

Executive Summary Background

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Reforming U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century

Tony Blankley, Helle C. Dale, and Oliver Horn

Margaret Thatcher once said that America is the only nation in the world “built upon an idea.” It is therefore both frustrating and ironic that the United States should have such difficulty conveying ideas today. Seven years into the war on terrorism, it is apparent that final victory must be won not only on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the hearts and minds of people. However, the institutions tasked with strategic communications (informing and influencing foreign publics) operate with too few resources and virtually no effective interagency coordination. Their messages, as a result, too often have been ineffective, incoherent, and sometimes contradictory.

While there is no easy fix, the next President and Congress need to reform the strategy, doctrine, and structure of strategic communications to engage in the war of ideas seriously and effectively. This requires a new institutional framework based on a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications, substantial reforms of the Department of State, and greater utilization of the Pentagon’s combatant commands.

Institutional Inadequacy. Folding the U.S. Information Agency into the State Department in 1999 has proven to be an exercise in placing square pegs into round holes. Former USIA employees were incorporated into geographic bureaus, and public diplomacy became simply another element of public affairs. The long-term efforts of public diplomacy were subordinated to the short-term

rapid-reaction goals emphasized by public affairs, leading to a disregard for outcomes and further dysfunction. Although successive Under Secretaries of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy have since made several substantive reforms, the structural problems remain.

In contrast, the Department of Defense (DOD) has worked aggressively to bolster its own information capabilities, citing strategic communications as “crucial” to shaping consistent, effective messages. Yet the DOD has neither the capabilities nor the desire to become the lead agency for informational outreach. Its roles and missions are vastly different from public diplomacy, and its personnel lack the necessary skills and expertise—all of which are found in the nation’s civilian agencies.

Congress Steps In. To alleviate public diplomacy’s shortcomings, several Members of Congress have introduced pieces of legislation. The Smith-Thornberry amendment (H.A. 5) would bolster the existing institutional framework by strengthening interagency coordination and providing additional

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resources for strategic communications research. The Brownback bill (S. 3546) would fundamentally reshape the current institutional framework. Although the two pieces of legislation differ significantly in their proposals, both offer effective schemes to enhance strategic communications and public diplomacy.

However, both pieces of legislation fail to address a key problem—defining the methods of informational outreach—that has beset government strategic communications and public diplomacy efforts since the Cold War. Too often, officials use their own communications capabilities to advance their own interests and ignore or contradict efforts both inside and outside of their agencies. Without an interagency definition of strategic communications, dysfunction will likely continue regardless of structure or resources.

A New Framework. Nevertheless, both legislative vehicles have elements that could serve as the foundation of a new, viable strategic communications institutional framework. The best outcome would combine the most effective elements of both with additional components that address their shortcomings. Specifically, the President and Congress should:

- **Establish a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications** to serve as the focal point for U.S. informational outreach capabilities. Under the guidance of the Director of Strategic Communications, it would craft and implement an interagency strategic communications strategy, oversee U.S. broadcasting, and administer grants to nonprofit groups engaged in useful information operation activities. The director would be responsible for interagency coordination of strategic communications, including coordinating the Pentagon's regional information activities with the rest of the U.S. government.
- **Establish a new strategic communications strategy that specifically defines the elements of information outreach.** As one of its first tasks, the agency should define strategic communications. The purpose and goals of public affairs, public diplomacy, international broadcasting, and information operations should be specifically defined so that their implementers

understand where they fit in the overall strategic communications strategy and process.

- **Reform the State Department.** Congress should transfer all functions and assets of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to the Director of Strategic Communications, except for the Bureau of Public Affairs, which would continue to serve as the State Department's public outreach arm. The State Department would focus exclusively on state-to-state, regional, and multilateral affairs.
- **Make use of the Pentagon's combatant commands.** Strategic communications should be implemented not only at the country level, but also at the regional level through the well-established combatant commands, one of the few established mechanisms capable of monitoring and coordinating government efforts across wide geographical areas.

Conclusion. For America, whose purpose is rooted in the aspirations of freedom for everyone, winning hearts and minds is a critical part of any effective foreign policy. Yet without substantial reforms in its structures and methods of public diplomacy, the United States will remain, as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said, "miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies and our goals." It is time for Congress and the President to ensure that the United States fully engages in the war of ideas by creating a comprehensive strategy and framework that utilize strategic communications as an effective, proactive foreign policy tool.

—Tony Blankley is Visiting Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at The Heritage Foundation. Helle C. Dale is Deputy Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies and Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Davis Institute, at The Heritage Foundation. Oliver L. Horn is a Research Assistant in the Allison Center. The authors thank the numerous current and former officials from the State Department, Defense Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development whose insights helped to make this report possible.

Background

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Margaret Thatcher once said that America is the only nation in the world “built upon an idea.”¹ This idea—liberty—has transcended geography and ethnicity to shape American identity and to inspire political discourse, both domestic and foreign, since the nation’s founding nearly two and a half centuries ago. Indeed, John Adams wrote that the American Revolution occurred first “in the hearts and minds of the people.”² Ideas lie at the very core of this country.

It is therefore both frustrating and ironic that the United States should have such difficulty conveying ideas today. Seven years into the war on terrorism, it has become apparent that final victory must be won not only on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the hearts and minds of people.³

In November 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates argued that “[w]e must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military... We must also focus our energies on the other elements of national power that will be so crucial in the coming years.”⁴ But the institutions that are tasked with strategic communications (informing and influencing foreign publics) operate with too few resources and virtually no effective interagency coordination. Consequently, their messages are often ineffective, incoherent, and sometimes contradictory.

This is inexcusable. Government officials, policy-makers, and scholars have known about this problem for years. Since 9/11, government and nongovernmental organizations have issued more than 30

Talking Points

- Seven years into the war on terrorism, it has become apparent that final victory must be won not only on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the hearts and minds of people.
- U.S. government institutions tasked with strategic communications (informing and influencing foreign publics) for too long have lacked the leadership and resources necessary to do their job and have operated with virtually no interagency coordination.
- Inherent shortcomings hinder the State Department from conducting effective public diplomacy, much less coordinating all of the government’s informational outreach.
- Despite launching a number of effective strategic communications programs, the Department of Defense is not the proper lead agency for informational outreach.
- Congress and the President should create a new, viable institutional framework and strategy that includes a new U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications.

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reports that address the nation's inability to use its resources to win hearts and minds abroad.⁵

While there is no easy fix, the President and Congress need to reform the strategy, doctrine, and structure of strategic communications to engage in the war of ideas seriously and effectively. This requires establishment of a new institutional framework focused on a new agency—a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications—as well as substantial reforms of the Department of State and greater utilization of the Pentagon's combatant commands.

A Brave New World

In 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri, an al-Qaeda deputy, observed that “[m]ore than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle, a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma [people].”⁶

He was right. In an age when information can be accessed easily and instantly via satellite television, the Internet, and cell phones, *perception* heavily influences and sometimes even becomes reality, if it does not trump reality outright. Al-Qaeda and insurgent groups in Iraq have utilized these technologies to spread daily press releases, weekly and monthly magazines, video clips, full-length films, and even television programs. A chilling report released in 2007 by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty states:

[M]edia outlets and products created by Sunni insurgents, who are responsible for

the majority of U.S. combat deaths in Iraq, and their supporters are undermining the authority of the Iraqi government, demonizing coalition forces, fomenting sectarian strife, glorifying terrorism, and perpetrating falsehoods that obscure the accounts of responsible journalists. *Insurgent media seek to create an alternate reality to win hearts and minds, and they are having a considerable degree of success.*⁷

Mainstream Arab media subsequently amplified the insurgents' and terrorists' efforts, spreading their messages to an audience throughout the Muslim world. These methods have proven so effective that these groups have shifted their tactics on the ground. Rather than simply recording their exploits, these groups often conduct operations with no clear objective other than to provide additional footage to post online.

In contrast, the U.S. government often adds fuel to the fire. A recent study by Harvard economists Radha Iyengar and Jonathan Monten suggests a direct correlation between the number of insurgent attacks in Iraq and public statements in the United States that are critical of the war. The authors found that when U.S. political leaders seemed to demonstrate weakening resolve, anti-coalition attacks increased by 5 percent–25 percent. These effects were strongest in Iraqi provinces with greater access to satellite television.⁸

1. Margaret Thatcher, “Freedom and the Future,” Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 304, March 1, 1991, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/HL304.cfm>.
2. John Adams, quoted in Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763–1776* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1968), p. xii.
3. Robert Reilly, “Winning the War of Ideas,” *Claremont Review of Books*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer 2007), at http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1387/article_detail.asp (June 27, 2008).
4. Robert Gates, Landon Lecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, November 26, 2007, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1199> (June 27, 2008).
5. William P. Kiehl, “Humpty Dumpty Redux: Saving Public Diplomacy,” Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, May 17, 2008, at <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/98.htm> (June 27, 2008).
6. John Hughes, “In Battle for Hearts and Minds, Iraqi Insurgents Are Doing Well,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 29, 2007, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0620/p09s01-cojh.html> (November 17, 2007).
7. Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo, “Iraqi Insurgent Media: The War of Images and Ideas,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty *Special Report*, June 2007, at <http://realaudio.rferl.org/online/OLPDFfiles/insurgent.pdf> (July 19, 2008); emphasis added.
8. Radha Iyengar and Jonathan Monten, “Is There an ‘Emboldenment’ Effect? Evidence from the Iraq Insurgency,” National Bureau of Economic Research *Working Paper* No. 13839, March 2008, at <http://people.rwj.harvard.edu/~riyengar/insurgency.pdf> (June 19, 2008).

This example is cited not to suggest that criticism of the war should be silenced in the United States—free speech is a cornerstone of American democracy—and not as an argument to engage in propaganda. In the words of a former National Security Council (NSC) official, “truthful information is the best antidote.”⁹

Countering adversaries’ messages is not primarily about establishing a “Brand America.” While public diplomacy is an important element of informational campaigns, Michael Doran, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy, believes that “[t]he key to the CIST [Counter Ideological Support to Terrorism] mission is influencing a primarily intra-Muslim conversation, with the goal of undermining the intellectual and perceptual underpinnings of terrorism.”¹⁰

As a first step, the United States must delegitimize the extremists’ message of hate and fear. As a second step, information campaigns must “counteract these responses by promoting a sense of individual responsibility, common human values across religious divides, empowerment, and a desire to fix current problems in a cooperative spirit rather than through a resort to violence.”¹¹

These examples suggest that the environment and, in turn, the goals and missions of public diplomacy and strategic communications have changed dramatically over the past 10 years. What we say and how we say it can have significant, often unintended consequences. Regrettably, through both missteps and neglect, and despite Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice’s efforts in transformational diplomacy, the United States has not yet fully calibrated its instruments of foreign policy to engage in an effective war of ideas.

Ideas Caught in the Crossfire

One of the principal casualties of the 1990s’ peace dividend was the United States Information Agency (USIA). Established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953, the USIA conducted America’s information campaigns and promoted the ideals of democracy, individual rights, and free markets for more than four decades during the Cold War. According to Dr. Carnes Lord, who crafted President Ronald Reagan’s public diplomacy strategy at the NSC, the “promotion of these values contributed mightily to the nearly bloodless dissolution of the Soviet Empire.”¹²

Despite its achievement, however, the USIA was dismantled for a number of overarching reasons.

First, ever since the excesses of the Creel Committee established by President Woodrow Wilson to conduct public diplomacy during World War I, Americans have had a profound disdain for government-manipulated information.¹³ As a result, Washington repeatedly has created the tools and weapons it needed to fight the war of ideas and then summarily dismantled or isolated them in dark corners of the government and outside of the national security policymaking process, as happened with the Office of War Information after World War II and the USIA after the Cold War.¹⁴

9. Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 39 (4th Quarter 2005), at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq_pubs/1839.pdf (May 29, 2008).
10. Michael Doran, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, November 15, 2007, at http://blog.wired.com/defense/files/doran_testimony.pdf (July 21, 2008).
11. *Ibid.*
12. Carnes Lord and Helle C. Dale, “Public Diplomacy and the Cold War: Lessons Learned,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2070, September 18, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg2070.cfm>.
13. President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (the Creel Committee) to influence domestic public opinion to support American intervention in World War I. Edward Bernays, one of Wilson’s advisers, famously summed up the modus operandi of the organization: “[T]he essence of democratic society” was the “engineering of consent.” Although the Creel Committee initially used factual material, it quickly switched to producing completely fabricated information, including stories of Germans bayoneting babies. The committee was abolished after the Treaty of Versailles.
14. Lord and Dale, “Public Diplomacy and the Cold War.”

Second, the “end of history” had arrived, and America had won the battle of ideas—or so our national leaders thought.¹⁵ In 1999, ostensibly to integrate information programs into the nation’s foreign policy more effectively and to save money, Congress and the Clinton Administration abolished the seemingly useless USIA and carved up its various functions and assets and rolled them into the State Department bureaucracy.

Third, despite fond recollections of the Cold War as the golden age of information campaigns, the dirty secret is that the USIA never really functioned as desired. In fact, it suffered from many of the same shortfalls that are being experienced today:

- **No Integrated National Strategy or Doctrine.** With a few notable exceptions—Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Reagan—most Presidents failed to value the information function as an important element of their foreign policy and provided it with little, if any, guidance. As a result, there was rarely a public diplomacy national strategy and never a doctrine for information dissemination. The USIA and other agencies lacked a unified vision, sense of purpose, and body of principles for engaging audiences abroad.
- **Unclear Mission.** The lack of guidance from the top was reflected in practice. USIA employees fundamentally disagreed as to whether they should act as disinterested providers of information or as a strategic tool to project American influence. Consequently, one early study concluded that the USIA suffered from an “inability to clarify its basic operating assumptions,” including “whether it is to function as an information or propaganda instrument.”¹⁶
- **Unclear Role in Policymaking.** Throughout the USIA’s existence, the perennial issue remained

whether it should merely implement foreign policy or have an actual role in crafting foreign policy. With the exception of former USIA Director Edward R. Murrow, who famously insisted to President Kennedy that he be “in on the take offs as well as the crash landings,” the USIA never played a significant role in shaping policy.¹⁷

- **Lack of Interagency Coordination.** Lack of organizational framework exacerbated the conflicts among bureaucracies involved in informational outreach. According to Dr. Carnes Lord, the USIA and State Department always had a troubled relationship because “[t]he State Department tended to resist public diplomacy missions, disparage their importance, and question the competence of its practitioners.”¹⁸ In addition, relations between the State Department and the Executive Office of the President were consistently dysfunctional. The White House tended to focus its public communications activities on domestic rather than foreign audiences.

Consequently, there was always confusion regarding how to integrate the USIA’s mission of educational and cultural outreach, general information, policy information, and policy advice into the nation’s foreign policy. Proposals dating back to the 1970s advocated restructuring or abolishing the USIA. Although not implemented at the time, they laid the intellectual groundwork for the State Department’s absorption of the USIA in 1999 and for the creation of an autonomous taxpayer-funded broadcasting organization under the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

The State of State

Regrettably, folding the USIA into the State Department has proven to be an exercise in placing square pegs into round holes. According to Lord,

15. Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989), at <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm> (October 16, 2008).

16. Ronald I. Rubin, *The Objectives of the U.S. Information Agency: Controversies and Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 10. See also Robert F. Delaney, “Psychological Operations in the 1970s: A Program in Search of a Doctrine,” in Ronald De McLaurin, Carl F. Rosenthal, and Sarah A. Skillings, eds., *The Art and Science of Psychological Operations: Case Studies of Military Application* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 1976), pp. 1–15.

17. Keihl, “Humpty Dumpty Redux: Saving Public Democracy.”

18. Lord and Dale, “Public Diplomacy and the Cold War.”

who served as Director of International Communications and Information Policy in Reagan's National Security Council, the State Department maintained its institutional culture of considering "it a good day when no one makes the news" rather than embracing its new role as the lead informational outreach organization. Former USIA employees were incorporated into geographic bureaus, with no regard for where they were most needed. Insiders at State have remarked that all 22 public diplomacy officers who had been countering the Soviet Union's propaganda in Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall were given to the European bureau. But the bureau responsible for engaging in international organizations, including the U.N., did not get even one, because there were none in USIA. Public diplomacy became simply another element of public affairs.¹⁹

As a result, the long-term mission of public diplomacy was subordinated to the short-term rapid-reaction mission of public affairs. This led to a disregard for outcomes and further dysfunction. To make matters worse, during much of George W. Bush's Administration, the position of Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy—the official who coordinates strategic communications across the entire federal government—was too often filled by an Acting Under Secretary as politics and Congress's concern about public diplomacy often held up confirmation of the President's choices.

When Congress finally confirmed Karen Hughes as Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy in 2005, hope ran high that her closeness to the President and her political and media savvy would work wonders. That hope was not realized. She was criticized for "listening" rather than "influencing" and for lacking any background in foreign affairs—a handicap that she could not easily overcome. Yet Hughes did make several sub-

stantive changes in the informational outreach within the State Department.

She set up the Counterterrorism Communications Center (CTCC), a small interagency organization aimed at countering terrorist ideology. With staff drawn from the State Department, Department of Defense (DOD), National Counter Terrorism Center, and intelligence community, the CTCC "produces strategic communications plans, develops effective narratives and themes to undermine and counter terrorist messaging, and produces specific messages for use by State and DoD communicators."²⁰ The Digital Outreach Team, a branch of the CTCC, consists of a group of bloggers who attempt to counter misinformation posted on Middle Eastern chat rooms and Web sites.

James Glassman, Hughes's recently confirmed successor, has stated that his top priority is to wage the war of ideas more effectively through a vigorous interagency process and that his principal tool is a bolstered CTCC, which has been renamed the Global Strategic Engagement Center.²¹ Whether he can energize a nearly moribund interagency process is an open question, but the record of his predecessors is not promising and suggests that tremendous challenges lie ahead.

Since the tragedy on September 11, 2001, government and nongovernmental organizations have issued more than 30 reports about the many shortcomings of the State Department's public diplomacy efforts. These include:

- **Lack of Leadership.** While the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy is nominally in charge of the State Department's informational outreach efforts, public diplomacy officers operate under the authority of chiefs of mission in embassies around the world, but they report to regional bureau managers in Washington, D.C. Conse-

19. *Ibid.*

20. Duncan MacInnes, "Strategic Communication and Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism," statement before the Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, November 15, 2007, p. 3, at http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/TUTC111507/MacInnes_Testimony111507.pdf (October 27, 2008).

21. James K. Glassman, "Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century," remarks before the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., June 30, 2008, at http://www.cfr.org/publication/16698/public_diplomacy_in_the_twentyfirst_century_rush_transcript_federal_news_service.html (October 16, 2008).

quently, the under secretary exercises no direct authority over public diplomacy assets, but instead must rely on the power of persuasion and work through a completely separate, stovepiped budget to implement programs in the field.²²

- **Lack of Personnel.** In 2006, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that, while the department had significantly increased the resources for public diplomacy programs by 25 percent in the Middle East and by 39 percent in Southeast Asia, roughly 15 percent of its public diplomacy positions were vacant. The following year, the GAO reported that vacancies had increased to 22 percent.²³ This number could increase to 30 percent by the end of this year.
- **Insufficient Language Skills.** Compounding this shortage is a dearth of personnel with critical language skills. For example, the GAO has reported that 30 percent of public diplomacy officers in the Middle East lacked the language capabilities required for their positions.²⁴ In addition, as of September 2007, the Digital Outreach Team had only two bloggers who spoke Arabic.²⁵
- **Not Engaged.** Even if everything works perfectly and a public diplomacy officer with the proper language is in place, he or she will likely spend only a little time communicating with foreign populations. The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy recently reported that 90 per-

cent of the job description entails activities (mostly administrative work) other than public diplomacy.²⁶ Given the crisis in how foreign publics view the United States, the primary responsibility of public diplomacy officers should be interacting with foreign audiences.

- **No Integrated National Strategy and Doctrine.** Four years after citing the need for a national strategy and doctrine, the GAO reported that the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the organization tasked with overseeing all U.S. civilian international broadcasting,²⁷ refused U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) requests to run programming to “tell America’s assistance story.” In addition, it rebuffed combatant commanders who were asking the BBG to carry public service announcements highlighting DOD assistance to foreign publics.²⁸

For such a vital component of the nation’s communications apparatus to refuse to cooperate with two organizations deeply involved in the nation’s foreign policy demonstrates a serious loss of mission, among other deficiencies. To alleviate this disorder, Karen Hughes finally introduced the first National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication later that year.²⁹ While this was a welcome first step toward establishing a unified voice across the federal government, it has done little to define

22. Jess T. Ford, “U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Persistent Challenges,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, GAO-06-707T, May 3, 2006, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06707t.pdf> (October 27, 2008).

23. Jess T. Ford, “U.S. Public Diplomacy: Strategic Planning Efforts Have Improved, but Agencies Face Significant Implementation Challenges,” testimony before the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, GAO-07-795T, April 28, 2007, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07795t.pdf> (July 20, 2008).

24. *Ibid.*

25. Neil MacFarquhar, “At State Dept., Blog Team Joins Debate,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2007, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/22/washington/22bloggers.html> (August 5, 2008).

26. U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *Getting the People Part Right: A Report on the Human Resources Dimension of U.S. Public Diplomacy*, U.S. Department of State, June 25, 2008, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/106297.pdf> (October 16, 2008).

27. The BBG oversees the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Martí, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Radio Sawa and Alhurra Television).

28. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy*, GAO-05-323, April 2005, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05323.pdf> (August 15, 2008).

foreign outreach or to implement it across the interagency process.

- **Inability to Use Modern Communications Tactics.** The State Department has been slow to adopt new communications techniques and technologies that are regularly exploited by the commercial sector and often by U.S. adversaries. In 2007, the GAO reported that the State Department failed to evaluate the impact of its communications efforts on target audiences. Instead of polling target groups and analyzing focus group data to determine which messages would resonate, “State’s measurement efforts rely on anecdotal evidence and program outputs, such as favorable articles by foreign journalists.”³⁰ Without the ability to assess performance—which is common practice in modern public relations and marketing firms—establishing any type of measurable objectives is impossible.

These shortcomings impede the State Department’s efforts to conduct its own programs, to say nothing of providing leadership and coordinating the host of government organizations involved in informational outreach: the White House Office of Global Communications, NSC, DOD, and USAID. Jeff Jones, a former NSC Director of Strategic Communications and Information in the George W. Bush Administration, described the current interagency environment as one of “[b]ureaucratic turf battles, misperceptions, and the absence of visible, sustained interagency commitment.”³¹ For the nation that historically has defended freedom around the world, this is simply unacceptable.

The Pentagon Goes “Soft”

After seven years in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defense has learned the conse-

quences of the nation’s disjointed efforts in the war of ideas the hard way. The latest National Defense Strategy states, “For the foreseeable future, [the strategic] environment will be defined by a global struggle against violent ideology.” The document concludes that “we are unable to communicate to the world effectively who we are and what we stand for as a society and culture, about freedom and democracy, and about our goals and aspirations.” Consequently, the Pentagon has worked aggressively to bolster its own information capabilities, citing strategic communications as a “crucial” tool to shape consistent, effective messages.³²

First, the Department of Defense has reformed and increased its capabilities for information operations, defined as “degrading an adversary’s decision making while preserving our own.” As early as 2003, internal DOD reports concluded that the various services, combatant commands, and other agencies lacked a common understanding of information operations. The Pentagon has since made information operations a core military competency and has clarified the respective responsibilities and tasks of psychological operations, defense support for public diplomacy, and public affairs. Specifically, the DOD has established “boundaries” to enable psychological operations to collaborate with other government organizations (e.g., the State Department) to support public diplomacy programs.³³

Second, the Pentagon has begun to incorporate social scientists into both its operations and its decision-making process. At the start of 2007, six small teams of social scientists and anthropologists, known as Human Terrain Teams (HTTs), were embedded in brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan. They worked with soldiers to “map human terrain” by providing insights into the customs and values of

29. U.S. Department of State, Policy Coordinating Committee, “U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication,” June 2007, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87427.pdf> (November 17, 2008).

30. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, GAO-03-951, September 2003, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03951.pdf> (July 20, 2008).

31. Jones, “Strategic Communication.”

32. U.S. Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, June 2008, pp. 2 and 17, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/2008%20National%20Defense%20Strategy.pdf> (August 1, 2008).

33. U.S. Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap*, October 30, 2003, at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB177/info_ops_roadmap.pdf (July 20, 2008).

local populations. The HTTs have yielded positive results. In April, Colonel Martin Schweitzer, former commander of the 82nd Airborne, told Congress that his unit's HTT helped to reduce "kinetic operations" by 60 percent–70 percent, increased the number of districts supporting the Afghan government from 15 to 83, and substantially reduced civilian deaths.³⁴

The Pentagon has also established the Minerva initiative to recruit and use academia in combating security threats. In the same manner that the DOD has traditionally funded the hard sciences and engineering, the program aims to fund evolutionary psychologists, demographers, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists in security research. This year alone, the Pentagon plans to spend \$150 million on social science work to understand tribal cultures and social networks and to increase the number of HTTs to 28.³⁵

However, despite these effective endeavors, the DOD has neither the capabilities nor the desire to become the lead agency for informational outreach. As an institution, its roles and missions are vastly different from, and its personnel lack the necessary skills and expertise found in, the nation's civilian agencies. Instead of duplicating these capabilities, the Pentagon would rather bolster the organizations that already have them. In a recent poll of officers, 84 percent stated that bolstering nonmilitary tools is *at least* as important as strengthening conventional capabilities in addressing national security threats.³⁶

Consequently, the DOD has sought to foster a whole-of-government approach through the com-

batant commands. The aim is to create a structure in which "every government department and agency understands the core competencies, roles, missions, and capabilities of its partners and works together to achieve common goals."³⁷ For example, the Pentagon has expanded Southern Command's inter-agency composition and has established Africa Command (AFRICOM), a new regional command, around an interagency framework.

AFRICOM will have a civilian deputy commander from the State Department and will draw up to one-fourth of its command staff from the State Department, Treasury Department, and USAID. Under this model, AFRICOM will not only maintain the traditional military roles and responsibilities of a regional combatant command, "but will also include a broader 'soft power' mandate aimed at building a stable security environment and will incorporate a larger civilian component from other U.S. government agencies to address those challenges."³⁸

In addition, the combatant commanders have been tasked with coordinating strategic communications across their respective geographic regions. They must now include strategic communications in crisis and contingency plans, security cooperation activities, and military support for public diplomacy. For example, Southern Command recently established the first Director for Strategic Communication, whose duties include shaping messages to reduce sources of conflict, promoting democratic practices, and developing collaborative approaches to regional problems.³⁹

34. Colonel Martin P. Schweitzer, statement before the Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Committee on Armed Services, and Subcommittee on Research and Science Education, Committee on Science and Technology, U.S. House of Representatives, April 24, 2008, at <http://gop.science.house.gov/Media/hearings/research08/april24/schweitzer.pdf> (July 20, 2008).

35. Greg Grant, "Anthropologists Lend Military Insight into Customs, Values of Foreign Cultures," *Government Executive*, April 25, 2008, at <http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0408/042508g1.htm> (July 20, 2008).

36. Geoff Garin and Bill McInturff, "Results of Military Officers Survey," Center for U.S. Global Engagement, July 15, 2008, p. 1, at http://www.usglobalengagement.org/Portals/16/ftp/Military_poll_highlights.pdf (October 30, 2008).

37. U.S. Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*.

38. Lauren Ploch, "Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa," Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress*, updated August 22, 2008, p. 5, at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL34003.pdf> (October 27, 2008).

39. Jones, "Strategic Communication."

These changes represent a giant step forward in fighting the war of ideas, but they do not alleviate the inherent deficiencies in the civilian organizations. While interagency efforts in the combatant commands will likely improve military capabilities, they also run the risk of militarizing political and economic elements of the nation's foreign policy. The challenge is to avoid this scenario while capitalizing on the DOD's newly developed capabilities and bolstering the civilian organizations.

Congress Steps In

Congress has become increasingly aware of the inherent defects of the post-USIA framework. To alleviate these shortcomings, several Members of Congress have introduced legislation. For example, the Smith–Thornberry amendment would bolster the existing institutional framework by strengthening interagency coordination and providing additional resources for strategic communications research. In contrast, the Brownback bill would fundamentally reshape the current institutional framework. Although these two proposals differ significantly in their provisions, both offer effective schemes to enhance strategic communications and public diplomacy.

Smith–Thornberry Amendment. H.A. 5, an amendment to the 2009 Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 5658) cosponsored by Representatives Adam Smith (D–WA) and Mack Thornberry (R–TX), seeks to bolster existing capabilities and coordination through three key components.

- *First*, it would require creation of a comprehensive interagency strategy for strategic communications and public diplomacy.
- *Second*, it would require the President to describe the respective roles and responsibilities of the State and Defense Departments. This is important because, while these organizations continue to debate about what they are and are not doing, confusion remains over what they *should* be doing.
- *Third*, the amendment would require the President to assess the feasibility of a new independent

nonprofit research organization dedicated to strategic communications and public diplomacy. This would develop new, often private-sector techniques and technologies and would bolster interagency coordination by serving as a platform for agencies to exchange ideas and programs.

Brownback Bill. Senator Sam Brownback (R–KS) has introduced the Strategic Communications Act of 2008 (S. 3546), which would comprehensively transform, rather than reform, the nation's strategic communications framework. Principally, the bill would centralize the government's strategic communications, including "information, educational, and cultural activities," in a new agency, the National Center for Strategic Communications.⁴⁰ The Director of Strategic Communication, appointed by and reporting directly to the President, would head the new organization.

Although the director would not sit in the President's Cabinet, he or she would directly advise the President on such matters as the agency's budget, government outreach activities, and the planning and progress of strategic communications across the interagency process. The director would also be tasked with developing an interagency national strategy for strategic communications.

In addition, the bill establishes guidelines for the roles and mission of the National Center for Strategic Communications through a clearly defined set of principles and mission statement. (See Appendix A.) Based on the belief that the "founding principles of the United States must be advanced and defended against those who (A) deny the truth of such principles; and (B) seek to overthrow such principles," the agency is tasked with serving as the "primary organization in the United States Government for conducting strategic communications, including information, educational, and cultural activities."⁴¹

The agency would have several key duties and responsibilities:

- Under the guidance of the Assistant Director for the Global Communications Corps, strategic

40. Strategic Communications Act of 2008, S. 3546, 110th Cong., 2nd Sess., § 5(e)(1).

41. *Ibid.*, §§ 3(4) and 5(e)(1).

communications officers would implement “the national strategic communications strategy on a regional and country-by-country basis”⁴² through the foreign embassies.

- The BBG would be abolished, and U.S. international broadcasting would be placed under the Assistant Director for Information Operations. The assistant director would oversee the planning, execution, and allocation of resources for all U.S. international broadcasts.
- The Assistant Director for Global Networks would administer grants to nonprofit organizations for information operations. The bill would also transfer the State Department’s informational programs to the Assistant Director of Information Operations and its cultural exchange programs to the Assistant Director of Global Networks.

Finally, the bill would establish a Strategic Communication Board within the National Center to bolster interagency coordination. Headed by the deputy director, the board would consist of officials from the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, and Treasury and from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and U.S. Agency for International Development. This group would assist the Director of Strategic Communication in crafting the national strategic communications strategy and report regularly on progress in implementing the strategy.

A New Framework

Both pieces of legislation contain critical and long-overdue reforms.

The Smith–Thornberry amendment addresses the lack of leadership, interagency coordination, defined roles and missions, and adequate resources that has plagued U.S. informational outreach since the end of the Cold War. However, these proposals might not be enough. Strategic communications and public diplomacy would continue to be a subset of, and thus overshadowed by, the primary responsibilities of the State and Defense Departments.

The National Center for Strategic Communications proposed in the Brownback legislation would fill this gap. In addition, the bill addresses many of the problems that plagued the USIA by providing a clear and effective mission and set of principles, and it would empower the National Center for Strategic Communications as the lead implementer and coordinator for informational outreach. However, the bill does not address or even mention the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Defense, a key agency in informational outreach.

Both proposals fail to address a key problem—defining informational outreach—that has beset government strategic communications and public diplomacy efforts since the Cold War. Too often, officials use their own communications capabilities to advance their own interests and ignore or contradict efforts both inside (public affairs vs. public diplomacy/information operations) and outside of their agencies (State Department vs. DOD). Without an interagency definition of strategic communications, dysfunction will likely continue regardless of structure or resources.

Nevertheless, both the amendment and the bill could serve as the foundation for a new, viable strategic communications institutional framework. Such a framework requires combining the most effective elements of both pieces of legislation with additional components that address their shortcomings. Specifically, the President and Congress should:

- **Establish a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications.** As described in the Brownback legislation, this agency should serve as the focal point for U.S. informational outreach capabilities. Under the guidance of the Director of Strategic Communications, who would report directly to the President, the center would craft and implement an interagency strategic communications strategy, oversee U.S. broadcasting, and administer grants to nonprofit groups engaged in useful information operation activities. The director would also be responsible for interagency coordination of strategic communications, including coordinating the Pentagon’s regional information activities with the rest of the U.S. government.

42. *Ibid.*, § 5(h)(2)(A)(i).

In addition, the research center advocated in the Smith–Thornberry amendment should be incorporated into the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications. Finally, Congress should fund and equip this new organization by transferring the State Department’s public diplomacy budgets and the BBG’s broadcasting assets.

- **Establish a new strategic communications strategy that specifically defines the elements of information outreach.** As one of its first tasks, the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications should establish a new national strategy and definition of strategic communications. Public affairs, public diplomacy, international broadcasting, and information operations should be specifically defined so that their implementers understand where they fit in the strategic communications strategy and process. The Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication has provided the most comprehensive and effective definition of strategic communications.⁴³ (See Appendix B.)
- **Reform the State Department.** In creating the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications, Congress should transfer all functions and assets of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to the Director of Strategic Communications, except for the Bureau of Public Affairs, which would continue to serve as the State Department’s public outreach arm. In addition, the State Department would no longer have a connection to U.S. broadcasting and would focus exclusively on its state-to-state, regional, and multilateral foreign affairs functions.
- **Make use of the Pentagon’s combatant commands.** Strategic communications should be implemented not only at the country level, as advocated within the Brownback legislation, but also at the regional level through the combatant commands. Often, an ongoing crisis can over-

whelm the capacities of a local country team or involve more than one nation, requiring a regional response. The combatant commands are uniquely suited to providing such a regional response because they have evolved into one of the few established mechanisms capable of monitoring and coordinating government efforts across wide geographical areas. Consequently, the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications needs to establish plans for informational outreach run through both the embassies and the combatant commands, as noted above.

Conclusion

For America, whose purpose is rooted in the aspirations of freedom for everyone, winning hearts and minds is a critical part of any effective foreign policy. Yet without substantial reforms in its structures and methods of public diplomacy, the United States will remain, as Secretary Gates said, “miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies and our goals.”⁴⁴ It is time for Congress and the President to ensure that the United States fully engages in the war of ideas and creates a new agency and a comprehensive framework to use strategic communications as an effective, proactive tool.

—Tony Blankley is Visiting Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at The Heritage Foundation. Helle C. Dale is Deputy Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies and Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Davis Institute, at The Heritage Foundation. Oliver L. Horn is a Research Assistant in the Allison Center. The authors thank the numerous current and former officials from the State Department, Defense Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development whose insights helped to make this report possible.

43. U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, at http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf (November 17, 2007).

44. Gates, “Landon Lecture.”

APPENDIX A**PRINCIPLES AND MISSION AS DEFINED IN S. 3546****Principles**

It is the Sense of Congress that—

- (1) radical Islamists deny these moral principles and use terrorism to achieve their ideological ends;
- (2) radical Islamists seek to—
 - (A) morally delegitimize democracy; and
 - (B) forcefully impose a universal political order that denies and suppresses the unalienable rights of human beings;
- (3) although military force may sometimes be necessary, military force alone cannot defeat the threat posed by Islamist extremism;
- (4) the founding principles of the United States, including freedom, human rights, and the rule of law, must be advanced and defended against those who—
 - (A) deny the truth of such principles; and
 - (B) seek to overthrow such principles;
- (5) the United States, out of a decent respect to the opinions of mankind, owes an explanation of its founding principles and the purposes of democratic, constitutional, and political order; and
- (6) the United States Government needs an organization whose mission is to engage foreign audiences in ways that advance the national interests of the United States, including—
 - (A) advancing understanding and appreciation for the founding principles of the United States; and
 - (B) defeating the ideas that are inimical to the founding principles of the United States.⁴⁵

Mission

- (e) Primary Missions - The primary missions of the [National] Center [for Strategic Communication] are—
- (1) to serve as the primary organization in the United States Government for conducting strategic communications, including information, educational, and cultural activities that are designed—
 - (A) to influence the opinions of foreign audiences in support of American ideals and in opposition to violent extremism;
 - (B) to dissuade foreign audiences from supporting violence;
 - (C) to provide other peoples with a better understanding of the policies, values, institutions and culture of the United States;
 - (D) to support other peoples who share the values of the United States, including those who seek to advance freedom and oppose violent extremism; and
 - (E) to promote the founding principles of the United States abroad, especially inalienable individual rights, freedom, democracy, and the rule of law;
 - (2) to develop and oversee the execution of the national strategic communications strategy;

45. Strategic Communications Act of 2008, § 3.

- (3) to encourage private institutions in the United States to develop their own exchange activities, and provide assistance for those exchange activities which are in the broadest national interest;
- (4) to ensure that international informational, educational, and cultural activities conducted or planned by other departments and agencies of the United States Government are consistent with the national strategic communications strategy;
- (5) to promote United States participation in international events relevant to the mission of the Agency;
- (6) to direct and coordinate foreign broadcasting by the United States Government; and
- (7) to research and analyze—
 - (A) global public opinion;
 - (B) media trends and influences on audiences;
 - (C) existing and emerging information technologies; and
 - (D) the implications of all source intelligence assessments.⁴⁶

46. *Ibid.*, § 5(e).

APPENDIX B

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS FROM THE DEFENSE SCIENCE BOARD

“**Strategic communication** is vital to America’s national security and foreign policy. Although recent attention to its value has been driven by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, strategic communication describes a variety of instruments that have been used by governments for generations to understand global attitudes and cultures; engage in a dialogue of ideas between people and institutions; advise policy makers, diplomats, and military leaders on the public opinion implications of policy choices; and influence attitudes and behavior through communications strategies.

“Strategic communication can be understood to embrace five core instruments: public diplomacy, public affairs, international broadcasting, information operations, and special activities. Only the first three instruments and one element of the fourth are discussed in this study.

“**Public diplomacy** is distinguished from traditional diplomatic interactions between governments. Public diplomacy seeks, through the exchange of people and ideas, to build lasting relationships and receptivity to a nation’s culture, values, and policies. It seeks also to influence attitudes and mobilize publics in ways that support policies and national interests. The time horizons for public diplomacy range from decades to news cycles. In an age of global media, the Internet revolution, and powerful nonstate actors—an age in which almost everything governments do and say is understood through the mediating filters of news programs, culture, memory, and language—no major strategy, policy, or diplomatic initiative can succeed without public support. Fulbright scholarships, youth exchanges, embassy press briefings, official websites in foreign language versions, and televised interviews with ambassadors and military commanders are examples of public diplomacy.

“The term ‘**public affairs**’ is used by the Departments of State and Defense to denote communication activities intended primarily to inform and influence U.S. media and the American people. The White House, the NSC, U.S. government departments and agencies, and military commands all have public affairs staffs. These staffs focus on domestic media, but their advocacy activities also reach allies and adversaries around the world. Distinctions between public affairs and public diplomacy continue to shape doctrine, resource allocations, and organization charts. But public diplomacy and public affairs practitioners employ similar tools and methods; the audiences of each are both global and local. The conceptual distinction between the two is losing validity in the world of global media, global audiences, and porous borders.

“**International broadcasting services** are funded by governments to transmit news, information, public affairs programs, and entertainment to global audiences via AM/FM and shortwave radio, satellite television, and Web-based systems. Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and the Radio Sawa and Al Hurra Arabic language radio and television services are examples of U.S. international broadcasting.

“**Information operations** is a term used by the Department of Defense to include computer network operations (computer network attack and defense), electronic warfare, operational security, military deception, and psychological operations (PSYOPs). This report will discuss only open PSYOPs—military activities that use selected information to influence the attitudes and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in support of military and national security objectives.”⁴⁷

47. U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Science Board, *Defense Science Board 2004 Summer Study on Transition to and from Hostilities*, December 2004, pp. 67–69, at http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-12-DSB_SS_Report_Final.pdf (October 27, 2008); emphasis added.