

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

The Jihadist Bee, Hamas's Strategic Communicator ^[1]

There's a new "bee" character on a Hamas TV children's show that encourages viewers to be martyrs.

Nahoul the bee wants kids to follow him into "martyrdom" along with his Mickey Mouse look-alike "cousin" Farfur, who was beaten to death by an "Israeli" in a previous episode, reports BBC monitoring.

Outrageous as it is, what we see here fits snugly under the heading of strategic communication, a Madison Avenue advertising/marketing term generally defined as getting the right message to the right person at the right time, to sell an idea, a product, or whatever.


Why, it's asked, if Madison Avenue and terrorists are so adept at strategic communication, can't the U.S. government do a better job conveying the story of America and its policies abroad using the same sales techniques as other savvy practitioners?

To the rescue come those who think they have the answers.

About the time Nahoul the bee debuted to advise kids to continue on "the path of heroism, the path of martyrdom, the path of jihad warriors," several new studies were offered about how to improve U.S. government strategic communications -- image making if you will.

The U.S. military paid the RAND Corporation \$400,000 for its 211-page study, released last week, "Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation," which discloses how to "brand" the military more effectively with the local population in Iraq.

The report suggests that while scouting for insurgents, the neighborhood leader should be sought with a friendly smile and wave. Not knowing one's audience is also a problem said the study, noting that when President Bush visited Texas and gave the University of Texas salute, the gesture meant an evil eye in some cultures, infidelity in others.

Another report issued last week by the U.S. Government Accountability Office  stressed that the State Department's public diplomacy efforts should rely more on research "to influence the attitudes and behavior of target audiences," something the State Department already knows and does. The GAO report also suggests that "strategic communication" should be conducted more in "campaign style," with "thematic," carefully targeted messages. Government agencies should also share research with others.

Karen Hughes, chief of the State Department public diplomacy operation, rejoined that others in the 1990s didn't help when they "murdered" the U.S. Information Agency, placing much of it in the State Department. The USIA had ably told America's story abroad for many decades,

and Hughes stressed that in the almost two-years she's been on the job she has been playing catch-up, and doing pretty well at it, she chronicled.

The other USIA beneficiary, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, oversees and protects the integrity of U.S. non-military broadcasts abroad through its mythical firewall. Its new Chairman, James K. Glassman, an accomplished news reporter/executive, can make his mark by not being merely a custodian for U.S. broadcasts abroad, but a catalyst for their refurbishment, enabling the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to attain their previous Cold War stature. America's Alhurra Arabic TV channel must become a true competitor with Al Jazeera for mass audiences in the Middle East.

As for the Hamas TV channel and its strategic communication project for children, the good news is that the channel may have been dropped by the Nilesat satellite that made it available to receiver dishes in the Middle East. We are informed by former European Broadcasting Union executive Morand Fachot that the Hamas transponder on Nilesat was not to be found when he last checked, perhaps due to a complaint to Nilesat from the Palestinian National Authority about the Hamas channel.

But it's clear that those who come up with Nahoul the bee will likely be heard from again, and U.S. communicators had better get their strategic communication act together themselves. Studies that tell them what to do are a waste of trees.
