

# Strategic Communication:

## Key Enabler for Elements of National Power

By Richard J. Josten

**Editorial Abstract:** Mr. Josten describes US Government challenges in exercising elements of national power, developing unified strategic messages, and balancing messages with actions. He recommends a reexamination of current guidelines for military support to public diplomacy.

*Author's Note:* In an article I wrote for the Joint Information Operations Center IO Sphere (Winter 2005), I made a case for a Capabilities Compendium, detailing the need for an integrative approach for the Elements of National Power. Essentially, the US has often favored hard power capabilities of military or economic might to coerce adversaries — a Cold War mentality that has started to change.

**“Since the attacks of September 11th, 2001, US public diplomacy has followed an ineffective information strategy borrowed from the Cold War.”<sup>1</sup>**

Hard power can be effective, and must remain credible. Even when held in reserve. However, the United States Government (USG) should not overlook use of soft power. Joseph Nye claims soft power “arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.” Some have called for an increase in ‘cultural diplomacy’—a more focused effort than public diplomacy. Whether using elements of hard or soft power, together these capabilities “form the crux of national strategic communications capability,” according to Jeff Jones, former Director for Strategic Communications and Information at the National Security Council (NSC). In a recent *Joint Force Quarterly* article he was critical of the US effort, stating “There is little evidence of cooperation, coordination, or even appreciation of the impact of strategic communication.”<sup>2</sup>

### What is Strategic Communication?

Presently the Department of Defense (DOD), US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), and other USG agencies are struggling with the concept of Strategic Communication (SC). There are several definitions of SC within the government, with some consensus that Military Information Operations (IO), Public Diplomacy (PD), and Public Affairs (PA) are primary components. At a glance, we can easily derive these SC pieces from the recognized Elements of National Power—Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic Power (DIME). The

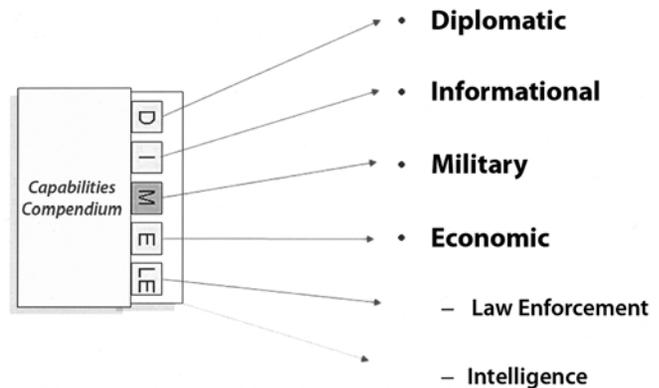


Figure 1.

The National Elements of Power are typically recognized as US Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic Power. Many writers include Law Enforcement and Intelligence capabilities in the line-up. However, national security strategy only reflects the first four.

coherent application of national (and allied) elements of power, using effects-based processes to accomplish strategic objectives, defines an effects based strategy. Any USG agency can create a strategic level effect, whether intentionally or unintentionally, though only one agency has the lead for Strategic Communication: the Department of State (DOS).

President Bush designated Ms Karen Hughes as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs— basically the US Director for Strategic Communication, to lead efforts to improve America’s dialogue with the world. She leads policy development in this arena, and oversees three bureaus at the Department of State: Educational and Cultural Affairs, Public Affairs, and International Information Programs.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the President charged Ms Hughes via the NSC to form a new Policy Coordination Committee on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications (8 April 2006).<sup>4</sup> Ms Hughes has a daunting task before her: to improve the image of the US abroad, and to convey key USG strategic messages. Strategic Communication, which is both message and action, provides the means to harness the Elements of National Power in an effective manner. SC must be driven by policy from the White House, the NSC, DOS, DOD and other the interagency organizations. All major interagency

organizations have a public affairs entity, but they are chiefly proprietary - concerned more with their own organization's message than the national strategic communications message. "Apart from the Department of Defense, no US department or agency devotes substantial resources to long-range planning," said Bruce Gregory of George Mason University.<sup>5</sup> In a work prepared for the Conference on International Communication and Conflict, he reviewed some thirty expert studies concerning Strategic Communication and the need for Public Diplomacy reform. Gregory cited no more studies are required concerning the recognized deficiency, because now is the time for a plan of action. Again I return to my argument in "Elements of National Power—Need for a Capabilities Compendium" that: "Military planning expertise must be lent to interagency personnel coordinating their efforts with those of DOD. Further, in order to employ non-DOD capabilities, there must be a better accounting of capabilities." USG capabilities must translate to deliberately planned actions. The NSC defines Strategic Communication similarly to the Joint Staff:

*The coordination of Statecraft, Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy [Military] Information Operations and other activities, reinforced by political, economic and military actions, in a synchronized and coordinated manner.*<sup>6</sup>

### Strategic Communication: An Effects-Based Approach

US Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) collected recent research on effects based operations (EBO) and related concepts in a series of transformationally-oriented doctrinal pamphlets.<sup>7</sup> Under the concept of Operational Net Assessment (ONA), effects are physical or behavioral, the result of actions applied against system nodes. ONA resources are essentially national power (DIME) capabilities [Author's note: Capabilities Compendium] directed at nodes, which are persons, places, or physical things in a system. In Information Operations (IO), those capabilities are often non-kinetic, sometimes non-lethal, and often aimed at processes within systems — that is, behavioral effects aimed at cognitive processes. Often networked globally, SC both informs and influences, synchronizing and deconflicting PA and IO themes and messages. In the world arena this is sometimes accomplished via the third element of SC: Public Diplomacy. Defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD) is presently receiving renewed USG attention.

### Defense Support to Public Diplomacy

Joint Publication 1-02, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines Public Diplomacy as: "Those overt international public information activities of the United States Government designed to promote United States foreign policy objectives by seeking to understand, inform, and influence foreign audiences and opinion makers, and by broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad." The new version of JP 3-13, *Information Operations*, slightly revises the previous JCS definition (approved for inclusion in the next edition of JP 1-02):

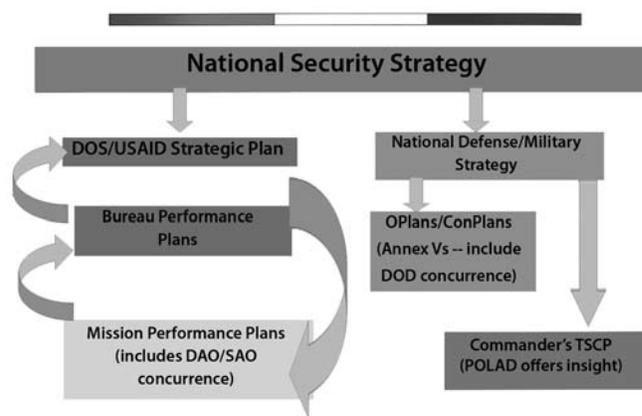


Figure 2.  
National Security Planning Linkages:  
Diplomatic & Military

*"Focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all elements of national power."*<sup>8</sup>

Strategic Communication must include synchronized themes and messages reinforced by premeditated actions. The effort must also include activities with long-ranging effects—too often the USG relies on short-term fixes to policy or image problems that actually require lasting changes. In his *IO Sphere* (Fall 2005) article on SC, Major Marshall Eckland recognized the primary reason for this shortcoming: "unlike diplomatic, military, and economic instruments of national power, no single government agency is responsible for providing the strong leadership and strategic direction necessary to operationalize the nation's vast portfolio [Author's note: Capabilities Compendium] of informational assets."<sup>9</sup>

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report entitled "Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy" criticized various failed USG efforts to solve the identified problem. The report recognizes DOD work to augment White House, NSC, and DOS efforts, but notes the Defense Department has "been reluctant to define any of its activities in public diplomacy terms." However, this reluctance must change. DOD involvement with ambassadorial staffs regarding Theater Security Cooperation Plans (TSCP) is one successful avenue of approach that can be further enhanced. The report also states DOD "has begun to develop a 'defense support for public diplomacy' strategy which acknowledges that the department has a role to play in this arena."<sup>10</sup> In a February 2006 speech, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called for a more aggressive, non-traditional information campaign to counter messages of extremist and terrorist groups in the world media. Following the completion of the Quadrennial Defense Review, he said, "Victory in the long war ultimately depends on strategic communication."<sup>11</sup>

## Creating an Effective National Strategic Communication Architecture

There is no doubt that the key USG strategic communicator is the President, followed by the President's closest administration officials. However, the USG is so large, and government agencies so separated by policies and intra-organizational goals—there must be one voice to promulgate the Executive Branch position in ways that do not contradict and lead to intra-governmental “message fratricide.” Both recent and historical solutions have been eliminated when the need seemingly went away (WWI era Committee of Public Information, and WWII Office of War Information); or collapsed from the sheer weight of the monumental undertaking (DOD Office of Strategic Influence, White House Office of Global Communication, and NSC Strategic Communication Policy Coordination Committee).<sup>12</sup> The SC task does not need to be overwhelming, but it must be sustained, resourced, coordinated, planned, and executed. It demands integrated action and consideration of unintended consequences, by all Elements of National Power, and with academic, private industry, and other non-government organization (NGO) support.

In April 2005, US Representative Mac Thornberry (Texas) proposed a bill to strengthen US Strategic Communication. The legislation called for “creation of a non-partisan and non-profit Center for Strategic Communication.”<sup>13</sup> The proposed center would be a privately-run entity to provide information and analysis to the State, Defense, Justice, and Homeland Security Departments, plus the Director of National Intelligence. According to Thornberry, “*the Global War on Terrorism is actually a Global War of Ideas and that terrorism is one of the tactics used in that War. Military power, alone, will not win this War...*” He further stated, “*As a non-governmental entity, the Center can take advantage of the experience and expertise of those outside of government who may be unwilling or unable to work within government but would like the opportunity to*

*contribute.*” The bill was inspired by recommendations of the Defense Science Board (DSB) Task force on Strategic Communication.<sup>14</sup> In addition to this independent, federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) proposal, the DSB recommended the National Security Council oversee the SC Center. Senator Richard Lugar introduced this idea in January of 2005, calling for a deputy NSC advisor to serve as the President's principal SC advisor. It begs the question whether the Global Innovation and Strategy Center (GISC), intended to be an FFRDC subordinate to USSTRATCOM, will satisfy the overall USG requirement, or will merely be seen as part of the military component of the SC effort.<sup>15</sup> In his statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, USSTRATCOM Commander General James Cartwright said: “*When fully operational, the Global Innovation and Strategy Center will be able to access on-site and public/private sector experts to conduct rapid analysis of national security situations. The center will also have access to a wide range of available technologies to assist in the development of strategies incorporating capabilities well in excess of those of the military alone.*”

In his guidance to the Joint Staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Peter Pace stated “*Our enemies are violent extremists who would deny us, and all mankind, the freedom to choose our own destiny...We must find and defeat them in an environment where information, perception, and how and what we communicate are every bit as critical as the application of traditional kinetic effects.*”<sup>16</sup> General Pace also identified key enablers critical to winning the war on terrorism. He cites improvement in organizational agility as the first, noting “*We must also help close the seams and gaps across the staff, the combatant commands, the department, and our interagency partners...*” As a second key enabler, he identifies a need for speed of action and decision, then a requirement for collaboration within the JS, DOD, interagency, and Coalition partners. Finally, he calls for outreach from prospective GISC elements, when the center formally stands up in 2006. General Pace notes “*we can both learn from and help others through a proactive outreach program to nontraditional partners. Academia, industry, think tanks, and a host of other organizations possess a wide-range of expertise and insights invaluable to finding solutions to our most pressing problems.*”

In addition to STRATCOM's establishment of the GISC, the Joint Information Operations Center stood up a Joint Strategic Communication (Support) Cell (JSSC) in April 2006. In essence, the COCOMs, Joint Staff, and USG agencies all acknowledge requirements for more SC support and synchronization. USSTRATCOM delegated SC planning in support of USSTRATCOM missions, and when directed in support of other COCOMs, to the JIOC. Liaison officers help link JIOC to STRATCOM J5 and the Joint Staff. STRATCOM J5 is responsible for ensuring information element integration in all its missions, and into any strategy related to their accomplishment. This will be done in concert

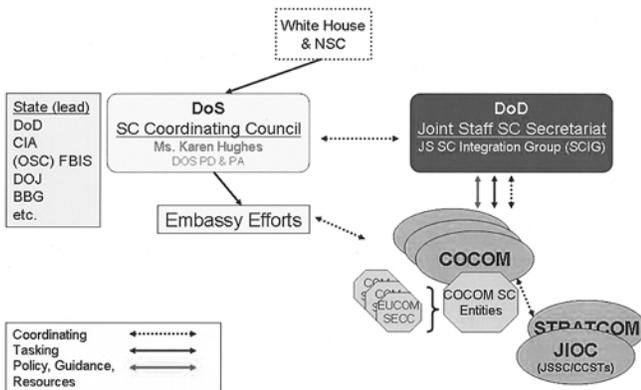


Figure 3.

The Department of State leads the interagency in disseminating the Strategic Communication message of the President of the United States. Diplomatic and informational elements of national power are supported by the military element via the concept of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy.

with other COCOMs and Joint Staff, and through the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) into the multi-agency process. Since establishment of its predecessor organization, the Joint Electronic Warfare Center (JEWEC) in the 1980s, the JIOC has maintained a well-established relationship with Joint Force Commanders via COCOM support teams (CCST). The implementation directive builds upon this long-standing relationship in three ways: directing the JSSC to provide SC planning support to the CCSTs; directing trans-regional SC planning support to the JIOC support teams (in line with the national objectives); and assigning JIOC direct liaison authority with OSD, other joint and service components and COCOMs.<sup>17</sup> Multi-agency interaction will be via JS and JIOC liaison officers.

A recent *US News and World Report* article described the new Pentagon road map for winning the battle of ideas against terrorists—including the new Strategic Communications Secretariat, and a Strategic Communications Integration Group (SCIG).<sup>18</sup> The article also brushed on JIOC involvement in the new road map—a mission still being defined. Air Force Lt Gen Victor E. Renuart, a member of the SCIG, recently commented the USG must craft “not (just) a military strategy, (but) a diplomatic, informational and communicative strategy, and (an) economic strategy.” He went on to note “this is the first time we’ve incorporated in a national strategy document the importance of strategic communication. For the first time, we have a real effort at orchestrating the strategic communications across the USG.”<sup>19</sup>

## Message and Action

Today’s form of terrorism is essentially strategic communication in the purest definition—message and action—utilizing the global communications network more to influence than inform. Modern global terrorism is also an extreme form of political warfare enabled by global processes, speed of technology, global media, and Internet resources. Currently, the Al Qaida (AQ) movement is not attempting to gain legitimacy as some terrorist movements have in the past. For example, the Palestinian Liberation Organization successfully achieved diplomatic recognition; other terror organizations like Hamas and the Badr Organization position themselves as political parties. So far AQ is not trying to gain legitimacy in the eyes of other governments, or gain diplomatic recognition. Al Qaida’s motives and messages are extra-governmental, and their movement thrives in anarchic environments. The 9/11 Commission Report stated the US needs “a preventive strategy...more political as it is military” and that we should strive to insure they cannot find sanctuary in “the least governed, most lawless places in the world.”<sup>20</sup> In the SC arena, AQ goes one step beyond attempting to influence the US to depart the Middle East—the leaders of Al Qaeda state they also want to destroy the Western way of life. Thus, their strategic message makes their position irreconcilable. AQ is a non-state entity, often with ‘non-governed’ sanctuaries or denied areas. Strategic communication directed at their leadership would be largely

ineffective, as pressure applied via public diplomacy toward a shadowy extra-governmental entity is basically impossible. However, AQ operates in dozens of countries, some with permissive environments, making those countries susceptible to our Strategic Communication efforts. With state entities, the USG can employ traditional public diplomacy. To paraphrase the views of Shibely Telhamai, the US has primarily focused on attacking the “supply side” of terrorism and on the “demand.” Telhamai observes “Public despair and humiliation are often fertile ground for terror organizers. If this demand side persists, the terrorism phenomenon is unlikely to be contained. For every terror organization that is destroyed, other suppliers will arise to exploit the persistent demand.”<sup>21</sup>

Strategic Communication messages, supported by actions that create enduring effects, can reduce the demand for terrorists. The US cannot decrease “despair and humiliation” in each state, but can develop TSCP plans, and engage in DSPD projects that mitigate conditions which contribute to enlistment of new terrorist recruits. International political analyst John W. Rendon recently noted “The US military operation for Tsunami relief is the only strategic victory in the GWOT in four years.”<sup>22</sup> The relief effort itself was effective Strategic Communication—message and action—because it was both noble and generous, and was successful because it was not overbearing. The Tsunami effort was not a plan pulled off a dusty shelf—a Joint Task Force swiftly and expertly executed support operations in a manner in which DOD excels. Imagine what we could accomplish on a global scale with a dedicated effort, earlier planning, sustained coordination among DOD, DOS, relief organizations, the interagency, and our coalition partners?

Programs like the President’s Proliferation Security Initiative or the Partnership to Defeat Terrorism are good examples of wielding the Capabilities Compendium of US power, through integration of our allies along with public and private sector cooperation. DOD must still define the boundaries and capabilities of military support to public diplomacy, and identify those effects achievable through public diplomacy, public affairs, and information operations. To reach this goal, the rest of the USG must echo the President’s Strategic Communication as a consistent, effects-based strategy—words must match actions. Presently, it appears that the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has a notable portion of that mission. We must seamlessly integrate IO capabilities and DSPD with other USG and State Department capabilities, in order to achieve effective Strategic Communication and gain strategic advantage in the Global War on Terrorism.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> R.S. Zaharna, “The Network Paradigm of Strategic Public Diplomacy,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Vol. 10 No. 1, April 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Force Quarterly*; Issue 39.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Hughes Biography, Undersecretary, Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, US Department of State; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/53692.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> GAO US Public Diplomacy Report, State Department Efforts Lack Certain Communications Elements and Face Persistent Challenges, 3 May 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Gregory, Director, Public Diplomacy Institute & Adjunct Assistant Professor for Media and Public Affairs, George Mason University, *Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication: Cultures, Firewalls, and Imported Norms*, August 31, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> National Security Council definition of Strategic Communication, February 2005, approved by Condoleezza Rice before her transition to the State Department.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Forces Command, JWFC Doctrine Pamphlet 4 *Doctrinal Implications of Operational Net Assessment* 24 Feb 04; JWFC Doctrine Pamphlet 7 *Operational Implications of Effects-based Operations*; and others, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jwfc\\_pam.htm](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jwfc_pam.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations*, 13 February 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Major Marshall V. Eckland (USA), "Strategic Communications: How to Make it Work?," *JIOC IO Sphere*, Fall 2005.

<sup>10</sup> GAO US Public Diplomacy Report, Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy, April 2005, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05323.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Scott Tyson, *Washington Post*, "Rumsfeld Urges Media to Fight Terror," 18 Feb 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Al Kamen, *Washington Post*, "Dear GOA: OGC is DOA," 6 April 2005. Presidential executive order established the Office of Global Communications 21 Jan, 2003. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ogc/global-messages.html>.

<sup>13</sup> H.R. 1869, *Strategic Communication Act of 2005*, [http://www.house.gov/thornberry/news\\_releases/2005/April/DC\\_StratCommunication04-28-05.htm](http://www.house.gov/thornberry/news_releases/2005/April/DC_StratCommunication04-28-05.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Defense Science Board, 2004, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Washington, D.C., Department of Defense, [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic\\_Communication.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Statement of General James E. Cartwright (USMC), Commander USSTRATCOM, Before the Senate Armed Services Committee – Strategic Forces Subcommittee, 4 April 2004, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2005/April/Cartwright%2004-04-05.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> *The 16th Chairman's Guidance to the Joint Staff – Shaping the Future*, General Pace, 1 Oct 2005, <http://www.jcs.mil/PaceGuidance02Oct05.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> James E. Cartwright, General, Commander USSTRATCOM, *Strategic Communication Responsibility Assignment Directive*, 18 April 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Robinson, "The Propaganda War," *U. S. News & World Report*, 29 May 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Samantha L Quigley, "Defeating Undefined Enemy Requires Multilayered National Strategy," American Forces Press Service, 16 Mar 2006.

<sup>20</sup> *The 9/11 Report – The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Thomas Kean, Chair & Lee H. Hamilton, Vice Chair, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Shibley Telhami, *The Stakes—America in the Middle East*, Westview Press, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> John Rendon of the Rendon Group, keynote speaker for the Conference on Culture and Adversary Modeling, sponsored by Air Force Office of Scientific Research, Joint Information Operations Center, and University of Texas at San Antonio, 30 Nov 05.



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