

**U.S. House Committee on Armed Services
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats**

**"Strategic Communication and Countering Ideological Support for
Terrorism"**

**Statement of Duncan MacInnes
Principal Deputy Coordinator
Bureau of International Information Programs
U.S. Department of State**

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Chairman Smith, Congressman Thornberry and distinguished Members of the Sub-Committee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities. Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the central strategic communications issue of countering ideological support for terrorism.

Combating ideological support for terrorism poses a variety of daunting, new challenges for U.S. public diplomacy. Terrorists have shown themselves to be adept at exploiting the freedom of the Internet to spread their propaganda directly to young Muslims around the world. Our traditional communication tools are designed for mainstream media and have little impact in this new information 'battlefield.' Our audience stretches beyond the traditional opinion leaders and political elites to include the general public and specifically the youth who are the target of extremist propaganda.

During the Cold War, we fought a traditional enemy in the USSR and our tools included traditional public diplomacy tools such as educational exchanges, publications, and mainstream media. These tools are still very effective at winning "hearts and minds," but are not sufficient by themselves. Our themes to win the "war of ideas" against communism stressed our core values – our dedication to liberty, democracy, freedom of speech and religion, and free markets – and our opposition to intellectual coercion, and political and economic oppression. These principles remain relevant and powerful today, but we need to continue to develop new tactics to counter an elusive and decentralized non-state foe who uses the Internet and new technologies to spread its ideology of violence.

We are meeting this challenge by shifting a portion of our efforts and resources from programs aimed at elite audiences and key opinion-makers to ones aimed at a broader audience, which includes potential recruits to terrorism – many of whom are young, marginalized or disaffected and hostile towards and suspicious of the United States.

We are in a struggle that will take years. While we must focus on the threat of the moment, we also need to take on the long term tasks of promoting freedom and democracy, which create conditions that do not allow extremism to flourish. We need to reach those who might be vulnerable in the future to extremist lies and messages of hate. We are dealing with the immediate and organizing for the long haul through educational and cultural programs, libraries, publications and English teaching.

Interagency Cooperation

We have come a long way in our efforts to coordinate strategic communication across the interagency. Last week, Dr. Doran and Captain Pittman and I were all together at a Global Synchronization Conference held by SOCOM. The week before that, we met as part of a State-DoD sub-PCC on planning and coordination of our activities. Overseas, in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe, our Public Diplomacy Officers work closely with military Public Affairs and PsyOps officers. Military Information Support Teams (MIST) are integrated into the work of an increasing number of our embassies.

At the direction of the President, the interagency Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication, with Under Secretary Karen Hughes in the chair, was established on April 8, 2006, to lead international strategic communications messaging within the Administration. Over the past year, Under Secretary Hughes has reorganized the PCC to ensure more active interagency coordination and synergy in the struggle with violent extremism. She established the interagency Counterterrorism Communication Center, created sub-PCC's to look at State-DoD Cooperation, coordinate Research, Analysis & Polling and study the issue of Branding.

Our State-DoD sub-PCC explores ways to enhance our cooperation and develop shared communication strategies. Already in the works are initiatives on coordinated web hosting and content, video and blogging, a renewed effort to identify and find ways to empower credible Muslim voices, develop a

shared image databank and strengthen the effectiveness of Military Information Support Teams (MIST) work in our overseas missions.

The Research and Analysis sub-PCC is developing interagency protocols for sharing information as a first step toward the creation of an electronic clearinghouse for unclassified foreign and security policy-driven public opinion polling and audience research by USG agencies. This is an unprecedented initiative, a demonstration of the determination of the participating agencies to work with each other to the advantage of U.S. national interests. Our intention is that the clearinghouse for all this interagency data will be housed on the USG-only INFOCENTRAL guidance web portal, managed by my bureau, International Information Programs (IIP) for the interagency.

The Counterterrorism Communication Center

Under Secretary Hughes established the Counterterrorism Communication Center (CTCC) last summer to coordinate overall overt USG strategic communications messaging in the war of ideas and to produce and disseminate effective messaging to counter terrorist ideology, especially in the Arab and Muslim world but also in Europe and elsewhere.

The CTCC is a small but truly interagency organization, with staff currently drawn from the Department of State, Department of Defense, the National Counter Terrorism Center and the intelligence community. Working with State, DoD and other USG agencies, it produces strategic communications plans, develops effective narratives and themes to undermine and counter terrorist messaging, and produces specific messages for use by State and DoD communicators. It responds with talking points to breaking events and works closely with the Rapid Response Unit in the State Department's Public Affairs Office to put out a daily anti-terrorism message. CTCC messages go to more than 2,000 key U.S. government communicators, including the Combatant Commands and all U.S. Embassies, who build on the themes and information in the messages, customizing them for local audiences in order to achieve the greatest impact. Our efforts focus on undermining and putting extremists on the defensive by exposing how terrorists recruit and exploit young people, destroy mosques and religious sites and murder women, children and innocent victims, such as the tragic events of last week that resulted in the deaths of 59 schoolboys, five teachers, police officers and other innocent adult bystanders in an effort to target members of the Afghan parliament, six of whom died in the attack.

The CTCC is intended to be a small, collaborative, interagency resource with a daily mission of providing the intellectual leadership necessary for countering terrorist ideology and extremist propaganda through coordinated messages. The mission and functions of CTCC were developed in response to needs identified by the defense, foreign policy and intelligence communities. The effectiveness of the CTCC is dependent on its interagency staffing, and we intend for the CTCC to continue drawing on expertise from across the entire government.

The Interagency Strategic Communication Fusion Team

The Interagency Strategic Communication Fusion Team is the first of our efforts to coordinate across the agencies. Managed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, it has been bringing together for over five years strategic communication professionals from State, DoD, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the intelligence community, and other agencies to exchange ideas and information on a weekly basis. In a government as large and complex as ours, the Fusion Team plays a valuable role in making connections between the many people working on the counter terrorism agenda and encouraging interaction among different bureaucracies and trading information about “best practices” and new ideas. Speakers from inside and outside government are selected for their ability to contribute useful information on strategic communication, especially countering ideological support for terrorism. The elegance of the Fusion Team rests in its flexibility and ability to network communication professionals.

Internet and New Technologies

The Digital Outreach Team

The Digital Outreach Team was launched just one year ago as a pilot initiative to counter ideological support for terrorism. It employs Arabic speakers to post entries on influential Arabic-language blogs, challenging misrepresentations and providing accurate information about U.S. policy and American society. These bloggers speak the language and idiom of the region, know the cultural reference points and are often able to converse informally and frankly rather than adopt the usually more formal persona of a U.S. government spokesperson. This is a major departure from our previous ways of conducting public diplomacy. It requires both creativity and a new set of skills.

The cultural sensitivity that this approach affords has been very successful, but it is labor-intensive. We are currently in the process of expanding the original team of two Arabic bloggers to six, while also adding one Urdu and two Farsi (Persian) linguists. The team does not engage hardcore militant sites, but concentrates on mainstream sites with heavy traffic that discuss U.S. policy, such as BBC Arabic, Al-Jazeera Talk, and Elaph On-Line News. We are also exploring how we can use the applicability to our mission of new cyber-technologies such as Second Life and cell phone games to further advance our mission.

Arabic and Persian Websites

Our Bureau of International Information Programs is fully engaged in dramatically expanding public diplomacy and countering extremist ideologies through the Internet. Our English language website and six foreign language sites – including Arabic and Persian – are being revamped to use more videos, blogging, podcast and webchats designed to reach younger audiences. The Arabic web site has the specific goal of countering violent extremism by offering a positive vision rooted in American values. It attracts more than 200,000 visitors per month, top users coming from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco.

The Internet also provides the most effective way of reaching Iranian youth. Our Persian web site has been highly successful with an average of 42,000 users – mostly from inside Iran -- visiting each week, making this one of the State Department's single most-viewed public diplomacy websites. We have attracted over 125,000 visitors to the Persian language version of our electronic journal on "Countering the Terrorist Mentality," which was publicized through an on-line ad campaign.

Credible Voices

The decline in overseas public opinion toward the United States has resulted in increased skepticism about the motives that drive our policy. On the practical side, this has led to distrust that undermines the effectiveness of our messages against extremists. We address this issue by working with our embassies overseas and with the American Muslim community to reinforce the messages of credible anti-extremists voices. For example, we have sent out dozens of American Muslims to predominantly Muslim countries to engage with counterparts. These Citizen Dialogue programs counter al-Qaeda's negative propaganda message that the U.S. is at war with Islam. The

CTCC collects and disseminates anti-terrorist statements, editorials and cartoons by Muslims from around the world in order to amplify their voices. Our Digital Outreach Team uses these statements in its Arabic blogging. We are in the process now of finding new ways to empower credible Muslim voices throughout the Muslim world.

“Diplomacy of Deeds”

Under Secretary Karen Hughes talks about the importance of “waging peace” by showing that the United States is a positive force for good in the world, in stark contrast to the destructive ideologies espoused by al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The strongest messages are sent not through words, but through the diplomacy of deeds. Americans are generous and committed to helping others. Our humanitarian aid – private and public – is unmatched in the world. We have worked hard with DoD to promote understanding among foreign publics of our humanitarian efforts. These have included the dramatic story of our emergency relief for tsunami and earthquake victims in Pakistan and Indonesia. These well-known efforts complement many other USG activities, such as visits by the U.S. hospital ships *Comfort* and *Mercy* to Latin America and the Far East, where they treated hundreds of thousands of patients. Our diplomacy of deeds dramatically reveals and the lies of the extremists’ misinformation and anti-American propaganda.

Countering Violent Islamic Extremism: The Pilot Countries Project

The Pilot Countries Initiative provides funding for special projects in 19 key countries with predominant or sizable Muslim populations. Funded by an emergency supplemental, the Pilot Country Project seeks to find ways to counter ideological support for terrorism through innovative projects identified by the Ambassador and senior embassy staff in each country. The focus of many of these projects is to reach young people who are vulnerable to radicalization and help them develop the skills and confidence they need to resist recruitment by committed extremists.

An example of a Pilot Country Project is the very well-received “Greetings from America” radio show, which broadcasts on local overseas radio programs the first-person accounts of life in America presented by Pakistani and Indonesia high school students studying here. Reaching several million young Muslim listeners, this program dispels myths and misinformation about the United States.

Mr. Chairman: I have given you and the members an overview of our current and new initiatives to counter extremist ideologies. I have also highlighted the very positive trend towards great interagency cooperation between the Departments of State and Defense. This struggle against the evils of terrorism will take many years, and we still have a great deal more to do to meet the challenge of violent extremism. We believe we have made major strides in adapting to the new and sometimes daunting media environment of the 21st century. But these initiatives do not stand in isolation. Public diplomacy and strategic communication must continue to deploy all instruments at our disposal and must rely on the best and most up-to-date research data. We need to expand our use of the Internet and other new and traditional media while continuing support for effective and more targeted educational exchanges, youth initiatives and English teaching programs. More importantly, we must continue to work harder to integrate our overall USG efforts, embrace new communication technologies and enlist the support of our allies overseas. We must continue to work towards a proactive position instead of one that is only reactive. The battle for the hearts and minds is one that will only succeed if we embrace innovation and use our nation's great communication talent and creativity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.