

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

Brokering Power, “Soft” and “Hard” ^[1]

Along the gradient of power, there’s a possible mix of “soft” and “hard” varieties. The public diplomacy originating at the U.S. State Department is commonly associated with the “soft” power of peaceful persuasion and cultural appeal; the foreign information efforts at the Pentagon are often in the service of some tangible “hard” power goal. The mixing often takes place in conflict zones, where a variety of forces and actors are in play. So who decides the mix, and how? [Walter Pincus’ piece](#) in today’s *Washington Post* (and [last week’s piece](#) in the *NYT* by [Dexter Filkins](#) and [Mark Mazzetti](#)) illustrate how haphazard and ill-defined — at times — the mix has been, and how the Pentagon has unilaterally turned to contractors who don’t get much oversight.

The *NYT* and *Post* stories mainly deal with the Michael Furlong case now being investigated at the Pentagon. Furlong, a senior civilian Defense Department employee, is alleged to have diverted funds intended for information-type programs in order to gather intelligence in Pakistan for military targeting. Even if Furlong is cleared of any misuse of funds, there is a larger issue of establishing how the Pentagon’s very broadly defined “information” contracts are to be devised, reviewed and overseen.

Pincus cites a Pentagon internal review of these contracts:

Purchases of products and services made through major contracts included “military analysts, development of television commercials and documentaries, focus group and polling services, television air time, posters, banners, and billboards,” the inspector general reported. Smaller individual purchases under information-operations programs included “magazine publishing and printing services, newspaper dissemination, television and radio airtime, text messaging services, internet services and novelty items”...

The central concern here is not that the Pentagon is doing information outreach in certain countries and environments. This may at times be well advised. The problem is when the work is done without appropriate oversight or coordination with the State Department — which has lead responsibility for foreign public diplomacy and public affairs work. Worse still is when the work is consigned to contractors who have no contact or accountability with State, and who have every incentive to add superfluous information activities as extra “billable items.”

Undersecretary of State Judith McHale is putting great emphasis on coordination between State and the Department of Defense, and the “potential rebalancing of the respective roles, responsibilities, and resources of State and Defense in the public diplomacy and strategic communications arenas.” One hopes that this effort will encompass the murky world of Pentagon contracting for foreign “information” activities, where clearly more oversight is needed. To use the popular phrase of the moment, there should be no “daylight” between

State and Defense on what should be done, and a bit more daylight cast on what is taking place.

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