

Nov 04, 2016 by *Adam Clayton Powell, III*

Panel: Pentagon Role Needed in Public Diplomacy ^[1]

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon's role in public diplomacy was strongly endorsed by panelists at a Heritage Foundation forum here yesterday.

"Influencing the enemy's will to fight is as old as warfare," argued Colonel Matt Venhaus of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. "Sending teams out to embassies to support public diplomacy is one way we do that."

The Defense Department's huge advantage in funding over the State Department was also discussed. Citing a report released last month by the Center for International Media Assistance that was critical of DoD operations, Juliana Pilon, Director of the Center for the Study of Culture and Security at the Institute of World Politics was blunt:

"The State Dept has a piddling amount, and right now, the question is why is DoD doing all of these things and State isn't?" she said. Instead, she argued, the question should be, "What are the most effective ways of doing it?"

"Unfortunately we have gotten so tangled up in who does what and who is in charge," Pilon continued, "that we have lost sight of what we do, rather than who gets credit."

Venhaus suggested DoD has to act independently because sometimes it has no choice.

"It is not important to us that we be most in charge [just] because we have the most assets," said the colonel. But then he described the Pentagon's role as "Support when we can, act independently when we must."

Pilon described the State Department's approach to public diplomacy as "strategic communication 'light,'" adding that U.S. policy should be to do whatever works.

"We have to stop being squeamish about something that is so common sense," she said. "It doesn't matter who does it as long as it is done correctly. It doesn't matter what you call it if in the end it promotes democratic values and diminishes the loss of life."

Public diplomacy and its relationship with the U.S. military have changed dramatically, according to the panel, largely because of a shift in the nature of armed conflict.

"Unconditional surrender was the focus," said Kevin McCarty, former Director for Global Outreach at the National Security Council, adding that now, "There is no one to 'unconditional surrender' to us."

Instead of centralized enemies in past wars, the U.S. now faces decentralized groups of

people who are not under central control.

"People flow in and out, much like Alcoholics Anonymous," said McCarty. "There is no one in charge telling them to do it."

Venhaus went even further, saying Al Qaeda just sits back and waits for volunteers.

"Young men seek Al Qaeda - Al Qaeda does not recruit," he said. "People who are looking for something find it. You can't get at the problem saying 'How can we keep Al Qaeda from recruiting him.'"

McCarty said that is another problem for the U.S., which has a culture of "counter:"

"Just being 'counter' is not something I'm a big fan of," he said. "Terror, drugs, crime. We're a very 'counter' culture. We don't think, 'What are you going to give them to do (after they stop)?"

Panelists also noted the title of the afternoon's session, "The Role of Psychological Operations in Strategic Communications," was out of date. On June 21st, the Pentagon officially retired the term "Psychological Operations" and replaced it with MISO - Military Information Support Operations.

MISO presumably is less squeamish than PsyOps.
