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US-DiGIA: Mapping the USG Discoverable Information Terrain

Executive Summary

Prepared for

Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment

Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: A Multi-Agency Deep Dive Assessment

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Deeper Analyses
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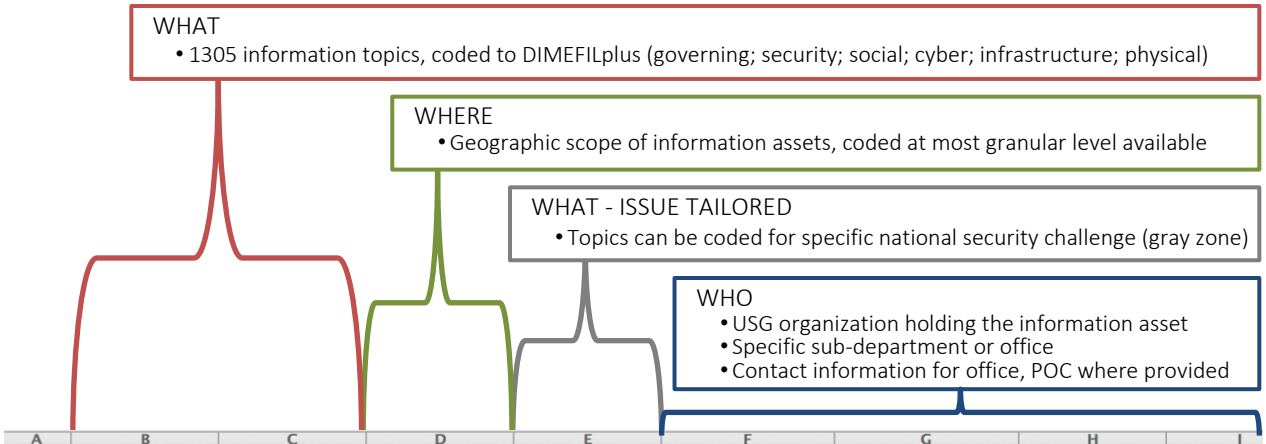
The United States currently faces a complex and dynamic security environment. States are no longer the only critical actors in the international arena; rather, a diverse range of non-state entities also has the potential to affect US interests and security—for good or bad. Economic influence, information control and propaganda, political influence, and social discontent can be and are being utilized by state and non-state actors alike to achieve their goals, in many cases bypassing the need for direct military action. In response, the US military is challenged to accomplish more, across a greater variety of domains, while facing a constrained budget environment. There are two central implications of this: first, many of the most intractable security problems the US faces require a whole of government approach. Second, in a complex and evolving international environment characterized by new and often ambiguous threats, information itself is a critical asset.

If USSOCOM and others were able to leverage these existing extant sources of information, data and expertise (i.e. *information assets*) held by the USG, the cost and time savings from avoiding duplication of effort would be potentially immense. In an effort to enable this, the NSI team "mapped" the USG information terrain, cataloguing all discoverable (unclassified, published, and referenced or held online) information assets relevant to national security and foreign policy held across the non-DoD and non-ODNI USG organizations.

This effort resulted in the Directory of Discoverable US Government Information Assets (US-DiGIA), which provides a tool that enables users to search for and locate open source USG information assets, and possible points of contact for interagency collaboration. The structure of the US-DiGIA is shown in Figure 1 below.



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Entry ID	Information Topic	DIMEFILplus	Geographic Region	Gray Zone Element	Organization	Office	Website	Contact
1543	arms_exports	economic	international	arms_exports	department_of_state	directorate_of_defense_tra	http://www.pmddtc.	
1547	arms_exports_embar	governing	international	arms_exports	department_of_state	directorate_of_defense_tra	http://www.pmddtc.	
1546	arms_exports_policie	governing	international	arms_exports	department_of_state	directorate_of_defense_tra	http://www.pmddtc.	
1593	arms_small_and_light	security	international	arms_exports	department_of_state	office_of_weapons_remova	http://www.state.go	
1322	arms_small_and_light	law_enforcement	central_america	arms_trafficking	department_of_state	western_hemisphere_affai	http://www.state.go	Giovanni Snidl
1323	arms_small_and_light	law_enforcement	north_america	arms_trafficking	department_of_state	western_hemisphere_affai	http://www.state.go	Giovanni Snidl
1596	arms_small_and_light	law_enforcement	international	arms_trafficking	department_of_state	office_of_weapons_remova	http://www.state.go	
1512	arms_trade_treaty	diplomatic	international	arms_exports	department_of_state	office_of_conventional_arr		
1545	arms_trafficking_inte	diplomatic	international	arms_trafficking	department_of_state	directorate_of_defense_tra		
1443	arms_transfers	economic	international	trade_arms	department_of_state	arms_control_verification_		
1787	asian_development_t	financial	asia_pacific	banking_international	department_of_the_treas	international_finance_south		
0943	asset_forfeitures	law_enforcement	united_states	assets	department_of_justice	criminal_division_asset_fort		
0946	asset_forfeitures	law_enforcement	united_states	assets	department_of_justice	us_marshals_office		
1049	asset_forfeitures	law_enforcement	international	assets	department_of_justice	criminal_division_office_of_		
1821	asset_forfeitures	law_enforcement	united_states	assets	department_of_the_treas	office_of_terrorism_and_fir		
1826	asset_forfeitures	law_enforcement	united_states	assets	department_of_the_treas	office_of_terrorism_and_fir		

The **US-DiGIA Directory**, with user guide, is available from the POC upon request.

Figure 1: US-DiGIA Directory Format

Key Findings

The US-DiGIA Directory can also be analyzed to provide an overview of the USG discoverable information terrain. This report presents some of the key findings of our analysis of the directory. Part 2 focuses on the subset of information assets relevant to gray zone challenges. It also demonstrates how tailored coding for specific issues or security concerns can increase the utility of the US-DiGIA directory for users with specific information needs.

We organized our analysis in each part around the three foundational whole-of-government questions that guided the structure of the directory itself.

1. *What* national security and foreign policy related information does the USG currently collect and hold?
2. *Who* (which organizations) collects and holds that information?
3. *Where* geographically are our information assets focused?

Part 1: US-DiGIA Directory as a whole

What National Security and Foreign Policy Related Information Does the USG Hold?

- Three DIMEFILplus categories—economic, diplomatic and governing each account for approximately 15% of the total discoverable information assets.
- Trade and security are the focuses of the majority of discoverable information assets.
- When it comes to economic aspects of national security and foreign policy, the information assets identified are US-centric and focused on trade.
- When accounting for economically focused diplomatic information assets, economic-focused information assets account for 21% of all US-DiGIA assets, whereas those focused on security account for 14%.
- While more organizations hold cyber related information than economic information, only three have a clear international focus to their cyber efforts.
- Coverage of social information assets accounts for less than 10% of all discoverable information assets. Only a minority of this focuses on topics that can be directly linked to political stability.

Who Collects and Holds that Information?

- The State Department has both the greatest quantity (501 information assets) and diversity (387 topics) of information relevant to national security and foreign policy.
- Many organizations outside the intelligence community (IC), or the group of organizations that frequently coordinate with the DoD[1], were found to have information potentially relevant to national security and foreign policy.
- Although the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Interior, and Energy all hold fewer overall assets than other organizations, they cover a broader range of topics.

[1] From the organizations we examined, we coded the CIA and DHS as part of the IC and the Departments of State, Justice, and the Treasury as frequent coordinators.

- The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has a, perhaps surprising, number of relevant information assets (99), and many of these assets relate to disease detection and tracking or emergency response.

Where Geographically is that Information Focused?

- Internationally focused discoverable information assets were more numerous than were US focused.
- Many information assets are not clearly geographically defined, which creates inefficiencies when searching for country or region specific information. It also makes it harder to identify countries or regions where national security and foreign policy relevant information is lacking.

Part II: Gray Zone Relevant Information Assets

What Gray Zone Related Information Does the USG Hold?

- While we have considerable information about US interests, we have few assets that can inform our understanding of international rules and norms.
- USG agencies collect and hold considerable information about US economic activity and relations. Better understanding of these economic relationships may help identify where and how US economic levers can be employed to counterbalance the use of economically focused gray actions by others.
- There is a growing recognition that identifying and countering gray zone strategies requires an understanding of the motivations of gray actors as well as the vulnerabilities of their targets. However, discoverable information for the actor dimension is relatively scarce, particularly information that could provide insight into the perceptions and attitudes of foreign leaders and populations.
- We found few information assets that could be directly used as indicators and warnings of gray actions. However, we identified information assets that could be useful for determining an actor's vulnerability to gray actions and physical environment data that may contribute to identifying areas of potential gray conflict.
- We have few specific information assets that help explain the informal relationships and practices that undergird formal international law and obligations. Norms violations are a critical component of gray actions, and this informational gap puts the US at a disadvantage.

Who Collects and Holds that Information?

- Gray zone relevant information is widely found in organizations beyond the "usual suspects" (those with a security or IC focus), underscoring the need for a whole of government approach to effectively address gray zone challenges.
- Organizations outside the IC hold information assets relevant to all gray dimensions. There is a greater diversity of USG organizations collecting and holding information assets relevant to actors and US interests than gray actions or international rules and norms.

Where Geographically is that Information Focused?

- Internationally focused discoverable information assets were more numerous than were US focused.
- Identifying which information assets cover specific CCMD AORs is in many cases not possible from the published descriptions. This creates inefficiencies when searching for country or region specific information, and it makes it harder to identify countries or regions where gray zone relevant information is lacking.

Implications

Information

Lack of information leaves us functionally blind to potential opportunities to further US interests or mitigate threats to those interests. Without reliable information, it is more likely that we may incorrectly classify an action as gray and increase the risk of either unintended escalation (by assuming an action is gray when it is not) or missing threats to our interests (by assessing an action as not gray when it is in fact gray).

The ability to identify and locate information assets across a broad range of USG organizations could reduce the need for SOCOM and others to undertake their own information collection efforts. This in turn increases the efficiency of information collection and reduces cost in both time and resources.

The current scarcity of information related to potential gray actions places the US at a disadvantage when it comes to developing indicators and warnings. These gaps highlight areas where SOCOM and others could focus their own information collection efforts to maximize efficiency and impact for analysts and planners.

Whole of Government

Appreciation of the complexity of the evolving security environment has prompted calls for a whole of government approach to national security challenges. Information exchange is a logical first step in increasing awareness of common interests and information assets across the USG, and the US-DiGIA Directory can contribute to that process.

The types of discoverable information an office with an organization holds also provide an indication of the interests and expertise within that office and thus a guide to the identification of possible points for interagency cooperation. Interagency collaboration enables the practitioners who best understand specific instruments of power to be involved in their application to specific national security (including gray zone) challenges.

Similarly, bringing diverse areas of expertise and authorities together can reduce institutional bias, and reveal underlying assumptions. This can create the potential for developing a broader and more adaptive set of strategies for responding to gray zone and other national security threats and avoiding unintended consequences.