

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

STRATEGY TO INCREASE US CREDIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

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Information, as an element of national power, must be effectively integrated with the other elements of national power to accomplish key provisions within the United States Government's (USG) *National Security Strategy* (NSS). The public's mistrust of the United States is born out of a widespread misunderstanding and mistrust of its policies and a lack of USG credibility, especially in the Greater Middle East. A coordinated strategy of policy adjustments and an integrated communication plan grounded in sound communication practices, using cultural expertise and all available communication means, should increase the USG's credibility. Credibility will improve USG ability to successfully inform domestic and international audiences and may dispel a portion of the mistrust and hate for its actions and policies. The purpose of this paper is to explore the informational element of national power, examine current public relations processes for developing communication strategy, discuss potential national security policy implications which affect the USG's credibility, and offer recommendations for a long-term strategy to increase USG credibility. A main premise used in this paper is that the root of most of the USG's credibility issues is inexorably linked to the mistrust of the USG's policies or actions and that an effective communication strategy will decrease that mistrust by increasing a relative understanding of those policies and actions.

STRATEGY TO INCREASE US CREDIBILITY

Information, as an element of national power, must be effectively integrated with the other elements of national power to accomplish key provisions within the United States Government's (USG) *National Security Strategy* (NSS). The public's mistrust of the United States, currently leveraged by extremist groups to foster violence and hatred, is born out of a widespread misunderstanding and mistrust of its policies and a lack of USG credibility, especially in the Greater Middle East.¹ Several national security policy areas and their associated actions appear counter to ideals outlined in the NSS and risk serious damage to USG credibility worldwide when those perceptions polarize various publics and increase negative perceptions of the US government. A coordinated strategy of selected policy adjustments and an integrated communication plan grounded in sound communication practices, using cultural expertise and all available communication means, should increase the USG's credibility. Credibility will improve USG ability to successfully inform domestic and international audiences and may dispel a portion of the mistrust and hate for its actions and policies.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the informational element of national power, examine current public relations processes for developing communication strategy, discuss potential national security policy implications which affect the USG's credibility, and offer recommendations for a long-term strategy to increase USG credibility.

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The Credibility Gap

The current Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and many of the objectives outlined in the NSS are negatively impacted by the USG's lack of credibility within many portions of the world but especially within the Greater Middle East. Effective communication alone will not solve this credibility gap. There must be a perceived congruence between the USG's actions and words. The 2004 DSB report suggests that the USG intervention in the Middle East has subsequently diminished support for the USG "to single digits in some Arab societies." When USG diplomats speak about furthering democracy in the region it is only seen as "self-serving hypocrisy." The US military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan also fuel the perception of diverging actions and words and has led to "only more chaos and suffering."²

A recent Pew Research Center report describes the level of mistrust of the USG's efforts:

Simply put, the rest of the world both fears and resents the unrivaled power that the United States has amassed since the Cold War ended. In the eyes of others, the U.S. is a worrisome colossus: It is too quick to act unilaterally, it doesn't do a good job of addressing the world's problems, and it widens the global gulf between rich and poor. On matters of international security, the rest of the world has become deeply suspicious of U.S. motives and openly skeptical of its word. People abroad are more likely to believe that the U.S.-led war on terror has been about controlling Mideast oil and dominating the world than they are to take at face value America's stated objectives of self-defense and global democratization.³

The lack of an ability to effectively communicate within such a vital area as the Greater Middle East will hamper the effectiveness of the other elements of national power. A communication strategy should be designed to gain the support of the USG policies from all audiences, local, national and global, while also reducing the support for our adversaries, the most prominent one being al-Qaeda.⁴ The Internet and satellite television have dramatically increased people's access to independent sources of information. However, the credibility and accuracy of this information may be questionable. Therefore, it is imperative for the United States to develop information campaigns and capabilities to counter misinformation very rapidly. Additionally, public diplomacy can aid in developing long-term perceptions of the USG which should influence foreign audiences. The Department of State's fiscal years 2004 – 2009 Strategic Plan outlines the areas of public diplomacy which should support USG policies.

Throughout the world, the public face of the United States generates strong opinions, positive and negative. These public attitudes directly affect our ability to achieve our foreign policy and development assistance objectives. The Department leads the effort to shape these U.S. perceptions by relating this public face to our values as a nation and our history as a people...the Department and USAID will work to paint a realistic picture of the United States, one that enables audiences to make informed judgments about our policies, our society, and the relationship of both to their own interests.⁵

The NSS outlines many objectives of the USG which should promote freedom, prosperity and respect. President Bush states, "The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better. Our goals on the path to progress are clear: political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity."⁶ He describes many areas which require effective use of information in order to succeed. However, the public perception of a few policies undermines this nation's ability to use information as an element of national power due to their unwanted ability to polarize populations and increase negative perceptions of the USG. When nations and publics mistrust the USG's policies or actions, they will have difficulty believing its words. Increasing the USG's credibility through an integrated

communication strategy based on sound communication practices and cultural expertise using a variety of methods may increase the USG's ability to achieve some of these objectives.

The USG is proposing to win a "war of ideas;"⁷ the NSS outlines several objectives:

- using the full influence of the United States...to make clear that all acts of terrorism are illegitimate;
- supporting moderate and modern government, especially in the Muslim world, to ensure that the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation;
- diminishing the underlying conditions that spawn terrorism by enlisting the international community to focus its efforts and resources on areas most at risk; and
- using effective public diplomacy to promote the free flow of information and ideas to kindle the hopes and aspirations of freedom...⁸

In order for the USG to win this war of ideas, it must effectively use its informational power. As a part of this power, our public diplomacy efforts must be able to inform and influence publics worldwide to convince them that joining alliances with the USG is in their best interest. Credibility and trust are essential to the relative effectiveness of this effort. These objectives require an effective communication strategy to further our public diplomacy efforts.

The Communication Process

Leaders want a tool which they can use to further their policy objectives in the public arena. In order to gain support for these objectives, they need the ability to effectively inform domestic and global publics.⁹ The ability to leave lasting perceptions of the merits of a policy requires the acceptance, or at least the understanding, of those policies. The goal of any communication strategy should be to maintain support among those who agree with your position, neutralize those who disagree and increase support in groups who are undecided. The communication of relevant, timely information in a manner which audiences can easily understand and relate to is essential to accomplishing any national security objective.¹⁰ While the information element of national power has been defined as the "ability to employ information capabilities to influence the attitudes and behaviors of foreign elites and publics,"¹¹ it also includes all aspects of information including public diplomacy, public affairs and information operations. Strategic communication has become a catch-all phrase for information or influence operations. Everyone wants it, but very few actually know how to use it. In essence, when most people think of the information element of national power, they are thinking of strategic communication. Strategic communication, however, is not perception management. Perception

management can include any actions used to either convey or deny information to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, or objective reasoning.¹²

A strategy for communicating applies the same analysis (ends, ways and means) to the art of communication as the well known military strategists Clausewitz, Jomini and Sun Tzu have described for the art of war. Just as these three strategists had differing views on military strategy, the art of communication has many views on effective strategies also. How do you get a person or group to take a desired action just by communicating with them? For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the strategy of communication defined as the process of determining the most effective way to achieve a desired end through the act of communicating. The draft Contingency Planning Guidance (CPG) offers this definition for strategic communication:

The transmission of integrated and coordinated USG themes and messages that advance US interests and policies through a synchronized interagency effort supported by Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, and military Information Operations (IO), in concert with other political, economic, information and military actions.¹³

The distinction between Public Diplomacy (PD), Public Affairs (PA), and Information Operations (IO) is significant. Military IO consists of computer network operations, electronic warfare, operations security, psychological operations and military deception.¹⁴ The highly technical aspects of information operations (computer network operations, electronic warfare) do not directly act to influence or inform a public. Operations security seeks to prevent critical friendly information from being collected and used against the US while military deception tries to communicate a false impression of friendly actions to an adversary. Psychological operations should be directed specifically at an adversary or non-US audience to influence them to take a particular action, and in my opinion, should not be used in a strategic context of informing global publics on the relative merits of the USG's policies. The primary difference between PA, PD and IO are that both PA and PD are focused at informing domestic and international publics through mainly public media, and IO is focused at influencing the enemy, their supporters, or foreign populations transmitted through primarily government-controlled means.

Many operations generate effects that have informational aspects and will communicate in some manner. A bomb landing on an adversary's doorstep communicates a message to those who see or experience it as does a television commercial. The art of effectively using the information element of national power is to use the appropriate means for the intended outcome. While public affairs and public diplomacy information may reach the adversary, it should not be primarily directed at them to influence a specific action. Both public affairs and public diplomacy focus on spreading the truth. The credibility of the messenger cannot be

compromised. The audience should be able to make an informed decision based on factual information. The more credible the information, the more likely the communication will influence that audience.

Although IO messages must also be grounded in the truth, they are intended to influence or deter an adversary's action and may employ deceit, misinformation, or manipulation of an audience's information. IO, both overt and covert, must not be specifically designed to be transmitted through the news media due to the potential negative backlash of perceived deception. If the media perceive they are being lied to, credibility has just gone down the proverbial toilet and cannot be "un-flushed". All three functions, PA, PD and IO, must be synchronized and inform the others of their activities to avoid the possibility of contradicting another's communication actions.

Credibility

In effective communication, upon which PA, PD and the influencing aspects of IO depend, an audience must perceive truth in what a person or document from a source states (in this case the USG). The absence of this fundamental building block destroys any message's credibility. The 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (QDR) describes the importance of credibility.

Effective communication must build and maintain credibility and trust with friends and foes alike, through an emphasis on consistency, veracity and transparency both in words and deeds. Such credibility is essential to building trusted networks that counter ideological support for terrorism.¹⁵

Joint Publication 3-61, *Public Affairs*, also describes the importance of credibility to the communication process:

Credibility is necessary to support the commander's mission and maintain essential public liaisons. The credibility and reputation of the US military in the international media is vital for combating adversary propaganda. It is imperative that this credibility is maintained; otherwise the media and the public will lose confidence in what DoD spokespersons say. Credibility with the media is earned over decades, yet can vanish overnight. Providing fast, truthful, credible information to the media is essential in order to maintain this credibility.¹⁶

There is a wide-spread perception that the US government is not credible in its words and actions. The Defense Science Board (DSB), a group of notable experts, completed a report on strategic communication in 2004 and it concluded:

Thus the critical problem in American public diplomacy directed toward the Muslim World is not one of "dissemination of information," or even one of crafting and delivering the "right" message. Rather, it is a fundamental problem of

credibility. Simply, there is none — the United States today is without a working channel of communication to the world of Muslims and of Islam.¹⁷

Most public affairs and public diplomacy professionals derive their practices from the public relations or communication fields of study. In a *Public Relations Quarterly* article, John Budd describes three tenets, or pillars, of public relations: trust, truth and transparency, bound together by a common thread – credibility. He describes the relationship among these tenets:

Trust represents moral authority; truth can be, and is, philosophically debated and transparency can be feigned. But credibility is concrete, non-ambiguous, immediate. It is the real bottom-line of persuasion in decision-making.¹⁸

The art of effectively using the information element of national power must be based upon credibility. However, the act of communicating the truth is only one element of credibility. An audience will also look at the consistency between an organization's actions and its statements. They will base their assessment of how credible an organization is when its words match its deeds.¹⁹ This perception of credibility will also be filtered through many factors within an audience's environment such as different languages or different cultures. Government actions and policies must be consistent with public statements.²⁰

Communication Strategy

A communication strategy should develop the best ways to communicate to a particular audience by using the most effective means to achieve a desired end state or effect. This process should apply to all communication objectives. A tactical level communication strategy in advertising could be as simple as increasing market share for a particular product. A more comprehensive strategy in the public diplomacy realm could be how to increase positive perception of the United States abroad.

In order for the USG to advance its interests and policies, it must develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy to support them. The effective use of the information element of national power requires an orchestrated effort by all government principals and departments to achieve any lasting support for the USG's policies. However, there are several policies which undermine the USG's credibility with some publics. Nations or publics need not agree with the USG's policies, but they should believe what it says. The public relations profession has developed numerous communication models attempting to find the right way to influence a potential consumer to buy a specific product, support a cause or otherwise influence their opinion. The USG could benefit from these processes developed by the commercial communication industry.

One communication strategy model described by Kounalakis, Banks and Daus involves analyzing the environment and delivering the content to achieve the desired goals.²¹ The intent of this model is to describe the process by which to evaluate the effectiveness of communication. Effective communication is based on a thorough analysis of the audiences, internal and external (or internal, micro-external and macro-external as they describe), and of the appropriate channel, or medium, to send the message. One must understand the factors that affect the receiver's perceptions and which media are the most effective at delivering the message.²² The authors further describe the actual content of the message being affected by several factors: completeness, accuracy, compellingness, consistency, context, integration and personalization.²³ The content of the message itself will determine in large part how it is received and how effective it will be at achieving the desired end. The final portion of their strategy model involves the actual outcome. The model describes the concept of alignment and action. Their premise is that if the message is properly aligned with the organization's goals, the communication will foster knowledge and insight creating the conditions for positive action. Conversely, if the message is not aligned it will cause confusion and cultivate negative action as related to the overall goal.²⁴

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), a highly regarded public relations organization and self-professed "pre-eminent organization that builds value, demand and global understanding for public relations,"²⁵ uses the text, *Effective Public Relations* by Cutlip, Center and Broom for their accreditation testing program. This text describes strategic communication planning to involve "making decisions about program goals and objectives, identifying key publics, setting policies or rules to guide selection of strategies, and determining strategies. There must be a close linkage between the overall program goal, the objectives established for each of the publics, and the strategies selected."²⁶ This approach to communication strategy adds a key aspect absent from the other already discussed – assessment. An organization must determine if its communication strategy is effectively reaching its target audience and if it is contributing to the overall goal. Accurate assessment will provide the necessary feedback to organizational leaders allowing them to make necessary adjustments to the strategy.

Another approach to communication strategy is outlined in Brown's text, *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*. He details a four-phase approach to communication strategy involving research, strategy, tactics and evaluation. He emphasizes the need for careful planning which will create the basis of plans that are "proactive and preventative."²⁷ The phases include: research to determine the communication situation including the organization itself and the publics affected; strategy to determine the goals and objectives; the respective strategies

and ways to effectively communicate; tactics to determine the specific ways and means to communicate; and evaluation to determine specific measures of effectiveness of the communication plan.²⁸

The strategies described above offer guidance to significantly improve USG communication effectiveness and possibly its credibility. Specifically, planning for an effective communication strategy should include the following elements: conduct research, define goals, identify means, and evaluate the results. Substantive research must be conducted to determine how a policy may affect or be perceived by certain populations. The research should include possible second and third order effects including cultural implications. Next, the desired goals or end state of the communication strategy must be determined and specific objectives established to obtain the goals or end state. Finally, a quantifiable assessment of how well the objectives produced the goal must be completed. A single entity should be created which orchestrates the various parts and assesses the relative effectiveness of each – producing alignment.

Centralized Integrating Function

To date, there appears to be no overarching USG communication strategy or even a policy to coordinate the varying departments' communication efforts. There is an Office of Global Communication within the Executive Office of the President and a National Security Council Policy Coordinating Committee on Strategic Communication, but neither has taken any substantive action.²⁹

The President is the most influential and potentially the most effective communicator within the US government. He can use his position to speak to various publics during country visits, special events and other venues. His speeches are rebroadcast and retransmitted via numerous means throughout the world and analyzed by numerous media organizations. The Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of State (DOS) are also key players for communicating to both the domestic and international audiences. The President's cabinet, specifically the Secretaries of State and Defense, can efficiently transmit their messages to vast audiences. Every American soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, diplomat, or other government employee deployed to another country is a potential ambassador for the USG.

This diverse group of communication transmitters can only be effective if properly aligned and perceived as credible. The more complex an organization is, the more complex the alignment must be to achieve an effective communication process.³⁰ The USG is an extremely complex organization, and the tremendous amount of potential transmitters requires a central

entity to properly align the communication strategy. Several DOD reports, including the QDR and the *IO Roadmap*, have advocated for a central coordinating function. The QDR states, "Responsibility for strategic communication must be government-wide and the QDR supports efforts led by the Department of State to improve integration of this vital element of national power into strategies across the Federal Government."³¹ An organizational solution to this problem should not control the actual words used by varying departments or coordinate the particulars of any speech or website, but should develop the overall communication strategy for the USG. This organization must have the authority to direct all departments to comply with the strategy and have the full backing of the President. The national communication strategy must focus on integrating all of the departments' communication plans to achieve the desired end state (or effect). The various plans must support the overall national strategy.

The communication strategy must take into account the cultural differences of the various audiences – both domestic and international. Defense Science Board (DSB) has produced two reports, *Managed Information Dissemination* in 2001 and *Strategic Communication* in 2004, dealing with the subject of communication strategy and both have recommended the formation of an organization in the National Security Council (NSC) to plan and coordinate communication activities of the USG.³² In 2002, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice established a NSC Policy Coordinating Committee to "coordinate interagency activities, to ensure that all agencies work together and with the White House to develop and disseminate the President's messages across the globe."³³ Furthermore, the Office of Global Communication (OGC) was established in 2002 to "coordinate strategic communication overseas that integrate the President's themes and truthfully depict America and Administration policies."³⁴ The 2004 DSB report faults both organizations for ineffective and overlapping activities.³⁵

An independent organization should be created, focused solely on development, integration and synchronization of an effective USG communication strategy and policy. This organization should have the authority to constrain any communication campaign within the USG, including military information operations, if it does not complement the overall USG communication strategy. However, it must be insulated from the day-to-day political communication demands as much as possible so it will not become focused on the partisan political aspects of our government. A possible solution could be a National Communication Director similar in scope of responsibilities to the Director for National Intelligence.

Cultural Expertise

The best alignment of communication will not be effective if the message is not credible. Any communication strategy must first examine the cultural, economic, informational and religious environment for which a particular strategy is being considered. For effective global communication, the USG must develop varying means to leverage cultural expertise for many different areas of the world. The 2006 QDR has also supported expansion of language and cultural skills to aid in their overall communication process.³⁶ The Joint Interagency Coordinating Group (JIACG) developed by US Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM)³⁷ could serve as a model for this development within the cultural specialists of the DOS, DOD, CIA, and other governmental entities. This group of experts should advise DOS, DOD and other agencies in developing their respective communication campaigns to ensure unity of effort and cultural awareness.

Cultural expertise cannot be bought or grown overnight. It must be developed over time and be drawn from any organization with the knowledge, skills and abilities. The DOS must have a central role in this cultural expertise and should actively seek chief of mission input in the planning process for all communication campaigns. However, all agencies and departments must be involved to better orchestrate their respective organization's intellectual capital and communication activities. This cultural communication approach should focus at various regions to better adapt to cultural differences. A centralized group of experts from various agencies could take advantage of their departments' resources to properly inform the development of communication strategies. This group could directly advise a synchronizing organization such as a National Communication Director on effective means to communicate with a particular public. However, the individuals comprising the group must also have direct access to their respective organization's leadership to provide feedback and advice concerning the communication campaigns. A secure collaborative network should be established to facilitate the interaction between members of the group and between their organizations. USJFCOM has developed a collaborative information environment (CIE) for use within the Combatant Commands³⁸ which should be expanded to all USG agencies to better share information and ideas. This interagency group could also take advantage of the private sector's ability to provide linguistic and other experts based on the needs of any particular situation. Furthermore, all PA, PD and IO specialists in all departments should be required to develop some cultural expertise, especially linguistic skills, commensurate with their positions and the areas of the world they support.

Policy Recommendations

Building upon the communication practices described above, there are a few policy adjustments which should be considered to better align the USG's ideals as outlined in the NSS to actual policies being implemented currently. The inconsistencies between the two have great potential to create credibility gaps and polarize various publics increasing negative perceptions of the USG. A better alignment of words and actions will significantly increase the USG's credibility and potentially increase its ability to achieve its national security goals.

Strengthen Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism

The NSS objective to strengthen multinational and bilateral alliances to defeat global terrorism will be difficult to achieve due to its credibility gap. In order to strengthen these relationships, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes, outlined the department's "4-E's" strategy for public diplomacy.

The 4-E's are engage, exchange, educate and empower.

We have to **engage** more vigorously... we have to be much more effective, rapid and nimble in responding to rumors and outright lies and misinformation.

The second E is **exchange**... our most successful, most effective public diplomacy tool over the last 50 years has been our exchanges.

The third pillar is **education**. Americans must educate ourselves to be better citizens of the world, learning different languages.

The final E is **empowerment**. ...(We have to) create a very robust citizen ambassadors program to allow Americans to share their unique American stories and to listen and learn with people across the world.³⁹

While the goals of educating and informing the global public are commendable, the USG credibility has again been undermined by our own actions. A DOD practice of secretly paying for positive articles to be published in Iraqi newspapers was uncovered by a Los Angeles Times reporter. This practice "could destroy the U.S. military's credibility both in foreign nations and with the American public."⁴⁰ The recently de-classified *Information Operations Roadmap* goes as far to suggest that USG officials are not the best messenger and that a third party should be sought out to communicate with foreign publics to lend greater credibility.⁴¹ When trying to win the war of ideas and establish an effective public diplomacy campaign, the USG should not engage in deceptive practices which undermine its credibility. The necessity of a policy directing all government agencies to coordinate their communication efforts is essential and should be enforced by a centralized National Communication Director.

Champion Aspirations for Human Dignity

If international alliances are vital to achieving the USG's objectives, championing human dignity should give the USG the moral high ground upon which to base its global leadership role. The goals for human dignity contained in the NSS are outlined in the following sentence:

America must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property.⁴²

On the surface this appears to be a lofty goal which most people would not disagree with, but the practice of detaining "enemy combatants" indefinitely has created the perception among some that the USG does not follow the rule of law. Furthermore, the widely publicized prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and others have only added fuel to that fire. The USG cannot claim to champion human dignity when photos of a pile of naked Iraqi prisoners and others are published worldwide. Whether this abuse was supported by the USG can be debated, but the perception that it was is widespread or unavoidable. CNN/USA Today/Gallup polls found that "nearly three-quarters of Americans think US troops or government officials have tortured prisoners in Iraq and other countries"⁴³ and a majority of Americans believe it's wrong to use torture to obtain information from prisoners.⁴⁴

Senator John McCain, a former Vietnam POW, wrote in a Newsweek article denouncing the practice of torture:

We should not torture or treat inhumanely terrorists we have captured. The abuse of prisoners harms, not helps, our war effort...Prisoner abuses exact a terrible toll on us in this war of ideas. They inevitably become public, and when they do they threaten our moral standing, and expose us to false but widely disseminated charges that democracies are no more inherently idealistic and moral than other regimes.⁴⁵

Recently the US Senate passed an amendment to the 2006 *Defense Authorization Act* which would "prohibit cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment of prisoners in the custody of the U.S. government."⁴⁶ This amendment did address the ambiguous policy regarding torture, but did not address the policy of rendition or unlimited detainment. Furthermore, when the President signed it he issued a signing statement which declared that he will view the interrogation limits within the broader context of his powers to protect national security and according to some legal analysts may waive the restrictions if the need arises.⁴⁷

The USG cannot continue with an ambiguous policy concerning prisoners and also hope to convince people that we support human dignity and the rule of law. In response to the growing criticism regarding this issue, CIA Director Porter J. Goss and others have tried to

clarify the USG's policy.⁴⁸ However, with limited credibility, documented cases of prisoner abuse and a growing controversy around alleged secret prisons, their words may not achieve the desired effects. In order to counter this credibility gap and increase global trust, the USG should adopt a policy which categorizes detainees in accordance with the Geneva Protocol or develop an internationally accepted policy for the detention of "unlawful combatants" in the war on terror.

Prevent Our Enemies from Threatening Us, Our Allies, And Our Friends With WMD

Another objective outlined in the NSS is the desire to prevent our enemies from threatening the US and our allies with WMD. To this end the USG has adopted a policy of preemption. The NSS states:

For centuries, international law recognized that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack. ... To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.⁴⁹

This preemption policy was first used by the Bush administration when justifying the war to oust Saddam Hussein. The premise was that Iraq had WMD and the US was going to prevent him from using it against us or one of our allies.⁵⁰ To date, no accounts of WMD being discovered in Iraq have been published. This instance of waging war on another country and having the main reason for justifying the war to be later discovered false is a significant blow to the USG's credibility. Senator Chuck Hagel summed up the public perception.

Trust and confidence in the United States has been seriously eroded. We are seen by many in the Middle East as an obstacle to peace, an aggressor and an occupier. Our policies are a source of significant friction not only in the region but in the wider international community. Our purpose and power are questioned. We are at the same time both a stabilizing and a destabilizing force in the Middle East.⁵¹

The USG's ability to employ preemption in the future has been damaged by the lack of WMD in Iraq. Although President Bush may have improved USG credibility by acknowledging the faulty intelligence he used to base his decision to go to war in Iraq,⁵² it's unlikely to be enough. The international mistrust of our intentions regarding Iraq will forever color their judgment. Furthermore, the perception that our actions in Iraq have only increased the global security risks is prevalent.⁵³ The USG, preferably the President, should address the UN Security Council or General Assembly detailing the intelligence failures in Iraq regarding WMD in an effort to strengthen the USG's credibility within the global community.

Conclusion

While many issues and actions continue to hinder the USG's capacity to use its informational power, an integrated communication strategy coupled with a few policy adaptations, could bring a significant change to the USG's credibility. While national interests will always be paramount when developing national security policies, global opinion must be considered when determining options.⁵⁴ The USG's ability to achieve its objectives may be constrained by the negative effects of poor global opinion such as deteriorating relationships with other governments or decreased support for diplomatic initiatives. Additionally the perceived lack of credibility and mistrust of the USG's actions has seriously jeopardized the ability of the USG to accomplish its national objectives. The USG must regain its credibility and trust with the global public through a coordinated and effective use of information power to explain potentially unpopular actions or policies. Perceptions that the USG condones torture and unlimited detention of enemy persons, and the reality of USG willingness to execute preemptive war must be countered through the use of an effective strategy to increase its credibility – orchestrated at the highest levels of government, based on sound communication practices and cultural expertise while using all available communication means. Furthermore, the information element of national power must be effectively integrated with the USG's diplomatic, military, and economic elements of national power to accomplish our national security objectives.

Endnotes

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