

Countering the Radical Islamist Message: Image Management as a Counter-terror Strategy

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Abstract

The ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu declared that it was best “to subdue the enemy without fighting” and goes on to explain that understanding and defeating the enemy strategy—aided by superior information/intelligence—rather than attacking the enemy force, is the best means of doing so. Strategists must consider public opinion as a strategic center of gravity. Radical Islamist enemies understand and use propaganda to distort the truth to their advantage. Thus, the US needs to conduct “Image management,” a new term which avoids the old connotations of propaganda, even the more recently tainted “strategic communication/influence,” and offers a fresh start at telling the truth, getting the word out, in order to counter the misleading use of information by America’s enemies. Image management is countering the false perceptions engineered via enemy propaganda. The ‘war of ideas’ struggles with identifying and engaging several “critical cultural-cognitive dimensions,” has often failed to successfully employ a policy-making system that engages cultural awareness and understanding. Image management must necessarily observe patterns on a strategic scale, import cultural contexts, and export cultural understanding to win hearts and minds away from supporting radical terrorist actors. A previous institutional lack of focus on image management has resulted in US standing plummeting around the world, and has undermined domestic political support for the war on terror. This essay explores three applications of image management: interests and ideals, executive authority, and religion/culture, in order to define and apply the concept and as an initial effort to demonstrate its policy application.

“Radical Muslims don’t hate America for its freedoms, nor do they particularly revile capitalism. No, what bin Laden and his ilk hate— even fear—is the influence of American culture and values on their religion. So what should the U.S. do? Export another, rarely seen, image of America.”
Dinesh D’Souza, 2007¹

Since events of 11 September 2001, the United States military has found itself conducting a war against terrorism, and more particularly, radical Islamists bent on attacking US assets and citizens at home and abroad. A myriad of articles and books have sought to address how this war should or should not be fought. A subset of this literature has dealt with the war for hearts and minds. The ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu declared that it was best “to subdue the enemy without fighting” and goes on to explain that understanding and defeating the enemy strategy—aided by superior information/intelligence—rather than attacking the enemy force, is the best means of doing so.² A famous Western strategist of the Napoleonic era, Carl von Clausewitz, envisioned “persuasive communication” as an element of leadership, according to Richard Halloran who also coined the term “strategic communication,” which appropriately fits the need described by Clausewitz and Sun Tzu.³

¹ Dinesh D’Souza, “The America Terrorists Never See,” *USA Today*, January 23, 2007.

² Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 77.

³ Richard Halloran, “Strategic Communication,” *Parameters* (Autumn 2007), 6.

Halloran goes on to describe the evolution of strategic communication and its connection to “propaganda,” which in the early 20th century was a neutral term involving the use of factual and accurate information to advance one’s cause. But Nazi propaganda of World War II altered the meaning of the word because of the party’s ability to focus propaganda efforts on the “big lie.”⁴ Strategic communication in the modern era is most often associated with propaganda in the negative sense, a spinning of the truth rather than actual facts. For example, the George W. Bush Administration effort to establish a Department of Defense Office of Strategic Influence was very short-lived due to its association with propaganda as it is now defined. Still, strategists must consider the advice of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu and not ignore the relevance of strategic communication. Public opinion is a center of gravity in Clausewitzian terms and the terrorists certainly know this and are not afraid to distort the truth to their advantage.⁵ Thus, the US needs to conduct “Image management,” a new term which avoids the old connotations of propaganda, even the more recently tainted “strategic communication/influence,” and offers a fresh start at telling the truth and getting the word out in order to counter the misleading use of information by America’s enemies. Image management is getting out the truth and countering the false perceptions engineered via enemy propaganda. Thus, as D’Souza attests in the quote at the beginning of this essay, the US must export the image of America as it is seen by citizens in America, not the affluent but amoral, crime ridden, violent image personified by Hollywood. This is a necessary cornerstone of US foreign and defense policy.

Image management is also intended as a means of reinvigorating US public diplomacy, which consists of programs designed to promote the interests, values, culture, and policies of the US with aims to facilitate the greatest understanding possible with and between foreign audiences in a positive image context.⁶ A relevant application of public diplomacy is provided by Joseph Nye’s indispensable conclusions about the creation, use, maintenance, and enhancement of soft power, “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When US policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, its soft power is enhanced.”⁷ As Senator William Fulbright noted during the beginnings of the Vietnam War, “the shape of the world a generation from now will be influenced far more by how well we communicate the values of our society to others than by our military or diplomatic superiority.”⁸ Communicating the truth is thus a specific application of soft power and is the focus of what is meant by image management.

Soft Power

Nye describes the agenda for world politics as a three dimensional chess game, in which one must play on all levels to win: a classical interstate military issue tier, an interstate economic issue tier, and a transnational issue tier—three games at once. Under the Bush Administration, this foreign policy chess game was perceived to orient itself around preserving hegemonic power and the ability to act unilaterally, rejecting Teddy Roosevelt’s adage concerning “speaking softly when you carry a big stick.”⁹ In this

⁴ Halloran, 6.

⁵ Dauber describes an incident in Iraq where al-Qaida of Iraq moved bodies and removed their guns after a firefight with American forces, carefully staging them in a mosque to look like they had been attacked while praying. These were subsequently photographed and the images uploaded to the net, along with a story explaining that American forces had attacked them in the mosque. See Cori E. Dauber, “The Truth is Out There: Responding to Insurgent Disinformation and Deception Operations,” *Military Review* (Jan/Feb 2009), 13-14.

⁶ Rosaleen Smith, “Mapping US Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2001), 433.

⁷ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

⁸ Smith, 422.

⁹ Joseph Nye, “US Power and Strategy After Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 4 (Jul/Aug 2003), 61.

manner, American military strategy seemed to have moved past Roosevelt's suggestions for implicit dissuasion to embrace a policy of speaking loudly while demonstrating American coercive prowess. This approach was not as effective as desired, nor as effective as Teddy Roosevelt's maxim, as reflected in slipping world opinion over the US role in managing global security, particularly as it related to the Middle East.

Why must American strategy now progress to embrace a new paradigm concerning image management as an application of soft power? Nye believes globalization, the information revolution, and technological change have all mandated a shift in strategy. "Globalization... has proved itself to be more than just an economic phenomenon; it has been wearing away at the natural buffers that distance and two oceans have always provided the US," implicating a need for the US to adopt a defense strategy that can better address asymmetric access and threats in a more interdependent world.¹⁰ "The information revolution and technological change have elevated the importance of transnational issues and have empowered non-state actors to play a larger role in the world politics," degrading US power and authority abroad and enabling dangerous, extremist terrorist enemies and entities throughout the world to harm US interests.¹¹ By understanding how US enemies utilize soft power to achieve their ends at the expense of US interests, this harm can be mitigated as America successfully begins to integrate soft power into its national grand strategy as an image management consideration.

The American Image in the Arab World

Nye's analysis of soft power failures requires an understanding of how the US policy is perceived in the Arab world. According to Abdelwahab El-Affendi, Arabs perceive that US strategy is, ...focused on American understanding, needs, fears and aspirations, and then proceed[s] to try to shape the world accordingly. Devising a public diplomacy campaign, which has been closely linked and integrated with the military/intelligence apparatus, and billed as a part to the "war on terror" it thus presented an instrumentalist and hegemon[ic] approach, which shows little respect for Muslim intellects or sensibilities and thus is hamstrung from the start... The impression in the region is that the United States is resorting to propaganda, manipulation, and even religious subversion. Until they can establish their credibility, the limited U.S. programs in democratization, public diplomacy, and other reform efforts, will thus appear as a half-hearted campaign to conquer, rather than win, Muslim minds (and no attempt at hearts).¹²

El-Affendi refers specifically to the post 9/11 Bush administration policies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, *Christian Science Monitor* writer Cameron Barr argues that "the roots of this anger lie in US political manipulations in the region during the 1950s and 1960s."¹³ Furthermore, the notable Middle East expert, William Quandt, has said that at least some of the resentment is simply driven by the US role as a superpower. "On the one hand, everyone is awed by US power, but on the other, they distrust it. . . There is a certain inevitability that Middle Easterners will view the United States with suspicion simply because it is the most powerful country in the world—quite apart from its policies."¹⁴

¹⁰ Nye, "US Power and Strategy After Iraq," 62.

¹¹ Nye, "US Power and Strategy After Iraq," 62.

¹² Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "The Conquest of Muslim Hearts and Minds: Perspectives on US Reform and Public Diplomacy Strategies," Working Paper (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press, September 2005), IV.

¹³ Cameron W. Barr, "New US Policies in Mideast Under Scrutiny," *Christian Science Monitor*, Internet Edition, September 13, 2001. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0913/p2s1-uspo.html>>.

¹⁴ William Quandt, "New US Policies for a New Middle East?" in David W. Lesch, ed., *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, 2nd Ed (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 432.

This perception of US-led and endorsed disenfranchisement is promoted by the respective extremist leaders and ideologies of enemy nations to account for inadequacies in their own regimes, forcing the blame not on their own governments, but on the Western World. This process not only undermines accountability in these states, but harms the image of the US. Allowing such a sentiment to fester without a concerted effort to foundationally address it, further suggests that the US is losing the “war of ideas.” The Bush National Security Strategy (March 2006) illustrated this concern by stating,

The War on Terror has been both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas—a fight against the terrorists and against their murderous ideology...In the long run, winning the war on terror means winning the battle of ideas for it’s ideas that can turn the disenfranchised into murderers willing to kill innocent victims.¹⁵

More specifically, Lambert asserts that trauma in the Islamic world contributes to a radically inspired version of the truth which inspires hatred against the West and a misunderstanding of Western values. The trauma he speaks of hinges on four influences: colonialism (representing the West’s ability to conquer the Islamic state), secularism in its Middle Eastern forms (breakup of the Arab nation into states and the resulting authoritarian governments), the reality of military and scientific impotency vis-à-vis the West, and due to past failures to modernize (nationalism, Marxism, Arab socialism and capitalism).¹⁶ All these traumas add up to *resentiment*, defined as “an incurable, persistent feeling of hating and despising...” It’s a “self-poisoning of the mind... [and] tends to come in the form of revenge, hatred, malice, envy...”¹⁷

While resentment applies to the radical agents within Islam, there is also a much more widespread Islamic revival underway. This revival is also driven by the trauma influences mentioned above—and is thus also unfriendly to or suspicious of the West, particularly the US, but it does not necessarily find itself an enemy of the West in the same way as the radicals.¹⁸ Thus, a window of opportunity is available if US defense and foreign policymakers choose to use it.

The ‘war of ideas’ struggles with identifying and engaging several “critical cultural-cognitive dimensions,” failing to successfully employ a policy-making system that engages cultural awareness and understanding, sees patterns on a strategic scale, imports cultural contexts, and exports cultural understanding to enemy nations or entities.¹⁹ This institutional lack of focus on image management has seen US standing plummet around the world, and has undermined political support domestically—there exists a prevailing loss of hope, that the US cannot persuade its enemies in the world of its good intentions.²⁰

“The ways and means of winning [the battle of ideas] are both informed and ultimately restricted by an innate US culture that struggles with democratic ideals seemingly at odds with the use of information to win over hearts and minds even while the enemy maintains no such inhibitions.”²¹ This ‘culture’ construes information operations, even those designed at education, as negative, and it is this bias that must be removed by incorporating image management into foreign policy decisions. The US

¹⁵ *National Security Strategy of the US of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2006), i.

¹⁶ Stephen P. Lambert, *Y: The Sources of Islamic Revolutionary Conduct* (Washington, DC: Joint Military Intelligence College, April 2005), 107-115.

¹⁷ Lambert, 118-119.

¹⁸ Lambert, 116-117.

¹⁹ Christine MacNulty, “Truth, Perception, and Consequences,” US National Intelligence University, Proteus Monograph Series, Vol. 1 (2007), v-vi.

²⁰ Halloran, 4.

²¹ Halloran, 15.

can no longer superficially engage the Islamic culture if it hopes to win a strategic victory among the more moderate forces of reason. Image management is essential to transitioning away from the simplistic orientation of battlefield success to address the foundation of opposition to the US by creating the means for understanding and reconciliation.

The audiences for image management exist both domestically and internationally, and their perceptions are based most directly on the image they associate with diplomacy in all its forms which shape international politics. If they see the US as an aggressor or simply have a negative image due to a lack of education or counter-information, this will undermine overall success. Audience perceptions must be understood and addressed. Given the military context and its influence in foreign policy decisions, the US needs to orient itself more towards influential means of persuading the target population, shifting the perception from one of US military domination, to friendly persuasion. Image management must be married to policy, including military strategy, and *it must* successfully adapt to address future geopolitical struggles.

The Way Forward

The greatest asset the US has at its disposal is communication. The US reigns preeminent in communication technologies and abilities, yet it often ignores those assets and allows terrorist networks and insurgency groups to better communicate their positions as the US provides no counter-perspective. Perhaps because the task seems so overwhelming, the US has yet to employ Nye's inevitable policy conclusions about an overarching soft power focus, but to help ease this transition, it shall be shown through the remaining sections of this essay that communication and a corresponding transparency in the context of discrete and explicit plans are pivotal to an image management consideration—soft power can be employed as image management through specific policy actions, not just a general, non-descriptive strategic orientation.

The necessity of striving to incorporate image management into all levels of defense and foreign policymaking is certainly a monumental challenge; the US must move away from the notion of a “crushing military victory over an opponent” as a primary strategy; rather, policymakers should embrace the ideas of the classical strategists to understand policy as a continuum—the progression of political agendas toward an end.²² Among civilian and military policymakers there seems to be a disconnect between battlefield- and grand-strategy, and joining these two concepts via image management would enhance military success. The US must make image management a priority at all levels of foreign and defense policymaking, not simply a strategic imperative that fails to connect to a soldier, commander, or foreign policymaker's notion of victory.

The remainder of this essay will explore three applications of image management: interests and ideals, executive authority, and religion/culture, in order to more fully explain the concept and as an initial effort to demonstrate its policy application. These are offered as a first look at what's possible in terms of strategy and policy application of image management as a principle, and in the hope that these ideas will stimulate further thinking and debate.

American Ideals and American Interests

The US image in other countries oftentimes dictates whether Americans receive support and admiration or opposition and disrespect. This image is built upon American policy, both real and imagined, as

²² Antulio Echevarria, “Toward an American Way of War” (Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), v-vii.

expressed by understanding specific cases like US efforts to rebuild and democratize Iraq. US image also relies upon American ideals, especially as perceived among peoples with governments or national traditions that reject Western ideologies. The power of the US image is supported by the nation's status as the most powerful country in the modern world. Built upon ideals that include the right to self-determination and personal freedoms for all people, the US government has fallen under close and never-ending international scrutiny for its ability to uphold or fail to uphold those rights abroad. At the same time, it is the duty of the US government to enact policies that address its interests, short and long-term successes benefitting its own economy and national security. The US cannot always pursue its interests to the detriment of its ideals; historically, the two have always been intertwined. Likewise, it is difficult for the US to support its ideals to the exclusion of national interest. The complexity inherent in reconciling ideals and interests is the focus of this section, where an analysis of significant differences between US professed ideals and its actual policies will illustrate a foreign policy weakness of the US image.

The Value of Reconciliation

As the US makes poor choices between balancing interests and ideals, its allies become irritated, disillusioned, and a negative image of the ascendant power of the US propagates among its enemies. The US military's effectiveness in achieving its goals will depend greatly on the preconceived notions of the regional populace. In recent conflicts, the inclinations of the populace have been inexorably linked to the ability of the troops to accomplish the mission.

The American image depends heavily on the reconciliation of its interests and its ideals as foundations for action. If the US supports an ideal vocally, but in practice only pursues it in select situations, the US oftentimes fosters a poor image within both the international and its domestic community, especially if it does not communicate its rationale effectively. The US is only one country, and even with its eminent military, economic, and political power, it can only pursue limited objectives on its own. When the US supports an ideal which it obviously cannot pursue everywhere at once, it must provide its rationale for engaging certain areas before others, lest the domestic and international populations misperceive US intentions. The US must effectively communicate its selection criteria, even when national interests are the primary guide. Despite recent pushes for more international governance, the world still operates largely on the basis of national sovereignty. People generally feel more comfortable and more inclined to show support when nations effectively communicate their intentions, so the US would do well to clearly articulate both its national interests and ideals, and demonstrate how they both fit specific US policies and actions.

Contextual Interests and Ideals

The moral foundation of the Declaration of Independence was largely based upon a set of ideals outlined as the natural rights of the people. Interests, however, play a key role in the survival and betterment of a nation-state. The first American president, George Washington, recognized early in his administration that effective governance meant the pursuit of interests, particularly in foreign policy. When Europe turned to war in order to quell the powerful ideas of the French Revolution, Washington restrained the nation from becoming embroiled in the European conflict. He stated that national interest dictated the neutrality of the US, regardless of American ideals. The US was nowhere near becoming a world power, and the country was hardly even able to pay the debts and arrears accumulated during its war for

independence. No one could legitimately disparage the fledgling nation for refusing to place its uncertain existence in peril, regardless of ideals. That was at the close of the 18th century. At the onset of the 21st Century, the US is unique as a global superpower.

Americans often heard from the George W. Bush Administration that those who wished to do harm to its citizens were motivated by a hatred of who Americans are and what they stand for. Actual hatred of US values is a rarity in the Muslim world. Even Osama bin Laden has spoken to the contrary, noting that he does not attack Sweden when it presents the same ideals and also represents a Western democracy. While bin Laden is not the most reputable source of information, his influence and power captures a large reservoir of anger in the Muslim world which exists apart from al-Qaida and agrees with its sentiments about American policy. According to the Pentagon's Defense Science Board, "Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather they hate our policies."²³

American support of autocratic regimes is one of the most substantial negative influencers upon the US government's image. It is also quite possibly the largest conflict that now exists between interests and ideals in American foreign policy. In the Middle East, the citizenry which full-heartedly supports their respective government is typically a minority.²⁴ Hence, the US encounters so much disapproval partly from its misunderstanding of the general feeling in Muslim countries. "There is no yearning-to-be-liberated-by-the-US groundswell among Muslim societies—*except to be liberated perhaps from what they see as apostate tyrannies that the US so determinedly promotes and defends.*"²⁵

The majority in most Muslim (especially Middle Eastern) states is unimpressed with the way their governments operate and wants change. Polls conducted in the region indicate that the majority of the people want their governments to be more democratic (67% of Muslims polled in Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco, and Indonesia). At the same time, they also want their governments to adhere to and to encourage the populace to respect some form of shari'a law (71% agree strongly or agree somewhat). Shari'a, the Islamic "law of life," took its form in the early years of the Golden Age of Islam and is iconic of an era which continues to remind Middle-Eastern and North-African Muslims of their rich heritage and of the possibility of a restoration of the Golden Age, a sociopolitical goal that endeavors to dissolve 'apostate' monarchial regimes in the region.²⁶

Widespread hope and desire for a restoration of the Golden Age of Islam should not be overlooked when appraising the mindset and beliefs of Muslims in certain regions of the world. The ideal of restoration has deep meaning for Arab Muslims in particular who are fully aware that their once-great civilization has experienced both regression and fragmentation, especially during the colonial era of the late 19th—early 20th century. With a better understanding of what many Muslims want, one can begin to see why the majority of Muslims are not content with the current status-quo in their respective countries, most of which are authoritarian or monarchial. The US lends major support to three such countries in the Middle East: Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. While Jordan's Hashemite Kingdom is vastly more open and free than its neighbors, having initiated democratic reforms, US support of Egypt and Saudi Arabia sustains what many believe to be corrupt governments.

²³ Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2004), 40.

²⁴ Defense Science Board, 40.

²⁵ Defense Science Board, 36.

²⁶ Steven Kull, et al., *Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda*, University of Maryland, World Public Opinion.org, April 24, 2007, 15.
<http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf>

Perception of Hypocrisy between Interests and Ideals

To many Muslims in the Middle East, American policy is a complete contradiction to its professed ideals of freedom and democracy. By supporting unrepresentative regimes, the US government is sending the wrong message to the citizenry—the Arab street. Many Arabs see double-speak and understandably are willing to entertain other beliefs about US intentions. Matters are even more complicated, however, in those countries where the populace is not permitted to speak ill of the government at all, but rather, they are encouraged to speak against the US as if it were the only source of their political frustration and woe. It is both paradoxical and very insightful, then, that the 9/11 hijackers consisted entirely of Egyptians and Saudi Arabians, countries with governments that continue to wield undemocratic power, often irrespective of human rights, over their citizenry; and yet, are countries which the US supports with substantial amounts of capital, both monetary and political.

If the US government wants the Muslim world to recognize that it is interested only in eliminating terrorists and their supporters, any communication to enlighten them of that fact seems to have failed. There is very low support for the US government's message in the Middle East, where 79 percent of Muslims polled believe that the US wants to weaken Islam. Also, 74 percent of Muslims polled either agree strongly or agree somewhat that the American military should withdraw from all Islamic countries.²⁷ The tide of public opinion may not reflect the exact feeling of the entire Islamic world, particularly in Iraq where the poll was not taken, but it presents a potent reminder of how the US tends to be viewed in many Muslim countries. From a Muslim perspective, the US destroyed Afghanistan, then plunged Iraq into chaos. While they are not well-informed about American intentions, actions have spoken louder than words and the US message is perceived as a war against Islam.

There is hence very little that the US can say to comfort Muslims or assuage their fears, at least not without some supportive action. While the US has a keen interest in the Middle East, especially with those countries it gives aid, it should step up its policy of supporting democratic institutions and the will of the people. The US has many allies to gain in that region of the world, and its support of Israel is not necessarily a roadblock to the development of better relations with Islamic countries if it is made clear that the US is simultaneously pursuing a solvent, independent Palestinian state as has been newly emphasized by the Obama administration.

Unconditional American support of autocratic governments, which is ultimately a self-defeating policy, is one of several errors that the US has made while trying to pursue its interests ahead of ideals in this region. While the conflict of interests and ideals inherent in the support of autocratic regimes has had pervasive aftereffects on US image, American credibility in the Middle East struggles in response to Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan did not go as planned when the marshalling of forces to engage Iraq stripped funds from the billions of dollars allocated to restore Afghanistan to self-sufficiency.²⁸

There is a visible conflict between US ideals and interests. The US can continue to pursue a policy of supporting undemocratic regimes or it can begin to demand more democratic progress in exchange for the aid it gives. If the US sincerely encouraged democracy, using aid as a reward for increased participation in government, the US would be able to build a more straightforward, no-nonsense image with the citizenry and begin to motivate support for American policy in the Middle East, building its image in that region of the world. The security and the benefits the US can offer could result in more

²⁷ Kull, 5.

²⁸ Greg Mortenson, *Three Cups of Tea* (New York: Penguin Group Inc, 2006), 290.

healthy political conditions, and autocratic governments would be forced towards increased policies of inclusion.

Recommendations for Improving America's Image/Ideals

In order to foster the right image and improve the effectiveness of American strategy, the US needs to change a few habits. First, it must realize that a country cannot serve national interests nor ideals alone. Today the world has transitioned into a new age characterized by transportation, communications, and information revolutions. The world's countries have become more interconnected, more dependent on each other, and more aware of global issues through technological advancements. Unfortunately, problems have arisen with much more global scope. Globalization has not driven countries into a new world order. Sovereignty remains with the nation-state as the main political unit of the modern age and there is no single governing body over the global commonwealth with legitimate authority and enforcement power to resolve problems that are truly global in nature. Instead, nation-states around the world are responsible for making connections and negotiating issues to determine appropriate solutions.

Since the world still operates so heavily along Westphalian concepts of national sovereignty, and since no legitimate international government exists, nations will continue to pursue national interests. This is expected and acceptable. However, ideals represent the fundamental beliefs upon which solutions to common problems may be based—ideals justify interests, especially in terms of American political culture. US policy-makers must identify and express America's ideals clearly, so that the US and nation-states with similar ideals can work together and ultimately establish more amenable relations. When the US entered Afghanistan, it desired to punish those responsible for American deaths and protect national interests. US goals were very clear and very understandable after intelligence pointed to the Taliban as the harborers of al-Qaida, so other nations in support of these ideals were willing to back the US-led intervention.

Second, the US must strive to better communicate its rationale for its policies and actions in more situations. Before the information revolution, it was less necessary for the US government to inform its population about all the details of its decision-making logic. Now the internet, email, satellite communication, and other technologies have made it possible to reach virtually the entire global population instantaneously. Thus, the evolution of rationales justifying the Iraq war, from ridding Saddam of WMD, to fighting an insurgency, to nation-building, left outsiders wondering about the real purpose of US intentions in an oil-rich region. With added emphasis on international cooperation and common solutions today, the US cannot afford to omit or misrepresent its intentions or motives. Communication is key in the era of globalization, and it works best when it can effectively attest to policies backed by commonly supported values.

For centuries, statesmen desired to maintain substantial secrecy regarding foreign affairs. In a political system based on national sovereignty, competition compelled nations to withhold information that jeopardized their own advantage. Before the information revolution, a nation could more easily hide its true intentions. Although certain issues must warrant restricted public disclosure for security reasons, the US administration must realize today's increased expectations for communication. The global community has more information available at its fingertips, so now citizens can hold their governments more accountable for actions and can demand more transparent explanations. Conflicts prior to Afghanistan and Iraq never received as much media attention. Streaming video, imbedded reporters, and rapid transportation have allowed the entire world to know more about the progress of these campaigns

and to offer more criticism than at any other time in the past. Image management works best when ideals are married to interests and the global community is suitably convinced.

The Presidential Image

The American President, the Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces, is the highest representation of the American image, the chief foreign policy maker and strategist. As has been illustrated, the American image is a means of gaining or losing both foreign and domestic approval. Thus, the President represents the policy, people, and chosen way of life for American citizens. The President must act as both a political and ceremonial leader, for a good image generates approval and approval produces political support. On the contrary, a bad image enhances the potential for conflict with foreign nations, especially those of different cultures. In the case of the recently retired George W. Bush, he represented American conduct in the war on terror to the rest of the world and his image was critical in gaining public support. Unfortunately, Bush's domestic approval ratings plummeted from 87 percent in September 2001 to only 32 percent by May 2007 with marked influence on America's image abroad.²⁹

Presidential Influence

In general, literature written on the President rarely analyzes the President's image as perceived by the international and domestic community. Instead, most focus on his relationship with formal government institutions. In his book *White House Images and Realities*, Hamilton writes, "Abstractly an image [of the President] is appearance, likeness, or semblance; an impression formed by the mind's eye, it may or may not be illusory."³⁰ Opinion polls from 2008 illustrate a decline in positive reactions to this image, reflecting negatively on American foreign policy in the war against terror.³¹ One of the most pertinent aspects of executive image directly relates to international acceptance and support of American policies. The President's image is often openly translated into the image of the nation as a whole. As the President loses support, so also do American interests and policies. Doug Miller, president of Globescan, Global public opinion and stakeholder research firm, states, "Our research makes very clear that the reelection of President Bush has further isolated America from the world... it will continue to erode America's good name, and hence its ability to effectively influence world affairs."³²

Investigating such an assertion, it is clear President George W. Bush failed to use image to his advantage in promoting America's effort to fight the war against terror. This image management failure can be expressed by analyzing the cultural gap between Western and Middle Eastern societies, which has had a profound effect on the domestic and international perceptions of the American Way of War. For example, language alone presents a considerable barrier, not only to the dissemination and encouragement of democratic policy, but also to the day-to-day military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Being able to understand one another, especially in another language, often equates to cultural acceptance. The image of a leader must be one interested in the culture and concerns of a major portion of his community or his target audience. When any American president visits a foreign nation, foreign dignitaries most often speak to him in English, creating the image that the President—and by association, the rest of the American population—is ignorant of their language and culture. The language barrier generates a

²⁹ "Historical Bush Approval Ratings," University of Minnesota online graphic, June 6, 2008.
<<http://www.hist.umn.edu/~ruggles/Approval.htm>>

³⁰ Holman Hamilton, *White House Images & Realities* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1958), 58.

³¹ Jaime Holguin, "Polls: World Not Pleased With Bush," *CBS News Online*, March 4, 2004.
<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/03/04/world/main604135.shtml>>

³² Quoted in Holguin.

considerable image of ignorance of Middle Eastern culture and tradition, thereby contributing to a negative image of America.

Roosevelt's Example

In the book *President, Roles and Powers*, author Daniel Boorstin discusses the concept of using executive image by consulting President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's example.³³ Analyzing how Roosevelt was the first "nationally advertised" President, Boorstin explores how Roosevelt possessed a genius for using radio broadcasts to his advantage, thereby creating a never before seen sense of intimacy between the American people and their President. Prior to his presidential term, communication from the President to the people was both infrequent and highly ceremonial.³⁴ With both the advent of this new communication tool and FDR's gift of executive image know-how, "the voice of the President was a voice from kitchen tables, from the counters of bars and lunchrooms, and the corners of living rooms."³⁵ Thus, Roosevelt developed an image of consideration, one of a President both professional and thoughtful.

In a study published in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, researchers Matthew Baum and Samuel Kernell analyze the effects of economic class and popular support for President Roosevelt in both war and peace. The authors emphasize that "American presidents have long viewed going public as a way to replenish or expand their support in pursuit of preferred policies. Some research even suggests that public appeals may enhance presidents' ability to successfully employ force abroad."³⁶ Roosevelt flawlessly demonstrated his understanding of this concept through the use of his famous "Fireside Chats" to the American public during World War II.³⁷

The simple act of communication did wonders in building the President's public image, both domestically and abroad. Promoting a positive image for himself through the simple means of communication resulted in an actual, sustained increase in approval ratings from 53 percent in September 1938, prior to entering the war, to 79 percent in December 1941 after declaring war on Japan and Germany.³⁸ Roosevelt used that era's communication revolution—the radio—to boost his own image and successfully aligned both the American and allied public towards supporting the war effort. But another important consideration of FDR's image management was his appointment of the first press secretary. With the advent of the press secretary, "No longer did the press await 'statements' from the White House; it could prod the President when he was reticent, and focus attention on embarrassing questions."³⁹ The new relationship to the public forged by FDR forced future generations of American presidents to rely on experts to help read the collective opinions of the masses, creating a need for reactive leadership that consults the likes and dislikes of the public in order to make a politically confident decision.

³³ Daniel Boorstin, "Selling the President to the People," *President, Roles and Powers* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), 263.

³⁴ Boorstin, 264.

³⁵ Boorstin, 269.

³⁶ Matthew A. Baum, and Samuel Kernell, "Economic Class and Popular Support for Franklin Roosevelt in War and Peace," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* (Vol. 65, No. 2, 2001), 212.

³⁷ Baum and Kernell, 212.

³⁸ Baum and Kernell, 216.

³⁹ Boorstin, 266.

A testament to his ability to garner support for World War II, historians consistently rank FDR among the nation's top five presidents and "his sustained popularity throughout his presidency defies research suggesting war and economic hardships depress approval ratings."⁴⁰

Such was not the experience of President Jimmy Carter (1977-80), witnessed by an "aggravated sense of anxiety and helplessness, coupled with guilt as well, for having failed to take the appropriate collective action," resulting in a perception of failure for his presidency.⁴¹ President Carter had "the most negative press of any twentieth-century president during his time in office."⁴² Carter's inability to improve his negative image led to decreased support domestically and internationally. The executive's negative image spiraled downward into a position of incapability to fulfill American objectives in Afghanistan and Iran. Carter's presidency is often blamed for the energy crisis, oil embargos, hostage situations, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, recession, high interest rates and inflation.⁴³

Recommendations for Presidential Image Management

Clearly, the executive branch is in the best position to manage the image of America in the world, capable of improving or encumbering domestic and international approval. Interestingly, newly elected President Barak Obama has already done much to improve America's image in the world simply through his election. Being the son of a Kenyan and Muslim father who gave him an Arabic name, his image already has clout in the Middle East.

It is imperative that President Obama and those who succeed him portray an image that demonstrates understanding and considers issues associated with the cultural gap when making foreign policy decisions. The immense job of image management does not have to and should not fall entirely on the President's shoulders, but there must be a constant and ongoing pursuit for support. As history demonstrates, all future presidents must recognize their role as a representative of the American image and the gravity that image has in necessarily obtaining both international and domestic approval.

Images of Islam and Christianity

Another key aspect of image management involves influencing how other groups or people view the US in terms of religiosity. The purpose of this section is to explore the concept and importance of America's religious image, investigate Islamic perceptions of that image, and illustrate how America should take positive action to reconstruct that image.

Religious image is interesting in that it transcends a temporal context, making it a relatively timeless, yet complex subject. In *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, a 2002 study on Osama bin Laden, (then anonymous) Michael Scheuer discusses the perceived conflict that exists between Western and Middle Eastern religions, noting how for some Middle Easterners, this is an intense ideological and religious struggle whereas the "US and other Western leaders describe bin Laden as [strictly] a terrorist problem, not a religious issue."⁴⁴ According to Scheuer, this is a potentially dangerous trend because, in bin Laden's own words, "This war is fundamentally religious."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Baum and Kernell, 215.

⁴¹ Dan Thomas and Larry R. Baas, "Ronald Reagan in the Public Mind," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 1993), 55-75.

⁴² Thomas and Baas, 4.

⁴³ Thomas and Baas, 5.

⁴⁴ Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2003), 17.

⁴⁵ Scheuer, 17.

Perceptions and Insights

There are two general themes that emerge concerning the perceived conflict with religious image: the first concerns claims as to how outsiders see America from a religious perspective, and the second concerns how the religious views and behaviors of Americans affect a country's overall image of the US. Scheuer paints a rather disturbing picture of how the Muslim community views America and the West: "There are tens and perhaps hundreds of millions of Muslims who, like bin Laden, hate the US for what they believe is its consistently anti-Islamic behavior."⁴⁶ A 2007 *Economist* article paints a similarly hostile view, illustrating how the American population is perceived as wicked and against God.⁴⁷ A prevelance of articles, editorials, and critiques suggest that other groups view the US in similar ways, and that America's lack of formal policy concerning religion may be the root of these perceptions—there is a failure to address religious differences in an international context and this leads to misunderstandings which may also contribute to conflict. The secular nature of the US government, clearly delineating politics from religion, leaves it unable to embrace its own religiosity as a foundation of moral and ethical conduct, whereas a religious-based foundation could lend credibilty to US foreign policy, particularly in regions of the world governed by religious views.

Several religious scholars have hyposthesized that a perception of a lack of morals in American foreign policy between World War II and 1988 may have produced an unfavorable image of American morality since US foreign policy was guided more by interests, or realpolitik, than ideals during the Cold War era.⁴⁸ Other scholars discuss how and why ethics in US foreign policy, mainly based on religious beliefs, affect others' views and how these perceptions both help and hurt the US. They assert that it helps in terms of creating an ethical standard for conduct, but hurts with respect to treating a Christian standard as a universal regulation to guide conflict for non-Christian regions of the globe.⁴⁹ Aslam Abdallah further describes how different types of media have swayed the Western view of Islam in varying directions, thus creating religious divisions.⁵⁰ It seems many problems stem from the fact that Americans do not recognize or engage the power that religion holds in other countries, if even as a cultural device to heal divisions and create avenues for compromise among predominantly moderate religious communities.

The Importance of Religious Image Today

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wrote to President Bush, "Whether we like it or not, the world is gravitating towards faith in the Almighty."⁵¹ If Ahmadinejad's statement accurately captures a developing trend in geopolitical thinking, increasing the credibility of a nation will soon be defined by how it handles issues of religion at home and abroad, and how religion guides policy-making. *The Economist* writes:

⁴⁶ Scheuer, 16.

⁴⁷ "In God's Name: A Special Report on Religion and Public Life," *The Economist*, November 3, 2007, 11.

⁴⁸ Os Guinness, "A World Safe for Diversity: Religious Liberty and the Rebuilding of the Public Philosophy," in *Religion in American Public Life: Living with Our Deepest Differences*, Azizah Y. al-Hibri, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Charles C. Haynes, Eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 137-150.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Moore, "A Framework for Understanding Fundamentalism," in *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture*, Claire Hoertz Badaracco, Ed. (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), 88.

⁵⁰ Aslam Abdallah. "Post-9/11 Media and Muslim Identity in American Media," In *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture*, Claire Hoertz Badaracco, Ed. (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), 127.

⁵¹ "The New Wars of Religion," *The Economist*, November 3, 2007, 15-16.

Phillip Jenkins, one of America's best scholars of religion, claims that when historians look back at this [the 21st] century, they will probably see religion as 'the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood, and, of course, conflicts and wars.' If the first seven years are anything to go by, Mr. Jenkins may well turn out to be right.⁵²

Historical and projected data concerning growth in numbers of believers in certain faiths show Christianity and Islam as the two fastest growing religions in the world, with projections of 33 percent and 21 percent of Earth's total population in 2050 worshipping those religions respectively.⁵³ Such growth is potentially destabilizing considering current perceptions: 67 percent of Muslims have an unfavorable opinion of the US, and 75 percent of Muslims oppose the US fight against terrorism.⁵⁴ Clearly, the possibilities for an intensely intimate and potentially combative atmosphere are staggering, which makes religious image management all the more necessary and a prudent consideration for foreign and defense policy. The US can no longer afford to phrase the current conflict in Iraq or against terror as a non-religious struggle—the extremists in the Middle East have put it into a religious context, and it therefore must be addressed as such.

Michael Scheuer observed that Americans are willingly in denial about such an orientation to the general nature of American beliefs and characteristics, stating:

There are few if any absolutes; most people think as we do, share our values, admire us, and want to emulate us; wars can be fought and won with few or no casualties; foreigners benefit from US foreign policy and should be grateful for our efforts; and there are issues about which it is not wise to talk for fear of being labeled as prejudiced. Contemporary Americans are also impatient, quickly frustrated, and have short attention spans; they accept being told how and what to think by the media; often form views on first appearances; are deeply cynical about their own and foreign leaders; have a marginal knowledge of their history and almost none of others'... and a perfect willingness to let the world go its own way if the world will leave us alone.⁵⁵

Though Scheuer's views about the US electorate may not be as universal as he suggests, certainly US policy lacks a religious focus regarding foreign affairs. Madeleine Albright recalls evidence of denial "in the late 1990's when a diplomat asked despairingly, 'Who would believe that we would be dealing with a religious conflict near the end of the 20th century?'"⁵⁶ Of course, the terror attacks of September 2001 awakened the US to this reality. A religiously-inspired threat drives radical Islamist organizations and media focus upon their actions and intents contributes to much of the misperception guided by a combination of US response—percieved as a war against Islam, as well as a lack of knowledge of US religious culture—percieved as a godless, decadent society threatening the Muslim way of life.

⁵² "In God's Name," 4.

⁵³ "In God's Name," 5.

⁵⁴ "In God's Name," 4.

⁵⁵ Scheuer, 15.

⁵⁶ "In God's Name," 5.

The Current US Religious Image

America's domestic religious image does not enjoy the same networking strengths as its enemies, yet it remains a vital topic in order to undo the stereotypes mentioned above. America's founders had the foresight to understand that religion is a divisive subject, so they created a provision in the First Amendment allowing for religious freedom while also separating the spheres of church and state. In order to effectively shape its global religious image, the US must first recognize that despite this separation, its country's religious characteristics have influenced and continues to influence its policy and consequently, should also contribute to a religious image. In other words, an American religious image is known and understood within the US, but it is not widely understood abroad. This stems, in part, out of the American passion for political correctness which is tied to the separation of church and state. Americans do not want to openly discuss their religious beliefs, except with those in their own congregations, at least at the personal, private level.

Still, a great number of Americans enjoy gathering collectivity through organized religion. Sixty percent of Americans said that "God plays an important role in their lives," and 40 percent attend church at least once a week.⁵⁷ Many religious organizations often have some association or affiliation with a place of worship. Religious centers become "a focal point of information about issues that bear on a collective identity, including political issues... It means that politicians...have a ready-made platform from which to appeal to a broad constituency. Inevitably, the religious and the political come together."⁵⁸ Inexorably, Americans do comprehend the influence and power religious leaders have in effectively mobilizing their groups, which shape much of civil society and influences the ethical values held by large numbers of Americans.⁵⁹ This collective power that influences American politics, especially in terms of moral dilemmas, can be harnessed if it is exported in the sense that the world needs to know that American society is value-based.

Religious Image Abroad

Unfortunately, there is the alter-image of crusading Christians with designs to convert or destroy the Islamic world, which will never positively impact US relations in their regions. But the greater fear of many Muslims is that Americans will increase their influence in the Islamic world and corrupt the population with Western culture. They view this possibility as a threat not only to their way of life but to the legitimate spiritual well-being of their communities and children. While America is certainly not a land devoid of morals and religion, as discussed above, the American media, which is watched, listened to, and read around the world, often sends a different message, reflected in both mainstream as well as low-budget, critically shunned Hollywood movies that have their only market in the Third World.

The image of a godless America, spawned by American pop culture and media, is one that must be overcome through image management. Though perhaps straying from political correctness, American religious and ethical values must be promoted to counter the Hollywood stereotypes. American is a nation with values, inhabited by a God-fearing majority, many of whom attend church and promote ethical norms like those of other faiths around the world. This more correct image of America should replace that portrayed by Hollywood and thus produce a positive influence on US foreign policy abroad.

⁵⁷ "In God's Name," 9.

⁵⁸ Shibley Telhami, "Between Faith and Ethics" in *Liberty and Power: A Dialogue on Religions & U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World*, E.J. Dionne Jr., Jean Bethke Elshtain and Kayla Drogosz, Eds. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 71-93.

⁵⁹ Telhami, 71-93.

Recommendations for Religious Image Management

Freedom of religion has promoted an effective equilibrium between religion and politics among the American populace; the US should attempt to bring this fact to light in other cultures, effectively showing that the US is accepting of all beliefs. “America has made scant use of its own Muslim population. The people of Iran and Pakistan have no idea that American Muslims are free.”⁶⁰ The US must simply get the truth out—let the world know that freedom of religion gives American Muslims the same right to practice as Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. And the truth that religion is widely practiced among Americans is also important—the US is a God-fearing society much more so than a godless one. Values and ethics do matter and are based upon religious foundations.

William Martin expresses that deep-rooted fears for the preservation of religion in many Muslim countries are legitimate, and the US must take them into consideration with the image it projects:

Their fears, not greatly different from those voiced by religious conservatives in [the US], are legitimate, real and powerful. Instead of assuming that other, ‘real’ motives are the only ones that need attention, diplomats need to face these fears openly, acknowledge their seriousness, make it clear that the same concerns are shared by millions of Americans, and offer whatever reassurance is required to help them believe that the US is not an enemy of Islam.⁶¹

Martin goes on to discuss that the US should consult and enlist the support of religious leaders in these countries as a way to manage its image. These leaders often have a better understanding of how their culture and religion work than the policymakers, and this provides the means for reconciliation. The US should consider using religious leaders more extensively. indeed, the US should consider sending its own religious leaders in an official capacity to meet with the religious leaders of other nation-states.

Sending a religious leader, or “let[ting] faith speak unto faith,”⁶² may prevent the type of misunderstanding that plagues the US religious image today. Such meetings between American (be they Christian, Muslim or Jewish) and Islamic religious leaders would project an image that the US is not threatening their values or way of life, rather it would legitimize them and it could provide the US with many other options otherwise unavailable—options that the US may not be aware of at this stage of investigation. Martin notes that American diplomats should always be on the lookout for opportunities to consult and enlist the support of religious leaders, both because they often possess more power, in terms of legitimacy, than political leaders, and they “may be able to draw on the best of their respective traditions to create something positive that might otherwise have been missed.”⁶³

Another option for harnessing a positive religious image is to increase the importance placed on and attention given to American missionary aid in foreign countries. “It is also important to recognize that America’s face to the world is represented not just by what the US government does abroad but also what individual Americans do. In this respect... the very long-standing missionary movement in the US... [goes] all the way back to 1806.”⁶⁴ In this capacity, Americans and especially American churches

⁶⁰ “In God’s Name,” 22.

⁶¹ Martin, 327-359.

⁶² “In God’s Name,” 22.

⁶³ Martin, 327-359.

⁶⁴ James Lindsay, “Morality is Really Hard,” in *Liberty and Power: A Dialogue on Religions & U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World*, E.J. Dionne Jr., Jean Bethke Elshtain and Kayla Drogosz, Eds. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 100-105.

have an opportunity to positively impact other regions of the world and improve the US image with those people, not explicitly recruiting or forcing a religious identity, but showing the humanitarian and moral foundation of American religiosity.

The US government and population must not ignore the influences religion has in its government, even if driven by a sense of political correctness. The US should embrace the fact that it is made up of religiously-based values and promote those values to positively affect its image worldwide. Recognizing the importance of religion for others, America should work with foreign religious leaders to prevent misperceptions of its intentions, policies, and actions, improve its religious image, and open up unknown avenues of communication and cooperation.

Conclusion

This essay does not provide an inclusive list of subjects that can and need to be evaluated in the context of image management. Rather, it is a sampling to demonstrate the relevancy of image management as a foreign policy and military strategy tool to improve the US ability to deal with its strategic interests. With new technologies and an understood need to engage others culturally, policy requires more than a foundational understanding of US diplomacy and the relevance of soft power tools. Image management must become a fundamental component of all foreign policy considerations and decisions to insure the long-term success of American foreign and security policy.

Having examined three specific issues and considerations for American strategy, it is easy to see how valuable a simple, yet monumentally important image management consideration can be—the true measure of a policy’s success cannot be measured from the policymaker, but by those who see and live the implications of that policy. This analysis began by defining image management as the synergistic application of US diplomacy doctrine with Joseph Nye’s conclusions about soft power, followed up by the challenges of perception and consensus unique to the Middle East. Thereafter, American values and interests were addressed in terms of image management. This constructed the background for a discussion of the most preeminent representation of the American image, the US President.

The discussion of religious image management revealed the importance of addressing the current challenges to US policy in a religious context, not ignoring an issue the enemy wishes to engage. By consulting religious figures and knowledgeable personnel, the US can mitigate the consequences to its image caused by ignoring or generalizing religious considerations.

In conclusion, image must become a cornerstone to foreign policy in order that the US may promote greater credibility, legitimacy, and influence because image directly impacts the effectiveness of any strategy employed to secure national interests. The US should be poised to introduce a 21st century orientation to information operations with specific image management considerations—a simple, strategic tool that embraces a need to reform policy-making without upsetting the foreign policy process. The best manner in which to apply this understanding to broad foreign policy considerations is to better marry interests and ideals—to clearly espouse the motivations for US action and further its credibility, if not also its legitimacy. Perhaps such an image management consideration would invalidate unwise policy decisions in the future, removing a necessity to mitigate negative image consequences.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, the Department of Defense or that of the US Government or any other of its agencies.

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