

USAID Censorship Scheme Exposed; Global Engagement Center Worked With UK Government And Media Firms To Deploy AI Tools



BY TYLER DURDEN

[Via America First Legal,](#)

On Thursday, America First Legal (AFL) released explosive [new documents](#) obtained through ongoing [litigation](#) against the U.S. Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC), exposing a vast, government-backed censorship operation to silence Americans under the guise of "misinformation," "disinformation," and "malinformation." The documents reveal a disturbing alliance between the GEC, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the British Foreign, Commonwealth, Development Office (FCDO), and media censorship organizations, all working in lock-step to manipulate public discourse, control media narratives, and suppress free speech.



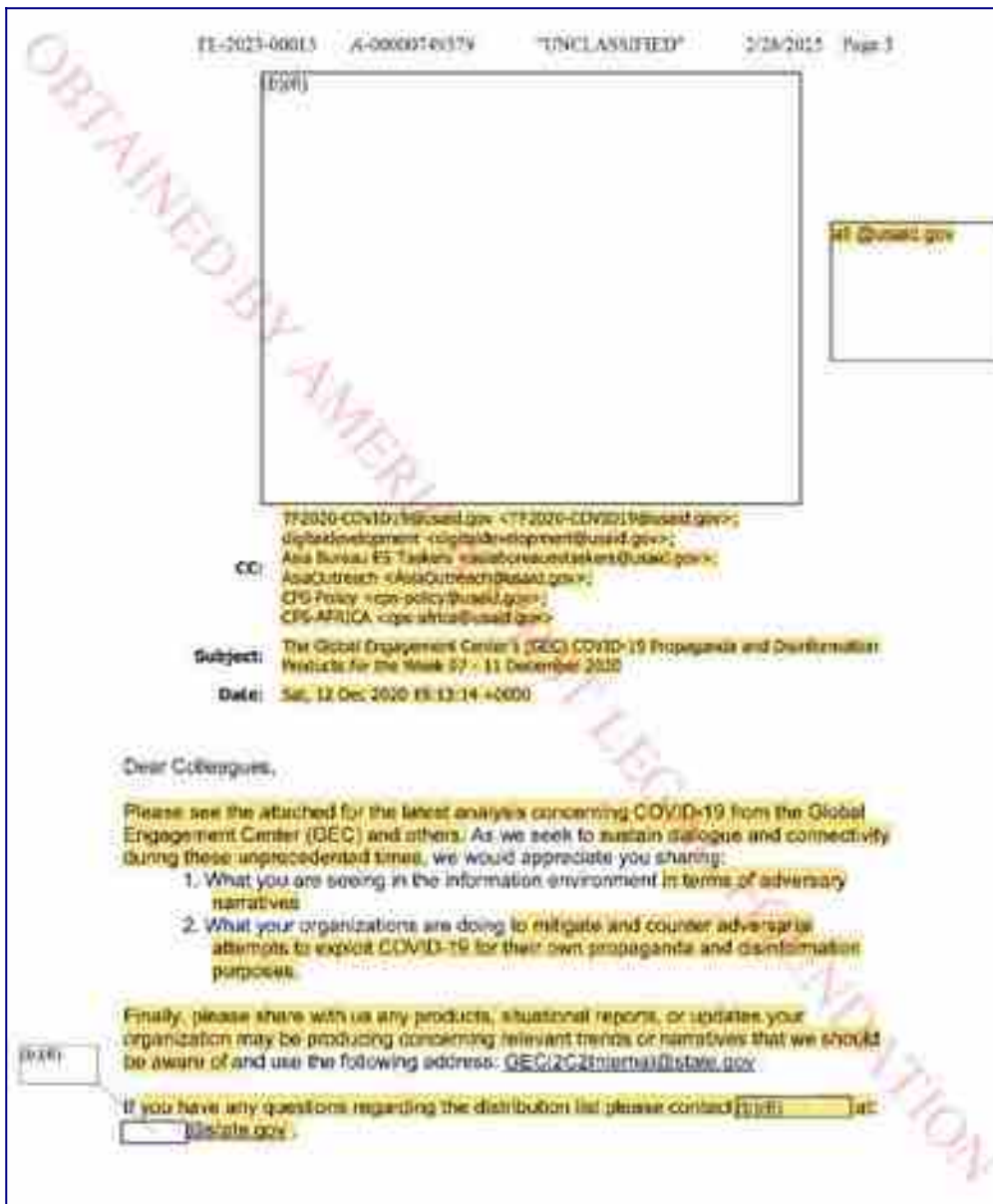
The GEC, which was [forced to shut down](#) in December 2024, was designed to “combat foreign disinformation abroad.” However, through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, AFL [uncovered](#) that the GEC engaged in state-sponsored propaganda, repeatedly using willing participants from private media organizations. Further, AFL’s [lawsuit](#) against the GEC revealed that USAID had created an internal [“Disinformation Primer”](#) that explicitly praised private sector censorship strategies and recommended further censorship tactics.

The new documents released by AFL show:

- The GEC and USAID coordinated efforts to censor “COVID-19 misinformation” and counter “COVID-19 propaganda.”
- The GEC collaborated with officials in the British Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office on disinformation efforts.
- The GEC coordinated with private media censorship firms, including Poynter and NewsGuard, which provided samples of its Misinformation Fingerprints artificial intelligence (AI) tool, designed to identify and rate websites based on their perceived “misinformation.”

I. The GEC and USAID coordinated to counter “COVID-19 Propaganda and Disinformation”

In a widely distributed email to USAID, the GEC’s “Liaison Planner to USAID” stated that GEC would like to “sustain dialogue and connectivity during these unprecedented times” to help counter “misinformation” surrounding COVID-19 despite USAID’s self-described [mission](#) being “to extend assistance to countries recovering from disaster, trying to escape poverty, and engaging in democratic reforms.”



The documents show that GEC communicated with multiple branches of USAID, including “TF 2020-COVID 19,” “Digital Development,” “Asia Bureau ES Taskers,” “Asia Outreach,” “Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) Policy,” and “CPS Africa.”



Additionally, GEC and USAID worked together on “counter-propaganda” and “Disinformation and COVID-19 related products,” ranging from a “KHARON” (risk analysis program) demo to

monitoring “disinformation” narratives surrounding the 2020 Presidential Elections in Moldova.



II. Coordination with Internet Censors NewsGuard and Poynter

Two days after the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, NewsGuard Technologies’ General Manager, Matt Skibinski, started an email chain to pitch NewsGuard services. Included in this email chain were:

- Park Advisors’ then-Director Christina Nemr is an Obama Administration State Department alum. According to her LinkedIn, Park Advisors “Designed and led multi-million public-private initiatives addressing security threats in the information environment, bridging gaps between emerging technologies and real-world operational needs. Built and managed a global platform that evaluated and connected tools with mission-critical challenges, supporting government adoption.”
- The House Small Business Committee [found](#) that Park Advisors received a GEC cooperative agreement award of more than \$6 million. Park Advisors then distributed subawards to several companies, including NewsGuard, the [Atlantic Council](#), and the [Global Disinformation Index](#), a project funded by George Soros that generated lists of [conservative websites it urged advertising companies](#) to boycott. Together, these groups, not subject to international restrictions like GEC was, tested disinformation products, which led to the creation of the “[Disinfo Cloud](#),” an unclassified platform used by the U.S. federal government,

the [European Union](#), the [U.K. government](#), the Australian government, and the Estonian government “to counter adversarial propaganda and disinformation.”

- Government employees from the Department of State, the National Security Agency (NSA), and Department of Defense components, including the National Security Innovation Network (NSIN), U.S. Cyber Command, and the U.S. Army European Command.

Skibinski showed samples of the new GEC/U.S Cybercommand Testbed Pilot (Misinformation Fingerprints). This program utilized artificial intelligence and machine learning to monitor “misinformation.” The House Small Business Committee [report](#) details that “there was no firewall in place to ensure that Federal resources were not being used to develop and promote technologies that would have domestic impacts.”

i. Testbed Methodology & Disinfo Cloud

The main Park Advisors deliverable was to design a Testbed initiative which allowed participants to learn about and test disinformation detection products in a sandbox environment. The GEC leveraged Park Advisors to source technologies, largely from small domestic businesses, to add to the sandbox for its partners to test. These partners—foreign governments, Federal agencies, and the private sector— are not subject to the same international restrictions as the GEC. The private sector tech partners testing these products moderate not only foreign speech

* Park Advisors worked with the EIT to develop two reports: (1) “Weapons of Mass Disinformation: Foreign State-Sponsored Disinformation in the Digital Age,” a review of the human and technological vulnerabilities to propaganda and disinformation with an overview of solutions known for such operations; and (2) “Flaming the Flames: Foreign State-Sponsored Disinformation in the Time of COVID,” which examined how the pandemic and resulting “infodemic” was exploited by hostile state actors and detailed the responses by government, online platform, and civil society. Both reports were distributed to government, academia, think tanks, and the private sector; Christine Narni, *The Disinfo Cloud Report*, Drivers Cloud (Dec. 21, 2021), Quarterly Performance Report, Park Capital Investment Group LLC, aka Park Advisors (Q4 2021) (on file with the Comm.);

* Quarterly Performance Report, Park Capital Investment Group LLC, aka Park Advisors (Q4 2021) (on file with the Comm.);

* Staff Production to H. Comm. on Small Bus., 2 (Mar. 28, 2024) (on file with the Comm.).

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on their platforms, but also domestic speech and domestic businesses’ use of their products. There was no firewall in place to ensure that Federal resources were not being used to develop and promote technologies that would have domestic impacts.

From: Matt Skibiński [mailto:mskibinski@newsguardtech.com]
To: Christine Lee [mailto:lee@poynter.com];
Dan Madden [mailto:dmadden@poynter.com];
Gordon Greider [mailto:ggreider@newsguardtech.com];
Harmony Kromer [mailto:hkromer@newsguardtech.com];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
CC: [mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
[mailto:];
Subject: Re: GEC / ONIP Technical Visit - group email
Date: Fri, 6 Feb 2020 13:30:11 -0500

All—

I've attached our sample of Fingerprints in Word Document form here as a .ZIP file. Please let us know if you have any issues accessing them.

Thanks,

Matt

Matt Skibiński
General Manager
NewsGuard Technologies
Resolving Trust & Accountability
[mailto:mskibinski@newsguardtech.com]
Twitter: @NewsGuardQuality @mskibinski
NewsGuard: The Internet Trust Tool
+1 (800) [redacted]

While [NewsGuard](#) claims to be a fair arbiter of truthfulness, research by the Foundation For Freedom Online reveals how NewsGuard operates [the enforcement arm](#) of the censorship industry that rates websites based on how much “misinformation” each site publishes.

Additionally, on February 4, 2021, Vonda Wolcott, Senior Program Manager at the [Institute for War and Peace Reporting](#), connected GEC’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) “expert” with Baybars Orsek from [Poynter](#). [AFL has shown](#) how Poynter funds a global false-flag operation of international “fact-checkers” that [claim to be independent](#) but are, in reality, a tightly woven network funded by Poynter and the GEC.

This email shows just how closely GEC and Poynter worked with GEC’s expert offering to “walk [Poynter] through GEC’s new M&E workbook.”

America First Legal will continue fighting to expose government censorship and will always defend the First Amendment.

Statement from Andrew Block, America First Legal Senior Counsel:

“The partnership between USAID and the Global Engagement Center is bad news for the American people. Add in the fact that they were coordinating with internet censorship enforcers at NewsGuard and Poynter, and you can start to see just how dangerous this unholy alliance is for free speech and free expression. Thankfully, the GEC is shuttered and USAID is being exposed — but lawmakers should take note of this example as they consider legislation to ensure the federal government actually serves American principles and interests,” said Andrew Block.

Read the documents [here](#).

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Down to our last few green [Waxed Canvas Hats!](#)

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