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U.S.-India Agreement on Nuclear Energy | Daily Press Briefing | What's New

KEYWORD SEARCH
Subject Index

BOOKMARK

Home Issues & Press Travel & Business Countries Youth & Education Careers About State Video

You are in: [Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs](#) > [From the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs](#)
> [Remarks by the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs \(2007\)](#)

Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination

Karen Hughes, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs

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Thank you for that gracious introduction. Admiral Thorp addressed our State Department public affairs officers earlier in the year – I'm here to return the favor – I hope he'll think it's a favor when I've finished speaking. He was a big hit – he urged our officers to get in touch with their counterparts at the regional commands, to put their phone numbers in speed dial lists, and he said he would urge DOD public affairs people to do likewise with the embassies in their AORs. [Area of Responsibility] That's good advice – I hope that it is happening and I come today in that spirit of close cooperation and coordination, so vital to our mission as strategic communicators.

I hear around the world that we don't speak as one government – yet whether it's a detainee issue or a secret prison issue or dealing with Iran or Iraq issues, mass audiences around the world don't really care if it's news from DOD or CIA or State Dept. – they hear it as news from America – it's increasingly important that we break down silos and coordinate and communicate in one voice.

I've been at State almost two years now – when President Bush and Secretary Rice asked me to take this great challenge – I read the 30-plus reports, they were critical of public diplomacy efforts – people were demoralized and still talking about the "murder" of USIA six years after its merger into the State Dept. I'm pleased to report that PD is back and is now a high priority at the highest levels of government. A reinvigorated and revitalized team is rebuilding our public diplomacy efforts. Recently the author of the most comprehensive and well known of those – Ed Djrejian, said we have implemented 80 percent of his commission's recommendations.

They include a new national strategic communications plan. It is short – it was not written for history – but to be used. It spells out our three strategic priorities to guide all our efforts – they provide a broad umbrella for what we're trying to do as a country. Each agency – such as HUD – is now preparing an agency specific strategic communications plan.

Our first strategic imperative is that America must offer people across the world a positive vision of hope that is rooted in our deepest values, our belief in liberty, in justice, in opportunity, in respect for all. I saw an interview of a young man in Morocco and he was asked; "What do you think when you think of America?" And he said, "For me, America represents the hope of a better

life." And it's vitally important that our country continue to be that beacon of hope, that shining city on a hill that President Reagan talked about so eloquently. And that's why we speak out for democracy and against human rights offenders and for a free press and against those who would stifle religious freedom, for equal treatment for women and minorities and against sex trafficking because America believes that every person has worth and dignity and value and we proudly stand for human rights and human freedom everywhere.

Our second strategic imperative is to isolate and marginalize the violent extremists and undermine their efforts to try to appropriate religion to their cause. We must remind people that America and the West are not in conflict with any religion, but are open to all religions, and people of all faiths worship freely in America. That's why I've spent a great deal reaching out Muslim Americans, because their voices often are most critical in this effort.

The third imperative, and this one sounds kind of simple – comes from a beloved former ambassador named Frank Wisner, who told me that especially at a time of war and common threats, that it is very important that America actively nurture and foster common interests and common values between Americans and people of different countries and cultures and faiths across the world.

As we seek to further these three objectives, I find myself increasingly focusing on three key areas:

The first is our education and exchange programs. These people-to-people programs foster life-long connections – I am convinced they are the single best way to build positive, lasting relationships with other peoples and nations. I'm happy to be able to tell you that we have increased participation in these vital education and exchange programs dramatically from 27,000 to more than 40,000 this year – and I hope it will pass the 50,000 mark as we make the case for additional budget funding.

We are teaching English to 10,000 young people ages 14-18 in more than 40 Muslim majority countries. I am a big believer in English training – it gives young people an employable skill – and a window to a wider world. In Malaysia, I saw a Madrassa advertising "good Islam, good English" and I thought, "I'm not going to let them beat me on English!" In Morocco, I met a young man and asked him what difference his English class had made on his life and he said, "I have a job and none of my friends do." It also provides those young people with hope, a reason to live rather than to kill himself and others in a suicide bombing.

I'd like to bring more people here to learn, but government can't pay for everyone to come, so we are creating partnerships with higher education leaders to promote the U.S. as a higher education destination. Two years ago, our higher education community was alarmed by declining numbers of international students and a lingering perception that student visas were hard to get in the aftermath of September 11. Today we have reversed that trend. We issued a record number of 591,000 student visas this year and are actively partnering with America's higher education community to send a clear message that we want the future leaders of the world to come here to study and get to know us.

America's flagship Fulbright program is now at a record high of 1,300 grants to American students – and more than 2,700 foreign students come here. We have also resumed the Fulbright program in Iraq and Afghanistan for the first time in more than two decades. Our growing Gilman scholarship program has made it possible for more low-income students to participate in study abroad programs and our new National Security Language Initiative brings foreign language teachers here and sends American young people to learn Arabic, Chinese, Farsi and other critical languages. We also have begun a new community college initiative, bringing 1,000 Egyptian students to the U.S. for vocational training.

Two years ago, an advisory committee highlighted a critical need for more cultural diplomacy. We launched a new Global Cultural Initiative in partnership with groups like the Kennedy Center and American Film Institute. By doing so, we are fostering the freedom of expression that is the lifeblood of the arts. We are reminding audiences across the world that despite differences of language or culture or policy, we share a common humanity. Through sports diplomacy, we are reaching out to more young

people, through soccer and basketball programs with the NBA.

A second area of focus is communications – I don't have to tell a room full of communicators that today's communications has to be rapid, it has to be global, it has to be multimedia and it has to be a team effort. We live today not in a 24-hour news cycle, but in an instantaneous news cycle – within minutes of an event happening or news breaking, the CNN's and Al Jazeera's will be cutting away to journalists and commentators, around the globe to fill in the story. The biggest difference between previous generations is that today's mass audiences are getting their news on television, with implications for our country.

Two years ago, the federal government had no effective, up-to-the-minute way to know what international media was communicating to mass audiences about America or its policies. Our new Rapid Response Unit, a state-of-the-art broadcast center, now constantly monitors international media. It produces a morning report that informs American policy makers with a daily one-page report of what is driving world news from the Middle East to Latin America, and provides our U.S. position on those issues to an email list of several thousand senior officials, from Cabinet secretaries to military commanders. I think one of the beauties of the RRU is that it not only that it gets our message to all our communicators, but it also focuses the attention of policymakers in Washington on what is important to audiences across the world.

Two years ago, many of our ambassadors were reluctant to engage the media without pre-clearance from Washington – now we provide media tools and training -- and public diplomacy is a criterion in the evaluation of every ambassador and Foreign Service officer.

To get more American officials out on television, we have established three regional media hubs in Dubai and Brussels and London. These hubs recognize the increasingly regional nature of today's media, which transcend borders... In a media center like Dubai, more than a thousand media outlets are represented -- and they aren't just focused on the country, they're focused on the entire pan-Arab world. And we are working with Cent COM there and our new media hubs are strategically placing American spokespeople on pan-regional television. As a result, we are doing more interviews than before and our presence on Arab media has increased by more than 30 percent.

We are also standing up -- with DOD help -- an interagency Counter-terrorism Communications Center. This center's daily mission will be developing culturally sensitive messages to undermine ideological support for terror. The center's job is to develop the message framework to inform all agencies. A lot of those messages won't be delivered by USG officials – sometimes the most credible voices are Muslim, both local and international.

We have been working to improve our use of technology, transforming our bureau of International Information Programs into a high tech hub with web sites in English and six foreign languages and a digital outreach team that counters misinformation and myths on blogs in Arabic.

I've challenged my team to come up with good ways to reach younger people – we've put TV cameras in the hands of some of our exchange students, so that they can do postings to YouTube. We're getting into pod casting and all sorts of the range of new communications tools that we need to reach younger audiences with images and tell our story visually. I just came from a meeting of the Broadcast Board of Governments. We have increased our weekly audience for our broadcasts from 100 million to 155 million, almost entirely in our Muslim target areas of the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Our third major area of focus is highlighting what I call the “diplomacy of deeds” -- the concrete ways in which our humanitarian and development initiatives are improving lives around the world – particularly in the areas that people care the most about – education, health, and economic opportunity. The military knows how powerful it can be when they provide assistance after a disaster like the tsunami in the Pacific and the earthquake in Pakistan. America believes in the dignity and value of every person

– and our actions in the world demonstrated that conviction. We're partnering with NGOs on the fight against malaria, which kills 3,000 children a day. We're partnering with Nancy Brinker and the Susan G. Komen Foundation in the first women's health initiative in the Middle East. This week First Lady Laura Bush announced a similar initiative for Latin America. Such lifesaving diplomacy shows Americans truly care about people around the world.

I have seen research that showed that after the Navy hospital ship USNS Mercy went to Bangladesh, polls showed the favorable opinion of the United States rose to 87 percent. The USNS Comfort – with the support of SOUTHCOM -- is in the Caribbean and Latin America this summer, helping to provide life-saving care to an estimated 85,000 people. I am planning to visit the Comfort hospital ship this summer. We need to take that goodwill and multiply and magnify it because it's that kind of people-to-people interaction that I believe is one of the most effective diplomatic tools we have.

We are also partnering with the private sector in new ways. We've leveraged more than \$800 million in private contributions for public philanthropy. Earlier this year, we hosted a private sector summit with top corporations from across the country and they came up with 11 things that businesses and corporations can do to help with America's strategic communications. We partnered with business leaders who raised money to help Pakistan recover from its devastating earthquake. We are partnering with business giants like Cisco to help Lebanon recover and create new jobs there.

These "deeds of diplomacy" display the compassion of America in a very tangible and I think a very important way.

It's no exaggeration to say that this is a hinge moment when history can tip one way or the other in a more positive direction or not. And it's a moment that calls on all of us to pitch in. Today every ambassador, every general and every soldier, sailor and employee can be an active, strategic communicator. Today's communications challenges require a seismic shift in the way we all do business: a shift way from tedious, bureaucratic processes. We need to train and trust and empower our communicators.

The war against terrorism is an asymmetrical contest against mobile, diffused, multi-statal forces. On the information battlefield, we face an enemy of anonymous volunteers, unchecked by standard of truth, free to Photoshop reality as they wish, and bent on carrying out operations to generate fear and mistrust. By contrast, we are a government, expected by our citizenry to behave by high stands of honesty, integrity and prudence. Our goals must be to generate understanding and trust through our public diplomacy or else we lose the high ground that we are fighting for.

If there is one thing that counterinsurgency theory and our own experience tell us, it is that public diplomacy and strategic communication must address the great majority of people who are NOT committed terrorists. We know they may not like some of our policies, but they still are able to hear reasoned arguments buttressed by facts and actions of good will. It is the job of public diplomacy and strategic communications to offer that silent majority an alternative vision to that of the extremists.

I'd like to leave you with a few challenges for your own communications efforts. First, we need to identify professionals or surrogates who speak other languages and use them to help the United States government present to the world the "personality" of America. Second, we need to do things differently – we need to think outside the walls of our agencies and the traditional ways we've done communications, and we need to engage more vigorously. Thirdly, we need to make better use of technology like pod casts, web-chats, and digital video teleconferences in our communications efforts. We need to think pictures – and images. And we need to cooperate, speak as Americans rather than as separate entities.

The need to communicate effectively is not new – one of Thomas Jefferson's six staff members when he served as Secretary of State was a messenger! But the communications environment that you and I face is dramatically different. In order to be successful, it's important for our messages to be coordinated – quick and credible. They must speak to the conscience of people around the world. And our actions must demonstrate the courage, conviction and compassion of the American character.

Thank you all for having me here today.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)



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