Strategic Communications and the Decline of US Soft Power

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Abstract

Four strategic communications practices tend to build on one another in contributing to the widely noted and continuing decline in US soft power. First is the problem of inattention to audiences. By neglecting them as we prosecute the war on terrorism, the war of ideas seems to swell more with critics and combatants than allies. Second, recent approaches to strategic communications tend to emphasize process and consistency in uniting messages, but the role of the national executive in achieving convergence may be more crucial. That is, sending identical or even reinforcing messages may not be as important as making sure that the messages are consistent with audience expectations about US policy. Third, Department of State (DoS) financing for public diplomacy has increased only incrementally, if that, while the Department of Defense (DoD) weight in the total flow of strategic communications, as in foreign policy generally, seems to have escalated along with its budget. The continuing deterioration of opinion suggests that the mix of communications is not working, and it certainly contradicts expert advice on the resources needed for public diplomacy.

Finally, the growing concern about the militarization of US foreign policy may reflect the rejection of the “military as messenger” for the United States, even if

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Strategic Communications and the Decline of US Soft Power

civilians actually make the policy. The US affirmation of the preemptive use of force puts the military at the forefront of US strategic policy, just as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have overwhelmed and tended to color the perception about the rest of our policy. Thus, the increasingly dominant role and resource endowment of DoD in strategic communications might actually worsen the impact on US soft power. While general flaws in US policy and deficiencies in the work of DoS may also contribute to the deterioration of America’s international image, recent experience suggests that DoD dominance of strategic communications, and of foreign policy in general, may be increasingly responsible for the deterioration of US international standing.

Opinions of the United States and American Soft Power Continue to Decline Together

Notwithstanding the global outpouring of sympathy for the United States following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, many observers noted a downturn in public support for the United States during 2002 that reflected widespread deterioration in opinions of the United States. The Pew Research Center for People and the Press reported in December 2002 that images of the United States had become increasingly tarnished in the publics of NATO allies, former East European nations, developing nations and especially Muslim nations and on a variety of dimensions. That report went on to detail how pluralities had become critical of American unilateralism, but this did not extend to rejection, except in Muslim nations, of the approach the United States was taking to the war on terrorism. On the other hand, the report was prescient in recognizing that a potential war with Iraq might “further fuel anti-American sentiment.”

As the Pew Center expected, important policy actions, such as the invasion of Iraq, apparently caused a further deterioration in opinions of the United States. Attitudes, even among allied nations, toward the US approach to the war on terrorism also turned sharply negative, and despite some break in the trend during 2005, the overall slide in global opinion of the United States continued to worsen and spread. Of course, this is a heavily nuanced phenomenon, and lots of other variables and the particular circumstances of each nation are important. This is also characteristic of the factors which are closely related to soft power, a nation’s ability to attract and persuade others. Opinions are really a snapshot of people’s orientations at a specific moment in time.

Professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and a number of others have shown that soft power is also highly situational. While acknowledging the influence of other factors that
contribute to anti-Americanism and the decline in soft power, Nye's perspective concurs with the observation of Australian foreign policy commentator Paul Kelly that:

[T]he lesson of Iraq is that the US's soft power is in decline. Bush went to war having failed to win a broader military coalition or UN authorization. This had two consequences: a rise in anti-American sentiment, lifting terrorist recruitment; and a higher cost to the US for the war and reconstruction effort.4

Besides the loss of soft power to influence the situation in Iraq, the growing anti-Americanism and deterioration in opinions of the United States will influence our soft power in other contexts as well. For instance, recent research on human rights shows that majorities in such allied nations as Great Britain and Germany no longer see the United States as an effective advocate of human rights.5 Without entering into details, it is not surprising to hear corridor concerns and read blogger speculation about declining US soft power as a contributor to such differing foreign policy problems as cooperation in managing nuclear confrontations with Iran and North Korea, the improvement of multinational peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in Darfur, or even the advancement of America's trade agenda.

This forum is not the place for a full exegesis of the way in which public diplomacy, strategic communications and propaganda are intertwined in wielding soft power. The broad tendencies of interest here and the degree of consensus about the interconnectivity among them was manifest in the use of a common frame of reference for our conference discussions provided in a timely article by Linda Robinson.6 In that article, Robinson describes a visit Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made to the Army War College in March 2003 in which he lumped all these concepts into a broad “war of ideas” in which he believes America is doing a very poor job: “If I were grading, I would say we probably deserve a D or D plus as a country as to how well we’re doing in the battle of ideas that’s taking place in the world today, . . .”7

Not surprisingly, Secretary Rumsfeld has followed up his expression of concern with some specific actions to study and improve the strategic communications morass in which America has been entrapped for several years. In this regard, his reaction has been concrete and definitely action oriented because of his executive authority, but the realizations that prompted his action are not dissimilar to the concerns that motivated the production of over thirty studies and recommendations within the US government over the last few years to address the problem of public diplomacy. Nor indeed has DoD been alone in trying to deal with the issue. In fact, prior to the recent actions in DoD, much of the effort had
been concentrated at DoS through the appointment of high profile individuals to take charge of the public diplomacy effort. Prominent advertising executive Charlotte Beers was appointed under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs in December 2002. She was followed by former State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler, and then after a two-and-a-half-year vacancy, the president called on his campaign and White House communications adviser Karen Hughes to take the job and launch yet another reform effort in the fall of 2005.

In 2006, Secretary Rumsfeld proposed some important new initiatives, many of which will only get under way as this volume is being published. Despite the good intentions of all those involved (and in which the author was also personally engaged until July 2005), the hypothesis that informs this analysis is that the new strategic communications effort in DoD may, as we have seen to a certain degree with the increasing efforts and new leadership at DoS, actually be prelude to further worsening of the US image and a greater loss of soft power. It may even be possible that the increasing effort in strategic communications at DoD will actually aggravate and further spread and deepen America’s soft power problem. As suggested by the Pew study in 2002, the fundamental problem is one of policy. This analysis takes that idea a step further by demonstrating that a fundamental part of the policy problem centers on the increasing visibility and ubiquity of the military in America’s global communications. Indeed, this may be increasingly at the root of America’s loss of soft power as we shall see later.

**Audience May Be as Crucial as the Message**

As mentioned previously, policy is the crucial issue for the deterioration in opinions of America and American soft power. Yet strategic communications plays an important role, and despite the increasing overall effort put forth by the United States, a good deal of the effort may even be counterproductive. One of the key problems is simply an inattention to audiences or attention to the wrong audiences, especially at the highest levels of government. Implicitly, the US Executive Branch and Congress appear to have decided that they don’t care about the opinion of most of the English-speaking world and traditional American allies in Western Europe. Congress has pushed for, and the Executive has complied with, the drastic reductions of public diplomacy spending, cut back or transferred out personnel, and curtailed the broadcasting of the Voice of America to countries that have been traditional friends and allies. Not surprisingly, opinions of the United States have declined markedly in most of these countries. Expanding private-sector communications, increasing tourism and trade, and even the popularity of
American films and TV shows obviously does nothing to stem nor reverse this increasing trend.

The private sector has, however, helped us understand and become more aware of just how bad the opinion trends are because they have learned, especially from the once path-breaking work on global public opinion performed by the United States Information Agency (USIA), that tracking what people think around the world is important. The Office of Intelligence and Research (INR) in DoS inherited this tradition, and it continues to do technically respected, policy relevant research, but not much of it in comparison to yesteryear. Today, there is a lot more publicly available data in the private sector on how German or Italian or Spanish or Latin American attitudes toward the United States are changing, so at least we do have a broad sense of what’s happening.

The problem for policy is that these private studies provide only a tiny window on the broad trend in audience opinions. The research needed for the formulation of a communications strategy is much more complicated and expensive. INR still does some of this research, but rather than showing the way to the private sector, the work that INR does now on DoS’s global audiences is just a fragment of what is done for most international private-sector marketing campaigns or in presidential elections in many countries. Candidates for governor or senator in most states have far more research resources available for shaping their campaigns than do US embassies in important posts over a two- or three-year span. Most of the studies about improving public diplomacy place a lot of emphasis on the need for more public opinion and other types of audience research, but overall funding for research has increased only incrementally over the last few years. The funds that are available have been concentrated much more on the Middle East and a few other priority regions and, even with the increases, the overall effort and systematic attention to audiences in the US government has declined greatly since the Cold War began to wind down.

The audience problem has also become more complicated because of changing technology. Without entering into detail, it has to be recognized that speeches delivered by the president and other high administration officials are often intended more for a domestic audience than overseas publics. However, words intended to arouse patriotism in the United States often have different, if not always opposite, effects overseas, but virtually any speech or op-ed piece or other public position taken by senior American officials is often disseminated more widely outside the United States than in and is readily available for hostile exploitation. For many in the Middle East, the “war of ideas” to which many US officials have made reference has been misunderstood, and partly because it has been wickedly portrayed, as a confrontation with Islam itself. In the context of a war on terrorism in which the
Strategic Communications and the Decline of US Soft Power

support of foreign publics is vital, the need for more cautious and restrained rhetoric at home is obvious.

Technology complicates the issue further, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan where the United States has suddenly opened the doors, not just to freedom, but to a media diversity that those people have never before experienced. Saddam Hussein used nearly universal access to terrestrial TV broadcasts, while repressing radio, satellite TV, computer/Internet and every other form of media access, to dummy down and shape the information that people had in his “brave new world.” The freedom provided by the United States after the invasion included a sudden explosion of exposure to information and the right to opine that the Iraqis love, as shown by the meteoric spread in the use of satellite TV and their high participation rates in polls and election turnout. Whenever even a few hours of electricity could be had, the availability of inexpensive satellite dishes also brought Arab, Iranian and lots of other new media sources. Afghanistan also opened up dramatically in comparison with the past, albeit the geographic, economic and other limitations are much more severe than in Iraq so the opening has not been nearly as pervasive.

Still another dimension, and in the long run in Iraq and Afghanistan perhaps the most serious of the audience problems, is that insurgents intermingle with other groups of people ranging from the actual supporters of enemy combatants to sympathizers with the United States. In these nations and those on the margin of every conflict, DoS and elements of DoD are separately engaged, have different missions and separately conduct political communications operations in the same arena and address overlapping populations. This is much less a problem of DoS than it is for DoD and our military units in the field because the nature of the DoS message is, in fact, public diplomacy. The intention is to be persuasive, arouse sympathy, create goodwill and so on. For military units, much of the time, the purpose of the unit’s presence is combat or combat support or force protection. All these missions, by their nature and before there is any communications per se, at least partially convey a message of potential threat and danger. By early 2004, polls in Iraq consistently showed that most Iraqi people did not want the United States to withdraw forces because of their fear of anarchy, but they also didn’t want them anywhere nearby because of the danger of those forces being targeted or engaging in combat.

This paper cannot do more than raise a serious concern about the audience issue in combat zones, but experience in Iraq also suggested that we may not have paid as close attention to the importance of not contaminating messages to the noncombatant population with those actually intended for the enemy. Discussions with officers involved in information operations in Iraq first raised this question, especially when hostilities became particularly widespread or prolonged in a given
area. After all, at both the practical level and conceptually, in a combat zone, the
overriding mission of the armed forces is the application of force to subdue the en-
emy, not win hearts and minds.\textsuperscript{13}

Evidence for the difficulty of separating out this condition conceptually is fairly
common in the military literature and suggests that operationally the difficulty
would be much greater. For instance, a thoughtful article by William Darley on the
application of Von Clausewitz's traditional war theory to information operations
fails to distinguish at all between the mission of compelling an enemy and the
problem of that enemy being in the midst of a population that we seek to make our
friends. That is, in writing about examples related to Desert Storm where the
United States was and departed as an invading force, he fails to mention the all per-
vasive distinction of our having become an occupying power trying to befriend the
Iraqi people as we are during Operation Iraqi Freedom.\textsuperscript{14} In another far more com-
plex study that centers on information operations during the 2004 combat that
raged in Fallujah, the authors pay more attention, and rightly so, to enemy informa-
tion operations.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, the study lacks as careful attention to the actual engagement of
the audience both before and after the attack, thus implying that the deterioration of
Iraqi opinion afterwards was largely due to the success of enemy information opera-
tions. However, given the predisposition of the Iraqi people toward intensive combat
operations of the sort launched in Fallujah, opinion may have declined even without
the enemy's apparently successful information operations.

Legal issues in the national security arena raise particularly thorny problems for
strategic communications because of their complexity. Here the chief audience
consideration centers on the capacity of the audience to comprehend the issue in
comparison with the likelihood that a few simplistic images will totally dominate
the perceptions and conclusions of the mass public and most other audiences. The
debate over whether adherence to the Geneva Conventions should be included in
the US military code of conduct or the treatment of detainees is a perfect example.
Certainly lawyers and political leaders may perceive ambiguity in the text of the
Geneva Conventions, but what most people understand is simply that the Geneva
Conventions have symbolized a globally accepted minimal standard of conduct in
war for generations.

\textit{Getting On the Same Page Counts Less Than Whose Page We Are On}

Rear Admiral Thorp initiated this panel with an articulate analysis of the impor-
tance of "process" for strategic communications in order to keep all the elements of
an organization in harmony with respect to "a good policy." He emphasized the
importance of consistency in policy and actions and the extraordinary difficulty of
accomplishing this in the context of national security, public diplomacy and international relations, thereby going beyond the natural emphasis of his remarks on developing a “culture of communications” within DoD. In my view that approach is analogous to the problem of ensuring that all the elements of an organization are on the same page, and I would agree with that approach for a single, even very complex organization, such as DoD. However, I think it falls short of the nature of the interrelatedness required for our national strategic communications and the relationship of DoD to the national undertaking.\textsuperscript{16}

For the strategic communications of the United States to function properly in advancing our national interests, especially in the soft power arena, the policy and actions of at least our most visible national organizations and disparate actors must be understood “to converge” on a single purpose. In the myriad reports related to America’s public diplomacy problem, this concern has generally been related to the need to integrate the public diplomacy effort with the executive leadership for foreign policy. For instance, in a Defense Science Board report, this is described as “leadership from the top”:

A unifying vision of strategic communication starts with Presidential direction. Only White House leadership, with support from cabinet secretaries and Congress, can bring about the sweeping reforms that are required.

Nothing shapes U.S. policies and global perceptions of U.S. foreign and national security objectives more powerfully than the President’s statements and actions, and those of senior officials.\textsuperscript{17}

In another excellent analysis and proposal by the Public Diplomacy Council about what needs to be done, the stress is more on the institutional connections to the presidency that are needed. Two of the five major recommendations—numbers one and four—that are advanced focus on this concern:

1. Establish an agency within the Department of State and the National Security Council process, the U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy (USAPD), to manage the U.S. government’s civilian information and exchanges functions and to coordinate all U.S. government public diplomacy efforts.

4. Establish by Presidential Directive an Interagency Committee on Public Diplomacy at the Cabinet Level to coordinate and direct the national public diplomacy strategy, with a permanent secretariat and associated working groups, co-chaired by the Deputy National Security Advisor for Communication and the Director of the new USAPD Agency.\textsuperscript{18}
The concern here could also be understood as one of process if that involves making sure that the entire US government strategic communications effort converges on the direction that the president, and through him, the National Security Council and its key components provide for the comprehensive enterprise. However, the American experience since the start of the US effort to respond in earnest to the September 11 terrorist attacks suggests that a still broader definition of convergence is needed. One of the remarkable consequences of those attacks was the sense of global empathy that they evoked. In an obvious allusion to President Kennedy’s quip to the beleaguered people of Berlin, Paris’ Le Monde showed just how strong the feelings were around the world in its September 12 headline, “we are all Americans!” Yet not long after the Bush Administration began to prosecute the war on terrorism and to hunt the perpetrators of the attacks, opinion of the United States began to decline.

Although there may have been widespread sympathy for the United States, it also appears that there were some definite expectations about how the United States would conduct the war on terrorism that were rapidly frustrated, and that this type of frustration definitely escalated and spread antipathy. Accordingly, convergence in strategic communications needs to be concerned with more than simply getting all the messages on the same page as the president’s, but for these to have a favorable impact they must also be in harmony with people’s expectations about those producing them. Thus it is not just that the messages from the White House and DoS and DoD need to be consistent with those from the presidency, as that these all need to harmonize with people’s expectations about the actions and values that America represents. Convergence, then, speaks to the coincidence between message and behavior in order to enable strategic communications to achieve the persuasive capacity or provide the desirable model that creates soft power.

Many early frustrations about the US conduct of the war on terror came most vividly and boisterously from Muslim nations and Muslim people living in the West as a result of the sudden dramatic increase in security operations in which the negative profile always involved them. The characteristics of the September 11 terrorists suddenly intruded on the lives of tens of thousands of students, businesspeople, international travelers and immigrants, and, despite the overwhelming sympathy of most of these people for prosecuting the war on terrorism, it suddenly called into question the sincerity of the US commitment to respect human and civil rights, as well as religious and ethnic tolerance.

Gradually, a series of other actions by the United States further contradicted values that the United States was expected to honor and advance in the world arena. For instance, the open questioning by senior US officials about the applicability of the protections under the Geneva Conventions long before actual revelations about abuses was not expected. After all, the United States had already been the
overwhelming global military power for the better part of a generation, so if the Geneva Conventions did not apply to the United States, then why should they apply to anyone. The recent harsh rejection by the Bush Administration of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was quickly linked to the questioning of the Geneva Conventions as a sign that the United States was putting itself above the law after having represented itself as one of the leading advocates of international law for over fifty years.

Despite the fact that it was under the Clinton Administration that the United States had opted out of joining both the Kyoto Protocol and the ICC after taking part in their negotiation, the way the Bush Administration opted to harden the US position seemed to represent a sudden increase in US unilateralism, and that increased resentment. Since the United States was viewed as the supreme power of the era, it appeared to be rebuffing its global responsibilities and undermining foreign perceptions of institutions that provided for the common good.21 Anyone can Google "truth President Bush" and immediately find harsh, partisan criticisms of the president that may not, however, be recognized as partisan by outside observers.22

Once the war in Iraq got under way, this pattern of perceptions in foreign audiences was repeatedly reaffirmed by events which seemed to constitute prima facie contradictions of the US assertion of lawfulness in the conduct of the war against terrorism. Media stories appeared all over the world about ambiguity in rules of engagement in combat and how individual troops interpreted them or said they were taught to interpret them.23 The revelation of the abuses of Abu Ghraib prisoners was just the most sensational of a series of cases in which US troops were brought up on charges of misconduct and while that perhaps should have been expected, the majority of the Iraqi people reacted with surprise and disappointment that American troops had proven just as fallible as any others might be. Finally, the long-running saga of Guantanamo scandals, court reversals of government practices, and the Administration’s widely lampooned discussion of alternative procedures and other euphemisms for torture communicated a sense of American disdain for the protections of the Geneva Conventions. Rather than converging to demonstrate the consistency of American behavior with the rhetoric we projected, whatever consistency there may have been in our messages was being completely overwhelmed by contradictions in our performance.24

When Resources Matter

Nearly all the major reports on fixing public diplomacy call for major increases in the allocations available for DoS and for the functions that used to be performed by USIA. The Defense Science Board Report calls for the current resources (both
funding and personnel) of DoS to be tripled, but neglects the subject of additional resource needs of DoD to support strategic communications almost entirely. The Public Diplomacy Council recommends a 300-percent increase in personnel and a four-fold increase in program budgets over a five-year period. Such reports directly attribute the loss of the US voice and the declining public image around the world to a decline in funding, pointing out how despite the success during the Cold War there was a subsequent pattern of neglect. Certainly, the constantly declining overall resource base and the constraint it placed on public diplomacy activities was a major consideration at every stage of my career experience in the field. On the other hand, organization, coordination and technique seem to have been the more important issues for DoD and the work of its professionals in the field of strategic communications. And while my personal experience in direct discussion of strategic communications with DoD and military colleagues was largely limited to four years of service in Italy during the Balkans conflicts and on other theater-wide issues that promoted extensive collaboration and during the last few years in Iraq and Washington, DC, I don’t recall that declining resources was ever a major concern of theirs.

Of course, part of the answer for this difference in perspective may be attributable simply to the fact that the DoD budget is dozens of multiples of the size of the foreign affairs budget, before even counting the costs of Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the order of magnitude of the difference in resource availability probably has a great deal to do with the reasons that a sophomoric mistake could be made in DoD to enable the Lincoln Group to pay journalists in Iraq for writing friendly stories, thereby undermining the credibility of any favorable information that might appear. And during the days of the Coalition Provisional Authority when resources were carefully husbanded for public diplomacy operations per se, a British production company could be paid millions of dollars out of military funds to run vague, feel-good-about-democracy advertisements on Iraqi television.

The tendency to confuse strategic communications with advertising may be in part responsible for the tendency in the US government to fund DoD strategic communications relatively lavishly in comparison with the starvation diet for public diplomacy. Every member of Congress understands how expensive media advertising can be and vaguely recognizes that DoS does not engage in that activity because the broadcasting function was handed off to the Broadcasting Board of Governors when USIA was merged into DoS. Moreover, additional ad hoc funding goes to DoD for direct support of military operations. All this means that strategic communications becomes the umbrella for consideration of resource allocations and moves all the further from public diplomacy. Yet it also means that the broader concerns of public diplomacy and its practitioners will be harder to integrate into the...
Strategic Communications and the Decline of US Soft Power

frameworks for orienting and controlling strategic communications. Practically speaking, this also explains why there were no public diplomacy specialists in the direct chain of command over the “feel good” advertising in Iraq.

More basic than the focus on strategic communications is the problem of whether it is the strategic communications or the public diplomacy effort that actually breeds the soft power. With a few exceptions, I think that this point is often lost because of the failure to understand the fundamental difference between the way soft power is developed and used. Strategic communications tends to be considered within the context of the achievement of a relatively specific government objective, while public diplomacy includes such communications but places them in the context of the broader relationship of societal trust, empathy and, hopefully, admiration. Since a broader objective and a non-specific time frame are also involved in public diplomacy, this makes it harder for the government to fund it as part of the traditional annual appropriations process.

Thus, the budgetary process disfavors the needed funding of public diplomacy, but in doing so, it may also prejudice strategic communications, or help explain why the Bush Administration drive is still not bearing fruit. That is, I think it reasonable to hypothesize that many, and certainly some of the more important, strategic communications objectives require the existence of a somewhat favorable climate of opinion for the messages to be credible and effective. Accordingly, the neglect for the longer-term public diplomacy effort may doom even a very intense strategic communications campaign.

Undermining the Credibility of the Military as Messenger

The Bush administration’s conduct of the war against terrorism has given rise to an increasing chorus of concern about the militarization of US foreign policy over the last few years. Of course, some of the most articulate voices, such as Chalmers Johnson’s, had begun to raise concerns and link them to historic arguments, especially about American imperialism, and how the conduct of American policy had been associated with antipathy toward America in a given region, especially East Asia and the Philippines, in response to specific actions, such as the expansion of the Vietnam conflict, even before the September 11 attacks. Johnson pursues his basic argument and expands it in the light of developments in the war on terrorism and Andrew Bacevich provides a broader focus on military history to develop parallel concerns focused on the Middle East. The problem in Johnson’s view is that
slowly but surely the Department of Defense is obscuring and displacing the Department of State as the primary agency for making and administering foreign policy. We now station innumerably more uniformed officers than civilian diplomats, aid workers, or environmental specialists in foreign countries—a point not lost on the lands to which they are assigned. Our garrisons send a daily message that the United States prefers to deal with other nations through the use or threat of force rather than negotiations, commerce, or cultural interaction and through military-to-military, not civilian-to-civilian, relations.

While the militarization of policy may be responsible for the deterioration of the US image, it is not something for which the military bears direct responsibility or can even fix. The problem is akin to that which each military unit now faces when they enter the field in Iraq. Most Iraqis fear having any contact with or even being in the vicinity of the US military, not because they have personally had a bad experience, but because they are aware that Americans are the targets of attacks that are dangerous to anyone near them and that the response to attacks has led to great damage in the surrounding areas, whether intentional or not. Indeed, the crux of the US problem, at least for the war on terrorism, may be in the strategy that the United States elected for pursuing the war on terrorism. That is, in the decision to justify the preemptive use of force for defending American interests.

President Bush’s speech at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly on September 12, 2002, provided the first public exposition and justification for the use of preemptive military force by the United States against Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq. That speech unleashed a wave of global controversy and debate because the US position seemed to hark back to a classical legitimating of war that was supposed to have been superseded by the creation of the United Nations collective security system. Within a few days, the Congressional Research Service, much better known for the quality than the celerity of its work, issued a report stating that “the historical record indicates that the United States has never, to date, engaged in a ‘preemptive’ military attack against another nation.”

Yet on September 19, 2002, the preemptive use of military force was incorporated as a cornerstone of the US national security strategy and the war on terrorism and thereby set the stage for the subsequent US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Despite the initial military success in Iraq, the reaction of much of the international community continued to worsen and harden despite any justification by the United States about the potential threat of weapons of mass destruction or links to terrorist organizations that had attacked the United States. Not only were the ethics of the US position questioned, but the gradual debunking of every rationale for the
Strategic Communications and the Decline of US Soft Power

attack except the spread of democracy further weakened the preemptive doctrine. According to foreign policy analyst Julia Sweig, the US loss of global respect was due to the imposition of US hegemony on the world community in the way that it had long exercised power in Latin America.

It had been one thing for the global powers that once held a stake in the region to yield grudgingly to U.S. hegemony with the Western Hemisphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But it was quite another for the United States to subject the entire world community—including former and aspiring world powers—to the fast-and-loose approach to diplomacy, military intervention, sovereignty, and international law that had long been the U.S. currency in America’s regional sphere of influence.

Other commentators have emphasized graver problems than the unilateralism and arrogance represented by the US action. Stanley Hoffman comments on how several international analysts link the preemptive strike doctrine to the deterioration of a sense of international order and cites a commentary on the US national security strategy by Henry Kissinger to that effect: “if each nation claims that right to define its preemptive rights, the absence of any rules could spell international chaos.” More to the point for this analysis, British commentator David Mepham notes how the negative impact of the loss of US credibility directly undermines public trust in the United States and actually increases the sense of insecurity in the global community that the United States is supposedly making safer.

Conclusion

The discussion of the first three areas of strategic communications practices discussed in this analysis was made in the spirit of offering experience-based suggestions for improving foreign opinions of the United States and supporting better achievement of policy objectives. For instance, a more explicit focus on the nature of the understanding that an audience brings to an issue should provide the framework for shaping of messages for it, especially given the complexity of legal issues and lawyerly discourse. However, the observation that these practices tend to be building upon one another is intended to suggest how limited the prospects may actually be for improvement in any area to make a difference for the soft power trend overall. That is, simply transferring resources from the strategic communications effort in DoD to the public diplomacy work of DoS probably won’t begin to reverse the negative trend. The crucial consideration now probably relates to the way the world has come to consider the exercise of power by the United States. Until we show that we are less inclined to rely on the use of our military or the use of preemptive military force in the face of strategic frustrations, the improvement in
our strategic communications craft will not actually serve to increase US soft power or to improve our long-term ability to advance our interests.

Notes

3. Since developing the concept of soft power in 1990, Professor Nye has returned to it in a number of works. The most comprehensive is JOSEPH S. NYE, SOFT POWER: THE MEANS TO SUCCESS IN WORLD POLITICS (2004).
7. 1.
9. This conclusion has been partially influenced by the growing literature on the militarization of America’s foreign policy, but it has also been developed empirically. It was originally inspired by observations and experience as the counselor for public opinion and polling for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad during 2004. That prompted the inquiry and findings reported here. The results of these polls have not been widely disseminated, but a few well known public accounts are available, such as Robin Wright, Iraqis Back New Leaders, Poll Says, WASHINGTON POST, June 25, 2004, at A19 and John Solomon, Poll of Iraqis Reveals Anger Toward U.S., ASSOCIATED PRESS, June 15, 2004, available at http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/0615-08.htm. Militarization will be discussed further below.
11. The author was on the staff of USIA’s Office of Research from 1984–88. My work as the counselor for public opinion and polling for the Coalition Provisional Authority during 2004 was closely coordinated with the current Office of Research in INR.
12. Pew Research Center studies have already been cited (supra notes 1 & 2), but there are many excellent sources ranging from organizations that mainly provide access to polling data from others, such as http://www.angus-reid.com, to organizations that do their own research, e.g., http://www.latinoobarometro.org, to those that combine these functions and a lot more, e.g., http://worldpublicopinion.org.
13. The report of the Defense Science Board makes this point more generally with respect to the special problem of the terrorism frame of communications that marginalizes other significant issues and obscures the difference between tactical and strategic considerations. See Office of the Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Report of the Defense Science
Strategic Communications and the Decline of US Soft Power

19. A significant step in this direction was taken in 2005 with the establishment of the Policy Coordination Committee on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications and the position of deputy national security advisor for strategic communications and global outreach as part of the reorganization of the National Security Council. Karen Hughes emphasizes the importance of the creation by DoS of a rapid response unit as a measure that "literally gets the U.S. government on the same page." See Traud, supra note 16. Yet the argument here is that even getting the entire US government on message is still not the crucial consideration.
20. Intellectual discourse about public diplomacy has grown rapidly in recent years and is benefiting from significant contributions from outside the United States. Jan Melissen has been one of the more significant international contributors. Although his focus tends to be more on actions centered in the foreign ministry, the concept of “societization” of public diplomacy that he has advanced is similar to the idea of convergence mentioned here. While Melissen also stresses the increasing significance of two-way communications in the field, he does not include the two-way perspective within the concept of “societization.” See Jan Melissen, Reflections on Public Diplomacy Today, Remarks Before the Conference on Public Diplomacy (Feb. 6, 2006), available at http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pnt&folder=7&paper=2655.
22. This is consistent with the underlying problem of fragmentation of political culture, the subject of the brilliant analysis in Donna Oglesby's paper, A Pox on Both Our Houses, delivered at the American Political Science Association Conference on International Communication and Conflict on August 31, 2005. Oglesby suggests that the problem is still more profound because of the fragmentation of political culture.
24. This discussion has concentrated on legal issues and is concerned with the global context of strategic communications. Within Iraq itself, the discord, rather than convergence, between communications and perceptions was much less concerned with legal matters. Polls in 2003–04 repeatedly demonstrated that the failure of the United States to deliver the promised benefits of
improved peace and security and quality of life, including availability of electricity, jobs and so on, was strongly related to the steady increase in negative attitudes toward the United States.


26. A CALL FOR ACTION, supra note 18, at 3.


28. DoS may have been the original source of its own funding disadvantage in the foreign policy arena when it joined with the still fledgling DoD to endorse the call for a dramatic buildup of military forces in the famous National Security Council Report No. 68, United States Objectives and Programs for National Security, Apr. 14, 1950, available at http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm. Describing the resource imbalance that had been developed thirty years later, Zbigniew Brzezinski said: "In the Department of State you have the glory of the office, to fly around in a big plane and to appear at international meetings. But you don’t have the clout. The Secretary of Defense spends money while the Secretary of State begs for money." Quoted in DAVID ROTHKOPF, RUNNING THE WORLD: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE ARCHITECTS OF AMERICAN POWER 181 (2005). Of course, as the merger of USIA into DoS was undertaken during the 1990s, the overall post-Cold War decline in funding for public diplomacy first accelerated and then kept deteriorating until at least 2004, despite the statutory safeguards for Fulbright exchanges and a few favored programs, the appointment of politically prominent under secretaries, and the many studies that called for more funding.

29. A DoD inquiry led by Rear Admiral Scott Van Buskirk concluded that propaganda efforts, including the paying of reporters, could damage US credibility and should be stopped. David S. Cloud, U.S. Urged to Stop Paying Iraqi Reporters, NEW YORK TIMES, May 23, 2006, at A19, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/24/world/middleeast/24propaganda.html?ex=1306123200&en=87f776e901aa126a&ei=5088&partner=r. Of course, military public affairs manuals have always taught this, and the many competent, hard-working military public affairs officers at the field grade level and above that I have known have been well aware of this precept. Accordingly, I am left with the impression that there was inadequate military supervision of the activity or such an abundance of resources that the decision may have been made at a lower level.

30. One commercial upon which much hope was based showed Iraqi youth of apparently different backgrounds joyfully playing soccer together as an apparent metaphor for the task of national unification. Unfortunately, the use of the spot had to be curtailed abruptly when news got out that it had been produced in a neighboring country with local children, presumably because security conditions in Iraq prevented filming it there with Iraqi children.

31. In a survey of embassy public affairs officers in 2003, half reported to the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) that they lacked sufficient officers to carry out public diplomacy activities. See Jess T. Ford, State Department Efforts Lack Certain Communications Elements and Face Persistent Challenges (May 3, 2006), available at http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06707t.pdf. Mr. Ford, the Director, International Affairs and Trade, GAO, was testifying before the Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies, House Committee on Appropriations.

32. For instance, Professor Nye argues that one of the most successful of all soft power episodes was the Cold War exchange program that brought Alexander Yakovlev to the United States in 1958 and exposed him to the pluralist ideas that later influenced the development of glasnost and perestroika. This, and most of the other classic episodes of public diplomacy described nicely
on http://www.softpowerbeacon.blogspot.com by Mark Safranski, emphasize the long-term framework in which successful public diplomacy takes place.


36. JOHNSON, supra note 34, at 5.

37. Further evidence for Bush Administration preference in the use of the military over civilian resources in the conduct of foreign policy came out just as this paper was being completed. See Mark Mazzetti, Military Role in U.S. Embassies Creates Strains, Report Says, NEW YORK TIMES, Dec. 20, 2006, at A8, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/20/washington/20embassy.html?ex=1324270800&en=e9eb8f0f9c1df4&ei=50888&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss. Mazzetti reported that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff had just completed a report showing that "the expansion of the Pentagon's presence in American embassies is creating frictions and overlapping missions that could undermine efforts to combat Islamic radicalism." Id.


39. The Carnegie Council organized a high-level debate on the question of evaluating the preemptive use of force that was the subject of an entire issue of volume 17, no. 1 of their journal ETHICS AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (Spring 2003). On the deepening of the controversy, see Howard LaFranchi, Bush's 'Preventive War' Doctrine Under Siege, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, Feb. 4, 2004, at 1, available at http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/0204-03.htm.


42. LaFranchi, supra note 39, quotes the associate director of the London-based Institute for Public Policy Research as saying: "The lack of credibility brought on by going to war in Iraq on the basis of inaccurate intelligence has undermined public trust and made the world more insecure."