conduct or commission baseline research to establish the basis for evaluation of the activities of the Center and related activities conducted by other agencies;
5. Develop analytical models and metrics, consistent with the Center's responsibilities, to enable measurement and evaluation of the activities of the Center in coordinating effective strategies to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations and other violent extremists abroad, and related activities conducted by other agencies; and
6. Perform such other functions related to the specific project as the Secretary may assign.

The GEC's Four Core Functional Objectives 2015-2016

1. **Partnerships:** To empower and build the capacity of a global network of credible voices against violent extremism through a variety of means, including funding, technical assistance, capacity building, and conceiving and implementing joint projects.
2. **Data Analytics/Science and Technology:** To become an analytics-based organization using big data analytics systems from both the public and private sectors to better understand radicalization dynamics online; to guide and inform USG messaging efforts and to measure their effectiveness; and to draw from proven polling operations, target audience studies, and academic research in support of these analytic activities.
3. **Content/Production:** To pursue collaborative, thematic campaigns in coordination with counter-ISIL coalition nations and other global partners; to develop and procure unbranded content; to make this content available to a global network of partners; and to reduce direct engagement with violent extremists in favor of partner-driven messaging and enhancing partner content capabilities.
4. **Interagency Engagement:** To liaise daily with the interagency and to coordinate, integrate, and synchronize day-to-day operations and campaign efforts across the interagency.

GEC Key Programs and Activities—2016

To expose the true nature of ISIL and other violent extremist organizations and to decrease their allure in the eyes of potential recruits and sympathizers, the GEC developed a set of integrated operational objectives. First, GEC programs and activities prioritized capacity building for credible third-party messengers in public and private sectors. This required the development of a global network of voices who could effectively counter violent extremist messages. Then, the GEC focused on the development and use of cutting-edge technology and data analytics systems to better understand ISIL's recruitment successes online and to use that information to disrupt and dismantle future recruitment among vulnerable audiences. The GEC was also tasked with coordinating and synchronizing the effort across the U.S. government to confront ISIL and other extremists in the information space.

Notable accomplishments in this period included the production of a weekly unclassified "Anti-Da'esh Weekly Messaging Update" report to highlight key efforts to counter terrorist messaging by Daesh elsewhere. These reports provided online and social media trending atmospherics on a background information basis.

The GEC moved away from the direct dissemination of its messaging products to end users. Instead, beginning in June 2016, the GEC incorporated its content into the London-based Global Coalition Communication Cell's daily media packs. This approach reinforced GEC's commitment to better coordinate coalition counter-ISIL messaging and to maximize its reach into global vulnerable communities.

The GEC also took the lead on the development of fact-based counter messaging as stipulated in Objective I of the 2015 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review[60] directive to prevent and mitigate conflict and violent extremism: "expand content collection and production activities to increase audience exposure to facts based messaging that will counter violent extremist ideologies and terrorist organizations."[61] In addition to providing its partner networks with quality, fact-based content for dissemination through their respective networks, the GEC also developed cloud-based content-sharing platforms accessible to all USG and Coalition partners.

Additionally, the GEC created an Arabic-language website to house anti-extremist content along with links to associated social media sites. This platform offered direct access to GEC content to incorporate into counter-narrative development or to repurpose for amplification through partner networks. The site also provided a single access point for breaking news related to violent extremist activities. Later enhancements included the addition of multiple language formats and links to other anti-extremist media.

Further to fact-based content development, coordination, and distribution, the GEC hosted a regular classified "Messaging Working Group" meeting to bring together stakeholders from State and the interagency to coordinate the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL (C-ISIL) CVE messaging efforts and equities. Agendas included deep-dives on messaging efforts and status updates on each C-ISIL line of effort. In addition to facilitating international coordination and leveraging whole-of-government capabilities in this effort, these meetings enabled the GEC to identify messaging gaps and constraints and dedicate resources to better synchronize and deconflict USG CVE efforts. In December 2016 the GEC hosted its inaugural USG CVE Messaging Seminar at the State Department to assemble stakeholders from across the interagency to review messaging coordination milestones and establish mutually beneficial ways to improve coordination against an "ever-changing adversary."

Origins of the 2017 NDAA Legislation

Beginning with Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and occupation of Ukraine's eastern provinces, the USG and its allies became increasingly concerned about Russian and Chinese efforts to manipulate public opinion and undermine democratic institutions around the world. Within Congress, both parties acknowledged the proliferation of foreign propaganda as a significant challenge to national security—and the need for the USG to get ahead of the threat.

By early 2016, there was strong bipartisan sponsorship and support in both the House and Senate for new legislation to counter these growing disinformation effects. Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Chris Murphy (D-CT) conceived and co-sponsored a bipartisan bill introduced as "The Countering Information Warfare Act of 2016" in the Senate on March 16, 2016.[62] A companion bill was introduced as the "Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act" in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 10, 2016, by a bipartisan group, including co-sponsors Congressmen Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) and Ted Lieu (D-CA).

Portman and Murphy emphasized the sense of urgency behind the new legislation, noting that:

> *This propaganda and disinformation threat is real, it's growing, and right now the U.S. government is asleep at the wheel. The U.S. and our allies face many challenges, but we must better counter and combat the extensive propaganda and disinformation operations directed against us. America's democratic values and open, transparent society are a key source of our identity as a nation and one of our greatest advantages against the propaganda and disinformation used to discredit them.*[63]

The senators also noted the growing threat of authoritarian influence campaigns aimed at destabilizing democracies:

> *Over the last decade, countries like Russia have dramatically ramped up efforts to spread propaganda and fake news all over the world, including here in the United States. It is a systematic effort to undermine democratic institutions and beat back America's foreign policy goals. I believe this measure will put us in a stronger position to meet this challenge head on and get the truth out.*[64]

The new legislation, which was included in the 2017 NDAA, focused on two main priorities to combat the constantly evolving nature of the threat of foreign disinformation. First, the language of the NDAA legislation called for the expansion of the GEC's authority, resources, and mandate to support the development, integration, and synchronization of whole-of-government initiatives to expose and counter foreign disinformation operations and proactively advance fact-based narratives that support U.S. allies and interests.

The NDAA also broadened the GEC's threat focus beyond countering violent extremism to include state actors like Russia and China. Second, the NDAA granted the GEC the capacity to leverage expertise from outside the federal government to create more adaptive and responsive U.S. strategy options. This included grant-making authorities as well as the establishment of a fund to build a decentralized network of private sector actors and allow the integration of capabilities and expertise available outside the U.S. government into the strategy-making process.

A bipartisan "sense of the Congress" included in the legislation provided insight into Congressional intent:

- Foreign governments, including the Governments of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, use disinformation and other propaganda tools to undermine the national security objectives of the United States and key allies and partners;
- The Russian Federation, in particular, has conducted sophisticated and large-scale disinformation campaigns that have sought to have a destabilizing effect on United States allies and interests;
- In the last decade disinformation has increasingly become a key feature of the Government of the Russian Federation's pursuit of political, economic, and military objectives in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, the Balkans, and throughout Central and Eastern Europe;
- The challenge of countering disinformation extends beyond effective strategic communications and public diplomacy, requiring a whole-of-government approach leveraging all elements of national power;
- The United States Government should develop a comprehensive strategy to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda and assert leadership in developing a fact-based strategic narrative; and
- An important element of this strategy should be to protect and promote a free, healthy, and independent press in countries vulnerable to foreign disinformation.

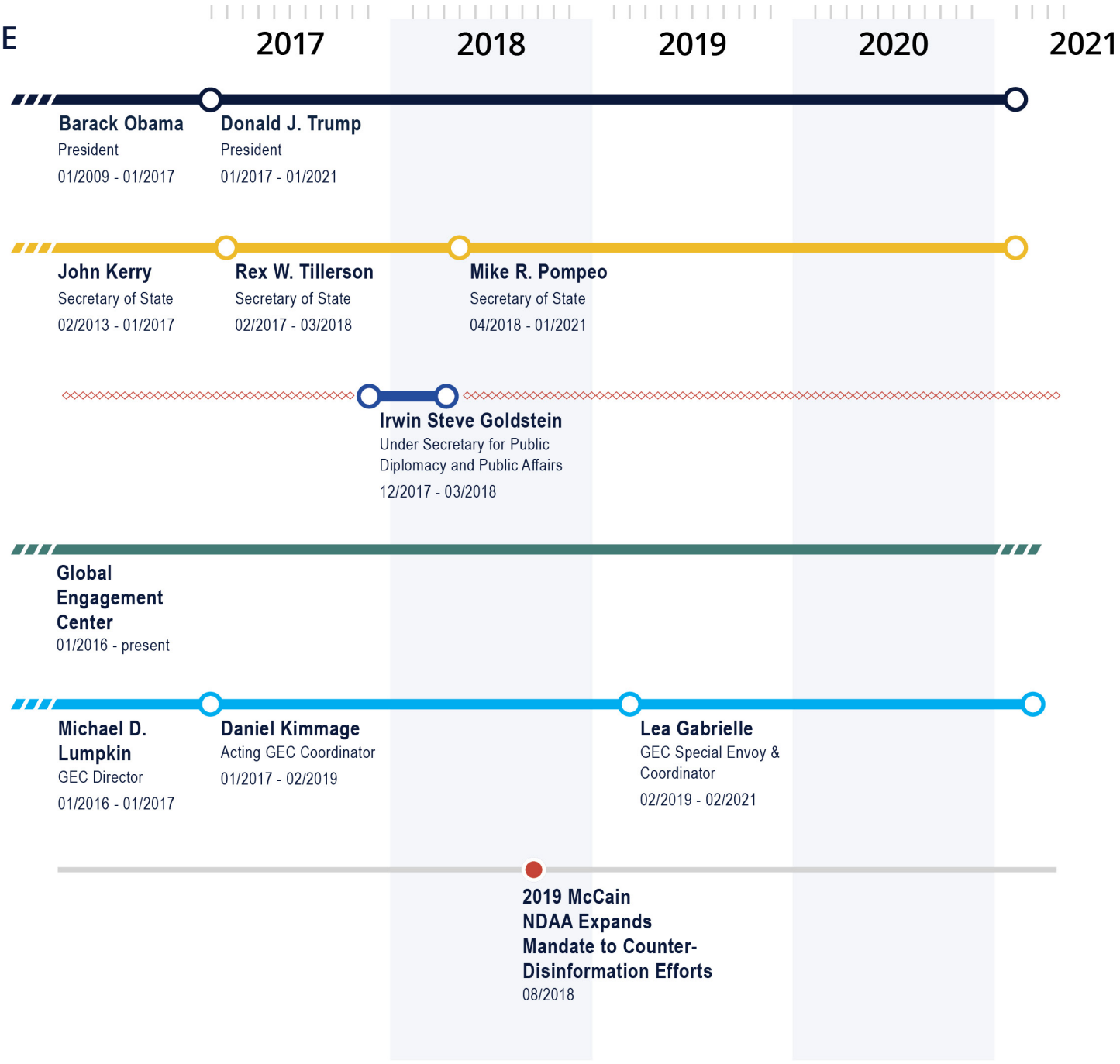
Both the House and the Senate included the bill in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017. The 2017 NDAA legislation was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama on December 23, 2016.

PART 6

"Synchronization, Integration, Coordination"

The Global Engagement Center: 2017-2021

PART 6: TIMELINE



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PART 6: THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER 2017-2021

The 2017 NDAA legislation became law as the White House, State Department, and GEC were in the process of transitioning to a new president and new administration leadership. Under Secretary Stengel departed in December 2016, and Ambassador Bruce Wharton was designated as the Acting R. Meanwhile, Michael Lumpkin resigned on January 20, 2017, and GEC Principal Deputy Daniel Kimmage became the Acting GEC Coordinator. Kimmage would lead the GEC for the next two years, until January 2019 when Lea Gabrielle was named the new GEC Special Envoy and Coordinator.

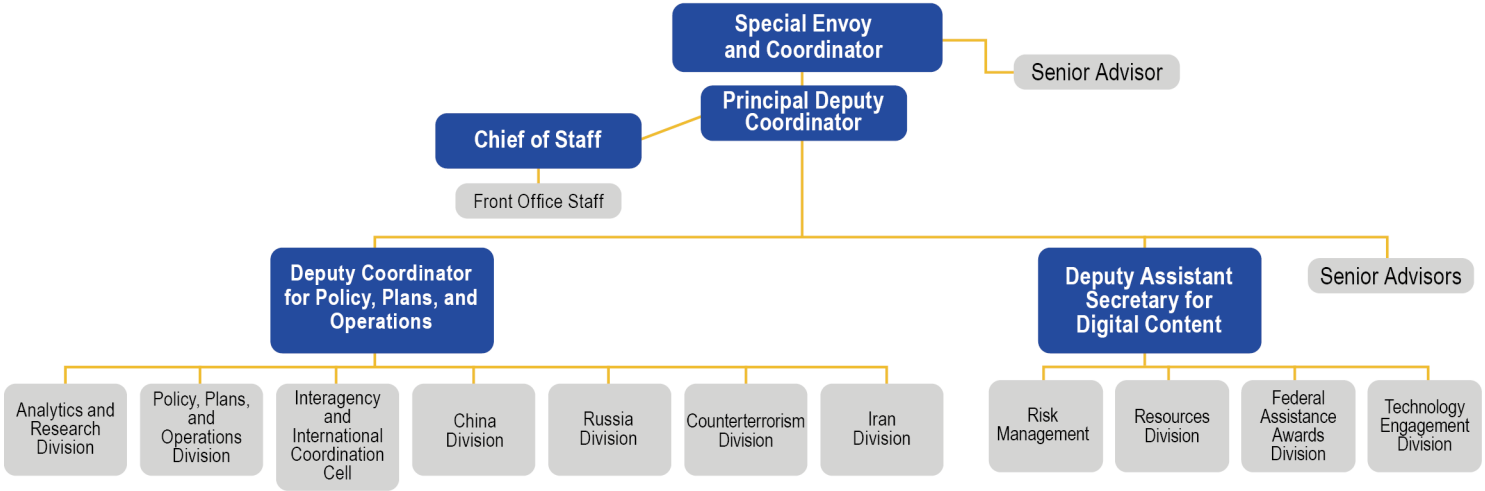
President Trump's administration considered the GEC's new mandate a priority, although there were significant delays in funding and hiring. Secretary of State Tillerson did not approve a $40 million funds transfer request from the DoD to the GEC until August 2017. Meanwhile, the prevailing hiring freeze at the Department of State significantly restricted the GEC's ability to staff up for its radically expanded NDAA mission. For more than a year, the GEC was not able to fill critical existing vacancies, including the two key analytics team leads.

Nominated as the new Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in November 2017, Steve Goldstein made the GEC one of his top priorities during his brief tenure as R (December 4, 2017 - March 13, 2018). Most importantly, he helped the GEC to overcome initial internal resistance to GEC's expanded mandate by elevating the Center's role within the Department. Goldstein also proactively promoted the GEC on the Hill and with media. Crucially, he personally engaged in the effort to secure approval for the GEC's hiring-freeze exemption requests to fill 13 mission-critical vacancies.

Finally, Goldstein was instrumental in finalizing the funding for the GEC's expanded mandate. On February 23, 2018, he signed a Memorandum of Agreement that governed the transfer of funds from DoD to the GEC for initiatives to counter propaganda and disinformation from foreign nations, including an initial tranche of $20 million. These initiatives included the creation of an Information Access Fund to support public and private partners working to expose and counter propaganda and disinformation from foreign nations. Under the Information Access Fund, civil society groups, media content providers, nongovernmental organizations, federally funded research and development centers, private companies, and academic institutions became eligible to compete for grants from the GEC to advance their important work to counter propaganda and disinformation.

Goldstein's abrupt departure in March 2018 left a leadership gap that significantly handicapped the GEC's efforts to capitalize on the MOA and secure a FY2018 funds transfer from DoD. However, the GEC persisted and ultimately succeeded in obligating the first $14 million tranche, which DoD transferred to State on the last day of the 2018 fiscal year.

The 2017 NDAA legislated a significant expansion of the GEC's mission, to include countering foreign state-sponsored disinformation as well as non-state sponsored disinformation. In addition to mandating eleven separate functions, it built up the GEC's grant-making authority, increasing the range of support that the GEC could provide to civil society organizations. The NDAA importantly provided the GEC with numerous legal authorities, including a Privacy Act authorization, to enable the GEC to meet the rising demand for effective data analytics from interagency and international partners. Acting Coordinator Daniel Kimmage moved forward with informally re-aligning the organization so the Center could begin advancing its new NDAA mandate to counter disinformation threats from Russia, China, and Iran in addition to its original counterterrorism-focused mission.



Current Global Engagement Center Organizational Chart [65]

PART 6: THE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER 2017-2021

By the end of 2017, the GEC had begun the process of updating its lines of effort to focus on leading, synchronizing, integrating, and coordinating U.S interagency, international partners, private sector, technology industry, media networks to maximize its ability to orchestrate the exposure and countering of state and non-state actor disinformation efforts.[66] The GEC also instituted additional efforts to assess and improve its own activities as well as those of its interagency and international partners via its Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Team, which is responsible for planning, monitoring, data collection, assessing, and reporting on the GEC's performance and impacts.

Global Engagement Center—Current Lines of Effort [67]

1. **Analytics and Research:** GEC's analysts and data scientists collect and analyze data from foreign state and foreign non-state actors to produce analysis of their foreign malign information influence narratives, tactics, and techniques. GEC shares these analyses with stakeholders within the Department, and among U.S. embassies, the interagency, and international partners.
2. **International Partnerships:** GEC has built and participates in multiple international coalitions and partnerships with other national governments for the purpose of coordinating counter-disinformation analyses and actions, and collectively buttressing the integrity of the global information environment.
3. **Programs and Campaigns:** GEC's Russia, People's Republic of China, Iran, and Counterterrorism teams are designed to build societal and institutional resilience to foreign propaganda and disinformation efforts abroad.
4. **Exposure:** GEC plays a coordination role in the interagency's public exposure of foreign information influence operations, including the use of proxy sites and social media networks overseas.
5. **Technology Assessment and Engagement:** GEC hosts private sector technology demonstrations, assesses counter-disinformation technologies against specific challenges, and identifies technological solutions through technology challenge programs.

In 2017-2018, the GEC also updated its key themes and functions. Its threat-focused divisions were designed to coordinate across the U.S. government to conduct programs worldwide that carry out the organization's congressional mandate to counter propaganda and disinformation by state and non-state actors. These divisions also shared insights and relevant information on disinformation efforts--by violent extremists, Russia, China, and Iran--with the USG interagency, international partners, private sector, civil society, and technology sector.[68]

Current GEC Threat Focused and Operational Divisions

The **GEC's Russia Division** works to understand, oppose, and degrade Russia's global implementation of information confrontation through leadership of policy, programmatic, and analytic efforts across the USG interagency and with foreign partners. The division operates in close collaboration with the regional bureaus, the U.S. European Command, multiple interagency partners, the EU and other multilateral partners, and a network of foreign government teams with similar missions to forge consensus on vulnerabilities and needs, and to synchronize and de-conflict programs and other efforts.

The **GEC's China Division** works closely with the State Department's regional and functional bureaus as well as individual posts to ensure strategic alignment with policy priorities. The division also engages and coordinates closely with the interagency, including the Department of Defense, and international partners to achieve maximum effect. To counter PRC disinformation and propaganda efforts, the GEC China Division has designed a global strategy with three primary lines of effort: 1) exposure through analysis of foreign narratives, tactics, and techniques; 2) capacity building through working with think tanks, academia, civil society, and media to raise awareness and build resilience; and 3) international partnerships with other nations to preserve a trusted information environment.

The **GEC Iran Division** focuses on monitoring Iranian disinformation to better understand the scope, trajectory, and preponderance of narratives as well as identifying amplifiers in both social and traditional media. The GEC Iran Division works in partnership with regional bureaus, others in the U.S. government, overseas missions, and third-party stakeholders to enable local voices in host countries to better counter Iranian disinformation.

The **GEC's Counterterrorism Division** leads the planning, coordination, and implementation of U.S. interagency and international partner campaigns that counter propaganda and disinformation by Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), disrupt their hierarchies, and degrade their ideologies. The GEC CT Division also convenes and strengthens networks of U.S. government and foreign partners, including allies in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, as well as other partner nations and the private sector, to recognize, understand, expose, and counter VEO propaganda and disinformation.

The **GEC's Policy, Plans, and Operations Division (PPO)** provides policy development guidance and operational support by serving as a center of gravity

for the development of GEC's strategy, collecting and sharing best practices in countering disinformation, offering measurement and evaluation expertise, and managing a broad range of operational support activities, including planning and graphic design services.

The PPO Division includes the GEC's Academic and Think-Tank Outreach Unit, which leads the development of the "International Counter-Disinformation Research Agenda" for universities and think-tanks, facilitates information exchanges with academics, and manages outreach to U.S. and international researchers.

The **GEC's Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2)** provides connectivity with interagency and international partners to accelerate responses to adversary propaganda and disinformation. The I2C2's liaison officers implement the GEC Strategic Plans LOE to establish a network of interagency, international, civil society, tech sector, and private sector partners.

The **GEC's Analytics & Research Division (A&R)** uses quantitative analysis and context-specific qualitative input to provide actionable insights to address foreign disinformation and propaganda and shape strategic communication efforts. A&R is multi-disciplinary and includes data scientists, statisticians, intelligence analysts, strategic communications professionals, and geopolitical subject matter experts.

The **GEC's Technology Engagement Division (TE)** defends against foreign disinformation and propaganda by transitioning technologies from concept to application at scale and in support of smart policies and operations. TE facilitates the use of a wide range of technologies and techniques by sharing expertise among U.S. federal government departments and agencies, seeking expertise from external sources, and implementing best practices.

The **GEC's Resources Division** carries out a broad range of internal management functions, liaises with all management-related external entities, and manages the execution of the GEC's budget. It works to ensure that resources are aligned and integrated to enable the activities of other GEC divisions and to advance the overall mission.

The **GEC's Federal Assistance Awards Division (FAA)** oversees the management of all of GEC's federal assistance awards funded by the China, Counterterrorism, Iran, Russia, and Technology Engagement Divisions. The FAA Division ensures that all GEC federal assistance awards support the overall mission of the GEC and overall programming is measured, monitored, and evaluated to illustrate effectiveness and impact. The FAA Division consists of monitoring & evaluation specialists who provide multiple support functions throughout the GEC divisions, to include compliance with 18 FAM 300 regulations and the 2018 Evidence Act.

Examples of GEC Campaign and Analytical Support 2019-2021[69]

- The GEC's Counterterrorism Division led the implementation of a multinational and fully integrated interagency operation to delegitimize the Islamic State (ISIS) and its now deceased Emir Al-Mawla. Through its close partnership with State Department bureaus, DoD, the intelligence community, and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the GEC coordinated the amplification and exploitation of declassified interrogation reports that revealed al-Mawla's betrayal of his co-terrorists to U.S. interrogators in 2008.
- The GEC's *We Are All Digital Citizens* campaign highlighted the replacement of Iran's Ministry of Education's image of a woman on the cover of a third-grade math textbook. The contrast between the original and new image highlighted the gender discrimination at the root of the Iranian regime's ideology. The ensuing dialogue among journalists, social media influencers, caricaturists and others online extracted an apology from the ministry and its promise to "amend the mistake" by restoring the original cover in time for the next school year.
- The GEC's China Division supported efforts to expose and raise global awareness of PRC messaging and activities in Xinjiang by enabling a third-party implementer to develop the largest online repository of open source-data on the cultural destruction and the internment and genocide of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, injecting fact-based narratives on the PRC's Xinjiang policies into local information environments across the world. The project's innovative research, available in a dozen languages, has influenced governments, corporate behavior, and landmark policies globally.

Examples of GEC Targeted Training, Research, and Outreach Initiatives 2019-2021[70]

- Supported independent media in Eastern Europe to continue to produce fact-based and unbiased news content in information environments targeted by Russia's state-sponsored media, disinformation, and propaganda.
- Supported comprehensive mapping of violence-affected areas in West Africa to better understand the needs and motivations of youth and to promote effective strategic communications practices that enable interventions for individuals susceptible to VEO propaganda/recruitment messages.
- Developed a whole-of-society approach through the training and networking of civil society organizations in Latin America under the GEC's Media Literacy Accelerator Network, providing access to seasoned experts experienced in countering Russia's disinformation globally.
- Supported high-quality quantitative and qualitative research with sustained rollout campaigns that reinforce positive narratives of U.S. economic contributions to third countries and limit the space where PRC state-sponsored propaganda can take root.

Expansion of the GEC Mission and Mandate—The 2019 McCain NDAA

The John S. McCain National Defense Authorization for FY 2019 updated and expanded the GEC's mission and mandate. In addition to the GEC's original purpose "to lead, synchronize, and coordinate," the Center would now also "direct" and "integrate" federal government efforts to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda aimed at much more than "undermining United States national security interests" as the original legislation directed.

The McCain NDAA also made numerous adjustments to the GEC's functions to meet evolving threats. First, it addressed a previous gap in monitoring and evaluation efforts by requiring the GEC to "measure and evaluate the activities of the Center, including the outcomes of such activities, and implement mechanisms to ensure that the activities of the Center are updated to reflect the results of such measurement and evaluation." In addition, the legislation refined the GEC's original interagency information collection requirement, requiring the GEC to:

> *Use information from appropriate interagency entities to identify the countries, geographic areas, and populations most susceptible to propaganda and disinformation, as well as the countries, geographic areas, and populations in which such propaganda and disinformation is likely to cause the most harm.*[71]

Finally, the 2019 NDAA extended the GEC's 3161 hiring authority, the mechanism for bringing in the necessary personnel resources and expertise not otherwise available within the Department of State. In FY 2021, the GEC had 179 staff members: 14 FSOs, 29 civil service employees, 6 interagency details, 116 third party contractors, and 14 personal service contractors.

CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways
Lessons Learned

CONCLUSION

As this report has shown, the GEC and its precursors made important contributions to U.S. government efforts to counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation targeting the United States and U.S. interests. As the USG's lead foreign affairs agency, the State Department coordinates the pursuit of foreign policy objectives across the interagency, making it the ideal platform for the GEC's mandate to direct, coordinate, and integrate federal government efforts to counter foreign disinformation and propaganda. Situated at the nexus of diplomacy and information operations, the GEC belongs within the public diplomacy function of the Department of State, defending the USG's national security interests in a competitive information environment.

However, it is also true that an innovative interagency coordinating entity like the CTCC, GSEC, CSCC, or GEC must, by design, operate outside the traditional norms and culture of the State Department. This unique status presents several institutional and functional challenges. First, advancing each successive Center's highly specialized mission requires consistent leadership, strong support within the State Department, White House, and Congress, and full interagency buy in, particularly within the defense and intelligence communities. In addition, the GEC requires flexible funding mechanisms, streamlined authorization processes, and the institutional capability to adapt to a continuously changing threat environment.

Additionally, the rapid evolution of the information technologies that enable foreign state and non-state disinformation and propaganda activities underscores the importance of having a flexible, resilient organization whose structure and mission can be readily adapted to counter new tools, methods, and platforms. Like its predecessors, the CTCC, the GSEC, and the CSCC, the GEC must evolve along with disinformation threats and innovate, or risk obsolescence. Therefore, it is important to recognize that periodic process updates and institutional resets do not necessarily reflect mission failure. Rather, they signal consequential shifts in the threat environment.

The Bush administration tailored the CTCC and GSEC missions and mandates to counter post-9/11 violent extremist threats in the Middle East and the Muslim world. The Obama administration adapted the CSCC's mission and mandate to counter the emerging violent extremist threat following high-profile attacks in Europe. With the rise of ISIS, the Obama administration again altered the GEC's mission and mandate. When Russia's weaponization of information emerged as a global threat to democracies in 2014, the 2017 and 2019 NDAAs tailored GEC's new mission and mandate to address and coordinate responses to the new state-sponsored foreign disinformation and propaganda threats. Successive NDAA's have continued to update the GEC's mission and mandate to keep it current as foreign disinformation threats emerge.

Key Takeaways

A Confirmed Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Provides Vital Leadership

A confirmed Under Secretary has been the key to successfully establishing each post-9/11 precursor of the GEC. The CTCC was started under U/S Karen Hughes, the GSEC under U/S James Glassman, the CSCC under U/S Judith McHale, and the GEC under U/S Richard Stengel. And U/S Steve Goldstein played a critical – albeit brief – role in establishing the GEC's new mission authorized by Congress in the 2017 NDAA. Moreover, each Under Secretary had the requisite authorities and strong, collaborative relationships within the State Department, White House, and interagency necessary to secure resources and personnel and maintain institutional support for the center. Conversely, as this report has shown, lengthy gaps between confirmed Under Secretaries – no matter how qualified and capable the acting R's have been – have created challenges for the GEC and its predecessors.

Champions in the White House Provide Critical Validation and Support

As Karen Hughes noted, "public diplomacy needs an advocate at the White House."[72] White House and NSC leadership support for and involvement in creating the CTCC, GSEC, CSCC, and GEC was crucial to the validation of their missions. For example, the White House put Hughes at the helm of the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication. Leadership of the PCC process granted Hughes the convening authority she needed to oversee the development and implementation of coordinated interagency efforts. Through this PCC process, Hughes was able to produce the first U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications, which also created the CTCC.

Recognizing the centrality of the CTCC to post 9/11 efforts to counter extremist messaging, NSC leadership then undertook a separate interagency process towards the end of the Bush administration to produce a consensus recommendation regarding the right structure and location for such a strategic communication operation. During the Obama administration, White House and NSC engagement and support were also key to successfully establishing the CSCC and, ultimately, the GEC.

CONCLUSION

Changes in Administration Can Have a Disruptive Impact

While transitions in political leadership can impact all State Department operations, the GEC and its predecessor organizations are particularly vulnerable to continuity gaps. First, owing to its mandate to continuously adapt to evolving threats, the GEC does not fit into State Department's traditional bureaucracy. Then, unlike the Department's regional and functional bureaus, the GEC must navigate prolonged transition periods in the absence of established authorities. Finally, by the time each new iteration of a Center gains a footing within one administration, little time remains until the next transition, resulting in a "roller coaster" effect on operations.

Strong Bipartisan Support is Essential

In the years since 9/11, Republican and Democratic officials within the executive and legislative branches have consistently supported the need for an entity like the GEC to counter foreign disinformation threats to national security. Congressional hearing transcripts related to the GEC and its predecessors reflect strong, enduring bipartisan support for the Centers' missions and mandates. A Republican White House created the CTCC and the GSEC. A Democratic White House created the CSCC and the GEC. A Democratic Senator and a Republican Senator jointly sponsored the 2017 NDAA legislation establishing the GEC's new mission, and strong bipartisan support ensured its passage.

Mission Execution Must be Aligned with Budget Realities

Given the nature of the budget process, Department of State and GEC leadership must ensure that expectations and activities are clearly aligned with resource realities. The GEC must also consistently and proactively engage its stakeholder community to communicate and coordinate priorities and activities.

Though the GEC has succeeded in obtaining additional funding for its programs and initiatives, it still does not have the infrastructure and personnel in place to execute all of them concurrently. As a result, the GEC routinely faces difficult trade-offs in deciding how to prioritize and resource the components of its mission. This effort is further complicated by the growing number of State Department bureaus and offices seeking funding for countering disinformation initiatives, creating an internal competition for such resources that ultimately erodes the GEC's capacity to carry out its broad interagency mandate.

Cumbersome Authorization Processes Delay Funding

The 2017 NDAA legislated a significant expansion of the GEC's mission, to include countering foreign state-sponsored disinformation as well as non-state sponsored disinformation. It further mandated that the GEC carry out eleven functions detailed in the legislation. What the 2017 NDAA did not do, however, was obligate the additional funding required for the GEC to transform itself from an organization structured solely to counter VEO disinformation into one structured for a radically different and expanded set of mission objectives.

The 2017 NDAA did include a novel provision authorizing the Department of Defense to transfer up to $60 million to the GEC, provided its budget was less than $80 million. While Congress intended this mechanism to be used to obtain additional funding for the GEC to advance its new legislated mandate, in practice it proved difficult to execute. The 2017 NDAA legislation funding provision was widely misinterpreted as mandating the DoD transfer of $60 million to GEC in FY 2017 and FY 2018, making it easy for GEC to obtain the additional funding. In fact, the legislation only provided the necessary authorization for such a transfer.

Moreover, execution of this provision was wholly optional and reliant on senior-level agency buy-in and support. At State and then at DoD, the relevant internal stakeholders had to approve the transfer request before it could be submitted to each Secretary for approval. The internal bureaucracies within both agencies were then required to facilitate the transfer, which subsequently had to be approved by each of the foreign affairs and defense related congressional committees. Though ultimately DoD transferred, and GEC obligated, the funds on the last working day of FY 2018, the process proved to be too cumbersome to sustain.

Lessons Learned

Institutional and Legislative Status

The U.S. government needs a unique organization like the GEC housed within the State Department to counter global disinformation threats from foreign state and non-state actors.

As the lead foreign affairs agency, State Department has a key role to play in promoting and defending national security interests in the global information space. Chief among them is the effort to counter disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and malign influence campaigns.

An Executive Order or corresponding congressional legislation is necessary to provide the GEC with the official mandate and authorities to advance its interagency mission and mandate.

An E.O. identifies the GEC as critical to the operation of the federal government. Congressional legislation provides the GEC with the additional authorities required to carry out its mission and mandate.

Interagency Buy-In and Cooperation

The GEC cannot succeed without adequate support and buy-in from Interagency stakeholders given the nature of its mission.

The GEC needs to consistently and proactively engage its stakeholder communities to communicate and coordinate priorities and activities, especially given budget constraints.

The DoD and the IC are essential partners.

The GEC relies on Department of Defense and intelligence community contributions in the form of expertise, personnel, and resources to staff the mission and provide crucial capabilities. However, it is important to note that DoD and IC willingness to contribute to the GEC's mission depends on active engagement and advocacy by State Department leadership.

Funding and Staffing

Indirect mechanisms for funding the GEC are not feasible and consume precious bandwidth.

It is more efficient and effective to give the money directly to the GEC. At the same time, given the nature of the budget process, Department of State and GEC leadership must ensure expectations and activities are clearly aligned with resource realities.

The GEC's unique mission requires a fresh flexible approach to staffing and oversight.

The traditional way of staffing bureaus and offices within the Department of State cannot support the GEC's highly technical, rapidly evolving, and innovative mission. The GEC needs special authorities and hiring mechanisms to bring in the right talent. Meaningful accountability and oversight controls must also be in place to ensure non-traditional hiring mechanisms are used appropriately to secure the expertise required to staff the GEC's goals and objectives.

Mission Evolution

The GEC's mission will evolve with the threat environment.

The GEC is one in a continuum of Centers that have been rescoped, reconfigured, and revitalized to maintain relevance and ensure capabilities to counter emerging disinformation threats. The capability to adapt to shifts in the information threat environment must be built into the GEC's funding and resource mechanisms.

The GEC's mission and mandate will remain relevant for the foreseeable future because the threat to national security posed by disinformation will continue to grow.

Previous assumptions that disinformation threats were eliminated led to precipitous declines in resources for public diplomacy and the Centers, making it difficult for them to adequately counter fresh threats to information integrity. As radically new global disinformation challenges emerge, the GEC or a similar entity must be in place and resourced to meet them.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A&R – GEC's Analytics & Research Division
ACPD – Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy
AQ – Al-Qaeda
BBG – Broadcasting Board of Governors
C-ISIL – Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL
CIA – Central Intelligence Agency
CSCC – Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication
CT – Counterterrorism
CTCC – Counterterrorism Communication Center
CVE – Countering Violent Extremism
DoD – Department of Defense
DOT – Digital Outreach Team
E.O. – Executive Order
ECA – Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
FAA – GEC's Federal Assistance Awards Division
FSO – Foreign Service Officer
GEC – Global Engagement Center
GECCO – Global Engagement Center Coordination Office
GSEC – Global Strategic Engagement Center
I2C2 – GEC's Interagency and International Coordination Cell
IC – Intelligence Community
ICC – International Coordination Cell
IIP – International Information Programs
IPC – Interagency Policy Committee
ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS – Islamic State
LOE – Line(s) of Effort
NCTC – National Counterterrorism Center
NDAA – National Defense Authorization Act
NSC – National Security Council
OIC – Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PCC – Policy Coordinating Committee
PD – Public Diplomacy
PPO – GEC's Policy, Plans, and Operations Division
R – The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs
RRU – Rapid Response Unit
SOCOM – U.S. Special Operations Command
STG – Small Table Group
TE – GEC's Technology Engagement Division
U/S – Under Secretary
USAID – U.S. Agency for International Development
USG – U.S. Government
USIA – U.S. Information Agency
VEO – Violent Extremist Organization

Adele E. Ruppe

Adele E. Ruppe is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service with the rank of Minister Counselor. She has served as a senior advisor to the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy's Office of Policy, Planning and Resources (R/PPR). From 2017-2021, Adele was assigned to the Global Engagement Center, serving as Chief of Staff, acting Principal Deputy Coordinator, acting Deputy Coordinator for Resources, and Senior Advisor for Election Security.

From 2014-2017, she was Director of the European Bureau's Office of Public Diplomacy. Earlier assignments include Counselor for Public Affairs in New Delhi and Brasilia; Senior Special Assistant in the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Acting R/PPR Deputy Director; the European Bureau's Public Diplomacy Policy Advisor for Economic Issues and Multilateral Affairs; Cultural Affairs Officer in Madrid, Mexico City, and San Jose, Costa Rica; and an Information Officer in Moscow.

A native of Michigan, Adele has a B.S. in Computer Science from Duke University, an MBA from the University of Michigan, and a M.S. in National Security Strategy from the National Defense University. She has received numerous Superior Honor and Meritorious Honor Awards from the State Department.

Vivian S. Walker

Vivian S. Walker is the Executive Director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy at the Department of State, Chair of the Foreign Service Journal Editorial Board, an Adjunct Professor in Georgetown University's MSFS degree program, and a Faculty Fellow at the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California. Previously, she taught at the Central European University's School of Public Policy, the National War College in Washington, D.C., and the National Defense College of the UAE.

As a career Foreign Service Officer with the Department of State, she rose to the senior rank of Minister Counselor. She twice served as a Deputy Chief of Mission (Croatia and Armenia), twice as an Office Director (Southeastern European Affairs and the Office of Press and Public Diplomacy for Europe), a Public Affairs Officer (Kazakhstan, with coverage of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), a Cultural Affairs officer (Tunisia) and an Information Officer (Haiti).

Other assignments include a two-year professorship in strategic studies at the National War College, a yearlong assignment as the State Department's Regional Border Coordinator in Afghanistan, and a fellowship on the US Atlantic Council. She has a PhD from the University of Chicago and a BSFS from Georgetown University.

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

[1]Governor Thomas H. Kean, Chair, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the 9/11 Commission), "The 9/11 Commission Recommendations on Public Diplomacy: Defending Ideals and Defining the Message," Prepared statement, August 23, 2004.

[2]It is important to note that this overview of the GEC and its antecedents differs from the recent Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report on the GEC in that it neither provides a targeted assessment of internal structures, processes, resource management and initiatives, nor offers a set of actionable recommendations that require institutional compliance. See the September 2022 OIG report here: Inspection of the Global Engagement Center | Office of Inspector General (stateoig.gov)

[3]Source—NDAA language.

[4]Interview with a former senior State Department official, September 9. 2022.

[5]Interview with a former senior State Department official, September 9, 2022.

[6]U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD) Report, "Building America's Public Diplomacy through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources," 2002.

[7]Interview with a former senior State Department official, February 5, 2023.

[8]Interview for the Oral History Project, State Department Office of the Historian, August 21, 2014.

[9]Interview with a former senior State Department official, February 5, 2023; Federal News Service, Inc, State Department transcript, "U.S. Working to Increase Contacts with Muslim World; Charlotte Beers outlines goals for better communication," May 23, 2002; Federal News Service, Inc, "Public Diplomacy After September 11," State Department News Conference with Charlotte Beers, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs," National Press Club, December 18, 2002.

[10]Beers, Federal News Service, Inc, "Public Diplomacy After September 11", National Press Club, December 18, 2002.

[11]Interview with former senior State Department official, February 5, 2023; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, American Public Policy and Islam, 108th Cong., 1st sess., S. Hrg. 108-121, February 27, 2003.

[12]Interview with former senior State Department official, February 5, 2023.

[13]Interview with former senior State Department official, March 7 and March 10, 2023; Interview with former senior State Department official, February 23, 2023.

[14]National Security Council Memorandum, Establishment of the Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), April 8, 2006.

[15]The Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications PCC, U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication, released June 2007.

[16]Briefing to the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications, Counterterrorism Communication Center Mission and Concept of Operations, March 20, 2007.

[17]State Department Counterterrorism Communication Center (CTCC) press guidance, May 2, 2007; (U) State Department cable 08 STATE 89047, August 19, 2008.

[18]U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Strategic Communications and Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism, 110th Cong., 1st sess., HASC 110-101.

[19]The Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) was the precursor to the current Global Public Affairs Bureau, established in 2019.

[20]U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Strategic Communications and Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism, 110th Cong., 1st sess., HASC 110-101; Briefing to the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications, Counterterrorism Communication Center Mission and Concept of Operations, March 20, 2007.

[21]Interview with former senior State Department official, March 7 and 10, 2023; Interview with former senior State Department official, February 23, 2023; Interview with former State Department employee, April 7 and 11, 2023.

[22]Karen Hughes, Testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Karen Hughes, Under Secretary, Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, April 19, 2007; State Department Press Release, Slides Accompanying Testimony, Karen Hughes, Under Secretary, Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, April 19, 2007; State Department Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, (U) Public Diplomacy Update, Vol. II, Issue IV, December 2007.

[23]White House's April 8, 2006, Memorandum establishing the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications.

[24]Briefing to the PCC on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications, Counterterrorism Communication Center Mission and Concept of Operations, March 20, 2007; Interview with former State Department employee, April 7 and 11, 2023.

[25]Interview with former senior State Department official, March 8, 2023; Interview with former senior State Department official, March 15 and April 6, 2023.

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[26]Interview with former senior State Department official, March 8, 2023; Interview with former senior State Department official, March 15 and April 6, 2023.

[27]Interview with former senior State Department official, March 8, 2023; Interview with former senior State Department official, March 15 and April 6, 2023; Interview with former State Department official, March 31, 2023; Interview with former State Department employee, April 7 and 11, 2023.

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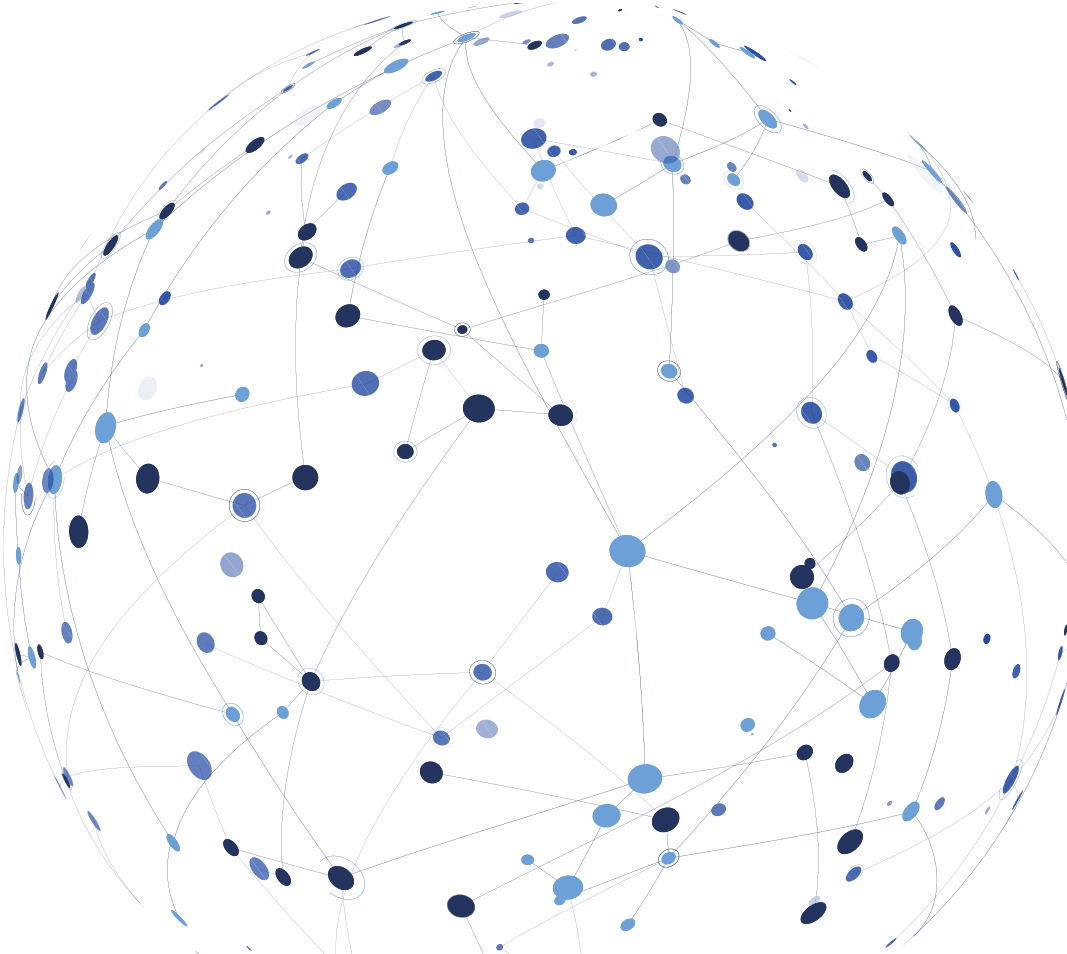

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