

## UPDATE TO CONGRESS ON NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

### **Purpose and Overview**

In 2010, the President laid out a comprehensive national framework for strategic communication including definitions, objectives, roles, and responsibilities as required by section 1055 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009. The Administration was also required to provide an update on this strategy after 2 years, including progress and any relevant changes. This report provides an update to the Congress on the Administration's interagency efforts on strategic communications over the past 2 years.

In 2010, we noted that, "effective strategic communications are essential to sustaining global legitimacy and supporting our policy aims...[and we must] do a better job understanding the attitudes, opinions, grievances, and concerns of peoples – not just elites – around the world." Events of the past 2 years have only reinforced the importance of public diplomacy and strategic communications in advancing U.S. interests. The continued rapid evolution of global communications is creating a landscape where our ability to engage and communicate with actors across societies is essential. The development of new media platforms is empowering global populations to reach out and communicate with others in ways they could not just a few years ago, and social and political movements are becoming savvier at mobilizing constituencies. Since our report in 2010, global events – from Cairo to Tehran – demonstrate that our engagement and communication with public audiences have never been more important.

### **Definitions and Strategy**

In the 2010 report, we defined strategic communications as: "(a) the synchronization of our words and deeds and how they will be perceived by others, as well as (b) programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals." This two-part definition continues to guide our efforts and inform our priorities. Events of the past 2 years have given us occasion to work toward aligning words and deeds,

as well as develop new and creative ways to reach foreign audiences.

Synchronizing Words and Deeds: As noted in 2010, the burden for synchronizing words and deeds must be shared by those beyond the communications community. Since all United States Government actions have communicative value and send messages, this responsibility belongs to senior leaders across agencies and in the field. We have worked to inculcate a culture of communication among leadership and to develop the mechanisms to make this standard practice. At the Department of State, Department of Defense (DOD), and the White House, we strive to ensure our words and deeds are synchronized at the highest levels of decisionmaking.

Deliberate Communication and Engagement: Similarly, deliberate communication and engagement has only grown as a pillar of our activity on critical foreign policy and national security issues. Our report in 2010 focused heavily on engagement with Muslim communities around the world, based on mutual respect and mutual interest. The events of the Arab Spring and political transitions across the Middle East and North Africa have demonstrated the importance of these programs. We have used our engagement programs to: support democratic political reform, strengthen an open and free press, bolster educational opportunity, and accelerate economic growth and foster entrepreneurship. The basis of these and other efforts reflects our continued emphasis on interactive communication and the importance of engagement, as articulated in the 2010 report: "connecting with, listening to, and building long-term relationships with key stakeholders." The emphasis on long-term relationship-building continues to guide our efforts as we have invested more time and resources in interactive communications channels, as well as programs structured around building and nurturing networks and supporting exchanges. This approach has extended far beyond the Middle East and North Africa to inform our programming, activities, and messages across all regions.

As in 2010, the Administration still sees the communications community as "comprised of a wide variety of organizations and capabilities including, but not limited to: public affairs (PA), public diplomacy (PD), military information operations (IO); and defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD)." We still believe these capabilities should be designed to "support policy goals as well as achieve specific effects to include: (1) foreign audiences recognize areas of mutual interest with the United States; (2) foreign audiences believe

the United States plays a constructive role in global affairs; and (3) foreign audiences see the United States as a respectful partner in efforts to meet complex global challenges." In addition, we also see our efforts to engage foreign audiences as critical levers to strengthen target elements within societies to help advance U.S. foreign policy objectives, such as democratic transitions, economic opportunity, or mutual understanding.

Agency Strategy Reviews: Shortly after our report to the Congress in 2010, the Department of State released its "Strategic Framework for Public Diplomacy," which elaborated on our national framework to highlight five priorities for U.S. public diplomacy: (1) shape the narrative; (2) expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships; (3) combat violent extremism; (4) better inform policymaking; and (5) deploy resources in line with current priorities. These objectives, and the tactical priorities outlined in that document, were embedded in the Department's Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), and continue to guide the Department of State's deployment of public diplomacy resources and tools.

In 2010, Secretary of Defense Gates directed a formal and comprehensive strategic communications and "Front-End Assessment" to address questions relating to roles and missions, definitions, management, resources, training, and education. This assessment resulted in two institutional changes that have an immediate and enduring impact on the efficacy of DOD's actions and organizational structures, resources, and coordination. First, the Secretary directed the publication of a new Directive on strategic communications to clarify and address execution at DOD and joint force levels. Second, Secretary Gates set in motion, and Secretary Panetta has continued to implement, a series of changes regarding how DOD's information operations are structured, led, and focused. Several of these changes and their intent are outlined below under "Roles and Responsibilities."

### **Interagency Planning and Coordination**

We have worked to integrate strategic communications activities through better planning and coordination both in Washington and in the field. The 2010 report emphasized the need for "programs and activities...to be strategic and long-term, not just reactive and tactical." In order to achieve these goals, we have placed a premium on the integration of strategic planning at all levels of decisionmaking, to include



the National Security Council, Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, as well as Interagency Policy Committees. We have also held working groups on strategic communications issues in critical geographies, including interagency messaging meetings intended to focus the substance and methods of our overseas communications. Departments have reinforced these processes with structural amendments, such as State's creation of six Deputy Assistant Secretaries for Public Diplomacy who provide senior leadership for engagement activities and provide integration into policymaking. At the operational level, we continue to rely on the Country Team, headed by the chief of the U.S. diplomatic mission and the plans and operations staffs at the combatant command headquarters.

The White House has worked to ensure that public diplomacy and strategic communications are built in to major policy reviews so that these functions are integrated up-front, instead of being added to fully developed policy. In addition, the White House continues to solidify a closer working relationship between State and DOD in the deployment of Military Information Support Teams (MISTs), the use of online platforms and other communication capabilities, priority setting, and messaging alignment with policy.

In 2010, we highlighted the need for all of these activities to be better informed by information, intelligence, research, and analysis. In a communications landscape as cluttered and competitive as today's, we must do a better job of understanding our audiences and choosing effective channels and messages. Since our 2010 report to the Congress, we have invested significantly in research and analysis. These efforts have spanned the Departments of State and Defense, the Intelligence Community (IC) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). For example, State created an Office of Audience Analysis to provide rigorous information on media environments, demographic information, and analysis on breaking trends to inform communications at our Embassies. Similarly, the IC has invested in open source reporting (including social media) and has started producing regular assessments on local landscapes for strategic communications. We have also done more to share this analysis with departments and agencies and coordinate contracting where commercial research is used to ensure that insights are shared and resources are conserved.

## Resources

In the 2010 report, we discussed the need to reexamine the balance of resources across agencies. We noted that balancing and optimizing our investment in these functions is essential and that resource levels should also be informed by existing roles, missions, and capacity. The White House facilitated a joint working group between the Departments of State and Defense to examine these issues and review military and civilian programs and capabilities. All parties agreed on the need to better synchronize State and DOD efforts, and to build civilian capacity at State in such areas as augmenting personnel at critical posts and developing more flexible models for rapid deployment of civilian officers. The Administration still believes strongly in enhancing Department of State civilian capacity in these areas and ensuring its primacy in communications and engagement outside of combat zones. Toward this end, the White House has emphasized interagency efforts (such as the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications described below), which build Department of State capacity to lead United States Government overseas communications.

The Administration has also worked to coordinate resources within current authorities. This has entailed efforts to streamline budgeting within agencies, and coordinate resources across agencies. For example, within the last 2 years, the Department of State has overhauled its public diplomacy budgeting processes to realign base budgets with policy priorities – a process that has not been undertaken since public diplomacy authorities migrated to State in 1999. This thorough yearly review has already realigned budgets across countries, regions, and programs. We have also taken a more hands-on approach to ensuring coordination of resources across agencies. Even in areas where DOD has more resources, we have worked to integrate the skills and perspectives of civilian officers and our Embassies into the deployment of these resources. Similarly, where DOD runs public-facing websites, we have developed closer coordination with State on editorial oversight and content selection. With these connections, we are strengthening the ability of the United States Government to leverage the expertise and experience of all of our communications professionals.

## Countering Violent Extremism

Another focus of the 2010 report was the need to enhance our efforts to counter violent extremism by "discrediting, denigrating, and delegitimizing al-Qa'ida and violent extremist ideology." In the past 2 years we have made large strides toward this goal. In addition to the growth of programs at Embassies and Geographic Combatant Commands focused on countering extremist narratives, we established the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) in September 2010 to help steer these efforts across our government. This interagency effort exemplifies the sort of collaboration we envision moving forward – combining the analytical expertise of the IC, the experience and resources of DOD, and the experience and knowledge of State regional experts to integrate communication considerations into our policy formulation and diplomatic missions.

CSCC's mandate was codified in Executive Order 13584, signed by President Obama on September 9, 2011. As defined by the Executive Order, the CSCC's mandate is to: "...coordinate, orient, and inform Government-wide public communications activities directed at audiences abroad and targeted against violent extremists and terrorist organizations, especially al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents, with the goal of using communication tools to reduce radicalization by terrorists and extremist violence and terrorism that threaten the interests and national security of the United States."

CSCC operates under the policy direction of interagency leadership – including the National Security Staff. The Coordinator reports to the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and works closely with the Counterterrorism Bureau, other State bureaus, DOD, and many government agencies. CSCC also engages with agencies with domestic responsibilities to ensure coordination and consistency of message. Drawing on whole-of-government knowledge, skills, and resources, CSCC is comprised of two interactive components. The Integrated Analysis component leverages the Intelligence Community and other substantive experts to provide context and feedback for communicators. The Plans and Operations component draws on this input to devise effective ways to counter the terrorist narrative. CSCC focuses on three core activities: confronting al-Qa'ida rhetoric through direct digital engagement (CSCC videos online have already registered hundreds of thousands of views); providing tools for United States Government communicators; and working with specific U.S.



Embassies' country teams to develop plans for engagement at the local level.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The bulk of our 2010 Report was dedicated to outlining roles and responsibilities for strategic communications across the White House, State, DOD, BBG, U.S. Agency for International Development, the IC, National Counterterrorism Center, and other departments and agencies. Most of these (both within and across departments) remain the same, and continue to function well.

However, in a few cases, changes have been made to structures, roles, and responsibilities, including:

- As part of its "Strategic Framework for Public Diplomacy," the Department of State created a new Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) of State dedicated to public diplomacy in each of the regional bureaus (for a total of six new positions). These officials have replaced the Public Diplomacy Office Directors (PDOD) described in the 2010 report as the senior public diplomacy officials in each regional bureau. The positions were created to ensure a voice for public diplomacy and communications in policy formulation and ensure that these issues had senior-level leadership. These Deputy Assistant Secretaries oversee strategy, resource allocation, and interagency coordination for all strategic communications activity within their regions. In addition, they supervise the PDOD and the offices dedicated to press and public diplomacy.
- The "Strategic Framework" also created a DAS and an Office for International Media Engagement within the Bureau of Public Affairs at the Department of State. As of our 2010 report, there was no office or official in Washington focused on the increasingly complex international media landscape, including supporting our Embassies. Now, this DAS coordinates foreign-facing media functions and oversees foreign press centers, regional media hubs, and rapid response units. Already, this office has pioneered new modes of engaging global media, including the innovative "State Department Live" platform for conducting virtual press briefings.
- In late 2010, the Department of State streamlined its interagency coordination function by eliminating the Global Strategic Engagement Center (GSEC). For several years, GSEC served as the Department's representative for coordination of

communications and engagement planning. GSEC served as a conduit between interagency decisionmaking bodies and relevant capabilities and bureaus within State. Over time, it became clear that this was a redundant function, which would be handled more effectively by plugging relevant policy experts directly into interagency meetings, instead of relying on an additional layer. This function is now coordinated directly through the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and relevant bureaus at the Department of State.

- As part of DOD's "Front-End Assessment," the Principal Staff Advisor function and responsibility for IO oversight and management moved from the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)). This realignment of responsibility provides a single entry point for IO for all components of the Department and its interagency partners. Also, this realignment assigns a single point of fiscal and program accountability; establishes clear linkage among policies, capabilities, and programs; and provides for better integration with traditional strategy and planning functions.
- The Secretary of Defense assigned the new function of joint oversight of IO to the Joint Staff. This highlighted the growing importance of the information domain to the joint force. Individual capability responsibilities are assigned to the appropriate Combatant Commands: in the case of Military Information Support Operations (MISO) to U.S. Special Operations Command; Computer Network Operations and Electronic Warfare to U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM); and Military Deception and Operational Security to the Joint Staff.
- The Secretary also directed the USD(P) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to revise the relevant policy and doctrine documents to reflect a new definition of IO that focuses on the integrating nature of IO. The new definition is "the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities and in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decisionmaking of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own."
- In the findings of DOD's "Front-End Assessment" discussed earlier, Secretary Gates designated the USD(P) and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs as co-leads



for strategic communications in DOD to better integrate policymaking and communication planning.

## **Conclusion**

The national framework that the Administration laid out in 2010 continues to guide our efforts as these capabilities have only grown in importance over the last 2 years. As we advance our interests in the 21st century, we must become more adept at communicating with and engaging an ever-widening circle of actors who are able to influence global events. We must forge partnerships, mobilize broad coalitions, and galvanize public opinion across all sectors of society. Our communication and public diplomacy efforts must be front and center if we are to meet the challenges before us – from facilitating smooth transitions to democracy to ensuring economic opportunity and growth to countering violent extremism.

The landscape we face in this arena is daunting: a communications landscape that is faster, more complex and more competitive than ever before; allies and adversaries who have become more adept at using these tools; and a savvier and more discerning global audience. To succeed, we must engage more broadly than ever before. The importance of aligning our actions with our rhetoric has never been greater as the failure to do so in this fast-moving information environment is made instantly transparent. Meanwhile, some countries are dramatically increasing their budgets in these spheres – from international broadcasting to language education to cultural centers. If we are to compete effectively in this global marketplace of ideas, we will need to invest wisely in the years ahead.