

Improving the U.S. Public Diplomacy Campaign In the War Against Terrorism

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Our ongoing struggle against the perpetrators of the September 11th attacks has many critical elements. The military campaign in Afghanistan is one; however, another campaign of potentially decisive significance is winning the battle for public support among Muslims around the world. Indeed, if we are unable to win the battle for hearts and minds, it may prove impossible to carry our military operations through to completion. We must create an understanding in the Muslim world of our cause and our actions that will give their leaders more flexibility to support the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks. Our goal in the public diplomacy campaign must be to demonstrate that the United States has a just cause for our actions. We are taking action against those who murdered our people and as well as to prevent them from threatening us again.

This paper is intended to assist the U.S. Administration in its ongoing efforts to prevail in this crucial struggle. The need for this paper stems from the mixed results the United States has had in the past with public diplomacy. We applaud the Administration's efforts so far in this crisis-including the establishment of a central coordinating office in the White House and offices in London and Islamabad-which reflect both an appreciation for the importance of the public diplomacy challenge, and a determination to meet it head on. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done. Although the United States is the pre-eminent communications society, we often have great difficulty bringing our resources to bear in this field. We remain convinced that the United States must further broaden and sharpen the message and the messengers we use to persuade the peoples of the world of the justness of our cause.

Organization

The federal bureaucracy is not configured to handle the demands of a major public diplomacy campaign. Public diplomacy is a low bureaucratic priority, as reflected by the relatively low-level officials traditionally assigned to it and the meager resources normally allocated to it. In addition, a successful public diplomacy campaign will require not only a high degree of coordination from the U.S. government, but also a high degree of agility. U.S. public diplomacy efforts need to be nimble enough to take advantage when a situation presents itself, and fast enough to respond to negative charges before they can take hold in the popular imagination. As part of this effort, the USG will have to be willing and able to reach beyond traditional bureaucracies to tap Agencies not traditionally associated with public diplomacy, as well as the private sector.

Within the federal bureaucracy, we recommend the following changes:

- Launch a comprehensive effort to ascertain how best to wage a public diplomacy campaign in the Middle East and South Asia employing modern public relations research and polling techniques. The U.S. government needs to develop a better

grasp of our target audiences, what they respond to, and how best to reach them. We should employ the most sophisticated tools that modern marketing (and political campaigns) have developed in pursuit of this crucial objective. Likewise, such an effort should also analyze the regional press, their audiences, their messages, and how best the U.S. could engage these media sources to get our own messages out most effectively.

- Closely monitor the public diplomacy campaign at the level of the Principals' Committee (PC). It is not enough for the PC to simply demand a more effective public diplomacy campaign. The bureaucracy focuses its attention on issues the Principals discuss-this is the key measure of importance within the government. If the PC is not willing to devote attention to it, the bureaucracy will inevitably relegate public diplomacy to a secondary priority.
- Streamline the review and coordination process for public diplomacy. A key obstacle to our ability to be pro-active and responsive is the excessive bureaucratic review required before even basic public diplomacy actions can be taken.
- Provide adequate resources to allow for a massive augmentation of public diplomacy assets. The need to be opportunistic and responsive, and the demands of polling and research, will especially require large numbers of people and funds. Also, Agencies need to start staffing the public diplomacy effort with top-caliber personnel.

Because any such expanded Public Diplomacy campaign will cost considerable amounts of money, the Congress must be a key participant in this effort. Indeed, close cooperation with the Congress is important not only to appropriate the required funding, but also for the broad political and moral support that only that institution can provide. Likewise, because of the importance of our message, and our reliance on a coalition to fight this war, we must ensure that our own public diplomacy efforts are closely coordinated with those of our allies.

Messengers

To a certain extent, in this case, the messenger may be more important than the message. The wrong messenger will kill the message, no matter how good it may be. The regional populace is far more likely to find Muslim and Arab interlocutors credible on these issues. The most important tactic we can take is to find credible proxies who can speak on our behalf rather than shouldering the entire public diplomacy burden ourselves.

The Administration must be willing to work with independent interlocutors. It is precisely this willingness to disagree at times with the USG that makes such people important interlocutors. Our very willingness to engage our critics demonstrates our willingness to take their grievances seriously.

- Have senior-level U.S. officials press friendly Arab and other Muslim governments not only to publicly condemn the 9/11 attacks, but also to back the rationale and goals of the U.S. anti-terror campaign. We are never going to

- convince the publics in the Middle East and South Asia of the righteousness of our cause if their governments remain silent. We need to help them to deflect any blowback from such statements, but we must have them vocally on board.
- Create a Public Diplomacy Advisory Board, including, among others, prominent Arab- and Muslim-Americans, university professors who work on the Muslim world, well-known business people who do business in the region, and advertising and marketing executives with experience in the region. This group should advise the USG on its public diplomacy campaign and act as a resource and a sounding board. Its members should also serve as goodwill ambassadors in the region. Of greatest importance, the Administration's effort should be bipartisan and should include people who do not necessarily agree with all their policies. Moreover, members of this Board should be encouraged to continue to speak their minds freely. (This is not to argue that we should seek out those who radically oppose the Administration's policy or who promote hatred, but that the USG should be looking to engage those who can genuinely be considered independent because they are known to have differing views.)
 - Inaugurate one or more "listening tours" whereby U.S. officials would travel to the region to meet with government officials, elites and average people alike. The people of the region need to see that we are interested in their concerns. Ideally, the members of the Public Diplomacy Advisory Board (proposed above) could be part of such an effort.
 - Launch an aggressive recruiting campaign to bring Arab-Americans, Afghan-Americans and other Muslim-Americans-as well as Arabic speakers, Pashto speakers, Dari speakers, Farsi speakers, etc.-into the U.S. government. Encourage USG officials at all levels to learn these regional languages. In the past one problem in such efforts has been misplaced security concerns, such as preventing Americans of Middle Eastern origin from obtaining security clearances because they traveled frequently to the Middle East. Such Catch-22s need to be scrutinized to determine effective compromises.
 - Encourage Bosnian, Albanian, and Turkish Muslims to educate foreign audiences regarding the U.S. role in saving the Muslims of Bosnia and Kosovo in 1995-1999, and our long-standing, close ties to Muslims around the world.
 - Engage regional intellectuals and journalists across the board, regardless of their views. We cannot allow them to claim ignorance as a defense, and we need to show them that we are interested in their opinions.

All of this is not to suggest that the United States should give up in terms of engaging in the public diplomacy battle ourselves. Quite the contrary. The U.S. government needs to be an active voice both to make sure that the official USG position is well known (and so cannot be misrepresented) and misinformation from our adversaries is authoritatively rebutted. If for no other reason than to show the world that we take regional public opinion seriously, we need to remain aggressive participants in the public diplomacy debate even as we rely on proxies to strike the most important blows. To this end, there are additional useful steps we can take:

- Routinely monitor the regional press in real time to enable prompt responses. Develop a more efficient system to ensure that responses are disseminated widely and quickly. (The development of rapid-response centers in Washington, London and Islamabad was an important step in the right direction.)
- Insist that U.S. officials regularly and frequently engage regional media and public groups. It should be routine for regional media to have U.S. officials available to talk on the record whenever news concerning the United States comes up. In particular, we need to make the large number of journalists from Middle Eastern and South Asian states in both Washington and New York a focus of our attention. They should be briefed regularly and their requests given the same level of priority as the New York Times and other key domestic media outlets.
- Release a White Paper explaining our goals and rationale for the war in Afghanistan, and outlining the evidence that the al-Qa'eda network was responsible for the 9/11 attacks.
- Begin a "Radio Free Afghanistan" as soon as possible.
- Bulk up Voice of America's broadcasting capabilities throughout the region.
- Consider establishing a high-quality Arabic-language satellite TV network that would function like the BBC as an authoritative source of news in the region.

In our determination to carry our message to the Muslim world, we cannot forget our other allies around the world, particularly in Europe. While Europeans appear overwhelmingly sympathetic to the United States following the 9/11 attacks, we should not forget that many are also uncomfortable with U.S. policies toward the Middle East and South Asia and that this influences their reaction to our response. We must make an effort to appeal to European publics in a similar manner to our efforts to reach out to Middle Eastern and South Asian audiences to persuade them of the justness of our cause, our attention to international law, and our extraordinary efforts to avoid causing pain to innocents. Moreover, we should keep in mind that if we can persuade European audiences, not only will this make it easier for their governments to support our efforts, but they are likely to in turn have some sway in the Muslim world as well.

- Employ many of the steps outlined above to target European audiences in a similar manner.
- Press our European allies to speak out to the Muslim world about the justness of our cause, the carefulness of our methods, and the importance of our actions for the entire world.
- Establish an informal, intergovernmental body of experts among the U.S., our European allies, the Canadians and Australians, and other like-minded allies to coordinate all public diplomacy assets and amplify our message to the Muslim world.

As the Administration has emphasized, the war is going to take a long time. Consequently, we should also develop longer-term programs that will begin to pay off farther down the road. This is also important because ultimately, changing the "hearts and minds" of the people of the region is going to be a monumental task that will require

tremendous effort from the U.S. sustained over many years. Some steps we may want to take include:

- Seek means to increase economic growth and political openness in the Muslim states. The people of the region need to see that the U.S. cares about their plight and is taking concrete steps to improve it. At a cruder level, they need to see that there are tangible benefits to siding with the U.S.
- Establish a U.S.-Muslim Policy Engagement Commission that would bring together public and private sector experts on Islam and the Middle East, coordinate outreach programs, and possibly also fund various intercultural activities. The members of the group could help speak to constituencies in the region and also help advise the U.S. government on public diplomacy efforts.
- Provide long-term education and scholarship assistance funding to the region to help them take education out of the hands of the fundamentalists and help extirpate the anti-American and anti-Semitic bile that plagues their educational systems.
- Intensify people-to-people contacts as a way of promoting understanding of American culture, values and policies.

Messages

Given the complexity of the task we have undertaken, there are a range of messages we should emphasize to convince the people of the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia to support our war on terrorism.

Personalize the victims and the attack. Regional audiences are most sympathetic to the fact that the United States was attacked and 6,000 innocents of many nationalities were murdered.

- Publicize the names, national origin, and families of Muslims who died in the WTC attack.
- Translate The New York Times obituaries into Arabic and other Middle Eastern and South Asian languages and disseminate them widely.
- Disseminate stories of particular victims to convey the range of people killed in the 9/11 attacks—stress range of religions, races, income levels, etc. (Stress that bin Ladin has killed co-religionists by showing Muslims killed, counteract myth that Mossad was behind the attacks by showing Jews killed, etc.)
- Stress references to the victims (and ideally, named victims to personalize them) whenever we discuss our cause and goals.
- Underline that Islam does not condone the killing of innocents. (This message in particular, must come from Islamic scholars and clerics. In fact, it is generally counterproductive coming from Western Christians and Jews.)

Stress that the U.S. is not waging a war on Muslims generally; it is waging war on those who attacked the United States and indiscriminately killed Muslims, Christians and Jews.

The Task Force includes a bipartisan group of individuals with experience at the highest levels of national security policy. Signatories endorse the general policy thrusts and judgments reached by the group, though not necessarily every finding and recommendation.

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