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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLANS
TO WIN THE HEARTS AND MINDS

by

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Introduction

Like many Americans, the author finds it hard to understand why there are extreme elements of the Muslim faith that despise our Nation, the messages we convey, and what it stands for as much as they do. Their perceived inability to welcome and embrace our efforts toward the creation of democratic societies in the Middle East leaves anyone involved frustrated and confused. Surprisingly, our international efforts in the Global War on Terrorism met with similar contempt from many democratic populations around the world as well as the very populations we are attempting to make free.

What our government has to say is honest and valuable. However, the creation and delivery method is often ineffective. More importantly, the lack of message credibility and the believability of the message's deliverer usually leaves the recipients with nothing more than hollow words. To be effective in this Global War of ideas we will need to develop strategic communication plans that deliver our message as effectively as the precision guided munitions being dropped from our aircraft.

“Negative attitudes and the conditions that create them are the underlying source of threats to America’s national security and reduced ability to leverage diplomatic opportunities.”¹ Our Nation, the Commander in Chief, Combatant Commanders, and leaders of every element engaged in the Global War on Terrorism require a process for developing and delivering a coherent and effective strategic communication plans, designed to counter and diminish these negative attitudes. The current process involving elements of the Department of Defense, Department of State, and other interagency players is “ad hoc, cumbersome, and inefficient, frequently missing key opportunities to advance the overall campaign. A new process is

desperately needed to develop a strategic communication plan, bringing the appropriate agencies, and their information, together during peacetime, crisis, military operations other than war, and during Phase IV of any military operation.”² The end product must then be integrated with the operational campaign plans and employed in the same way we send complimentary military and interagency forces and their equipment into combat.

Fighting forces have used strategic communication plans since wars’ inception. Today, in the sophisticated information age of we find ourselves operating in, such plans are more important than ever. The Global War on Terrorism we face has become a war of ideologies. It is not a war of economics or territory or even religion, as some have claimed. As the lone super-power, our adversaries have painfully realized that we are unmatched in military might. It is highly unlikely we will face a force on force battle, with a peer competitor, in the near future. The insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan have realized this and have conducted successful military and information operations against us for more than 4 years. There is a prevailing belief within the US Government that we have “totally failed to explain or justify our foreign policy goals to the Muslim world, and notes that even if we do get the message out, actions speak louder than words.”³ The perceptions amongst Muslim communities, throughout the world, center around a belief that messages conveyed by the United States are not trustworthy. In essence, we lack the credibility necessary to completely and accurately get our message across to our target audiences. Therefore, it is imperative we successfully develop and utilize a strategic communication plan containing the type of credible messages aimed at diminishing the hatred this small section of the Muslim community feels toward the United States, our policies, and many of our allies. Ultimately, the US must develop and execute credible strategic communication plans through interagency coordination. The messages they deliver must begin

to gain and maintain favorable public opinions in our target audiences and help our Nation obtain its national objectives.

Drawing on government documents, articles, public opinion surveys, and various texts, this paper will address the purpose and employment of a strategic communications plan, the problems we currently face with our development of such plans, and some recommendations for their effective creation and employment in the future.

Notes

¹ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 15.

² Col Mike Neill, ACSC Research Paper Topic Request, *A Systematic Approach to Strategic Communication Plans*, US Joint Forces Command, 2005.

³ Democrats and Liberals Archives, "Strategic Communication," 29 November, 2004, <http://www.watchblog.com/democrats/archives/001861.html> , 1.

The Need for Strategic Communication

“Victory in the long war ultimately depends on strategic communication by the United States and its international partners.”¹ The effective delivery of strategic communication is ultimately critical to our Nation’s security and the success of our foreign policy. During both times of peace and war, the most effective way to deliver this information is through the creation and delivery of strategic communication plans. These plans, unlike our kinetic weapons, must be applied against not only the enemy, but also “all prospective audiences around the world – allied, friendly, neutral, potentially hostile, and hostile.”²

Definition and Core Instruments

The basic definition of a strategic communications plan is varied. Jeffrey Jones, in his Joint Forces Quarterly article defines it as,

“the synchronized coordination of statecraft, public affairs, public diplomacy, military information operations, and other activities, reinforced by political, economic, military, and other actions, to advance US foreign policy objectives.”³

The September 2004 Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication used the following definition:

“Strategic communication describes a variety of instruments used by governments for generations to understand global attitudes and cultures, engage in the dialogue of ideas between people and institutions, advise policymakers, diplomats, and military leaders on the public opinion implications of policy choices and influence attitudes and behavior through communication strategies.”⁴

The Defense Science Board Task Force also went on to identify four core instruments used to deliver strategic communication;

1. **Public diplomacy** seeks through the exchange of people and ideas to build lasting relationships and receptivity to a nation's culture, values, and policies.
2. **Public affairs** is used by the Departments of State and Defense to depict communication activities intended primarily to inform and influence US media and the American people.
3. **International broadcasting services** are funded by governments to transmit news, information, public affairs programs, and entertainment to global audiences via a variety of means.
4. **Information operations** is a term used by the Department of Defense to include computer network operations, electronic warfare, operational security, military deception, and PSYOP.⁵

The variety and complexity of these instruments, through which we send our messages, require the coordination of many different government agencies. Fortunately, we have developed and maintained effective instruments for the delivery of our intended messages to the target populations. The dilemma we face is not in the delivery method, but rather in the actual message, we deliver and how well the deliverer is received or believed. When we successfully utilize the previously identified core instruments, in delivering a credible message, we “informationally prepare the battlespace” for the impending war of ideas and clash of cultures.⁶

War of Ideas and Clashing Cultures

In the Global War on Terrorism we currently face the “war of ideas” as “an essential objective, because the larger goals of the US strategy depend on separating the vast majority of non-violent Muslims from the radical-militant Islamist-Jihadists.”⁷ This war of ideas has become a “struggle for hearts and minds.”⁸ It is not about military might or technology. It is much more primitive and basic than either of those historical reasons for war. Countless

anthropologist and social scientists will wager their degrees on the concept that you will not win a single “heart” or “mind” without effective communication. In that struggle for hearts and minds, we must be keenly aware that we are attempting to communicate and convince a small segment of a culture that is vastly different from us and the Western civilized world. As with any population throughout the world, the Islamic culture shapes the perceptions of the majority of our opponents. “Islam’s internal and external struggle over values, identity, and change is the dominant political arena in which strategic communication takes place. Islam’s crisis must be understood as a contest of ideas and engaged accordingly.”⁹ In addition to the language disparity, the Muslim world has many more cultural differences that few people are fully aware of or sensitive to. This ignorance adds embarrassment and further diminishes the limited credibility in an already a meager message or messenger. In order to be effective when communicating to our target Muslim audiences, our strategic communication must fully understand and appreciate these “attitudes and cultures, respect the importance of ideas, adopt advanced information technologies, and employ sophisticated skills and strategies.”¹⁰ At the core of our strategic communication plan, in an attempt to get “America’s message across, we need assurance, positive actions and examples, persuasion, moral suasion, and other inducements as much as we need deterrence, dissuasion, and coercion.”¹¹ Most importantly, we need credibility in our message. The words we choose, and the medium through which we deliver those words, must be trusted. In the end, a well-developed and effectively employed strategic communication plan helps shape the context and work toward building relationships that improve the success of our political, economic, and military objectives. In its final state, as the core of the information instrument of power, it should be in concert with the “political strategy of the Department of State, the economic strategy led by the National Security Council Office of International

Economic Affairs, and the national military strategy implemented by the Secretary of Defense and the uniformed military.”¹²

In today’s bureaucratic world of treaties, demarches, UN Resolutions, and competing 24 hour news agencies, the development of a strategic communications plan is a difficult and complicated process. Like any effective battle plan, there are many agencies involved in the creation of a strategic communications plan. Ultimately, “strategic communication plans would be integrated into operation, concept, and contingency plans in much the same way as we have incorporated flexible deterrent options.”¹³ The use of information requires not only the coordination and assistance of our friends and allies, it also “demands constant multi-agency, multiservice, multidisciplinary, and multidimensional integrations as well as orchestration, choreography, and synergy.”¹⁴ This coordinated process must begin in the strategic planning sessions at all levels before conflicts arise.

The global environment we have experienced since 2000 is substantially different from what we faced during the Cold War of the 1970s and 1980s. We ended the Cold War with a misconception that we could also end our responsibility and funding of strategic communication. In doing so, we made a “critical strategic mistake at the same time a new threat posed by radical Islam was emerging.”¹⁵ Unlike the information our government distributed during this Cold War period, the US is not seeking to “contain a threatening state/empire, but rather seeking to convert a broad movement within Islamic civilization to accept the value structure of Western Modernity – an agenda hiding within the official rubric of a War on Terrorism.”¹⁶ Many of the interagencies, to include the White House, Congress, the Department of State, and Department of Defense are finally beginning to recognize the critical need for changes in our strategic communication. They realize that our communication plans, at this level, begin with our

National interests in mind. One of the main instruments, through which we articulate our National interests, is through the National Security Strategy.

National Security Strategy

The President's 2002 National Security Strategy emphasized a change in the application of non-military power including "a different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts that can help people around the world learn about and understand America."¹⁷ Such an acknowledgment in this important document, that there are needed improvements in the way we communicate with the world, is a positive sign. There is a realization at all levels and in all branches of Washington that our Nation is in a long difficult war of ideas that will not be won with bombs and bullets alone. This awareness is slowly spreading, like a tremor, through other agencies to include the Departments of Defense and State.

Report of Defense Science Board

Secretary Rumsfeld recognizes that strategic communication is a "vital component to U.S. national security."¹⁸ He acknowledged "to win the war on terror, we must also win the war of ideals."¹⁹ On 20 May, 2004 the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the formation of a Defense Science Board Task Force addressing the "Transition to and from Hostilities."²⁰ In the memo, Secretary Wolfowitz directed the Task Force to focus on a number of areas in order to "enhance the effectiveness across this spectrum of pre- and post-conflict issues."²¹ At the conclusion of their research and "extensive interactions with a broad range of sectors in the

government, commercial, and academic worlds, as well as a series of highly interactive internal debates,” the Defense Science Board produced the September, 2004 Report on Strategic Communication.²² One of the many findings the Board illuminated was the fact there is no information strategy at the national level. We now “have national security strategies for security cyberspace, protecting national infrastructures, military strategy, and others, yet a national strategy for the employment of strategic communication does not exist.”²³ As Jeffrey Jones points out, “there is little evidence of cooperation, coordination, or even appreciation for the impact of strategic communication” at the National policy making levels.²⁴

Department of Defense

The 2005 “QDR identified capability gaps in each of the primary supporting capabilities of Public Affairs, Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, Military Diplomacy, and Information Operations, including Psychological Operations.”²⁵ As with the National Security Strategy, the mere fact the Department of Defense chose to devote a section of this critical document to strategic communication signifies the importance it has in achieving unity of effort in our Global War on Terror. “The United States will not win the war on terrorism or achieve other crucial national security objectives discussed in this Report by military means alone.”²⁶ The QDR recommended, to help win the Nation’s Global War on Terror, “the Pentagon must bolster its strategic communication’s capabilities to better integrate its public message with military programs, plans, and policies.”²⁷ The Report continues to stress, “effective communication must build and maintain credibility and trust with friends and foes alike through an emphasis on consistency, veracity, and transparency both in words and deeds.”²⁸ The QDR made mention of

the efforts thus far by the Department of State to improve the coordination and integration of this vital instrument of national power.

The Department of Defense

“must instill communication assessments and processes into its culture, developing programs, plans, policy, information and themes to support Combatant Commanders that reflect US Government overall strategic objectives. To this end, the Department will work to integrate communications efforts horizontally across the enterprise to link information and communication issues with broader policies, plans, and actions.”²⁹

Expanding on the QDR’s strategic communication findings will be a follow-on assessment team directed by Deputy Secretary of Defense, Gordon England. Deputy Secretary England wrote in a January 5, 2006 memorandum to senior defense officials that strategic communication is one of “several initiatives identified that warrant a greater degree of attention and execution.”³⁰ It is his hopes that a panel “will define missions and develop doctrine for strategic communications, including public affairs, information operations, and defense support to public diplomacy.”³¹ As the current administration was looking at new ways to defend our nation through the analysis and exploitation of information, there was a short-lived organization that Secretary Rumsfeld launched called the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI).

Created on October 30, 2001, OSI was “to serve as the Department’s focal point for a ‘strategic information campaign in support of the war on terrorism.’ The Office ‘was to develop a full spectrum influence strategy that would result in greater foreign support of US goals and repudiation of terrorists and their methods.’”³² It “planned to establish access to information for those in regions dominated by enemy propaganda, such as the jihadist schools of Pakistan—the most fertile recruiting fields of terrorism.”³³ The office was to use “unique and innovate approaches” to strategic communication and counter disinformation in an attempt to bolster our

own credibility while destroying that our the terrorists.³⁴ Unfortunately, the office was disbanded in February of 2002 when incorrect reports emerged that the office intended to plant lies in the foreign media and possibly mislead US press sources as well. “The episode made this vital mission so politically radioactive that no comparable institutionalized effort has subsequently been launched to perform it.”³⁵ While the Department of Defense struggles with how tackle the deficiencies in our Nation’s strategic communication plans, so too the principle diplomatic policy making branch of our government, faces many of the same challenges.

Department of State

The Department of State has a vested interest in making sure the message we transmit to the world is going to assist, or at least not hinder, their diplomatic efforts. Shortly before taking over as the Secretary of State, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said, “we are engaged primarily in a war of ideas, not of armies. It will be won by visionaries who can look past the moment. It is absolutely the case that the United States needs to put new energy into its public diplomacy.”³⁶ One of the ways in which her agency has placed more energy into public diplomacy is through the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). As the “principal international strategic communications service for the foreign affairs community, the IIP designs, develops, and implements a variety of information initiatives and strategic communication programs.”³⁷ The IIP was created in 1999 with the disbanding of the US Information Agency. Unfortunately, “national assets for communication, information, and education around the globe have continued to degrade, and other actors and key communicators are now involved.”³⁸ The largest hinderance to the efforts IIP, and other agencies make, is their lack of “cooperation,

coordination, or even appreciation from the impact of strategic communication.”³⁹ In an effort to begin to institutionalize some of our strategic communication plan efforts there is currently legislation on the House floor proposed by Representative Mac Thornberry from Texas.

Representative Thornberry Bill

“Because military power will not be sufficient to win the Global War on Terror,” US Representative Mac Thornberry (Texas - District 13) filed legislation in the form of HR 1869.⁴⁰ His bill is intended to fill the apparent gaps “in the way the United States understands and relates to the rest of the world.”⁴¹ His bill, titled the Strategic Communications Act of 2005, “calls for the creation of a non-partisan and non-profit Center for Strategic Communication.”⁴² In his own words, Rep Mac Thornberry states;

“In the years since the September 11th attacks, study after study has reached the conclusion that our government’s efforts in strategic communication are in desperate need of improvement. It’s no secret that much of the world sees our country in a very negative light. I believe a significant reason that we have a bad image is our repeated failures to communicate who we are.”⁴³

The desired outcome is that his proposed, “Strategic Communications center will help us do a better job of anticipating the potential consequences of our actions.”⁴⁴ As with many of our attempts to communicate with our adversaries, our actions, taken with the best of intentions, all too often end up hurting our relations with the people we are trying to help. The Center for Strategic Communications that Rep Thornberry envisions “would be privately run entity providing information and analysis to the State Department, Defense Department, the Justice Department, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence.”⁴⁵

From this center's efforts, information would be provided to our national decision makers with regard to a particular population's opinions, media trends, culture, and reactions to our operations. These devised "communication strategies will promote diplomacy, provide a positive view of the United States, and respond to national security threats."⁴⁶

A common theme throughout the reports, studies, and editorials researched for this paper call for the establishment of a permanent agency to coordinate, implement, and oversee all interagency strategic communication plan efforts. They all realize the capability to quickly collect and accurately disseminate information containing our message will be necessary to win the Global War on Terror. Though these are seemingly simple tasks in today's age of information, it is compounded by the fact that in order to be entirely effective, the message must be credible.

Notes

¹ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, January 2006), 91, 92.

² Jeffrey B. Jones, "Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 110.

³ *Ibid.*, 108, 109.

⁴ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 11

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁶ Jeffrey B. Jones, "Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 111.

⁷ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

- ¹⁰ Ibid., 11.
- ¹¹ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
- ¹² Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 108.
- ¹³ Ibid., 110.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 109.
- ¹⁵ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 37.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 36.
- ¹⁷ Bush, George W. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2002, 31.
- ¹⁸ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 28.
- ¹⁹ Secretary of Defense Donald S. Rumsfeld, “Take the Fight to the Terrorists” *Washington Post*, 26 October 2003, found within the Defense Science Board Report, page 28.
- ²⁰ Deputy Secretary of Defense Memo, 20 May 2004, copy found within Defense Science Board Report, 87.
- ²¹ Ibid., 87.
- ²² Ibid., 87
- ²³ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 37.
- ²⁴ Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 110.
- ²⁵ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, January 2006), 92.
- ²⁶ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, January 2006), 92.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 92
- ²⁸ Ibid., 92
- ²⁹ Ibid., 92
- ³⁰ “QDR: DOD Must Bolster Strategic Communication for Long War,” *Inside the Pentagon*, 26 January 2006, 1.
- ³¹ Ibid., 1.
- ³² Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 24.
- ³³ Frank J. Gaffney Jr., “The Political Front,” *National Review Online*, 7 December 2005, <http://www.nationalreview.com/gaffney/gaffney200512071319.asp>, 2.

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁶ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 28.

³⁷ USINFO website http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/about_usinfo.html.

³⁸ Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 110.

³⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁰ Rep Mac Thornberry, *Thornberry Bill Seeks to Strengthen U.S. Strategic Communication*, Press Release, 28 April 2005, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Ibid., 1.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.

Credibility of Our Message

There is consensus amongst much of the leadership in Washington DC that our “public diplomacy is in crisis.”¹ In today’s complex information age, “the United States is without a working channel of communication to the world of Muslims. “America’s image problem, many suggest, is linked to perceptions of the United States as arrogant, hypocritical, and self-indulgent.”² Inevitably therefore, “whatever American’s do and say only serves the party that has both the message and the ‘loud and clear’ channel: the enemy.”³ Our ability to obtain that clear channel of communication is only the first step. Once we obtain and utilize the core instruments of communication, as discussed in the previous section, we must have a coherent and credible message to deliver. Many of our adversaries have been part of oppressive governments and very restrictive religions. They have become inherently skeptical of any types of information coming from Western media and their own biased government sources. In many areas of the Middle East, the Imams are perceived as being the most credible source of information about their world. Unfortunately, the same information sources that feed the Imams’ are often distorted and blatantly incorrect. The vast majority of Arabs get any remaining information about America, and our intentions, from their Arab media sources. Our ability to influence such biased sources is one of the largest hindrances to our quest for credible channels of communication into the Muslim world. Once we have infiltrated our story into such sources it is even more difficult to build and earn credibility in what is being reported. With our message on the streets, there are significant factors, beyond our credibility still working against the successful reception of our information. We must next look at some of those other factors and

ways we can measure the success or failure of our processes.

Factors Working Against Us

In his Joint Forces Quarterly article, Jeffrey Jones identified seven significant factors that make this development and delivery of a credible communication plan difficult:

1. “Traditional dividing lines between public affairs, public diplomacy, and military information operations are blurred because of immediate access to information.
2. Resources dedicated to the information realm have been estimated to be insufficient by a factor of ten.
3. There is extensive proliferation of animosity, alienation of allies, disappointment of friends, and disillusionment of those who have traditionally looked to a trusted America for hope.
4. Technological innovations exist but are insufficiently funded, tapped, or fused.
5. Al Qaeda and other parties constitute an active adversary in the propaganda domain.
6. Bureaucratic turf battles, misperceptions, and the absence of visible, sustained interagency commitment are detriments to the progress.
7. Our national ability to use television and the internet in sophisticated ways to reach the full spectrum of audiences remains woefully inadequate if we are to influence the future.⁴

Many of these factors have been created by neglecting the way in which we, as Americans, communicate with the Islamic world. Those factors we have not directly created, we have failed to properly respond to and/or diminish the negative effects they cause. Before 9/11, we afforded little attention to the Middle-East if it did not directly impact our access to oil. Our government turned a blind eye to thousands of Saudi funded madrasa schools on the Arabian peninsula, in Pakistan, and Indonesia. As the madrasas produced hundreds of thousands of brainwashed

Islamic extremists during the 1980s and 90s, we continued to reduce our HUMINT and other intelligence spending in this critical region of the world. Strategic communication was not a decisive factor in our overwhelming victory in DESERT STORM and consequently, we continued to ignore this critical audience, the perishable communication lines, and dwindling credibility we held in this region. During this decay of our ability to strategically communicate with the Muslim world, two global events occurred; the 28 September 2000 Second Intifada, also known as the al-Aqsa Intifada, and 11 September 2001. Immediately following both events, we found ourselves in a position with few channels through which to communicate a message that carried very little credibility. We were instantly in desperate need of allies throughout the Muslim world. Our government required an audience that believed and could help communicate our objectives to find, and bring to justice, those members of the Muslim world directly involved in terrorism. In bringing this justice, we also attempted to convince the world that our prosecution of the Global War on Terror would be swift and just. Our messages were believed by few and were instantly discounted by the majority of the audiences we were trying to convince.

Much of the hard work we achieved in developing credible messages and believable spokespeople was instantly negated by the actions of a small group of Americans. The citizens of Iraq and other audiences throughout the Muslim world became outraged as TV images of “tortured” Abu Ghraib prisoners were broadcast on news programs around the globe. Our legitimacy for prosecuting the Global War on Terrorism was destroyed. Anything we attempted to communicate to the people of Iraq we were sent to make free and secure, was seen as American propaganda. Ironically, due to catastrophic events caused by mother nature, we were provided with two incredible opportunities in 2004 and 2005 to demonstrate our genuine

compassion for predominately Muslim populations. The Tsunami in Indonesia and the earthquake in Pakistan enabled us to display and provide humanitarian relief to tens of thousands of hurt, hungry, and displaced Muslims. Our actions were backing up our words and the extremists were unable to counter it with their usual propaganda.

Polling Numbers

In June of 2004 , a Zogby International survey conducted in six Middle-Eastern countries, identified some alarming “Impressions of America.” Of their principle findings:

- Overall favorable ratings toward the U.S. have declined in the past two years
- Attitudes toward U.S policy in Iraq and Palestine are extremely low
- Attitudes toward U.S. policy on terrorism are somewhat higher, though still quite low and have declined precipitously in the past two years.
- Most Arabs have only indirect or received knowledge about America. The principle source of that knowledge comes from the Arab media.⁵

What emerged from the examination of the data “was that these negative attitudes were driven by Arab anger and frustration with American policy, especially toward what was seen as its ‘unbalanced policy in the Israel-Palestine conflict.’”⁶ As stated earlier, culture shapes perception. So, in a culture that perceives itself and its Muslim brothers and sisters as being treated unfairly, it is no surprise they would not believe anything we say. The Zogby survey directly supported this overwhelming dismissal of the U.S. message. A 2004 Zogby poll of Arab opinion shows that the audience receptive to the U.S. message is miniscule:

Country	June 2004 Favorable / Unfavorable	April 2002 Favorable / Unfavorable
Morocco	11/88	38/61
Saudi Arabia	4/94	12/78
Jordan	15/78	34/61
Lebanon	20/69	26/70
UAE	14/73	11/87
Egypt	2/98	15/76

Report of Zogby International, *How Arabs View America How Arabs Learn About America*. (Zogby International, June 2004), Page 3.⁷

What seems to be most alarming from this data is the substantial decline in just two years. Over this period of time we have been more engaged in the Middle East than ever before. In those same 24 months we have liberated two countries, brought their citizens freedom and humanitarian relief of ever kind, destroyed or disbanded hundreds of terrorist cells, and improved the infrastructure of the same two nations with millions of American taxpayer dollars. Seemingly, these acts would improve the reception of our messages and approval would be at its highest. Instead, “the Jihadi message – that strongly attacks American values – is being accepted by more moderate and non-violent Muslims.”⁸ “We must understand that we may no longer be the critical or most credible deliverers of the message.”⁹ In many instances, we must actively engage multilateral and international organizations, to include nongovernmental organizations to assist with conveying our messages to the target audience. These agencies often “understand who the true influencers are in an affected population and have conduits to them.”¹⁰ We must never underestimate the cultural value of face to face communication. At the same time, we must also pursue ways to influence or infiltrate the adversaries’ primary news sources. While doing so we must also establish criteria through which we can measure our successes.

Measuring our Success

In all operational plans, commanders develop, closely monitor, and measure the success of their operations. So too must those agencies that develop and deliver strategic communication plans must also establish criteria to measure the effectiveness of our messages.¹¹ In addition to the statistically accurate polling data collected by organizations such as Zogby, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) collects foreign opinion polling data and "provides daily reports on foreign media editorials and commentary."¹² The Foreign Broadcast Information Service also "collects and analyzes foreign print, radio, TV, web-based, and gray literature publications, including assessments of Al Jazeera and other Arab/Muslim satellite TV broadcasting."¹³ Additional foreign opinion poll results are analyzed and available through the US embassies, the DoD, the combatant commands, CIA, NGOs and civilian polling organizations. Regardless of where the data measurement eventually comes from, "dedicated personnel and systems must be in place to measure the effectiveness of messages and actions, monitor adversarial media, accelerate response times at all levels, and preempt or counteract enemy misinformation and disinformation."¹⁴

Our strategic long-term objective in this war is to diminish the underlying causes of hate and animosity toward the United States. We do not intend to change a religion or alter the way in which the Islamic extremists think about their faith. We do aspire to change the way in which much of the Muslim world thinks about the US and our policies that affect them. In many ways, and on an equal number of levels, we have failed at this objective. Not only have we failed, we have also often achieved the opposite of what was intended. Our message, though one of truth

and logic, still lacks the credibility necessary to convey the planned messages to our intended audiences. Thankfully, there are thousands of individuals working to improve our strategic communication. There has become an increased awareness of the value in effective communication of our policies, attitudes, and intentions. The final section of this paper will identify some of the recommendations that should improve our Nation's ability to get our message out to those audiences who threaten our way of life and prevent us from spreading democracy.

Notes

¹ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴ Jeffrey B. Jones, "Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 109.

⁵ Zogby International, *Impressions of America 2004 How Arabs View America How Arabs Learn About America*, (Zogby International 2004), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 46.

⁹ Jeffrey B. Jones, "Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹² Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴ Jeffrey B. Jones, "Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 112.

Conclusion

“Strategic communication can contribute significantly to keeping the peace, reinforcing stability, and inhibiting terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the flow of drugs.”¹ Though it is not the ever elusive “silver bullet”, effective strategic communication plans can be the most effective weapon on and off the battlefield. “The Nation needs strategic communication capabilities that are planned, directed, coordinated, funded, and conducted in ways that support the nation’s interests.”² The only way to achieve this is through a combined effort from the President all the way down to the US Marine on patrol. Outside of the efforts led by the Department of Defense, we need open communication and full collaboration with the intelligence communities, the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, civilian news agencies, civilian strategic communication agencies, and the governments of allies. Through such cooperative efforts, we have the opportunity to develop credible strategic communication plans we will deliver to audiences that will help further our national interests. In getting our message out, we have the capability to create a better state of peace throughout the world.

Recommendations for Recovery

There are three primary recommendations, based on the results of the research the author has conducted, that must be implemented for future success in the development and employment of credible strategic communication plans. Together, they provide a new level of interest and decision maker involvement that will move our strategic planning process toward greater inclusion in all operational plans.

New Legislation (Thornberry Bill)

The first recommended step on this road to recovery begins at the highest levels of government. Future success in operations in the interest of the Nation is dependent upon the approval of the Representative Mac Thornberry Bill. This bill, currently in the House International Relations Committee, will provide the legislation necessary to begin the creation of a non-governmental entity that will:

1. provide information and analysis to civilian and military decision-makers
2. develop plans and programs to create and implement U.S. communication strategies
3. support government strategic communications.³

Through these actions, the non-governmental entity will develop an organization that will create a coherent and credible message that will be shared by all government agencies involved in helping achieve our National objectives. In his introduction of the bill, Representative Thornberry ended his comments by stating, “Strategic communication is a vital component of U.S. national security. It is in crisis and must be transformed with a strength of purpose that

matches our commitment to diplomacy, defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security.”⁴ The fact that this topic is being discussed on the floors of Congress and in sub-committee can only help draw attention to this crisis in communicating our message. The more members of Congress who become aware of this issue the better we will be positioned to ensure we think about our message before taking diplomatic or military action.

Department of Strategic Influence - Part II

The second recommendation is the government’s re-establishment of the Department of Defense Office of Strategic Influence. This capability in our IO arsenal is critical to countering the lies and propaganda produced by our adversaries. Though this venture was quickly shut down when attempted by Secretary Rumsfeld in 2002, its rejuvenation would greatly enhance our ability to defuse or counter counterproductive information from any source. Armed with the capability to quickly and effectively broadcast the messages we want our adversaries and allies to receive, this organization will be on the “front line” of battle in winning the all important hearts and minds. Having such an influential office in the Pentagon will help simply due to its location. They would be included in the planning of future military operations and ensure we consider the IO aspect of any OPLAN. Their ability to quickly respond to any enemy propaganda or foreign news stories will be enhanced with their proximity to the “nerve center” of the US military. The office will also be able to utilize the military’s massive network of contacts and conduits into the areas of operation. These conduits will allow the OSI to insert news stories or pieces of intelligence directly into the front lines. Such direct insertion may also provide the US with a way around the credibility issue. Covert operations and HUMINT

capabilities will be utilized to “plant” information in such places as the mosques and streets around the markets.

Civilian Expert Assistance

The final recommended step for improvements in our development and delivery of strategic communication plans is to utilize the massive marketing intelligence of civilian contracted strategic communication organizations such as the Lincoln Group. Collaboration between government and the considerable benefits of private sector thinking and skills should be strongly encouraged.”⁵ We must explore “new ways to harness strategic communication to the flexibility and creative imagination of the private sector.”⁶ Our potential partners in the commercial sector have a “dominant competitive edge in multi-media production, opinion and media surveys, information technologies, programs evaluations, and measuring the influence of communications.”⁷ “U.S. broadcasters lag well behind the private sector and America’s adversaries in developing interactive, content rich, targeted, multi-lingual web based broadcasting services. The U.S. needs trusted, reliable, web sites conducive to dialogue on political, intellectual, and cultural levels.”⁸ Our government should be tapping into that expertise at both the message creation and its delivery levels. There is no cost benefit for the creators of this message to package and deliver its contents. That job could be done much more effectively and efficiently by the vast amounts of civilian expertise available in today’s market.

One of the principle responsibilities of these organizations should be to exploit the media’s portrayal of good stories and diminish the impact of broadcasting bad actions or events. Regardless of who delivers the message, and how it is delivered, we must make improvements in

“capturing the positive acts of our own Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, the activities of the US Agency for International Development, the citizens themselves, and other parties across the country.”⁹ At the same time, with such civilian assistance, we can quickly react to any negative, false, or otherwise damaging stories produced by our adversaries.

Notes

¹ Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 114.

² Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 11.

³ Rep Mac Thornberry, *Thornberry Bill Seeks to Strengthen U.S. Strategic Communication*, Press Release, 28 April 2005, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, September 2004), 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹ Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue Thirty-nine (Fourth Quarter 2005), 112.

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