

IMPROVING THE UNITED STATES' STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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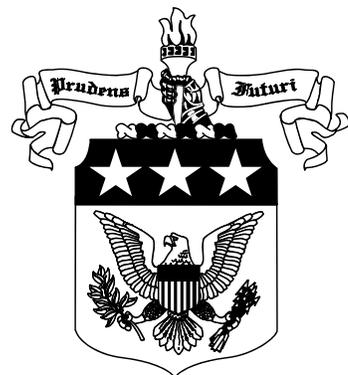
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

IMPROVING THE UNITED STATES' STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

by

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ABSTRACT

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America's image in the world is faltering. Why is this the case and how can the United States regain its once held position of popularity among the peoples of the world? Much of the answer to this question is the failure of the United States Government to effectively use strategic communication to inform and influence populations to recognize the value of American efforts around the world, to understand and support American foreign policy objectives in the War on Terror, and in the broader development of the global society in this young century. Today, America leads the fight against rogue states, international terrorists, and religious extremists who willingly slaughter innocent civilians in pursuit of political and cultural agendas. Unfortunately much of the world resents and fears the United States because they do not understand American objectives and receive a distorted and negative view of American actions through propaganda, manipulated news, and America's own tunnel-visioned overreliance on the military aspect of national power.

This paper will review the current United States Government strategy for using strategic communication, will discuss the weaknesses and shortfalls of that strategy,

and will recommend specific actions to strengthen the strategy and improve its effectiveness.

IMPROVING THE UNITED STATES' STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

America's image in the world is faltering. Recent surveys find that majorities in 10 of 15 countries polled do not trust the United States, that half of people surveyed in 25 nations think the U.S. plays a negative role in the world, that majorities in five Middle East countries have lowering opinions of the United States, and that the opinion of foreigners, particularly Europeans, toward Americans has substantially declined since 2002.¹ Why is this the case and, more importantly, how can the United States regain its once held position of popularity among the peoples of the world?

There are many reasons for America's falling global public opinion numbers. Some of it can be blamed on the natural resentment of people to the "richest country on earth," the "biggest consumer nation in the world," and to the sole superpower who dabbles its fingers in every corner of the globe. Much of this decline in international public standing is the result of unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in which the United States is seen as invading sovereign nations and causing much human suffering on flimsy evidence or anti-Muslim crusades. While these reasons may explain the surface causes of American unpopularity around the world, they do not address the root cause of the symptoms of envy, resentment, and fear of the United States indicated by surveys and polls.

Americans rightly see the United States as a force for good in the world. No nation in history has been as generous to those in need, as forgiving of past enemies, or as unselfish as the United States. After all, it is America that comes to the aide of people stricken by natural disaster. It is America that offers the dream of success and prosperity for anyone willing to work for it. It is America whose soldiers have fought and

died in foreign lands not for the purpose of conquest, but for the purpose of liberation from tyranny and oppression. Why is this view of America not shared by the majority of people around the world at the beginning of the 21st Century?

A major part of the answer to this question is the failure of the United States Government to effectively use strategic communication to inform and influence populations, foreign and domestic, to recognize the value of American efforts around the world, to understand and support American foreign policy objectives in the War on Terror, and in the broader development of the global society. In the early part of the 20th Century, America was respected as the fresh, young nation stepping in to help the old powers resolve the disputes that brought war to Asia and to Europe. In the middle part of that century, the world was grateful for America the arsenal of democracy, who stopped the tyranny of fascism from dominating the world. During the Cold War, America was seen as the bulwark of freedom against the spread of oppressive communism. Today, America leads the fight against rogue states, international terrorists, and religious extremists who willingly slaughter innocent civilians in pursuit of political and cultural agendas. Unfortunately much of the world resents and fears the United States because they do not understand American objectives and receive a distorted and negative view of American actions through propaganda, manipulated news, and America's own tunnel-visioned overreliance on the military aspect of national power.

This paper will review the current United States Government strategy for using strategic communication in the War on Terror, will discuss the weaknesses and

shortfalls of that strategy, and will recommend specific actions to strengthen the strategy and improve its effectiveness.

U.S. Strategic Communication Strategy

As the War on Terror unfolded after 2001, the U.S. Government recognized the need to improve its use of information as an element of national power, often called strategic communication. American officials saw the lack of international popular support for U.S. policy and actions and correctly attributed much of the blame to a failure in strategic communication. At the same time, America's enemies have proven to be very adept at it. Al Qaeda attempts to manipulate nations with messages delivered via Internet postings, videos smuggled out of caves, and the televised images of bombs exploding in crowded public places (ask the losers of the Spanish parliamentary elections in 2004). As Dennis Murphy and James White point out in their recent article, propaganda is the weapon of the insurgent cell, "It costs little, is easy to distribute, and has near-immediate worldwide impact. The improvised explosive devices that have killed and maimed so many U.S. troops in Iraq are propaganda weapons. Their impact is not the tactical kinetic victory, but the strategic propaganda victory."² Hezbollah's use of aggressive strategic propaganda effects in its conflict with Israel in 2006 took what started out as justified, internationally supported strategic victory for Israel (defending herself from terrorist rocket attacks) and turned it into a strategic defeat. The bombing of the Iraq's Al-Askari Shiite mosque in February 2006, in order to fuel sectarian strife and violence, is an example of tactical operations supporting an information strategy.³

In May 2007, the United States Government published the National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication. This new strategy document resulted

from recognition by the Bush Administration that the U.S. needed an integrating plan for its new emphasis on strategic communication. The plan was based on the recommendations from more than 30 different studies of U.S. policy, feedback from across the U.S. Government interagency, academic institutions, and public relations professionals in the private sector.⁴ Then Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes said “the plan is designed to provide unified strategic framework for U.S. government communications, yet be flexible and adaptable to meet the different needs and responsibilities of very diverse government agencies.”⁵

The strategy establishes “three strategic objectives to govern America’s public diplomacy and strategic communication with foreign audiences: 1) America must offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in our most basic values. 2) With our partners, we seek to isolate and marginalize violent extremists who threaten the freedom and peace sought by civilized people of every nation, culture and faith. 3) America must work to nurture common interests and values between Americans and peoples of different countries, cultures and faiths across the world.”⁶ It goes on to define the strategic audiences (key influencers, vulnerable populations, and mass audiences)⁷ and establish public diplomacy priorities (expand education and exchange programs, modernize communications, and promote the “diplomacy of deeds”).⁸ The strategy calls for specific interagency coordination structures (a Counterterrorism Communications Center within the Department of State, an Interagency Crisis Communication Team, and regular monitoring of implementation) and addresses actions required by each agency and embassy in their role in public diplomacy and global communication, as well as identifying the need for increased funding to resource all of these efforts.⁹

This new strategy was designed to tie together all of the efforts being taken by the U.S. Government on behalf of strategic communication, many of which were uncoordinated actions across the interagency, attempting to fill the need being realized more and more as the War on Terror progressed. The 2002 National Security Strategy identified the need for “a different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts that can help people around the world learn about and understand America.”¹⁰

In the fall of 2001, the Department of Defense (DoD) established the Office of Strategic Influence to be the central coordinating agent for “a strategic information campaign in support of the war on terrorism.”¹¹ This effort produced little and in February 2002, the Secretary of Defense dissolved the Office due to opposition from government public affairs officials who feared it would undermine their credibility and from negative U.S. and international media coverage alleging the Office intended to place lies and disinformation in foreign news media.¹²

In 2002, the National Security Council (NSC) created the Policy Coordination Committee (PCC) on Strategic Communication. This PCC included members from across the interagency and was chaired by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Its mission was “to develop and disseminate the President’s message around the world by coordinating support for international broadcasting, foreign information programs, and public diplomacy; and to promote and develop a strategic communications capacity throughout the government.”¹³

In early 2003, The Bush Administration formed the Office of Global Communication (OGC) within the White House in order to coordinate across the

interagency on informational matters. This office was to be an adviser to the President and the executive department/agency heads on the “utilization of the most effective means for the United States Government to ensure consistency in messages that will promote the interests of the United States abroad, prevent misunderstanding, build support for and among coalition partners of the United States, and inform international audiences.”¹⁴ Unfortunately, the OGC was not effective in this mission and it was closed in 2005 as the Administration shifted responsibility for strategic communication efforts to the Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the Department of State (DoS).

In addition to creating new organizations to handle various aspects of U.S. Government strategic communication efforts, some no longer functioning, the DoD and DoS have led the way within the interagency to develop new doctrine and guiding concepts that make strategic communication an important part of ongoing operations and planning. Each agency is preparing an agency specific strategic communications plan that will nest within the overall national strategy.¹⁵

Assessing the U.S. Strategic Communication Strategy

Is the U.S. national strategy for strategic communication working? There is no doubt that the senior officials of the Bush Administration “get” the need for effective strategic communication efforts to support American policy. Officials from DoD, DoS, the White House, and Congress have all acknowledged the need for action on improving American strategic communication efforts and have backed up those acknowledgements with actions. Progress is being made, but is the strategy set up for success?

In testimony before Congress in the spring of 2007, then Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Hughes said, “public diplomacy now has a place at the most senior policy tables of our government; our public diplomacy programs are reaching more people around the world more strategically than ever before, and public diplomacy is now viewed as the national security priority that it is.”¹⁶ She went on to cite several examples of improvements in U.S. Government public diplomacy actions, including yearly increases in the number of student and exchange visitor visas issued, expanded partnering with American colleges and universities to attract foreign students to U.S. schools, expanded English language teaching programs for young people in foreign countries, creation of a Rapid Response Unit that monitors international news media and produces daily reports for American policymakers on world news as well as emailing thousands of foreign officials the U.S. position on issues mentioned in international news stories, the establishment of high tech digital outreach teams that work to counter misinformation and myths on Arabic Internet blogs, making public diplomacy part of the criteria used to evaluate all American ambassadors and foreign service officers, and expanded outreach to the private sector for foreign disaster relief assistance and education and training programs.¹⁷

Other evidence of progress can be seen in new efforts to recruit successful Muslim-Americans from the private sector to speak to foreign Muslim audiences about the United States, new guidelines to American diplomats and other officials serving abroad that require them to seek out and engage foreign media outlets in order to explain American policies and views, and the creation of DoS Communication Hubs in London, Dubai, and Brussels (with more coming in 2008) that have the mission of

actively engaging foreign news media to present American views and comments on important policy topics.¹⁸

Clearly, progress has been made over the last few years as more emphasis has been placed on informational power and strategic communication, but critical weakness and shortfalls still exist. Is there an Ends/Ways/Means mismatch for the American strategic communication strategy? Current evidence says yes.

In terms of the Ends for the U.S. strategic communication strategy, the national strategy document lists three strategic objectives in flowery terms (as listed earlier), but not in sufficient detail to effectively guide policy formulation or the planning and execution of strategic communication efforts. While the strategy makes clear America's goals of "offering a positive vision of hope and opportunity," to "isolate and marginalize violent extremists," and to "nurture common interests and values," it does not provide a good framework for organizing and executing American strategic communication efforts.

One of the first problems with U.S. Government strategic communication efforts is the lack of a single, common definition for strategic communication. The DoS sees strategic communication as primarily public diplomacy and public affairs activities. In the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, the DoD defined it as "focused U.S. Government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs and actions synchronized with other elements of national power."¹⁹ The National Security Council defines it as "the coordination of statecraft, public affairs, public diplomacy, information operations, and other activities, reinforced by political, economic, and

military actions, in a synchronized and coordinated manner.”²⁰ Various think tanks define strategic communication as the aggregation of methods used by the Departments of State and Defense to deliver strategic effects,²¹ or express it in terms of *Ends* (cognitive information effects on attitudes and perceptions leading to changes in behavior), *Ways* (strategic communication), and *Means* (integrated words, images, and actions),²² or that “strategic communication means persuading allies and friends to stand with you. It means persuading neutrals to come over to your side or at least stay neutral. In the best of all worlds, it means persuading adversaries that you have the power and the will to prevail over them.”²³ The Defense Science Board described strategic communication as instruments governments use to understand global audiences and cultures, engage in a dialogue of ideas between people and institutions, advise policymakers, diplomats and military leaders on the public implications of policy choices, and influence attitudes and behavior through communication strategies.²⁴ Even though there is no common definition for strategic communication in the U.S. Government, there are some common threads among the various definitions: strategic communication includes public diplomacy, public affairs, and informational operations designed to inform and influence people using messages tailored to specific audiences, messages designed to promote the appealing values of America, and the coordinated use of words, images, and actions to get these messages to their intended receivers. What most officials seem to mean by the term strategic communication is the effective exercise of the informational instrument of national power – the big **I** in the strategic thinkers acronym of **DIME** (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic instruments of national power). As defined by Robert Neilson and Daniel Kuehl, the

information element of national power is the “use of information content and technology as strategic instruments to shape fundamental political, economic, military, and cultural forces on a long-term basis to affect the global behavior of governments, supra-governmental organizations, and societies to support national security.”²⁵ To date, no single definition of strategic communication, incorporating these key aspects, is in use across the U.S. Government.

Another major issue with the Ends of the U.S. strategic communication strategy is that there has been no single, consistent theme underlying all U.S. Government strategic communication efforts in support of the War on Terror. Indeed Americans, and the entire world, have received mixed messages about why the United States is fighting a war on terror and what the basic strategy is for winning that war. President Bush and other officials of his administration have not effectively explained a clear narrative that unites the majority of Americans behind a strategy for victory in the way the mostly consistent narrative, supported by fairly consistent policy goals, kept the public behind the strategy of containment of the Soviet Union and communism during the Cold War. Not only has the Bush Administration confused the public with focuses at different times on weapons of mass destruction, the spread of democracy, and transnational terrorist groups, but the President’s political opponents, for short-term political gain, have sown doubt and suspicion among the American people and foreign audiences with declarations of defeat in Iraq and calls for unconditional withdrawal of American troops from the combat theaters. Near historically low approval ratings for the President’s policies demonstrate some of the result of the failure to have a clear narrative underlying strategic communication efforts on the War on Terror. As Joel Roberts points

out in his paper on the battle of ideas, “this decrease in support is not a result or indication of a lack of patriotism within the country, but due to the administration’s paucity of internal strategic communication themes to continually remind the public of the cause and continued need for the war. We do not provide a clear strategic message to the American people concerning the overall War on Terrorism; particularly how the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are a part of a larger campaign.”²⁶

In terms of the Ways of the U.S. strategic communication strategy, several weaknesses appear. The key problem is integrating strategic communication efforts across the U.S. Government interagency. The Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the U.S. Government official rhetorically charged with coordinating all strategic communication efforts, has no authority over the public diplomacy functions or personnel working public diplomacy/public affairs functions outside the Office for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in DoS, and has little say over resources devoted to public diplomacy.²⁷ This problem was identified by the Defense Science Board in 2004 and remains an issue.²⁸ This problem is compounded by the fact that the Strategic Communication Policy Coordination Committee within the National Security Council, chaired by the above mentioned Under Secretary, has no authority to task and/or direct agencies of the government.²⁹ The broader issue is that the U.S. Government still does not have a single entity charged with developing, coordinating, executing, training for, and resourcing strategic communication efforts for the Nation.

Having a single government agency responsible for U.S. Government communication efforts is not new. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, government and military leaders saw the need to coordinate U.S. Government

information efforts. In response the U.S. Government established the Committee on Public Information, also called the Creel Committee.³⁰ Similarly, during World War II the United States created the Office of War Information that worked to generate media coverage for both domestic and foreign audiences on the progress of the war effort, using services like the Voice of America radio network.³¹ When the Cold War heated up in the early 1950s, the United States formed the United States Information Agency (USIA) to confront the Soviet Union on the information battlefield. President Kennedy described the role of the USIA as, “to help achieve U.S. foreign policy objectives by (a) influencing public attitudes in other nations, and (b) advising the President, his representatives abroad, and the various departments and agencies of the implications of foreign opinion for present and contemplated U.S. policies, programs, and official statements,”³² During the Cold War, public diplomacy initiatives and international broadcasting helped contain and defeat communism, promote democracy, explain American foreign policy, and expose foreign audiences to American values.³³ The U.S. Government does not have a single agency or entity leading, coordinating, and executing strategic communication efforts today.

Various recommendations exist for how and like what a strategic communication agency should look. In 2004, the Defense Science Board recommended the formation of “an independent, non-profit and non-partisan Center for Strategic Communication to support the National Security Council and the departments and organizations represented on its Strategic Communication Committee” that is modeled on federally funded research and development centers like the Rand Corporation.³⁴ Writing in the DISAM Journal, Curtis Jenkins calls for establishing a “Joint Inter-Agency Task Force

for Strategic Communication” including representatives from the DoS, DoD, Department of Justice, Central Intelligence Agency, Department of Homeland Security, and the NSC as a minimum, with the President as the head of the task force.³⁵ Each of these recommendations has merit, but the most effective way of maximizing the integration, coordination, and resourcing of strategic communication efforts across the entire U.S. Government is to establish a cabinet level agency whose head holds equal status to the Secretaries of State and Defense and who sits on the National Security Council.

As Bruce Gregory points out, real improvement in U.S. Government strategic communication efforts requires more than just reform of “coordinating” processes, but requires processes that provide “strategic direction” for all U.S. Government efforts.³⁶ This is best achieved by having a single agency that can translate the President’s guidance into this strategic direction.

Unfortunately, effective in 1999, the USIA was abolished, with most of its functions absorbed by the DoS.³⁷ This move was part of the general downsizing of America’s national security apparatus in the wake of the end of the Cold War. It also followed up on some of the key recommendations of the 1975 “Stanton Commission” which recommended the abolishment of the USIA and replacement of it with a new quasi-independent Information and Cultural Affairs Agency which would combine the cultural and educational programs of the USIA and DoS, the establishment of a new Office of Policy Information within DoS to administer all programs that explain U.S. foreign policy, and the setting up of Voice of America as an independent federal agency under its own board of governors.³⁸ One of the results of changes like the folding of USIA functions into the DoS and of making the Voice of America and other U.S. Government

broadcasting programs independent, is that now the National Endowment for Democracy, the DoS, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are all in the business of running programs in the areas of education reform, political reform, state-building, civil society, and democratization, while interagency mechanisms for coordinating these programs remain weak or non-existent.³⁹ Some researchers also point to the organizational culture of the DoS as part of the reason why the merging of USIA functions into State has not produced effective strategic communication efforts. Carnes Lord, a former USIA and National Security Council official and former national security assistant to Vice President Quale, says that “the information function has always lacked prestige within the culture of the Foreign Service, and is currently ghettoized (that is public diplomacy is a fifth career cone within the Foreign Service, distinct from the prestigious political cone). This has meant consistent undermanning and underfunding of public diplomacy activities.”⁴⁰

Also a Ways shortfall, and working to confuse and slow effective strategic communication efforts by the U.S. Government, are the antiquated laws and regulations restricting government action in regard to information use. Due to perceived excesses by the Office of War Information during World War II, and due to a general public distrust and dislike of anything possibly falling into the category of “propaganda,” the Congress has placed restrictions and prohibitions on the dissemination within the United States of informational products intended for foreign audiences. In 1948, Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act which, although recognizing the importance of marshalling American cultural and information outreach efforts in support of national engagement in the Cold War, carefully stipulated that these programs intended for foreign audiences

could not be disseminated in the United States.⁴¹ Restrictions like those of the Smith-Mundt Act and others, are not only relics of the Cold War and of a different type of conflict, but also do not reflect today's state of technology in which information flows almost instantaneously around the world on satellite TV, digital cellular networks, and the Internet. It is unrealistic to assume that information intended for foreign audiences will not quickly make its way to American audiences and vice-a-versa.

Another major Ways weakness is the common use of strategic communication as an "afterthought" in the policymaking and strategic planning process. U.S. Government processes typically treat strategic communication as a supporting element to the primary operation/policy effort, as often evidenced by the strategic communication portion of the policy or plan being relegated to an annex or appendix to the main document. Similarly, the establishment of a separate Strategic Communication Policy Coordination Committee on the National Security Council implies that strategic communication is a separate function.

Strategic communication and informational themes, messages, options, and approaches must be included from the beginning of policy formation and campaign planning. The idea of involving strategic communication specialists/planners early in the policy formulation process is not new. Richard Halloran illustrates this well when he recounts famed journalist Edward R. Murrow's response to President Kennedy's request that he head the U.S. Information Agency in 1961, "If you want me to be there on the crash-landings, I better be there on the takeoff."⁴² According to an experienced strategic communication practitioner, a good analogy for this early involvement in the planning process is that of marketing vs. advertising. Advertising is figuring out how to

sell a product after the product is already developed while marketing is figuring out what the potential customers want, how best to design the product to meet the need of the customers, and how best to present the product to the customers that will get them to buy it.⁴³ Larry DiRita, an aide to then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, put it this way, “the old fashioned idea that you develop the policy and then pitch it over the transom to the communicator is over. You’re continually thinking about communications through the course of the policy development process. The policy gets better when it’s subjected to the rigors of knowing how you’re going to communicate that policy.”⁴⁴ The current War on Terror, and the predominant form of warfare most experts foresee in the 21st Century, is what Thomas Hammes calls a Fourth Generation War (4GW)⁴⁵ in which America’s adversaries rely less on direct military confrontation in the conventional sense and more on irregular warfare with information operations and attacks designed to further an informational theme or message. As Hammes describes a 4GW campaign, the planner “must determine the messages he wants to send, the networks available to him, the types of messages those networks are best suited to carry, the action that will cause the network to send the message, and the feedback system that will tell him if the message is being received.”⁴⁶ This approach should be at the heart of all policy formulation and strategic campaign design.

Part of this formalization of strategic communication into all U.S. Government and U.S. military planning processes must include processes and plans that anticipate mistakes and failures as well as processes and plans for seizing opportunities in the informational realm. No one gets everything right and no plan or policy works perfectly. Planners and policymakers can anticipate mistakes or failures and can have already

thought through options for using strategic communication means to mitigate those things that don't go well. Similarly, planners and policymakers must expect that situations will arise that will present opportunities to further informational themes, goals, or objectives. Processes must exist that facilitate rapid seizure of these opportunities.

Finally, one of the most important Ways shortfalls of the U.S. strategic communication strategy is the failure to adequately address what Linton Wells calls "strategic listening". Wells correctly claims that it is not enough just to deliver the message. Successful long-term strategic communication must have listening and influence analysis as critical prerequisites. He concludes that effective strategic listening includes: receiving without judgment (seeing what's there, adapting, and finding ways to connect); being willing to relinquish control, moving from strongly held positions, and co-creating; making use of user-generated content; and sustaining involvement in an area (taking a long-term focus and maintaining contact despite the agenda of the moment).⁴⁷ Effective strategic listening will not only aid in presenting U.S. policies and actions in the best ways to the right audiences, but will also aid in developing policies and taking actions that more effectively achieve the goals and objectives intended. This is another area best planned, trained for, and coordinated by a single lead strategic communication agency.

In the area of Means for the U.S. strategic communication strategy, some of the interagency coordination mechanisms called for in the strategic communication national strategy document have been established, but with limited effect. The Counterterrorism Communications Center is up and running within the DoS and includes representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, and

USAID. While this Center is actively monitoring breaking news events related to terrorism, it too has no authorities to direct action, informational or physical, by any other parts of the government. Also, the Interagency Crisis Communications Team has yet to be formed and tested.⁴⁸

Another major Means weakness is in the area of resources. While there is broad agreement within the U.S. Government that the United States needs “more strategic communication,” real efforts are only being made by the DoD and DoS. The National Security Council has a Policy Coordination Committee that is supposed to review and coordinate strategic communication policy formulation across the interagency, but its effectiveness is limited because agencies other than DoD and DoS do not have strategic communication personnel to work on the PCC.⁴⁹ Even within the two most prominent and forward leaning strategic communication agencies of the government, DoD and DoS, not everyone is aware of where they fit into the U.S. Government’s overall strategic communication strategy. For example, in November 2007, the head of the New York office of the Department of State’s Foreign Press Office did not know about the National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication that had been published five months earlier.⁵⁰ Much of the problem is funding. The DoS was happy to receive \$1.5 billion for Fiscal Year 2008 for strategic communication efforts, with almost half of that (\$668 million) for broadcasting programs like the Voice of America. However, no other agency (with the exception of DoD) received funding specifically to address strategic communication programs, processes, or personnel.⁵¹

Another Means weakness hampering U.S. Government strategic communication efforts is the lack of integrated and coordinated research on foreign audiences. The

General Accounting Agency (GAO) reports that “U.S. Government agencies conducting research on foreign audiences currently do not have systematic processes in place to assess end-user needs or satisfaction pertaining to research products, or to coordinate or share research,” and that “efforts to coordinate and share audience research data are hampered by the lack of interagency protocols for sharing information, a dedicated forum to periodically bring key research staff together to discuss common concerns across all topics of interest, and a clearing house for collected research.”⁵² This is another area in which having a single agency responsible for coordinating all U.S. Government strategic communication efforts, including research and analysis on foreign audiences, would benefit American strategic communication efforts.

A significant Means shortfall is the lack of efforts to harness the power of the American media and entertainment industries in support of U.S. strategic communication efforts. Movies, television, music, and video games have tremendous influence over various populations and are extremely good mediums for sending messages. For good or for bad, American movies, television, and music reach every corner of the globe. Much of the world learns most of what it knows about America, about Americans, and about American policies from these sources. Movies and television especially can help to achieve some of the goals (offering a positive vision of hope and opportunity, isolating and marginalizing violent extremists, and nurturing common interests and values) of the U.S. strategic communication strategy.

As an example, a growing area of influence with young people worldwide is in video games. There are already video games developed by Arab companies that involve heroic young Arab men fighting Israelis and Americans. Couldn't similar games,

distributed via free Internet downloads in the same manner as the U.S. Army recruiting video game, *America's Army*, show heroic Arab men battling Al Qaeda and other extremist organizations with the aide of America? The DoS has made some efforts along this path recently when it worked with the Walt Disney Company to produce a 7-minute film, and hundreds of still images, featuring American people from all regions and walks of life for showing in U.S. consular offices worldwide and in arrival areas of foreign flights into the United States.⁵³ While politically left-leaning Hollywood would probably not be receptive to direct U.S. Government involvement in movie making, there may very well be Hollywood producers, writers, directors, and actors who would respond to formal and informal encouragement to produce movies that honestly highlight American ideals of freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights and that are targeted to Muslim and other key audiences around the world.

Also in the area of Means is the relatively untapped resource of well-publicized, high-profile actions that highlight the many good things the United States does every year for people in need around the world. Under Secretary Hughes referred to the "Diplomacy of Deeds" as one of the keys to successful U.S. Government strategic communication.⁵⁴ One of those deeds cited by the Under Secretary and others was the recent humanitarian missions to South America by the U.S. hospital ship *Comfort* and Southeast Asia by her sister ship *Mercy*. These missions, in which the *Comfort* and *Mercy* provided much needed medical assistance to the people of those regions visited, improved public opinion of the United States in those areas.⁵⁵ The United States should seek out more opportunities like these and do a much better job of publicizing the actions. While there is no doubt that the people directly affected by one of the *Comfort's*

or *Mercy's* visits have a better opinion of the United States, how many other people in similar countries never heard a word about it?

An additional area of needed Means improvement is that of countering enemy propaganda and inaccurate/misleading (accidental or intentional) news reports and media portrayals of America, Americans, and American actions. Murphy and White accurately point out that “failure to quickly and accurately react to propaganda cedes the international information environment to the enemy. The reality of instant communications means that individuals on the ground at the lowest tactical level should be empowered to respond to propaganda to the best of their ability.”⁵⁶ The DoS is making some efforts in this area with its Rapid Response Unit, foreign communication hubs, and digital outreach teams, but this effort is not Government-wide. This task can fall primarily to rapid reaction teams or “truth squads” (like DoS’s Rapid Response Unit) created within each U.S. Government agency and be coordinated by an expanded USIA-like information agency. Challenging adversary propaganda and news media inaccurate or slanted news stories with speed and consistency not only gets accurate information to the various audiences around the world, but also has the longer-term benefits of making propagandizing harder for the adversary and of making news organizations more careful and more balanced with their reporting. Journalists only have to be exposed in public as victims of propaganda or inaccurate/biased reporters a few times before they will police themselves.

Recommendations for Improving U.S. Strategic Communication for the War on Terror

While some parts of the U.S. strategic communication strategy for the War on Terror are gaining traction, the U.S. Government should take additional steps and set

additional processes in place to make the strategy more effective. The following recommendations use the *Ends – Ways – Means* framework to outline ideas for immediate action by U.S. Government senior policy makers.

In the area of Ends for the U.S. strategic communication strategy, the first step is to identify, develop, and promulgate a set of overarching principles that will govern and guide all of the U.S. Government's strategic communication efforts. These principles form the bedrock on which to build a successful strategic communication strategy for the War on Terror, and must be included in a strategic communication vision statement issued by the President and followed by all parts of the Federal Government. The three strategic objectives (ends) identified in the U.S. national strategic communication strategy document provide a good set of generic goals for American strategic communication efforts, but they do not provide enough detail to effectively guide the efforts of strategic policy and decisionmakers across the U.S. Government. The basic principles of an effective strategy should include:

- Strategic communication efforts are an interagency responsibility in which each agency has a part to play in planning, resourcing, and executing strategic communication activities in support of American foreign policy objectives.
- Strategic communication efforts are focused on the long-term success of American foreign policy in securing the homeland, protecting vital U.S. and allied interests around the world, and in promoting regional stability and the spread of democratic ideals and institutions. U.S. policy, plans, and actions must support a long-term commitment to the people, institutions, and resources vital to peaceful prosperity for all members of the family of nations.

- Strategic communication is embedded into the basic processes used for all policy formulation and campaign planning, and is resourced as a top priority of each U.S.

Government agency.

- Successful strategic communication efforts must include processes and procedures for strategic listening and learning from other nations, organizations, and people, and all strategic policies and campaigns must convey the willingness of the United States to consult with, cooperate with, and learn from allies and partners.

- The United States will not be universally loved and welcomed around the world, but all people, friends and foes, must see it as consistent, fair, determined, generous, agile, and willing to act and engage. There is natural resentment to the richest nation on earth, the great consumer nation, and the unchallenged superpower, but America has a unique responsibility to represent what is right about civilized people. Remember Ronald Reagan's advice, it is nice to be liked, but better to be respected.

With these guiding principles in mind, the following set of 10 specific actions fall into the Ends, Ways, and Means areas for improving the U.S. Government's strategic communication strategy:

1. *(End) Develop a single overarching "narrative" for the War on Terror from which all strategic communication efforts flow.* Counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen talks about the need for a "narrative" or consistent, coherent message that ties strategic communication themes together. He says people are not mobilized individually by cold consideration of rational facts, but are mobilized in groups by influences and opinion leaders, through a "cultural narrative" that include seven basic elements: a simple, easily expressed explanation for events; a choice of words and story format that

resonates with the target group; symbolic imagery that creates an emotional bond; elements of myth that tap into deep cultural undercurrents of identity and appeal to universal ideals; a call to action; credibility built on a high degree of consistency between what is said, what is done, and what is seen; and a future focus that inspires people to mortgage current self-interest for future benefits.⁵⁷ The specific messages (using words, images, and actions) sent out as a part of strategic communication campaigns must be tailored to the audiences for which they are intended, but there must be one overarching, consistent narrative that underlies those messages.

2. *(Ways) Create an independent federal agency responsible for directing, coordinating, and executing strategic communication for the U.S. Government.* This agency should have equal standing with the other major departments of the government and its head should be an equal member of the President's cabinet. The head of this agency should sit on the National Security Council and the Homeland Security Council to directly advise the President. It should have the authority to task and direct in support of public diplomacy, public affairs, and other informational activities. It should be responsible for media analysis, foreign public opinion analysis, and other analysis (all of the things related to "strategic listening" as described earlier) to support themes, messages, and actions. This agency should be responsible for training communication specialists and public affairs officers for the U.S. Government. This agency should also be non-political and non-partisan in manner of the FBI, CIA, and Federal Reserve. It should run all U.S. international broadcasting efforts such as the Voice of America, Radio Marti, etc., and take over the cultural exchange programs, educational programs,

and democracy promotion programs currently under the Department of State and other agencies.

3. *(Ways) Give the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs authority over and responsibility for all public diplomacy and public affairs functions of the DoS worldwide, to include the communication specialists and public affairs officers serving in embassies around the world.* If this Under Secretary is to truly lead DoS's, and as currently designed the entire interagency, strategic communication efforts, he or she must have the authority to task and direct actions, to set priorities, and to determine how to invest resources.

4. *(Ways) Draft new legislation for Congressional action, and executive agency regulations/orders that clarify strategic communication and information operations responsibilities, definitions, and limitations.* The President should work with the Congress to pass new laws that will provide a common definition of strategic communication for the U.S. Government, that will take into account the current and emerging technologies that impact how and when audiences around the world receive news and information, and that facilitate the legitimate efforts of U.S. Government agencies to inform and influence both American and foreign audiences. National leaders must admit that the United States actually does want to truthfully influence foreign audiences and that this cannot be done without simultaneously influencing American audiences. Informing people about the true nature and objectives of American foreign policy and influencing people to support those policies is not dishonest and can absolutely be done without misleading the public.

5. *(Ways) Create policy development processes and campaign plan development processes that formalize mechanisms for strategic communication of specific messages at their heart.* All policy formulation and strategic campaign design processes should have strategic communication aspects, messages, and actions as part of the base plan rather than as an appendix or afterthought.

6. *(Means) Fully resource the Strategic Communication strategy with people, training, and funds.* The President should request and Congress should appropriate funds for each agency of the U.S. Government specifically targeted to strategic communication efforts. Each agency needs to hire strategic communication specialists for their policy formulation teams, public affairs departments, to be members of the NSC Strategic Communication PCC, etc. Strategic communication cannot be an additional duty for an already heavily tasked official. Congress should also specifically appropriate funds to support training programs for strategic communication specialists, and should use its oversight responsibilities to require the heads of U.S. Government agencies to periodically report their strategic communication efforts.

7. *(Means) Recruit the entertainment industry to help spread the message of what is good about America and what is bad about the extremists/terrorists.* Movies, television, and music can highlight American ideals of freedom and human dignity and show the evils of extreme ideologies. Video games targeted to specific audiences in the Islamic world, and Islamic communities, which reinforce good and demonize extremists, could be effective.

8. *(Means) Seek out and exploit opportunities for simple, yet meaningful American humanitarian assistance in the Muslim world.* The United States does much good in the

world that literally saves lives every year. These efforts should be expanded and publicized.

9. *(Means) Aggressively challenge adversary propaganda and inaccurate, misleading, and slanted news media reporting.* U.S. Government officials from the highest levels down to the foot soldiers of each agency should review media reports about U.S. Government, American industry, U.S. military, and adversary actions to identify the mistakes, inaccuracies, and misleading news stories, then aggressively challenge those items and provide accurate information to correct the reporting and expose propaganda and biased media.

10. *(Means) Use Communication Planning techniques and the best Communication Planners from private industry and advertising firms to assist in strategic policy formulation and strategic campaign design.* Communications planning is a technique developed in Europe and involves determining which media channels and messages will work best for a particular brand. Over the last five years, several companies in the United States have put communications planning at the forefront of their thinking about how to better engage consumers.⁵⁸ Not only should the U.S. Government use this same technique to make its strategic communication more effective, but it should hire some of the same communications professionals who are making this work for private industry. The expertise exists in the private sector and there is no reason why the U.S. Government should not harness this resource for the good of U.S. foreign policy and ultimately for the good of the nation.

Conclusion

After a slow start, the United States Government has realized the importance of effective strategic communication in support of U.S. foreign policy and the War on Terror. The new strategic communication national strategy is slowly bringing more synchronization and integration to U.S. Government efforts at public diplomacy and strategic communication. More work needs to be done and implementing the recommendations laid out previously will help correct the current ends/ways/means mismatch of the strategy, and will ultimately make this strategy more successful.

The lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and those in the greater War on Terror, have brought a new realization that America's great military power is not enough to achieve success in the conflicts of the 21st Century. All elements of national power must be applied to the problems and challenges the United States faces in its role as the sole superpower in the world. These lessons, some reminiscent of those learned in earlier periods of conflict, are driving a substantial investment in strategic communication efforts by the U.S. Government. With some new guiding principles, new and expanded government structures and processes, and adequate resources, the United States can achieve its policy objectives and regain the respect and support of most the world.

Endnotes

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