

# NATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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*There is no more important challenge for our future than the urgent need to foster greater understanding, more respect and a sense of common interests and common ideals among Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths throughout the world.*<sup>1</sup>

— Karen Hughes

The essence of strategic communication is to synchronize and coordinate public affairs, statesmanship, public diplomacy, and military information operations in concert with the actions of employing the national elements of power to achieve national objectives. The information element of national power must be continuously employed in peacetime, during military campaigns, and throughout national efforts to cultivate a world consistent with interests and values embraced by the United States. This strategy supports the United States National Security Strategy by leveraging strategic communication to win the war of ideas and fortify America's security at home and overseas.

## **Nature of the Information Environment**

New public audiences are emerging through communications systems involving the internet or electronic messaging, creating new news audiences in non-traditional news venues. The future leaders and decision makers of the world include a growing number of people who have grown up playing video games and clicking through multiple media presentations. The developing audiences in foreign nations have also found the internet and emerging technologies to be a window to news previously not available to them. In order to grab their attention it is necessary to develop ways to present news that engages and involves them.

Understanding various audiences and how they perceive our messages is essential to succeeding in supporting national interests

through communication efforts. The diversity and fragmentation of the audiences, as well as the media, make for a challenging environment to compete in. Some audiences may even shift sides depending on how a particular campaign affects their concerns. The world's media seem to be fixated on America's faults, and this makes the adversary's job easier by diverting attention from negative coverage of their actions to any error of the U.S. or its allies.

News groups and listserves are providing the information exchange that people went to the commercial news organizations for in the past. Access to foreign press sites and alternative press are letting news seekers go beyond the local or national news franchise perspective on the news. The conventional model of a mass medium was a one-way flow of the news from the news organizations to the public audience. Things like web logs are providing a different way to access news and commentary. Bloggers invite the contributions of their readers, and facilitate conversation between the readers. The discussion generated about the news is often the most interesting, and provides broader understanding or different perspectives of the news event, rather than the news itself.

Our adversaries are not constrained by truth and accuracy and can easily exploit information to gain and maintain ideological support. "Violent extremists are using the Internet and some mass media as a safe haven for organizational support, intelligence gathering, and offensive operations."<sup>2</sup> Adversaries use the internet for command and control, disseminating and collecting information.

### **Strategic Intent**

"Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but for the most part we, our country, our government has not."<sup>3</sup> The intent of our national communication strategy is to employ our informational and diplomatic capabilities to enhance the power of our ideals to encourage people of other nations to choose freedom over tyranny. Responsibility for strategic communication must be government wide under the leadership of the NSC.

In order to keep pace with communicating to the emerging media audiences it is critical to adapt communication strategies and

technologies to participate in these environments. It is also necessary to be able to accelerate responses to adversarial misinformation and disinformation to all potential audiences. We must be creative in seeking new ways to engage and educate people

## **Goals and Objectives**

“To win in a global battle of ideas, a global strategy for communicating those ideas is essential.”<sup>4</sup>

Goal: Synchronize interagency communication efforts. The first element of the national communication strategy is to reinvigorate the interagency process. Objective: The State Department must “identify and marshal all the communications and public diplomacy resources of our different government agencies and provide leadership to make our efforts more coordinated and more strategic.”<sup>5</sup> This includes merging training and equipping efforts of the various agencies, and ensuring interoperability of information automation as well as techniques and procedures. Themes and messages generated at the highest level must be disseminated, understood and employed at the lowest levels across the spectrum of governmental agencies. This will also require changing the culture of media interaction from aversion to engagement. Synchronization of communication activities throughout the interagency community is critical. Department of Defense Theater Security Cooperation activities must be synchronized with State Department diplomatic efforts and Central Intelligence Agency activities among others.

Goal: Increase effectiveness in Strategic Communication. Doing so will require a culture that instinctively integrates the development of communication strategy into policy development, operational planning and execution to advance national interests. Objective: Institutionalize a process in which Strategic Communication is incorporated in the development of strategy, policy, planning, and execution.<sup>6</sup> Strategic communication processes and supporting capabilities must be included in all aspects of the federal government’s activities and synchronized vertically and horizontally.

Goal: Promote greater awareness and understanding of America’s values, policies and interests. We must leverage technology and

seek ways to develop better communication with foreign publics. Objective: The nation must use all means to engage people with our ideas and values to build and maintain credibility and trust among friends and foes and align coalition and partner nations to support democratic processes and denounce violent extremism. Emerging technologies and audiences must be aggressively explored and engaged in order to get out in front of issues and shape the information environment rather than reacting to it. We must instill a culture of engagement across the federal government built upon coordinated themes to engage media and international partners and competitors.

Goal: Improve our rapid response capability. Objective: The U.S. government should be able to monitor stories driving news globally and give the U.S. position on these issues within the same news cycle. In an environment where rumors can reach mass audiences in seconds it is critical to be able to respond in a credible manner to dispel or correct misinformation. “We need to be more creative in our communications, using new technologies, and we need to strengthen our use of research and the evaluation of our programs to determine how to be most effective.”<sup>7</sup> In order to do this we must develop ways to take advantage of the creativity of the private sector.

Goal: Understand various audiences and how they perceive our messages. In the global community effective cross-cultural communication is paramount in a world full of differences. Objective: Ensure the messages, ideals, and values the U.S. wishes to express are interpreted and received in the manner intended. Leaders and communicators must be trained and educated to acquire the necessary intercultural skills to successfully communicate in the global environment. The success of this communication strategy will be built on our ability to understand and nurture strong relationships with international and multicultural partners and audiences. Language training and cultural awareness must be incorporated in the development of diplomats and governmental communications practitioners.

## **Conclusion**

This National Communication Strategy will require close cooperation between all elements of the national government and the American

public. Building on the lessons learned over the past several years, this strategy maps the nation's way ahead for the next few decades of this long struggle.

It is extremely important that all elements of the United States government understand the capability and impact of this vital element of national power and work together to communicate in a synchronized manner. This understanding is critical to the implementation of this strategy. Strategic communication must be included in all plans and activities of the agencies of our government. We must leverage the advantages of our technology and creativity to develop a proactive and responsive communication capability to set conditions favorable to our interests. We must also be aware of the culture, customs, language and philosophy of affected populations and our enemies, to more effectively counter extremism, encourage democracy, freedom, and economic prosperity abroad.

Diplomatic, economic, and military actions reinforced by strategic communication are necessary to advance national policy objectives: "No single contributor is preeminent. All are required in a synchronized and coherent manner."<sup>8</sup>

