

# Executive Summary Backgrounder

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## Strengthening U.S. Public Diplomacy Requires Organization, Coordination, and Strategy

*Stephen Johnson, Helle C. Dale, and Patrick Cronin, Ph.D.*

September 11, 2001, may have been a wake-up call to reform America's outdated intelligence bureaucracies and fight a global war on terrorism, but in some corners of the government, the war of ideas has been a lesser priority. While overseas opinion polls show mostly negative views of the United States, the communications machinery at the Department of State remains in disarray, inter-agency coordination remains minimal, and America's foreign communications effort lacks focus.

The nomination and confirmation of Karen Hughes as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs is a much-needed step, but it is not enough. The White House and Congress must give Under Secretary Hughes adequate authority and resources, streamline foreign broadcasting to make it more flexible and less wasteful, and appoint a White House-level coordinator to ensure continuity across government agencies.

Specifically in the Middle East and Muslim world—the current priority—the United States must promote regional and local media initiatives to augment U.S. government broadcasting, support education programs to open minds, and engage foreign opinion leaders to lend their support.

**Crippled Capabilities.** Public diplomacy had been losing resources since the end of the Cold War. In 1999, Congress and the White House folded the once independent United States Information Agency (USIA) into the U.S. Department of State, creating disarray. As a result, the President

lost the USIA director, a top adviser who tapped the pulse of the world's streets. Creative and independent-minded USIA communicators were forced into the lumbering, rigid State Department bureaucracy that started sending its own non-qualified officers to fill public diplomacy jobs. Frustrated, the last two Under Secretaries of State for Public Diplomacy quit after a short stay.

Other government agencies—including the Department of Defense, U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, and U.S. Agency for International Development—tried to fill the vacuum, with mixed results.

**Missing Coordination.** After September 11, the White House organized interagency communications crisis response teams similar to those used in political campaigns. It also created the Strategic Communications Policy Coordination Committee and the Office of Global Communications to help spokesmen stay on message and facilitate contacts with foreign journalists. Neither carried out long-term strategic planning, coordination, or program evaluation.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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Some Administration initiatives, including the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the National Security Council (NSC) Muslim World Outreach initiative, show promise. However, these efforts lack a coordinating structure, and spending has been scattershot.

**A Coordinated, Focused Approach.** Like stovepiped intelligence programs prior to 9/11, U.S. public diplomacy still lacks organization, coordination, and strategy. While America cannot revive Cold War-era mechanisms, public diplomacy can be reshaped and redirected. Specifically, the White House and Congress should:

- **Strengthen State Department public diplomacy with personnel and budgetary authority.** The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs should control public diplomacy officers, both at headquarters in Foggy Bottom and in embassies around the world, to ensure that they have adequate resources and program guidance. Operational control can be shared with regional and functional bureaus.
- **Streamline foreign broadcasting** to ensure timely coverage and less waste. The Broadcasting Board of Governors should make policies, not manage individual projects. The International Broadcasting Bureau should launch new surrogate services to promote free media where absent, but such outlets should become self-sustaining. Congress should rewrite the Voice of America's archaic federal personnel rules to permit more flexible management.
- **Integrate efforts across government agencies** by appointing an NSC public diplomacy coordinator and establishing an independent foreign polling center to serve government agencies.

The United States must also counter the influence of Islamic extremism to defuse the root cause of current terrorism by:

- **Promoting regional and local media initiatives that combat extremism.** America should encourage the growth of independent private media and provide access to U.S. Arabic-speaking spokesmen and program content on U.S. channels that gives balanced news and commentary to counter misperceptions.
- **Investing in education.** The United States should enhance support for existing American schools, offer local scholarships for the poor, and increase adult education opportunities. Moribund book translation programs should be revived.
- **Engaging opinion leaders.** Public diplomacy officers should reach out to media elites to ensure that they have the information to counter misperceptions, distortions, stereotypes, and lies about America.

**Conclusion.** The Bush Administration and Congress have made progress in some areas of public diplomacy. Larger audiences are tuning in to U.S. government broadcasts while the Middle East Peace Initiative and Muslim World Outreach are encouraging more creative planning. However, the United States will lag in foreign outreach unless bureaucratic structures are streamlined, better coordinated, and focused on tasks at hand. A new Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy may help, but that is clearly not enough.

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# Background

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## Strengthening U.S. Public Diplomacy Requires Organization, Coordination, and Strategy

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The final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States said that America's biggest failure leading to the events of September 11, 2001, was a lack of imagination.<sup>1</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, terrorist dangers were hardly mentioned as priorities in America's policy debates. Likewise, leaders in both the legislative and executive branches considered public diplomacy (PD) a Cold-War relic in the absence of a powerful adversary.

In 1999, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) was merged into the U.S. Department of State, where senior managers carved up its functions and dispersed them among the State Department's geographic and functional bureaus. Foreign broadcasting was placed under a new, independent Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). Thus, public diplomacy lost its leadership and organizational integrity just before the September 11 attacks. Since then, the Department of Defense (DOD) and foreign broadcasting have tried to fill in the void.

While overseas opinion polls show mostly negative views of the United States, the State Department's communications machinery remains in disarray. Congressional funding for public diplomacy programs has increased only slightly since 9/11, interagency coordination remains minimal, and America's foreign communication efforts lack a focused strategy.<sup>2</sup> More worrisome, new programs may not be effective in confronting the array of security, foreign policy, and economic challenges emanating from the Middle East.

On July 29, 2005, the Senate confirmed Karen Hughes as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplo-

### Talking Points

- The Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs needs authority and resources to conduct foreign outreach work in the State Department, which traditionally shuns public communication.
- U.S. foreign broadcasting efforts need streamlined management, and independent services launched by the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors should be self-sustaining.
- Public diplomacy efforts across government agencies should be coordinated within the National Security Council, aided by independent audience research, and guided—for the first time—by a public diplomacy doctrine.
- Outreach toward the Middle East must include encouraging the growth of independent media, promoting universal and higher quality education, and better informing local opinion leaders so that they can counter misperceptions about U.S. policies and long-term hopes for the region.

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macy and Public Affairs. As a close adviser to President George W. Bush since he was governor of Texas, she should have his backing to advance needed reforms, but her task will be daunting and limited to fixing one part of the larger public diplomacy effort. To strengthen America's waning communications capabilities, the White House and Congress therefore should:

- **Strengthen State Department public diplomacy** by providing adequate authority and resources;
- **Streamline foreign broadcasting** to ensure better coordination with global public diplomacy and development goals;
- **Integrate efforts across the government** by appointing a high-level coordinator and establishing an independent foreign polling center;
- **Create a public diplomacy doctrine and global strategy**, developed by lead public diplomacy actors; and
- **Abolish domestic access limits on public diplomacy products** contained in legislation dating from the 1940s.

In the Middle East, the current regional priority for public diplomacy, the U.S. government should:

- **Promote regional and local media initiatives** to counter the growth of militant Islamic extremism;
- **Support educational alternatives to help open minds** through American schools, adult education and training, and enhanced exchange programs; and

- **Engage local opinion leaders** to ensure that they have enough facts to counter misperceptions, distortions, and disinformation about U.S. desires to encourage peace, prosperity, and partnership in the region.

### Holding Pattern

From the height of the Cold War to 9/11, public diplomacy has never enjoyed a domestic constituency. The 1948 Smith–Mundt Act that established the basis for much of America's public diplomacy efforts prohibited domestic use of materials produced for overseas missions, ensuring that few Americans knew about the mission.<sup>3</sup> Public diplomacy has only now become better known because Americans realize both that U.S. policies are often misunderstood in various parts of the world and that the United States is poorly regarded among peoples with whom U.S. citizens seldom have contact.

**Misguided Merger.** As the lead organization for public diplomacy, USIA began to lose substantial resources and effectiveness in the early 1990s. Outreach programs like academic and cultural exchanges, book translation, U.S.–host country binational centers, and American libraries were cut, and funding was frozen at \$1 billion annually, which amounts to steady reduction after inflation. In 1998, Congress decided to reduce foreign operating expenses and consolidate operations.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Agency for International Development was the main target but, unaffected by domestic lobbying restrictions, escaped dismantling through skillful advocacy. Instead, Congress and the Clinton Administration

1. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, "Executive Summary," *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 2004, p. 9, at [www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report\\_Exec.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Exec.pdf) (July 18, 2005).
2. Several private and government groups have made recommendations to strengthen U.S. public diplomacy, including the Center for the Study of the Presidency, the Council on Foreign Relations, The Heritage Foundation, the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World chaired by U.S. Ambassador Edward Djerejian, the U.S. Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office.
3. The 1948 U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (Public Law 402) is known as Smith–Mundt after its sponsors, Senator H. Alexander Smith (R–NJ) and Representative Karl E. Mundt (R–SD).
4. The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act (Public Law 105–277) ended a half-century of public diplomacy independence.

## The Public Diplomacy Mission

Public diplomacy is partly about message and partly about medium. Its core function is to promote U.S. interests and security proactively through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad on a long-term basis.

That means giving timely news to foreign journalists, providing information on U.S. values and policies directly to foreign publics through various media, sponsoring scholarships and exchanges to the United States, showcasing American culture, and transmitting

balanced, independent news to captive people who have no information source besides a repressive government.

For public diplomacy to succeed, it must be guided by doctrine and a long-term strategy that vigorously defends public information programs within the foreign policy establishment, encourages communication, and provides parameters for its use. This is important because successful public diplomacy relies on proactive outreach, which clashes with the corporate cultures in the State Department, Defense Department, and other agencies with foreign affairs responsibilities.

folded USIA into the U.S. Department of State as part of an overall project to reinvent government.

Although it made economic sense, the merger created disarray. Negotiators unfamiliar with USIA's mission carved up the agency and placed regional divisions under the authority of the State Department's geographic bureaus and buried support functions within the State Department's functional divisions without much regard for outcome. USIA's public opinion research office was placed in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), outside the hierarchy of communications professionals who need its analysis the most. Most of all, USIA's proactive communicators and creative personnel were dropped haphazardly into a bureaucracy that values secrecy and a deliberative clearance process. Career State Department officers consider it a good day when no one makes news—the opposite of classic public affairs (PA) and public diplomacy practice.

**Still Racing to the Airport.** Former USIA Director Edward R. Murrow recommended that public diplomacy be in at the takeoff of foreign policies, not just at the occasional crash landing. That was possible when the USIA had a prominent direc-

tor—like Murrow, Frank Shakespeare, and Charles Wick—who had the ear of the President, but USIA lost its presidential connection and strong leadership when it was folded into the State Department. Its independent culture clashed with the consensus-driven State Department. Without leadership that understood how to integrate public diplomacy into department operations, PD/PA officers were left out of senior policy meetings in both regional and functional bureaus.<sup>5</sup>

Ignoring the unique mission of public diplomacy, the State Department's personnel system has sent non-qualified Foreign Service officers to lead overseas public diplomacy sections. Some have arrived on station ill-prepared to talk to journalists or cultivate civic leaders. Ineffective at public affairs, some have reverted to more comfortable political or consular roles, leaving the host-country employees to run the public diplomacy section.

As a remedy, the Personnel Bureau has been working with the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) to develop short courses to minimally qualify incumbents who have no communications background. In fact, FSI has increased the number of public diplomacy courses, but their offerings do not yet match

5. Western Hemisphere Affairs and International Organizations have been exceptions, because they are viewed as essential members of the assistant secretary's team.

the intensity of training available to career military public affairs officers through DOD's Defense Information School and private-sector exchanges.

Under Secretaries for Public Diplomacy in the Bush Administration have found the job frustrating. Besides the domestically oriented Bureau of Public Affairs, the under secretary has a small staff to handle foreign cultural affairs, news dissemination, and policy but no reporting or budgetary authority over public diplomacy officers in the department or embassies. Former advertising executive Charlotte Beers was shunned by the department and left after 17 months. Veteran bureaucrat Margaret Tutwiler stayed only six months. On and off, the position has been vacant for a total of 27 months.

In September 2004, the State Department created an Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources in the Under Secretariat to provide long-term planning and coordination. At the same time, however, the White House asked the Assistant Secretary for Cultural Affairs to become Acting Under Secretary and do both jobs at once. As a result, the Policy, Planning, and Resources Office got off the ground only to enter a holding pattern.

**Defense on Its Own.** Other government agencies have conducted foreign communications efforts separately and more aggressively. The Department of Defense established the secretive Office of Strategic Influence in October 2001 but shut it down four months later after public affairs professionals and media watchdogs charged, entirely without substantiation, that it would plant false stories in the foreign press that could end up as propaganda in American media. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld replaced it with an Office of Strategic Communica-

tion to coordinate dissemination of traditional combat information.<sup>6</sup>

In Iraq, the DOD used Saddam Hussein's former Ministry of Information to disseminate information from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). It maintained a newspaper, *Al-Sabah*, the TV channel Al-Iraqiyah, and a radio network. Broadcasts mixed CPA announcements with programming from independent Iraqi producers, creating a confusing stew that tainted participating journalists. Wisely, the CPA permitted media outlets to organize on their own, and by the time the CPA handed over power to the Iraqis, some 100 to 200 independent newspapers and magazines had flourished.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, the DOD has let contracts worth \$300 million over five years to private firms in the Washington, D.C., area to write news stories, produce television commercials, and develop Internet pop-up ads to improve foreign public views of the United States. The Joint Psychological Operations Support Element of the U.S. Special Operations Command is coordinating the efforts. Psychological operations, or "psyops," are persuasive communications targeted at foreign publics in combat zones to encourage cooperation with U.S. forces, but they should not be confused with public diplomacy or public affairs.<sup>8</sup>

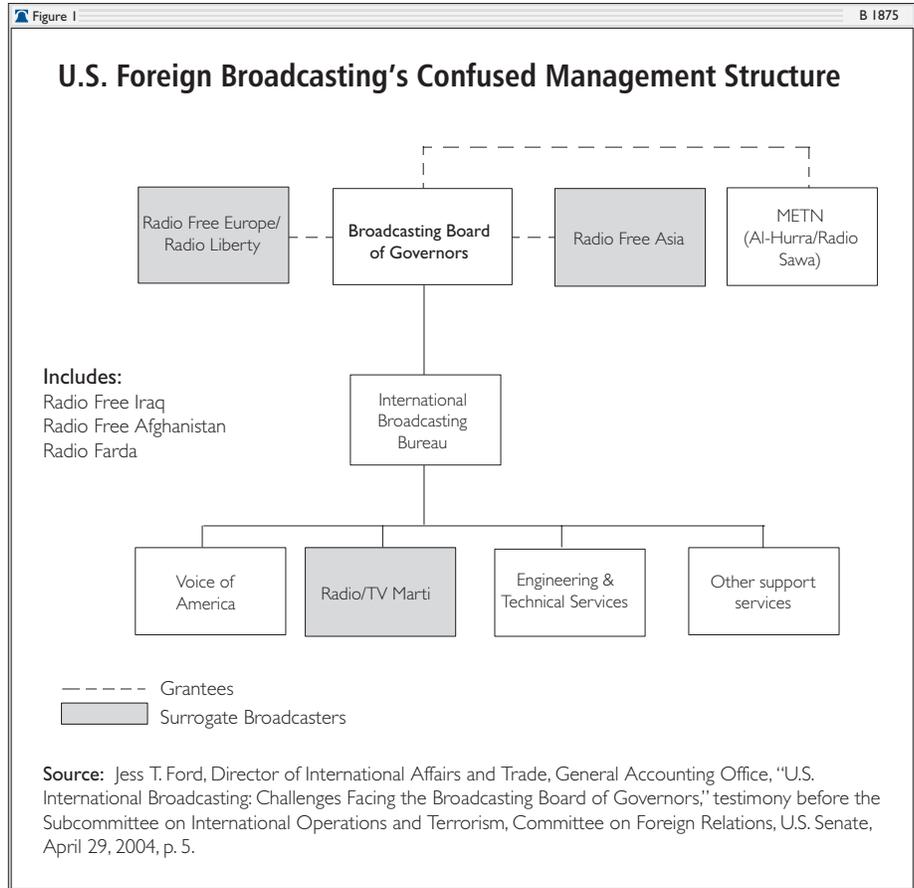
**Ad Hoc Broadcasting.** Members of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors have addressed short-term foreign communication needs in spite of the makeshift structure of overlapping proprietary and surrogate broadcasting operations inherited from Congress and the Clinton Administration's half-hearted attempt to reinvent government. Despite tactical success, their efforts lack long-term strategy and

6. Besides public affairs aimed at domestic audiences, the DOD engages in information warfare to shape battlefield communications environments and psychological operations to encourage foreign civilian populations to cooperate with U.S. objectives during combat operations.
7. Stephen Schwartz, "Free the Iraqi Press!" *The Weekly Standard*, May 17, 2004, at [www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/072/kcdat.asp](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/072/kcdat.asp) (May 13, 2004).
8. Renae Merle, "Pentagon Funds Diplomacy Effort," *The Washington Post*, June 11, 2005, p. A1. SYColeman and Science Applications International Corporation of Virginia and the Lincoln Group of Washington, D.C., will help to develop radio and TV programs, advertising, Internet Web content, and novelty items meant to boost the image of the United States among international audiences. A hypothetical campaign might explain how car bombs meant for soldiers might also harm innocent civilians. However, types of communications—often unattributed—must be used sparingly to avoid blowback into U.S. media or populations outside the conflict zone.

planning. The eight members of the BBG function like a hydra-headed chief executive with authority to meddle in daily operations and control individual pet projects like Radio Free Asia and the Middle Eastern Radio and Television Networks. The subordinate International Broadcasting Bureau directs the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Martí, and marketing and engineering services.

On the plus side, the BBG launched new Arabic-language radio services. Radio Sawa and the Middle Eastern Radio Network began broadcasting only six months after 9/11. The BBG created Radio Farda in 2003 to broadcast objective news in Farsi to Iran. It established the Middle Eastern TV network, dubbed Al-Hurra (“The Free One”), to provide U.S.-style programming via satellite to cable systems and home antennas throughout the Near East.

Impressive as these accomplishments might seem, they came at the cost of reforming VOA Arabic broadcast services. In 2001, VOA management was trying to shift its programming from the increasingly outmoded shortwave bandwidths to more popular FM frequencies and break into satellite TV. Upgrade costs would have been only about \$15 million because of existing infrastructure and talent, but “if we had waited for VOA to do it, with its civil service regulations and union rules, it would have taken years,” said BBG Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson. “The war against terror is now.”<sup>9</sup>



Congress gave the board \$35 million for Radio Sawa and \$62 million for Al-Hurra TV.

New radio efforts have employed a creative mix of pop music and entertainment interspersed with news to build audience share among adolescents and young adults (15–30 years old). Radio Sawa is reaching 51 percent of targeted listeners on FM, according to the U.S. General Accounting (now Government Accountability) Office, compared to VOA’s single digits.<sup>10</sup> However, it is unclear that this innocuous menu will win hearts and minds for the United States. According to former U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates William

9. Most IBB and VOA staff are federal employees entitled to job stability that inhibits surge capacity and rapid staffing changes to meet new challenges. It is easier to create a new bureaucracy or support surrogates like Radio Free Asia than to task the IBB with urgent requests. Brooke Gladstone, interview with Ken Tomlinson, “On the Media,” National Public Radio, July 23, 2004.

10. U.S. General Accounting Office, *U.S. International Broadcasting: New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audiences But Lacks Measurable Program Objectives*, GAO-03-772, July 2003, p. 11.

A. Rugh, Radio Sawa gives young Arabs “the programs they want, namely pop music, but the station does little to advance public diplomacy objectives, which include improving understanding and appreciation of American society and foreign policies.”<sup>11</sup>

Al-Hurra TV is similarly controversial in that the BBG intended it to be an American-style channel adhering to principles of free press to compete with and force change upon existing Arab channels. Whether it can catalyze change among the likes of Qatar-based Al-Jazeera, Saudi-run Al-Arabiya, the Lebanese Arab News Network, Hezbollah’s Al-Manar, state-run networks, and hundreds of other satellite channels is debatable.

An informal survey of viewers in Cairo, Egypt, where anti-American views prevail, revealed a mix of attitudes. Many saw it as a government-run propaganda channel like their own; some thought it amateurish; others liked the mix of American cinema and open public discourse unavailable on other outlets; still others considered it too restrained.<sup>12</sup> They neither openly embraced it nor—more important—rejected it.

Sadly, the Voice of America—a recognized brand in its own right—has continued to wither. The BBG has abolished 10 language services to Central and Eastern Europe and reduced global programming in English to partially fund new surrogates. Writing VOA news stories for broadcast to the People’s Republic of China has been outsourced to contractors in Hong Kong, raising issues of accountability. Elsewhere, as in Latin America, VOA programming has been neglected. In South America, Venezuela’s authoritarian president Hugo Chávez has created Telesur, a satellite TV channel to promote radical socialism and

denounce the United States. Al-Jazeera TV is opening a bureau in Caracas, Venezuela. Currently, the VOA has few resources to offer balance.

**USIA-Supported Libraries and Cultural Centers.** In the mid-1990s, Congress ended funding for USIA-supported libraries,<sup>13</sup> U.S.–host country binational cultural centers,<sup>14</sup> and book translation programs to cut foreign operating expenses. Congressional critics viewed libraries and binational centers as superfluous in friendly European countries, overtaken by the Internet, and difficult to secure in downtown, storefront locations. With the end of the Cold War, they considered book translation and donations equally unnecessary.

Nevertheless, a few enterprising Foreign Service officers and private-sector entrepreneurs are trying to make up for the loss. After the State Department replaced downtown USIA libraries with sparsely equipped Information Resource Centers in fortress-like U.S. embassies, public diplomacy officers suggested locating them in more accessible universities, existing libraries, and chambers of commerce. Besides supplying literature and Internet access, they make comfortable venues for American speakers. At present, there are more than 200 “American Corners,” with plans to double that number around the world.

USIA binational centers were developed mainly in Latin America but began to lose support in the 1970s. After U.S. funding ended in the 1990s, a few survived and prospered in 18 Latin American countries and France on the basis of teaching English. An example is the Alianza Cultural Uruguay–Estados Unidos in Montevideo with its community theater, a 12,000-volume library with subscriptions to 90 periodicals, and 48 branches in cities and towns across the country.<sup>15</sup> State Depart-

11. William A. Rugh, “Broadcasting and American Diplomacy,” *Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal*, No. 14 (Spring/Summer 2005), at [www.tbsjournal.com/rugh.html](http://www.tbsjournal.com/rugh.html) (June 29, 2005).

12. Summer Said, “Alhurra on the Cairo Street,” *Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal*, No. 14 (Spring/Summer 2005), at [www.tbsjournal.com/said.html](http://www.tbsjournal.com/said.html) (June 29, 2005).

13. There were about 160 libraries in 80 countries during the 1990s.

14. Binational centers predate USIA and modern notions of public diplomacy. The first was established in Argentina in 1928. For an in-depth description of what they do, see Louis P. Falino, “The Binational Center and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *The North South Agenda Papers*, No. 19, University of Miami, June 1996.

ment public diplomacy sections are now beginning to re-engage these centers, although no money has been appropriated for this purpose.

To provide public diplomacy information and consular services to remote audiences that have Internet connections, entrepreneurial diplomats developed Virtual Presence Posts in 2001 as part of an “eDiplomacy” initiative to make such information more accessible. Regrettably, senior State Department managers buried the program in the Bureau of Information Resource Management (IRM), a technical support division that handles hardware purchases, maintains system security, and has a reputation for opposing innovation.

The Franklin Book Program was a USIA-funded effort that translated American books into Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages from 1952 to 1978. After it closed, the USIA’s book translation program continued to contract translations of hundreds of books on American politics and economics with print runs of up to 50,000 copies each. Budget cuts in the mid-1990s forced USIA to close its central office and leave it to posts such as Amman, Cairo, and Paris to arrange translations on their own, although these efforts are rebounding.

Private organizations fill in the gap to the extent that they receive donations. Since 1986, the Sabre Foundation has distributed some \$200 million in donated English textbooks to foreign libraries and universities. Business for Diplomatic Action, a U.S. industry group, has suggested several ways that businesses can polish America’s image abroad, from urging U.S. television producers to dub more programs into foreign languages to sponsoring cultural exchanges and providing corporate-level foreign exchange opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

Books and culture clearly remain valid ways to build bridges in foreign lands where some people are unreachable by broadcasting or are unlikely to participate in academic exchanges.

**Branding Foreign Aid.** The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has funded

journalistic workshops and provided grants to the publicly and privately funded National Endowment for Democracy. Its humanitarian and agricultural assistance also shows the flag when publicized. In 2003, USAID and the State Department created a joint policy group to exploit that “branding” opportunity. However, coordination with other agencies’ communication efforts has been minimal. In July 2004, USAID’s Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs launched an aggressive effort to train its own professional communicators overseas.

Today, some 44 full-time development and outreach communications specialists help USAID to gain publicity for overseas programs by pitching stories to local media, writing speeches for local mission directors, and helping to translate USAID concepts into local parlance. So far, six regional conferences have been held to develop communication strategies and coordinate local messages.

However, this commendable program could have unintended negative consequences. USAID’s branding agenda could conflict with or overshadow U.S. embassy public diplomacy efforts at posts where inexperienced and undertrained State Department officers are sent to lead public diplomacy sections.

**Missing Coordination.** Immediately following the September 11 terrorist attacks, the White House and State Department organized inter-agency communications crisis response teams modeled after political campaigns. In September 2002, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice created the Strategic Communications Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), co-chaired by the National Security Council (NSC) and the State Department. It reportedly met a few times and provided an e-mail listserv to share information among members, but did little else in the absence of a confirmed Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. In January 2003, the White House formally established the Office of Global Communi-

15. See Alianza Web site, at [www.alianza.edu/English/index.html](http://www.alianza.edu/English/index.html) (July 12, 2005).

16. For specific information on these programs, see Sabre Foundation Web site, at [www.sabre.org](http://www.sabre.org) (July 27, 2005), and Business for Diplomatic Action Web site, at [www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org](http://www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org) (July 27, 2005).

cations to help domestic and overseas spokesmen stay on message and facilitate contacts with foreign journalists.

None of these entities carried out long-term strategic planning, coordination, or program evaluation.<sup>17</sup> At present, both entities are inactive.

### Grappling with the Middle East

What is functioning are two ambitious initiatives that have public diplomacy components. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is a 2002 foreign aid program in the State Department's Near East Affairs Bureau that is intended to foster reform in the region by promoting market liberalization, improvements in public education, stronger influence among moderate civil society groups, and political opportunities for women.<sup>18</sup> The State Department received control because, at the time, it had more regional expertise than USAID, which understandably did not have a strong presence in countries like Iraq.

The other is the Administration's Muslim World outreach that began with the creation of a Policy Coordinating Committee in July 2004. U.S. embassies in the region were polled for ideas on how to communicate with Muslim audiences. Their ideas included bolstering the influence of moderate leaders, working through allied Islamic nations such as Indonesia to counter extremism, funding moderate Muslim think tanks, integrating psychological operations into U.S. efforts, and giving foreign aid to establish moderate Muslim

schools as well as to restore mosques. Even U.S. intelligence contacts within fundamentalist movements are holding dialogues to persuade followers to renounce violence.

Critics claim that these efforts may not be enough to overcome bad feelings engendered by decades of U.S. collaboration with some of the region's repressive leaders, the Abu Ghraib Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal, and U.S. support for Israel in the Middle East peace process. MEPI's spending pattern has been scattershot—dividing a \$129 million budget into a myriad of small projects unlikely to promote long-term change. Some of the money also goes to host-country governments, a discredited practice that elsewhere has permitted local officials to skim off funds. Analyst Daniel Pipes points out that even Middle East experts in the U.S. government have a mixed record of identifying moderate Muslims, while aid to influence Islamic schools also serves to promote a specific religion, which may violate the First Amendment.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, unfavorable foreign public opinion of the United States has declined slightly since 2003 in countries such as Morocco, Pakistan, and Jordan, and favorable views of fugitive terrorist Osama bin Laden have dropped significantly, according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project. Moreover, growing majorities of Middle Eastern and Asian Muslims say that democracy can work in their countries.<sup>20</sup> The Bush Administration's recent advocacy of democratic elections

17. See U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, p. 26. More recently, the Government Accountability Office reported that "the Office of Global Communications has not facilitated the development of a strategic communications plan for the United States, provided guidance on the need for regional or country-specific action plans tailored to local conditions, pushed for an analysis of the root causes for anti-American sentiments and the best means to address such root causes, or encouraged the development of mechanisms to increase private sector involvement in U.S. outreach efforts." U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy*, GAO-05-323, April 2005, p. 12.

18. Secretary of State Colin Powell announced this initiative, hailing it as "an initiative that puts the United States firmly on the side of change, on the side of reform, and on the side of a modern future for the Middle East." Colin L. Powell, "The U.S.—Middle East Partnership Initiative: Building Hope for the Years Ahead," *Heritage Foundation Lecture No. 772*, December 17, 2002, at [www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/hl772.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/hl772.cfm).

19. See Daniel Pipes, "Washington Finally Gets It on Radical Islam," *FrontPageMagazine.com*, April 25, 2005, at [www.danielpipes.org/article/2546](http://www.danielpipes.org/article/2546) (July 15, 2005).

20. Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, at [pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248](http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248) (July 15, 2005).

## Between Isolation and Great Potential

Despite oil riches in some countries, many Middle Eastern children still lack access to basic education, and authoritarian rule sharply limits freedom of the press and stifles commerce in knowledge. Secretary of State Colin Powell portrayed the challenges of the region thus:

But economies are not creating enough jobs. Growth is weak. The GDP of 260 million Arabs is already less than that of 40 million Spaniards and falling even further behind. Add in the production of Iran's 67 million people, and the total is still only two-thirds of Italy's. Internally, many economies are stifled by regulation and cronyism. They lack transparency and are closed to entrepreneurship, investment, and trade.

The countries of the Middle East are also largely absent from world markets.

They generate barely one percent of the world's non-oil exports. Only ten Middle Eastern countries belong to the World Trade Organization. The region's governments are now recognizing, as Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak has warned, that "giving a boost to exports is a matter of life or death."

A shortage of economic opportunities is a ticket to despair. Combined with rigid political systems, it is a dangerous brew indeed. Along with freer economies, many of the peoples of the Middle East need a stronger political voice. We reject the condescending notion that freedom will not grow in the Middle East or that there is any region of the world that cannot support democracy.<sup>1</sup>

1. Colin L. Powell, "The U.S.–Middle East Partnership Initiative: Building Hope for the Years Ahead," Heritage Foundation Lecture No. 772, December 17, 2002, at [www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/hl772.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/hl772.cfm).

in the region has even met with qualified acceptance in Lebanon and Egypt.

### A Focused Approach

Members of Congress, career professionals, and even Administration officials have pointed out that U.S. foreign communication efforts still lack organization, coordination, and strategy, despite gains in some areas such as more training for State Department public diplomacy officers and the cultivation of a larger audience base for broadcasts in the Middle East. In many ways, disparate U.S. public diplomacy efforts mimic America's stovepiped intelligence programs prior to 9/11.

Congress has passed modest increases in public diplomacy funding, increasing appropriations for educational and cultural exchanges from \$200 million to \$400 million.<sup>21</sup> However, the \$1.2 billion annual budget for public diplomacy is not much larger than the \$1 billion spent annually during the 1990s, and it is clearly insufficient, particularly when compared to the need for more exchanges and balanced U.S. international broadcasting around the globe, not just in the Middle East.

Even Congress recognizes that for more spending to do any good, public diplomacy must be better organized and have a game plan. In January

21. From 1993 to 2001, overall funding for educational and cultural exchange programs fell by about 33 percent, from \$349 million to \$232 million (adjusted for inflation). U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, "Building America's Public Diplomacy Through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources," 2002, p. 10, at [www.state.gov/documents/organization/13622.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/13622.pdf) (July 27, 2005).

2005, Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced a bill to establish the post of Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications.<sup>22</sup> In April 2005, Representative William “Mac” Thornberry (R-TX) introduced a measure to establish a nonprofit Center for Strategic Communication to advise various government agencies on foreign public opinion, culture, and emerging technology.<sup>23</sup> Senators Russell Feingold (D-MN) and Chuck Hagel (R-NE) have submitted a resolution to promote international exchanges.<sup>24</sup>

While the USIA-State Department merger cannot be undone, public diplomacy can be strengthened within the State Department. Foreign broadcasting can be better managed and more supportive of U.S. policies and foreign assistance efforts, and inter-agency cooperation can be improved. Specifically, the White House and Congress should:

- **Reassign personnel and budgetary authority for public diplomacy in the State Department to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.** Public diplomacy officers in embassies should be directly responsible to the under secretary, and the under secretary should ensure that they have adequate resources and guidance. They would still be answerable to regional and other functional bureaus, but resources and program authority would be protected.

The Bureau of International Information Programs should be renamed the Public Diplomacy Bureau and should be used to channel resources to public diplomacy sections in bureaus and embassies to assure programmatic continuity. The Office of Media and Opinion Research should be moved to the new PD Bureau where it

can help regional PD desks to tailor their products to specific audiences and channels. The State Department should permit the PD Bureau to establish a dedicated information technology division to provide appropriate hardware and software programs to creative elements throughout the hierarchy.<sup>25</sup> All government agencies would gain from stronger State Department leadership in improving support for U.S. policies and enhancing understanding abroad.

- **Streamline foreign broadcasting** to ensure more useful coverage and coordination with other government public diplomacy efforts and development goals. The Broadcasting Board of Governors should make policies for its subordinate International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) to implement, but it should not manage individual projects or meddle in daily decisions. Separate directorates might exist under the IBB to manage the Voice of America, to manage specific U.S.-funded and U.S.-controlled outlets intended to provide information to captive audiences like those in Cuba, and to provide engineering expertise.

The IBB could continue to launch new semi-independent surrogate services to regions where an American voice is weak or absent. Once established, such outlets could be funded by the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy until they became self-sustaining or were no longer needed.

For its part, Congress should increase allocations to international broadcasting to allow more comprehensive VOA coverage in regions in turmoil beyond the Middle East and the growth of such media as television and Internet broadcasting.<sup>26</sup> Future savings could be obtained by

22. S. 192, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., January 26, 2005.

23. Strategic Communication Act of 2005, H.R. 1869, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., April 27, 2005.

24. People-to-People Engagement in World Affairs Resolution, S. Res. 104, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., April 12, 2005.

25. The State Department’s centralized Bureau of Information Resource Management understandably places a high priority on standardization to save costs. While pennywise, it does not currently support graphics programs and specialized platforms used by public relations professionals. As a result, embassy public diplomacy sections are not able to keep up with emerging communications technologies such as “podcasting”—a broadcasting technology based on disseminating computer-generated audio files used by MP3 players and commercial radio stations alike.

reforming foreign broadcasting's federal personnel rules to permit more flexible hiring, reassignment, and dismissal of employees based on merit and changing IBB needs.

- **Integrate efforts across government agencies** by appointing a high-level coordinator.<sup>27</sup> The inactive White House Office of Global Communications could be invested with resources to coordinate multi-agency efforts, as recommended by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> However, an NSC advisory position would be preferable because it would be more permanent and plugged into policy discussions, although the person holding the position should not wear other hats since coordinating policy and multi-agency operations is a full-time job.
- **Establish an independent center to conduct public opinion research in foreign countries for the U.S. government agencies.** All government entities with public diplomacy responsibilities need access to foreign public opinion research. Currently, the Smith-Mundt Act restricts the State Department Office of Media

and Opinion Research in disseminating information to other agencies. The BBG, DOD, and CIA already engage commercial polling firms for certain proprietary needs. If more is to be invested in opinion research, it should benefit multiple agencies and be targeted to broad needs to eliminate waste and duplicated effort.<sup>29</sup> The data should be made available to senior policymakers, who have been denied access since the State Department swallowed USIA. However, the center should not compete in media production or otherwise usurp user-agency authority in developing and disseminating products and services.<sup>30</sup>

- **Task lead public diplomacy actors to develop a public diplomacy doctrine and overall strategy.** Doctrine provides an overall framework and general principles to guide institutional activities. Strategies apply functions and principles to long-term problems or issues. The President should task the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the proposed NSC coordinator for public diplomacy, and the chairman of the Broadcasting

26. Although listenership for VOA radio programs has declined, particularly for outmoded formats like shortwave, television viewership has more than doubled. VOA-TV is allotted about \$30 million per year, while Al-Hurra receives about \$60 million. Other technologies, such as the use of the Internet for radio broadcasting and video streaming, will pose new challenges. Recent data indicate that the number of Internet users has increased by 253 percent in China, 295 percent in Brazil, and 270 percent in India. See U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *2004 Report*, September 28, 2004, p. 36, at [www.state.gov/documents/organization/36625.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/36625.pdf) (July 27, 2005).

27. See U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, "Building America's Public Diplomacy," p. 5; U.S. Department of Defense, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, pp. 66–70; and Edward P. Djerejian, "Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World," Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, submitted to the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, October 1, 2003, pp. 59–61, at [www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf) (July 27, 2005); and People-to-People Engagement in World Affairs Resolution.

28. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy*, p. 23, and U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, "Building America's Public Diplomacy," p. 5.

29. The State Department currently spends about \$3.5 million on foreign public opinion research. Expert opinions collected by the Government Accountability Office suggested that \$30 million to \$50 million would be needed for polling to provide strategic direction and measure effectiveness of existing programs. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy*, p. 24, and U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, "Building America's Public Diplomacy," p. 22.

30. For an explanation of the rationale behind the proposed U.S. Foreign Opinion Research Institute (FORI), see Kenneth Ballen, "FORI: A New Program for Understanding and Undermining the Popular Support Base Behind Global Terrorists," paper presented at Heritage Foundation conference, "America's Public Diplomacy: Roadmap to Recovery," Washington, D.C., June 14, 2005.

Board of Governors with developing a doctrine and overall strategy for U.S. international communications. These documents, subject to reform as times change, should be yardsticks to evaluate public diplomacy activities.<sup>31</sup>

The doctrine should mark general areas of responsibility between agencies and limits to special missions like psychological operations. It should also outline functions such as public information, cultural relations, foreign broadcasting, and democracy promotion operations. Finally, it should outline working principles of public diplomacy; e.g., U.S. public diplomacy efforts must never lie, should maximize dissemination with minimum delay while keeping secrets secret, should target information locally, and should sustain reservoirs of public goodwill. The doctrine should be simple and non-technical, since technology is changing too fast to be incorporated in a durable document.

- **Repeal Smith–Mundt restrictions on domestic dissemination of public diplomacy materials.** The restrictions were established to prevent overseas public relations from being used to propagandize and promote itself to the American public. In the Internet age, almost anyone with a computer can access public diplomacy materials if they know where to look, and almost every U.S. government entity outside of the State Department engages in self-advocacy. Smith–Mundt needlessly complicates the job of government communicators by blocking the cross-flow of products and services from public diplomacy and public affairs units, slowing the production of public relations materials, and ensuring duplicated efforts and expense because agencies outside of State Department public diplomacy must create similar products, such as pamphlets and press releases, from scratch.

To minimize propaganda, the White House should ensure that government agencies tailor public information materials so that they would be appropriate for both domestic and foreign audiences. Congress can keep the government

from lobbying itself and American citizens by sanctioning certain kinds of content, not who creates it. The White House can ensure that those limitations are echoed in public diplomacy doctrine.

- **Make better use of internal audits to plan reforms.** The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy should review the efforts of all agencies with public diplomacy responsibilities and report back to senior leadership and the proposed NSC coordinator to identify problems and possible corrective action. Both the U.S. Advisory Commission and the GAO have issued informative reports on PD strengths and weaknesses. While critical, the April 2005 GAO and the 2002 Advisory Commission reports were seminal and constructive. The DOD Science Board Task Force has done extensive research on the subject.

### Plugging into the Middle East

While championing the role of public diplomacy in a wider security effort, it is important to note that there is no single nostrum that can stem terrorist acts against the United States and its allies around the world. Contemporary terrorism connected with Middle East sources is inextricably linked to currents that run deep through the cultures, religions, history, politics, and economics of the region. However, this very complexity means that a focused and aggressive public diplomacy effort is essential to the achievement of long-term U.S. security objectives. If the *raison d'être* of U.S. public diplomacy during the Cold War was to counter Soviet power and influence throughout the world, the objective now is to counter the influence of Islamic extremism and thereby defuse the root cause of terrorism.

Bearing this in mind, Congress and the Administration should pursue four broad courses in the Middle East to:

- **Promote regional and local media initiatives that combat extremism** to bring better, more reliable information about the United States

31. As a reference, the U.S. Army field manual AFM 46-1 is an example of doctrine applied to the public affairs career field.

and its intentions to varied audiences in the region and the Muslim world in general. There are 120 satellite channels in the Arab world, and 70 percent of them are controlled by governments. Instead of making U.S. taxpayers pay \$85 million annually to broadcast American rock music and television entertainment to the Middle East to gain audience share, America should prioritize the growth of private media, provide access to U.S. Arabic spokesmen, and program content on U.S. channels to give balanced news and counter misperceptions. U.S. officials on the ground in each country should constantly gauge these efforts to ensure that they build local capacity and initiative without having independence turn into irresponsibility.

- **Invest in education for the long term.** Although education can be a double-edged sword in funding religious academies, enhancing support for existing American schools, making more scholarships available for the poor to attend, increasing English-language training abroad, and providing adult education and training all offer economic promise and opportunity. Translation of American economic and political texts into Arabic is important in a region isolated by limited knowledge and information sharing. No more than 10,000 foreign books have been translated into Arabic in the past millennium—about the same number translated into Spanish each year.<sup>32</sup>

Congress should provide funds to expand the reach and offerings of American Corners, to assist binational centers, and reconstitute a central book translation program in the State Department's Public Diplomacy Bureau.<sup>33</sup> More academic exchanges, although expensive, should be funded. Over the longer term, the United States must also build its own human

capacity by providing opportunities for young Americans to gain an understanding of the languages, peoples, cultures, and politics of the Middle East and put this knowledge to use both within and outside of the U.S. government.

- **Engage opinion leaders in Middle Eastern countries.** America must do a far better job of engaging local intellectuals and officials to help them stand up against terrorists who are hijacking Islam for violent purposes. Public diplomacy officers should ensure that private and government media elites have the requisite information to counter misperceptions, distortions, stereotypes, and lies. Local opinion leaders need access to the facts about U.S. efforts to build peace, spur development, and reach out in partnership with their societies.
- **Improve the quality of public diplomacy officers serving in the Middle East.** To achieve this, the U.S. government must attract highly talented individuals, beginning with those who are fluent in Arabic and other relevant foreign languages and understand the culture and history of the area. Expanded training programs must be created to build a pipeline of future recruits. The U.S. Foreign Service promotional system and career path need to reward risk takers and not simply support those who support the status quo. Finally, public information officials overseas need to be fully integrated into the country team, an issue that the Secretary of State should take up with U.S. ambassadors and regional assistant secretaries.

## Conclusion

The Bush Administration and Congress have made progress in some areas of public diplomacy since 9/11, but to use this tool effectively in the 21st century, policymakers and lawmakers must

32. United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2003*, New York, October 2003.

33. The Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, also known as the Djerejian Commission, recommended that American Corners be expanded to include essential book collections on politics, economics, and current affairs in English and host-country tongues. According to the United Nations' 2003 *Arab Human Development Report*, many Arab nations suffer from a growing knowledge gap based on limitations in print publishing and media censorship. This presents an opportunity for the United States to fill in the gap at a fairly modest cost of about \$5,000 per translation plus whatever print runs might be required. See Djerejian, "Changing Minds, Winning Peace," p. 37.

move beyond the decaying Cold War public diplomacy structure to build bridges of understanding between America and various publics around the world. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes has an opportunity to help get public diplomacy up and running at the State Department if she so chooses.

The Bush Administration must help as well. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice should endorse personnel and budget authority for Under Secretary Hughes and promote PD/PA participation in policy deliberations at all levels. Congress and the White House need to redesign international broadcasting's structure and budget. The White House must strengthen coordination and planning.

The Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the proposed NSC coordinator for public diplomacy, and the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors should develop a foreign communications doctrine and long-term strategy. All public diplomacy players should give due consideration to observations and suggestions of the Government Accountability Office and U.S.

Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy to solve problems and prepare for new challenges.

The United States spends about \$30 billion annually on intelligence gathering to find out what others are thinking throughout the world, but only \$1 billion on trying to shape those thoughts. Even at that sum, the American public should be getting more for its money. At her January 18, 2005, confirmation hearing, Secretary of State Rice told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “[W]e will spread freedom and democracy throughout the globe.” That may be impossible unless America has a more coordinated, cooperative mechanism for tailored public outreach.

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