



Report of the
**DEFENSE
SCIENCE
BOARD**

• • TASK FORCE ON STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION • • • •



JANUARY 2008



This report is a product of the Defense Science Board (DSB).

The DSB is a Federal Advisory Committee established to provide independent advice to the Secretary of Defense. Statements, opinions, conclusions, and recommendations in this report do not necessarily represent the official position of the Department of Defense.

The DSB Task Force on Strategic Communication in the 21st Century completed its information gathering in August 2007.

This report is unclassified and cleared for public release.

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DEFENSE SCIENCE
BOARD

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4 Jan 2008

MEMORANDUM FOR UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR ACQUISITION,
TECHNOLOGY & LOGISTICS

SUBJECT: Final Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic
Communication

I am pleased to forward the final report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication, which was conducted within the context of the DSB 2007 Summer Study on Challenges to Military Operations in Support of National Interests. This report offers important recommendations for transforming the nation's strategic communication capability.

The DSB first examined the matter of strategic communication in 2001, finding it an important instrument of national power. The Board's commitment to that finding remains strong, particularly in light of the conflicts in which the nation has been embroiled since the tragedies of September 11. In that context, this report examines a series of questions designed to better position the government and the nation in today's security environment. What can the nation learn from successful strategic communication experiences? How can government best understand cultures, values, and changing technologies—and act effectively on this knowledge? How should we enhance government-civil society collaboration to support strategic communication? Can a sustained commitment to strategic communication be achieved?

Answers to these questions motivated the recommendations put forth in this report—recommendations that extend government wide and focus on the importance of proper leadership and resource commitment. I endorse all of the study's recommendations and encourage you to forward this report to the Secretary of Defense.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Schneider, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. William Schneider, Jr.
DSB Chairman

Executive Summary

The 2007 Defense Science Board (DSB) Task Force on Strategic Communication has written this report within the context of a larger study, the *DSB 2007 Summer Study on Challenges to Military Operations in Support of National Interests*. The summer study recognized that effective strategic communication, coordinated and executed in association with all aspects of national capacity, can help to prevent and limit conflicts and greatly enhance responses to global challenges that threaten America's interests and values.

In this context, the objectives of the 2007 DSB Task Force on Strategic Communication were to:

- Review and assess the recommendations made in the 2004 DSB report on *Strategic Communication* and the 2001 DSB report on *Managed Information Dissemination*.
- Review and assess strategic communication activities since 2004.
- Establish actionable recommendations for strategic communication in the 21st century.

Strategic Communication at a Critical Time

The dynamic process of strategic communication begins with choices among strategic priorities and deep comprehension of attitudes and cultures. It integrates the development, implementation, assessment, and evolution of public actions and messages in support of America's interests at home and abroad. Strategic communication is a central responsibility of the President and senior government leaders, and is conducted by a wide variety of civilian and military practitioners. Its successful use depends on shared knowledge and strong, adaptive networks both within government and between government and civil society.

This study is born of a conviction that the instrument of strategic communication is vital to America's future, and must be transformed at strategic and operational levels. The United States and its partners face

an array of trans-national and state-based threats, as well as an abundance of opportunities. These threats and opportunities vary greatly in their nature and potential effect, but they present a common challenge. That is, they require a strategic communication instrument with sustained impact and far greater capacity to understand, engage, and influence global populations on issues of consequence.

Why undertake another study now when many excellent reports have addressed problems in America's strategic communication and public diplomacy? The attacks of 9/11, widespread anti-Americanism, and ongoing threats from terrorist and insurgent networks prompted many of these reports. We are mindful of these issues, but the questions that led to this report are different. What can the nation learn from historic strategic communication successes? How can governments best understand cultures, values, and changing technologies—and act effectively on this knowledge? How should the nation enhance collaboration between government and civil society in support of strategic communication? Is it possible to break the pattern of America's episodic commitment to strategic communication and over-reliance on coercive instruments of power?

This is the Defense Science Board's third report in a decade on strategic communication. The world has changed and so have our views. We remain steadfast in our belief that strategic communication is critically important to the success of every strategy and the wise use of all elements of national power. We have not wavered in our judgment that strategic communication must be transformed with resources and a strength of purpose that match our commitment to defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security. But we have changed our thinking in important ways. This report reflects our heightened appreciation that success in strategic communication depends on:

- deep comprehension of the identities, attitudes, cultures, interests, and motives of others
- awareness by leaders and practitioners that *what we do* matters more than *what we say*

- institutionalized connections between a wide variety of government and civil society partners in the United States and abroad
- a durable model of strategic direction that adapts quickly, transforms stovepipes, integrates knowledge and functions, and builds next generation skills and technologies

Despite Progress, Much Remains to be Done

In 2004, this task force found “tactical achievements” in strategic communication, notably in public affairs coordination, U.S. broadcasting to the Middle East, and the embedded media policy of the Department of Defense (DOD). We concluded, however, that despite the promise of statements calling for significant change in the President’s National Security Strategy (2002), “the U.S. had made little progress in building and transforming its strategic communication assets.”

Nearly four years later our view is more positive at the departmental level. The State Department has had strong, consistent leadership for more than two years in the office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. There is new leadership in the Broadcasting Board of Governors. The 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review included a Strategic Communication Working Group, which led to approval of a Strategic Communication Roadmap and creation of a Strategic Communication Integration Group by the Deputy Secretary of Defense. In May 2007, the interagency Strategic Communication Policy Coordinating Committee issued a “U.S. National Strategy for Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy.” These developments and a number of positive changes at the operational level are discussed in this report.

Nevertheless, the task force finds reasons for continued concern. Positive changes within organizations are real, but they depend to a considerable extent on the skills and imagination of current leaders. These changes must be evaluated, and those that work should be institutionalized. Resistance from traditional organizational cultures continues. Resources for strategic communication have increased, but they fall substantially short of national needs.

This task force's primary concern is that fundamental transformation in strategic communication has not occurred at the strategic and interagency level. Reforms within organizations are important, but they are not a substitute for strong White House leadership and enduring, flexible networks that connect strategies and capabilities, departments and agencies, government and civil society.

Collaboration with Civil Society at a New Level

The United States will fail in meeting 21st century national security challenges if it does not take existing government collaboration with civil society to a new level. Challenges of the kind and magnitude the world now faces cannot be met by states alone. This will mean strengthening traditional partnerships with non-profit organizations in exchanges, broadcasting, and other government functions. Much more needs to be done. The nation must harness the knowledge, skills, creativity, and commitment of academic, non-profit, and business communities in more imaginative ways.

In its 2004 report, the task force recommended institutionalizing relationships between government and civil society through an independent, non-profit entity that would support the government's strategic communication activities. We imagined an entity shaped by the need to provide government agencies with information, analysis, products, and services. In this report, we have broadened our thinking in the context of a global environment that is more complex and information technologies that are changing rapidly.

Government departments alone cannot develop the deep understanding of cultures, influence networks, or information technologies that can be achieved through close collaboration with civil society. Their efforts will benefit from the expertise, methods, core data, and best practices available outside government. In recommending the creation of an independent Center for Global Engagement, the task force does not seek to duplicate or draw funding from effective government strategic communication activities. We do seek an entity that is accountable, that operates in the public interest, that is outside but closely connected with government, and that will greatly enhance an instrument that can only succeed with

shared knowledge and adaptive networks between government and civil society.

Sustained White House Leadership

Strategic communication requires sustained senior leadership at the White House level that focuses exclusively on global communication and directs all relevant aspects of national capacity. These leaders must have authority as well as responsibility—authorities to establish priorities, assign operational responsibilities, transfer funds, and concur in senior personnel appointments. Importantly, these senior leaders must have direct access to the President on critical communication issues when policies are formulated and implemented.

The task force has looked closely at this issue for nearly a decade, and we have reached the following conclusions. Presidents shape the nation's strategic communication in powerful ways, and they require permanent structures within the White House that will strengthen their ability to understand and communicate with global audiences. Coordination committees may occasionally work well, but they are not a substitute for strategic direction that is durable and empowered. Leaders in departments have full-time management responsibilities that limit their ability to direct and coordinate at the interagency level. Departments and agencies have constraints that make it difficult for them to think and act in interagency terms. Ad hoc "czars" and incremental changes to national security structures designed generations ago are not the answer. There is no such thing as a "perfect" strategic direction model. Talented, competent leadership will determine success, but good leaders function best in good structures.

Election cycles and episodic commitment have shaped and limited strategic communication for decades. Today, America needs a new vision, new structures, and new legislated authorities. These can only be achieved with Presidential direction and the focused actions of leaders in Congress.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1.

The Center for Global Engagement _____

The President, Congressional leaders, and interested organizations outside government collaborate to create an independent, non-profit, and non-partisan Center for Global Engagement (CGE). Three principles should guide the establishment and work of the center. First, that the direction, planning, and execution of the government's strategic communication instrument are government responsibilities. Second, that government cannot succeed in carrying out its responsibilities without sustained, innovative, and high-quality support from civil society. Third, that the academic, research, business, and non-profit communities offer deep reservoirs of untapped knowledge, skills, credibility, and agility needed to strengthen strategic communication.

The Center for Global Engagement should be a:

- 501(c)(3) corporation with an independent director and board of directors
- means to motivate and attract civil society's best and brightest
- hub for innovation in cultural understanding, technology, and media
- repository of expertise
- magnet for innovative ideas
- means to institutionalize continuity and long-term memory
- focus for experimentation and project development

The task force recommends that Congress provide the Department of State with \$500,000 to develop a charter that will define the mission, structure, and operations of the CGE. The Department should award these funds through a competitive grant to an organization or group of organizations that will prepare and execute a business plan leading to the creation of the CGE as an independent corporate entity (one option could be to extend the mission of an

existing federally funded research and development center or 501(c)3 corporation).

Thereafter, Congress should provide sustained funding for the CGE through a line item in the Department of State's budget. This should be new money appropriated to the Department. Congress should provide the CGE with an initial appropriation of \$50 million in fiscal year 2009. The objective should be steady funding growth, consistent with performance and use by multiple government agencies, to \$250 million during the first five years.

The CGE should:

- respond to multi-agency government taskings, coordinated through a National Security Council Deputies Committee for Strategic Communication
- provide deep understanding of cultures and cultural dynamics, core values of other societies, and media and technology trends
- provide core data, best practices, and an opinion research clearing house in support of government-sponsored strategic communication programs
- assess the effectiveness of national strategic communication activities and programs
- collaborate with independent organizations that promote universal values, cultural understanding, and global engagement
- maintain a repository of strategic communication talent, skills, and capabilities
- attract fellows from the academic, non-profit, and business communities, and from government

Recommendation 2.

Leadership _____

Create a permanent strategic communication structure within the White House. This structure should have the following elements:

- a Deputy National Security Advisor and Assistant to the President for Strategic Communication
- a Deputies Committee for Strategic Communication
- a Strategic Communication Policy Committee, chaired by the Deputy National Security Advisor and Assistant to the President for Strategic Communication, to include all departments and agencies with substantial strategic communication responsibilities
- an Associate Director for Strategic Communication in the Office of Management and Budget
- legal and regulatory authorities as necessary for the Deputy National Security Advisor and Assistant to the President for Strategic Communication to:
 - (1) assign operational responsibilities, transfer funds, and concur in personnel appointments
 - (2) provide guidance on strategic communication to an independent Center for Global Engagement

Recommendation 3.

Critical Science and Technology Opportunities _____

The Department of Defense should make greater use of existing tools and technologies to support strategic communication. For example, existing science and technology capacity can be used to:

- identify nodes of influence through network analysis
- support communication and media analysis with machine translation
- understand viral information flows and influences
- utilize innovative evaluation and measurement methodologies (e.g., sentiment detection/analysis).

The task force recommends that \$50 million a year be invested to advance knowledge in these areas and that this research budget be managed by the Defense Advance Research Projects Agency, the National Science Foundation, and the intelligence community. The task force recognizes the current but disparate efforts in these areas and recommends vigorous engagement across the strategic communication community to share the existing knowledge base.

Recommendation 4.

Department of State

The Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs should be given enhanced policy, budget, and personnel authorities. The task force recommends a significant increase in the budget for the State Department's public diplomacy programs, including exchanges over a five-year period. The budget should be tripled and additional funds used in the following areas:

- exchanges (e.g. Fulbright, International Visitor Leadership Program, International Military Education and Training)
- Americans studying/conducting research abroad
- recruitment, training, and deployment of additional public diplomacy positions
- support for strategic communication and public diplomacy activities of the U.S. military's combatant commands
- Internet, websites, blogging, Rapid Response Units, and Digital Outreach Teams
- opinion, attitude, and behavioral research and evaluation of/for public diplomacy programs
- book translation programs
- utilization of sports and entertainment figures as cultural diplomats
- training and partnerships with key civil society activists (journalists, local media, civic organizations)

- online English language (English as a second language) programs focused on marginalized young Muslim populations
- public-private partnerships targeted at economic development and job creation in key strategic nations (Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq)

The task force recommends that a senior State Department public diplomacy representative be assigned to each combatant command.

Recommendation 5.

Broadcasting Board of Governors _____

Conduct a review of the mission, structure, funding, and performance of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, as an integral element of the overall U.S. strategic communication capability. The task force recommends that the following be part of the review:

- current media mix
- relationship among the U.S. international broadcasting services (such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia)
- utilization of new communication media
- new models for utilization and funding of news and program services
- language priorities (currently 60 languages)
- audience research (e.g., market research, media usage, impact)
- management structures and relationships with the Executive Branch

The task force is pleased with the passage of Section 316 of the 9/11 bill that provides the President new authority to support requirements for surge broadcasting. The task force urges the administration and the Congress to implement procedures and funding measures to utilize this much-needed authority when a surge requirement is identified.

Recommendation 6.**Department of Defense**

Create a permanent Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Strategic Communication, reporting to the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. This new office would include senior representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, the Joint Staff, and the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence. This new office would review and coordinate all information activities aimed at foreign governments across public affairs and information operation domains.

Significantly increase the strategic communication budgets of each combatant commander. The task force suggests that funding be tripled and identified within a separate budget for each geographic combatant command, and that additional funds be used in the following activities:

- task federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs), such as the Institute for Defense Analyses and RAND, to conduct cultural analysis and program development in each combatant commander's area of responsibility
- provide communications infrastructure in support of stability operations and disaster relief operations
- increase public affairs presence at each combatant commander to support security cooperation
- increase collaborative planning and experimentation with nongovernment organizations

Increase engagement in support of strategic communication.

For example:

- increase hospital ship and crew activation to support security cooperation programs
- utilize Corps of Engineers capabilities to support programs for disaster relief, flood control, and infrastructure development (security cooperation)

- release reconnaissance products for environmental studies, crop management, weather forecasting, food and water supply management, deforestation, and other similar activities
- create opportunities for civil sector participation (e.g., media, nongovernment organizations, academics) at the National Defense University, the military service colleges, and Centers for Regional Security Studies

Finally, the task force recommends that psychological operations be relabeled according to whether they are in support of military operations or other activities, such as security cooperation and DOD support to public diplomacy.

Recommendation 7.

Actions for Today

Many of the specific actions identified in Recommendations 4 and 6 can be implemented immediately. We have organized these actions in Recommendation 7 and encourage addressing them immediately.

The task force recommends that the Department of Defense and Department of State implement immediate actions as follows:

- Establish and enhance combatant commander's budgets for strategic communication to:
 - fund FFRDCs (such as the Institute for Defense Analyses, RAND) to conduct cultural analysis and program developments in the area of responsibility
 - provide communications infrastructure in support of stability operations and disaster relief operations
- Increase Defense Department support for strategic communication by, for example:
 - increasing hospital ship and crew activation to support security cooperation programs

- releasing reconnaissance products for environmental studies, crop management, weather forecasting, food and water supply management, deforestation
- creating opportunities for civil sector participation (e.g., media, nongovernment organizations, academics) at the National Defense University, the military service colleges, and Centers for Regional Security Studies
- Expand the Department of State's strategic communication funding and for such activities as:
 - online English language programs focused on marginalized young Muslim populations
 - Internet, websites, blogging, Rapid Response Units, and Digital Outreach Teams
 - public-private partnerships targeted at economic development and job creation in key strategic regions (e.g. Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq)

Chapter 2. What is Strategic Communication and Why Does it Matter?

Strategic communication is vital to U.S. national security. It is an increasingly powerful, multi-dimensional instrument that is critical to America's interests and to achieving the nation's strategic goals.

Although attention to strategic communication is widespread, its power and potential are generally misunderstood. Too often it is an afterthought in determining strategic priorities. For many it is simply a matter of crafting and disseminating messages. Today's threats and opportunities call for a radically different approach. Asymmetric threats abroad and vulnerabilities at home are decreasing the effectiveness of military force and increasing the need to invest in other instruments of power.¹³ At the same time, significant new opportunities exist to leverage national capacity within government and to mobilize talent, expertise, and creativity outside government. The nation needs to build capacity in both with much greater emphasis on institutions that connect government and civil society.¹⁴

The United States can no longer depend on an instrument that is low priority, reactive, and episodic—something “discovered” after an attack and addressed only in occasional bursts of national commitment. National needs require a proactive and durable means to engage and influence the attitudes and behavior of global publics on a broad range of consequential issues.

13. For an expanded analysis of this point, see the forthcoming report of the *DSB 2007 Summer Study on Challenges to Military Operations in Support of National Interests*. See also John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2007).

14. By “civil society” we mean the totality of voluntary civic, social, and commercial organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the structures of a state.

Strategic communication is essential to the successful use of all persuasive, cooperative, and coercive instruments of national power. It can amplify or diminish their effects. It is necessary long before, during, and after armed conflict. It can help prevent or limit conflict. It is central to the formulation and implementation of strategies, and it must be treated accordingly.

Strategic Communication is an Interactive Process

Strategic communication is a sustained and coherent set of activities that include:¹⁵

- *understanding* identities, attitudes, behaviors, and cultures; media trends and information flows; social and influence networks; political, social, economic, and religious motivations
- *advising* policymakers, diplomats, and military commanders on the public opinion and communication implications of their strategic and policy choices—and on the best ways to communicate their strategies and policies
- *engaging* in a dialogue of ideas between people and institutions that support national interests and, wherever possible, common interests and shared values
- *influencing* attitudes and behavior through communication strategies supported by a broad range of government and civil society activities
- *measuring* the impact of activities comprehensively and over time

These activities are elements in a continuous, dynamic, and iterative process that begins with choices among strategic priorities and deep comprehension of attitudes and cultures. This means more than just an appreciation of the opinions and motivations of others. It means seeing

15. See also Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication, *Strategic Communication*, September 2004, pp. 11-13. http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf.

ourselves as others see us, rather than through the “looking glass” of our own perceptions. It means full use of the rich variety of interpretive tools available for penetrating analysis of cultures and influence networks. Planning, advising leaders, building relationships, advocacy campaigns, assessment of impact, and adaptation to changing circumstances follow, as illustrated in Figure 1.

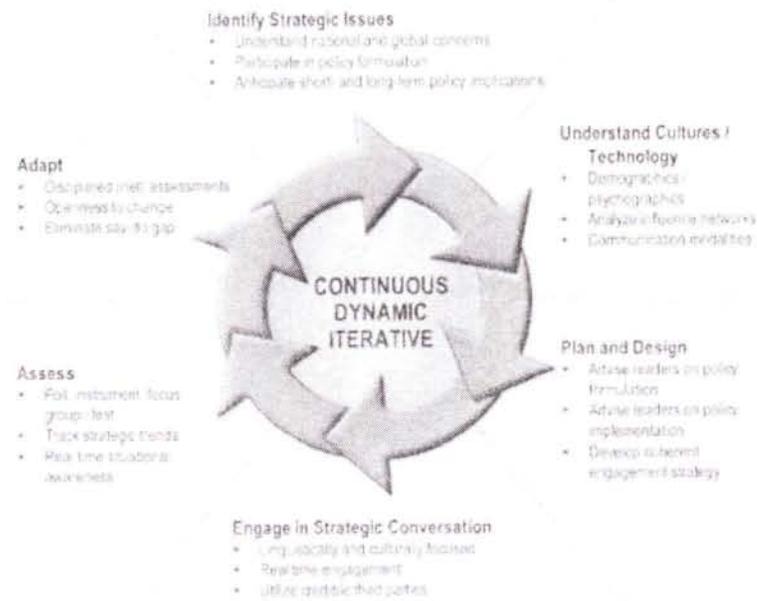


Figure 1. Strategic Communication Process

Strategic communication takes place in three timeframes:

1. short-term news streams
2. medium-range campaigns on high-value policies
3. long-term engagement

Strategic communication is conducted not just by the Departments of State and Defense, but by at least 64 U.S. government agencies, 50 states, many U.S. cities, coalition partners, and a wide variety of civil society organizations. Public diplomacy, military civil affairs, military

international education and training programs, cultural diplomacy, public affairs, international broadcasting, and support for democracy are among the means by which it is carried out.

Strategic communication differs from education, journalism, advertising, branding, and public relations. To succeed, however, it depends on strong relationships with civil society and uses many of civil society's methods, skills, and norms.¹⁶ Strategic communication is an instrument of statecraft that depends on shared knowledge and adaptive networks—both within government and between government and society. It must be understood, directed, coordinated, funded, and conducted in ways that leverage relationships with civil society in support of the nation's interests at home and abroad.

Strategic Communication Depends on Cultural Context

While “all politics is local,” all communication is now global. Gaps between what the nation says and does—and gaps between what it says and what others hear—have strategic consequences. These “say-do” and “say-hear” gaps affect U.S. interests in ways that can be measured in lives, dollars, and lost opportunities. We, as a nation, continue to underestimate them to our disadvantage.

16. On differences between strategic communication by governments and civil society, and the value of importing civil society's methods, see Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation* (Washington, DC: 2007), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG607.pdf; U.S. General Accountability Office, *Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research*, GAO-07-904, Washington, DC, July 2007, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07904.pdf>; and Bruce Gregory, “Public Diplomacy as Strategic Communication,” Chapter 17, pp. 336-357, in James J. F. Forest (editor), *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century*, volume 1, (Westport, CT: Praeger); earlier version in “Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication: Cultures, Firewalls, and Imported Norms,” Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Conference on International Communication and Conflict, Washington, DC, August 31, 2005, <http://www8.georgetown.edu/ect/apsa/papers/gregory.pdf#search=%22gregory%20firewalls%22>.

Successful strategic communication requires an interactive relationship between senders and receivers.¹⁷ People understand and relate to ideas and information when they can identify with what is conveyed. Successful communicators enlist interest and evoke common ground.¹⁸ They enlist interest through credible symbols (actions, images, and words) that resonate with others. They evoke common ground by focusing on culturally independent concepts that are globally valued—human dignity, health, personal safety, education, the environment, and economic well-being—and do so in ways that build support and mobilize allies. The opinions of others should not determine U.S. strategies, but taking them into account is critically important to any successful strategy.

Deep appreciation that what the nation says often is not what others hear is also critical. Words such as “democracy,” “rule of law,” and “freedom” have different meanings in different cultures at different stages of their development. When the United States says democracy, our message may be self-rule; but others may hear chaos. To U.S. citizens, rule of law means order; for others it may mean oppression. To some, jihad means terrorism; to others it means holy war or purification. Understanding the “pictures in the heads” of others is a crucial first step in strategic communication.

Actions are more important than carefully crafted messages. Additionally, it is important to avoid message vulnerabilities. Messages intended to galvanize support at home often have negative impact internationally—such as “global war on terror,” and “fighting them there so we don’t have to fight them here.” Images, body language, and media context in real and virtual worlds are messages as well—messages that often conflict with actions and words.¹⁹

17. Steven R. Corman, Angela Trethewey, and Bud Goodall, *A 21st Century Model for Communication in a Global War of Ideas: From Simplistic Influence to Pragmatic Complexity*, Report #0701, Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, April 3, 2007.

18. See the section on “Historic Strategic Communication Successes” in Chapter 2 of this document.

19. Images of Saddam Hussein talking with visibly frightened children during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and the “Mission Accomplished” sign behind President Bush on the USS Abraham Lincoln after major combat in Iraq in 2003 make the point.

Most people don't choose between true and false messages. In a complex globalizing world they choose between trustworthy and untrustworthy messengers. For presidents, policymakers, diplomats, and military commanders, credibility and "message authority" matter more than the message.

Strategic Communication Must Be Agile

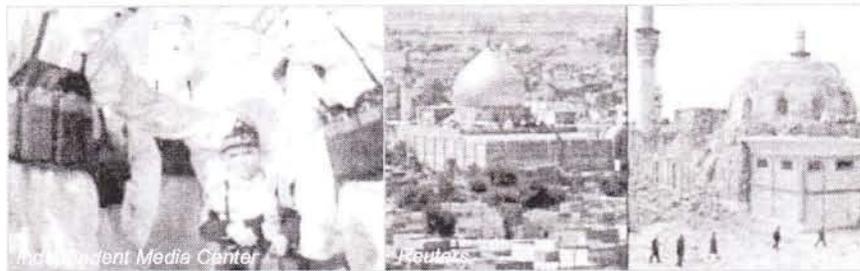
Strategic communication is engaged in a generational and global struggle about ideas. This is not a war between the West and Islam. It is not a war against terrorism, although it is about challenging ideas that give rise to terrorism. Strategic communication is an instrument that can be used to engage and influence global publics on a broad range of strategic issues (such as nuclear proliferation, trade, energy, global pandemics, climate change, and a variety of challenges from state and non-state actors).

To succeed, strategic communicators must be agile and adaptive. Events and actions provide opportunities for interpreting positive values in fresh and effective ways. Some events and actions—by the United States, its allies, and its adversaries—can be anticipated. Engagement and influence strategies can be planned in advance. Other events and actions are surprises. Skilled communicators need a basic understanding of issues and themes. But in a world of rapid change, they also need the support of rapid response capabilities that monitor the forces and media frames driving events. They need both the mindsets and the tools that will enable them to seize opportunities and adapt. Agility is critical.

Adversaries present opportunities to offer a contrasting positive vision based on shared values where they exist, as well as to delegitimize their actions and messages. This means emphasizing actions, relationships, images, and messages that build on shared values. It means empowering surrogates and credible third parties (exchange participants, religious leaders, foreign media, and academics) without undermining their legitimacy.

The United States also must identify its opponent's weaknesses and exploit them vigorously. The nation should emphasize actions and

statements that are inconsistent with prior statements or with the core values and cultures of the communities it seeks to influence. Attention to failures, inconsistencies, and falsehoods—time after time—can create a compelling story that isolates extremists, undermines their efforts, and possibly changes opinions and actions.



The identities and beliefs of the audience are key. For example, the image of a child suicide bomber shows a violation of sacred values. To many Muslims and non-Muslims alike, the image of a mosque destroyed by Muslims may be an unexplained inconsistency and a desecration. Sometimes a single statement or image persists in the mind of the listeners or viewers. For example, John Kennedy's statement "Ich bin ein Berliner" had lasting impact. The single image of an Iraqi woman holding up her finger coated with purple ink to indicate that she had voted had immediate impact and staying power.

Rapid response is challenging because of the many media organizations that are operating 24/7 and responding to the same situations.²⁰ Citizen reporters who can transmit via a multiplicity of channels—websites, blogs, listserves, and virtual platforms such as YouTube—add to the challenge. All have access to rapid communication. Media frames of events travel across the world with light speed. They shape the perceptions of competing elites and global publics. Media frames reflect different cultural contexts



20. See Chapter 4 for an expansion of this issue.

and the mindsets of reporters and editors. In breaking news environments, media frames are not likely to change what people think, but they are powerful agents in telling people what to think about.

Rapid responses and generational struggle are not inconsistent. Strategic communication requires sprinters and long-distance runners.

Historic Strategic Communication Successes

Americans have had many strategic communication successes. In some cases it was a single document or speech (the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg address) or an image (the moon landing). In other cases, success was a product of actions, complemented by images and words, in the context of strategic objectives (the Marshall Plan, Dayton Accords, HIV/AIDS initiatives). In still other cases, long-term relationships between people and institutions led to success (the Fulbright program, large-scale educational and scientific exchanges).



What were the elements of success?

- Strategic objectives were defined at the nexus of national interests and shared values.
- Sustained Presidential leadership, bipartisan support, and generous funding were linked to comprehensive strategies.
- Civilian and military departments and agencies collaborated.
- Programs and activities were culturally, politically, and/or economically relevant.
- Activities were understood, timely, focused, credible, meaningful, and accessible to the intended populations.
- Significant government and non-government resources were involved.
- Successes were often scientifically and/or technologically enabled.

Not every element was relevant to every success, but lessons were taught and can be learned (Table 1). Effective communication strategies in the past were grounded in actions, relationships, images, and words. They were sustained, comprehensive, relevant, and adequately resourced. Presidential leadership and bipartisan support were critical.

Table 1. Lessons Taught from Successful Strategic Communication Activities

Actions trump words	Relationships are critical
Partners count	Coordination is critical
Messenger authority	Trusted voices
Language matters	Images matter
Speed counts	Endurance counts

Strategic Communication Challenges

Effective strategic communication is inherently difficult. As the examples of historic communication successes illustrate, shared values and a genuine, positive correlation of interests are necessary. Ironically, the explosion of new communications media and the attendant social change it is spawning will make it more difficult to frame positive outcomes in the foreseeable future. As traditional barriers to information flow fall, the speed with which information circulates and its ubiquity will overwhelm the ability to distinguish important from trivial. More and more, image will overwhelm context.

The “say-do gap,” always a challenge for powerful nations that must balance competing and often conflicting interests, will be more obvious. The ability of the U.S. government to operate in secrecy or to control messages, perceptions, and attitudes will be greatly diminished.

The growing youth bulge adds to complexity. In many developing societies the percentage of youth in the population is rising rapidly, as that percentage decreases in most developed countries. Young people have access to new information sources that will often amplify distrust of traditional sources.

The viral nature of electronic media, coupled with the growing proliferation of electronic communication devices, means that almost every action or operation that can be witnessed can also be recorded, distributed, manipulated, and distorted. Individual actions will be amplified. In military situations, small, tactical actions will be viewed globally and take on strategic significance.

A thoughtful, sustained, and comprehensive response is essential. The United States will have to think and operate differently and must learn to think and communicate in ways that unite rather than divide. Polarizing rhetoric may have short-term benefits in motivating support at home, but abroad it can have adverse long-term consequences that reduce the willingness of potential allies to collaborate, and give unwarranted legitimacy and unity of effort to dispersed adversaries.

The more difficult interpersonal communication is, the more important it becomes. The more difficult it is to engage potential adversaries in a common search for solutions, the more important it is to try. The easier it is to employ military power to respond to challenges to national interests, the more important it becomes to consider alternative responses.

Transforming Strategic Communication

The world is changing, with profound consequences for how the United States considers and uses strategic communication. During the hot and cold wars of the 20th century, states were dominant actors. Relatively few non-state actors occupied the world stage. Contests about ideas were secular struggles between authoritarian and democratic worldviews. Bright lines separated war and peace. Information systems used analog technologies. Governments organized on hierarchical principles. National armies fought on battlefields with industrial age weapons.

That world no longer exists. Globalism, networks, non-state actors, ideas, advanced technologies, and new forms of warfare are transforming strategic communication and all other instruments of 21st century statecraft. The United States will struggle to engage in effective strategic communication in a world where states are becoming more limited in their legitimacy and in their capacity to satisfy human needs.

Highly centralized, prescriptive, top-down communication strategies will matter far less. Resilient strategies grounded in deep comprehension of the attitudes, cultures, and goals of others will matter much more. Strong networks, rather than hierarchies, will be critical to these strategies—networks characterized by openness, trust, access, and collaborative effort by multiple public and private actors with diverse motives.