


Nov 04, 2016 by *Carrie Walters*

Hughes Releases First-Ever Comprehensive National Strategy for Public Diplomacy ^[1]

This is the first in a series from Carrie Walters, Pickering Fellow at the U.S. State Department and Master's Candidate in Public Diplomacy at USC's Annenberg School for Communication.

After extensive input from various government agencies, private sector communication professionals, and over thirty independent studies of U.S. public diplomacy, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes unveiled her new national strategic communications plan  on May 31. The plan is a result of more than a year of effort by Hughes and her staff, and is considered the first comprehensive national strategy ever developed for public diplomacy.

In her remarks to the inter-agency Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications Policy Coordinating Committee that helped guide the development of the document, Hughes emphasized that the new strategy provides a unified strategic framework while at the same time allowing for enough flexibility to meet each government agency's individual needs.

The strategy outlines three key objectives to govern America's communication with foreign audiences: it states that the United States should offer a vision of hope and opportunity to the world, should isolate and marginalize violent extremists, and should nurture common interests and values between Americans and foreign publics. In order to achieve this, several key priorities for public diplomacy programs and activities are established. The priorities are accompanied by concrete and detailed examples of how each can be turned into action.

First, the strategy calls for the expansion of education and exchange programs, with particular emphasis given to reaching youth, women, and other key influencers in society (i.e. journalists, clerics, business leaders). Here, English language teaching, the use of technology, and public-private partnerships are identified as crucial components for success.

Second, the need to modernize communication tactics is addressed. Under Secretary Hughes has called for an increase in the presence of language trained American spokesmen on foreign media outlets. This is seen as a priority not only with television and radio, but also with new technologies such as the internet, web chats, blogs, online videos, and podcasts.

Third, the plan emphasizes the leverage that can be raised by concentrating on America's "diplomacy of deeds." Regardless of their opinion towards U.S. policy, foreign publics should know the tremendous impact that Americans are making across the world in areas that people care about most: health, education, and economic opportunity. By expanding and advertising

these accomplishments, we will be able to communicate our values most effectively.

In addition to these priorities, the new strategy pays particular attention to the importance of inter-agency coordination, evaluation and measurement, and tools for success. As a result, there is widespread support for the establishment of a Counter Terrorism Communications Center to coordinate messaging across government agencies on the war on terrorism. Also in the works is the creation of a central repository of information and analysis of international public opinion, which will collect data from both public and private organizations and use it to help monitor the effectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy activities. The plan is accompanied by a copyrighted strategic communications tool which walks those in the field through a step-by-step method for developing effective messages and programs.

What does this plan signify? Most obviously, it shows recognition of the fact that the U.S. government needs to communicate with a unified voice when acting overseas. We have too often been guilty of speaking on behalf of one particular agency or idea while ignoring those alternate (and sometimes conflicting) messages emanating from other parts of the government. Perhaps more importantly, however, this new strategy reflects the increasing role that public diplomacy will likely play in our post-Cold War world. Strategic communication can no longer take a back seat to other items on the national security agenda. Public diplomacy is a vital part of winning the war on terror—and having been approved at both the White House and the NSC, this strategy is a big step forward in acknowledging that fact.
