"Strategic Global Influence for the United States"

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Introduction

Chairman Carnahan, Congressman Rohrabacher and other members of the panel, I appreciate Chairman Berman's invitation to testify to you today about how public opinion of the US abroad can be leveraged to promote national security. Given the general consensus out there about the problems, I will try to discuss practical, actionable solutions. My testimony will address four themes that Chairman Berman asked me to discuss:

1. How public opinion of the US abroad can be leveraged to promote national security;
2. How strategic communications can be used to enhance our strategic global influence;
3. Challenges in America's public diplomacy apparatus; and
4. Practical steps to improve interagency coordination and effectiveness.

To begin, I would like to ask anybody who has run for public office to stop and think, "Would I run my political campaign the way the United States government runs its strategic communication?"

Next, it would be effective to ask, "What does my campaign committee do in my district or state that our nation should do in the world at large?"

By taking the principles and techniques of the permanent political campaign that form the circulatory system of American democracy, and adapting those principles and techniques to serve the national interest as instruments of American global power, we can get a better idea of how we as a nation should orient our strategic global influence efforts.

This proposal might be heresy from a classical diplomatic perspective, or even from the viewpoint of a public diplomacy professional. But it is crucial for the United States to prevail in the global political battlespace.

How public opinion of the US abroad can be leveraged to promote national security

Influencing public opinion abroad is the most effective, adaptable, cost-effective and humane means of leveraging tax dollars to promote national security. We don't need to use threats or force, intimidation or coercion, or reduce ourselves to self-defeating bluster when our other tools fail.

We have soft power, the policies of attraction that Professor Nye has so elegantly crystallized: long-term, positive, appealing aspects of American culture and society that aren't necessarily calibrated to promote a particular policy or initiative, but are always working for us in the background. Then we have the evolution of that idea to "smart power," as Professor Nye and his colleagues have done.

I would take that approach a bit further still, adding a hard edge to soft power when attraction fails, but giving our nation extra tools to use instead of military force. This edge takes two forms. The first is political action – the same type of political action that other countries use against us when they hire lobbyists, fund grass-roots front organizations, and channel money through political action committees and similar organizations. If other countries can use the American system to apply pressure on Members of Congress and the executive branch – and even further their agendas by helping elect or defeat candidates and incumbents – then is the United States not compelled to do the same around the world to promote its own interests? So we need a political action instrument of US national security policy to influence public opinion and decisionmaking in other countries.

And when softer, more genteel persuasive methods and political actions fail, will need another instrument of statecraft: political warfare. Political warfare differs from political action in that it is inherently aggressive, usually very negative and unpleasant, yet it stays within the confines of civilized political conflict and can avoid the need to use military force. We like to think that our intelligence agencies are adequately equipped, staffed and authorized to wage political warfare in the dark shadows of black operations around the world, but this is wishful thinking. We need to include political warfare as a means of influencing public opinion and the policies of leaders around the world to promote our national security. By doing this, we can avoid the perceived need to resort to economic sanctions and military force that needlessly harm human life.

Here's an example. The United States is close to exhausting its non-military options to prevent Iran from building a nuclear missile. It has failed completely to deter or prevent Iran from killing hundreds of American and allied servicemen in Iraq and Afghanistan by supplying IEDs and EFPs to insurgents. It is wringing its hands about what next steps to take, and whether our

inaction will force Israel to act on its own and perhaps cause a wider conflict in the region. We seem to have run out of options short of attacking Iran.

By taking a strategic global influence approach, however, we automatically have more options. First, there is Iranian public opinion – which is overwhelmingly against the regime. Second, there is world population in countries that matter; not only our military allies, but countries like Brazil, where we are being rebuffed in large part because we lack a strategy to influence public opinion in that country. Third, there is the leadership of Iran, which cares obsessively about its image. We don't even know whom to target, obsessing over President Ahmadinejad when in fact he does not control the things that concern us most: the Revolutionary Guard, Hezbollah, support for the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan to kill our people, the ballistic missile program or the nuclear warhead program.

The proper target is the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameni. Khameni likes to portray himself as a modest, humble, honest leader, the arbiter of morality in his country. In reality he is the corrupt ruler of a corrupt regime, amassing a personal fortune estimated at $30 billion. If we target his corruption, the corruption of his family, and the corruption of his inner circle, we can tear away his moral legitimacy and cripple his decisionmaking. We can help fuel Iranian public opinion against him – at a time when the people have started to turn against their once-sacrosanct Supreme Leader. What we need is an intelligence collection effort to document the corruption of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and of Khameni and the Revolutionary Guard in particular, and to disseminate that information, accurately and truthfully, to the Iranian people and to the world. That simple effort alone would go a long way toward helping the Green Revolution, promoting regime change, and avoiding a regional war.

How strategic communication can be used to enhance our strategic global influence

Addressing "strategic global influence" is an extremely important point that Chairman Berman raised in his invitation, because many communicators in the US government shy away from the term "strategic influence."

One of the difficulties the US has had with strategic influence is that it has been subject to the approval of, or even under the control of, public affairs. And public affairs practitioners generally shun the role of influencer. It hasn't been part of their training and, though things are changing, is not usually part of the public affairs ethos.

Strategic communication is worthless without influence as the objective. The Department of Defense definition of strategic communication is instructive here: "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."

This is an excellent definition. And it doesn't necessarily require expensive, cumbersome, time-consuming bureaucratic changes in our government. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, summed it up best last summer, when he said this about strategic communication:

> "Frankly, I don't care for the term. We get too hung up on that word, strategic. . . the lines between strategic, operational, and tactical are blurred beyond distinction. . . . By organizing to it—creating whole structures around it—we have allowed strategic communication to become a thing instead of a process, an abstract thought instead of a way of thinking."

Strategic communication isn't a thing. It's a state of mind. If our diplomats, public diplomats and other message-makers thought as strategic communicators – as strategic influencers – we would go a long way toward solving the problem.

For the short-term, the problem is as simple as that to solve: Change the mindset among our public servants to make them aware that everything they say or do, and everything they don't say or don't do, sends a message. And that in this time of instantaneous communication where the smallest act can have strategic consequences, everything we say or do, or don't say or don't do, can have strategic effects for better or for worse.

Challenges in America's public diplomacy apparatus

America's public diplomacy apparatus is slow, cumbersome, reactive, under-resourced, and lacking in strategic vision and depth. Perhaps the greatest challenge in the apparatus is the absence of long-term, global strategic planning – a problem endemic in the entire State Department.

Since 2003, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has identified problem areas in the nation's strategic communications system, and of the four non-intelligence agencies specified – State Department, Broadcasting Board of Governors, US Agency for International Development, and Department of Defense – only DoD has responded positively and comprehensively.

The State Department remains antiquated in structure, staffing and process. It lacks an internal strategic planning center. Even so, it remains at the lead of the nation's strategic communications efforts. While this is proper in many ways, State has yet to ask Congress for the necessary resources and authority. State has also failed to reform itself as called for by the GAO.

Public diplomacy and public affairs need to be put in their proper places, subservient to – and not superior to - strategic communication. Their collective mission must be similar to the mission of the armed forces: to project American power and influence and provide a permanent system through which to ensure the national interest globally. The mission must not be communication for communication's sake, or simply to make the United States a player in the "global marketplace of ideas." The mission must be to dominate that market. It must be to fight to win. It

must be run strategically, like a permanent political campaign. To do so, it must be run not only by diplomats and public affairs pros, but by real strategists and practitioners in the art of political action.

Why, after all these years, do bipartisan majorities in Congress and mainstream public diplomacy advocates insist that the State Department be the nexus of the nation's strategic communication effort? The George W. Bush Administration hobbled itself from the beginning by re-wiring the federal government's tangled public diplomacy circuitry, and routing virtually all international communications efforts—including military psychological operations and information operations—through the office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Yet for 40 percent of the time since 9/11, the post of under secretary has stood vacant. And when the position was filled, did it really matter? Even though that post is filled today, the Obama administration has basically maintained the general approach of the Bush administration when it comes to strategic communication. This must change. People who can run hugely successful political campaigns at home are ideally suited to design a permanent global campaign for US interests worldwide.

Public diplomacy and political warfare. Imagine, then, if our brilliant political campaign strategists put their visionary, calculating, often deviously cynical genius to work to promote the national interest globally. What would they do for a strategic global influence effort? First, they would map the world country by country and take an inventory of existing friends, allies, neutrals, opponents and enemies. Then they would map the world by transnational issues, as one would with trans-state or trans-regional issues at home: ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural, religious, business, labor, women, family, generational, environmental, and so forth. They could constantly conduct polls, surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups, dialoguing with every imaginable slice of society in every place of importance, to discern and monitor people's perceptions, moods, aspirations, fears and ideas. This would be followed by a strategic message for each and a constellation of surrogate spokespersons, both overt and covert; and the political ground troops of activists, donors, protesters, letter-writers, and arm-twisters. Like a good political campaign, the leaders would frame the issues and entrust the activists and precinct walkers to tailor the messages on their own, and to empower third-party surrogates and sympathizers.

By running strategic communication and its elements—public diplomacy, public affairs, international broadcasting, information operations, psychological operations and the like—in the same fashion as a perpetual global campaign on behalf of American strategic interests worldwide, the United States would be permanently conducting the "engagement" that so many advocate but so few actually practice. Like the permanent campaign of the American presidency and Congress, cadres of seasoned strategists and operatives would spend their time building alliances and keeping them—or at least maintaining a grassroots presence in reserve to be deployed as circumstances require them. But, unlike the permanent campaign, a real strategic influence capability for the United States as a whole would not be driven by domestic political issues. Much like standard diplomacy, or military or intelligence capabilities, the strategic influence capacity of the U.S. would be subject to domestic politics, but driven by trained professional civil servants and not partisan activists.

Practical steps to improve interagency coordination and effectiveness

The US can take several practical steps to improve interagency coordination and effectiveness. First, the effort needs an independent leader. It would be instructive to look at how the Reagan Administration coordinated an ideological warfare campaign to counter Soviet international propaganda or "active measures" in the 1980s. The US Information Agency (USIA) still existed at the time, and did a magnificent job. But the inter-agency effort was based from the White House, with an Active Measures Working Group run by the National Security Council staff under the personal direction of the White House Chief of Staff. The Chief of Staff's role helped give greater power to the NSC staff to bring the other agencies together and coordinate an effective global campaign across the entire government. The Obama Administration should adapt that model in support of the current war efforts and of strategic global communication in general. It can do so without need of legislation.

Second, the State Department should study what the Defense Department is doing in the area of strategic communication. DoD is doing an amazing thing. It is sending warfighters into battle as strategic influencers. Our military people know that the actions of each soldier or Marine can have strategic consequences. The military is stressing dialogue, engagement, and trust-building with the local people in various areas of operations. We can see the fruits of that approach in the course of the current offensive against the Taliban in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

The military has also flattened the decisionmaking process to allow lower-ranking officers to make strategic communications decisions that previously required the approval of generals and civilian leaders in the Pentagon. This new approach has made for better warfighters, and has reduced the need for our military to kill people as it has enhanced our ability to persuade and build trust.

State should also streamline its message-making processes, flatten them so that lower-ranking diplomats can take more initiative, be rewarded for taking well-considered risks and not be penalized for making mistakes.

I concur with nearly all of the GAO's findings and recommendations of the past seven years. In addition, I'd like to provide some practical near-term and long-term steps to improve interagency coordination and effectiveness.

1. First, all policymakers, diplomats and warfighters should know inherently that they are strategic influencers. They must all be aware, as part of their professional ethos, that everything they say and don't do, and don't say and don't do, can have strategic consequences.
2. Encourage the White House to establish an interagency group run out of the NSC and chaired by the White House chief of Staff to coordinate global strategic communication among government agencies and with non-governmental organizations.

3. Abolish obsolete Cold War legislation, such as the line in the Smith-Mundt Act that bars the State Department from certain message-making in the United States. That provision was driven by a suspicion that the State Department was infiltrated by Soviet agents, and to prevent the State Department from spreading Communist propaganda to the American people. Let's throw that antiquated law out the window and free up our public diplomats and strategic communicators.
4. Create a new international strategic communications agency, somewhat along the lines of the hugely successful United States Information Agency. This agency, or a parallel organization, should have a political warfare component outside the intelligence community that can be used when soft power isn't enough and military force is too much.
5. Order a total overhaul of the State Department and how America communicates with the world. Congress should impose a Goldwater-Nickles type set of reforms on the State Department, just as it did on the Department of Defense. The post-9/11 congressional mandates on the intelligence community, such as the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, are also good models to drive reform in the State Department.
6. Support the new House Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Caucus. This new group will provide an important congressional constituency to discuss problems, provide solutions and drive the changes our nation needs to improve its strategic global influence.