



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

FEB 11 2010

The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Section 1055(b) of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2009 provides that the Secretary of Defense shall review and report to the congressional defense committees on, the organizational structure within the Department of Defense for advising the Secretary on the direction and priorities for strategic communication activities. Please find that report enclosed.

I look forward to working with you on this and other related issues in the future. My staff is available to provide additional information or briefings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Gates".

Enclosure:  
As stated

cc:  
The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon  
Ranking Member



# Department of Defense

## Report on Strategic Communication

### December 2009

#### Purpose of Report.

Section 1055(b) of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Section 1055) provides that the Secretary of Defense shall report to the congressional defense committees on “the organizational structure within the Department of Defense for advising the Secretary on the direction and priorities for strategic communication activities, including an assessment of the option of establishing a board, composed of representatives from among the organizations within the Department responsible for strategic communications, public diplomacy, and public affairs, and including advisory members from the broader interagency community as appropriate, for purposes of (1) providing strategic direction for Department of Defense efforts related to strategic communications and public diplomacy; and (2) setting priorities for the Department of Defense in the areas of strategic communications and public diplomacy.” This report addresses these matters.

This report describes how DoD understands strategic communication, offers DoD views on the appropriate DoD role in strategic communication and public diplomacy, explains existing DoD processes and organizations that support effective strategic communication, and describes some potential future avenues for improvement and change (including an assessment of the option of establishing a strategic communication board within DoD).

#### Defining Strategic Communication for DoD.

The *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Joint Publication 1-02) defines the phrase “strategic communication” for the Department as “Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.” However, this recitation of a dictionary definition does not explain how this term is interpreted and implemented.

Emergent thinking is coalescing around the notion that strategic communication should be viewed as a process, rather than as a set of capabilities, organizations, or discrete activities. In its broadest sense, “strategic communication” is the process of integrating issues of audience and stakeholder perception into policy-making, planning, and operations at every level. As the Joint Staff’s October 2009 Joint Integrating Concept for Strategic Communication (SC JIC) puts it, “Strategic communication is the alignment of multiple lines of operation (e.g., policy

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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implementation, public affairs, force movement, information operations, etc.) that together generate effects to support national objectives. Strategic communication essentially means sharing meaning (i.e., communicating) in support of national objectives (i.e., strategically). This involves listening as much as transmitting, and applies not only to information, but also [to] physical communication — action that conveys meaning.”

Other important DoD documents also recognize the importance of strategic communication. The January 2009 Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report noted the need for DoD strategic communication processes to “improve the alignment of actions and information with policy objectives” and “integrate strategic communication into defense missions and to support larger U.S. policies as well as the State Department's public diplomacy priorities.” Similarly, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning, explains that strategic communication (SC) is “a natural extension of strategic direction, and supports the President’s strategic guidance, the Secretary of Defense’s National Defense Strategy, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s National Military Strategy... This is an interagency effort, which provides an opportunity to advance US regional and global partnerships.”

The strategic communication process is designed to synchronize – and thus maximize the impact of – efforts to achieve one or more of the following, depending on the circumstances:

- Improve U.S. credibility and legitimacy;
- Weaken an adversary’s credibility and legitimacy;
- Convince selected audiences to take specific actions that support U.S. or international objectives;
- Cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions.

Effective strategic communication requires active listening and sustained engagement with relevant stakeholders; given this, some in DoD are increasingly using the term “strategic engagement and communication” instead of the term “strategic communication,” as the latter term is often misinterpreted to imply a narrower concern with media, messaging, and traditional “communications” activities. Several other Departments and Agencies, as well as the National Security Staff (NSS), are also beginning to use the term “engagement” in lieu of or to supplement the term “strategic communication.” In May, the NSS established a Global Engagement Directorate, with strategic communication nested within it. Similarly, the State Department coordinates strategic communication with interagency partners through its Global Strategic Engagement Center; and the National Counterterrorism Center nests strategic communication within its Global Engagement Group. Although internal DoD discussions about the most useful terminology are ongoing, this report will continue to use the phrase “strategic communication.”

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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The strategic communication process involves both horizontal coordination (across DoD and the U.S. Government, as well as with international partners when appropriate) and vertical coordination (up and down the chain of command). In all cases, such coordination is designed to ensure that:

- Cultural, informational, and communication considerations are part of strategy, planning, and policy development from the very beginning (rather than as afterthoughts);
- The potential communication impacts of both kinetic and non-kinetic actions – their likely “perception effects” — are assessed and planned for *before* the actions are taken;
- Our words and our actions are consistent and mutually reinforcing (closing the “say-do” gap); and
- “Soft power” options and capabilities are given equal priority and considered in coordination with hard power alternatives.

It is difficult for large organizations to ensure effective strategic communication consistently at every level. But the difficulty of the challenge merely increases the need to focus attention on its importance. Although many challenges remain, DoD has, in recent years, made significant progress in focusing attention and resources on improving strategic communication, in part through effective coordination, integration and deconfliction of key supporting capabilities and activities.

Although SC is neither a capability nor a specific military specialty, some capabilities, functions, and activities are key enablers and amplifiers of effective strategic communication. As DoD’s conception of SC has evolved, emphasis on strictly “informational” activities has decreased. DoD is shifting to viewing strategic communication as an adaptive, decentralized process of trying to understand selected audiences thoroughly, hypothesizing physical or informational signals that will have the desired cognitive effect on those audiences, testing those hypotheses through action, monitoring the actual result through feedback, and disseminating the best solutions quickly through the Department and the joint force. DoD thus now recognizes the importance to strategic communication of ensuring effective coordination among a much larger group of capabilities, functions, and activities.

These include, but are not limited to, civil-military operations, military-to-military engagement, and many DoD activities that fall within “Security, Stability, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations” (SSTRO). That list is necessarily incomplete, however, as all DoD activities have a communication and informational impact. The Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept, while not formal DoD guidance, usefully highlights eleven supporting capabilities that DoD should consider critical to the strategic communication process in the future:

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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1. The ability to integrate all joint force actions to maximize desired effects on selected audiences.
2. The ability to coordinate joint force actions with the efforts of other agencies and partners within the context of a broader national strategy.
3. The ability to access, produce, and maintain information and knowledge on the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of potential audiences.
4. The ability to access, produce, and maintain information and knowledge on complex social communication systems, including the characteristics of various media channels and the intentions, capabilities, and efforts of other influencers within and having an effect on the joint operations area.
5. The ability to detect, monitor, translate, and assess the effects of the strategic communication efforts of others—including friendly governments, non-state groups, neutrals, competitors, and adversaries—as the basis for responding to those effects.
6. The ability to estimate the direct and indirect effects of potential actions and signals on the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and actions of selected audiences, both intended and unintended.
7. The ability to conceive and formulate timely and culturally attuned messages.
8. The ability quickly to produce and deliver information designed to influence selected audiences as desired.
9. The ability to conceive and coordinate physical actions or maintain physical capabilities designed to influence selected audiences as desired.
10. The ability to document, through various means, joint force actions, down to small-unit levels, and to disseminate this information in real or near-real time as required.
11. The ability to coordinate, monitor, measure, and assess the effects of friendly signals with other partners on intended and unintended audiences in relation to expected effects.

DoD is currently conducting a Strategic Communication Capabilities-Based Assessment to determine the degree to which existing capabilities are sufficient or need to be enhanced and to identify best practices for strategic communication at the Combatant Command level. As noted above, however, the Department does not view these or other supporting capabilities as discrete, specific “strategic communication capabilities” or activities; these are capabilities that are already resident in existing DoD components and processes, but may need further leveraging or more robust resourcing in the future to support the strategic communication process most effectively.

## Department of Defense Role in Strategic Communication.

The strategic communication process should be engaged in by all USG actors at all levels, from the operational level of war to the highest interagency levels. DoD’s responsibilities and operational missions give DoD a unique role to play, ensuring that the Department’s strategic communication processes support major military operations, shape the environment to prevent conflict, and if conflict occurs, ensure it occurs on terms favorable to the realization of U.S. national security interests.

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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DoD does not engage directly in public diplomacy, which is the purview of the State Department, but numerous DoD activities are designed specifically to support the State Department's public diplomacy efforts and objectives, which in turn support national objectives. DoD refers to these activities as "Defense Support to Public Diplomacy" (DSPD). Many of these DSPD activities are initiated via direct request to DoD or a Geographic Combatant Command from a U.S. Embassy, from the applicable regional bureau in the State Department, or from the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Some DSPD activities are initiated by DoD or Geographic Combatant Command recommendation to the State Department.

DSPD activities range from hospital ship visits and community service activities performed by military personnel, to the provision of Military Information Support Teams (MISTs) to embassies upon the request of the Ambassador, to DoD logistical or transportation support for State Department public diplomacy activities. In all cases, DSPD activities are coordinated with the State Department, either at the country team level or at the Washington interagency level.

Virtually all of DoD's efforts and activities overseas have direct or indirect diplomatic impacts, even when not specifically designed as DSPD activities. A Navy ship stopping in a foreign port—and the interactions of U.S. sailors with local populations, for instance—can have a significant impact on how Americans and U.S. policy are perceived by the host population, as can kinetic actions. The Department is keenly aware that all its activities have public diplomacy effects, and Pentagon and Combatant Command staffs coordinate continually with the State Department and U.S. embassies around the world to ensure that DoD and State Department activities and efforts are integrated, mutually supportive, and further national objectives.

In some areas, DoD and State Department roles and responsibilities can overlap. For instance, some DoD informational activities and key leader engagements closely resemble State Department public diplomacy efforts. At times, this overlap is useful and does not lead to problems; at other times, it is appropriate for one agency to have a lead or exclusive role. Thus, during combat operations or in other non-permissive environments, DoD often takes the lead out of necessity, as civilian actors may be unable to perform their usual activities. DoD, the State Department and the National Security Staff (NSS) are currently reviewing roles and responsibilities for informational activities among departments and agencies.

## Department of Defense Strategic Communication Process.

From a DoD perspective, "strategic communication priorities" are not separate and distinct from national or Department policy objectives. DoD's strategic communication process is designed to support USG and DoD policy goals; thus, the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, National Military Strategy, and DoD Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF) provide the overarching policy objectives and planning guidance for DoD during the SC

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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process. Each Geographic Combatant Commander uses these documents, as well as additional policy guidance from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, to develop Theater Campaign Plans (TCPs) that describe how the Combatant Commander intends to conduct operations and activities – including shaping and influence programs – in theater in support of national and DoD objectives.

The Secretary of Defense is informed through each of his principal staff assistants, and DoD does not view “strategic communication” as something that can be meaningfully presented separately from discussion of an overall strategy and the process designed to implement that strategy. A key lesson from previous DoD efforts to conceptualize and organize for effective strategic communication is that processes intended to develop separate and distinct strategic communication priorities, plans, or organizations are ineffective when divorced from other planning processes. Strategic communication must instead be integrated into existing and time-tested policy-making and planning processes, and the SC process should not displace or alter the roles and responsibilities of existing DoD components.

Although virtually every DoD office has a role in the strategic communication process, certain offices are the key drivers and leaders of the process, due to their roles and responsibilities in policy formulation, planning, public communication, and the information environment. These key offices are described below.

## Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)).

The USD(P) is the principal staff assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense for all matters on the formulation of national security and defense policy, and the integration and oversight of DoD policy and plans to achieve national security objectives. As such, the USD(P) is responsible for ensuring that issues of stakeholder perception and response have been integrated into policy decisions, and that the strategic communication process is integrated into DoD long-term policy planning via documents such as the GEF. USD(P) also provides final OSD approval of Combatant Command contingency plans.

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) is organized both regionally and functionally to develop regional-, country-, and issue-specific policy guidance.

From 2007 until 2009, OUSD(P) had a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Support to Public Diplomacy. Experience proved, however, that a DASD-level office was not an effective means for ensuring high-level attention to improving policy-driven strategic communication, and in March 2009 that office was disestablished. Recognizing that effective strategic communication requires high-level advice and coordination, USD(P) appointed a senior advisor with responsibility for global strategic engagement within the OUSD(P) front office in April 2009, and shortly thereafter established the OUSD(P) Global Strategic Engagement Team (GSET). This team reports directly to USD(P) and is tasked with facilitating the strategic

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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communication process within OUSD(P) and liaising with other DoD components as appropriate. The GSET co-chairs the DoD-wide Global Engagement Strategy Coordination Committee (GESCC).

Primary responsibility for Defense Support for Public Diplomacy was placed with the appropriate regional and functional offices within Policy, and the OUSD(P) DASD for Plans was given the primary responsibility for strategic communication as it applies to Global Force Posture and plans directed by the GEF. The DASD for Plans coordinates closely with the OUSD(P) GSET.

Within OUSD(P), the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities (ASD (SO/LIC&IC)) serves as the principal staff assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense on Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict matters. The ASD (SO/LIC&IC) exercises policy oversight for PSYOP activities within the DoD, including Military Information Support Teams. ASD (SO/LIC&IC) is responsible for development, coordination and oversight of the implementation of policy and plans for DoD participation in all USG combating terrorism activities, including programs designed to counter violent extremism. The ASD (SO/LIC&IC) coordinates closely with the OUSD(P) GSET.

## Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ASD(PA)).

The ASD(PA) is the principal staff assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense for all communications activities including, but not exclusively, DoD news media relations, public liaison, and public affairs. ASD(PA) conducts short-, mid-, and long-term communication planning in support of policy objectives. These plans are coordinated extensively across the Department, and with interagency partners as applicable. ASD(PA) also coordinates media engagement and prepares speeches and talking points for the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and OSD principals, provides media and audience analysis for use by DoD components, and approves public affairs guidance for the Combatant Commands and other DoD components. As such, the ASD(PA) is a participant in the strategic communication process and works closely with other DoD components to ensure that the strategic communication process is integrated into DoD long-term planning.

## Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (USD(I)).

The USD(I) is the principal staff assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense for Information Operations (IO). DoD Directive 3600.01 defines Information Operations as “the integrated employment of the core capabilities of Electronic Warfare (EW), Computer Network Operations (CNO), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Military Deception (MILDEC), and Operations Security (OPSEC), in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.” The USD(I) exercises authority for oversight of IO in coordination with the

## DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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USD(P) and other OSD offices. OUSD(I) also works with the Military Departments to develop an Information Operations Career Force. Information operations personnel are key participants in the strategic communication process at Combatant Commands and across the Department.

Information Operations are always coordinated with other information activities within the Department. DoD submitted to Congress an interim report on information operations focusing on influence activities in September 2009, and will submit a follow-up report by January 26, 2010 (as directed by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2010 Conference Report).

### Joint Staff

The Joint Staff contributes to the strategic communication process at many levels. The J-3 (Current Operations) Directorate provides IO and PSYOP expertise and advice to DoD leadership to achieve national, strategic, and theater military objectives. The J-5 (Plans and Policy) Directorate, in conjunction with the Combatant Commands and Military Departments, develops policy guidance, plans, and strategic narratives for senior leadership, based upon policy guidance and directives from OSD. The J-5 also acts as the Joint Staff representative in the interagency strategic communication process to ensure that policy objectives are planned, coordinated, and integrated appropriately. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Public Affairs Office (CJCS PAO) works with OSD(PA) to ensure that broad policy guidance is effectively communicated by the military to public audiences with appropriate messages and talking points. Most importantly, with regard to the strategic communication process, the Joint Staff provides planning guidance to the Combatant Commands in the form of planning orders. The Joint Staff also reviews and staffs all Combatant Command operations and contingency plans.

### Global Engagement Strategy Coordination Committee (GESCC).

Although DoD believes that strategic communication should be inherent in all policy making, operational planning, and execution, the Department also recognizes that effective processes require appropriate coordination mechanisms, including designated individuals tasked with facilitating the strategic communication process. Accordingly, a number of DoD components have designated staff sections as having the responsibility to assist senior leaders in ensuring that the key orchestrating and synchronizing aspects of the SC process are carried out effectively. A critical lesson from past DoD efforts to organize for effective strategic communication, however, is that the strategic communication process works best when strategic communication coordinating mechanisms are designed to *leverage* and improve, rather than duplicate or replace, the capabilities residing in existing DoD components.

In June 2009, OUSD(P) and OASD(PA) re-missioned an informal DoD information-sharing body previously known as the Information Coordinating Committee, expanding its

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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membership and renaming it the Global Engagement Strategy Coordination Committee (GESCC). The GESCC is evolving into the central body for facilitating the strategic communication integrating process within the Department. The GESCC meets on a biweekly basis to identify emerging issues, exchanges information on key actions being worked across the staffs (including strategic communication studies, reports and long-term planning documents), and facilitates the proper integration and deconfliction of DoD activities.

The GESCC is co-chaired by OUSD(P) and OASD(PA), and brings together all of the key DoD offices mentioned above (OUSD(P), OASD(PA), OUSD(I), Joint Staff). Other regular GESCC attendees include representatives from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology & Logistics. Other DoD offices, including Combatant Command representatives, are invited to participate in GESCC meetings as appropriate, as are representatives of other USG agencies, such as the State Department, Open Source Center, the National Security Staff, and the National Counterterrorism Center. GESCC representatives participate in the NSC's regular interagency policy committee meetings on strategic communication and global engagement, and also work closely with the State Department's Global Strategic Engagement Center.

## Way Forward

It is extremely difficult for an organization as large and complex as DoD to integrate fully matters of stakeholder and audience perception and response into policy-making, planning, and operations at every level, and to ensure that actions, words, and images are consistently synchronized and deconflicted. The strategic communication process is always a work in progress, one that is inherently aspirational in its goals. Nonetheless, it is a critical process, one that DoD is committed to improving.

Recent DoD initiatives have already significantly improved the strategic communication process. After struggling to define strategic communication and develop effective coordination processes for much of the past decade, there is now substantial consensus within the Department about the value of viewing strategic communication fundamentally as a process, rather than a collection of capabilities and activities. Conceptualizing strategic communication as a process has allowed the Department to focus on ensuring effective coordination among DoD components, and to identify needed supporting capabilities, instead of designing and resourcing elaborate new structures and organizations.

## Assessment of the Option of Establishing a Board.

The Department examined the proposal to establish a new "board, composed of representatives from among the organizations within the Department responsible for strategic communications, public diplomacy, and public affairs, and including advisory members from the broader interagency community as appropriate, for purposes of (1) providing strategic direction for Department of Defense efforts related to strategic communications and public diplomacy; and

## DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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(2) setting priorities for the Department of Defense in the areas of strategic communications and public diplomacy."

The GESCC, described above, functions effectively as a coordinating board that facilitates the strategic communication integrating process, both within DoD and *vis a vis* interagency actors. Although relatively young, the GESCC has so far proven a successful mechanism for identifying emerging issues, exchanging information on resources, best practices, and key actions being worked across the staffs, and ensuring proper integration and deconfliction of DoD activities. The GESCC is actively engaged in several pending studies and reports designed to identify ways to improve DoD's strategic communication process, including the Strategic Communication Capabilities-Based Assessment, the SC Joint Integrating Concept, and a number of studies and reports relating to information operations.

Strategic communication priorities are viewed by DoD as directly related to broader USG national security priorities, and, as noted previously, the Department has no single organization "responsible for strategic communications;" rather, we view several DoD components as playing key roles in leading the strategic communication process. The GESCC performs this function of acting as a broker to provide consolidated advice to the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy on "priorities for the department in...strategic communications and public diplomacy."

Despite these promising recent initiatives, significant challenges remain in ensuring an effective DoD-wide strategic communication process. These challenges include:

- Ensuring that DoD personnel at every level understand the concept and principles of strategic communication;
- Fully institutionalizing this understanding of strategic communication into doctrine and training, and ensuring its centrality to DoD policy development, planning, and implementation;
- Ensuring that the strategic communication process is supported by appropriate advisors and coordinating mechanisms at the Combatant Command, Military Department, and component levels, as well as at the Department level;
- Ensuring, simultaneously, that such essential coordination mechanisms leverage existing organizations and capabilities to minimize bureaucratic layers and competition for limited DoD staff and resources; and
- Ensuring that adequate mechanisms exist to collect, analyze, disseminate, and share information on key stakeholders and target audiences and the effects of U.S. Government activities on their perceptions and actions.

# DoD Report on Strategic Communication

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## Conclusion

In this ever more complex and interdependent world, the strategic communication process is increasingly vital for DoD. Without a nuanced understanding of stakeholders and audiences, DoD policy-makers, planners, and field personnel cannot effectively evaluate the likely effects of DoD actions, words, and images. And unless those “perception effects” are taken into account, DoD components cannot effectively develop or implement policy or come up with effective engagement plans, communication plans, or risk mitigation strategies.

Integrating issues of audience and stakeholder perception into policy-making, planning, and operations at every level is difficult, as is the effective orchestration of actions, images, and words. Over the past few years, DoD has experimented with a range of mechanisms for ensuring effective strategic communication, and this will continue to be a work in progress. DoD will continually review and revise procedures, doctrine, guidance, and coordinating mechanisms to ensure that the strategic communication process effectively supports national and DoD objectives.