Summary of Conclusions Interagency Policy Committee
Meeting on Information Integrity and Resilience

USAID's Responses to the NSC:

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Departments and agencies (D/As) will confirm in writing the primary office and Deputy Assistant-level POC for all relevant information manipulation discussions, recognizing that each primary lead may collaborate with different internal stakeholders on specific issues, depending on the specific campaign theme, region, or actor involved. D/As can update that POC formally in writing as necessary. If a D/A is unable to identify and confirm a primary lead office, please provide a rationale in writing for NSC staff consideration.

- USAID DDI / DRG: Vera Zakem and Johnny Walsh

~~(U//FOUO)~~ D/As reaffirmed the importance of a risk- calibrated approach to guide use of limited resources to analyze and respond to specific information manipulation campaigns by foreign state and non-state actors targeting U.S. national security interests. NSC staff reviewed NATO's risk framework, and D/As provided feedback on its applicability to U.S. efforts to address information manipulation and offered additional factors that could be taken into consideration, including whether online dissemination of narratives is matched with offline activities. D/As will review the NATO risk assessment framework and confirm support to pilot its use in analysis of emerging information manipulation campaigns from foreign actors, providing as necessary additional factors (with rationale) they believe should be incorporated into a risk assessment framework. (Action: All, by July 22)

- USAID has a few recommendations regarding the NATO risk assessment framework-

    - There should be a more nuanced approach to framing disinformation campaigns through binary lenses in which hostile "external" actors or non-state actors are targeting USG strategic interests. Political elites can also be co-opted or independently gain disinformation tools which may also impact USG strategic values and national security interests. The "disinformation industry" through private companies or ad tech also has a role and can impact USG strategic interests for financial gain.

    - The NATO Risk Assessment only addresses mis/dis-information and does not take into account factually accurate information that could be misrepresented to discredit the US (such as discrediting our foreign policy in Ethiopia) or extreme speech which could contribute to offline harm and even violence.

- The risk ratings for Table 1 referencing 'reach' should not be used to tailor response efforts. For example, the NATO risk assessments framework ranks narratives that only appear on fringe outlets as green/"Low" for reach. Although these types of narratives may not have a wide reach at the given time of assessment, fringe outlets and websites are likely to be the source of conspiracy theories and narratives that can trigger a wider and more viral response. Therefore narratives with low reach or only resonating on fringe outlets should ***not*** be underestimated. A green or "low" rating category may suggest a correlation with a green or "low" response effort- whereas fringe outlets could serve as early detection platforms and therefore may warrant more attention. Additionally, the reach risk scale also neglects considerations around how narratives are resonating in the information environment over a period of time.

- Table 2 of NATO's framework suggests a risk rating around USG policy activities or capabilities. Generally USAID views this category in terms of risks to USAID's reputation (e.g. narratives where USAID is correlated with the CIA or Tigray narratives). While this table is useful for addressing USG reputational risks, it neglects disinformation campaigns that do not target US policies, activities or capabilities (e.g. hate speech online that rises to the level of ethnic violence around elections). While the former is a direct threat to the USG, the later may have human security implications locally which can also impact US foreign policy interests.

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    - USAID currently does not have the capabilities to identify disinformation risks targeting the agency because USAID does not have social media analytics capabilities monitoring for threats posed to USAID in the information environment.

- The NATO Risk framework suggests that information manipulation risks are only a risk when they directly target the USG, our US foreign policy objectives and US credibility. USAID's perception of risk is that information manipulation has direct impacts, not just on reputational risk to USAID itself, to include our Missions, staff and implementing partners- but directly impacts development gains. Information manipulation has human security implications -both in kinetic and non-kinetic environments, erodes democracies by delegitimizing elections or institutions and the media sector, affects vaccination rates and trust in medical providers and services, science integrity, beliefs in climate change, poses challenges to academic institutions and economic growth.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ D/As will provide additional options to the draft catalog of near-term response options available to D/As to respond to specific campaigns, or confirm the list reflects the totality of current options. (Action: All, by July 22)
    - While USAID is looking into capability to address near team response options, USAID focuses on long term resilience to addressing information manipulation.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ NSC staff will begin hosting a monthly sub-IPC-level call to sync on planned public, congressional, and multilateral engagements related to information manipulation. D/As are asked to provide to NSC staff their current topline press guidance on their work on information manipulation. (Action: All, by July 22)

    - *USAID addresses information manipulation through four lines of effort (LOE) -*
        - *This includes implementing programs that aim to build information resilience among local communities, such as through our global health programs which address rumors around COVID vaccinations or our media programs that build media literacy skills.*
        - *Our second LOE, is recognizing that our strategic and local messaging is critical for conveying fact-based information about our USAID programs.*
        - *Increasingly, USAID recognizes that there are operational risks to our Missions, our staff and our implementing partners. USAID works in some of the most challenging places in the world and often finds itself in aggressive information environments in which USAID is becoming targeted.*
        - *Lastly, USAID values our interagency colleagues and recognizes the need for a whole-of-government response to improve information ecosystems. We aim to work closely with our implementing partners and civil societies as well as the private sector.*

    - ***Mis/Dis/Mal-information is driven locally and requires context specific solutions.*** *USAID aims to* ***build local capacity*** *in this space by developing*

*independent and local skills to verify content- whether that means by building the capacity to fact check, conduct social media analysis or through our media literacy activities to enhance awareness of false content. The **best solution** to addressing the information disorder problem is by placing the tools in the hands of locals who have the linguistic skills and cultural understanding to detect when content isn't authentically generated.*

- *USAID views that we need to take **a whole-of-society approach to build information resilience** - which includes working with institutions of truth-telling such as independent journalism, civil society organizers, forthright government public communicators, academia, technology companies, advertisers and others that provide fact-checking, investigations, media literacy that bolster societal resilience and proactively blunt the impact of information manipulation. USAID recognizes that the complex and fluid nature of mis-, dis- and malinformation requires working beyond our traditional media partners to invest in: more diverse multi-stakeholder working groups and initiatives, including participants from the Global South and Big Tech, and pilots in social behavior change communication and social impact entertainment that bring people together around shared norms and values.*

- ***USAID has had extensive experience working in the informational resilience space.** Much of our programming in this space has evolved from our work in the media sector -which began over 30 years ago. We currently have media programs in over 40 countries worldwide. We recognize that many of our programs have had to pivot to address this emerging challenge and we need to think more holistically about this problem.*

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DDI/DAA:		
DDI/DRG: Vera Zakem	Clear	7/18/2022
DDI/DRG/DRI: Beatrice Reaud	Clear	7/26/2022