

## Background Research

### Gates Forum I

# Winning the Narrative: How China and Russia Wield Strategic Communications to Advance Their Goals

Samantha Custer, Austin Baehr, Bryan Burgess, Emily Dumont,  
Divya Mathew, Amber Hutchinson  
AidData | Global Research Institute | William & Mary

November, 2022



# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction  | 1  |
| 2. China's Practice of Strategic Communications                          | 4  |
| 2.1 Media Broadcasting and Cooperation                                   | 4  |
| 2.2 Education and Cultural Cooperation                                   | 17 |
| 3. Russia's Practice of Strategic Communications                         | 24 |
| 3.1 Media Broadcasting and Cooperation                                   | 24 |
| 3.2 Education and Cultural Cooperation                                   | 32 |
| 4. Outcomes and Implications for US Strategic Communications             | 36 |
| 4.1 Synchronicity: Strategic Communications in Concert With Other Tools  | 36 |
| 4.2 Outcomes: How Have Target Audiences Responded to the PRC and Russia? | 38 |
| 4.3 Implications: Key take-aways for U.S. strategic communications       | 43 |
| References   | 45 |

# 1. Introduction

The world in 2022 is a time of contested narratives. Is the People's Republic of China (PRC) using economic power to coerce countries to do things that are not in their interest, or is it working towards their mutual benefit? Is Russia protecting communities' rights to self-determination or flouting the basic laws of international order? Is the United States promoting a "free, open, secure, and prosperous world" (NSS, 2022) or bullying countries into "surrendering their sovereignty" (Kremlin, 2022)? Chinese, Russian, and U.S. leaders each have their own preferred answers to these questions and jockey for position to ensure their story wins over the foreign leaders and publics they seek to influence.

The PRC has multiple objectives for its strategic communications. Beijing wants to win the world's admiration for its economic success following a "century of humiliation" (Tischler, 2020). To this end the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks to take back control of the narrative from a hostile Western media, assuage fears about the implications of its growing power, and present an alternative narrative of its peaceful rise to which other countries can aspire. Beijing also recognizes that favorable public opinion and closer ties with other countries are a means to other economic, security, and geopolitical ends.

Economically, promoting positive narratives about China with foreign publics are essential to attracting new markets for Chinese goods, services, and technologies. The PRC needs raw materials and energy supplies to fuel its economy, transportation routes for Chinese exports, and opportunities to put excess industrial capacity and foreign exchange reserves to productive use abroad. If foreign citizens and governments admire the PRC for its economic success and believe that Beijing is a beneficial partner in their country's development, this generates demand to buy, trade, and work with the PRC.

Geopolitically, Beijing needs willing allies to support its positions in the United Nations, apply pressure on those that recognize Taiwan, and gain legitimacy for its development model and dealings with other countries. Beijing needs to win over foreign leaders and publics to adopt its viewpoints, project strength to check the influence of rivals, and inoculate itself against criticism from its detractors. This involves a dual strategy of "rebuking" Western conceptions of human rights and norms, and "selling" alternative

narratives and norms that are more conducive to advancing its interests (Repnikova, 2022). Moreover, Beijing aspires to displace status quo powers like the U.S. in a bid for global hegemony (Doshi, 2021) and the ability to inform, control, and co-opt narratives are critical to its success.

Beijing's leaders know that reputation is critical to the PRC's security interests. Offensively, it is easier for the PRC to justify its assertiveness in advancing its maritime and territorial claims if others either accept its actions as legitimate or lack the will to mount a compelling objection. Displacing the U.S. as the primary security provider in Asia, as well as accessing overseas ports and bases to project naval power requires bringing other countries along to feel that the PRC is a protector rather than a threat to their national interests. Defensively, Beijing knows that international criticism gives fuel to its domestic opposition and increases the likelihood of foreign intervention to aid them. If the PRC can cultivate support for its norms, values, and development model this neutralizes potential threats.

Russia wants to be seen by others as an undisputed leading world power and recover from the trauma of losing its empire, with the fall of the Soviet Union (Rumer, 2021). However, this manifests itself as less about image management than in animating a "revisionist foreign policy" (NSS, 2022). The Kremlin aims to expand Russian influence, undermine American influence, and pull countries away from Western institutions (Gates, 2021, p. 284). Yet, as with the PRC, the Kremlin's strategic communications must also support its broader economic, security, and geopolitical interests.

Economically, Russia has a smaller economy than that of the PRC or the U.S, but the Kremlin maintains a virtual monopoly on energy exports in Europe. This has provided Russia with substantial leverage to extract security concessions by threatening to cut off, divert or increase the costs of energy supplies. To sustain this advantage, the Kremlin has sought to undermine Western resolve by splintering consensus about the relative costs and benefits of international sanctions, as well as the impact on Russia's economy. Second, it has sought to reduce opposition to, and stoke public sympathy for, its signature energy projects such as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which was vocally opposed by the U.S.

Geopolitically, Russia has a strong desire to wall off Eurasia as its own unrivaled sphere of influence, free from external intervention (Watts et al., 2020). The Kremlin has been

vocal in its desire to curb the eastward expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, instead proposing neighboring states to join an alternative Eurasian Union (ibid). Moscow also aims to achieve the acquiescence of rivals to its territorial claims. To achieve these objectives, the Kremlin needs to convince neighboring countries of the benefits of working with Moscow, the unreliability and dangers of Western partners, and the inevitability of Russia's continued dominance. It also acts as a spoiler: supporting disputed territories to push for greater autonomy from their own government, as well as promoting sympathetic fringe parties, individuals, or movements to gain popularity within their countries.

The Kremlin is also concerned with regime survival, and Putin sees Western democracy and liberalism as a threat to that interest. Mindful of the precedent of color revolutions in Eastern Europe, Putin wants to position itself as the rightful protector of conservative values and traditions to curb the spread of secularization and cultural liberalism that provide entry points for the West to foment unrest. The Kremlin seeks to mobilize Russian co-ethnics, Orthodox church members, and youth to embrace a common Eurasian identity with shared religion, ideology, and culture as an alternative to Western-style democracy. It sows doubt about democratic ideas and values, as well as exploiting social cleavages to heightened perceived disenfranchisement of Russian speaking or Orthodox minorities.

As U.S. leaders look to strengthen America's strategic communications capabilities to be fit-for-purpose in an era of heightened great power competition, it must take stock of which tools Beijing and Moscow use with whom, how, and with what results. In this background paper we take an in-depth look at the strategic communications toolkits of the PRC (Section 2) and Russia (Section 3), with an emphasis on international broadcasting and public diplomacy. In Section 4 we turn to assessing how well the PRC and Russia can translate their strategic communications inputs into their desired outcomes, as well as identify implications for the U.S. in terms of potential blind spots, comparative advantages, and entry points to exploit the weaknesses or vulnerabilities of its competitors in its bid to win the narrative.

## 2. China's Practice of Strategic Communications

In this section we provide an overview of the ways, means, and target audiences for the PRC's global strategic communications efforts—focusing on its international

broadcasting and public diplomacy overtures with foreign publics—and the extent to which this has varied over time and space.

## 2.1 Media Broadcasting and Cooperation

Beijing's most overt and direct form of strategic communications is disseminating its preferred narratives via state-owned media outlets. These print, radio, and television channels are primarily used for broadcasting to whole populations, though customized content and multilingual offerings allow for narrowcasting to more targeted subcommunities such as the Chinese diaspora. As Repnikova (2022) stresses, outreach to "Overseas Chinese" has long been a priority target audience of the PRC for many years, with an emphasis on cultivating sympathy for its policies and discouraging possible dissent. However, there are trade-offs for the PRC as leveraging its state-run media gives it more control the message—maintaining the integrity of the content and how it is distributed to target audiences—at the expense of perceived credibility, given skepticism about the ability for any Chinese media, state-run or otherwise, to maintain journalistic independence (Custer et al., 2019a).

The PRC has a large stable of state-run media outlets over which it can exert direct control to communicate the CCP's preferred narratives. Its print media holdings include: the People's Daily (Renmin Ribao), with web pages in English; China Daily, the official English language newspaper; Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao); which offers both English and Chinese language editions; and Reference News (Cankao Xiaoxi), published by Xinhua News Agency (Custer et al., 2019a). In addition, Beijing has extensive multimedia holdings: China Central Television (CCTV), its national broadcasting arm; China Global Television Network (CGTN), its international broadcasting arm with content in five languages; China National Radio (CNR); and China Radio International (CRI) with programs in over 60 languages (ibid). The Chinese government also controls the Xinhua News Agency and the China News Service, both state-run news agencies with web pages in English.

As Repnikova (2022) argues, Chinese media is heavily controlled and the CCP's governance of the media industry is highly institutionalized. In a major reform in March 2018, President Xi reorganized the PRC's state bureaucracy to merge three of its state-run media enterprises—China International Television, China Radio International, and China National Radio—under a newly formed "Voice of China," almost mimicking

the Voice of America (Custer et al., 2019a). The CCP's Propaganda Department took on oversight of Voice of China, along with China Daily, Xinhua, among other responsibilities (Xinhua, 2018) to consolidate party control over Chinese media (both state-owned and private) and engagement with foreign journalists (Bowie and Gitter, 2018; ChinaFile Conversation, 2018). The PRC has a far-reaching ability to not only directly control the content of its state-owned enterprises but exert "de facto influence over a second tier of media outlets" by virtue of government regulations, CCP oversight, and low levels of media freedom (Custer et al., 2019a).

Four of the PRC's state-run media organizations maintain a physical presence in other countries: Xinhua, People's Daily, China News Service, and CCTV/CGTN. The first three outlets operate branches in every continent which collect information on current events of interest in the county or region in which they are based to send back to headquarters for wider distribution. CCTV/CGTN operates production centers which receive inputs from reporters to create full programs or segments primarily for CGTN.

Xinhua has the largest global footprint of the four outlets in terms of on-the ground presence with 177 branches across 142 countries and multiple branches concentrated in 16 priority countries.<sup>1</sup> Most countries either have a Xinhua branch within their borders or are adjacent to a country that does. In comparison, People's Daily operates fewer branches (40) in a lower number of countries (38), but even this outlet spans 6 continents. The United States is the one exception to the People's Daily normal rule of thumb of one branch per country. Examining the distribution of its branches, People's Daily has a revealed preference for setting up operations in countries that meet one or more of the following criteria: home to large Chinese diaspora communities, in close geographic proximity to China, or are economically or geopolitically important epicenters of power.

China News Service maintains branches in fifteen countries across six continents, primarily targeting G20 member countries (or other important regional powers). The few exceptions to this rule (Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines) are important to Beijing for other reasons: they are home to large Chinese diaspora communities.<sup>2</sup> CGTN has a somewhat different geographic footprint because its three local production centers

---

<sup>1</sup> The top 16 countries with the highest volume of Xinhua branches are: Russia (6), the U.S. (6), Australia (3), Brazil (3), Canada (3), India (3), Japan (3), Belgium (2), Italy (2), Nigeria (2), South Africa (2), Spain (2), Turkey (2), UAE (2), UK (2), and Vietnam (2).

<sup>2</sup> This includes: Australia (1), Belgium (1), Brazil (1), Canada (1), France (1), Germany (1), Indonesia (1), Japan (1), Malaysia (1), the Philippines (1), Russia (1), South Africa (1), Thailand (1), UK (1), U.S. (1).

serve as regional hubs to generate and distribute content. The Nairobi (Kenya) center prepares and packages content for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. The centers in London (UK) and Washington D.C. (U.S.) do the same for Europe and the Americas, respectively. These production centers, working in concert with Beijing's strong foothold in Asia, gives the PRC the ability to produce high quality television programming that covers regionally relevant news across the globe.

Beyond maintaining a physical presence in a subset of countries, the PRC can directly project and distribute its state-run media narratives via several channels. It distributes physical copies of China Daily in 27 countries across 6 continents.<sup>3</sup> Once again, the revealed preference here is to emphasize those countries that host large Chinese diaspora communities, are near China, or are major nodes of economic or political power. The paper is typically printed at one central location in each country, with exceptions of the UK, U.S., Brazil, and Canada which had multiple locations.<sup>4</sup>

PRC-run media outlets have online websites to target customized content (not just verbatim translations) in the official languages and other popular languages of its target countries. This provides Beijing with a powerful and relatively cost-efficient amplification vehicle to reach broader audiences. In parallel, they have used social media channels such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook in some markets, even as the use of these tools are often restricted to its own citizens. In a limited content analysis of PRC state media on Twitter in the East Asia and Pacific region, stories disproportionately focused on the signature policies of senior leaders, namely the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the Chinese military (Custer et al., 2019a).<sup>5</sup> Just as the PRC has invested in the 'pipes' to distribute its content globally, it has also sought to develop more customized and targeted content that is fit-for-purpose for local audiences through what Repnikova (2022) describes as Beijing's localization strategy, which includes "hiring local journalists, primarily for reporting roles, while keeping editorial and managerial positions with Chinese staff."

---

<sup>3</sup> Lim and Bergin (2018) describe four- or eight-page inserts from China Daily called "China Watch" as an example of such circulation.

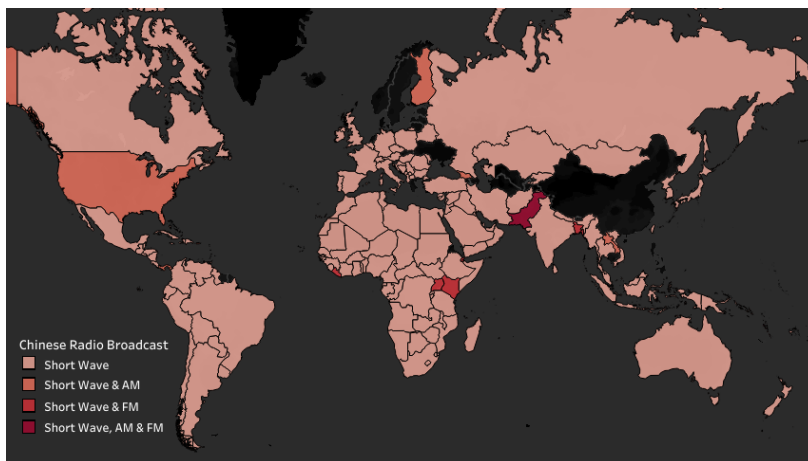
<sup>4</sup> Although China Daily is printed in two Brazilian cities, we did not find any evidence of it in circulation in any Spanish speaking countries in South or North America. This was admittedly the opaquest of all the media types to track distribution. Presumably, if it is being printed in Spanish, China Daily is likely in circulation in additional countries beyond what we were able to capture.

<sup>5</sup> Custer et al. (2019a) "categorized the Twitter feeds of six different Chinese state-run media outlets to identify the substantive focus of their communications across five thematic areas, including art and culture, sport, science and technology, Xi Jinping, BRI, and the military."



Similar to the U.S., the PRC has invested extensively in radio and television capabilities to transmit its broadcasts across the globe (Figure 1). Managed by China Radio International (CRI), its international terrestrial radio network leverages three types of broadcasts: FM (short distance), AM (moderate distance), and short wave (extremely long distance). It operates at least twenty-one FM and AM radio stations around the world<sup>6</sup> with the highest concentration in the United States (five AM stations), Pakistan (one AM station and two FM stations), Kenya (two FM stations), and Uganda (two FM stations).<sup>7</sup> CRI also has short wave radio transmitters in mainland China, Cuba, and Mali; however these broadcasts have the range to reach listeners anywhere in the world, only limited by language.<sup>8</sup> There is a CCTV/CGTN channel available via satellite in every country on earth, producing programming in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Xinhua has a significant television presence outside of the Western hemisphere. CNC World English is a branch of Xinhua that broadcasts exclusively in English.

Figure 1. Global Reach of PRC Radio Broadcasting Facilities, Snapshot in 2022



<sup>6</sup> FM stations can reach listeners in an area the size of a large city while AM stations can reach listeners at longer distances.

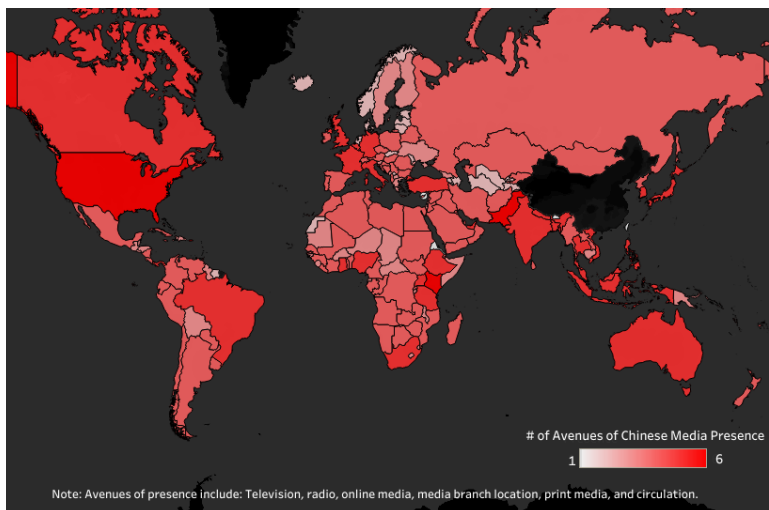
<sup>7</sup> The total list of includes: Dhaka, Bangladesh (1 FM); Djibouti (1 FM); Tbilisi, Georgia (1 FM); Hong Kong (1 AM); Nairobi, Kenya (2 FM); Vientiane, Laos (1 FM); Monrovia, Liberia (1 FM); Macao (1 FM); Islamabad and Karachi, Pakistan (2 FM); Apia, Samoa (1 FM); Nuku'alofa, Tonga (1 FM); Kampala and Mombasa, Uganda (2 FM); Atlanta, Boston, Philadelphia, Riverside (CA), Washington, DC in the U.S. (5 AM); and Port Vila, Vanuatu (1 FM).

<sup>8</sup> Short wave radio can be broadcast over large areas by reflecting the radio waves off of the atmosphere.

*Note: This gradient map shows the reach of Beijing's shortwave, AM, FM capabilities by country, globally. Lighter colors indicate less intensity of coverage (fewer channels), darker colors indicate greater intensity of coverage (more channels). Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

PRC state-run media is a global enterprise: there is not a single country on earth that is not reached by one or more of its channels (Figure 2). In fact, foreign publics have multiple points of potential direct exposure to content from one or more of Beijing's stat-run media channels: local branches of Xinhua, People's Daily, China News Service, and CCTV/CGTN; access the PRC's radio broadcasts, satellite television channels, or physical copies of newspapers; and websites published in the official or popular languages of target countries. Of these points of potential exposure, television and radio broadcasting, along with websites with customized content for local populations are most prolific, followed by physical branches. Physical circulation of the PRC's print newspapers in foreign countries is far less common.

Figure 2. Concentration of PRC Media Presence by Number of Avenues per Country, 2022 Snapshot



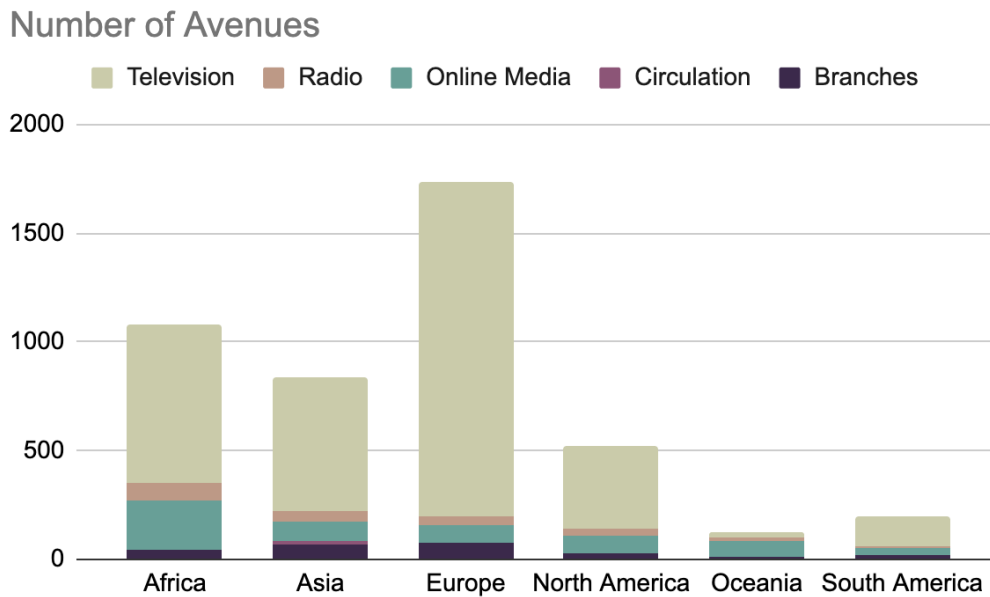
*Note: This gradient map shows the concentration of PRC media presence by the number of avenues it has to expose foreign publics to its content. The avenues are television, radio, online media, physical branch location, and circulation. Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

In comparing the PRC's media footprint to that of the U.S., there are several key take-aways that are immediately apparent in terms of reach and revealed priorities. Beijing orients the largest share of its state-run media attention towards Europe and a fair amount of resources towards Asia (Figure 3), consistent with Repnikova's (2022) argument that the PRC tends to emphasize its communications and diplomatic outreach

to major economies and its immediate neighbors. This profile is consistent with what Custer et al. (2022a) find as the revealed priorities of U.S. broadcasting in a companion paper. If we look at historical financing and congressional legislation, the U.S. has traditionally focused the lion's share of its broadcasting emphasis across VOA, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Asia to Europe and Asia.

Yet, there is also a stark difference. Compared to the PRC, the U.S. appears to have a relatively large blind spot: Africa. The African continent captures the second largest share of Chinese state-run media attention, but the U.S. has none of its grantee broadcasters specifically focused on this region, nor has it been a major focus of either its resources or Congressional legislation. Noticeably, this finding is consistent with Repnikova's (2022) insight that the PRC has a concerted interest in building a strong positive image of itself in Africa, which it views as an important source of natural resources, and proactively countering arguments from the West which characterize its actions as neo-colonialist.

Figure 3. Regional Concentration of PRC Media Presence by Number of Avenues, Snapshot in 2022



*Note: This graph shows the concentration of PRC state media activity by region, broken down by the avenues of its reach (television, radio, online media, circulation, physical branches). This considers the activities of the core six PRC state-run media outlets with an international presence: CCTV/CGTN, CRI, China Daily, China News Service, People's Daily, and Xinhua.*  
*Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Beyond these institutional faces of PRC state media, Beijing also extensively makes use of its senior leaders and ambassadors to put a human face on its preferred narratives by giving interviews or placing guest op-eds with foreign media outlets. Ambassadors have been an important asset in the PRC's strategic communications arsenal, for they tend to be somewhat more recognized faces of the Chinese government within the countries where they are posted, as well as being more familiar with the target audience to better connect Beijing's messages with local realities. Beyond merely promoting positive stories about China, at times, PRC ambassadors have used this medium to rebut rival counternarratives from the U.S. and others. For example, the Chinese and American ambassadors to Nepal placed a series of heated op-eds debating the benefits and drawbacks of the Belt and Road Initiative versus the Indo-Pacific Strategy in the pages of Nepali news media (Custer et al., 2019b).

In the digital age, social media channels are tailor made for individual diplomats to quickly and widely transmit content via online networks, as well as engage in social listening to understand local sentiment towards current stories and events. There has been an uptick in the PRC's use of a variety of different social media channels in recent years (Schleibs, 2020; Repnikova, 2022), but that does not mean that it employs them in the same way. Facebook appears to be the place for Beijing to promote more "official, formulaic content," while PRC-affiliated accounts on Twitter tend to use a "more personalized and conversational style with foreign publics" (Custer et al., 2021a).

The PRC's messaging on these platforms throughout the COVID-19 pandemic show that accounts associated with individual diplomats or state-run media embraced several different tactics. Specifically, PRC affiliated accounts used posts to counter that Western criticism of Beijing were racist and biased, undercut the appeal of competitors by questioning their motives (i.e., they put profits over people) or the efficacy of their solutions (i.e., their technology does not work), while reinforcing its the PRC's reliability and generosity as a partner by featuring its medical teams and donations extensively.

Despite Beijing's supply-side enthusiasm for leveraging social media to reach foreign publics, the extent to which they can use these tools to effectively connect with foreign publics, versus speaking loudly to its rivals like the U.S. is an open question. In an analysis of 115 PRC-affiliated accounts focused on South and Central Asia, we found that its Twitter footprint is extremely limited in direct connections to active policy elites in 12 countries of interest (Custer et al., 2021a). Instead, Beijing is almost entirely reliant

on indirect connections via relatively few “brokers” with more expansive local networks (ibid).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, any network power the PRC has to communicate with foreign publics on Twitter (at least in these countries) is tenuous, as it must piggyback on a few “individual politicians and journalists in South Asia” and “government agencies tasked with foreign affairs and trade in Central Asia” with larger local networks to promote its preferred narratives or counter those of others (ibid).

Given the skepticism about the independence of the PRC’s state-run media, and even its social media presence, Beijing has used another strategy to overcome this credibility hurdle: cultivating relationships with media outlets and journalists in other countries to serve as sympathetic interlocutors. Although this means that Beijing cedes some control over the message in partnering with local media, this strategy has several upsides for the PRC’s strategic communications. Domestic media outlets already have a “readymade base of readers, viewers, and listeners,” which provides Beijing with a “shortcut” to co-opt these existing networks which are deeper and wider than its own to tell its story (Custer et al., 2019a). Rather than the PRC having to put in the work to understand the frame of reference of a local population, partnering with domestic media outlets outsources the process of contextualization (ibid). Finally, domestic media outlets may have greater reputational currency with their local audiences as trustworthy sources of news and information that PRC state-run media outlets likely lack (ibid).

There are several different ways that Beijing “borrows the local credibility” of domestic media outlets in other countries (Custer et al., 2019a). The PRC’s most prolific strategy in this regard is the use of 429 content sharing partnerships (CSPs), agreements brokered between Chinese state-media and counterpart media outlets within target countries to reprint, share or co-create content. These CSPs involve media of all different types—print, radio, television, digital—and incorporate a wide range of 36 PRC media outlets at national and local levels.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> As Custer et al. (2021) explain, “each individual and organization on Twitter has a network of their own immediate connections: people they choose to follow and those who follow them. In turn, these connections have their own accounts that they follow and that follow them. These two tiers of relationships—one’s immediate connections and the connections of those you are connected to—are consequential because they influence the information you are likely to see and the conversations in which you are most likely to engage.”

<sup>10</sup> At the national level, there are CSPs with actors such as CCTV/CGTN, China Daily, China Education Television, China News Service, China Radio International, Global Times, People’s Daily, South China Morning Post, Xinhua. There are also examples of CSPs that involve subnational level media outlets in China such as those from Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Jilin, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Shanghai, Tianjin, Yunnan, Zhejiang, and Guangzhou.

However, not all these outlets are equally prominent—the top five (Xinhua, People’s Daily, CCTV, China News Service, China Daily) accounted for 86 percent of all known content sharing partnerships. Moreover, compared to its state-run media footprint, Beijing focuses more of its CSPs on print media, which accounted for half of these agreements, followed by online media (20 percent). State media networks in counterpart countries (including, but not limited to newspapers, radio, and television) also receive a high volume of agreements (11 percent).

Taking a global view, the geographic distribution of the PRC’s content-sharing partnerships appears to be heavily weighted towards high-volume trading partners, geostrategically important countries, or those with moderate to sizable Chinese diaspora communities. Asia has the lion’s share (45 percent) of all known content sharing partnerships with PRC state-run media outlets (194 agreements). The countries attracting the highest number of partnerships were Thailand (26), Indonesia (14), Japan (14), Cambodia (12), South Korea (12), the Philippines (11), and Malaysia (10). This emphasis on neighboring countries is consistent with Beijing’s state priority to strengthen ties with its so-called “greater periphery” (Li and Yuwen, 2016).

Europe, Africa, and North America held similar weight to each other in attracting roughly 15-16 percent of the PRC’s CSPs (66-70 agreements each). Italy, notably, the first G7 country to join the Belt and Road Initiative, accounted for the largest share of CSPs (10), Hungary, Ukraine, and Albania (all BRI member countries) had multiple agreements with PRC media outlets. France and Spain also attracted attention, despite not yet signing on to BRI. On an individual country basis, two countries in North America—the U.S. and Canada—have brokered the first and third highest numbers of CSPs with PRC state-media outlets, accounting for 36 and 26 agreements, respectively. In Africa, the PRC’s footprint of agreements is more distributed across the continent with South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria the top recipients of CSPs. South America and Oceania were once again relatively lower priority for the PRC on this measure.

What do these content sharing partnerships look like in practice? This can be as straightforward as local outlets subscribing to Xinhua’s free daily information sharing service, reproducing CCTV news reports as part of international news coverage, or using Chinese state-media broadcasting discs and equipment in their operations (Custer et al., 2019a). Producing local language content is an important focus of many CSP agreements to make PRC content more accessible to a wider audience. For

example, Xinhua's TV arm works with Thai News channel TNN24 to dub and broadcast PRC content from English into Thai via their distribution network and China Radio International has agreements with 23 countries to dub and distribute Chinese movies and TV dramas into foreign languages (CNC, 2013; Custer et al., 2019).

In addition to redistributing coverage from PRC media, local outlets also pursue co-creation of new content. For example, TVK in Cambodia and China Intercontinental Communication Center collaborated to create a documentary of Sino-Cambodian friendship (Custer et al., 2019a), while Chinese and Pakistani TV hosts join forces on a co-produced "CPEC Time" program on Pakistani television to discuss the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Ahmed, 2019). Through a partnership between China's Shandong Journalist Association and its counterpart in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley, journalists on both sides have jointly produced content such as documentary films on Uzbek handicrafts, Uzbek horses, and the Confucius Institutes (Custer et al., 2019b). CSPs can also involve more ambitious efforts to join forces on dissemination on at an institutional level rather than related to discrete pieces of content, such as the Yunnan Mobile Digital TV Company and the National Television Company of Kampuchea brokering a deal to pursue an 80-channel digital TV transmission network (Gai Shuqin, 2012).

In practice, CSPs can provide Beijing with a pass-through for PRC narratives to directly infuse domestic media coverage with minimal intermediation, while citizens who consume local news are oblivious to the fact that they are effectively consuming the CCP's propaganda. Redistribution of PRC state-run media content via domestic outlets seldom discloses that the material, in whole or in part, originally came from a Chinese state-owned enterprise. This is particularly concerning in countries with lower levels of capacity to produce high quality news that maintains journalistic integrity. During interviews with journalists conducted across 9 Asia-Pacific countries (Custer et al., 2018 and 2019b), it was not uncommon for interviewees to say how easy it was to copy content from Xinhua or other PRC news media (with the permission of their CSPs) and paste that into their own news stories to meet a deadline.

Although CSPs are the most readily quantifiable way of monitoring the PRC's ability to influence domestic media, Beijing also interacts with individual journalists and editors across the globe in ways that also can determine what is covered, how, and with what tone. One important way that Beijing does this is by offering to step in with professional

development opportunities for local journalists to either participate in training programs offered locally or visit China as part of journalist exchanges. For example, the China Radio and TV Company for International TechnoEconomic Cooperation offers technical training courses on radio and TV management with an emphasis on developing countries (CRTV, 2011). Such courses feature lectures on Chinese broadcasting, site visits to Chinese state media production facilities and manufacturing plants for radio and TV equipment (Custer et al., 2019). CRTV (2017) estimates that more than 1400 participants from over 100 countries have attended the courses as of 2017, going home to become the “backbones of their radio and TV institutions.”

Beijing has doubled down on brokering new content sharing partnerships with counterpart media outlets over the years. Although the first instances occurred in 2000, the year 2016 was an inflection point. Prior to this, the PRC signed nine agreements on average per year. However, perhaps sensing an opportunity as the U.S. and Western countries turned inward due to populist pressures at home in 2016, Beijing began to flood global newspapers with its content at an unprecedented rate, signing 72 new CSPs in a single year. This followed a directive from President Xi himself during a speech at the People’s Daily, where he “...emphasized that Chinese media ‘must love, serve and protect the CCP’” (CMP Staff, 2021).

Beijing’s journalist exchange programs are a powerful tool to build rapport and ingratiate itself with individual journalists in the hope that they view China more favorably and that, ultimately, this translates into more positive coverage when they return to their home countries. Journalists interviewed in the Asia-Pacific often viewed these interactions as making a positive impression on them, as their hosts “roll out the proverbial red carpet” (Custer et al., 2019b). Participants describe these press junkets as elaborate affairs which treat visitors to “multicourse meals, cultural exhibitions, and visits to model development projects or cities as part of a tightly controlled program of events (Custer et al., 2018). AidData tracked 539 separate instances where Beijing has hosted foreign journalists from the region in China between 2002 and 2017.

The PRC has also employed other means to influence the broader environment in which journalists operate in other countries, as well as foreign journalists working in China, using carrots to reward those who are deemed friendly to Beijing and sticks to punish or cajole its critics. Access to officials, credentials to cover important events or visas to visit China, for example, are important currencies for media outlets to produce compelling



news stories, which makes them powerful levers for Beijing to exert influence through opening or closing these opportunities for journalists. In turn, this creates levers of potential control for Beijing when it comes to approving or denying applications for new or renewal visas, requests for press credentials to cover events, and access to Chinese officials for interviews or comments.

The results can range in level of severity from missed opportunities to interference in operations and more serious acts of harassment or physical violence. On the less severe end of the spectrum, accredited journalists from Australia and Papua New Guinea were banned from covering events organized by the PRC alongside the 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit (RSF, 2018), while Nepali editors reported receiving calls from the Chinese embassy to mute criticism of China in their coverage or lose advertising revenue (Custer et al., 2019b). The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) reports that Beijing routinely restricts or cuts short visas for journalists covering sensitive topics such as the treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang province and a growing number of members have had difficulty renewing their visas (FCCC, 2018 and 2019).

For some journalists the consequences are far beyond the level of mere inconvenience and constitute more serious levels of outright interference or intimidation. According to the FCCC (2018, 2019), half of foreign correspondents surveyed in China in 2017 said they had directly experienced some form of "interference, harassment, and physical violence" in their reporting, with 55 percent in 2019 saying that the environment had even further deteriorated (ibid). Journalists working for American media outlets such as Voice of America are not immune from this harassment, as they were pressured to prematurely end a live interview with a Chinese dissident (Guo Wengui) and later fined (ibid). Even Chinese journalists are not immune from such heavy-handed treatment, as they may be harassed for failing to provide "proper coverage" (Hassid, 2008) or censored on social media (King et al., 2013).

The PRC has also begun to experiment with more expanded use of digital harassment as a strategic communications tool in recent years, not only focused on journalists but the broader public. The rise of artificial intelligence and other technologies has made it easier for states to engage in "computational propaganda" where they couple automation in the form of bots,<sup>11</sup> along with human curation, to flood the information

---

<sup>11</sup> Machine operated accounts to automatically generate and spam content out across a social media network.

environment with false or sensationalized information. As compared to the other overtures described in this section, human trolls and automated bots are more covert, in the sense that they often present a “false front” in not revealing the identity of the real individual(s) or organization behind the account and thus make it more difficult to clearly identify affiliations with a state actor.

However, these tools can, and often are, used in synergy with more overt communication channels. For example, official channels may intentionally pick up stories manufactured by trolls to boost their signal, while troll farms and bots may do the same to amplify official efforts via alternate channels. One of the rationales for this mixing of covert and overt tools is to manipulate how much importance individuals or groups attach to a specific event or news story relative to others (Kluver et al., 2020). State and non-state actors can artificially inflate the importance of a topic or view by flooding the physical and digital air waves with their preferred stories (Schleibs et al., 2020).

The net result of these tactics is to create a “firehose of falsehood” (Polyakova and Boyer, 2018), that allows the PRC to exploit a 24/7 news cycle and the scale of the Internet to continuously push out false or sensationalized information at a volume and velocity that is hard to control or counter. In this respect, this is very much tied into broader strategies such as “exploiting search engine results” and “trafficking in conspiracies” that Brandt describes the PRC using to inauthentically amplify messages in her companion paper to this one. The Hong Kong protests, and COVID-19 are two powerful examples of how this firehose of falsehood works in practice. Covert PRC-affiliated accounts on Facebook and Twitter were identified as promoting content “depicting Hong Kong protesters as violent and extreme” (Custer et al., 2019a), as well as responsible for 70 percent of U.S. social media fake news stories related to COVID (Tomlin, 2021).

## 2.2 Education and Cultural Cooperation

In addition to its overtures in the international media arena, the PRC also uses more personalized public diplomacy to build people-to-people ties between Chinese citizens and foreign publics in counterpart countries. With a nod to the playbooks of other foreign powers, the PRC has invested substantially in education and cultural exchange programs over the last two decades—opening language and cultural centers overseas,

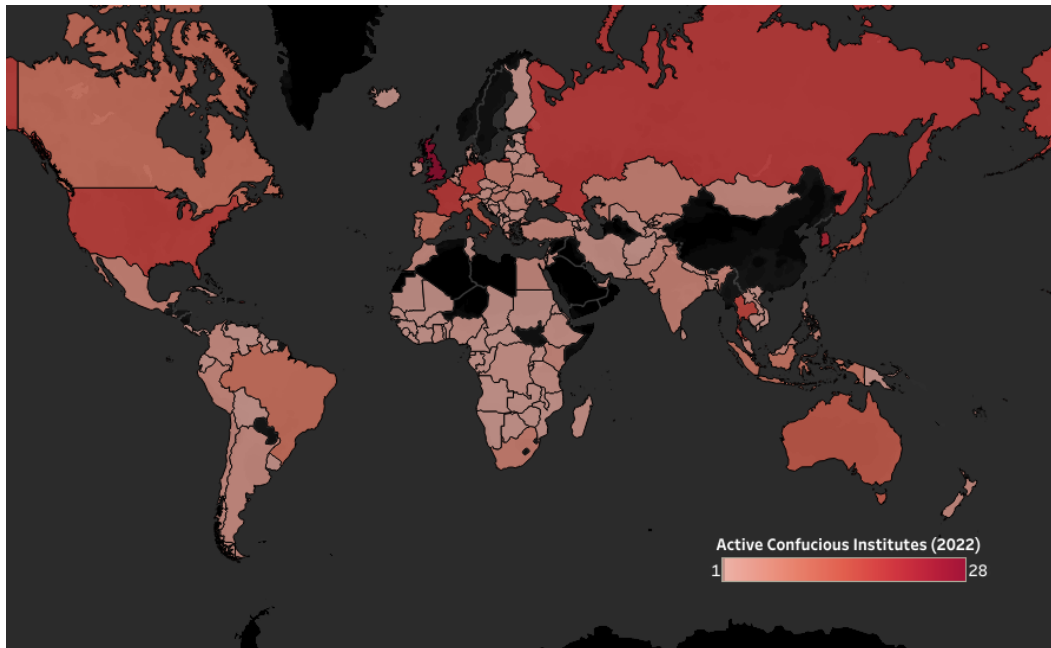
proffering generous scholarships and reducing other barriers to stoke demand to study in China, as well as providing vocational training and technical assistance.

The strategic rationale is twofold. In the short term, these pathways create relationships and goodwill that Beijing hopes will increase affinity towards Chinese culture, norms, and narratives. In the long term, as these social networks mature, past participants in education and cultural programs are more likely to source ideas, policies, goods, and services from Chinese counterparts. Taken together with the fact that the priority target audiences for such initiatives tend to be the sons and daughters of government, military, and industry, and cultural elites—this is a long-term investment in winning friends and allies within the next generation of leaders.

As Beijing's signature cultural diplomacy initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Confucius Institutes and Classrooms have a mandate to promote Chinese language and culture abroad. Confucius Institutes (CIs) are typically embedded within local universities in a counterpart country and promote cooperation with Chinese businesses. Confucius Classrooms (CC) are often established in secondary schools as either satellites to larger Confucius Institutes in the country, or as stand-alone institutions with a much smaller sphere of influence and fewer resources. These classrooms provide access to language classes, Chinese cultural materials, cultural events for the host school or the community, as well as facilitating participation in exchange and study abroad programs in China (Lien et al., 2012).

As of 2022, there are 448 Confucius Institutes in operation globally (Figure 4). The majority are in Europe (39 percent) and Asia (27 percent), consistent with the PRC's emphasis on these two regions in its media engagements described previously. The PRC's CIs are geographically dispersed, but ten countries account for more than one-third of its portfolio: the UK (28 CIs), South Korea (22), France (18), the Russian Federation (18), Germany (17), the U.S. (17), Thailand (16), Japan (14), Australia (12) and Italy (12). Yet, consistent with what we observed with its international broadcasting footprint, Africa is an up-and-coming region of interest to the PRC. The African continent is home to the third largest share of CIs, led by South Africa (6) and Kenya (4), but the numbers of CIs per country tend to be smaller.

Figure 4. Concentration of Active Confucius Institutes, by Country, Snapshot as of 2022



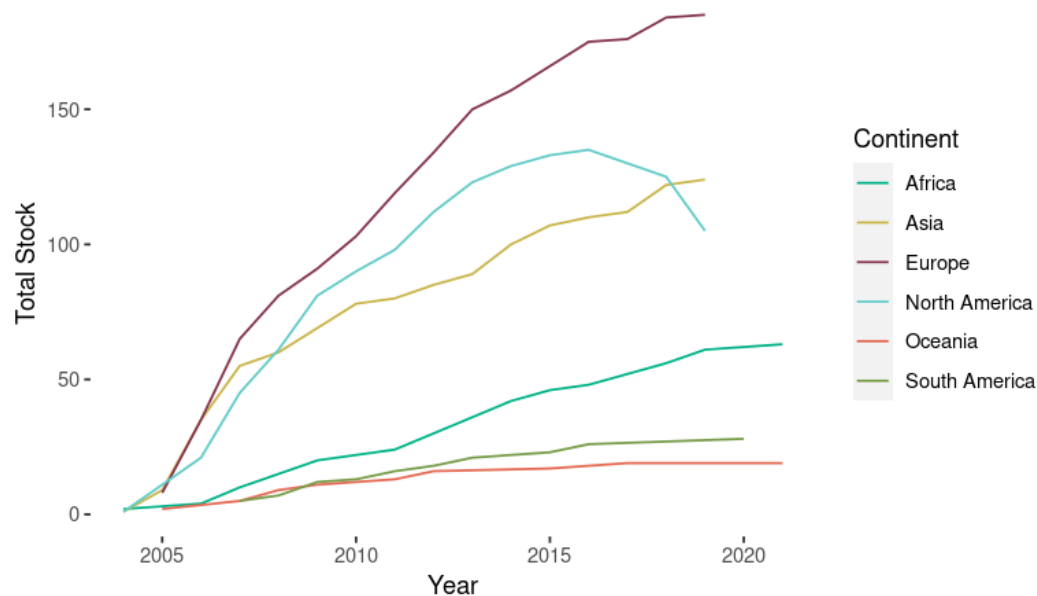
*Note: This gradient map shows the concentration of active PRC Confucius Institutes (excludes Confucius Classrooms) as of the end of the 2021-2022 academic year subtracting out institutions that had previously closed. The lighter colors indicate fewer numbers of CIs in each country and the darker colors indicate a higher concentration in each country. Black indicates no CI presence. Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Beijing's CIs tend to be heavily concentrated in countries that are economically or politically powerful, with less emphasis on smaller, poorer, and closed societies. That said, the PRC does have at least one CI in almost every country in the world. At the subnational level, it places CIs in cities that are either economically or geopolitically important to Beijing (Custer et al., 2021a). At the primary and high-school level, CCs appear in all regions, but are predominantly located in the United States and Europe. In 2018, the last year of data available, more than 45 percent of all CCs globally were located within the United States, followed by the United Kingdom at 14 percent. Of the top seven countries hosting CCs, six of the countries have English as their primary language.

Taking the long view, Beijing is continuously adapting how it uses CIs and CCs within its larger strategic communications portfolio as it adjusts course to navigate headwinds in the form of increased resistance in target countries and criticism from competitors like the U.S. After the first center was established in 2004, PRC leaders initially doubled

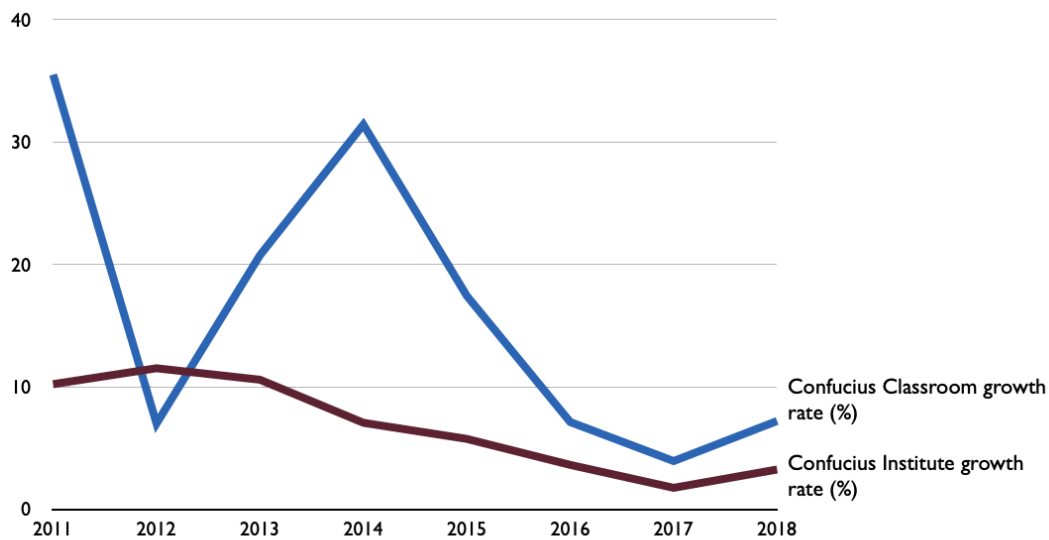
down on opening new CIs and CCs, with growth rates reaching a high of 8 percent and 23 percent per year, respectively, between 2013 and 2015. The single largest increase in new centers occurred in a single year: 2014 (+234 centers). However, after this early bonanza, Beijing dramatically pulled back on new centers. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was certainly a major disrupter, the PRC's subtle course correction began much earlier. By 2016 to 2018, the average growth rate for new centers declined to 3 percent for CIs and 6 percent for CCs.

Figure 5. Total Number of PRC Cultural Centers (Accounts for Closures) By Region, 2004-2022



*Note: This graph shows the total number of CIs and CCs in each year by region beginning in 2004 and through the 2021-2022 academic year (no data for CCs after 2018). The yearly totals subtract out closures. Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Figure 6. Growth Rate of New CIs and CCs Opened, 2011 to 2018



*Note: This graph shows the growth rate of new CIs (red line) and new CCs (blue line) between 2011 and 2018, years where the openings of the two types of institutions overlapped. Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The PRC's investments in Confucius centers are highly synergistic with another area of focus: educational exchange. Prior to the pandemic, Beijing prioritized positioning China to be a premier study abroad destination to compete with other popular locations such as the U.S., Europe, Japan, and Australia. The CIs and CCs serve multiple purposes in this regard: to expose foreign students to study abroad options in China, promote scholarship opportunities, and provide the language training that would make them competitive to win those scholarships. In this respect, the Confucius centers are invaluable to the PRC in identifying new study abroad candidates early on to be cultivated and later fed into China's higher education institution network. In addition to

language training and scholarships, the PRC also employed loosened visa restrictions<sup>12</sup> and English medium of instruction courses<sup>13</sup> to further seal the deal.

Chinese state-backed exchange and scholarship programs are under the purview of the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE); however, there is an extensive network of actors involved. The China Scholarship Council (CSC), the MoE's non-profit arm, implements its international academic exchange programs (Custer et al., 2019a). Numerous central government agencies (Ministry of Commerce, Chinese Academy of Sciences, World Academy of Sciences), provincial governments, along with Chinese universities and private sector actors sponsor scholarships for international students (Latief and Lefen, 2018). Given the emphasis in the Belt and Road Initiative in facilitating multiple “connectivities” between countries (i.e., physical, digital, and social), the PRC launched a new Silk Road Scholarship fund to support student exchange between China and BRI countries, along with scholarships for Mandarin language learning for students from BRI countries (China MoE, 2016). Across these and other vehicles, the PRC has awarded over 350,000 scholarships to international students between 2010 and 2018, while 13 percent of international students in China were scholarship recipients (CAFSA, 2010).

In specific regional analyses conducted in the Asia-Pacific and Africa, we see that Beijing is highly strategic in how it employs government-backed scholarships, using access to these subsidized opportunities to stoke future demand in countries that have typically not sent large contingents of students to study China (Custer et al., 2021a; Dumont et al., 2021).<sup>14</sup> Prior to the pandemic, the PRC had proven to be very adept in casting its study abroad opportunities and scholarships in a very generous light, with prospective candidates viewing Chinese scholarships as more generous than those in other countries (Custer et al., 2018). Yet, in a head-to-head analysis of government

---

<sup>12</sup> In a comparative analysis of visa requirements and fees imposed by several study abroad destination countries for international students from 13 countries in South and Central Asia, Custer et al. (2021a) found that the PRC offered the least burdensome requirements—in terms of cost, health requirements, and proof of payment—for students from most countries in the region. By contrast, the U.S. and the UK offered substantially more burdensome, time intensive, and costly requirements for prospective study abroad candidates to overcome.

<sup>13</sup> According to an assessment by Custer et al. (2021a), the use of English as a medium of instruction in “two-thirds of the top 351 higher education institutions in China” is a powerful incentive for international students who have not learned Mandarin, do speak English, but want to study somewhere closer to home or cheaper than the alternatives.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Custer et al. (2019a) found that “Beijing appears to disproportionately target scholarships to EAP countries that lag their peers in sending their students to study abroad in China. In other words, the number of students an EAP country sent to study in China was negatively correlated with the volume of Chinese government backed scholarships a country received. Dumont et al. (2021) found that scholarships were the PRC's preferred mode of technical assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa—a region which had not previously sent high numbers of students to study in China—each year from 2010-2015.

scholarships offered by popular study abroad destinations such as the U.S., UK, Japan, and Australia, we find that this is a well curated (and encouraged) narrative that is factually untrue. Custer et al. (2019a) found that “after adjusting for purchasing power parity, Chinese scholarships carried roughly two-thirds of the value of most scholarships offered by other developed nations in relative terms.”

The PRC’s embassies abroad “play a dual role” in educational exchange: attracting foreign students to study in China, while also “mobilizing Chinese students overseas to serve as people-to-people ambassadors” (Custer et al., 2019a). President Xi Jinping has tasked the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCPPD) to work with the Ministry of Education and embassies abroad to impress upon Chinese overseas students their responsibility to help increase “patriotic energy” for the “China Dream” within their host countries (ibid).

This exhortation sparked pushback among foreign governments who have begun to more closely scrutinize Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs), which support expatriate Chinese students abroad, organize cultural events, and often receive funding from the local embassy (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2018, p. 10; Hamilton, 2018). Since most Chinese students studying abroad tend to do so in advanced economies and open democracies (e.g., the US, UK, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand), this has provoked concerns in line with research which points to the potential of authoritarian regimes to use the relative openness of democratic societies as a weapon against them through the practice of “sharp power” (Walker et al., 2020). Although the choices of students to study abroad is not likely one dictated by the PRC,<sup>15</sup> President Xi’s own statements underscore that the CCP almost certainly sees its overseas students as an important face of strategic communications with their host country peers.

Beyond students, the PRC also set its sights on providing vocational training for both civil servants and professionals. These projects, which include local training programs within counterpart countries and bringing professionals to study in China, allow Beijing to simultaneously shape professional norms and build relationships with local communities. In past research, we have found extensive examples of the PRC offering training for local law enforcement, border patrols, and justice officials, among others

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, the Economist (2016) offers one widely cited reason being the desire to bypass the competitive National University Entrance Examination (Gaokao) required to pursue higher education within China.



(Custer et al., 2019b and 2021a; Dumont et al., 2021) which gives Beijing a potent channel to influence leaders charged with discharging and protecting the rule of law in their countries.

Another potentially powerful vehicle to watch is the PRC's use of Luban Workshops. Backed by a consortium of 31 companies and 18 vocational colleges in China (TEDA, 2021), the Luban workshops pair Chinese institutions with counterparts in host countries (like the CI model) to "export high-quality vocational education overseas" (Custer et al., 2021a) to socialize demand for Chinese technology, standards, and training. Although there were only 18 Luban Workshops globally as of May 2021, President Xi has referenced these institutions in several speeches promising to open more in future (DevonshireEllis, 2021; Yau and van der Kley, 2021).

### 3. Russia's Practice of Strategic Communications

In the remainder of this section, we provide an overview of the ways, means, and target audiences for the Kremlin's global strategic communications efforts—focusing on its international broadcasting and public diplomacy overtures with foreign publics—and how this has varied over time and space.

#### 3.1 Media Broadcasting and Cooperation

President Putin began cracking down on Russia's domestic traditional media decades ago. In his first year as president, he took control of two of the three major Russian independent television networks in 2000, knowing that they were important sources of news for citizens (Gates, 2021, p. 264). Putin also has a long record of harassing Russian journalists to suppress criticism of the government (Gates, 2021, p. 271). These actions have allowed the Kremlin to control domestic stories for decades.

Similar to the CCP, the Kremlin's extensive state-run media apparatus also focuses on disseminating its preferred narratives abroad and offers the most direct route for influence of foreign publics. The main conduits include two international news agencies (Sputnik and TASS), along with seven state-backed television networks (Channel One, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Russia Today, Russia 1, Russia 24, Russia K, RTR-Planeta). These can be further bifurcated into two groups. Most of the outlets appear to have a circumscribed geographic reach, primarily focusing their content on Russian-language speaking minorities within the states of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. TASS, RT, and Sputnik, however, are explicitly global in their outlook and distribution networks, like the profile of the PRC's Xinhua, CCTV/CGTN, and CRI, for example.

Among the globally focused outlets, TASS is one of Russia's oldest continuously operating media institutions and serves as the state news wire service. The outlet's 2000 employees staff domestic operations, as well as operate 63 news bureaus in 60 countries (TASS, n.d.), including the "largest network of foreign correspondents among [all] Russian media" (COP22, 2016).<sup>16</sup> TASS boasts that it produces 100 news products, including 70 news feeds and its digital holding tarr.ru,<sup>17</sup> with content in five languages:

---

<sup>16</sup> In fact, TASS says that its correspondents are the only Russian media representatives in 16 countries.

<sup>17</sup> TASS (n.d.) reports that tarr.ru is one of the largest online media outlets in Russia, exceeding 267 million users with approximately 34 million unique visitors per month. However, it should be noted that there are concerns that Russia state media routinely inflates its audience numbers.

Russian, English, Spanish, French, Chinese (TASS, n.d.; COP22, 2016). To further expand its influence, TASS reports that it has held 1500 press events attended by domestic and foreign elites, as well as brokered partnerships with 370 media sources from 134 countries (TASS, n.d.b).

Russia Today, commonly known by its acronym RT, was founded in 2005 and is now Russia's most visible international news outlet. A television network focusing on international news for a global audience (Russia Today. (n.d.)), it positions itself as a competitor to other state-backed international news outlets, including the British Broadcasting Corporation, France 24, Deutsche Welle, and Al Jazeera. Although it was initially launched as an English-language TV station (BBC, 2022), it also produces programming in Arabic, Spanish, and French.

RT appears to have the most extensive distribution network of the main Russian state media channels: 22 satellites and over 230 operators push out its signal (Russia Today. (n.d.)). The network boasts that over 700 million people in over 100 countries watch its programming (ibid); however, the statistics can be misleading as RT is suspected of vastly exaggerating its audience to project strength vis-a-vis international competitors (GEC, 2022). It also advertises the fact that RT has established partnerships with over 8000 hotels,<sup>18</sup> making the channel "available in more than 2.7 million hotel rooms throughout the world—more than any other channel." Apart from Facebook and Twitter, the Kremlin also uses VKontakte, a popular social media app in Russia and Eastern Europe, to promote its messages.

RT's subsidiary, Ruptly, focuses exclusively on producing viral multi-media content largely aimed for social media consumption. Ruptly, in turn, wholly owns Redfish, a Berlin-based media company with a reported 1.4 million social media followers (GEC, 2022; Gilbert, 2022). Redfish is worth mentioning as an example of an emergent form of state-directed propaganda: designed to be ideological but produced in a way to convince the public of its believability and forget the associations with the Kremlin. As a case in point, Redfish gained notoriety for posting a map of airstrikes around the world mere hours after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

---

<sup>18</sup> As of 2010, this included top international channels with linkages to the West such as "Hilton, Ritz-Carlton, Marriott International, Hyatt, Radisson Hotels & Resorts, Kempinski, Renaissance Hotels, Taj Resorts and Palaces, Holiday Inn, Four Seasons Hotels, Starwood Hotels, Best Western, and Sofitel." This picture may have changed substantially since the outbreak of most recent hostilities in Ukraine, as many countries have enacted bans and sanctions on the distribution of Russian state media such as RT and Sputnik.

In hindsight, it was a blatant effort to deflect criticism away from the Kremlin's actions, yet it was so subtly done that thousands of people shared and re-shared the visual, taking up the call to "condemn war everywhere," without realizing that it was produced by Russian state media (Gilbert, 2022). This is striking especially because social networks like Twitter often proactively disclose, and label media outlets affiliated with state actors (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Redfish Viral Social Media Map of Global Air Strikes to Deflect Criticism of the Kremlin, 2022



Sputnik is the newest of the trio of globally focused outlets, functioning as both an international wire service and radio network—the foreign face of the Russian media group Rossiya Segodnya. Following a major reorganization of Russian state media orchestrated by Putin in late 2013, Sputnik was launched in November 2014 with a stated mission to cover international political and economic news for a global audience (GEC, 2022; Sputnik International, 2021). Sputnik broadcasts its programming via

terrestrial radio as well as its website, using 25 multimedia centers<sup>19</sup> around the world to produce and distribute content in 30 languages<sup>20</sup> (Sputnik International, 2021; GEC, 2022).

Among the outlets focused on Russian compatriots, Channel One television is the post-Cold War successor to the Soviet-era Programme One station, which broadcasts Russian language programming targeting Russian speakers living in or near the former USSR (Channel One Russia, n.d.). Rossiyskaya Gazeta is a Russian-language newspaper founded in 1990, focusing on socio-political and business news (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, n.d.). The Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), established the same year, oversees numerous media outlets in Russia, several of which reach publics outside of Russia in the states of the former USSR and into Eastern Europe (VGTRK, n.d.). These stations include RTR-Planeta (international service), Russia 1 (entertainment), Russia 24 (news), and Russia K (culture), which primarily serve either the domestic Russian market or Russian-speaking communities abroad. Founded in 1997 by the city of Moscow's government, TV Centre provides Russian-language coverage of news and human-interest topics for domestic and international audiences (TV Centre, n.d.).

These primarily Russian-language outlets have a more limited geographic focus on the states of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia compared to RT and Sputnik. Yet, the sheer number of these Kremlin-affiliated channels and their ubiquity is potentially powerful in dominating the information space in the relatively small media markets of these countries. Television, radio, and news agencies appear to be the Kremlin's preferred modalities for reaching consumers across the 17 Eastern Europe and Eurasian countries, while print has a narrower footprint (Dumont et al., 2022). Kyrgyzstan (11 outlets), Armenia (10 outlets), Georgia (9 outlets), Kazakhstan (8 outlets), and Belarus (7 outlets) attracted the most attention (ibid). This stable of Russian-language offerings is strategically important to the Kremlin given its express interest in mobilizing Russian ethnic and linguistic minorities.

---

<sup>19</sup> As of 2014, Sputnik had multimedia centers in London, Washington, D.C., New Delhi, Cairo, Montevideo, Beijing, Berlin, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, Paris, Buenos Aires, Belgrade, Helsinki, Minsk, Kiev, Tashkent, Astana, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Sukhumi, Tskhinvali, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Baku and Chisinau. It further says that each center is staffed by 30-100 local professionals. As Repnikova (2022) notes, with the outbreak of hostilities, some of these centers were shut down.

<sup>20</sup> Sputnik (2014) reports that it offers content available in the following languages: Russian, Abkhaz, Azerbaijani, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Crimean Tatar, Dari, English, Estonian, French, Finnish, German, Georgian, Hindi, Japanese, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Latvian, Moldovan, Ossetian, Polish, Portuguese, Pashto, Spanish, Serbian, Tajik, Turkish, Uzbek, and Ukrainian.

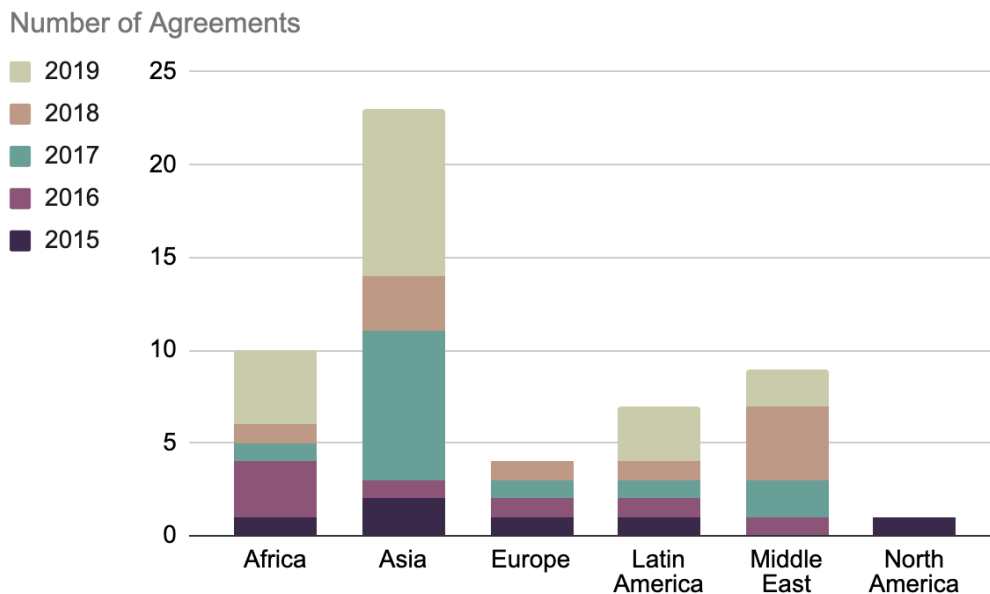
Similar to the dynamics described with the PRC's content sharing partnerships, the Kremlin also has demonstrated interest in borrowing the local credibility of domestic media outlets in other countries to piggyback on their existing audiences to distribute its narratives. Bugayova and Barros (2020) argue that this is a more contemporary development, capturing 50 instances of new agreements signed between Russian state media and agencies in 39 counterpart countries after 2015, coinciding with Russia's revised "Information Security Doctrine." The Kremlin brokered agreements with outlets in every region (Figure 8), yet the preponderance of these overtures were in Asia (43 percent), followed by Africa (19 percent) and the Middle East (17 percent). There was also substantial emphasis on cooperation with China (7 agreements), India (4 agreements), Iran (3 agreements), and Indonesia (3 agreements).<sup>21</sup>

Although these agreements most often related to content or information sharing, some referenced joint projects and training for local journalists (Bugayova and Barros, 2020). For example, Sputnik and RT agreed to provide training for Cuba's Institute of Radio and Television and Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, respectively (ibid). This emphasis on socializing the next generation of journalists to the Kremlin's standards and views is consistent with broader efforts such as the "Sputnik Pro Educational Project" which the outlet says has trained emerging journalists from 90 countries to date (Aregbesola, 2022). Other agreements cast their goals in more philosophical terms, cooperating with United News of India in 2019 to democratize and eliminate "Western media bias in presenting international information" and agreeing at the 2019 BRICS Summit that Sputnik would assist member nations to create a "unified fact-checking platform...to counter the dissemination of false information" (Bugayova and Barros, 2020).

---

<sup>21</sup> There was one general agreement signed with BRICS countries included in the totals for China and India, while the others were all bilateral agreements.

Figure 8. Distribution of Kremlin Media Cooperation Agreements with Counterpart Outlets, 2015-2019



*Notes: This visual shows the number of known media cooperation agreements signed between Russia state media and counterpart outlets in other countries during the period 2015 and 2019. Additional agreements that were initially considered but subsequently stalled or canceled are excluded. Source: Underlying data for this graph was pulled and adapted from analysis by Bugayova and Barros (2020).*

Less visible than its international broadcasting and cooperative agreements, but equally if not more important are the Kremlin's efforts to co-opt the governance of counterpart media outlets—either through buying up ownership shares or cultivating ties with other owners—in ways that have the potential to shape both what is covered and how. Vulnerability is highest for countries which have relatively small media markets with few alternative sources of information, high concentration of media in the hands of relatively few elites, and low degrees of transparency about who owns the media (Dumont et al., 2022). These attributes very much characterize several countries in Russia's immediate backyard in Eastern Europe and Eurasia where this channel of influence is arguably most strongly felt.

In an in-depth analysis of top media outlets (print, TV, radio, online) across 17 countries associated with the former Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, Dumont et al. (2022) found that the Kremlin had deeply penetrated and compromised several media markets, as many of the most consumed outlets were either directly Russian owned or had owners with known or suspected ties with the Kremlin or Russian oligarchs through professional and personal connections. The most serious cases were Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine

(before the February 2022 invasion). Figure 9 shows what this co-optation can look like in an illustrative case like Moldova, where the Kremlin is in prime position to influence coverage across 3 of 5 of the country's most consumed TV outlets, 2 of 5 top newspapers, 1 radio station, and 4 of the most popular online news platforms (ibid).

**Figure 9. Example of Russian Penetration of Local Media Markets — Moldova**

| <div> <div>No Russian ties</div> <div>Suspected Russian ties</div> <div>Known Russian ties</div> <div>Direct Russian ownership</div> <div>Local state-owned media</div> </div> |                                 |   |                     |           |
|--|---------------------------------|---|---------------------|-----------|
| Medium   | RankOutlet                      | Owner, Company                            | Owner, Individuals  | Owner (%) |
| Television   | 1Prime                          | General Media Group Corp LLC              | Vladimir Plahotniuc | 100       |
|  | 2Moldova 1                      | Teleradio-Moldova Company                 |                     | 100       |
|  | 3Jurnal TV                      | Reforma Art LLC                           | Victor Topa         | 100       |
|  | 4RTR Moldova                    | Rosmediakom                               | Sberbank            | Unknown   |
|  |                                 |   | Vneshekonombank     | Unknown   |
|  |                                 |   | VGTRK               | Unknown   |
|  |                                 | Valentina Stetco                          | Valentina Stetco    | 25        |
|  |                                 | SB Grup Media S.R.L.                      | Galina Sirbu        | 20        |
|  |                                 |   | Oxana Borsevici     | 5         |
|  | 5NTV Moldova                    | Exclusiv Media                            | Corneliu Furculita  | 100       |
| Newspaper  | 1Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove | Exclusiv Media                            | Corneliu Furculita  | 100       |
|  | 2Makler                         | Makler LLC                                | Olga Sviridova      | 50        |
|  |                                 |   | Valeriu Zelinschi   | 50        |
|  | 3Jurnal de Chisinau             | Reforma Art LLC                           | Victor Topa         | 100       |
|  | 4Arugmenti i Fakty              | Exclusiv Media                            | Corneliu Furculita  | 100       |
|  | 5Ziarul de Garda                | Publicatia Periodica Ziaruli de Garda SRL | Aneta Grosu         | 50        |
|  |                                 |   | Alina Radu          | 50        |
| Radio  | 1Radio Moldova                  | Teleradio-Moldova Company                 |                     | 100       |
|  | 2Radio Noroc                    | Noroc Media SRL                           | Doinita Topala      | 100       |



|        |             |                              |                        |       |
|--------|-------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| Online | 3Radio Plai | Radio Plai SRL               | Maria Covalenco        | 100   |
|        | 4Hit FM     | Radio Hit SRL                | Jana Lozovan           | 75    |
|        |             |                              | Pavel Lozovan          | 25    |
|        | 5Jurnal FM  | Reforma Art LLC              | Victor Topa            | 100   |
|        | 1Jurnal.md  | Reforma Art LLC              | Victor Topa            | 100   |
|        | 2Protv.md   | PPF Group                    | Petr Kellner Family    | 98.93 |
|        |             |                              | Ladislav Bartonicek    | 0.535 |
|        |             |                              | Jean-Pascal Duvieusart | 0.535 |
|        | 3Stiri.md   | Simpals LLC                  | Dmitri Volosin         | 90    |
|        |             |                              | Roman Stirbu           | 10    |
|        | 4Point.md   | Simpals LLC                  | Dmitri Volosin         | 90    |
|        |             |                              | Roman Stirbu           | 10    |
|        | 5Publika.md | General Media Group Corp LLC | Vladimir Plahotniuc    | 100   |

As Brandt (2022) discusses at length in her companion paper, Russia also relies heavily on covert actions to spread propaganda through social media and online news sites. This includes strategic use of trolls and targeted information operation campaigns to spread propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation, quickly and covertly. Paid Russian Internet trolls work to meet daily quotas by sharing across social media, but also undermine views that run “counter to Russian themes” by commenting on other sites such as discussion forums and news sites (Paul, 2016). Besides RT, there are dozens of other proxy news sites that share Russian propaganda but hide their affiliation. In the case of both the trolls and the proxy news sites, obfuscating that these sources are acting in the Kremlin’s interest is important to influence the target audience.

Trolls produce Russian propaganda quickly. They are “responsive and nimble” since they do not need to fact check, and often “repeat and recycle disinformation” to drill down on pro-Russian themes and messages (Paul, 2016). Social media quickly picks up Russian disinformation and disseminates it, and it is a near-impossible challenge to stop given that it is “rapid, continuous, and repetitive, and it lacks commitment to consistency” (Paul, 2016). This information could be intended to cause harm or

confusion or be benign but is all part of the Kremlin's broader goal to influence beyond its borders. While some of these efforts clearly target Western countries and organizations, such as the efforts to undermine the 2016 U.S. elections, others are merely to confuse the truth. Compared to military influence, these strategic communications efforts are relatively inexpensive. However, outside of Europe, Russia has made less significant gains by using these tactics than the U.S. usually fears (Rumer, 2021).

### 3.2 Education and Cultural Cooperation

Beyond the realm of media, the Kremlin has an expansive education and cultural exchange effort. It has historically granted an estimated 15,000 to 18,000 scholarships annually for international students to attend its universities (Study in Russia, 2022; Amur State University, 2022), with recipients receiving a modest monthly payment of 1300 rubles and student housing (Amur State University, 2022). Prior to the Ukraine invasion and the current wave of international sanctions, Russia was a relatively easy country to access for prospective study abroad candidates from Commonwealth of Independent States' countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), as it had "relatively lax visa requirements" compared to other popular destinations such as the U.S. and UK (Custer et al., 2021a).

The PRC's Confucius Institutes and Classrooms may have invited greater media attention, but the Kremlin has a much longer standing practice of opening Russian language and culture centers around the world. Custer et al. (2021a) identify some of the earliest examples opening as early as 1965 (New Delhi), 1974 (Dhaka), and 1975 (Mumbai). As of 2021-22, there were 338 Russian language and cultural centers open in 100 countries and semi-autonomous regions. These institutions are typically operated by one of two organizations, Rossotrudnichestvo<sup>22</sup> or Russkiy Mir,<sup>23</sup> though the Gorchakov Fund,<sup>24</sup> Moscow House, Pushkin Institute, and Foundation for Support of Compatriots were involved in some cases. In keeping with the Kremlin's strong interests

---

<sup>22</sup> Established in 2008, Rossotrudnichestvo (the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation) is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that promotes political and economic cooperation with Russia, including management of the country's exchange programs (Government of the Russian Federation, n.d.).

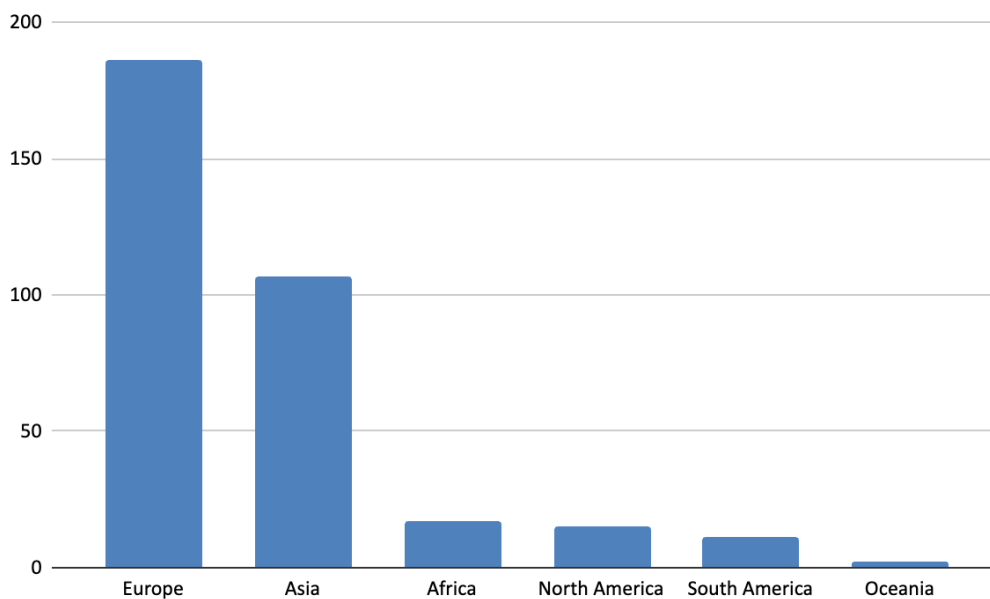
<sup>23</sup> Russkiy Mir was established in 2007 at Vladimir Putin's personal direction as an organization to promote the Russian language and culture as well as support ethnic Russians living abroad.

<sup>24</sup> The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, founded in 2010, promotes Russian culture abroad and provides funding to CSOs/NGOs.

in promoting Eurasianism (Watts et al., 2020), it is not surprising to see that Europe (55 percent) and Asia (32 percent) attracted the lion's share of these centers (Figure 10).

At the country level, the distribution of centers is somewhat more even as most receive between one and a handful of such institutions (Figure 11), though the top five recipients stand out as collectively accounting roughly one-fifth of the Kremlin's entire portfolio: Moldova (15), Bulgaria (14), Ukraine (14), China (11), Kyrgyzstan (10). Importantly, these numbers may not consider recent closures of centers because of the current hostilities in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the locations of these centers are also revealing—long prior to the 2022 invasion, there was a Russian language and cultural center in each of Ukraine's eastern oblasts,<sup>25</sup> which coincides with the Kremlin's broader strategic communications objective to use multiple influence tools to cultivate subcommunities sympathetic to its interests. As a marker of revealed priority, the Kremlin opened three centers each in Georgia's disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, more than 71 countries in Russia's portfolio which receive only 1 or 2.

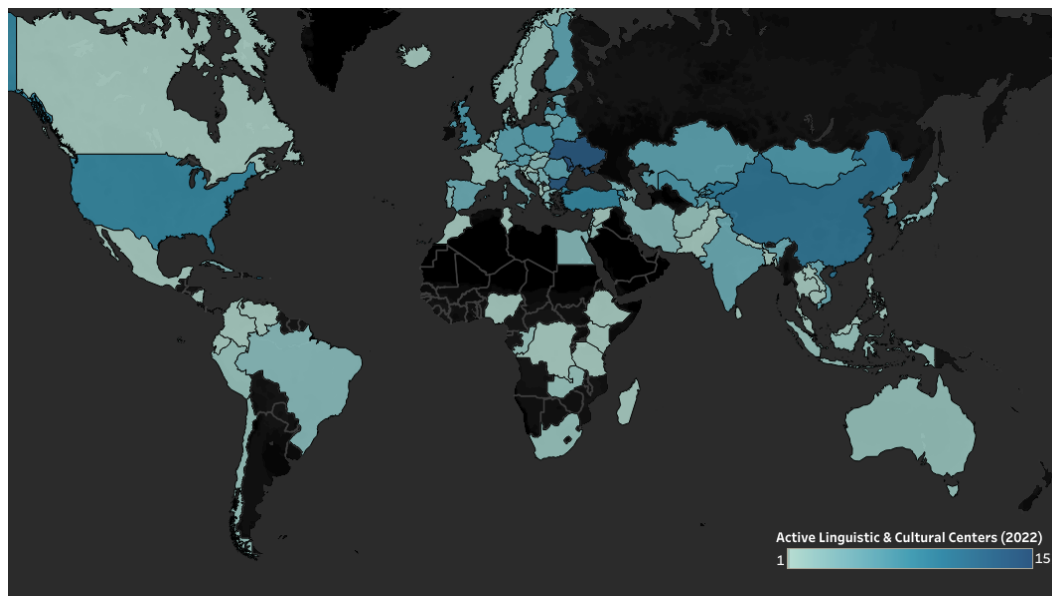
Figure 10. Regional Distribution of Russian Language and Cultural Centers, Snapshot as of 2021-22



*Note: This graph shows the regional breakdown of Russian language and cultural centers as of 2021-22 by geographic region; this may not reflect centers that were shut down by the authorities in the wake of*

<sup>25</sup> Dnipropetrovsk: 1; Donetsk: 2; Gorlovka: 1; Kharkov: 1; Kherson: 1; Kyiv: 2; Luhansk: 2; Odessa: 2; Rovno: 2; Simferopol: 1

Figure 11. Country Distribution of Russian Language and Cultural Centers, Snapshot as of 2021-22



*Note: This gradient map shows the number of Russian language and cultural centers as of 2021-22 by country, this may not reflect centers shut down by the authorities in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Lighter colors indicate fewer centers, darker colors indicate a higher volume of centers, and black no known centers. Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

In addition to global efforts, the Kremlin has pursued country- or region-specific initiatives to bolster people-to-people ties with key groups to elevate pro-Kremlin voices, promote shared identity, and encourage greater autonomy for disputed territories. Formal non-governmental organizations, informal community groups (e.g., Orthodox churches, Russian compatriot unions), think tanks, and schools are priority targets for Russian public diplomacy overtures, as these organizations can promote and legitimize Russian policies abroad (Vojtíšková et al., 2016).

For example, between 2015 and 2021, Custer et al. (2022a) identified over 710 cooperative projects between Kremlin-affiliated organizations<sup>26</sup> and counterpart organizations in 15 Eastern Europe and Eurasian countries. Local civil society organizations were the most common beneficiaries in 75 percent of these projects,

---

<sup>26</sup> In total, we identified 112 Kremlin-affiliated organizations who supplied financial or technical assistance, as well as event support and training to counterpart organizations in other countries. However, most projects were carried out by one of four organizations: Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian Embassy or Consulate General, Gorchakov Fund, or Russkiy Mir.

followed by local Russian compatriot unions (14 percent), schools (7 percent), and government agencies (8 percent). These cooperative efforts focused disproportionately on cultural events and educational programming that emphasized four key themes: youth patriotic education, Russia's leadership in fighting Nazi Germany and modern-day fascism, promoting shared religious ties between Orthodox communities, and Eurasian integration. The most favored recipients of these overtures also says a lot about the Kremlin's revealed preferences to focus on capital cities and disputed territories (such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Republika Srpska, and Donbas).

## 4. Outcomes and Implications for US Strategic Communications

In this concluding section, we focus on answering the ‘so what’ and ‘now what’ questions to derive insights from this analysis of PRC and Kremlin strategic communications’ practices to inform how we think about what, if anything, the U.S. should do differently as a result. Specifically, we consider the following questions:

- What is the interplay of how Beijing and Moscow use multiple strategic communications tools and other instruments of power to advance their goals?
- To what extent do we see that Beijing and Moscow are successful in translating strategic communications inputs into changing the attitudes and behaviors of their target audiences?
- How might U.S. strategic communications seek to counter the strategic communications strengths of these competitors and exploit their relative weaknesses?

### 4.1 Synchronicity: Strategic Communications in Concert With Other Tools

Rather than treating their broadcasting and public diplomacy as siloed activities, we see very strong indications that the PRC and the Kremlin are strategic in synchronizing the two streams of strategic communications, along with other instruments of power to reinforce several key narratives. Moreover, there are some instances where these two authoritarian powers have joined forces (either explicitly or implicitly) to amplify each other's messages in areas of common interest.

Beijing has promoted several common narratives across its broadcasting and education and cultural exchange activities. A consistent thread is a bid to recast norms and reframe narratives related to governance and human rights in ways that are conducive to its interest. Instead of rejecting human rights, the PRC aims to redefine them: emphasizing collective over individual rights and economic over political rights. It raises up the PRC’s development model as one to which other countries can aspire, Beijing as a “good neighbor” and “responsible global leader” interested in win-win solutions and

working together as part of a “community of common destiny.” Not only are these common refrains in the PRC’s state-run media and senior leader communications, but they are also reinforced by its education and exchange programs which train journalists, law enforcement, border patrol agents, justice officials, future leaders among other key demographics.

The most powerful combination of instruments in the PRC’s foreign policy toolkit is arguably how it exploits natural synergies between its broadcasting, public diplomacy, and economic power. In several AidData surveys of global leaders in low- and middle-income countries, the most common reasons given for why they view Beijing favorably and as having substantial influence over their policy priorities is due to the PRC’s economic importance to their countries (Custer et al., 2021a, 2021b). This subjective perception is based on objective fact, for the PRC is now the world’s largest financier of overseas development projects (Malik et al., 2021), the largest official creditor (Horn et al., 2019), and the number one trading partner for 70 percent of the world’s countries. Beijing amplifies this narrative through ensuring that its economic assistance is highly publicized by its state-run media, its CIs and CCs reinforce the appeal of learning Mandarin and studying in China as a gateway to economic opportunity.

Of course, just as multiple tools can work together, they can also undercut each other, and this is very much true for the PRC. Beijing’s assertiveness in projecting strength via reconnaissance aircraft and civilian fishing boats to assert maritime claims in the South China Sea, for example, do send a powerful signal, but arguably not one that wins it very many friends (Custer et al., 2018). Similarly, the strong association in people’s minds between China and the Belt and Road Initiative has proven to be a double-edged sword, making Beijing vulnerable to accusations of encouraging irresponsible borrowing behaviors and worsening corruption within partner countries (Horigoshi et al., 2022). Meanwhile, its heavy-handedness in mobilizing overseas Chinese students to promote the “China dream” and curbing the independence of journalists both at home and abroad has generated both attention and pushback.

Comparatively, less of Russia’s emphasis has been on its appeal as offering economic opportunities for other countries, though that has been true on a more limited basis in promoting the Eurasian Union specifically and Eurasian integration more generally. Certainly, the Kremlin has used both strategic communications and its position as an

energy power to shore up its economic importance to countries particularly in its near abroad and many of its neighbors still rely heavily on remittance flows from family members working in Russia. Nevertheless, more of Russia's efforts build upon pre-existing language and cultural ties with post-Soviet states, as well as appeal to shared values (anti-Westernism, conservatism) with foreign publics farther afield.

Noticeably, Russia's state-run media reinforced emphases seen in its education and cultural cooperation activities. In an in-depth analysis of TASS and Sputnik coverage, Custer et al. (2022a) found that nationalist and far-right groups were frequently mentioned to heighten anxiety about rampant neo-Nazism in ways that complimented the Kremlin's educational programming featuring its role in fighting Nazi Germany in the second World War. Russian state media raised the profile of Eurosceptic parties, Orthodox churches, and pro-Kremlin institutions in ways that were consistent with its education/cultural cooperation with these actors, while discrediting pro-European parties and organizations. Stories positioned Russia's actions in Donbas or Crimea, as well as Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, as examples of the Kremlin serving as the natural security partner, in line with its emphasis on youth patriotic education. Russian media coverage and cooperation efforts sought to increase the credibility and capacity of local authorities and civic actors in breakaway regions to assert autonomy and align with Moscow.

## 4.2 Outcomes: How Have Target Audiences Responded to the PRC and Russia?

As we have seen, the PRC and the Kremlin each have an ample array of strategic communications tools to potentially shape popular attitudes, media narratives, and elite behavior in ways that advance their respective economic, geopolitical, and security interests. Nevertheless, we must be wary of conflating inputs with outcomes. Just because they are doubling down on international broadcasting, partnerships with local media, as well as education and cultural exchange programs, does not necessarily mean that the PRC and the Kremlin are winning the world one yuan or ruble at a time. Participation rates (e.g., consumption of state broadcasting, volume of students studying abroad, agreements signed between host and counterpart institutions) do offer a way to gauge demand, or at least, reveal interest on the part of foreign publics in what the PRC or the Kremlin have to offer.



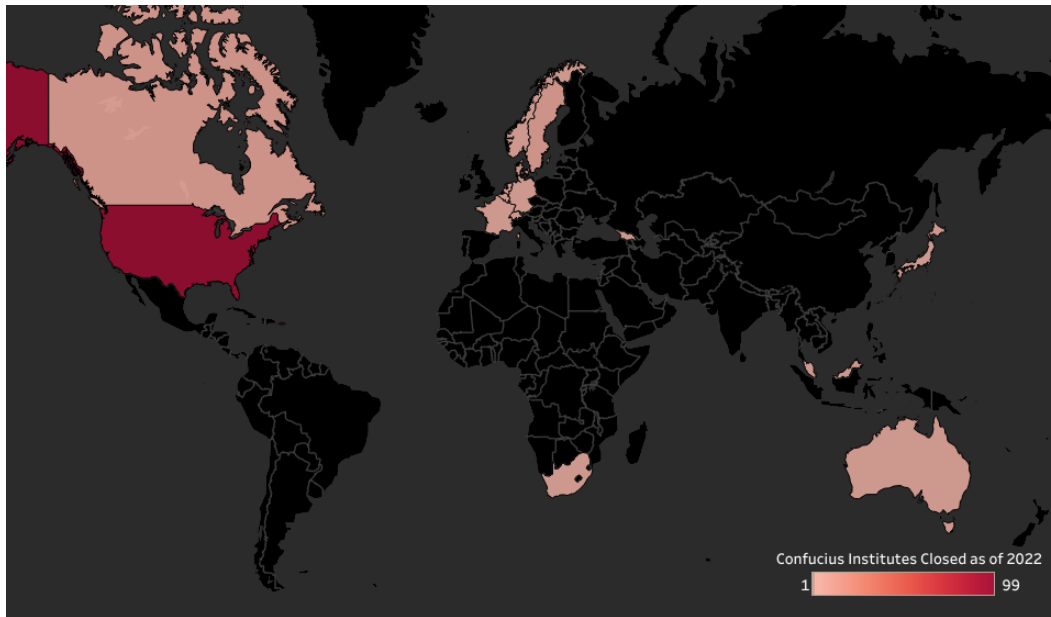
Nearly half a million foreign students from 196 countries chose to study in China in 2018 (the last year of available data),<sup>27</sup> making it one of the world's most popular study abroad destinations (China MoE, 2019), while 31 percent of the recipients of PRC scholarships surveyed in 2018 said they were encouraged to apply by a personal contact (Myungsik and Elaine, 2018). Nevertheless, the annual rate of growth in new international students studying abroad in China had begun to slow down, even prior to COVID-19 (Hartley, 2019). The PRC's zero-COVID policies have likely tarnished its appeal as the lead story in prospective students read more and more stories of "stranded" peers, unable to begin or resume their studies, due to travel restrictions (Yau et al., 2021; Custer et al., 2021).

In parallel, the increasing number of universities and schools that host CIs and CCs, as well as domestic media outlets signing content sharing agreements with PRC state media are also indications of a groundswell of demand. However, the PRC's CIs and CCs have stoked considerable debate between those that see these institutions as a danger to national security and academic freedom versus those who feel they add value or at least do limited harm. The increased scrutiny has led to highly publicized closures in some cases, particularly the United States (Figure 5), along with parliamentary inquiries and executive branch review of existing Confucius center agreements in Australia (Power, 2021) and India (Krishnan, 2020), among more muted concerns raised in other countries.

---

<sup>27</sup> From modest initial growth in students of about 5 percent a year in 2014-15, China's intake of new students skyrocketed in 2016-17 with growth rates of 10-12 percent (China MoE, 2017).

Figure 5. Total Number of Closures of Confucius Institutes, by Country, as of 2022



*Note: This gradient map shows the number of closures of Confucius Institutes (CCs are excluded) as of 2021 by country. Lighter colors indicate one or more closures, darker colors indicate a higher volume of closures, and black no known closures. Source: Underlying data collected via web scraping by AidData staff and research assistants.*

There are some indications that the PRC's investments are paying dividends in advancing its goals. A survey of PRC scholarships found that international students were more positive towards China the longer they studied abroad (Myungsik and Elaine, 2018).<sup>28</sup> In a series of studies on the PRC's media cooperation and public diplomacy activities in the Asia-Pacific, Custer et al. (2018, 2019a, 2019b) found that the PRC's Confucius Institutes, content-sharing partnerships, sister cities, and ambassador op-eds were associated with more favorable citizen views of the PRC's senior leadership.

Brazys and Dukalskis (2019), meanwhile, found that proximity to an active Confucius Institute was associated with more positive reporting about China within African media organizations. In addition to affecting the tone of coverage, Custer et al. (2019a) argue that the PRC's efforts may also have a "chilling effect" on criticism such that it affects what stories are covered at all, particularly regarding Beijing's human rights practices. Given that poorer and less democratic countries attract a disproportionate share of

---

<sup>28</sup> In their global study, Myungsik and Elaine (2018) found that most international students who resided in China for three or more years reported having positive impressions of China, regardless of their original views.

Beijing's scholarships, this may make these countries particularly vulnerable to PRC influence.<sup>29</sup>

The COVID-19 era is instructive in illuminating how the PRC synchronized its broadcasting, economic assistance, and public diplomacy to win friends and allies, particularly in the Global South. Although Beijing's so-called mask diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy, attracted a fair amount of derision in the international media, the perspective from low- and middle-income countries was quite different. In two AidData surveys of policymakers in South and Central Asia (2021) and Africa (2022), respondents largely gave the PRC high marks to the PRC for adapting its public diplomacy more effectively than other great powers in the era of COVID-19 and that its assistance during the pandemic had made them feel more favorably to Beijing (Custer et al., 2021a; Horigoshi et al., 2022).

Yet, there are several indications that attitudes towards China are not uniform and are in fact becoming more polarized. As Repnikova (2022) notes in her companion paper, perceptions of the PRC in liberal democracies tend to be more negative, while the PRC appears to be more successful in winning support from parts of the Global South such as Africa. Recent AidData analysis of attitudes towards the PRC across low- and middle-income countries, reinforces this view. Horigoshi et al. (2022) find that while the PRC has maintained a core base of support in surveys conducted across the Global South between 2005 and 2021, the share of citizens who disapprove of the PRC is growing and there are fewer undecideds after 2015. The PRC performs best with low-income countries which rely on its economic assistance more heavily (ibid).

Although the Kremlin is thought to inflate the reported audience metrics for state-run media (GEC, 2022), metrics from recipient countries about their top-most consumed media outlets might provide a more reliable barometer. If we take the case of Eastern Europe and Eurasia—the region in which Russia's media broadcasting is most heavily concentrated—Kremlin affiliated media do make an appearance in the top-five most consumed outlets (by media type) in some countries including: Argumenty i Fakty (Moscow government) in Uzbekistan and Ukraine, Russian Channel 1 in Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan (Channel One Eurasia subsidiary), as well as privately held outlets Komsomolskaya Pravda, Humor FM, Russkoe Radio and Russian Planet in Belarus.

---

<sup>29</sup> Myungsik and Elaine (2018) found that nearly 90 percent of the scholarship students they surveyed came from partly free or not free countries and 62 percent of the scholarship students belonged to countries that had a GDP per capita lower than that of China.

In other countries in the region, Russian state media was nowhere to be seen in the most consumed outlets, despite major investments to that effect. Globally, despite the uptick in media cooperation agreements between 2015 and 2019, others were stalled or withdrawn under circumstances that shed light on growing misgivings about Russian state media. EU sanctions against Russia related to Crimea and the Skripal poisoning reportedly disrupted Sputnik's operations in Estonia and Latvia (Bugayova and Barros, 2020). In other cases, governments in Slovakia and the Philippines backed away from cooperation with Sputnik and RT, because of public outcry (ibid). Perhaps the strongest reaction of all was in Lithuania, which deported Sputnik's chief editor in May 2019 for five years, citing the Russian journalist as "a threat to national security" (ibid). The EU's March 2022 decision to sanction and suspend the broadcasting activities of RT and Sputnik was a blow to Russia's strategic communications capabilities, as it resulted in the closures of its facilities across the bloc (Council of Europe, 2022).

Prior to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin was charting steady growth in attracting a growing number of international students to study in Russia, reaching 395 million by 2021: a net increase of 112 million from 2016 (Statista, 2022b). Russia's attraction as a study abroad destination has been strongest and most durable among countries within its near abroad, particularly Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan which together accounted for roughly half of its international student population in the 2020-21 academic year (ibid). However, there is also an indication of its growing ties to China and India, which sent the third and sixth largest numbers of students to study in Russia that same year (ibid). Yet, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent international sanctions against the Kremlin, have majorly disrupted this status quo, as foreign universities who had sent students to Russia began evacuating them and/or strongly advising their imminent return home (Packer, 2022).

Meanwhile, if the Kremlin is banking on shared language and cultural identity as the cornerstone of its influence strategy, there are some early warning signs that these ties are weakening in its near abroad. In an extensive review of their language and education policies, Custer et al. (2021a) found that the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) have all either "proposed changing, begun transitioning, or have already switched their alphabet from the Cyrillic to Latin Script." There is waning interest among young people to learn Russian as a foreign language and governments in the region are promoting other foreign languages such as English or Mandarin to support multiple objectives of

de-Russification, national pride, and economic opportunities (ibid). This linguistic transition may ultimately have ripple-effects in terms of depressing future consumption of its Russian-language media and ability to continuously attract international students.

### 4.3 Implications: Key Takeaways for U.S. Strategic Communications

Both China and Russia have formidable strategic communications capabilities, but as we have seen, they are imperfect. Stepping back from the specific tools and tactics to take a broader view, there are several takeaways for U.S. leaders to consider as they seek to revitalize America's international broadcasting and public diplomacy efforts to ensure it wins the narrative.

**Insight #1.** Pay more attention to Africa—the U.S. is underinvesting in strategic communications on the continent compared to its competitors, which is a growing source of public opinion vulnerability

Africa is an up-and-coming area of interest for both the PRC (in its broadcasting operations) and, to a lesser extent, Russia (through its media cooperation efforts). The PRC tends to attract more favorable views from citizens in Africa because of its economic importance to the continent (further amplified by its strategic communications), as well as Russia to a lesser extent (Repnikova, 2022). Similarly, a 2022 AidData survey of African leaders from 55 countries and semi-autonomous regions found that they preferred China's development model to that of the U.S. (Horigoshi et al., 2022), though Russia garnered the least favorable views of all, likely a reaction to the invasion of Ukraine.

Comparatively, Africa is a relative afterthought in America's own practice, as a share of financing for strategic communications and as a congressional priority. Remedying this status quo could involve expanding the mandate and resources for existing efforts such as Voice of America's existing division focused on Africa or collaborating with like-minded partner countries such as the UK or France that may have additional broadcasting operations oriented towards this part of the world given past colonial ties.

**Insight #2.** Don't go dollar for dollar in symmetrically outspending the PRC and Kremlin on broadcasting; engage asymmetrically by undercutting their ability to borrow local credibility

The greater risk to U.S. interests is not necessarily the official broadcasting operations of the PRC and Russia, which target audiences often recognize as propaganda, and discount their credibility accordingly, but rather the ability of Beijing and Moscow to borrow local credibility through cooperation agreements, ownership stakes, and training/exchange programs with media outlets and journalists in other countries. These pathways of influence are more insidious because they are more difficult to track due to the opacity of the PRC and the Kremlin regarding their own activities, a lack of legislation within recipient countries that require transparent disclosure of content sources and outlet ownership, as well as less well-developed journalistic standards and training in many recipient countries.

Remedying this status quo could involve extending the mandate and resources of existing efforts to reduce vulnerability to co-optation by PRC or Kremlin state media, as well as support new initiatives in this area. Examples of existing efforts which could be further strengthened include: the National Endowment for Democracy's Center for International Media Assistance, the State Department's Edward R. Murrow Program for emerging journalists and the International Visitor Leadership Program in the fields of journalism and media, USAID's local media strengthening, civil society development, and rule of law work, as well as the new International Fund for Public Interest Media set up after President Biden's Democracy Summit, among others. In parallel, the Global Engagement Center could be tasked with the mandate and resources to track and publish publicly available information on PRC and Kremlin ownership shares and content sharing/cooperation agreements with domestic media outlets.

**Insight #3.** Take a page out of the competitors' playbook, orient broadcasting and public diplomacy to emphasize mutually reinforcing themes

The PRC and Kremlin are very intentional and systematic in looking for coherence and consistency across two streams of their strategic communications: broadcasting and education/cultural exchange. Yet, that degree of coherence does not appear to be the case for U.S. strategic communications given the extent of interagency coordination

challenges. Rather than a generic appeal for greater coordination, U.S. leaders could get the incentives right to generate small wins in this area through establishing an innovation fund that agency personnel could apply via a competitive process to access supplemental resources for programming that effectively integrates U.S. broadcasting and exchange capabilities to reinforce themes related to the October 2022 National Security Strategy.

A departure point for designing this fund could be the Department of Defense's Minerva DECUR partnership which issues grants of up to US\$400,000 with the intent to spur collaborative research between Defense Professional Military Education institutions and civilian research universities on priority topics of interest to DOD. Even though the context was somewhat different, Minerva DECUR was designed to increase the benefits, to reduce the perceived transaction costs, of cooperation across traditional silos by tying resources to the desired behaviors, shrinking the change to discrete projects, and providing a process for identifying the best applicants and ensuring accountability for results.

## References

- Ahmed, Z. (2019). Is Bangladesh falling into a Chinese 'debt trap'?, July 11. DW. Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/is-bangladesh-falling-into-a-chinese-debt-trap/a-49556829-0>
- Aregbesola, I. (2022). Professionalism: Russia's Sputnik trains young African journalists. October 20, 2022. NAN News Nigeria. <https://www.nannews.ng/2022/10/20/professionalism-russias-sputnik-trains-young-african-journalists/>
- Amur State University. (2022). Russian Government Scholarships. <https://www.amursu.ru/en/admissions/russian-government-scholarships/>
- BBC. (2022). Russia profile - Media. Updated: October 19, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17840134>
- Bowie, J. and D. Gitter. (2018). The CCP's Plan to 'Sinicize' Religions. June 14, 2018. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/the-ccps-plan-to-sinicize-religions/>
- Brands, H. & Beckley, M. (2022, August). What Does China Want? *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/13/what-china-wants-us-conflict/>

Brandt, J. (2022). Autocratic Approaches to Information Manipulation: A Comparative Case Study. Unpublished draft background paper manuscript prepared for the December 2022 Gates Forum on Strategic Communications. October 2022.

Brazys, S., and A. Dukalskis. (2019). Rising Powers and Grassroots Image Management: Confucius Institutes and China in the Media, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 12, Issue 4, Winter 2019, Pages 557–584, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poz012>

Bugayova, N. and G. Barros. (2020). The Kremlin's Expanding Media Conglomerate. January 15, 2020. Institute for the Study of War. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/kremlin%E2%80%99s-expanding-media-conglomerate>

CAFSA. (2010). A Brief Introduction to the Data of Studying Abroad in China in 2010. December 13, 2010. China Association for International Education. <http://www.cafsa.org.cn/research/show-194.html>

Channel One Russia. (n.d.). Channel One Russia History. Digital TV Family. Retrieved October 26, 2022, from <https://eng.1tv.com/history>

China MoE. (2019). Statistical report on international students in China for 2018. April 17, 2019. [http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201904/t20190418\\_378692.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201904/t20190418_378692.html)

China MoE. (2016). Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative. <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/30277.htm>

CIUS Center. (2020). Clarity Around Name Change. <https://www.ciuscenter.org/clarity-around-name-change/>. Xi, Chen. (2020). New NGO to operate China's Confucius Institutes, 'disperse misinformation'. July 5, 2020. Global Times. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1193584.shtml>

CMP Staff. (2021). *Running defense for China's global media push*. <https://chinamediaproject.org/2021/05/12/running-defense-for-chinas-global-media-push/>

CNC. (2013, December 21). CNC partners with Thai news channel. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2mSJ1Vx>

COP22. (2016). Partners: TASS Russian News Agency. Sustainable Innovation Forum 2016. November 2016. <https://www.cop22.org/partners/tass-russian-news-agency1>

Council of Europe. (2022). EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's broadcasting in the EU. March 2, 2022. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rt-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/>



Custer, S., Mathew, D., Burgess, B., Dumont, E., and Zaleski, L. (2022a). Measuring civic space risk, resilience, and influence in Europe and Eurasia. Williamsburg, VA. AidData at William & Mary.

Custer, S., Prakash, M., Solis, J., Knight, R., and J. Lin. (2019a). *Influencing the Narrative: How the Chinese government mobilizes students and media to burnish its image*. Williamsburg, VA. AidData at William & Mary.

Custer, S., Sethi, T., Solis, J., Lin, J., Ghose, S., Gupta, A., Knight, R., and A. Baehr. (2019b). *Silk Road Diplomacy: Deconstructing Beijing's toolkit to influence South and Central Asia*. Williamsburg, VA. AidData at William & Mary.

Custer, S., Schon, J., Horigoshi, A., Mathew, D., Burgess, B., Choo, V., Hutchinson, A., Baehr, A., and K. Marshall (2021a). *Corridors of Power: How Beijing uses economic, social, and network ties to exert influence along the Silk Road*. Williamsburg, VA. AidData at William & Mary.

Custer, S., Russell, B. DiLorenzo, M., Cheng, M., Ghose, S., Sims, J., Turner, J., and H. Desai. (2018). *Ties That Bind: Quantifying China's public diplomacy and its "good neighbor" effect*. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

Devonshire-Ellis, C. (2021). China-Central Asia Conference: Analysis. May 14, 2021. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2021/05/14/the-china-central-asia-conference-analysis/>

Doshi, R. (2021). *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dumont, E., Custer, S., Baehr, A., and B. Burgess. (2021). China Soft Power Indicators: Key Trends in China's Global Soft Power Projections, 2010-2020. Unpublished manuscript. Williamsburg, VA. AidData at William & Mary

Dumont, E., Solis, J., Custer, S., and L. Zaleski. (2022). Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels in Europe & Eurasia. Unpublished manuscript. Williamsburg, VA. AidData at William & Mary.

FCCC (2019). Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) Working Conditions Report. January 29. FCCC. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2KzuN56>

Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) (2018) Access Denied: Surveillance, Harassment and Intimidation as reporting Conditions in China Deteriorate. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2kTjRFI>

Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) (2019) Under Watch: FCCC 2018 Reports on Media Freedoms in China. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2sTGv0T>

Gai Shuqin. (2012, November 29). China to promote digital television broadcasting in Cambodia. China Daily. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2kTRB5S>

Gates, R.M. (2021). Exercise of power: American failures, successes, and a new path

forward in the post-Cold War world. Vintage.

Gilbert, D. (2022). Millions of Leftists Reposting Kremlin Misinformation by Mistake. March 4, 2022. Vice News.

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxdb5z/redfish-media-russia-propaganda-misinformation>

GEC. (2022). Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik's Role in Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem. January 2022. Global Engagement Center. US Department of State.

[https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Kremlin-Funded-Media\\_January\\_update-19.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Kremlin-Funded-Media_January_update-19.pdf)

Government of the Russian Federation. (n.d.). *Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation*. Retrieved October 27, 2022, from <http://government.ru/en/departments/93/>

Hartley, A.P. (2019). Drastic Slowdown in the Number of International Students Choosing China. April 23, 2019. The Beijinger. <https://www.thebeijinger.com/blog/2019/04/23/slowdown-number-international-students-choosing-china>

Hassid, J. (2008). Controlling the Chinese Media: An uncertain business. *Asian Survey*. 48(3) 414-430.

Horigoshi, A., Custer, S., Burgess, B., Marshall, K., Choo, V., Andrzejewski, K. and E. Dumont. (2022). *Delivering the Belt and Road: Decoding the supply of and demand for Chinese overseas development projects*. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

Horn, S., Reinhart, C.M., and C. Trebesch. (2019). *China's Overseas Lending*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326-343.

Kliver, Z., Cooley, S., Hinck, R., and A. Cooley. (2020). Propaganda: Indexing and Framing as Tools of Disinformation: Quick Look. NSI. (pp.1-11). [https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Quick-Look\\_Propaganda-and-Disinformation-in-Networked-Societies\\_FINAL.pdf](https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Quick-Look_Propaganda-and-Disinformation-in-Networked-Societies_FINAL.pdf)

Kremlin. (2022). Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia. September 30, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>

Krishnan, A. (2020). The Hindu Explains What are Confucius Institutes and Why They Under the Scanner in India. August 9, 2020.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-hindu-explains-what-are-confucius-institutes-and-why-are-they-under-the-scanner-in-india/article32306693.ece>

Latief, R. & L. Lefen (2018). Analysis of Chinese Government Scholarship for International Students Using Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP). *Sustainability*, MDPI, Open Access Journal, vol. 10(7), pages 1-13, June.

Lien, D., Oh, C. H., & Selmier, W. T. (2012). Confucius institute effects on China's trade and FDI: Isn't it delightful when folks afar study Hanyu?. *International Review of Economics & Finance*, 21(1), 147-155.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1059056011000761?via%3Dihub>

Li, X., & Z. Yuwen. (2016). A blueprint for China's neighborhood diplomacy. *The Diplomat*. March 30, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/a-blueprint-for-chinas-neighborhood-diplomacy/>

Malik, A.A., Parks, B., Russell, B., Lin, J.J., Walsh, K., Solomon, K., Zhang, S., Elston, T., and S. Goodman. (2021). *Banking on the Belt and Road: Insights from a new global dataset of 13, 427 Chinese development projects*. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

Myungsik, H., & Elaine, T. (2018). Socialization of China's Soft Power: Building friendship through potential leaders. *China: An International Journal*, 16(1), 45-68.

National Security Strategy. (2022, October).  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administration-s-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

Packer, H. (2022). Russia: international students suffer under sanctions. March 8, 2022. *PIE News*. <https://thepienews.com/news/russia-students-suffer-sanctions/>

Paul, C. and Matthews, M. (2016). *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why it Might Work and Options to Counter It*. Rand Corporation.  
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>.

Polyakova, Al. and S.P. Boyer. (2018). "The Future of Political Warfare: Russia, the West, and the Coming Age of Global Digital Competition". *Brookings Europe*. (pp. 1-18).  
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/the-future-of-political-warfare.pdf>

Power, J. (2021). Confucius Institutes at Australian Universities Could Be the Next Casualty in Strained Beijing-Canberra ties. May 28, 2021. *South China Morning Post*.  
<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3135021/confucius-institutes-australian-universities-could-be-next>

PRC Ministry of Education. (2017). *Statistics on the situation of international students in China in 2016*.  
[http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xwfb/xw\\_fbh/moe\\_2069/xwfbh\\_2017n/xwfb\\_170301/17030](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/xw_fbh/moe_2069/xwfbh_2017n/xwfb_170301/17030)

1\_sjtj/201703/t20170301\_297677.html

Repnikova, M. (2022). China-Russia Strategic Communication: The Evolving Visions and Practices. September 10, 2022. Unpublished draft background paper manuscript prepared for the December 2022 Gates Forum on Strategic Communications. October 2022.

Rossiyskaya Gazeta. (n.d.). About the Newspaper. RGRU. Retrieved October 26, 2022, from <https://rg.ru/pages/about>

RSF (2018). Papua New Guinea: Chinese delegation excludes journalists from three side events during APEC summit. Reporters Without Borders (RSF). November 21. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2qYhsZS>

Russia Today. (2022). Distribution. RT.Com. <https://www.rt.com/about-us/distribution/>

Rumer, E. and Sokolsky, R. (2021, June 3). *Grand Illusions: The Impact of Misperceptions About Russia on U.S. Policy*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/30/grand-illusions-impact-of-misperceptions-about-russia-on-u.s.-policy-pub-84845>.

Russkiy Mir. (n.d.). *About - russkiymir.ru*. Russkiy Mir Foundation. Retrieved October 27, 2022, from <https://russkiymir.ru/en/fund/>

Russia Today. (n.d.). About RT. RT International. Retrieved October 26, 2022, from <https://www.rt.com/about-us/>

Russia Today. (n.d.). Distribution. <https://www.rt.com/about-us/distribution/>

Schliebs, M., Bailey, H., Bright, J., and P.N. Howard. (2020). China's Public Diplomacy Operations: Understanding Engagement and Inauthentic Amplification of PRC Diplomats on Facebook and Twitter. Programme on Democracy and Technology. <https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/127/2021/05/Chinas-Public-Diplomacy-Operations-Dem.Tech-Working-Paper-2021.1-4.pdf>

Sputnik International. (2021, November 30). Sputnik News - World News, breaking news & top stories. Sputnik International. Retrieved October 26, 2022, from <https://sputniknews.com/docs/index.html>

Sputnik International. (2014, October 11). Major News Media Brand Sputnik Goes Live November 10. <https://sputniknews.com/20141110/1014569630.html>

Statista. (2022a). Share of international students enrolled in bachelor's, specialists's, and master's programs in higher education institutions in Russia in school year 2020/2021, by country of origin. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129553/foreign-students-in-russia-by-country/>

Statista. (2022b). Total inbound internationally mobile students in Russia from 2016 to 2021.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1238266/number-of-international-students-russia/>

Study in Russia. (2015-2022). Russian Government Scholarships.

<https://studyinrussia.ru/en/actual/scholarships/>

TASS (n.d.a). TASS history. Retrieved October 26, 2022, <https://tass.com/history>

TASS. (n.d.b) About TASS. Retrieved October 28, 2022, <https://tass.com/today>

Tischler, M. (2020). China's 'Never Again' Mentality. The Diplomat. August 18, 2020.

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/chinas-never-again-mentality/>.

Tomlin, G. (2021). The Case for an Information Warfighting Function. Military Review Journal. September-October, 2021.

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/September-October-2021/Tomlin-Info-Warfighting-Function/>

TV Centre. (n.d.). About Company. ТВ Центр - Официальный сайт телекомпании.

Retrieved October 26, 2022, from

<https://www.tvc.ru/section/show/id/3? x tr sl=ru& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc>

VGTRK. (n.d.). Russia television and Radio. About Us. Retrieved October 26, 2022, from

<https://vgtrk.ru/about>

The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government -Funded Organisations in the EU.

July 20, 2016. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

<https://www.martenscentre.eu/publication/the-bear-in-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-in-the-eu/>

Walker, C., Kalathil, S., & Ludwig, J. (2020). The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), 124-137.

Watts, S., Beauchamp-Mustafaga, N., Harris, B., and C. Reach. (2020). "Appendix A: China and Russia in Contemporary Ideological Competition". (Pp. 1-32). IN: Alternative Worldviews. RAND.

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2900/RR2982/RAND\\_RR2982.appendixes.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2900/RR2982/RAND_RR2982.appendixes.pdf)

Xinhua Net. (2018, March 21). Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Deepening Party and State Institutional Reform Plan. Retrieved from:

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c\\_1122570517.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm)

Yau and van der Kley. (2021). China's Global Network of Vocational Colleges to Train the World. November 11, 2021. The Diplomat.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/chinas-global-network-of-vocational-colleges-to-train-the-world/>