United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

May 2006

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges

G A O

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State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges

Why GAO Did This Study

Public opinion polls have shown continued negative sentiments toward the United States in the Muslim world. Public diplomacy activities—led by the State Department (State)—are designed to counter such sentiments by explaining U.S. foreign policy actions, countering misinformation, and advancing mutual understanding between nations. GAO was asked to examine (1) what public diplomacy resources and programs State has directed to the Muslim world, (2) whether posts have adopted a strategic approach to implementing public diplomacy, and (3) what challenges remain to be addressed.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State develop (1) implementing guidance for its public diplomacy strategy modeled on private sector best practices, (2) a sample country-level communication plan that could be adapted for local use by posts, and (3) a systematic mechanism for sharing best practices data to address long-standing program challenges. State agreed with the report's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-535.

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

What GAO Found

State has increased public diplomacy resources to countries with significant Muslim populations in recent years and launched three major initiatives directed at the Muslim world. Comparing data for fiscal years 2004 and 2006, overseas operations budgets have increased, with the largest percentage increases going to regional bureaus with significant Muslim populations. However, the number of authorized overseas positions in all regional bureaus increased slightly or not at all. As part of the Secretary of State's newly announced transformational diplomacy initiative, the department intends to reposition staff to better align with policy priorities. Since 2002, State has initiated three public diplomacy activities focused on the Muslim world—a media campaign, a youth-oriented magazine, and a group of youth-focused exchange programs—but these initiatives have been largely terminated or suspended. However, several exchange programs continue to target youth in the Muslim world. In addition, posts in the Muslim world use a range of standard programs and tools which the Under Secretary plans to supplement with several new initiatives.

GAO's fieldwork revealed that posts' public diplomacy efforts generally lacked important strategic communication elements found in the private sector, which GAO and others have suggested adopting as a means to better communicate with target audiences. These elements include having core messages, segmented target audiences, in-depth research and analysis to monitor and evaluate results, and an integrated communication plan that brings all these elements together. These findings were reinforced by State's own post-level review. State established a new strategic framework for public diplomacy in fiscal year 2006, calling for, among other things, marginalizing extremists and demonstrating respect for Muslim cultures. However, posts have not been given written guidance on how to implement this strategy. Such guidance is a critical first step to developing in-depth communication plans in the field.

Posts in the Muslim world face several challenges in implementing their public diplomacy programs, including the need to balance security with public outreach and concerns related to staff numbers and language capabilities. For example, we found that 30 percent of language designated public diplomacy positions in the Muslim world were filled by officers without the requisite language skills. State has begun to address many of these challenges, but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of many of these efforts. Further, State lacks a systematic, comprehensive means of sharing best practices in public diplomacy, which could help transfer knowledge and experience across posts.

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Abbreviations

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
BDA	Business for Diplomatic Action
DOD	Department of Defense
PLUS	Partnerships for Learning-Undergraduate Study
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIA	U.S. Information Agency
VOA	Voice of America
YES	Youth Exchange and Study

United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

May 3, 2006

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf
Chairman
Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State,
   Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, foreign public opinion polls
conducted by the State Department (State) and firms such as Zogby
International have shown that negative attitudes toward the United States
have generally grown worse in many countries around the world. One
particular concern has been a marked worsening of such negative attitudes
in the Muslim world[1]—an audience of key strategic interest in the United
States' war on terrorism.[2] State's public diplomacy programs and activities
are designed to counter such negative sentiments through ongoing
attempts to communicate with elites and mass audiences overseas. These
efforts include crisis management and daily news operations designed to
explain U.S. foreign policy positions and actions; strategic information
programs designed to more broadly engage, inform, and influence target
audiences; and long-term activities, such as exchanges, to promote
relationship building and mutual understanding.[3]

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[1]For the purposes of this report, the "Muslim world" refers to the 58 countries and territories
identified as "countries with significant Muslim populations" by the State Department's
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This list includes Muslim-majority countries and
members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Appendix II lists these countries.

[2]These negative trends amongst Muslim populations have been documented in a variety of
analyses and polls. For example, see Office of Research, State Department. "Independent
Survey of Arab Publics Shows Bad U.S. Image Based Primarily on U.S. Regional Policy."
Opinion Analysis. Washington, D.C.: M-34-05, Mar. 23, 2005.

[3]Public diplomacy programs and tools also support the department's traditional policy-
oriented goals such as promoting regional stability, democracy and human rights, and
economic prosperity and security.

GAO-06-535 U.S. Public Diplomacy

As a follow-up to our April 2005 public diplomacy report,[4] we reviewed State's current public diplomacy initiatives designed to reach out to countries with significant Muslim populations and determined how such initiatives are being implemented at the post level. Specifically, we examined: (1) what public diplomacy resources and programs State has directed to the Muslim world, (2) whether posts have adopted a strategic approach to implementing public diplomacy, and (3) what program challenges remain to be addressed.

To accomplish our objectives, we interviewed State officials from the Under Secretary's office, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Bureau of International Information Programs, the Bureau of Public Affairs, and the Bureau of Resource Management. We also interviewed officials in State's Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs, South and Central Asian Affairs,[5] African Affairs, and East Asian and Pacific Affairs. We collected and analyzed data on the allocation of public diplomacy staff and selected program costs by regional bureau. We also convened a roundtable of nongovernment Muslim experts in Washington, D.C., who were identified by various U.S. government officials and others as knowledgeable of U.S. efforts to engage Muslim audiences, to discuss key program challenges, obstacles, and potential solutions.

We conducted fieldwork in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Egypt to review the implementation of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in countries of particular strategic interest to the United States. In each country, we met with a broad cross section of U.S. embassy officials, British Council and embassy staff, and local focus groups to discuss public perceptions of the United States, program implementation efforts, effectiveness measurement efforts, and program challenges. Additionally, we conducted phone interviews with State Public Affairs officers in Indonesia and Turkey to supplement the information we collected at the three posts we visited. The combined population of these countries is approximately 680 million, or 45 percent of the total population of the 58 countries and territories in the Muslim world.

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[4]GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy*, GAO-05-323 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 4, 2005).

[5]In February 2006, State moved the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, creating the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

The focus of our review was public diplomacy activities designed to communicate information about the United States to target audiences overseas. Thus, we did not review State-led reform initiatives, such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative.[6] Aside from State, we examined U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) efforts to tell America's assistance story and Department of Defense (DOD) efforts to support State's public diplomacy activities. In addition, we collected funding and program information on U.S. international broadcasting but did not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of Radio Sawa and the Alhurra satellite television network—the Broadcasting Board of Governors' (BBG) two primary initiatives aimed at Arab audiences. GAO is reviewing these broadcast initiatives separately.

We performed our work from April 2005 to February 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

State has increased public diplomacy resources to countries with significant Muslim populations in recent years and launched three major initiatives directed at the Muslim world. Comparing data from fiscal years 2004 and 2006, regional bureau budgets for overseas operations increased by 21 percent in total, with the largest percentage going to the South Asia (39 percent), East Asia and the Pacific (28 percent), and Near East (25 percent) regions, each of which includes countries with large Muslim populations. Over the past 3 years, however, the number of authorized overseas positions in all regional bureaus increased slightly or not at all. As part of the Secretary of State's newly announced transformational diplomacy initiative, the department intends to reposition some staff to better align available resources with its strategic priorities, including initial plans to shift 28 public diplomacy officers from posts in Europe and Washington, D.C., to India, China, and Latin America, as well as to the Muslim world. Since 2002, State has initiated three public diplomacy activities focused on the Muslim world—Shared Values, a media campaign; *Hi*, a youth-oriented magazine; and Partnerships for Learning, a group of exchange programs geared to younger audiences. While these particular initiatives have been largely terminated or suspended, posts continue to

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[6]In August 2005 GAO issued a report on the Middle East Partnership Initiative. See GAO, *Foreign Assistance: Middle East Partnership Initiative Offers Tools for Supporting Reform, but Project Monitoring Needs Improvement*, GAO-05-711 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 8, 2005).

pursue a range of standard public diplomacy programs and tools available to embassies around the world. In addition, while Partnerships for Learning no longer provides a focal point for State's exchange efforts in the Muslim world, several exchange programs continue to target younger, marginalized sectors of society in the Muslim world. The new Under Secretary has introduced several new public diplomacy initiatives to help officers at all posts better advocate U.S. policy and respond to breaking news, while many other initiatives are still in their early stages of development.

Our fieldwork revealed that posts' public diplomacy efforts generally lacked important strategic communication elements found in the private sector, which GAO and others have suggested adopting as a means to better communicate with target audiences. These elements include having core messages, segmented target audiences, detailed strategies and tactics, in-depth research and analysis to monitor and evaluate results, and a communication plan that brings it all together. These findings were reinforced by a worldwide review of mission performance plans conducted by State in 2005, which also concluded that a large number of posts lacked at least some of these key strategic elements. State recently established a strategic framework outlining priority goals for public diplomacy, such as marginalizing extremists, and related tactics that include education and empowerment; however, the department has not issued guidance on how these strategies and tactics should be implemented. Such guidance is a critical first step to developing detailed communication plans in the field.

U.S. embassies face multiple challenges in implementing their public diplomacy programs, including the need to balance security with public outreach and concerns related to staff numbers, time, and language capabilities. These challenges are particularly acute in countries with significant Muslim populations; for example, the threat level for terrorism is rated as "critical" or "high" in 80 percent of posts in the Muslim world, and 15 of State's 20 so-called unaccompanied posts are located in countries in the Muslim world. Security and budgetary concerns have forced embassies to close publicly accessible facilities and curtail certain public outreach efforts, sending foreign publics the unintended message that the United States is unapproachable. Efforts to compensate for this loss in public presence include the use of small-scale external facilities staffed with local employees, expanded embassy speaker programs, and traveling teams of embassy employees engaging in outreach efforts. Meanwhile, public diplomacy efforts at post are hindered by a shortage of officers, and these officers face an increasing administrative burden. Tours of duty for diplomats at posts in the Muslim world are shorter than elsewhere, which

can limit the effectiveness of public diplomacy efforts in these posts. Furthermore, State's data show that as many as 30 percent of public diplomacy positions in countries with significant Muslim populations are filled by officers with insufficient language skills. As a result, public diplomacy officers in the Muslim world spend less time communicating with local audiences than the position requires. While State has begun to address many of these challenges, it is too early to determine the effectiveness of such efforts. Further, opportunities to share best practices across posts on how to overcome some of these challenges remain underutilized.

To increase the sophistication and effectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy outreach efforts, we recommend that the Secretary of State develop written guidance detailing how the department intends to implement the Under Secretary's priority goals and tactics as they apply to the Muslim world. We recommend the development of a sample country-level communication plan to accompany this document as a guide for posts to use and adapt to their environment. Finally, we recommend that the Secretary develop a systematic mechanism for sharing best practices data to address long-standing program challenges, which have been particularly acute in the Muslim world. In commenting on a draft of this report, State concurred with our findings and recommendations. We have reprinted State's comments in appendix V. We also incorporated technical comments from State where appropriate.

Background

The overall goal of U.S. public diplomacy efforts is to understand, inform, engage, and influence the attitudes and behavior of global audiences in ways that support the United States' strategic interests. U.S. public diplomacy efforts are implemented by several entities, including State, DOD, USAID, and BBG, and function under the broad guidance of the White House and the National Security Council.[7] Funding is concentrated in State and BBG, which together received approximately $1.2 billion for public diplomacy in fiscal year 2005. USAID and DOD have relatively small public diplomacy budgets.

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[7]In March 2005, the President reorganized the National Security Council and created a Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications and Global Outreach, whose responsibilities include U.S. public diplomacy efforts.

State Department Public Diplomacy Efforts

State's public diplomacy operations are guided by the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who oversees the Bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs, International Information Programs, and Public Affairs. The department's regional and functional bureaus also contain public diplomacy offices, which report to the relevant assistant secretary.[8] The Under Secretary has direct authority over the three public diplomacy bureaus but does not have line authority over public diplomacy operations in other regional or functional bureaus.[9] In overseas missions, Foreign Service public diplomacy officers (including Public Affairs, Cultural Affairs, Information, Information Resources, and Regional English Language officers) operate under the authority of the chief of mission and report to their regional bureau managers in Washington, D.C.

Public Diplomacy Budget and Programs

In fiscal year 2005, State dedicated $597 million to pubic diplomacy and public affairs. According to the department's performance plan, its investment in public diplomacy and public affairs continues to increase, particularly for efforts targeting audiences in the Middle East. Exchange programs received the majority of fiscal year 2005 funding, $356 million, which was a 12.4 percent increase over fiscal year 2004. These programs include international visitors, citizen exchanges, the Fulbright academic exchange program, and English-language teaching. State's information programs received roughly $68 million in fiscal year 2005 to fund programs such as the U.S. speakers program, mission Web sites, and American Corners, which are centers that provide information about the United States, hosted in local institutions and staffed by local employees. The remaining public diplomacy funds go to State's regional bureaus to pay for the salaries of locally engaged staff overseas, among other purposes. Appendix III provides a summary of selected programs managed by each bureau along with a description of staff positions.

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[8]State's regional bureaus are the Bureaus of African Affairs, East Asian and Pacific Affairs, European and Eurasian Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, South and Central Asian Affairs, and Western Hemisphere Affairs. Functional Bureaus with public diplomacy responsibilities include: Administration; Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; Economic and Business Affairs; Intelligence and Research; International Security and Nonproliferation; Information Resource Management; Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs; and Political-Military Affairs.

[9]State has begun to appoint "dual-hatted" Deputy Assistant Secretaries for Public Diplomacy in each of the six regional bureaus. These individuals report directly to both their Regional Assistant Secretary and to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

USAID, DOD, and BBG also support the U.S. government's communication efforts in the field. USAID reports that it has established an overseas network of more than one hundred Development Outreach and Communications officers, who work with Public Affairs officers to promote America's assistance story. DOD has also become involved in public diplomacy and is developing a strategy for "military support for public diplomacy" to identify ways it can effectively support State's operations. For example, DOD Military Information Support Teams have been dispatched to selected posts, at the request of the Ambassador, to assist with outreach efforts. Finally, U.S. international broadcasting, led by the BBG, is a major contributor to the United States' efforts to communicate directly with foreign audiences. Between fiscal years 2004 and 2006, the BBG expects to spend nearly $240 million on its Middle East Broadcasting Network, which includes Alhurra satellite television network and the Arabic-language Radio Sawa.

Definition of the Muslim World

According to State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Muslim world is composed of 58 countries and territories with significant Muslim populations, many of which are members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. These countries have a combined population of more than 1.5 billion and are located in Africa, Asia, and Europe (see app. II). Figure 1 shows their locations.

Figure 1: Map of the Muslim World

Near East and North Africa

Algeria	Morocco
Bahrain	Oman
Egypt	Qatar
Iran	Saudi Arabia
Iraq	Syria
Jordan	Tunisia
Kuwait	United Arab Emirates
Lebanon	(West Bank and Gaza)
Libya	Yemen

Europe and Eurasia

Albania	Tajikistan
Azerbaijan	Turkey
Kazakhstan	Turkmenistan
(Kosovo)	Uzbekistan
Kyrgyzstan	

South Asia

Afghanistan
Bangladesh
Maldives
Pakistan

East Asia and Pacific

Brunei
Indonesia
Malaysia

Sub-Saharan Africa

Benin	Guinea-Bissau
Burkina Faso	Mali
Cameroon	Mauritania
Chad	Mozambique
Comoros	Niger
Cote d'Ivoire	Nigeria
Djibouti	Senegal
Eritrea	Sierra Leone
Ethiopia	Somalia
Gabon	Sudan
Gambia	Togo
Guinea	Uganda

Countries without significant Muslim populations
Countries with significant Muslim populations

Source: State Department.

State's public diplomacy investment in these 58 countries and territories has increased in recent years. According to department data, State provided funds for 179 speakers to travel to these countries in fiscal year 2005, up from 157 in fiscal year 2004. Additionally, the department funded nearly 5,800 exchange participants from these countries in fiscal year 2005, up from about 5,100 in fiscal year 2004. The department spent nearly $115 million on exchange and information programs in these countries in fiscal year 2005.

State Devotes Significant Public Diplomacy Resources to the Muslim World, but Programs Generally Remain the Same

State devotes significant public diplomacy program and staffing resources to regions with large Muslim populations. Beginning in 2002, State introduced three key initiatives focused on reaching younger and broader Muslim audiences to supplement the standard exchange and information programs used by most embassies; these initiatives have been largely terminated or suspended. Nevertheless, posts in the Muslim world continue to generally employ the same exchange, cultural, and information programs used throughout the world.[10] In fiscal year 2006, the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs introduced several new initiatives designed to help officers in the field improve their advocacy of U.S. foreign policy and enhance their ability to quickly respond to breaking news stories, while other initiatives, some of which are specific to Muslim audiences, are still in development.

Resources Directed to Regions with Significant Muslim Populations

In our 2003 report on public diplomacy, we reported that the department had increased its overall spending on public diplomacy since the terrorist attacks of September 11, with the largest relative increases going to regions with large Muslim populations. Specifically, we noted that while State's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs received the largest overall share of overseas public diplomacy resources, the largest percentage increases in such resources occurred in regions with significant Muslim populations. As table 1 shows, this pattern has continued over the past 3 years, with total spending on overseas public diplomacy increasing 21 percent between fiscal years 2004 and 2006. The Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs continues to receive the largest overall share of overseas public diplomacy resources, with the largest percentage increases in resources going to regions with countries with large Muslim populations including South Asia (39 percent), East Asia and Pacific (28 percent), and the Near East (25 percent).

Table 1 provides data on public diplomacy funding and staffing for each of State's regional bureaus. The table also shows the number of countries with significant Muslim populations in each region, according to State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, along with the population of these countries.

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[10]These programs are outlined in appendix III.

Table 1: Overseas Public Diplomacy Resources by Regional Bureau, Fiscal Years 2004 and 2006

Dollars in millions

Regional bureau	2004 (actual)	2006 (estimated)	Percentage increase	Countries with significant Muslim populations	
				Number of countries (58 total)	Total population (millions)
Africa					
Funding	$59	$70	19%	24	432
Authorized officers	90	91	1		
East Asia and Pacific					
Funding	78	100	28	3	266
Authorized officers	89	89	0		
Europe and Eurasia					
Funding	198	229	16	9	141
Authorized officers	192	192	0		
Near East					
Funding	69	86	25	18	341
Authorized officers	66	68	3		
South Asia[a]					
Funding	41	57	39	4	337
Authorized officers	38	39	3		
Western Hemisphere					
Funding	74	87	18	0	NA
Authorized officers	103	103	0		

Source: State Department.

Notes: Funding data include American salaries for overseas staff including regional bureau employees and employees from the Bureau for International Information Programs and the Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Data do not include salary costs of locally engaged staff.

Funding data include exchange programs, regional bureau program funds, and program budgets managed by Information Resource officers and Regional English Language officers.

Authorized officer positions cover overseas staff including regional bureau employees, Information Resource officers, and Regional English Language officers.

[a]Data current as of January 2006.

In our 2003 report, we noted that authorized officer positions overseas had significantly expanded, with the most notable increases occurring in State's Near East (27 percent increase) and South Asia (15 percent increase) bureaus. However, current data show that staff numbers have stayed

largely the same over the past 3 years with increases of 3 percent or less. In January 2006, Secretary Rice announced plans to reposition officers as part of her transformational diplomacy initiative. State officials said that the department will initially reposition approximately 75 Foreign Service officers this year from posts in Europe and Washington, D.C., to India, China, and Latin America, as well as to the Muslim world. According to these officials, over one-third of the positions that will be relocated are public diplomacy positions.

Muslim-Specific Initiatives Have Been Short-lived

State has developed three programs specifically designed to reach Muslim audiences: the Shared Values media campaign, the Arabic-language *Hi* magazine, and the youth-oriented Partnerships for Learning exchange strategy. These initiatives have been largely suspended or terminated, but State continues to focus many of its exchange programs on younger audiences.

Shared Values Initiative

In 2002, State launched the Shared Values Initiative to highlight the common values and beliefs shared by Muslims and Americans, demonstrate that America is not at war with Islam, and stimulate dialogue between the United States and the Muslim world. The initiative, which cost about $15 million, centered on a paid television campaign, which was developed by a private sector advertising firm and attempted to illustrate the daily lives of Muslim Americans. This multimedia campaign also included a booklet on Muslim life in America, speaker tours, an interactive Web site to promote dialogue between Muslims in the United States and abroad, and other information programs. The initial phase of the Shared Values Initiative was aired in six languages in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Kuwait, as well as on pan-Arab media. State estimates that 288 million people were exposed to these messages, but television stations in several countries, including Egypt and Lebanon, refused to air the programs for political and other reasons.

In 2003, the report by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, commonly referred to as the Djerejian report, credited the campaign for having a solid research basis but criticized it for taking far longer to develop than similar private sector advertising campaigns.[11] The report also noted that some embassies were reluctant to promote the ads. A department analysis of foreign reaction to the Shared Values Initiative concluded that media outlets in many countries found the campaign to be propaganda and unlikely to succeed as long as U.S. foreign policy remained unchanged. While some posts continue to host events on Muslim life in America, the Shared Values Initiative's centerpiece television campaign aired only for the holy month of Ramadan in the winter of 2002-03 and was subsequently discontinued. Additionally, the interactive Web site, "Open Dialogue," is no longer in operation.

Hi Magazine and Web Site

Following the demise of the Shared Values Initiative, State launched the Arabic-language *Hi* magazine in July 2003 with an annual budget of $4.5 million. Designed to highlight American culture, values, and lifestyles, *Hi* was directed at Arab youth in the Middle East and North Africa and was expected to influence Arab youth to have a more positive perception of the United States. *Hi* was produced by a private sector magazine firm, and State estimated its circulation to be about 50,000 in the Arab world. One official in Egypt, however, said that of the 2,500 copies the embassy distributed monthly to newsstands in Cairo, often as many as 2,000 copies were returned unsold (see fig. 2). State officials in Washington noted that, as a matter of practice, these copies were subsequently redistributed to public institutions in Egypt, such as schools and libraries. According to embassy officials, they were unable to sell many copies of *Hi* because it was so new and relatively expensive. In December 2005, State suspended publication of *Hi* magazine pending the results of an internal evaluation, which was prompted by concerns over the magazine's cost, reach, and impact, according to State officials. State expects this evaluation to be completed by May 2006. According to one official, an initial assessment of

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[11]Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds Winning Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 1, 2003).

the magazine found that most readers access *Hi* via its Web sites, which remain in operation.[12]

Figure 2: Unsold Copies of *Hi* Magazine Returned to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, October 2005

Source: GAO.

Partnerships for Learning

In 2002, State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs developed an exchange initiative specifically for youth from Muslim communities called Partnerships for Learning, which provided an organizing theme to help guide the department's exchange investments. Designed to reach a "younger, broader, deeper" audience in the Muslim world, one senior State official called Partnerships for Learning, "the heart of our extensive engagement with the Arab and Muslim world." According to a senior State

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[12]State estimated that *Hi*'s Web sites received approximately 3 million hits in December 2005.

official, the Partnerships for Learning program was terminated as an organizing theme in late 2005 with the appointment of the latest Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Nevertheless, department officials said that its exchange programs will continue to focus on younger audiences. These officials stated that the department is exploring other program models to engage the greatest number of undergraduate students while increasing cost effectiveness. Similarly, State told us that the Partnerships for Learning concept continues to infuse almost all of its citizen exchange programs.

Between 2002 and 2005, the department estimates that nearly $150 million was spent on exchanges supporting the Partnerships for Learning theme. This figure includes new programs developed to implement this theme and funds spent on existing exchange programs that targeted a younger, more diverse, and less elite audience in the Muslim world. The two major new programs developed by the department were the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program and the Partnerships for Learning Undergraduate Studies (PLUS) program.[13] Between 2003 and 2005, the YES program provided scholarships to more than 600 high school students from the Muslim world to study in the United States. Similarly, since 2004 the PLUS program has brought more than 170 students from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia to the United States for 2 years of academic study at an American college or university. The YES and PLUS programs, with a combined budget of $25 million, remain active in fiscal year 2006. The department has not yet conducted a formal evaluation of the YES and PLUS programs.[14]

Public Diplomacy Efforts at Selected Posts Rely on Standard Programs and Tools

Officials at the three posts we visited—Nigeria, Pakistan, and Egypt—said that they use a broad range of programs available to them, similar to the mix of programs used throughout the world, including information, exchange, and cultural programs. Table 2 provides a breakdown of selected activities at each post. In addition to these programs, these officials said

[13]Other Partnerships for Learning programs include CultureConnect, which supports American cultural figures' engagement of young audiences in the Muslim world, and English ACCESS Microscholarships, which provide English language instruction to low-income and underserved youth abroad.

[14]State officials noted however, that the Youth Exchange and Study program was modeled after the department's Future Leaders Exchange program, which was assessed in 2003 and found to be meeting its goals.

that they spend a significant amount of time on news and crisis management, such as responding to media inquiries and coordinating media events. In Pakistan, for example, we observed the acting public affairs officer coordinate media events related to the Secretary of State's visit and arrange interviews for the Ambassador regarding U.S. relief efforts in the wake of the October 2005 South Asian earthquake.

Table 2: Selected Public Diplomacy Activities at Posts in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Egypt, Fiscal Year 2005

	Nigeria	Pakistan	Egypt
American Corners			
Number–opened	10	0	0
Number–planned	2	5	2
Number of speakers	5	18	7
Number of exchange participants	143	215	359
Local language magazine	*Magama*	*Khabr-o-Nazar*	*Hi*

Sources: GAO and State Department.

Academic and professional exchanges were an important public diplomacy tool at each post we visited. In fiscal year 2005, State obligated more than $12 million for such exchanges in these countries. All of the posts we visited had an active Fulbright exchange program, managed by the embassy in Nigeria and by binational commissions in Pakistan and Egypt. In Nigeria, the embassy has participated in the Partnerships for Learning-YES program since 2003 and has sent about 35 Nigerian high school students and their teachers to study in Iowa through this program. According to the Public Affairs officer in Nigeria, the embassy has shifted resources to assure that 50 percent of exchange participants are Muslim, reflecting their overall proportion of Nigeria's population. Additionally, the Public Affairs officer in Islamabad is working to develop a database of Pakistani exchange alumni to enable the embassy to maintain better contact with this audience.

Posts have also made use of information programs such as speakers, magazines, information resource centers, and, to a limited extent, American Corners. Data from State's Bureau of International Information Programs show that the bureau funded 5 speakers in Nigeria, 18 in Pakistan, and 7 in Egypt in fiscal year 2005. These speakers discussed

topics such as the 2004 U.S. presidential election, Muslim life and religious tolerance in America, and U.S. foreign policy. In addition, these posts take advantage of "target of opportunity" speakers—American experts who already happen to be in the region. Each post we visited also distributes a U.S.-funded magazine in local languages, such as the Hausa *Magama* in Nigeria and the Urdu *Khabr-o-Nazar* in Pakistan. Further, these posts operate small reference libraries within the embassy compound, known as Information Resource Centers. According to officials in Egypt, the embassy's resource center receives more than 1,000 visitors per month, on average, while security concerns in Pakistan have limited the numbers of visitors to its center. Additionally, the embassy in Nigeria has established 10 American Corners, with plans to open more in the near future. While there are no American Corners in Egypt or Pakistan, embassy officials in those countries told us they are currently seeking local partners to host such a facility.

Finally, other agencies have played a limited role in supporting the mission's overall public diplomacy efforts in the countries we visited. USAID has hired Development Outreach and Communication officers in Nigeria and Egypt and was in the process of hiring an officer in Pakistan in October 2005. DOD has sent two Military Information Support Teams to Nigeria to help publicize the department's humanitarian assistance programs in the country. In addition, U.S. broadcasting reaches audiences in Nigeria and Pakistan through Voice of America's (VOA) Hausa, English, and Urdu services, and the Arabic Radio Sawa and Alhurra satellite television network reach some audiences in Egypt. Finally, in November 2005, VOA announced the launch of a new half-hour television program in Urdu to be broadcast on GEO-TV, a commercial station in Pakistan.

Recent Initiatives Focus on Improving State's Policy Advocacy and News Management Operations

During the past 6 months, State has launched a number of initiatives designed to broadly improve its ability to explain U.S. foreign policy decisions and respond to breaking news both within and outside the Muslim world. These initiatives, created in Washington, D.C., impact field operations to the extent that Ambassadors and other spokespersons at posts will be better positioned to advocate U.S. foreign policy decisions and actions and effectively react to developing news stories. These initiatives include the following:

- A Rapid Response Unit established in the Bureau of Public Affairs to produce a daily report on stories driving news around the world and give the U.S. position on those issues. This report is distributed to U.S.

cabinet and subcabinet officials, Ambassadors, public affairs officers, regional combatant commands, and others.

- "Echo Chamber" messages to provide U.S. Ambassadors and others with clear guidance so they are better able to advocate U.S. policy on major news stories and policy issues. These policy-level statements are posted to State's internal Web site and can be broadly accessed by post staff around the world. These statements are also made available to VOA's policy office for use in crafting editorials reflecting the views of the U.S. government.

- Establishing a regional public diplomacy hub in Dubai, a key media market, this summer. The hub, which will operate out of commercial office space to facilitate public access, will be staffed with two to three spokespersons whose full-time job will be to appear on regional media outlets, with a focus on television given its broad reach, to advocate U.S. policies. According to State officials, a regional center is needed since embassy public affairs staff focus on bilateral issues and no one in the department is specifically responsible for transregional media operations.

In addition to these initiatives, several other efforts are under way. These efforts include empowering the American Muslim community to speak out for the United States,[15] creating an Office of Public/Private Partnerships to stimulate private sector involvement, and developing enhanced technology to expand the use of new communication venues in order to better reach target audiences.

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[15]GAO's roundtable of nongovernment Muslim experts focused on the importance given to reaching out to American Muslims and empowering them to reach out to the Muslim world. State has begun to take specific steps toward this end. For example, the department sponsored a symposium in Brussels in November 2005 to bring together American and Belgium Muslims to discuss common areas of concerns. State officials noted that this symposium was intended to serve as a prototype and that similar conferences could be held elsewhere in Europe and beyond.

Post Program Planning and Evaluation Efforts Lack Appropriate Guidance, but Improvements Are Planned

Our review of mission performance plans for the countries we visited found that they lacked key strategic planning elements recognized by GAO and the private sector as vital to effectively communicating with target audiences. Among the missing elements are core messages and themes, target audience segmentation and analysis, details on program strategies and tactics, in-depth research and evaluation to inform strategic communication decisions, and a fully developed communication plan to tie everything together.[16] In 2005, State established a strategic framework for U.S. public diplomacy efforts; however, these early efforts lack guidance from Washington to the field on strategies and tactics. In addition, posts are not required to develop in-depth analysis to better inform and support their program decisions or country-specific communication plans to help inform and guide their implementation efforts.
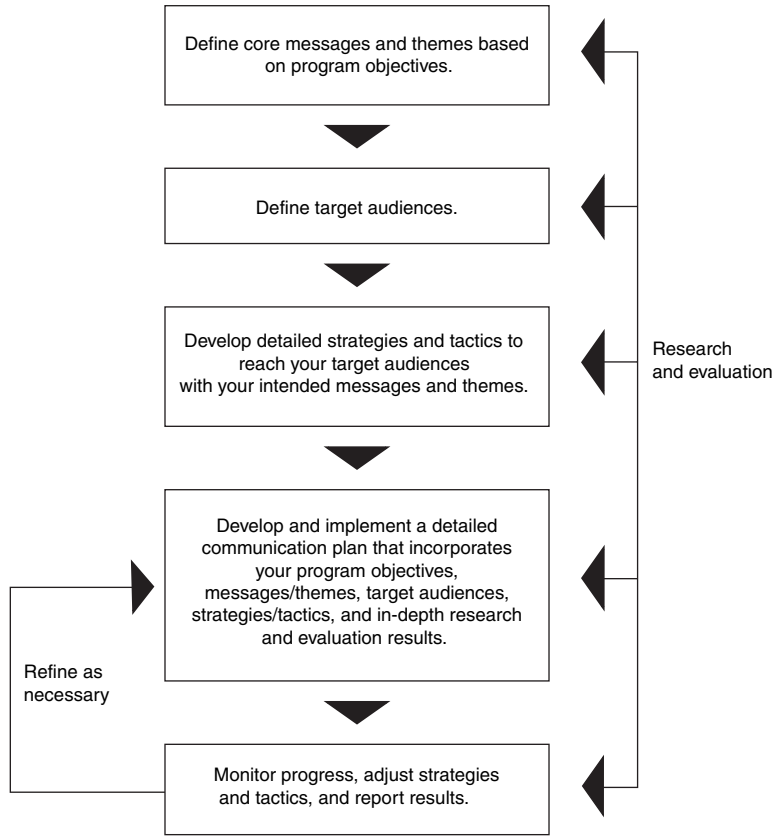
Posts Lack Strategic Approach to Public Diplomacy

GAO and other groups, including the Defense Science Board,[17] have suggested that State adopt a strategic approach to public diplomacy by modeling and adapting private sector communication practices to suit its purposes (see app. IV). Key best practices identified in GAO's September 2003 report are shown in figure 3.

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[16]Appendix IV provides more details on such private sector best practices.

[17]The Defense Science Board advises DOD on scientific, technical, manufacturing, acquisition process, and other matters of special interest to the department.

Figure 3: Key Elements of a Typical Public Relations Strategy

Define core messages and themes based on program objectives.

▼

Define target audiences.

▼

Develop detailed strategies and tactics to reach your target audiences with your intended messages and themes.

Research and evaluation

▼

Develop and implement a detailed communication plan that incorporates your program objectives, messages/themes, target audiences, strategies/tactics, and in-depth research and evaluation results.

Refine as necessary

▼

Monitor progress, adjust strategies and tactics, and report results.

Source: GAO.

Based on our review of mission performance plans[18] and on fieldwork in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Egypt, we found that posts' public diplomacy programming generally lacked these important elements of strategic communications planning. In particular, posts lacked a clear theme or message and specific target audiences were generally not identified. Posts also failed to develop detailed strategies and tactics to direct available public diplomacy programs and tools toward clear, measurable objectives in the most efficient manner possible. Further, research and evaluation efforts to inform all facets of strategic communications are limited by the relatively small budget in Washington, D.C., allocated to such efforts and a general lack of expertise in the field with regard to commissioning and conducting such studies. Finally, posts lack detailed, country-level communication plans to tie everything together. These findings are reinforced by a worldwide review of fiscal year 2007 mission performance plans conducted by State's Bureau of Resource Management in 2005. In particular, State determined that post efforts were generally not directed at specific target audiences, lacked specific and reasonable communication objectives and strategies, and often failed to provide outcome and impact measures of program success.

Post Efforts Not Directed Toward a Core Message or Theme

Private sector communication best practices suggest the need for a core message or theme, which can be developed on a worldwide, regional, or country-by-country basis, and should be consistently applied to and woven through all program activities and events. The posts we visited did not have a core message or theme to direct their communication efforts. We found that post efforts focused on general program goals established in Washington, D.C., which are found in the mission performance plans. For public diplomacy, these goals are promoting mutual understanding, advancing American values, and influencing international public opinion. According to State officials, these goals can be interpreted in many different ways and have limited practical utility for developing a targeted communication strategy. As one senior embassy official in Nigeria noted, these goals are "amorphous" in nature and "hard to quantify" in practice. Specifically, posts noted the following communication goals in their fiscal year 2006 mission performance plans:

- *Nigeria—Influencing International Public Opinion:* Nigeria's fiscal year 2006 mission performance plan simply states that the post intends

[18]Mission performance plans serve as top-level statements of agency program goals and objectives, resource requirements, strategies and tactics, and performance indicators.

to move the opinions of Northern Nigerians to mirror those of the rest of the Nigerian population, which is largely supportive of U.S. values and principles.[19]

- *Pakistan—Promoting Mutual Understanding:* Pakistan's mission performance plan states that the post will seek to enhance the image of the United States in Pakistan and increase the depth of understanding among Pakistanis of how American society, culture, and values shape the objectives behind and reasons for U.S. policies towards Pakistan.

- *Egypt—Advancing American Values:* Egypt's mission performance plan notes that the post will use information activities, exchanges, and local information programming to bolster awareness among Egyptians of values shared with Americans and increase Egyptian public understanding of American society.

The Deputy Chief of Mission in Pakistan told us that, while specific messages have been developed at post, there are in fact too many competing messages (such as the United States is a great place to live, the United States is a great place to visit, American cultural diversity and democracy are good things), and the post needed to do a better job of defining and clarifying its message. A senior embassy official in Nigeria echoed this point by stating that his post needed a core message that could be coordinated across State, USAID, DOD, and other supporting agencies.

Target Audiences Have Not Been Clearly Defined

Private sector best practices suggest that analyzing target markets in depth and segmenting these markets are critical to developing effective information campaigns. The posts we visited generally had not used these practices to help refine and focus their communication efforts. In its worldwide review, State's Resource Management Bureau found that some posts had done a poor job of answering the basic question of whether to direct their communication efforts at a mass audience or opinion leaders. The reviewers concluded that posts should focus on opinion leaders in the 130 less developed countries with poor communications infrastructure (many countries with significant Muslim populations fall in this group), while posts in roughly 40 other countries with adequate communications infrastructures should focus on reaching the general public. As a first step,

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[19]Post officials in Nigeria are faced with the prospect of reaching a countrywide audience of over 130 million people, roughly half of whom are concentrated in the Northern portion of the country, where the United States does not have a permanent diplomatic presence.

the reviewers recommended that posts in the former group undertake an inventory of opinion leaders they wished to influence. This "key influencers analysis" could be segmented into various groups such as youth; women; opinion and editorial writers; professors; and ethnic, religious, and business leaders, who could serve as message multipliers. In 2004, Washington sought to supplement mission performance planning activities by asking posts worldwide to prepare an analysis of key influencers. According to senior officials in Washington, D.C., only about one-half of posts worldwide ever submitted the requested analysis. Among the posts we visited, only Nigeria was able to produce a copy of an influence analysis, which we found to be rudimentary in nature and not fully responsive to the guidance provided by Washington, D.C.

The posts we visited generally neither focused on important subcategories such as urban versus rural, men versus women, and religious versus nonreligious, nor did they segment based on the level or intensity of opposition (ranging from "soft" to "hard") toward the United States. However, posts have attempted to reach a "younger, broader, and deeper" audience[20] through exchange programs such as YES, which targets high school students. Also, some efforts are under way to target exchange program alumni,[21] locals who have studied in or visited the United States, and expatriates living in the United States who could serve as goodwill ambassadors for the United States.

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[20]According to a senior official in Washington, D.C., the term "younger" implied the need to target even high school students who might be tomorrow's opinion leaders. "Broader" implied the need to reach beyond elites and target disadvantaged youth as well. "Deeper" implied a desire that all program participants have as meaningful an experience as possible.

[21]State officials noted that they have developed a worldwide database of exchange participants, established a global alumni Web site to encourage dialogue, provided field staff with training and best practices information to facilitate the establishment of local alumni programs, and codified the responsibilities of the Alumni Division in Washington with regards to these and other activities.

In contrast to post practices, we noted that the British Council,[22] which maintains a presence in all three countries we visited, relies on a four tier audience system, which is used worldwide to target their outreach efforts.[23] Also, the Defense Science Board has reported that target audiences in the Muslim world can be divided into five categories, ranging from hard opposition to hard support. Their report notes that identifying audiences that are "winnable" in terms of increased public support is critical to successful strategic communication and requires borrowing from campaign and private sector methodologies and conducting political-style attitudinal research and identifying the highest priority support groups that can most likely be influenced.

Strategies and Tactics Lack Detail

The private sector uses sophisticated strategies to integrate complex communication efforts involving multiple players. Our review of mission performance plans revealed that only limited attention had been given to developing detailed public diplomacy strategies and tactics to guide their implementation of an array of public diplomacy programs and tools. While such strategies can include message amplification tactics or the use of third-party spokespersons to increase the credibility of delivered messages,[24] the mission performance plans we reviewed were noteworthy for their brevity and lack of detail on such strategies. For example, the Nigerian post's goal paper on public diplomacy and public affairs runs just over two pages. These two pages serve as the road map for implementing the post's public diplomacy efforts, which involve several agencies, assorted programs and projects, and substantial program funds. The plan devotes one sentence to describe its strategy to achieve its performance goal and three sentences to describe the tactics that will be used to implement the strategy.

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[22]The British Council manages the British government's exchanges and cultural programming outreach efforts.

[23]The British Council divides its audiences into four tiers: T-1: top 100 most influential individuals in the host country; T-2: academics, professional networks (journalists/lawyers), alumni associations, and teachers; T-3: young professionals; and T-4: informed audience.

[24]Message amplification involves using a positive story about U.S. assistance or actions and delivering it to a mass audience via available communication channels including newspapers, radio, and television. The use of third-party spokespersons, such as local religious leaders, can help ensure message credibility, which is often difficult when information is transmitted from the United States to a target audience.

On occasion, the strategies and tactics outlined in mission performance plans were or will be supplemented by additional planning efforts. In Pakistan, we noted that the Public Affairs officer had drafted a summary level plan to guide the efforts of the public affairs section. In Egypt, the Public Affairs officer told us that the Chief of Mission has directed his section to develop an "Islamic strategy" for Egypt to include details on working with religious leaders, integrating English language teaching efforts, working with local universities, and so on.

In its review, State's Resource Management Bureau also found that posts had generally not developed meaningful strategies and tactics that would lead to quantifiable results. The reviewers suggested that posts adopt a more rigorous and measurable outreach strategy focused on opinion leaders in countries where a mass audience cannot easily be reached. As defined earlier, the first step entails identifying the opinion leaders the post would like to influence. Second, posts should identify a "critical mass" of opinion leaders who must be reached and influenced in order to have a significant impact on the target audience. Third, posts should develop programs and initiatives designed to reach these specific individuals, with the goal of persuading and motivating opinion leaders to spread the message. The reviewers suggested that exchange programs could be reinforced with targeted strategic information programs. Public Affairs officers were briefed on these findings in 2005, and mission performance plan guidance has been updated to incorporate most of these recommended elements.

Research and Evaluation Efforts Are Limited

Private sector best practices highlight the value of a research driven approach to designing, implementing, evaluating, and fine-tuning strategic communications efforts. Given the relatively small budgets devoted to research and evaluation efforts, posts had access to a limited amount of information to help guide their strategic communication activities.[25] Valuable research can include such topics as: (1) audience attitudes and beliefs; (2) root causes driving negative sentiments and beliefs; (3) country-specific social, economic, political, and military environments; (4) local

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[25]As noted in GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, GAO-03-951 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2003), our roundtable of public relations experts estimated that State would need to spend up to $50 million to conduct adequate opinion research and performance measurement given the size of its public diplomacy budget and scope of operations. We reported that State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research spent only about $3.5 million annually on overseas opinion research. In fiscal year 2005, this amount increased to $4.4 million.

media and communication options; and (5) diagnosis of deeper performance issues and possible program fixes.

Because the posts we visited did not have the budgets or required expertise to conduct this type of research or program evaluation on their own, they relied on the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and evaluation staff in Washington, D.C., to conduct such studies for them. However, only a limited range of research and evaluation data is available to posts. Most of this data is not tailored to a specific country and it was unclear whether available research and evaluation results are incorporated in post planning and evaluation activities. Available research and evaluations products include the following:

- *Broad public opinion polling data:* Conducted by State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, these polls document that local populations, to a significant degree, hold negative views toward the United States. Such polls serve a valuable role in identifying the depth of the public perception problem but are of limited utility in diagnosing the source of the problem or the specific impact that U.S. public diplomacy efforts have had on alleviating such negative perceptions.

- *Root cause polling data:* In particular, State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research released an opinion analysis in March 2003 based on a series of surveys examining the root causes of anti-American sentiments in 10 Muslim-majority countries (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia). Significantly, the 2003 analysis notes that "the belief that the U.S. is hostile toward Muslim countries was the single largest component of anti-American sentiments in all 10 countries, outweighing even the publics' view of how the United States treats their own country." This type of insight can provide the basis for identifying and developing a core message or theme—one of the key private sector best practices discussed earlier. Our roundtable of nongovernment Muslim experts noted that this view is grounded in Muslim concerns over U.S. foreign policies and actions in the Muslim world. All of our panelists agreed that U.S. foreign policy is the major root cause behind anti-American sentiments among Muslim populations and that this point needs to be better researched, absorbed, and acted upon by government officials. According to our panelists, these core issues include the Arab/Israeli conflict, the war in Iraq, U.S. support for antidemocratic regimes in the region, perceptions of U.S. imperialism, and U.S. support for globalization, which is viewed as hurting Muslims.

- *Program evaluations:* While State has traditionally focused its evaluation activities on exchanges, the department has established an evaluation schedule that includes ongoing assessments of key public diplomacy programs and initiatives, including the English ACCESS Microscholarship program, *Hi* magazine, American Corners, and a contract with the Performance Institute to examine State's performance measurement framework for public diplomacy. Planned evaluations include media training and outreach and the U.S. speakers programs. These evaluations are conducted by staff in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Bureau of International Information Programs, and the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources in the Under Secretary's office.

Additionally, other forms of research are not being fully utilized. In particular, the Central Intelligence Agency sponsored a series of public diplomacy planning papers in 2005 for six countries of strategic national interest to the United States (China, Egypt, France, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Venezuela). These papers included detailed country profiles and issue analyses, recommended public diplomacy strategies for each country, and served as the focus of two conferences that sought to promote dialogue among academic and agency experts regarding how to improve and refine U.S. public diplomacy efforts in each country. However, we found that State officials in both Egypt and Nigeria were not familiar with this exercise or the papers produced for their host countries.

Country-Level Communication Plans Lacking

Private sector best practices suggest that a detailed, country-specific communication plan serves to pull together the complex data and analysis required for a feasible plan of action that can be monitored and improved as needed based on performance feedback. However, none of the posts we visited had such a detailed communication plan. Prior to 1999, when public diplomacy efforts were managed by the former U.S. Information Agency (USIA), detailed communication plans were developed on a country-by-country basis. These plans included details on core messages and themes, target audiences, and research on key opinion leaders, audience attitudes, and the local media environment. With the integration of the USIA into State in 1999, these country plans were eliminated, leaving the mission performance plans as the focal point for such information. As suggested by several post officials, the country plans prepared by USIA were superior to the mission performance planning process since they focused on public diplomacy (a program driven function that is distinct from the policy focus predominant in other department operations) and provided a detailed road map to guide program implementation efforts.

In marked contrast to State, we noted that USAID's new Development Outreach and Communications officers are developing country-level communication plans. These plans are based on guidance prepared by public affairs staff in Washington, D.C., pertaining to roles and responsibilities, coordination requirements, communication tips and techniques, and the development of a long-term communication strategy. This guidance notes that "having a thoughtful communication strategy that is understood by the key leadership of the Mission is integral to communicating most effectively." The guidance suggests that a good communication strategy should adequately describe the Mission's public relations goals, should be linked to a specific time frame and resource request, and should identify the Mission's communication strengths and weaknesses, key themes and messages, priority audiences, and the best means to reach them. Most importantly, the messages must be repeated over and over again to ensure that they are heard.

Strategic Framework Lacks Implementing Guidance

In 2005, the Under Secretary established a strategic framework for U.S. public diplomacy efforts, which includes three priority goals: (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. The Under Secretary noted she intends to achieve these goals using five tactics—engagement, exchanges, education, empowerment, and evaluation—and by using various public diplomacy programs and other means. This framework represents a noteworthy start; however, the department has not yet developed written guidance that provides details on how the Under Secretary's new strategic framework should be implemented in the field.

Our past reports have detailed the difficulties the White House and the department have encountered in developing any type of written communication strategy. In our 2003 report and again in our 2005 report, we noted several attempts by State and the National Security Council to develop a communication strategy for the interagency community. In 2004, the National Security Council and the department created the Muslim World Outreach Policy Coordinating Committee to develop an interagency strategy to marginalize extremists. The committee collected information from embassies around the world to help develop a draft outreach strategy, but it was ultimately not released to posts pending further guidance from the new Under Secretary. On April 8, 2006, the President established a new Policy Coordinating Committee on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication. This committee, to be led by the Under Secretary, is

intended to coordinate interagency activities. According to department officials, one of the committee's tasks will be to issue a formal interagency public diplomacy strategy. It is not clear how long this effort will take or when a strategy will be developed.
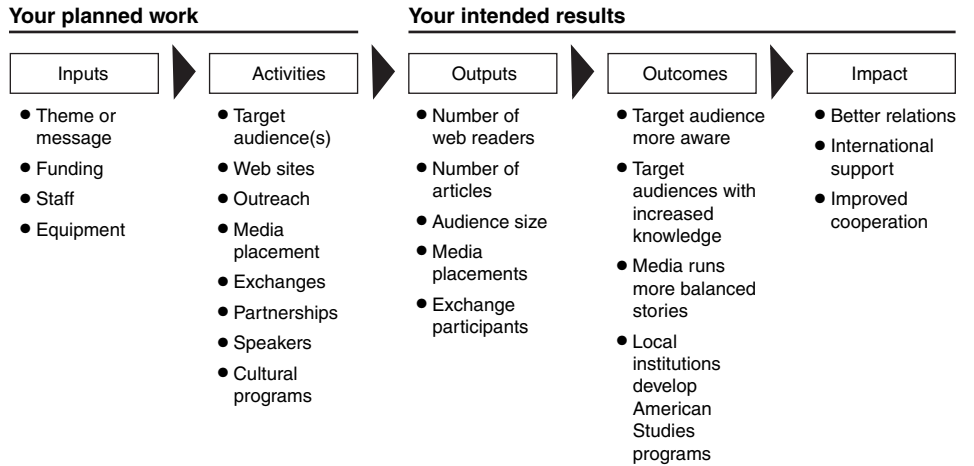
Post Planning and Evaluation Improving but Certain Elements Still Lacking

While the department has not yet issued guidance on how to implement the strategic framework established by the Under Secretary, officials in Washington acknowledged the need to improve message delivery at the post level and have begun to implement a more rigorous approach to program planning and evaluation. Based on prior reports by GAO and others, the department has begun to institute a "culture of measurement," which should significantly impact the rigor and sophistication of its strategic planning and evaluation efforts. Beginning 2 years ago, the department sought to establish this culture through a variety of means, including the creation of an Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources within the office of the Under Secretary; the creation of a Public Diplomacy Evaluation Council to share best practices; the creation of a unified office of program evaluations; and the development of an expanded evaluation schedule, which places a new emphasis on assessing the department's strategic information programs.

The department also plans to institutionalize the use of the "logic model" approach endorsed by GAO and others, which could have a significant impact on the department's program design, implementation, and evaluation efforts.[26] The logic model calls for program managers to define their key inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact. The head of the Public Diplomacy Evaluation Council has briefed field staff on the logic model using the illustration in figure 4.

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[26]See GAO-03-951 and GAO, *Program Evaluation: Strategies for Assessing How Information Dissemination Contributes to Agency Goals*, GAO-02-923 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 2002).

Figure 4: Logic Model for State Public Diplomacy Programs

Your planned work

Your intended results

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
• Theme or message	• Target audience(s)	• Number of web readers	• Target audience more aware	• Better relations
• Funding	• Web sites	• Number of articles	• Target audiences with increased knowledge	• International support
• Staff	• Outreach	• Audience size	• Media runs more balanced stories	• Improved cooperation
• Equipment	• Media placement	• Media placements	• Local institutions develop American Studies programs	
	• Exchanges	• Exchange participants		
	• Partnerships			
	• Speakers			
	• Cultural programs			

Source: State Department.

The logic model will be implemented via a performance measurement framework contract led by the Performance Institute. Implementation details, guidance, training, and so on will be developed by the Performance Institute in coordination with key State stakeholders. Major elements of the model should be in place by September 2006, with full implementation expected by the 2009 mission performance plan cycle.

In January 2006, the department issued guidance on preparing mission performance plans that embodies its desire to increase the rigor and sophistication of post strategic planning and evaluation efforts. Issued for the fiscal year 2008 planning cycle, this guidance calls for more strategic thinking and planning than was required in the past, noting that "there are increased expectations for measurement and specificity in planning for public diplomacy and this leads to requests for more sophisticated information from the field." The guidance calls for identification of specific target audiences, key themes and messages, detailed strategies and tactics, and performance outcomes that can be measured with a reasonable degree of precision and clearly demonstrate the ultimate impact of U.S. public diplomacy efforts. If fully implemented, this guidance should begin to address the shortcomings we found in mission performance plans in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Egypt. However, such guidance will not be implemented for another 2 years, raising significant concerns about what the department intends to do now to address strategic planning shortfalls.

While Washington's guidance is designed to significantly improve the strategic decisions summarized in mission performance plans, it does not require that missions prepare in-depth analyses to better inform and support their strategic program decisions. Such analyses include country-situation papers, in-depth audience research, media analyses to understand how people receive information and who the key media providers are, and details on how related agency programs and planning efforts should be integrated to achieve common communication objectives. Finally, this guidance does not require that missions develop a separate communication plan to incorporate Washington and post-conducted analyses and planned strategies and tactics. The lack of a country-level communication plan increases the risk that planning will remain largely conceptual and fall short in terms of effectiveness at the tactical level. Also, country-level communication plans could be prepared and updated as needed, apart from the mission performance planning cycle, particularly as the new guidance for mission performance plans will not take effect until fiscal year 2008.
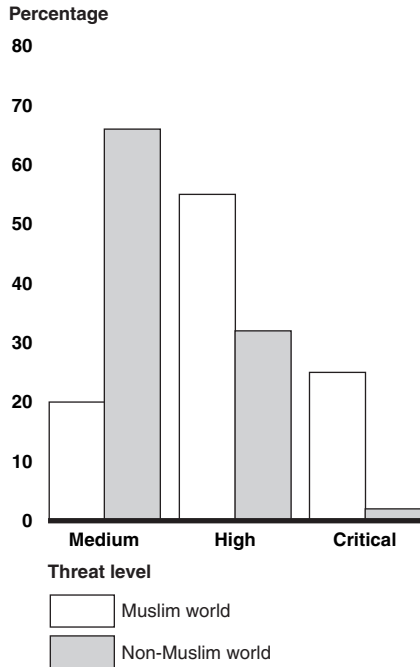
Security and Staffing Pose Challenges to Public Diplomacy Efforts in the Muslim World

Public diplomacy officers struggle to balance security with public access and outreach to local populations. The public diplomacy corps in the field faces several human capital challenges, such as the lack of a sufficient number of officers, lack of staff time, shortened tours of duty, and limited language proficiency. While State has taken steps to address these challenges, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of some of these efforts, and officers at the three posts we visited told us that many of these issues remain unresolved. In addition, State lacks an effective means to share embassy best practices that could help address some of these challenges.

Embassy Must Balance Security and Public Outreach

Security concerns have limited embassy outreach efforts and public access, forcing public diplomacy officers to strike a balance between safety and mission. Shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell stated, "Safety is one of our top priorities… but it can't be at the expense of the mission." While posts around the world have faced increased threats, security concerns are particularly acute at many posts in countries with significant Muslim populations. As figure 5 illustrates, the threat level for terrorism is rated as "critical" or "high" in 80 percent of posts in the Muslim world, compared with 34 percent of posts elsewhere.

Figure 5: Terrorist Threat Ratings for Posts in the Muslim and Non-Muslim Worlds, October 2005

Percentage

Threat level	Muslim world	Non-Muslim world
Medium	20	66
High	55	32
Critical	25	2

Legend:
- Muslim world
- Non-Muslim world

Source: State Department.

Security and budgetary concerns have led to the closure of publicly accessible facilities around the world, such as American Centers and Libraries. According to one State official, in 1990 the majority of posts had such publicly accessible facilities; now, however, few do. In Pakistan, for example, all of the American Centers have closed for security reasons, with the last such facility, in Islamabad, closed in February 2005. These same concerns have prevented the establishment of a U.S. presence elsewhere. Officials in Nigeria said they would like to open a facility in the north of the country to serve the region's 70 million predominantly Muslim inhabitants, but security and budgetary concerns prevent them from doing so—one senior embassy official in Nigeria said that nothing they can do from the capital, Abuja, would be as effective as having a permanent presence in the north. As a result, embassies have had to find other venues for public diplomacy programs, and some activities have been moved onto embassy compounds.

Other public diplomacy programs have had to limit their publicity to reduce the risk of becoming a target. A recent joint USAID-State report concluded that "security concerns often require a 'low profile' approach during events, programs or other situations, which, in happier times, would have been able to generate considerable good will for the United States."[27] This constraint is particularly acute in Pakistan, where the embassy has had to reduce certain speaker and exchange programs. For example, an official in Peshawar, Pakistan, said that consulate staff handpicked students for a *9/11 Commission Report* reading group because the consulate could not widely publicize the program. While several officials in Pakistan described the reading group as a success, its reach was limited due to security concerns.

Furthermore, precautions designed to improve the security of American facilities have had the ancillary effect of sending the message that the United States is unapproachable and distrustful, according to State officials. Concrete barriers and armed escorts contribute to this perception, as do requirements restricting visitors' use of cell phones and pagers within the embassy. According to one official in Pakistan, visitors to the embassy's Information Resource Center have fallen to as few as one per day because many visitors feel humiliated by the embassy's rigorous security procedures. In Egypt, one of the ambassador's priorities is remodeling the embassy in order to make it more inviting to visitors.

State Has Developed Initiatives to Respond to Security Concerns

State has responded to security concerns and the loss of publicly accessible facilities through a variety of initiatives, including American Corners, which are centers that provide information about the United States, hosted in local institutions and staffed by local employees. According to State data, there are currently approximately 300 American Corners throughout the world, including more than 90 in the Muslim world, with another 75 planned (more than 40 of which will be in the Muslim world). Several recent studies on public diplomacy have recommended the expansion of the American Corners program, but its effectiveness has not been evaluated.[28] While one State official told us that American Corners are the best solution given the current security environment, others have described them as public diplomacy "on the cheap." The American Corner we visited in Nigeria was confined to a single small room housing a limited

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[27]USAID, *Operating in High Threat Environments* (Washington, D.C.: June 2005).

[28]The department is currently evaluating the American Corners program.

reference library and a small selection of donated books (see fig. 6); at a meeting with a focus group of Nigerians in Abuja who had participated in U.S. sponsored exchanges, no one present was familiar with the American Corner. Other posts we visited have had difficulty finding hosts for American Corners, as local institutions fear becoming terrorist targets.

Figure 6: Photographs of American Corner, Abuja, Nigeria

Source: GAO.

Information Resource Centers, small reference libraries for limited audiences created to replace some of the functions of American Centers' open libraries, most of which have closed, are another attempt to balance security and access. State's Bureau of International Information Programs operates more than 170 such centers worldwide. Because they are located within the embassy compound, however, public access to these facilities is often limited. For example, in Abuja, the center is open only to students and other specific demographic groups, and access is granted by appointment only; officials in Islamabad reported similar restrictions. The head of the center in Abuja said that accessibility was one of his primary challenges.

State has also made departmentwide efforts to expand public outreach beyond external facilities, and individual posts are devising creative solutions to this challenge. In Nigeria, several embassy staff, including the Ambassador, often travel together to cities lacking a permanent American presence; according to embassy officials, these "embassy on the road" tours typically last 3 or 4 days and can involve dozens of individuals. Additionally, in Pakistan we observed an embassy-funded American Discovery Center, a small kiosk providing information on America, placed

in a local school. There are over 180 such kiosks in schools across Pakistan, although one embassy official remarked that as many as half of these schools have restricted access to the kiosk for a variety of reasons.

Addressing concerns over the United States' decreased outreach capabilities, Secretary Rice recently announced plans to deploy more diplomats in areas with a limited U.S. presence by increasing the number of American Presence Posts. There are currently 8 such posts,[29] which are staffed by one Foreign Service officer and are intended to extend the U.S. diplomatic presence beyond foreign capitals and reach out to "emerging communities of change." We visited one such post in Alexandria, Egypt, which contained a publicly accessible reading room, offered free computer access, and hosted frequent cultural events. One advantage of the American Presence Posts over American Corners, according to the principal officer in Alexandria, was that the post was able to maintain control over the facility.

Another means of reaching large audiences in high-threat posts while minimizing security concerns is through international broadcasting.[30] However, in a 2003 survey conducted by GAO, almost 30 percent of public diplomacy officers in the field said that transmission strength was ineffective in helping to achieve public diplomacy goals in their country. Officials we spoke with in Pakistan and Egypt said this challenge still exists, suggesting that poor signal strength for U.S. broadcasts in their host countries limits the impact of broadcasting. The administration's fiscal year 2007 budget request includes a request to increase U.S. broadcasting to countries in the Muslim world while reducing broadcasts elsewhere, particularly in Europe and Eurasia.

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[29]American Presence Posts are located in Alexandria, Egypt; Medan, Indonesia; Winnipeg, Canada; and Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Rennes, and Toulouse, France.

[30]GAO has reviewed U.S. broadcasting efforts in the Middle East separately. See GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Efforts in the Middle East but Face Significant Challenges*, GAO-04-435T (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 10, 2004). A separate GAO review will evaluate the effectiveness of Radio Sawa and the Alhurra satellite network—the Broadcasting Board of Governors' two primary initiatives aimed at Arab audiences.

Staffing Challenges at Posts in the Muslim World: Tour Length, Time, and Language Capability

Insufficient numbers of public diplomacy staff and staff time hinder outreach efforts at posts in the Muslim world. Additionally, tours of duty tend to be shorter in the Muslim world than elsewhere, which negatively impacts continuity at a post, as well as the ability to cultivate personal relationships. Further, we found that public diplomacy officers at many posts cannot communicate effectively with local populations in local languages, hampering overall U.S. public diplomacy efforts. To address these challenges, State has taken several steps, both at the department and post level, highlighted by the Secretary's transformational diplomacy initiative, but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative.

Lack of Staffing and Staff Time Hinders Public Diplomacy Efforts

While several recent reports on public diplomacy have recommended an increase in spending on U.S. public diplomacy programs, several embassy officials told us that, with current staffing levels, they do not have the capacity to effectively utilize increased funds. According to State data, the department had established 834 public diplomacy positions overseas in 2005, but 124, or roughly 15 percent, were vacant. Compounding this challenge is the loss of public diplomacy officers to temporary duty in Iraq, which, according to one State official, has drawn down field officers even further. Staffing shortages may also limit the amount of training public diplomacy officers receive. According to the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, "the need to fill a post quickly often prevents public diplomacy officers from receiving their full training."[31]

In addition, public diplomacy officers at post are burdened with administrative tasks and thus have less time to conduct public diplomacy outreach activities than previously. One senior State official said that administrative duties, such as budget, personnel, and internal reporting, compete with officers' public diplomacy responsibilities. Another official in Egypt told us that there was rarely enough time to strategize, plan, or evaluate her programs. In addition, State officials in Washington acknowledged that additional requirements for posts to improve strategic planning and evaluation of their public diplomacy programs would need to be accompanied by additional staff with relevant expertise.

Short Tours of Duty in the Muslim World

Staffing challenges in public affairs sections at posts in the Muslim world are exacerbated by shorter tours of duty and fewer officers bidding on

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[31]U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *2005 Report* (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 7, 2005).

public diplomacy positions than in the non-Muslim world. According to data provided by State, the average tour length at posts in the Muslim world is 2.1 years, compared with 2.7 years in the non-Muslim world. Figure 7 shows the average tour length by region. Furthermore, as a result of the security concerns mentioned above, tours at many posts in the Muslim world are for only 1 year, without family members. Of State's 20 so-called unaccompanied posts, 15 are in the Muslim world.

Figure 7: Average Tour of Duty Length by Region (as of December 2005)
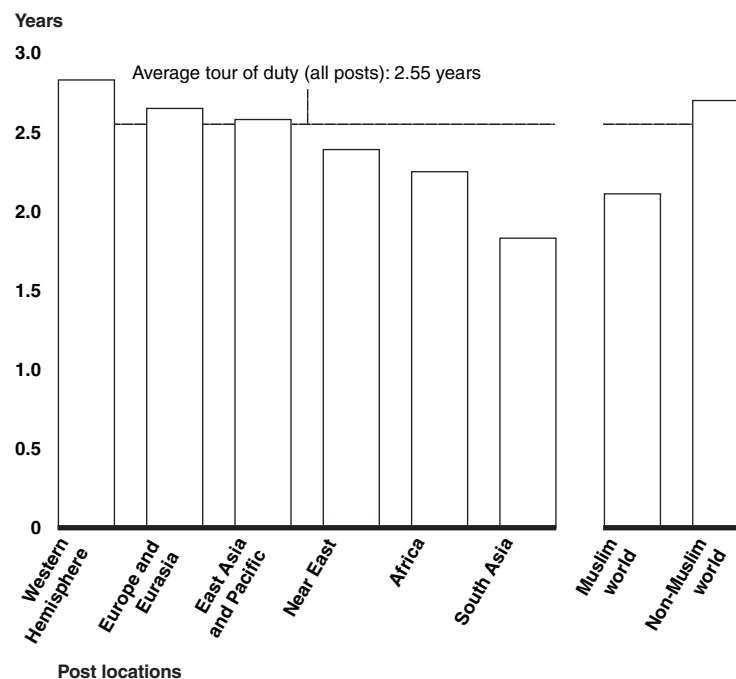
Source: State Department.

Shorter tours contribute to insufficient language skills and limit officers' ability to cultivate personal relationships, which, according to a senior public diplomacy officer, are vital to understanding Arabs and Muslims. Another senior State official, noting the prevalence of one-year tours in the Muslim world, told us that Public Affairs officers who have shorter tours tend to produce less effective work than officers with longer tours. In Pakistan, we were told that the Public Affairs officer views himself as a "management consultant," in part because of his short tour in Islamabad. Furthermore, the department's Inspector General observed that the rapid

turnover of American officers in Pakistan was a major constraint to public diplomacy activities in the country.[32]

In addition, public diplomacy positions in the Muslim world have received fewer bids than public diplomacy positions elsewhere. An analysis of data from State's summer 2005 posting cycle shows that public diplomacy positions in the Muslim world received fewer than half the average number of bids of non-Muslim posts—averaging 3.7 bids per position at posts in the Muslim world, compared with 8.9 bids per position elsewhere. As a result of the lower number of bids for public diplomacy positions in the Muslim world, it has been harder to fill these positions.

Language Deficiencies Pronounced in the Muslim World

Many public diplomacy officers in the Muslim world do not meet the language requirements established for their positions by State.[33] According to data provided by State, in countries with significant Muslim populations, 30 percent of language-designated public diplomacy positions are filled by officers without the requisite proficiency in those languages, compared with 24 percent elsewhere. In Arabic language posts, about 36 percent of language-designated public diplomacy positions are filled by staff unable to speak Arabic at the designated level. In addition, State officials told us that there are even fewer officers who are willing or able to speak on television or engage in public debate in Arabic. The Information Officer in Cairo stated that his office does not have enough Arabic speakers to engage the Egyptian media effectively. Figure 8 shows the percentage of public diplomacy positions in the Muslim world staffed by officers meeting language requirements.

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[32]State Department Office of the Inspector General, *Inspection of Embassy Islamabad, Pakistan*, ISP-I-05-35A (Washington, D.C.: August 2005).

[33]In January 2002, GAO reported on language proficiency shortfalls at State and other agencies. See GAO, *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, GAO-02-375 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2002).

Figure 8: Percentage of Filled Language-Designated Public Diplomacy Positions in the Muslim World Staffed by Officers Meeting Language Requirements (as of August 2005)

Percentage
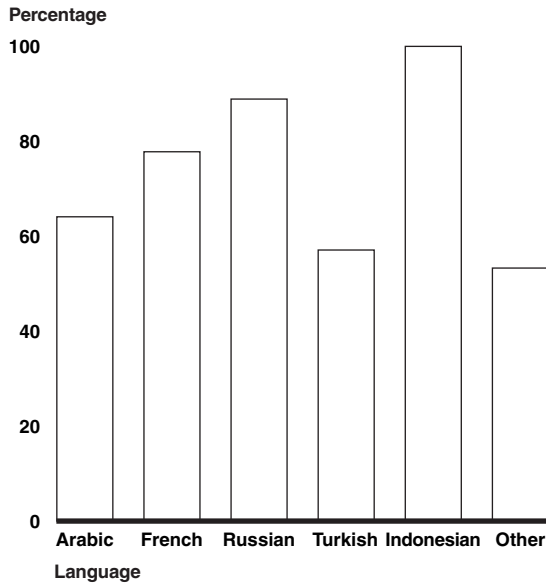
Source: State Department.

As a result, many public diplomacy officers in the Muslim world cannot communicate as well with local audiences as their position requires. According to the Djerejian report, "The ability to speak, write, and read a foreign language is one of the recognized prerequisites of effective communications. Foreign Service officers who are fluent in Arabic immediately convey a sense of respect for and interest in the people to whom they speak, and fluency prevents the distortion of translation." State's Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs has said that communicating in other languages is a public diplomacy challenge and that encouraging Americans to speak foreign languages is a priority for public diplomacy.

State Has Taken Several Steps to Address These Human Capital Challenges

State has recently made several efforts to address its human capital challenges; in particular, following the Secretary of State's comment that public diplomacy is the job of the entire embassy, officials in Washington have encouraged posts to expand their embassy employee speaker programs. By increasing the number of American officers speaking to foreign audiences, posts have attempted to compensate for the loss of

public diplomacy staff and the diminished amount of time public diplomacy officers have available for outreach. We observed these efforts in Abuja, Islamabad, and Peshawar, where the embassies have developed mission speaker bureaus, which are lists of embassy staff willing to speak to local audiences on a variety of topics related to America. In Egypt, however, the department's Inspector General noted that non-public diplomacy officers rarely engage in public outreach, missing a valuable opportunity to further increase understanding of U.S. policies, culture, and values.

The Secretary of State also recently proposed changes in staff incentives as part of her call for transformational diplomacy. New requirements for career advancement would include service in at least one hardship post, fluency in two or more languages, and expertise in two or more regions. In addition, the Secretary has announced plans to reposition staff in all career tracks, starting in summer 2006, from posts in Europe and Washington, D.C., to India, China, and Latin America, as well as to the Muslim world. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these efforts.

Recognizing a persistent national foreign language deficit, in January 2006 President Bush announced plans for a National Security Language Initiative to further strengthen national security by developing foreign language skills.[34] The President's original request for this initiative was $114 million in fiscal year 2007, split between State, DOD, the Department of Education, and the Director of National Intelligence—State's share of this funding is about $27 million, according to department officials. State's efforts will focus on critical languages spoken in the Muslim world, such as Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, and Urdu, among others. Under this initiative, State will provide opportunities for U.S. high school students, undergraduates, and graduate students to study these and other languages abroad and will strengthen foreign language teaching in the United States through exchanges and professional development. State has also established a facility in Tunis for advanced Arabic language instruction, including courses to train staff to appear on Arabic-language television and radio.

State Lacks Systematic Means for Communicating Best Practices

While individual posts have devised innovative approaches to overcome the challenges their public diplomacy programs face, State generally lacks a systematic, comprehensive means of communicating these practices and

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[34]For a detailed description of the National Security Language Initiative, see appendix III.

transferring knowledge and experience across posts. For example, in Nigeria, we noted the embassy practice of taking a team, headed by the Ambassador, on coordinated outreach efforts to key cities in the country where the United States currently lacks a diplomatic presence. The Deputy Chief of Mission noted frustration with the post's inability to share this and other practices with posts that might benefit from lessons learned in Nigeria.

Existing means of sharing best practices among public diplomacy officers tend to be regional in scope, ad hoc in nature, or underutilized in practice. These mechanisms include annual Public Affairs officer conferences in each region, anecdotal submissions in State's RESULTS database, and weekly newsletters issued by regional public diplomacy offices. While some officers stated that the regional Public Affairs officer conferences were helpful for sharing these practices, one official noted that no formal reports were generated at these conferences and that there has only been one global conference. The department maintains a database of public diplomacy program results, which is based on anecdotes submitted by officers in the field following speaker, exchange, or other public diplomacy programs. While it is a potential tool for retaining institutional memory at State, some State officials said that anecdotes were not systematically entered into the database. Others suggested that this database be modified to enable officers to flag best practices to make them easier to locate in the future. In March 2006, State officials told us that the Under Secretary's office was working on a Web-based system for officers in the field and in Washington, D.C., to share ideas and expected this system to be operational within the next month.

A strengthened, institutionalized system for sharing best practices could improve the retention of institutional memory at State. However, given the constraints on public diplomacy officers' time, any means of sharing best practices should not create an additional reporting burden on officers in the field. Furthermore, whichever method State chooses to communicate best practices, it should ensure that the practices are not self-submitted but rather reviewed by a third party for appropriateness.

Conclusions

In recent years, State has shifted public diplomacy resources to the Muslim world, but three of its new initiatives specifically designed to reach Muslim audiences have been short-lived. Lacking specifically targeted programs, posts in Muslim-majority countries continue to use the same information and exchange programs available to posts throughout the world. GAO and

others have suggested the adoption of private sector best practices as a means to improve the department's communication efforts in Washington and at the post level. These practices call for the use of central messages or themes, target audience segmentation and analysis, in-depth audience research and evaluation, and the preparation of detailed communication plans to pull these various elements together. Communication efforts at the posts we visited generally lacked these strategic elements. State has taken several steps to address this problem, including the development of a strategic framework with goals and tactics, the creation of a transformational diplomacy initiative to implement some of these best practices, and the issuance of updated guidance to improve fiscal year 2008 mission performance plans. These are all positive steps. However, Washington still lacks written guidance to implement the strategic framework developed by the current Under Secretary. In addition, posts have not prepared in-depth analyses or detailed communication plans to support their strategic communication decisions. Compounding this lack of strategic planning and evaluation are challenges related to staffing and security at posts in the Muslim world. State currently lacks a systematic mechanism for sharing best practices, which could help address some of these challenges.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve the delivery of public diplomacy messages to Muslim audiences around the world, we recommend that the Secretary of State direct the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to take the following two actions:

- To increase the sophistication and effectiveness of U.S. outreach efforts, develop written guidance detailing how the department intends to implement its public diplomacy goals as they apply to the Muslim world and incorporates the strategic communication best practices discussed in this report. This guidance should be developed in consultation with the White House, affected government agencies, and outside experts who have a practical knowledge of what is needed to translate private sector best practices into practical steps which can be taken in the field. To accompany this guidance, we recommend that State develop a sample country-level communication plan that posts can tailor to local conditions.

- To meet the challenges facing public diplomacy officers in the field, including the need to balance security with outreach and short tours of duty at certain posts, strengthen existing systems of sharing best

practices in order to more systematically transfer knowledge among embassies around the world.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

The State Department provided written comments on a draft of this report (see app. V). State concurred with the report's findings and conclusions. State also indicated that it has begun to address the recommendations contained in this report. State said it is developing an integrated strategic plan that includes elements of private sector best practices. State also said it is developing a sample country-level communication plan and constructing a Web-based system for conveying best practices. State did not indicate when the strategic plan or sample country-level communication plans will be completed. We modified our findings regarding State's exchange programs, noting their continued focus on younger audiences. In addition, State provided technical comments, which have been incorporated throughout the report where appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to other interested Members of Congress and the Secretary of State. 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 Offices 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 VI.

Sincerely yours,

Jess T. Ford
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

To determine what public diplomacy resources and programs the State Department (State) has directed to the Muslim world, we reviewed State budget requests, annual performance and accountability reports, and other documents. We also interviewed officials from State's Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs; the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources; the Bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs, International Information Programs, and Public Affairs; the Bureau of Resource Management; and regional bureaus. We also observed training classes for new public diplomacy officers at State's Foreign Service Institute. We obtained and analyzed documents on public diplomacy budgets and program descriptions from these offices and bureaus. To assess the reliability of State's data, we reviewed documentation related to the data sources and discussed the data with knowledgeable State officials. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We also compared data on the populations of countries in the Muslim world from the United Nations, World Bank, and CIA World Factbook, and found them sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

We based our definition of the Muslim world on State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' list of 58 countries and territories with significant Muslim populations. These countries are spread across the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe, and have a combined population of more than 1.5 billion people. Appendix II lists these countries.

To assess whether posts adopted a strategic approach to implementing public diplomacy, we reviewed Washington-produced mission performance planning guidance prepared by the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources (located within the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs), the results of a fiscal year 2005 review of mission performance plans conducted by the Bureau of Resource Management, public opinion polling results prepared by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and related strategic planning and evaluation documents prepared by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Bureau of International Information Programs. In Egypt, Nigeria, and Pakistan, we reviewed fiscal year 2005 mission performance plans and related strategic planning and evaluation documentation, and, to discuss the scope and adequacy of each post's strategic planning and evaluation efforts, also met with a wide range of embassy officials including the Ambassador or Deputy Chief of Mission, public affairs section staff, political and economic officers, regional affairs officers, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of Defense (DOD)

officials. To discuss a range of strategic planning, research, and evaluation issues in Washington, we met with representatives from the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources; the Bureau of Resource Management; the Bureau of Intelligence and Research; the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs; and the Bureau of International Information Programs. We also discussed private sector communication best practices with a representative from Business for Diplomatic Action.

To identify the challenges facing U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the Muslim world and what State has done to address these challenges, we reviewed recent studies and reports on public diplomacy. In addition:

- We met with officials from State's Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and the Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources; the Bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs, International Information Programs, and Public Affairs; and regional bureaus in Washington, D.C.

- We met with U.S. embassy officers and foreign government, academic, and nongovernmental organization representatives in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Egypt to learn about and observe challenges facing public diplomacy efforts at posts abroad. We also spoke with U.S. embassy officials in Indonesia and Turkey by telephone. We selected these countries based on their strategic importance to the United States, their proportion of the total population of the Muslim world, their geographic distribution, and their mix of public diplomacy programs.

- We analyzed State data on staffing, language requirements, bids for public diplomacy positions, and threat ratings from 2005. To assess the reliability of these data, we surveyed agency officials responsible for collecting and analyzing these data. We determined the data to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

- In September 2005, we convened a roundtable of Muslim experts in Washington, D.C., to discuss program challenges and potential solutions. Participants included experts in public opinion and public affairs, foreign journalists, and representatives from think tanks and academia.

We did not review covert strategic communications efforts managed by DOD or the intelligence community. We limited our review of USAID to the agency's efforts to communicate its assistance efforts and did not review

the assistance efforts themselves. We limited our review of DOD to its support of State's public diplomacy activities. We did not review State-led reform initiatives such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative but focused instead on public diplomacy activities designed to communicate information about the United States to target overseas audiences. For the BBG, we collected funding and program information but did not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of Radio Sawa and the Alhurra satellite network—the BBG's two primary initiatives aimed at Arab audiences. We are reviewing these broadcast initiatives separately.

We performed our work from April 2005 to February 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Countries and Territories with Significant Muslim Populations

Region	Country	Populationᵃ	Percentage Muslim
Africa	Benin	7.5	20%
	Burkina Faso	13.9	50
	Cameroon	16.4	20
	Chad	9.8	51
	Comoros	0.7	98
	Cote d'Ivoire	17.3	35-40
	Djibouti	0.5	94
	Eritrea	4.6	>50
	Ethiopia	73.1	45-50
	Gabon	1.4	<1
	Gambia	1.6	90
	Guinea	9.5	85
	Guinea-Bissau	1.4	45
	Mali	12.3	90
	Mauritania	3.1	100
	Mozambique	19.4	18
	Niger	11.7	80
	Nigeria	128.8	50
	Senegal	11.1	94
	Sierra Leone	6.0	60
	Somalia	8.6	>50
	Sudan	40.2	70
	Togo	5.7	20
	Uganda	27.3	16
East Asia and Pacific	Brunei	0.4	67
	Indonesia	242.0	88
	Malaysia	24.0	60

(Continued From Previous Page)

Region	Country	Population[a]	Percentage Muslim
Europe and Eurasia	Albania	3.6	70
	Azerbaijan	7.9	93
	Kazakhstan	15.2	47
	Kosovo		
	Kyrgyzstan	5.1	75
	Tajikistan	7.2	90
	Turkey	69.7	100
	Turkmenistan	5.0	89
	Uzbekistan	26.9	88
Near East	Algeria	32.5	99
	Bahrain	0.7	100
	Egypt	77.5	94
	Iran	68.0	98
	Iraq	26.1	97
	Jordan	5.8	92
	Kuwait	2.3	85
	Lebanon	3.8	60
	Libya	5.8	97
	Morocco	32.7	99
	Oman	3.0	>75
	Qatar	0.9	95
	Saudi Arabia	26.4	100
	Syria	18.4	74
	Tunisia	10.1	98
	UAE	2.6	96
	West Bank and Gaza	3.8	75
	Yemen	20.7	90
South Asia	Afghanistan	29.9	99
	Bangladesh	144.3	83
	Maldives	0.3	>50
	Pakistan	162.4	97

Sources: State Department and Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

Note: As defined by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

[a]In millions.

Inventory of State Department Public Diplomacy Positions and Selected Programs

Positions

Public Affairs Officer (PAO): The PAO is the senior public diplomacy adviser in the embassy. He/she coordinates all aspects of mission public affairs ensuring that public diplomacy resources are deployed in support of mission goals. The PAO also supervises the public affairs section including the work of the information/press section and the cultural section.

Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO): The CAO manages the embassy's educational and professional exchange programs, including the Fulbright program. He/she also carries out cultural programs that highlight American society and achievements and administers the speaker program that brings U.S. experts to address targeted audiences in the host country.

Information Officer (IO): The IO is the embassy spokesperson and primary point of contact for information about the United States and mission affairs. The IO advises senior management on media relations and public affairs strategies and manages the distribution of information to members of the target audience.

Information Resource Officer (IRO): Generally librarians by training, IROs are responsible for embassies' Information Resource Centers (IRC) and American Corners. They are also responsible for supporting IRC programs and training local IRC staff. There are approximately 20 IROs at missions around the world.

Regional English Language Officer (RELO): Worldwide, State has 17 experienced TEFL/TESL professionals, known as RELOs. RELOs help embassies design strategies to support English teaching and work with various partners to organize in teacher training seminars and workshops and offer general guidance.

Programs

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Programs

- *Fulbright Program:* Flagship U.S. government exchange program for graduate students, professors, researchers, professionals, and secondary level teachers to teach, study, and conduct research. Americans are hosted by schools or universities around the world, and foreign participants by U.S. secondary schools, colleges, or universities.

- *International Visitors (IV):* 3-week visits to the United States by rising leaders in diverse fields. IVs travel in groups or as individuals and

experience American cultural life and society along with professional interchange with U.S. counterparts.

- *Voluntary Visitors (VV):* Programs for foreign nationals already traveling to the United States, including professional appointments and domestic travel support. VVs can partly be funded by an embassy.

- *Office of Citizen Exchanges professional and institutional exchange programs:* Exchanges designed to link private sector American expertise and resources with priority institutions to engage youth influencers and promote civil society, democracy, youth leadership, and volunteerism, among other topics.

- *Humphrey Program:* Midlevel professionals from developing countries come to the United States for a year of academic study and professional experience.

- *English Language Teaching:* Targeted English language programs in specific regions and countries of the world, coordinated with the embassy. Programs include the English ACCESS Microscholarship program, English Language Fellow program, English Language Specialist program, and E-Teacher program.

- *Rhythm Road:* Professional jazz and urban music groups who tour countries with limited exposure to American culture, playing concerts and talking about their music and American society.

- *Feature Film Service:* Films provided to posts by the Motion Picture Association of America and other organizations for festivals, screenings by Ambassadors, and other programmatic usage by post public affairs sections.

- *Cultural Ambassadors:* Utilizes world-renowned American cultural figures to reach out to young people around the globe.

- *Cultural Envoys and Cultural Visitors:* Cultural Envoys aims to utilize the talents of average Americans to engage with young people abroad. Cultural Visitors is designed to bring young "idea" leaders in the arts and humanities to the United States for internships.

- *Arts Exchanges in International Issues:* An annual grants competition designed to identify American partner organizations to conduct

exchange programs in priority countries, utilizing cultural and artistic media and programs to address priority U.S. foreign policy goals.

- *Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation:* Assists less developed countries in preserving their cultural heritage and demonstrates U.S. respect for other cultures.

- *International Partnership Among Museums:* An institutional linkage program carried out with the American Association of Museums, selecting American museums to partner with a museum abroad to develop a collaborative program built around a theme.

- *International Cultural Property Protection:* Carries out the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act, which protects cultural patrimony of signatory nations.

- *National Security Language Initiative:* Program activity will include in-country language training for U.S. Fulbright students in Arabic, Turkish, and Indic languages; summer intensive language programs abroad for undergraduate beginning students and intermediate/advanced training for undergraduate and graduate students; expansion of the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program to bring 300 native speakers of critical languages to teach in U.S. universities and schools; and a new component to the teacher exchange program to assist U.S. teachers of critical need languages to study abroad.

- *Study of the U.S.:* Promotes better understanding of the United States through Summer Institutes for foreign university faculty, reference collections, and the Currents in American Scholarship series.

- *EducationUSA:* Promotes higher education abroad by supporting overseas advising centers and collaborating with U.S. educational organizations to strengthen international exchange.

Bureau of International Information Programs

- *U.S. Speakers:* American subject-matter experts travel to a host country to address selected audiences on a range of policy issues and various aspects of American society.

- *American Corners:* Public diplomacy outposts in host-country organizations, such as libraries and universities, that provide access to information about the United States through book collections, the Internet, and local programming to the general public.

- *Information Resource Centers:* Computer-based knowledge platforms at embassies and consulates that provide information about U.S. policies and American society to targeted sectors of the host-country population.

- *Digital video conferences:* Two-way video/phone dialogues between U.S. subject-matter experts and their counterparts in a host country.

- *USINFO:* Authoritative, up-to-date Web site providing information on U.S. policy and American issues directed at foreign readers. Available in English and six world languages.

- *Washington File:* Daily compilations of news articles and official texts intended for foreign audiences. Available on the USINFO Web site.

- *Electronic Journals:* Web-based monthly publications focused on themes supporting mission performance plan goals. Available in several languages, Electronic Journals can be downloaded and printed for local distribution.

- *Infocentral:* On-line resource for U.S. government spokespersons and embassy officers who need information on policy issues, access to press clips, and cleared guidance.

- *Mission Web sites:* Each embassy maintains its own Web site with links to the State Department and other sources of information about the United States and U.S. policy.

- *Issue Briefs:* Background information on policy topics, available at the Infocentral Web site, intended for use only by U.S. officials who need to articulate and explain policy positions.

- *Paper Shows:* Exhibitions of 35-40 panels featuring photographic and documentary images and text on significant American personalities, issues, and events. Paper shows are produced in several languages and displayed in museums, libraries, theaters, and other public places worldwide.

Bureau of Public Affairs Programs

- *Foreign Press Centers:* Support centers for foreign journalists in Washington, D.C., New York, and Los Angeles providing facilitative assistance, interviews with U.S. officials, and information resources.

- *Office of Broadcast Services:* Provides television and radio to overseas posts, runs American Embassy Television Network, and assists foreign TV crews making film documentaries in the United States on subjects of interest to the U.S. government.
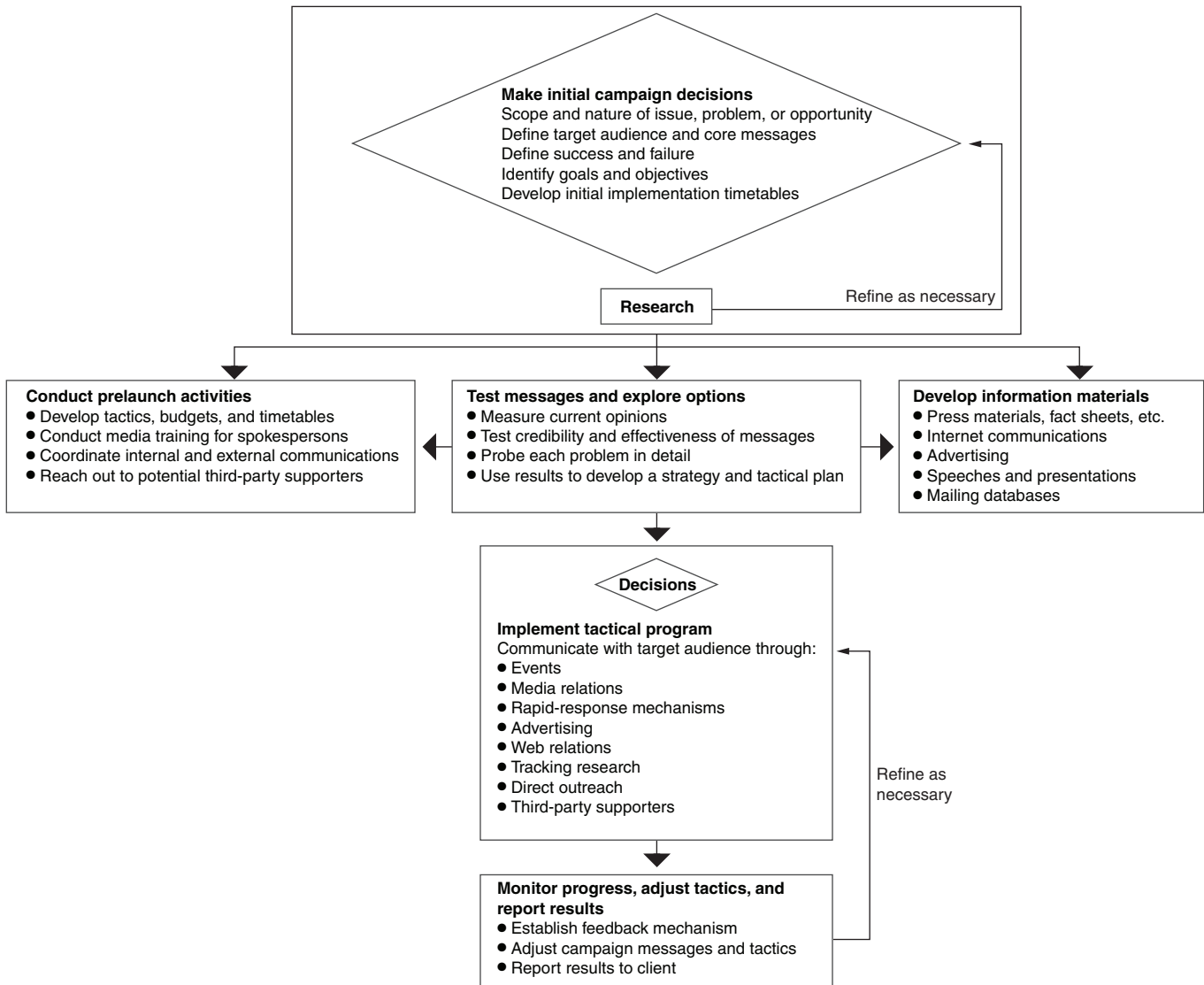
Other Programs

- *Media reaction:* Summary compilations of foreign editorial and op-ed reactions to issues of interest to the United States, available daily on the Web.

Private Sector Best Practices

GAO and other groups have called for a transformation in how U.S. public diplomacy efforts are conducted. One key element of this proposed transformation is the perceived need to adopt and adapt strategic communication best practices from the private sector.

GAO suggested in its September 2003 report on State public diplomacy efforts that the department examine private sector public relations efforts and political campaigns' use of sophisticated strategies to integrate complex communication efforts involving multiple players. GAO's roundtable with public relations firms from the private sector revealed that the key strategic components of such efforts include establishing the scope and nature of the problem, identifying the target audience, determining the core message, and defining both success and failure. The panel emphasized the importance of synchronizing these activities in a systematic way, so that communication efforts are mutually reinforcing in advancing the campaign's overall objectives. They noted that without a carefully integrated plan, the various elements are at risk of canceling each other out and possibly damaging the overall campaign. Figure 9 illustrates the steps in the process.

Figure 9: Elements of a Typical Public Relations Strategy

Make initial campaign decisions
Scope and nature of issue, problem, or opportunity
Define target audience and core messages
Define success and failure
Identify goals and objectives
Develop initial implementation timetables

Research

Refine as necessary

Conduct prelaunch activities
● Develop tactics, budgets, and timetables
● Conduct media training for spokespersons
● Coordinate internal and external communications
● Reach out to potential third-party supporters

Test messages and explore options
● Measure current opinions
● Test credibility and effectiveness of messages
● Probe each problem in detail
● Use results to develop a strategy and tactical plan

Develop information materials
● Press materials, fact sheets, etc.
● Internet communications
● Advertising
● Speeches and presentations
● Mailing databases

Decisions

Implement tactical program
Communicate with target audience through:
● Events
● Media relations
● Rapid-response mechanisms
● Advertising
● Web relations
● Tracking research
● Direct outreach
● Third-party supporters

Refine as necessary

Monitor progress, adjust tactics, and report results
● Establish feedback mechanism
● Adjust campaign messages and tactics
● Report results to client

Sources: GAO; developed from Weber Shandwick.

Business for Diplomatic Action

Testimony by the President of Business for Diplomatic Action (BDA)[1] provides a suggested strategic road map for the government to follow, building on private sector best practices.[2] BDA suggests that U.S. public diplomacy efforts be redesigned following a five step plan: (1) listen, ask questions, and analyze; (2) participate in foundation building process for a comprehensive communication strategy; (3) introduce a "positioning concept" for the United States in a post-9/11 world; (4) develop a comprehensive communication plan; and (5) put someone in charge. Under step one, BDA notes that "there are knowledge gaps with regard to issues of anti-American sentiment and public diplomacy programming." Under step two, BDA suggests that a task force of public and private sector parties explore the significance and implications of the research data collected under step one. Under step three, a "positioning concept" for the United States would be developed, capturing a point of view, a promise, and a personality. Step four requires the development of a comprehensive communication plan which can take the form of a multiaudience grid listing existing attitudes, desired attitudes, barriers standing between existing and desired attitudes, and the best means to address and remove these barriers. BDA notes that answers to these questions will vary by target audience (e.g., Muslim parents, Muslim youth, Chinese business leaders, etc.), but all must be translations of the "positioning concept" agreed to in step three. Finally, someone must be in put in charge to ensure that all activities, behaviors, and messages are aligned to the new positioning concept.

Defense Science Board

In its September 2004 report on strategic communications, the Defense Science Board makes a case that borrowing and adapting private sector communication practices is a critical step toward revitalizing U.S. public diplomacy efforts.[3] The report notes that the United States approaches

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[1]Incorporated in January 2004 by interested private sector leaders, BDA seeks to counter anti-American sentiments that can harm U.S. business interests by helping to coordinate the outreach efforts of U.S. multinational companies.

[2]Reinhard, Keith. Testimony before the U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Government Reform. *The 9/11 Commission Recommendations on Public Diplomacy: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations.* 108th Cong. 2nd sess., Aug. 23, 2004.

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

modern warfare with cutting-edge strategies, tactics, and weapons, designed to be effective against modern foes, and constantly updated. By contrast, the report argues, U.S. current strategic communication planning and execution is mired in diplomatic and marketing tactics of yesteryear. The United States has no clearly defined strategic framework, themes, or messages. The report goes on to note that building an effective strategic communication culture that borrows the most effective private sector marketing and political campaign techniques will be at the core of rebuilding and reinventing the way the United States listens, engages, and communicates with the world.

The report notes that achieving this goal will involve the following three key steps:

- As in a successful political campaign, the United States must clearly define what success means in terms of its benefits for all target audiences. All constituents must understand what success means for them in personal terms. A carefully defined set of themes and messages must reinforce targeted audiences' perceived and personal benefits.

- The United States must communicate what its vision for the future promises on individual terms, not national or pan-national religious terms. The United States should personalize the benefits of its defined future, for example, personal control, choice and change, personal mobility, meritocracy, and individual rights (in particular, women's rights).

- As with most effective private sector and political marketing campaigns, the United States must understand what target populations must be reached and influenced to achieve success. And the United States must understand what it takes to move them. More importantly, it must target audiences that can be moved—pragmatically and strategically picking its target audiences.

Comments from the State Department

United States Department of State

Assistant Secretary and Chief Financial Officer

Washington, D.C. 20520

APR _ 7 2006

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: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges," GAO Job Code 320339.

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 – Michael Ten Kate
R/PPR – Gretchen Welch
State/OIG – Mark Duda

Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report

**U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim
Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant
Challenges, (GAO-06-535, GAO Code 320339)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the GAO's report on U.S.
public diplomacy in the Muslim world. We appreciate the fact that the report
acknowledges steps the Department has taken to adopt a strategic approach to
engage Muslim audiences. As we reported to GAO auditors, we are in the midst of
developing an integrated strategic communication plan that includes core
messages, segmented target audiences, detailed strategies and tactics, and in-depth
research and analyses to monitor and evaluate results. (This survey has been
conducted – we are awaiting final reports on which to base our plan.)

We have worked closely with the GAO to correct technical inaccuracies we
found in this draft report. However, we remain concerned about two issues the
report raises with respect to our exchange programs. The draft report states that
the State Department has not created new and lasting programs to engage key
audiences in the Arab and Muslim Worlds and that the Partnerships for Learning
(P4L) Program has been terminated. In fact, we have put in place innovative
exchange programs directed at Muslim and Arab audiences and we have adapted
longstanding exchanges of demonstrated effectiveness to help achieve our goals.
While many of these programs no longer carry the P4L label, the concept remains
sound and imbues these youth-oriented programs.

The Department believes that the recommendations contained in the draft
report are in sync with the improvements we have underway. We have laid the
foundations for a broad public diplomacy strategy that includes elements of private
sector best practices. We are developing a sample country-level communication
plan and specific plans for a number of individual countries that are key to this
effort. We have asked our embassies in a number of pilot countries to prepare
analyses of their "key influencers" as part of that process. We are currently
building an intranet website devoted to best practices that will encourage
interactive engagement and sharing of information among our public diplomacy
practitioners. The site will also contain a wealth of practical information on how to
access and use public diplomacy resources.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Jess Ford (202) 512-4128

Staff Acknowledgments

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