United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

July 2007

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research

GAO

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

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Accountability·Integrity·Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of GAO-07-904, a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. strategic communication efforts are supported by media and audience research efforts conducted by the State Department (State), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), Department of Defense (DOD), and Open Source Center (OSC). GAO examined (1) how research is used to support U.S. strategic communication objectives; and (2) how agencies identify end-user needs, assess end-user satisfaction, and share available research. GAO examined program documents and met with key officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) the Secretary of State formally adopt a research-focused, "campaign-style" approach to thematic communications; (2) State, BBG, DOD, and OSC systematically assess user needs and satisfaction; (3) the Secretary of State, in conjunction with other members of the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, establish protocols for sharing audience research information as well as create a research staff forum and clearinghouse of U.S. government-sponsored research; and (4) the Secretary of Defense ensure that planned steps to improve the coordination of media monitoring activities are implemented. Agencies agreed with these recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-904.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford, (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Agencies rely on an array of media monitoring products to support daily communication activities. DOD and USAID use program-specific research to design, implement, and evaluate the impact of thematic communication efforts created to influence the attitudes and behaviors of target audiences. In contrast, we found that State has generally not adopted a research-focused approach to implement its thematic communication efforts. For example, in a recent major thematic communication effort, 18 posts participating in an ongoing pilot initiative developed country-level communication plans focusing on the broad theme of countering extremism. Although broad attitudinal polling is available to inform these efforts, these plans were not supported by the types of program-specific research inherent in the "campaign-style" approach utilized by both DOD and USAID, which stipulates that communication efforts should follow a logical and predictable series of steps. The pilot country plans GAO reviewed did not include program-specific research such as attitudinal polling of specific target groups, focus group data on which messages would most resonate with target audiences, or detailed media environment analyses that could provide the basis for developing in-depth information dissemination strategies. State commitment to the development of a defined approach to thematic communications, centered on program-specific research, has been absent. However, there is evidence to suggest that State's approach is changing. A June 2007 interagency communication strategy developed under the guidance of State's Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs describes a communication process model similar to the campaign-style approach, with the major exception that it does not describe how and to what extent research should be used to support each step in the communication process.

U.S. government agencies conducting research on foreign audiences currently do not have systematic processes in place to assess end-user needs or satisfaction pertaining to research products, or to coordinate or share research. In the absence of systematic processes to understand the needs or level of satisfaction of policymakers, managers, and program staff, agencies generally rely on ad hoc feedback mechanisms, such as conversations with individual users and irregular e-mail submissions. Agencies utilize certain mechanisms to coordinate and share research information, for example, the Open Source Center aggregates media monitoring data from more than 30 organizations on its Web site. However, efforts to coordinate and share audience research data are hampered by the lack of interagency protocols for sharing information, a dedicated forum to periodically bring key research staff together to discuss common concerns across all topics of interest, and a clearinghouse for collected research. DOD is currently reviewing the organization and effectiveness of its media monitoring efforts and agency officials indicated that an improved approach to both internal and external coordination will be developed once a department-wide inventory of media monitoring activities is completed.

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United States Government Accountability Office

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Abbreviations

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CENTCOM	Central Command
DOD	Department of Defense
ECA	Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau
EUCOM	European Command
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GIIT	Global Information and Influence Team
IIP	International Information Programs Bureau
INR	Intelligence and Research Bureau
ISP	International Strategic Priorities
OSC	Open Source Center
PAO	Public Affairs Officer
PDEO	Public Diplomacy Evaluation Office
PSYOP	psychological operations
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
R&A	research and analysis
SARA	Strategic Audience Research Archive
SCL	Strategic Communications Laboratory
SSD	Strategic Studies Detachment
State	State Department
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WHA	Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau

United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

July 18, 2007

The Honorable Richard G. Lugar
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

Dear Senator Lugar:

The attitudes of foreign citizens toward the United States have worsened
in recent years, with negative implications for America's national security
and economic interests. Communication efforts designed to reverse this
trend depend, in part, on the availability of in-depth research on the
foreign audiences the United States is seeking to inform, engage, and
influence. Led by the Department of State (State), U.S. communication
efforts encompass a range of disciplines, including public diplomacy,
public affairs, psychological operations, and U.S. international
broadcasting. While these communication disciplines vary in terms of their
target audiences, objectives, and tactics, they share a common need for
both broad and targeted research to develop and implement
communication strategies, programs, and campaigns and to assess the
impact of such government outreach efforts. Government-sponsored
research provides critical data to policymakers and government
communicators on a range of topics, including what foreign media are
saying about the United States, foreign audience attitudes toward the
United States, root causes for negative views about the United States, how
foreign citizens access and use information, and what messages will most
likely resonate with target audiences and lead to desired attitude and
behavior changes.

We reviewed current research activities of State and other key agencies
seeking to communicate with foreign audiences. Specifically, we
examined (1) how U.S. government agencies use research to support their
strategic communication objectives; and (2) how agencies identify end-
user needs, assess end-user satisfaction, and coordinate the sharing of
available research. We also provide information in appendix IV on a new
strategic communication model adopted by the British government that
could help broadly inform U.S. operations and related research activities.

To accomplish our objectives, we reviewed agency documentation pertaining to the scope and quality of conducted research. We conducted interviews at State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), and the Department of Defense (DOD) and met with senior managers, research directors, and relevant program and budget staff. In addition, we met with officials from the Open Source Center (OSC), which provides media translation and analysis services to the interagency community, and officials from the Central Intelligence Agency's Global Information and Influence Team (GIIT), which seeks to promote interagency dialogue on research issues of interest to government communicators.

We examined a number of agency-specific communication efforts in Washington, D.C., to see how research is used to help develop communication strategies and programs and evaluate results. We also obtained information from State public affairs officers in Germany, Jordan, India, Indonesia, Niger, Peru, the Philippines, and Yemen to obtain a perspective on how research supports communication efforts in the field. Finally, we convened a group of senior agency managers, research directors, and representatives from academia and the private sector to broadly discuss key challenges facing government communicators and potential solutions to these challenges.

We conducted fieldwork at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, where we met with psychological operations (PSYOP) research support staff, as well as in London, where we met with a range of government and private-sector officials to discuss British government communication strategies and related research efforts. We conducted our work from May 2006 through May 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

Agencies use a variety of media monitoring and audience research to support daily as well as mid- to long-term communication activities. To support daily communication activities designed to explain U.S. actions and decisions to foreign audiences, U.S. agencies rely on an array of media monitoring products which capture what is being reported about the United States overseas. These daily activities include developing speaking points, tracking and countering misinformation, and gauging the success of outreach efforts. We found no evidence to suggest that agencies suffered from a shortage of media monitoring data. Agencies use research to support thematic outreach initiatives, which use a central theme or message to influence the attitudes or behaviors of target audiences. While

DOD and USAID use extensive program-specific research to design, implement, and evaluate the impact of their thematic communication efforts, State generally does not. For example, 18 posts participating in a State-led pilot country initiative recently developed country-level strategic plans focusing on the broad goal of countering extremism. We reviewed most of these plans and found that they were not supported by the type of program-specific research inherent in the "campaign-style" approach to thematic communication utilized by both DOD and USAID, which stipulates that communication efforts should follow a logical and predictable series of steps. In June 2007, the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee[1] released a U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Communication to guide and inform U.S. communication efforts led by State. The strategy describes a communication process model that is similar to the campaign-style approach in terms of outlining key steps in the communication process. Formal recognition of this model is a positive development and opens the possibility that State communication staff will begin to adopt a more rigorous approach toward their thematic communication efforts. However, the model remains a suggested tool and does not describe how and to what extent research should be used to support each step in the communication process.

Agencies conducting research do not have systematic processes in place to assess whether they are meeting their users' needs,[2] and efforts to coordinate and share collected information are limited. Agencies generally assess user satisfaction through ad hoc methods and based on anecdotal information, such as conversations with individual users and irregular feedback submitted via e-mail. As a result, these agencies have no assurance that their work meets the needs of most of their users. Agencies rely on several mechanisms to exchange information gathered through their research activities. For example, the OSC shares media monitoring products from multiple agencies on its Web site and provides liaisons to other agencies to promote the sharing and exchange of information and monitoring techniques. In addition, State aggregates its audience polling data on a central Web site available to the interagency community. Despite these mechanisms, agency officials expressed general concern about the

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[1]The Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee was formed in 2006 to help focus and coordinate U.S. public diplomacy efforts.

[2]Users of research products include senior-level managers, policymakers, country-level staff, and other individual analysts.

limited sharing of information and coordination across agencies. Government efforts to share and coordinate research data are hampered by the lack of interagency protocols for sharing information, a forum to periodically bring key research staff together to discuss common concerns across all topics of interest, and a clearinghouse for collected information. DOD officials and a new DOD strategic communication plan specifically highlighted the need for evaluating and improving DOD's coordination of media monitoring activities, both within the department and with other U.S. agencies. Major improvements are planned in both these areas.

To help ensure that State's outreach initiatives are informed by targeted research, we recommend that the Secretary of State adopt a research-based "campaign-style" approach to implement thematic communication and provide guidance on using "actionable" research to inform these efforts. To improve the extent to which the government's research efforts meet users' needs, we recommend that State, BBG, DOD, and the OSC implement systematic strategies to assess user needs and satisfaction. To facilitate the coordination and sharing of collected information within the U.S. government, we recommend that the Secretary of State, with other members of the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, develop protocols for sharing audience research information, establish a research staff forum, and create a clearinghouse of U.S. government-sponsored research. We also recommend that the Secretary of Defense ensure that planned improvements to DOD's internal and external media monitoring coordination efforts are implemented.

In commenting on a draft of this report, State, DOD, and the BBG generally agreed with our findings and recommendations. State noted certain practical concerns associated with wholesale adoption of the campaign-style approach to thematic communication. The BBG endorsed the need to establish a clearinghouse of U.S. government-sponsored research but added that the Board reserves the right to withhold selected research information meant for internal use only. USAID had no comments. Agency comments are reprinted in appendixes V through VII.

Background

Prior reports by GAO[3] and the Defense Science Board[4] have noted the importance of actionable research to guide and inform U.S. government strategic communication efforts directed at foreign audiences. Actionable research is research that supports specific information campaigns and provides the basis for selecting a defined target audience, developing customized messages, designing tailored information dissemination strategies, and assessing whether agency communication objectives have been achieved.[5] In contrast, more generic research efforts, such as broad national attitude polls, can provide a useful context for U.S. communication activities, although such research does not provide a meaningful basis for developing and implementing targeted information campaigns designed to achieve specific communication objectives.

Government Focuses on Three Types of Research

Actionable and generic research is generated through (1) audience polls, studies, and focus groups; (2) media environment analyses to understand media outlets, industry leaders, and preferences in a given country; and (3) daily monitoring of media outlets around the world to determine what is being said about the United States. Detailed program descriptions and resource commitment data for each of these categories is provided in appendixes II and III.

Audience Polls and Studies

State and BBG are the primary producers of audience research among U.S. government agencies, but other agencies also conduct their own audience research activities. State conducts and contracts for broad public opinion polling and focus groups in over 50 countries each year through its Office of Research,[6] which has an annual research budget of approximately $3

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[3]GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, GAO-06-535 (Washington, D.C.: May 3, 2006) and *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, GAO-03-951 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2003).

[4]Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board on Strategic Communication* (Washington, D.C.: September 2004).

[5]Without such actionable research, agency communication efforts represent little more than educated guesses of what is likely to influence foreign cultures where target audiences have views of the United States that are potentially informed by a complex mix of psychological, historical, political, cultural, religious, and other factors.

[6]State's Office of Research is located in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research but receives funding from the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and serves members of the intelligence community and public diplomacy staff.

million.[7] BBG, with a research budget of about $10 million per year, has a contract with a private sector company to conduct audience surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and listener and monitor panels to support its broadcasting activities throughout the world.[8] Additionally, while USAID does not have a central research office that conducts audience research, staff at some missions contract for polling and focus groups to support specific, targeted public awareness campaigns. Finally, DOD's 4th Psychological Operations Group Strategic Studies Detachment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the Joint Psychological Operations Support Element at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, conduct target audience analyses to inform DOD's psychological operations (PSYOP) efforts; moreover, some of the combatant commands have recently initiated their own polling and focus group efforts.

Media Environment Analyses

State, BBG, and OSC all conduct media environment analyses. All three agencies have conducted specific studies of media environments around the world, both at the country and regional levels. For example, State recently commissioned studies of the media in seven European countries that examined the overall media environments, assessed television and radio usage, profiled key television channels and radio stations, and identified influential programs. Additionally, BBG and State both maintain electronic archives of country-level media environment information.

Media Monitoring Activities

Several U.S. agencies monitor foreign media outlets, including print and broadcast media and the Internet. OSC conducts the bulk of U.S. government media monitoring activities, although DOD, State, USAID, and BBG all conduct media monitoring as well. OSC analysts both in the United States and in overseas bureaus provide a variety of media monitoring products, including translations, as well as summaries and analysis of media coverage. Additionally, multiple entities within DOD, including the combatant commands, conduct and contract for media monitoring. For instance, in 2006, DOD's Strategic Command awarded a contract for media monitoring focused on the Global War on Terror, which is worth up to $67.8 million over multiple years. Within State, two offices

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[7]State also recently requested an additional $2 million to begin conducting further, more targeted opinion polling to inform its efforts to reach target audiences and develop effective messages in a limited number of countries.

[8]BBG's contractor, InterMedia, conducts audience research in support of the International Broadcasting Bureau, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia. These offices each also maintain a small research staff of their own.

conduct media monitoring in Washington, D.C., the Media Reaction Division of State's Office of Research, which focuses on editorial commentaries in print media; and the Rapid Response Unit, which monitors foreign media to inform U.S. responses to significant stories and issues overseas. Some State and USAID field staff also conduct media monitoring, often focused on topics of particular importance in their specific embassies or countries. Finally, one of BBG's grantees conducts some media monitoring in the countries in which it broadcasts.

Three Categories of Strategic Communication Efforts

Agency research efforts support three categories of communication as defined by Joseph Nye—one of America's leading academics on strategic communication efforts used to advance U.S. business and national security interests. Nye divides U.S. strategic communication efforts into daily communications, outreach initiatives related to specific themes, and long-term relationship building efforts in support of broader U.S. strategic communication objectives.[9] Daily communications involve explaining U.S. foreign and domestic policy decisions to the media, as well as preparing for public response to crises and countering misinformation. Thematic outreach initiatives focus on communicating simple themes, such as the shared values of the United States and the Muslim world. According to Nye, these themes can be developed using a campaign-style approach, with linked events and various communications planned over a period of time. The third category, building long-term relationships with key individuals over many years, generally consists of programs such as exchanges, scholarships, training, and conferences. These programs typically do not include a detailed audience research component beyond pre- and post-survey evaluations to gauge whether the attitudes and opinions of participants changed as a result of participation in the program. Examples of such programs include State's Fulbright Academic Exchange Program and International Visitor Leadership Program.

Actionable Research Is Required for Campaign-Style Approach

In our 2003 report,[10] after consulting with representatives of some of America's largest public relations firms, we described the elements of a typical public relations strategy, which we refer to as the "campaign-style" approach (see fig. 1). The campaign-style approach has been identified by

[9]Joseph S. Nye, Jr., BBS Public Affairs, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (2004), 107.

[10]GAO-03-951.

the private sector and government agencies as a leading practice for carrying out thematic communication initiatives. One overarching tenet of this approach is that each step in the communications process must be supported by actionable research. Using this approach, program planners define their program objectives and develop initial core messages based on these objectives. Next, they identify target audiences, refine the messages, and develop detailed strategies and tactics to reach these audiences. They then develop and implement a detailed communication plan that incorporates the program's objectives, messages, and target audiences. The final step is to monitor progress and adjust strategies and tactics accordingly. As shown in Figure 1, each step in the process is supported by actionable research.

Figure 1: Key Elements of the Campaign-style Approach
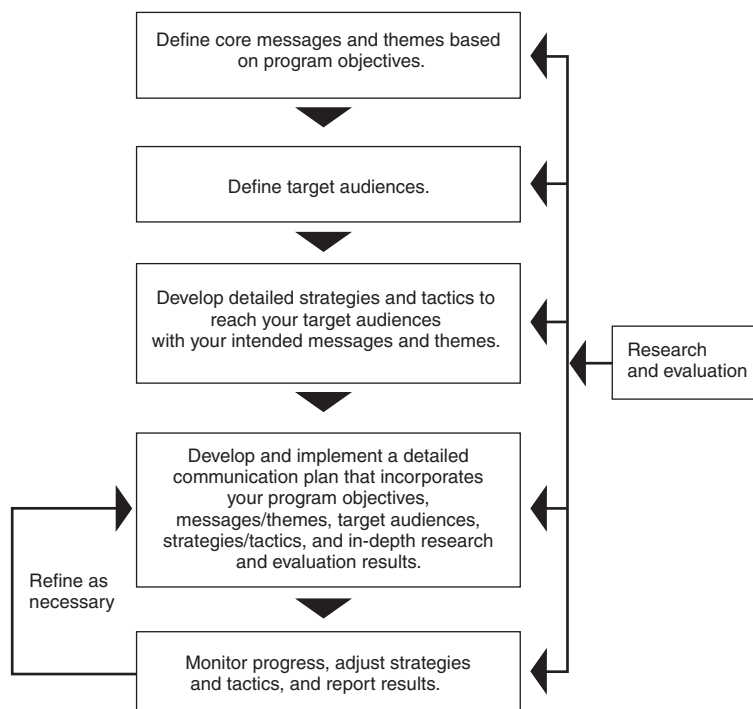
Source: GAO.

Within this approach, agency research needs vary, depending on whether their communication efforts are designed to broadly inform target audiences or specifically influence attitudes and behaviors, the latter of which requires more in-depth, actionable research. USAID and BBG communication efforts are primarily intended to inform foreign audiences.

USAID's communication mission, based on the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, is to inform host country audiences about U.S. development assistance, and BBG aims to promote and sustain freedom and democracy by broadcasting accurate and objective news and information about the United States and the world to audiences overseas. To influence attitudes toward the United States, State pursues three strategic communication objectives that include (1) offering foreign publics a vision of hope and opportunity rooted in the most basic values of the United States, (2) isolating and marginalizing extremists, and (3) promoting understanding regarding shared values and common interests between Americans and peoples of different countries, cultures, and faiths.[11] DOD aims to advance national interests and objectives by not only informing key audiences and influencing their attitudes but also by changing behavior, such as encouraging civilians to report terrorist activities.

State Department Faces Challenges in Using Research Strategically

For daily communications, agencies rely on an extensive array of government-sponsored media monitoring research to develop a broad understanding of key issues, prepare briefing points, track and counter misinformation, and gauge outreach. For their thematic outreach initiatives, DOD and USAID use actionable research to support a campaign-style approach to communications—which we have broadly endorsed based on input from public relations experts. In contrast, we found State does not generally use such research in its thematic outreach initiatives, and it has not adopted a campaign-style communication approach that would require the use of such research. In addition, State officials have noted the lack of actionable, in-depth research available to them, and public diplomacy staff receive little training on how to identify and use such research. A June 2007 interagency communication strategy developed under the guidance of State's Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs opens the possibility that State communication staff may begin to adopt a more systematic approach toward their thematic communication efforts. The new strategy describes a communication process model similar to the campaign-style approach, with the major exception that it does not describe how and to what extent research should be used to support each step in the communication process.

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[11]These objectives were adopted by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in 2005.

Agencies Use Media Monitoring Products to Support Daily Communications

U.S. government officials have access to a large selection of research from media monitoring products produced by three major suppliers—DOD, OSC, and State. While end-user satisfaction with the scope and quality of available media monitoring data remains uncertain, we found no immediate evidence to suggest that agencies lacked such data.[12] Some examples of these products include weekly media summaries by DOD's Strategic Command, OSC media aids, and a daily media report developed by State.

Officials use this information to (1) develop a broad understanding of issues, (2) brief agency management and spokespersons, (3) track and counter misinformation, and (4) gauge the success of their news placement activities. According to State officials, field staff use the daily media report and other Washington, D.C.-based products to quickly inform themselves about events in other parts of the world, provide guidance to higher-level officials about media coverage of key events in the region, and develop background information and potential speaking points. DOD staff receive various media monitoring products, including media summaries and analyses from combatant commands, to augment their knowledge of events in their region and help develop communication strategies and speaking points. USAID missions and BBG monitor foreign media on an ad hoc basis to supplement the activities of DOD, OSC, and State.

DOD and USAID Use Actionable Research to Guide Thematic Communication Efforts

Agencies use research to support thematic outreach initiatives, which are designed to communicate a central theme or message with the goal of influencing the attitudes or behaviors of target audiences. DOD has developed a formal process for its tactical psychological operations (PSYOP) that generally follows the campaign-style approach, including the need to support each step in the process with actionable research data. These steps include developing clear objectives, testing messages, identifying targeted and complex dissemination strategies, and measuring effectiveness. In addition, because of the high turnover of soldiers, the need to train soldiers quickly, and the number of recruits who lack higher education, DOD has developed a rigorous training process for PSYOP soldiers, including extensive documentation. In one example of DOD's use of the campaign-style approach cited in a DOD training manual, PSYOP planners addressed parents of young children in a specific country to

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[12]Later in this report, we note that agencies generally lack adequate information on user needs and satisfaction regarding media monitoring and other research products.

convince them to increase their reporting of insurgent activities. PSYOP planners used audience research to more clearly understand this target audience's vulnerabilities and fears. Based on their findings, they developed messages to appeal to the target audience, such as statements about how reporting insurgent activity increases security and how it is the most direct way parents can protect their children. They also assessed the best ways to reach the target audience, including broadcast media, handbills, and face-to-face communication. Finally, they conducted pre- and post-campaign testing of a random sample of 100 parents to measure the effectiveness of their efforts. This testing found that DOD's communication efforts directly contributed to increased reporting of insurgent activities.

USAID also relies on actionable research in conjunction with its use of a campaign-style approach to support its public awareness campaigns. USAID requires its communications specialists, known as Development Outreach and Communication Officers, to develop written communication strategies for USAID missions that include goals, objectives, messages, action plans and budgets, as well as methods to measure the impact of communication efforts. These field-based specialists develop and implement information campaigns to inform audiences about USAID's work, and USAID staff commission audience research to support these efforts. Development Outreach and Communication Officers attend in-depth training that emphasizes best practices in using audience research to support outreach campaigns. According to USAID, the last training session focused on public opinion polling and communication measurement and evaluation. USAID also provides its communication officers with a practical, field-oriented "survival manual" encouraging staff to monitor local media and analyze local polls. The manual was recently revised to include guidance on using communication research instruments, particularly polling, as well as criteria for assessing the quality of research instruments and a standard set of research questions.

One example of USAID's use of research for its campaign-style approach occurred in Jordan, where the mission's communication objectives called for increasing Jordanians' knowledge of USAID programs and improving the image of U.S. assistance among Jordanians. The mission identified primary, secondary, and tertiary target audiences and commissioned two surveys and a series of focus groups to gauge awareness of USAID and perceptions of U.S. assistance. Based on findings that the vast majority of respondents, particularly the poor and less educated, could not identify USAID programs, the mission decided to focus its outreach program on these groups. The mission contracted with a public relations firm to

develop its outreach campaign, then used audience research to measure results and refine the campaign.

State Generally Does Not Use Actionable Research or a Campaign-Style Approach to Support Its Thematic Initiatives

In contrast to USAID and DOD and the approach we endorsed in our 2003 report,[13] we found that State generally does not use actionable research to support its thematic communication efforts, and it has not adopted a campaign-style approach that would require using actionable research at each step in the communication process.[14] According to State officials, overall program development continues to be challenged by a lack of actionable, in-depth research that could help identify and develop culturally appropriate messages and dissemination vehicles. Field-based public affairs staff we contacted reported that they generally did not attempt to segment their target audiences or conduct in-depth research into these audiences because of a lack of funding and time. For example, the State-led pilot country initiative involving 18 posts, which is designed to counter extremism, is not supported by actionable research data. Rather, State's public affairs officers have generally been allowed to pursue this thematic communication effort using any combination of public diplomacy tools they believe to be appropriate. We also found that research conducted in support of the department's public diplomacy mission is largely generic in nature and is not tied to specific information campaigns at the country level. Finally, we noted a general lack of guidance and training provided to field staff on how to obtain and utilize actionable research to support their thematic communication efforts.

Pilot Country Initiative Not Driven by Actionable Research

Posts participating in the pilot country initiative have developed country strategies that list broad objectives and potential programs in each country to support the overall theme of countering violent extremism. We reviewed most of these country strategies and found that although broad attitudinal polling was available to inform these efforts, the strategies lacked actionable research to support decisions regarding audience targeting, message development, information dissemination strategies, and

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[13]GAO-03-951.

[14]We identified at least one exception to this statement. State's Greetings from America program presents American society and culture from the point of view of Indonesian and Pakistani exchange students studying in the United States. State has used research to tailor its programming to its audiences' interests and adjusted messages based on online feedback. According to State, research commissioned by the public affairs section in Indonesia showed that the program helped increase understanding of and positive attitudes toward the United States among local youth.

post-campaign evaluation and follow-up. The plans we reviewed did not include references to attitudinal polling of specific target groups, focus group data on which messages would most resonate with target audiences, or detailed media environment analyses that could provide the basis for developing in-depth information dissemination strategies. For example, State requested that pilot country posts develop lists of key influencers in their respective country, such as journalists, musicians, or civil society leaders. However, while the pilot country posts have put together these lists, they have not extensively researched their audiences to support the implementation of specific planned programs. Similarly, according to State officials, posts involved in the pilot country initiative have not crafted or tested messages based on in-depth research. Finally, we found that while State staff have identified broad goals for pilot countries, such as fostering positive views of the United States and increasing outreach to youth, these plans consistently lacked measurable objectives related to target audience attitude or behavior change, making it more difficult to use actionable research to support or assess program objectives.

State's Audience Research Focuses on Broad Public Opinion Polling

Most of the audience research produced by State is broad survey information rather than specific information that could be used to develop or improve programs aimed at narrow audiences. While Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) polls are available to U.S. government staff, public diplomacy officers we spoke with in Washington, D.C., and overseas noted these polls are of limited use in developing an in-depth understanding of specific groups within a population. Our analysis of 12 INR polls conducted in Indonesia, Jordan, and several other Arab countries in 2005 and 2006 found that while the polls focused on broad political issues such as opinions of U.S. policy and bilateral relations, they generally did not focus on cultural, religious, educational, or linguistic influences, which could be used at the program level to design specific communication campaigns. The lack of such in-depth research may, in part, be attributed to the limited resources available to the Office of Research and the need to focus on its annual schedule of public opinion polls, which are used by a wide range of U.S. government agencies.

State Guidance and Training Is Limited

State guidance stresses the importance of research but does not formally endorse a campaign-style approach to thematic communications. In a cable providing guidance to posts on how to develop their fiscal year 2008 Mission Performance Plans, State highlighted the importance of selecting well-researched target audiences. In addition, some field staff involved in the pilot country initiative told us they have requested support from Washington, D.C., to identify and obtain such research. However, State has not followed up with guidance on how to conduct or obtain such research,

and it is not clear whether it will provide such guidance for the newly configured Mission Strategic Plans that will be produced starting in 2009. State's most recent guidance to posts on the Mission Strategic Plan issued in 2007 did not provide any advice on selecting target audiences. Although State addresses elements of the campaign-style approach in the Foreign Service Institute training it provides to new public diplomacy staff, this training does not provide guidance about the extent to which staff should use this approach in their thematic outreach initiatives. In addition, the training that public diplomacy officers receive focuses almost exclusively on INR research and does not teach officers how to identify and assess other sources of actionable, in-depth research.[15]

In June 2007, the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee released a U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication that describes a communication process model—the "ABCDE model"—that is similar to the campaign-style approach. While the release of the strategy is a positive development, the strategy presents the model as a suggested approach rather than clearly endorsing it for broad use in thematic outreach initiatives. In addition, the model does not describe how and to what extent research should be used to support the initiatives, although we have noted in past reports[16] that research should inform each step of the campaign-style approach.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors Uses Research to Help Its Broadcast Services Develop and Evaluate Programs

BBG uses audience research and media environment analysis to help its broadcast services plan and evaluate their programs. According to BBG officials, the agency's specific mandate of broadcasting accurate and objective news and information sets it apart from other strategic communication efforts. BBG's language services' news and feature programs are broadcast as regular communications, some of which focus on ongoing themes such as democracy and life in the United States. In addition, individual broadcasters attempt to develop and maintain long-term relationships with their broad audiences. Although BBG does not carry out thematic outreach campaigns as part of its regular activities, it

[15]Because of the challenges in identifying such in-depth research, posts also rely on what they have called "informal" audience research, such as obtaining verbal feedback from participants at an embassy event. However, it is difficult to gauge the accuracy of informal audience research, and it is possible that by limiting themselves to such research agencies may be missing key trends and influences.

[16]GAO-03-951 and GAO-06-535.

does conduct in-depth research into its audiences and their listening habits. Research staff at BBG's International Broadcasting Bureau work with BBG's contractor to conduct surveys on audience size and media usage, focus groups with topics selected by a given language service, and evaluations of individual broadcast programs. The data from this research are used to design programs, analyze BBG's competition, provide the basis for performance reporting, target specific audiences, and determine if the news on BBG programs is considered credible. This research helps BBG staff and management evaluate their programs and make research-based decisions about changes. For example, when developing a pilot show, Voice of America-Indonesia staff discussed the idea with the affiliate that was to air the pilot and reviewed existing quantitative, qualitative, and evaluative research. In another example, BBG used focus groups of Jordanians and Palestinians to help them develop Radio Sawa, the U.S. government's Arabic-language radio station. According to BBG officials, these focus groups and other research in the Middle East revealed the need for profound change in how the U.S. approached broadcasting in the region and, in this case, that the station should present a mixture of music and news.[17]

Agencies Lack Systematic Methods to Assess User Satisfaction with Research Efforts, and Interagency Coordination Strategies Are Limited

Agencies generally use informal and ad hoc approaches to obtain information about whether their research efforts meet their users'[18] needs and, therefore, cannot be sure that their research products are actually useful to public diplomacy and communications officers on a regular basis. However, some agencies have taken steps toward a more systematic assessment of user satisfaction. Agencies depend on a variety of strategies to exchange information about their research activities. However, overall information sharing remains limited, particularly regarding general audience research activities as well as media monitoring conducted by DOD. Notably, the government lacks interagency protocols for sharing information, a forum to periodically bring key research staff together to discuss their common interests and concerns, and a clearinghouse to facilitate the sharing of audience research among agencies. DOD has recognized the need to better organize and coordinate its media monitoring activities and efforts are under way to catalogue the full extent

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[17]See GAO, *U.S. International Broadcasting: Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved*, GAO-06-762 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 4, 2006).

[18]As discussed above, users of research generally include senior-level managers and country-level staff, as well as policymakers and individual analysts.

of DOD's media monitoring efforts. Also, plans exist to develop an improved approach to coordinating this research both within and outside the department.

Agencies Generally Rely on Anecdotal Information about User Satisfaction

Although two agencies systematically gather input from users, agencies generally use informal methods to assess whether users' needs are being met. State's Office of Research and BBG's research offices[19] consult with some of their users as they develop their annual research agendas. In particular, as staff in the Office of Research develop their plan for audience research each year, they solicit input from public diplomacy staff at the bureau level, as well as their own analysts, to gather information about research priorities. At BBG, the yearly research agenda is developed in consultation with individual broadcasters and language services. However, agencies generally gather such information through informal methods, such as irregular e-mail messages, informal conversations, agency meetings, and customer comment tools on their Web sites. For example, the OSC gathers user feedback through interagency meetings, dialogue with individual agency staff, and a feedback link on its Web site. Additionally, DOD's combatant commands and the 4th Psychological Operations Group Strategic Studies Detachment primarily rely on direct, one-on-one feedback provided through conversations and e-mail.[20] While approaches like these may provide some useful anecdotal information, they do not offer a comprehensive picture of user satisfaction.

Some Agencies Have Taken Steps Towards More Systematically Assessing User Satisfaction

During our small group exercise, agency participants told us that determining their users' needs and developing useful research products are among their major challenges. Additionally, all three BBG research directors indicated that a more systematic assessment of whether user needs are being met would be valuable. Further, both State's Rapid Response Unit and OSC are considering establishing more systematic strategies to assess whether their work is meeting their users' needs. Specifically, the Rapid Response Unit has worked with evaluation staff in

[19]Separate research offices exist in the International Broadcasting Bureau, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia.

[20]USAID does not measure user satisfaction because research is conducted and used at the mission level, with users directly involved in the development, design, and execution of research activities. As such, it would not be helpful to have users survey their own satisfaction with the research they designed and commissioned.

the Public Diplomacy Evaluation Office (PDEO) to develop a customer survey that would be distributed to all recipients of Rapid Response Unit products and would assess whether recipients use the products, how they use them, and whether they believe the products are useful. While State previously opted to delay the distribution of the survey until the Rapid Response Unit, which was established in September 2005, became more established, officials from both the unit and the PDEO told us they believe it would be appropriate to conduct the survey in the near future. Similarly, OSC plans to hire a contractor to help it develop a more systematic strategy for assessing user satisfaction and expects this work to begin later this year.

OSC and State Have Taken Steps to Coordinate and Share Information, but Officials Report Limited Access to Audience Research Data

Both OSC and State have established mechanisms to facilitate interagency coordination and sharing of research information. OSC has implemented a variety of methods intended to foster interagency collaboration and information sharing, focusing on media monitoring and media environment analysis. First, OSC supports sharing media monitoring information through its Web site, which currently hosts products from over 30 organizations, including State's Rapid Response Unit and DOD's Strategic Command.[21] Second, OSC staff provide assistance to agencies seeking to develop their own media monitoring capacity by providing technological support and guidance. In exchange for this support, agencies are asked to share their media monitoring products with OSC, which then makes them available on its Web site (see fig. 2). Finally, OSC staff work as liaisons with other U.S. agencies, providing direct support for media monitoring activities and creating additional avenues for interagency communication. For example, one OSC staff member served on detail in State's Rapid Response Unit, supporting the development of the unit's capacity to monitor Arabic media and providing a link between OSC and State.

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[21]While OSC focuses its activities on media monitoring and media environment analysis, its Web site includes audience research reports from State's Office of Research.

Figure 2: Opensource.gov Provides a Mechanism for Sharing of Research Information
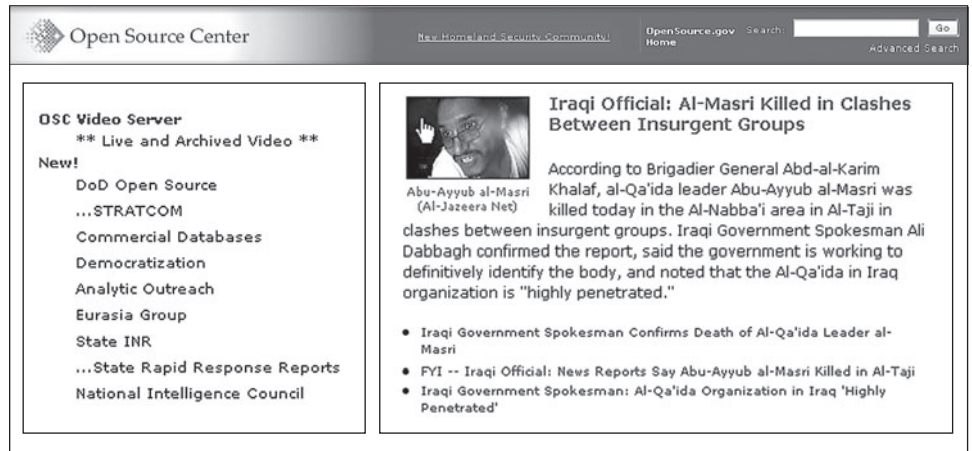

Source: www.opensource.gov.

In addition, State's Interagency Strategic Communication Fusion Team and Infocentral Web site[22] provide mechanisms for coordination and information sharing focused on strategic communication activities, including related research. The Fusion Team brings program-level officers together on a weekly basis to discuss ongoing and proposed efforts, including research activities, across the federal government. For example, the Fusion Team has hosted presentations on OSC's efforts and DOD's PSYOP activities. Additionally, State's Bureau of International Information Programs maintains the Infocentral Web site (see fig. 3), which provides U.S. government staff with guidance and information related to strategic communication efforts, including polling results from State's Office of Research and media monitoring products from the Rapid Response Unit.

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[22]Access to both Infocentral and OSC Web site is restricted to the U.S. government.

Figure 3: State's Infocentral.gov Facilitates Sharing of Some Research Information
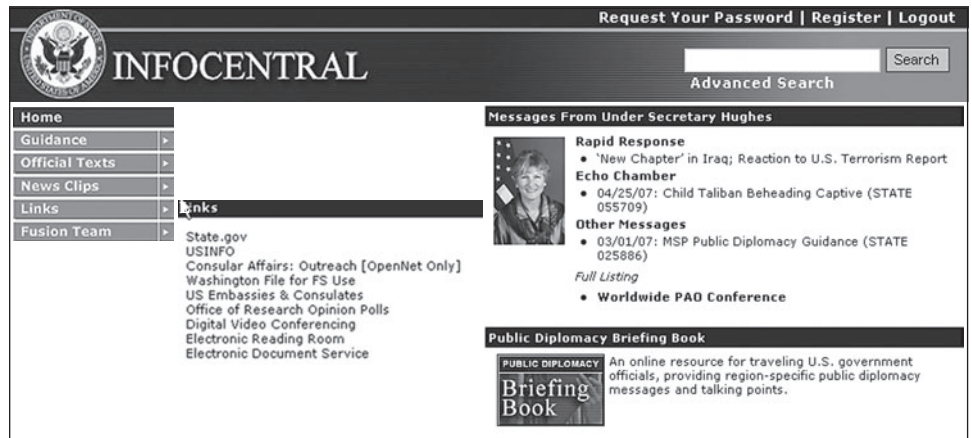
Source: Infocentral.gov.

While both the fusion team and Infocentral provide opportunities to coordinate agency activities and share information, they are focused on broad strategic communication efforts and not specifically on research.

Although OSC has established some initiatives to enhance coordination of media monitoring and media environment analysis, no comparable entity or mechanism facilitates the comprehensive coordination and sharing of audience research information across U.S. government agencies. Instead, individual agencies conduct their own audience research and provide limited access to many of their products. For instance, BBG's Strategic Audience Research Archive, a source of information on audiences and media throughout the world, is not currently accessible to U.S. government staff outside of BBG, although agency officials said it would be useful for their work. Agency officials indicated they have only limited knowledge of and access to the audience research being conducted by other agencies and were supportive of developing new strategies to facilitate the sharing of audience research information. In a positive development, State's Office of Research chairs a new interagency working group on research and analysis, which met for the first time at the beginning of May. The working group focuses on supporting communication efforts to counter terrorism but may be expanded to facilitate coordination and sharing of research among U.S. government agencies across a broader range of public diplomacy and strategic communication efforts.

Agency coordination efforts are hampered by the lack of both interagency protocols for sharing information and a forum to periodically bring key research staff together to discuss common concerns across all topics of interest. The Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee has acknowledged the need for a centralized source of U.S. government audience research data for use by staff at all U.S. agencies, and BBG officials at our small group exercise expressed a willingness to share some of the contents of its audience research archive with staff from other agencies.

Efforts to Improve DOD Coordination of Media Monitoring Activities

Coordination of media monitoring also is a challenge for DOD. DOD conducts a number of media monitoring activities, and officials from throughout DOD, including the combatant commands, as well as the Joint Chiefs, expressed concerns that monitoring activities are not coordinated, awareness of all of the monitoring work being conducted within the department is limited, and duplication is likely. We identified multiple instances in which two commands monitored the same media at the same time, and two commands have hired the same contractor to provide media monitoring services. This duplication may suggest that DOD is paying for the same information twice. While some duplication of monitoring activities can be valuable to the extent that it helps ensure comprehensive coverage, the concerns raised by DOD officials indicate that at least some of the existing duplication may be the result of limited coordination rather than strategic choice.

To improve coordination of monitoring activities, DOD officials from multiple combatant commands suggested several possible approaches, including creating a single Web portal to share media monitoring information, or managing media monitoring contracts at the department level rather than in the individual commands and components, as it is currently done. In addition, through the implementation of its 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution

Roadmap,[23] DOD identified the need to reassess its media monitoring efforts and indicated that it intends to improve coordination as part of this process. Officials from the Office of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy told us the department is currently working to develop an agencywide inventory of all media monitoring activities. Upon completion of that effort, DOD plans to develop a new approach to guide its media monitoring activities, including working to improve coordination of this work both within the department and with other U.S. agencies.

Conclusions

We found no evidence to suggest that program officials lack access to the media monitoring information they need to perform their daily communication activities. DOD's and USAID's thematic communication efforts were guided by actionable research as part of a campaign-style approach to communications that calls for such data. This heightened the likelihood that their communication campaign objectives were achieved. In contrast, we found that State's key pilot country initiative was not supported by actionable research, in part because State has not formally endorsed or adopted a campaign-style approach to thematic communications. An interagency strategy that was released in June 2007 describes a similar approach called the "ABCDE model," but it does not specifically endorse this model for widespread use, and it does not discuss the need for actionable research to support the model. In addition, State officials have noted the lack of actionable, in-depth research available to them, and public diplomacy staff receive little training on how to identify and use such research. As a result, State, which is the lead agency for strategic communication, cannot be assured that its messages are targeted and delivered to the right audiences to achieve maximum impact.

U.S. government research activities can provide valuable information to support U.S. strategic communication efforts conducted by State, DOD,

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[23]In September 2006, the department issued its Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap to define planned improvements, objectives, timelines, and oversight requirements to ensure that QDR objectives relating to communicating with foreign publics are achieved. The roadmap outlines three overarching objectives: (1) define the respective roles and responsibilities of primary support capabilities within DOD, including public affairs, psychological operations, military diplomacy, and military support for public diplomacy; (2) properly resource these primary support capabilities; and (3) institutionalize DOD strategic communication processes. Additionally, DOD seeks to develop a process to integrate and support strategic communication efforts within DOD and align its efforts with broader U.S. government activities.

USAID, and BBG. However, our analysis identified weaknesses in the agencies' strategies for assessing user satisfaction and for facilitating coordination within and among departments and agencies. In the absence of systematic assessment methods, agencies cannot be sure that their research activities and associated products actually meet the needs of their users, and they lack valuable information that could inform the substance of their activities and decisions on resource allocations. Further, with limited mechanisms to coordinate their activities and share collected information, agencies are unable to fully leverage work conducted by others and may be duplicating efforts. Multiple opportunities for improvement exist. Notably, the government lacks interagency protocols for sharing information and a forum to periodically bring key research staff together to discuss concerns across all topics of interest. Specifically, with regard to audience research, the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee acknowledged the need to provide a centralized source of U.S. government audience research data. Given the size of the effort DOD is making in media monitoring, it is particularly important that it coordinate these activities and share the information generated to avoid unnecessary duplication and enable staff to leverage available information. DOD's Strategic Communication Roadmap process has prompted efforts to improve the department's media monitoring activities, including the launch of a departmentwide inventory of media monitoring activities and a stated intent to develop effective internal and external coordination strategies once the inventory is completed.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To help State adopt a more strategic approach to its communication efforts, including the strategic use of research, we recommend that the Secretary of State take the following two actions:

- Formally endorse and adopt a research-based campaign-style approach to thematic communications.

- Provide public diplomacy staff with written guidance and related training on the campaign-style approach, as well as how to identify and use actionable research to support these efforts.

To help ensure that the government's research efforts meet the needs of users, we recommend that State, BBG, DOD, and OSC implement systematic strategies to assess user needs and satisfaction.

To improve the coordination of U.S. government research activities and promote the sharing of information across agencies, we recommend that the Secretary of State direct the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, in conjunction with other members of the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, take the following two actions:

- Develop interagency protocols regarding the sharing of audience research information, including establishing a forum that would bring audience research staff together on a regular basis to discuss plans and concerns across all topics of interest.

- Develop an electronic clearinghouse of U.S. government audience research that could be accessed by staff throughout State, USAID, DOD, and BBG, including BBG grantees. A key component of this clearinghouse should be the body of research about audiences and media environments collected in BBG's Strategic Audience Research Archive. In developing this clearinghouse, OSC's model for sharing media monitoring information should be considered.

We also recommend that the Secretary of Defense ensure that officials from the Office of Support to Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs follow through on plans to develop a new approach to guide the department's media monitoring activities, including working to improve coordination of this work both within the department and with other U.S. agencies.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We received written comments on a draft of this report from the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the Department of Defense, and the Department of State. Their comments are reproduced in appendixes V through VII, respectively. Each agency generally concurred with the report's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Regarding our recommendation that the Department of State formally endorse and adopt a research driven campaign-style approach to thematic communications, State noted a preference for the new "ABCDE" model that incorporates research, evaluation, and assessment as necessary steps in the process of effective communication. State added that posts do not have sufficient resources to obtain actionable research to support every step of every thematic communication plan, as suggested by the campaign-style approach.

We agree with State that posts should have the freedom to choose the communication model (campaign-style, ABCDE, or any other relevant

model) that works best. Nonetheless, we reiterate that State has not yet formally endorsed the use of research to guide post communication efforts or explained how and to what extent research should be incorporated in the models to support the development of post-specific communication plans. We also acknowledge that resource constraints can limit the extent of research conducted and that choices and trade-offs must be made at times. We are encouraged, however, by State's cited example that posts involved with the pilot country initiative identified the need for additional research and that Congress has approved $2 million in additional funding for this purpose.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors generally concurred with our report recommendation that agencies institute systematic strategies to assess end-user needs and satisfaction. BBG's response points out that while research staff routinely query end users and managers regarding their specific research needs, surveying users could yield more complete feedback on the utility of provided research. BBG's response also endorses GAO's recommendation regarding the need to establish a clearinghouse of U.S. government-sponsored research; however, it adds that BBG reserves the right to withhold selected research information meant for internal use only.

Both State and DOD provided technical comments, which have been incorporated throughout the report where appropriate. USAID received a draft but had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to relevant agency heads and to other interested Members of Congress. We will also make copies available to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Office of

Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

Sincerely yours,

Jess T. Ford
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We examined (1) what strategic communication objectives U.S. agencies pursue and how research is used to support these objectives, and (2) how agencies identify end-user needs, assess end-user satisfaction, and coordinate the sharing of available research. We also provide information in appendix IV on a new strategic communication model adopted by the British government that could help broadly inform U.S. operations and related research activities. Our review focused on the efforts of the Department of State (State), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). We also reviewed the activities of the Open Source Center, which is under the authority of the Director of National Intelligence.

To assess how U.S. agencies use research to support their strategic communication objectives, we examined agencies' communication efforts and met with agency officials in Washington, including senior managers, research directors, and relevant program staff. At State, we met with senior officials in the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs; the Bureaus of International Information Programs (IIP), Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), and Intelligence and Research (INR); as well as with staff from all six regional bureaus. Additionally, we obtained information from State Public Affairs Officers (PAO) in order to get a perspective on how research supports communication efforts in the field. Specifically, we held a discussion session with a group of PAOs during State's Worldwide PAO Conference in January 2007; distributed a questionnaire and held semistructured interviews with PAOs in Germany, India, Niger, Peru, the Philippines, and Yemen; and corresponded with post staff in Indonesia and Jordan. We selected these countries based on a variety of factors, including geographic location, presence of a significant Muslim population,[1] post size, recent visits by U.S. officials, and inclusion in State's pilot country initiative.

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[1]We identified countries meeting this criterion based on ECA Bureau's list of 58 countries and territories with significant Muslim populations, as previously reported in GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, GAO-06-535 (Washington, D.C.: May 3, 2006).

At USAID, we met with officials in the Legislative and Public Affairs
Bureau and interviewed USAID mission staff in Indonesia and Jordan to
learn about how research is used as part of USAID's Development
Outreach and Communications Program. At DOD, we conducted fieldwork
at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa,
Florida; spoke with DOD officials from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Special
Operations Command, the Office of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy,
the 4th Psychological Operations Group, and the Joint Psychological
Operations Support Element to learn about how research is conducted
and used to support psychological operations; and corresponded with staff
in the combatant commands to gain an understanding of how they use
research to inform their communication efforts. Finally, to learn how
research is used at the BBG, we met with senior BBG managers, as well as
the research directors for the International Broadcasting Bureau, Radio
Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia. Additionally, we met with
staff who manage Voice of America broadcasting in Indonesia and with the
leadership of the Middle East Broadcasting Networks.

To determine how the agencies assess user needs and satisfaction, and
coordinate their research efforts, we met with senior officials at State's
Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, as
well as the Bureaus of Public Affairs, Educational and Cultural Affairs, and
Intelligence and Research. We also interviewed and corresponded with
officials and staff at the Open Source Center, DOD, USAID, BBG, and the
Central Intelligence Agency's Global Information and Influence Team.
Additionally, we reviewed the research materials available through the
Open Source Center's Web site; IIP's Infocentral Web site; and the BBG's
Strategic Audience Research Archive. Finally, we reviewed agency
planning documentation and research products.

To assess the extent to which the British government's new model can
inform U.S. research activities, we conducted fieldwork in the United
Kingdom. We met with government and private-sector officials in London
to discuss British government communication strategies and related
research efforts. We selected the British government for this case study
because the United States and the United Kingdom share many key
characteristics, including well-developed public diplomacy efforts, parallel
organizations and communication types, and similar communication goals.
Further, we have previously drawn upon the United Kingdom for insights
into public diplomacy activities.

Additionally, we convened a group of senior agency managers, research
directors, and representatives from academia and the private sector to
discuss key challenges facing U.S. government strategic communications
and related research efforts and identify potential solutions to address
these challenges. We selected participants based on their expertise and
experience with U.S. strategic communication efforts and related
research. The discussion included a short exercise designed to build
consensus around the key challenges related to conducting audience
research and media monitoring.

We conducted our work from May 2006 through May 2007 in accordance
with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix II: Audience Research, Media Environment Analysis, and Media Monitoring Activities by Agency

Agency research efforts include (1) audience attitude polls and studies; (2) media environment analyses of media outlets, key industry leaders, and preferences in a given country; and (3) daily monitoring of media outlets around the world to determine what is being said about the United States. Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide details on government research efforts in each of these categories.

Table 1: Audience Research

Agency/office	Activity
Department of State	
Bureau of Intelligence and Research	The Office of Research conducts and contracts for public opinion polls and focus groups, in over 50 countries each year, to support U.S. government public diplomacy staff, as well as members of the intelligence community. Research activities focus on both mass and elite audiences and examine public opinion of the United States, including foreign policy, as well as other issues of importance to foreign audiences.
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA)[a]	WHA commissioned the Office of Research, INR to conduct focus groups in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela in 2005 and to purchase polling questions on a regional public opinion survey in 2006. These activities have focused on public opinion regarding democracy and democratic government, the United States, and economic development.
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)	ECA conducts focus groups, in-depth interviews, and surveys with program participants to evaluate the impact of bureau programs, including exchanges.
U.S. embassies	Some embassy staff conduct informal surveys and focus groups and contract for additional research support on a limited basis.
Broadcasting Board of Governors	
International Broadcasting Bureau[b] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Radio Free Asia	The research offices manage their audience research through a BBG-wide master contract with InterMedia for surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and listener/monitoring panels to assess broadcast coverage, media consumption habits, and audience ratings in over 100 countries, with a general focus on areas in which the BBG broadcasts.
U.S. Agency for International Development	
Select missions	Missions in Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, and West Bank/Gaza contracted for polling and focus groups in 2005 and 2006 to support specific, targeted public awareness campaigns through the Development Outreach and Communications Program.
Department of Defense	
4th Psychological Operations Group, Strategic Studies Detachment (SSD)	SSD analysts conduct target audience analysis, assessing how to communicate specific messages to identified target audiences, to support psychological operations around the world. Analysts draw upon a variety of inputs in conducting these analyses, including knowledge of religious, linguistic, and cultural factors, as well as polling data and in-country research.
Joint Psychological Operations Support Element, Research & Analysis Directorate (R&A)	R&A analysts conduct target audience analysis, assessing how to communicate specific messages to identified target audiences, to support psychological operations around the world, with a general focus on transregional psychological operations

Agency/office	Activity
European Command (EUCOM)	In close cooperation with the Office of Research, INR, EUCOM recently contracted for polling in nine Trans Saharan countries to support influence and information operations to counter terrorism.
Central Command (CENTCOM)	CENTCOM recently contracted for issue-specific polling and focus groups within the command area of responsibility.
Central Intelligence Agency	
Global Information and Influence Team (GIIT)	GIIT conducts polling with an undisclosed focus in an undisclosed number of countries.

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

[a]We spoke with public diplomacy staff from all of the regional bureaus within the Department of State. None reported conducting audience research of their own, and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs is the only bureau that reported contracting for audience research.

[b]The International Broadcasting Bureau has responsibility for research for the Voice of America, Radio/TV Marti, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks.

Table 2: Media Environment Analysis

Agency/office	Activity
Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP)	In 2005, IIP created its "Media Matrix," an internal Web site and database that tracks information about key media outlets in individual countries around the world. Embassy staff are responsible for inputting and maintaining the information.
Department of State, Public Diplomacy Hubs	In 2006, State contracted for a multi-country media environment analysis in Europe. The contractor provided analysis of key media outlets, their audiences, and other environmental factors influencing media.
Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG)	The BBG contracts for the development and maintenance of the Strategic Audience Research Archive (SARA), which is an electronic archive that provides country- and region-level media and audience profiles in each of the language areas targeted by the BBG.
Director of National Intelligence, Open Source Center	Analysts have produced media guides in over 30 cities, countries, and regions around the world. Media guides provide information regarding key media outlets and their audiences within individual countries and regions.

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

Table 3: Media Monitoring

Agency/office	Media monitored	Activity
Director of National Intelligence		
Open Source Center	Print, radio, television, blogs, chat rooms	Monitors media around the world and provides a variety of summary and analysis products.
Department of Defense		
Office of the Secretary of Defense	Television and Web sites	Contracts for media monitoring focused on countering Islamic extremism and produces daily summaries and some additional topic-specific special products.
Strategic Command	Print	Contracts for monitoring of print media in 50 countries around the world, and provides daily and weekly summaries, as well as special reports.
European Command	Print, television, radio, blogs	Contracts for monitoring of media within the command area of responsibility and other regions based on command interest, and provides daily summary products.
Central Command	Print, television, blogs	Conducts region-based monitoring with an emphasis on extremist activity and provides daily summary products.
Pacific Command	Print, television, radio, blogs, chat rooms	Conducts and contracts for monitoring of media within the command area of responsibility, and provides a variety of summary products.
Northern Command	Print, television, radio, blogs	Conducts and contracts for monitoring and provides daily summary products.
Southern Command	Print, television, radio, blogs	Conducts and contracts for monitoring of news and opinion and provides daily, and weekly products.
Transportation Command	Print, television, radio, blogs	Conducts monitoring focused on defense issues and their impact on the command mission; does not provide products based on monitoring.
Joint Forces Command	Print	Conducts monitoring focused on the global war on terror, and provides daily summary products.
Department of State		
Media Reaction Division, Office of Research, INR	Print	Monitors print commentaries around the world, and provides daily summaries and special products.
Rapid Response Unit	Print, television, blogs	Monitors media around the world to inform U.S. government responses and messaging. Produces a daily one-page media summary, along with regional summaries.
Digital Outreach Team	Blogs	Contracts for monitoring of blog content as part of an effort to counter terrorist use of the Internet.
Select regional bureaus[a]	Varies	Conduct formal and informal monitoring in conjunction with post-level activities.
U.S. embassies	Varies	Monitor national and international media outlets to support embassy and Washington, D.C.-based activities.
U.S. Agency for International Development		
Individual missions	Varies	Conduct media monitoring both in-house and via contractors, focusing on coverage of USAID activities.

Agency/office	Media monitored	Activity
Broadcasting Board of Governors		
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	Print, television, radio	Conducts monitoring of media in target broadcast countries and regions, and provides daily and weekly products.

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

[a]We spoke with public diplomacy staff from all of the regional bureaus within the State Department. Staff in the Bureaus of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Western Hemisphere Affairs, South and Central Asian Affairs, and Near Eastern Affairs reported conducting some media monitoring.

Appendix III: Audience Research and Media Monitoring Resources for Select Activity Centers

Agencies devote varying levels of resources to research in support of U.S. strategic communication efforts.[1] In general, funding for audience research appears to be more limited than for media monitoring. Of the agencies we reviewed, the State Department (State) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) are responsible for the largest share of the spending on audience research, with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Defense (DOD) devoting relatively little funding to these efforts. With regard to media monitoring, DOD has made a significant investment, with the Strategic Command and the Office of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy each reporting annual expenditures on media monitoring that exceeded State's total annual spending for audience research and media monitoring activities combined in fiscal years 2005 and 2006. Tables 4 through 7 provide additional details regarding agency spending and staffing for both audience research and media monitoring.

Table 4: Audience Research Expenditures[a]

Dollars in thousands

Agency/office	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006
Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Office of Research	$2,922	$3,422
Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs	60	10
Broadcasting Board of Governors[b]	11,476	9,828
Select USAID Missions (6 total)	220	112
Department of Defense, 4th Psychological Operations Group Strategic Studies Detachment	175	175[c]
Department of Defense, Central Command	0	200[d]

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

[a]Expenditure totals include direct costs, including contractor costs, but do not include staff costs associated with conducting or overseeing these activities.

[b]BBG totals reflect expenditures for all research activities, including those conducted by the International Broadcasting Bureau, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia. Additionally, they include over $8 million per year for the board's master contract with InterMedia, some of which pays for media environment analyses.

[1]We were unable to provide comprehensive data on total expenditures for U.S. government research activities due to a variety of factors, including the large number of activity centers, a lack of specific budget line-items for research activities in many instances, and the fact that staff often devote only part of their work time to research activities. We do not list resources for media environment analysis separately because they are relatively limited, and these analyses mostly draw upon information gathered through audience research and media monitoring activities.

[c]Expenditure values for the Strategic Studies Detachment are estimates because SSD funding is not tracked separately from the overall budget for the 4th Psychological Operations Group.

[d]This total for CENTCOM was for a contractor responsible for researching open source and subscriber-based polling, not for conducting polling.

Table 5: Audience Research Staffing

Agency/office	Number of staff
Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Office of Research	35
Broadcasting Board of Governors	13
Department of Defense, 4th Psychological Operations Group Strategic Studies Detachment	36
Department of Defense, Joint Psychological Operations Support Element Research & Analysis Directorate	10
Department of Defense, European Command	1[a]

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

[a]This staff person devotes only 20 percent of her/his work time to audience research efforts.

Table 6: Media Monitoring Expenditures

Dollars in thousands

Agency/office	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006
Department of State		
Rapid Response Unit	$222	$323
Digital Outreach Team	0	249[a]
Department of Defense		
Office of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy	3,500	6,900
Strategic Command	7,500	9,300
European Command	225	200
Pacific Command	960	2,036
Northern Command	31	36
Southern Command	0	5

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

[a]Total expenditures for IIP paid for two contractors to support the Digital Outreach Team. While IIP reported this spending for both audience research and media monitoring, the description of the Digital Outreach Team provided by State staff indicates that the activities being conducted are consistent with our definition of media monitoring, though not audience research. Additionally, the funds listed were not spent exclusively on media monitoring.

Table 7: Media Monitoring Staffing

Agency/office	Staff
Department of State	
Rapid Response Unit	7[a]
Digital Outreach Team	2[b]
Media Reaction Division	5
Selected embassies	Range from 6-12[c]
Department of Defense	
European Command	11
Central Command	Approximately 38
Pacific Command	57
Northern Command	6[d]
Southern Command	2
Transportation Command	3
Joint Forces Command	1[e]
Director of National Intelligence	
Open Source Center	Approximately 500[f]

Source: GAO analysis of agency information.

[a]Not all of these staff members work in the Rapid Response Unit full time. Additionally, the Rapid Response Unit is supported by three contractors, one detailee from the Open Source Center, and one analyst (part time) from the Media Reaction Division of INR's Office of Research.

[b]One of these staff members is dedicated to the Digital Outreach Team full time, while the other only spends about one-quarter time on the team. Additionally, the team has hired two contractors to observe and analyze content of foreign Arabic- and English-language discussion forums and blogs.

[c]Staff members at our selected embassies devote varying amounts of their work time to media monitoring efforts, ranging from 2 to 30 hours per week.

[d]Northern Command estimates that these staff spend a combined total of approximately 4 hours per day conducting media monitoring work.

[e]Joint Forces Command estimates that this individual spends approximately half of his work time conducting media monitoring activities.

[f]Of the Open Source Center staff, approximately 200 are located within the United States and about 300 are overseas.

Appendix IV: Elements of New British Approach to Government Strategic Communication Could Help Inform U.S.

British government officials cited several major changes to their strategic communication activities that have broad implications for the effectiveness of their outreach efforts and specific implications for the scope and nature of research conducted to support these changes. Major changes implemented by the British government include (1) adopting a common set of strategic priorities, (2) closer integration of strategic planning and research across key agencies based on a consistent framework for program development and evaluation, (3) a focus on behavior change performance goals, and (4) the creation of new public diplomacy tools to supplement traditional activities such as exchange programs. The State Department's (State) communication efforts mirror some of these practices but diverge in several key respects. For example, State uses public diplomacy to help improve the general image of the United States and to support specific foreign policy objectives, such as countering extremism. British officials stated that their public diplomacy efforts will now focus on promoting specific foreign policy objectives as opposed to nation-branding efforts. These areas of divergence offer possible insights for U.S. strategic communicators that could help guide strategic refinements and prompt related changes to research strategies and outputs.

United Kingdom Recently Completed Reviews of Its Strategic Communication Efforts

Two major reviews of British strategic communication efforts have identified opportunities for improvement. First, a January 2004 report by the Phillis Commission[1]concluded that the importance of communications to government and modern society requires that such efforts are approached in a systematic and coordinated manner. In response, the British government appointed a Permanent Secretary for Government Communications and established a new cabinet-level support group, called the Government Communications Network, to promote communication best practices throughout the British government, including agencies communicating with foreign audiences. A second review, led by Lord Carter of Coles and completed in December 2005, reported that British public diplomacy efforts had improved since 2002, but that additional advances were needed, including a clearer articulation of the purpose of these efforts, greater clarification of the roles and responsibilities of key

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[1]Named for its Chairman, Bob Phillis, the group's report sought to address a perceived breakdown in trust between the government, the media, and the general public, resulting in a general failure of government communicators to dialogue effectively with target audiences.

government agencies,[2] and the adoption of an improved system for measuring and evaluating program impact. In order to deliver greater accountability, the Carter team called for the creation of a new Public Diplomacy Board, which would be responsible for agreeing on a communication strategy, advising on resource allocation decisions, and ensuring performance measurement and monitoring. In response, the Public Diplomacy Board[3] was formed in April 2006 to provide strategic and program guidance to key government agencies engaged in strategic communication, with a focus on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the British Council, and the BBC World Service.[4] Significantly, it was stressed that the BBC World Service only has observer status on the board and retains absolute editorial independence over its operations and reporting.

Public Diplomacy Board Endorses Significant Changes to British Strategic Communication Practices

The Public Diplomacy Board has endorsed a new approach to government outreach efforts that includes adopting a common set of strategic priorities, closer integration of strategic planning and research across key agencies based on a consistent framework for program development and evaluation, a focus on behavior change performance goals, and the creation of new public diplomacy tools. These four changes are consistent with the findings and recommendations of the 2004 and 2005 reviews noted above and a December 2006 report by a private contractor hired by the board to help guide the development and evaluation of government communication efforts. Under the direction of the Public Diplomacy Board, Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff will pilot test this new

[2]The report defines the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), British Council, and BBC World Service as the government's three key public diplomacy partners.

[3]Other members of the board, which is led by FCO's Minister for Public Diplomacy, include FCO's Director of Communication, representatives from the British Council and BBC World Service, and two independent members (one advertising expert and one country branding expert). The board sets common strategic objectives for the public diplomacy community, makes recommendations on resource allocations, monitors ongoing performance data, and provides feedback to partner agencies to ensure that performance measurement becomes embedded in each organization's culture.

[4]Primary responsibility for British public diplomacy efforts rests with the FCO's Public Diplomacy Group which is also responsible for overseeing grants-in-aid to the British Council—which manages cultural affairs, exchanges, and English-language training—and to BBC World Service—which provides news and information to a worldwide audience. The Ministry of Defense, the Department for International Development, and Visit Britain (the British government's leading tourism promotion body) each play supporting roles in promoting British government public diplomacy objectives.

approach using three of the British government's International Strategic Priorities (ISP) in select countries.[5] A senior British official explained that audience research will be used to develop communication programs and related evaluation techniques in each pilot country. A research evaluation expert has been hired to work with post staff to develop research plans tailored to each country's specific needs and the target ISP. Research will generally be conducted at the post level to ensure that it is relevant and directly supports program objectives.

Focus on International Strategic Priorities

The first concept endorsed by the board was that public diplomacy activities should focus on supporting the British government's policy objectives—or International Strategic Priorities formulated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—rather than on promoting the image of the United Kingdom as a brand. The board has concluded that any attempts to manage the image of a developed country are largely doomed to failure given the scope and complexity of the task relative to available resources. One board member noted in a written response to GAO that the public diplomacy field needed major innovations, including new skill sets and perspectives, to become a key component in the art of peaceful international relations. This individual noted that public diplomacy should help a government achieve its foreign policy objectives, rather than spending money on "propaganda" and image making.

Under this new approach, public diplomacy will become a tool to help achieve intermediate and long-term foreign policy goals, such as climate control and countering terrorism, where targeted communication efforts can reasonably be expected to have a measurable impact on target audience behaviors. One British government official noted that, in limited circumstances, it makes sense to attempt to influence foreign publics to hold more favorable views of the British government, culture, and people and cited the example of Visit Britain, an initiative that explicitly seeks to project a positive image of the United Kingdom to attract tourists. It was also noted that nongovernment players such as private businesses can and should play an active role in image building efforts.

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[5]A total of 10 International Strategic Priorities (ISPs) have been formulated by FCO. Pilot countries will focus on climate control, democratic development, and promoting U.K. business investment. Pilot country strategies have been developed and implementation is expected to begin this year. Results will be evaluated and adjustments made before program efforts are expanded to additional countries and ISPs.

Integration and Coordination of Strategic Planning and Evaluative Research	The board and its contractor have adopted a model of public diplomacy that requires the close integration and coordination of strategic planning and evaluative research across key agencies. First, by design the board includes representatives from FCO, the British Council, and BBC World Service to facilitate the coordination of government communication efforts toward common strategic goals and objectives. Second, the board's contractor reports that the partner agencies have agreed to establish shared communication strategies, which will be implemented jointly overseas, and focus on narrowly defined target audiences where genuine impact can be reasonably expected. Finally, the contractor has developed a shared evaluation and research system that will provide uniform performance information and allow the board to manage toward common and clear objectives. Both the shared communication strategies and the common evaluation and research system will be supported by a framework, called a logic model, that ties inputs and outputs to desired public diplomacy outcomes. Each partner organization will assume responsibility for monitoring inputs and outputs, and evaluation of intermediate and longer-term outcomes will be shared among the three public diplomacy partners. The board will review and analyze partner reporting data and analysis and use it to refine ongoing strategies, plan new strategies and activities, and report to Parliament on the effectiveness of its shared strategy approach and the ultimate effectiveness of the British government's public diplomacy efforts.

Within the context of this established framework, the contractor's report outlines a number of research instruments that can be used to assess progress toward each type of intermediate outcome: (1) opinion and behavior tracking research, (2) media monitoring, (3) tracking of objective outcomes, and (4) evaluative research. Assessing progress against longer-term outcomes will be based on a narrative report, supported by externally generated indicators where available. Analysis will be needed to suggest whether progress on intermediate outcomes is contributing as expected to achieving the longer-term outcomes.

Focus on Behavior Change	A common theme from board members, other British government officials, and outside experts was that government communication efforts should focus on changing target behaviors based on detailed audience research. A senior FCO public diplomacy official told us that "if you can't change behavior, there is no point in doing public diplomacy." The same official added there is no point in doing audience research if specific communication objectives are lacking.

The central importance of research in focusing on behavior change was reiterated by a private-sector group in London called Strategic Communications Laboratory (SCL), which provides consulting and program services to both governments and private groups. SCL officials we met with told us that communication efforts typically do not come into focus until desired behavior changes are identified. SCL officials also stressed the critical importance of understanding group behavior since individuals take social cues and behavior norms from the groups they belong to.

Identification of New Public Diplomacy Tools

With a new approach to public diplomacy, the board has seen the need for new tools to complement traditional activities such as press releases, conferences, art exhibits, and exchanges. As noted by one board member, "most foreign services continue to work with a limited range of fairly conventional public diplomacy tools and techniques, some of which are little more than simple media relations, clumsily adapted from the private sector, and poorly suited to the modern world." While traditional tools will not be abandoned, the board wants government communicators to think more creatively about how to reach foreign publics and not rely exclusively on the same mechanisms they have used to reach these audiences in the past. With these aims in mind, a Public Diplomacy Laboratory has been set up under the auspices of the Public Diplomacy Board to tap into a wide range of contributors, including marketing experts, journalists, interactive specialists, writers, propaganda scholars, psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists, political scientists, and others.

State Department Strategic Communication Efforts Diverge in Several Ways along Four Key Principles

Comparing the four key principles endorsed by the British government's Public Diplomacy Board with State Department practices reveals some similarities and certain key differences. First, unlike the United Kingdom, the State Department follows a dual set of objectives, which encourages the use of public diplomacy as both a tool designed to change public attitudes towards the United States and to promote U.S. foreign policy objectives. Second, while various attempts have been made to develop and coordinate U.S. agency strategic planning, evaluation, and research activities, these efforts remain largely separated. Third, State focuses on attitude-based program outputs and outcome measures and does not set explicit behavior change objectives. Fourth, State has not launched an effort comparable to the British government's Public Diplomacy Laboratory to identify new public diplomacy tools.

Focus on International Strategic Priorities

State's public diplomacy encompasses a dual set of objectives—one focused on using public diplomacy as a tool to promote specific foreign policy objectives, and another on using public diplomacy to promote a more positive image of the United States. This dual nature of U.S. public diplomacy efforts is reflected in the strategic framework established by the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in 2005, which lists three top priorities: (1) support the President's Freedom Agenda with a positive image of hope, (2) isolate and marginalize extremists, and (3) promote understanding regarding shared values and common interests between Americans and peoples of different countries, cultures, and faiths. According to the framework, the department will achieve these goals using five tactics—engagement, exchanges, education, empowerment, and evaluation—implemented through various public diplomacy programs and other means. This framework provides a focal point for such key initiatives as the pilot country initiative designed to counter extremism in 18 target countries. What is not clear, however, is how the Under Secretary's strategic framework links to State and USAID's joint strategic plan and related annual mission planning activities, which are driven by a related but different set of expectations and priorities.

This dual view of the purpose of public diplomacy is also reflected in State-USAID's 2004-2009 joint strategic plan, and in State's annual mission performance planning guidance. The joint strategic plan lists 12 discrete objectives focused on such topics as counterterrorism, democracy and human rights, and promoting mutual understanding through U.S. public diplomacy efforts. The plan makes clear that public diplomacy and public affairs can be pursued both to increase understanding for American values, policies, and initiatives to create a receptive international environment, and to promote specific foreign policy objectives. In addition, State's mission performance planning guidance allows public diplomacy staff in the field to integrate public diplomacy into strategic plan goals, focus on public diplomacy as a stand alone performance goal, or do both.[6]

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[6]For the fiscal year 2008 planning cycle, posts can pursue public diplomacy as a stand-alone goal, integrate public diplomacy into other mission goals such as counter terrorism efforts, or both. When treated as a stand-alone goal, posts are expected to generate related performance indicators and targets. However, when public diplomacy efforts are integrated with other strategic goals, posts are not required to develop related performance targets and indicators.

Integration and Coordination of Strategic Planning and Evaluative Research

Compared to the system developed in the United Kingdom, which defines an explicit partnership arrangement among FCO, British Council, and BBC World Service, U.S. agencies involved with strategic communication efforts remain largely separate despite numerous attempts to improve coordination.[7] U.S. government agency efforts to improve the coordination of strategic planning include the following: (1) the Secretary of State or designee serves as member of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG); (2) BBG annually consults with State regarding its country priorities; (3) the Department of Defense recently established a new Office of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy to improve coordination with State's outreach efforts; and (4) the government has convened a series of policy coordinating committees culminating in the current Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, chaired by the Under Secretary, which recently released an interagency communication strategy.

While these mechanisms have facilitated some improvements in interagency coordination within the U.S. government, they do not replicate the unified board approach adopted in the United Kingdom. For example, under the British system, BBC World Service, while having only an observer role, is a strategic contributor to the Public Diplomacy Board and is expected on an ongoing basis to demonstrate in broad terms how its efforts support the International Strategic Priorities of the British government. We found no comparable arrangement or expectation exists for the BBG and its assorted broadcast entities.

State has taken significant steps to incorporate an evaluation framework that is almost identical to the logic model developed for the Public Diplomacy Board. However, one key difference is that State's model applies only to State's operations and does not extend to key partners, as is the case with the Public Diplomacy Board. In September 2005, State hired the Performance Institute[8] to review its evaluation system and develop a logic model for application to its public diplomacy operations. The Performance Institute delivered its final report in October 2006, and State has begun to incorporate the model into its program design and

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[7]U.S. interagency efforts currently include both DOD and USAID. In contrast, the British system does not currently incorporate counterpart organizations, but it may in the future, according to British officials.

[8]The Performance Institute is a Washington, D.C.-based contractor that specializes in the development of evaluation models for government clients.

evaluation efforts. Finally, State recently launched a pilot performance measurement project that is designed to collect, document, and quantify reliable annual and long-term performance measures to support government reporting requirements. Some of the prototype tools developed for this initiative, such as State's new media tracker, appear similar to the research tools developed by the Public Diplomacy Board's contractor. Other planned efforts, such as the Public Diplomacy Board's plans to track behavior change, are not incorporated in State's plans.

Focus on Behavior Change

While State officials participating in our small group panel argued that ultimately all public diplomacy efforts are directed at behavior change, we found no evidence that State has explicitly factored expected behavior change into its operations—as part of setting communication strategies and objectives, designing programs, or evaluating results.[9] Our review of State's strategic plan, mission performance planning guidance, Results Act planning documents, and planning reports required by the Office of Management and Budget reveals that the department's focus remains on tracking outputs (such as the number of exchange participants and speaker programs), measuring broad attitudinal changes in foreign publics, and measuring specific attitudinal changes in selected cases, such as exchange program participants.

Identification of New Public Diplomacy Tools

The current Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has indicated a willingness to try new communication approaches where appropriate. However, we are unaware of any effort similar to the Public Diplomacy Laboratory where an explicit attempt has been made to bring together creative thinkers, from across a range of disciplines, on an ongoing basis to brainstorm new and creative approaches to U.S. public diplomacy.

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[9]One senior USAID official noted that if and when State decides that its public diplomacy efforts should seek to change target audience behaviors, USAID would be available to assist with this effort. This official noted that the "social marketing" discipline provides a framework for communication efforts designed to change social behavior(s). USAID's Development Outreach and Communication Officers do not engage in social marketing since USAID's mission is restricted to telling America's assistance story. However, other parts of USAID use social marketing communication techniques extensively to promote desired behavior change involving such issues as personal health decisions.

BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

June 21, 2007

Jacquelyn L. Williams-Bridgers
Managing Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Williams-Bridgers

The Broadcasting Board of Governors welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft GAO report "Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research."

We note that the report focuses largely on research and media monitoring in support of public diplomacy and strategic communication in areas other than U.S. international broadcasting. Indeed, GAO acknowledges that the BBG's "specific mandate of broadcasting accurate and objective news and information sets it apart from other strategic communication efforts."

This said, we appreciate GAO's finding that "the BBG uses audience research and media environment analysis to help its broadcast services plan and evaluate their programs." GAO has reviewed BBG research efforts in several previous reports and thus has had considerable background on the strategic development of our research program. We believe that a six-fold increase in research spending – from $1.5 million in 2001 to over $9 million in 2007 – has created today a far more research-driven and performance-oriented culture throughout the BBG.

The BBG agrees with some qualification with GAO's finding, "(U.S. government) agencies lack systematic methods to assess user satisfaction with research efforts." As regards BBG research, the report recognizes that BBG research personnel routinely query end users in the broadcast services as well as managers regarding their specific research needs. Still, we agree that actually surveying users could yield more complete feedback on the utility of the research product.

Finally, the BBG also supports with minor qualification GAO's recommendation calling for "sharing audience research information as well as (creating) a research staff forum and clearinghouse of U.S. government-sponsored research." The report refers to the body of market and audience research in BBG archives and notes that it could become a key component of such a clearinghouse. In its 2008-2013 strategic plan, the BBG calls for greater sharing of our research data. The important caveat would be that the BBG would reserve the right to withhold selected research information meant for internal use only, such as evaluations of programming that included the critique of on-air personalities.

Sincerely,

James K. Glassman
Chairman

Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Defense

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2000

POLICY

JUN 2 5 2007

Jacquelyn L. Williams-Bridgers
Managing Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Williams-Bridgers:

This responds to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-07-904. 'U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research' dated June 5, 2007 (GAO Code 320427).

The Office of Support to Public Diplomacy (SPD) and Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) concur with the recommendation in the report.

The detailed response to the report recommendation is provided in the enclosure. Suggested technical changes have been provided separately.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

Alisa Stack-O'Connor
Principal Director
Support to Public Diplomacy

Enclosure:
As Stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED JUNE 5, 2007
GAO-07-904 (GAO CODE 320427)

"U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: ACTIONS NEEDED TO IMPROVE
\STRATEGIC USE AND COORDINATION OF RESEARCH"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense ensure
that officials from the Office of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy follow through on
plans to develop a new approach to guide the department's media monitoring activities,
including working to improve coordination of this work both within the department and
with other U.S. Agencies.

RESPONSE: The SPD and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public
Affairs) concur with the recommendation.

Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of State

United States Department of State

*Assistant Secretary for Resource Management
and Chief Financial Officer*

Washington, D.C. 20520

JUN 2 2 2007

Ms. Jacquelyn Williams-Bridgers
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Ms. Williams-Bridgers:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research," GAO Job Code 320427.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Bud Jacobs, Senior Advisor, Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Office of Planning and Resources, at (202) 647-0444.

Sincerely,

Bradford R. Higgins

cc: GAO – Audrey Solis
       R/PPR – Sean McCormack
       State/OIG – Mark Duda

**Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report
U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve
Strategic Use and Coordination of Research
(GAO-07-904, GAO Code 320427)**

The Department of State is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this draft GAO report.   We believe that the report is timely and adds substantially to our thinking on this subject.

The Department is pleased that the report acknowledges the inclusion of the "ABCDE" communications process model in the U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication. As the report notes, this model is very close to the "campaign plan" model for thematic communication proposed by GAO in this and in previous reports, and we have encouraged our posts and other agencies to use it as they plan their strategic communications activities. While we agree with GAO that the "campaign plan" model is useful, we do not believe that the Department, our regional bureaus, or our posts have the resources necessary to obtain actionable research data for every step of every thematic campaign plan that might be developed. For our purposes, we believe that the "ABCDE" model, which incorporates research, evaluation and assessment as a necessary step in the process of effective communication, is a more useful tool. However, as they develop thematic communication plans, our regional and functional bureaus, and our posts, are free to adopt GAO's "campaign plan" model, the "ABCDE" model, or any other model that includes the critical steps of identifying the audience, establishing objectives, creating core messages, and assessment and evaluation.

We would, however, like to make some suggestions with respect to the draft's treatment of Under Secretary Hughes' pilot country project and local media and marketing analysis. While it is correct that the posts' draft plans do not include specific requests to do media analysis and market research, our tasking to them asked for programmatic suggestions to counter extremism. In fact, the posts did request funding for local analysis. Under Secretary Hughes convened a conference of pilot country PAOs in Paris in October 2006, and there was so much interest in this topic that $2 million was included in the 2007 Emergency Supplemental for the Global War on Terror. We are very pleased that this funding was approved, and look forward to utilizing this funding in support of the pilot country project.

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We are working with INR to decide on allocations of this money among the
pilot countries.

It is important to note that the inter-agency national strategy is the
framework and point of departure for developing regional and country-
specific strategic communication plans. The first step in implementing the
national strategy is for agencies participating in the Policy Coordinating
Committee (PCC) to develop their own agency plans, and that work is
underway.

We believe that the draft report's other two recommendations for the
State Department – that State, BBG, DOD, and the Open Source Center
assess user needs and satisfaction; and that the PCC on Strategic
Communication and Public Diplomacy establish a clearinghouse for U.S.
government-sponsored research – make sense. We will take them under
consideration and determine how best to implement them. We would note,
however, that there may be substantial resource implications for each
recommendation, and that will be a crucial issue for us to resolve as we
move forward.

Appendix VIII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact	Jess T. Ford, (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov
Staff Acknowledgments	In addition to the individual named above, Audrey Solis, Assistant Director; Rick Boudreau; Joe Carney; Kate France Smiles; Michael ten Kate; and Eve Weisberg made significant contributions to this report. Wilfred Holloway, Ernie Jackson, Karen O'Conor, Andrew Stavisky, and Elizabeth Wood provided technical assistance.

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