DSD ✓

CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20318-9999

CM-0087-07
14 December 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

1. With a view that strategic communication (SC) is an *enabling function* that guides and informs our actions and that any SC organization should exist only to facilitate the transition to more organic processes imbedded within existing structures, I offer here my recommendations.

2. In the near term, I recommend you go ahead and re-authorize the DoD Strategic Communication Integration Group (SCIG) for one more year. But this should be done with an understanding that it serves primarily to help the Department transition to embedded SC thinking and planning. Think of it -- and treat it -- more like a Task Force or an integrated process team than a permanent office. Give it a sundown clause, and hold to it. The SCIG should work itself out of a job. Furthermore, you should:

a) Appoint a leader and hold him or her accountable. You could do this by either selecting a new Special Advisor/Assistant -- someone above and separate from those currently involved in the SC process -- or you can select someone already engaged. I recommend that for corporate knowledge's sake you make the ASD(PA) Chair of the EXCOM and lead agent of the SCIG. I recognize this will be opposed by those who maintain SC is bigger than PA. But if the goal of SC really is, as the Roadmap defines it, to "understand and engage key audiences ... through coordinated information, themes, plans, programs and actions," there is no one better suited in my view to accomplish that job than a professional communicator. I liken it to the way the Navy assigns command of aircraft carriers to naval aviators. There's more to a carrier than launching and recovering aircraft, but there isn't anything *more* important.

b) Repurpose the SCIG. The SCIG has evolved into a communications planning shop instead of a genuine integration group. Get it back up to the strategic level and out of the business of writing plans. Let the Services and Combatant Commands conduct the SC planning they need to do. As I said, the SCIG should be focused on formulating a strategy to inculcate SC principles across DoD. In the meantime, it could help facilitate SC by accomplishing three other things: 1) developing major themes and messages DoD desires to project (provide top-down guidance); 2) advising senior leaders and coordinating across the interagency about the delivery of those themes and messages; and 3) serve as a "one stop" point for COCOM and Service SC plans and staff those plans through OSD, the JS and the interagency (with a special emphasis placed on the State Department).

c) **Restructure the EXCOM**. The EXCOM should operate as an advisory group, not a decision-making body. To that end -- and to help create a broader sense of SC -- I recommend you expand the EXCOM to include USD (Intelligence), ASD(LA), DASD (Joint Communication) and the OCJCS PAO. I would also suggest that the Joint Staff's senior member be the Director, Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate (J5). Additionally, there needs to be clear expectations placed upon the SCIG and EXCOM to deliver product to you in a timely fashion. Deadlines should be set and met.

3. Over the long term, I recommend you invest SC planning and coordination in the DASD (Joint Communication), as it was originally intended in the December 2005 mandate for that office. I further recommend that you re-establish the Plans and Policy Division of ASD (PA). This will serve the communications planning function the SCIG will have formerly executed and provide a vehicle to transmit more specific guidance to subordinate commands and activities.

4. I have grown increasingly concerned about the military's fixation on strategic communication. We get hung up on that word, *strategic*. If we've learned nothing else in this war, it should be that the lines between the strategic, operational and tactical are blurred almost beyond distinction. This is particularly true in the field of communication, where videos and images plastered on the Web -- or even the *idea* of them being so posted -- can and often do drive national security decision making. With the aggressive use of technology, the tactical becomes the strategic in the blink of an eye.

5. I believe what we are really after here is better and more synchronized communication, pure and simple. This requires, in my view, an understanding of two essential truths:

a) Communication is a two way street. It can't only be about us "telling our story." We must be better listeners. This really came home to me when I sat down recently with a group of moderate Muslim leaders at the Hudson Institute. The Muslim community, one of them stressed, is a "subtle world" we don't fully attempt to understand. He said we needed to communicate not by transmitting, but by receiving. As one anthropologist familiar with the Department's efforts put it, "Our current government's style of strategic communication and public diplomacy works from the outside in. It demonstrates little insight into human behavior and fails to understand that the old "push-dominate" paradigm of public diplomacy is outmoded. You can't capture hearts and minds."

b) Credibility counts more than content. As the QDR states, "effective communication must build and maintain credibility and trust ...through an emphasis on consistency, veracity and transparency both in words and deeds." You often rightly argue that "we are what we buy" in this Department. I would add that we are also "what we do." And we would do well to remember that no website we develop or communication plan we write is ever going to have the same impact on an audience as our actions and the validation those actions receive through credible third parties, be they foreign leaders, analysts or media.

6. I share SECDEF's frustration that we are not as nimble as Al Qaeda in communicating our message. But I believe the answer lies not in a static, separate SC organization -- or even SC at

all -- but in the need to work harder, as the QDR put it, to instill communication assessments and processes into our culture. That task is better served by inculcating communication execution in existing functional areas and by decentralizing the effort. Only then can we hope to be nimble enough to reclaim the information battlespace Al Qaeda has appeared to master.

M. G. MULLEN
Admiral, U.S. Navy