

Engaging the Muslim World A Communication Strategy to Win the War of Ideas

Hady Amr and P.W. Singer

Summary

A critical pillar of success in the war on terrorism is restoring the world's trust in America's word. Fortifying this pillar should be a top priority of the next President, with a special focus on relations with the Muslim world. To win the war of ideas with those advocating violence against America and Americans, we must act quickly to rebuild the shattered foundations of understanding between the United States and predominantly Muslim states and communities.

For America's efforts at public diplomacy and strategic communications to be effective, the U.S. government must move beyond understanding the problem as simply a global popularity contest. The very success of American foreign policy depends on how the United States can engage with, and help shape the views and attitudes held by, foreign populations. Both how and with whom America speaks create the environment in which our policies sink or swim.

Quickly upon taking office, the next President should initiate a strategic planning process leading to a National Security Presidential Directive for improving our relationship with the Muslim world. The President should also take personal steps to use a limited window of opportunity to "reboot" that relationship, such as an early presidential trip to Muslim nations, meeting with reporters from Arabic-language media, and clearly condemning anti-Islamic bias. The strategy should then be institutionalized, backed by specific policy initiatives, including:



- creating an America's Voice Corps
- establishing American Centers in predominantly Muslim countries and implementing an American Knowledge Library initiative
- privatizing Al Hurra television and Radio Sawa and launching "C-SPANs" for the Muslim world
- bolstering cultural exchange programs, while fixing problems with the visa process
- harnessing America's diversity by engaging Arab- and Muslim Americans
- involving the whole federal bureaucracy in public diplomacy
- developing military exchange networks and incorporating public diplomacy into the Pentagon budget.

Context

The current National Security Strategy of the United States, issued by President Bush in March 2006, states that winning the war of ideas is the key to long-term success in the War on Terrorism. Unfortunately, we are losing that war.

During the past few years, America's standing in the Muslim world has sustained a deep and rapid deterioration. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 80 percent of citizens of predominantly Muslim countries have solidly negative views of the United States. Importantly, the anger is not with American values; rather, American foreign policy is identified as the main cause of the negative sentiments.ⁱ Negative ratings are even higher in the key moderate countries of Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey.^{ii, iii} Yet, inexplicably, out of an already small federal budget of about \$1.5 billion for core public diplomacy, only about 9.5 percent (\$140 million) are devoted to the Near East and South Asia,^{iv} core areas of the Muslim world. Meanwhile 16 percent (\$240 million) were spent on the U.S. mouthpiece television and radio stations Al Hurra and Radio Sawa^v which have limited following and limited impact.

By any measure, America's efforts at communicating with Muslim-majority nations since 9/11 have not been successful. The efforts have lacked energy, focus, and an

overarching, integrated strategy. Instead, the efforts have relied on informational programming that has lacked priority or been misdirected, lacked nuance in dealing with diverse and sensitive issues, and not reached out to the key “swing” audiences necessary to marginalize and root out violent extremists.

Getting Our Communications Right

Analysts on both sides of the political aisle often describe the current challenge to the United States as a long-term conflict, akin to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. That conflict, like the current one, was waged both in the realm of ideas and in the realm of national security.^{vi} If this is a valid comparison, then, at best, we are no further along that we were before the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan in 1947, when we were still wrestling with the fundamental questions of who and what confront us, and what should be the nature of our long-term response? At worst, we may be standing on the wrong side of such a historic comparison, as we are now the ones struggling against credibility and image problems similar to those of the former Soviet Union, so memorably characterized by President Reagan as “The Evil Empire.”

We occupy a crucial period, when enduring attitudes are being formed. Getting our communications right is critical to overall national security now, and will continue to be critical in decades to come. Much of the threat we face comes from terrorists around the globe, often acting in a decentralized, self-inspired fashion. However, our security concerns extend beyond terrorism and suggest a longer-term need for a grand strategy to prevent or wage a wider conflict in the future. The United States—and the world—may be standing on the brink of a “Clash of Civilizations,” as Samuel Huntington once warned.^{vii} The view, widely held among Muslims, that the U.S. war on terrorism is a “war on Islam” illustrates the vast gulf in understanding and perceptions.

The prevailing view in the Muslim world’s of a “war on Islam” impedes our success not only in mounting a viable grand strategy in our overall foreign policy but also in confronting localized terrorist threats. The global war on terrorism, after all, is not a

traditional military conflict made up of set-piece battles; it's a series of relatively small wars and insurgencies in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt—and even neighborhoods in Britain. In each case, the United States must sway a population from hostility to support, in order to oust terror cells and shut down recruiting pipelines. As the U.S. Marine Corps *Small Wars* manual famously notes, such “...wars are battles of ideas and battles for the perceptions and attitudes of target populations.”^{viii}

More than merely a lost popularity contest, then, the deepening divide between the United States and Muslim nations and communities around the world poses a huge barrier to our success on a breadth of vital issues, from running down terrorist groups to expanding economic development and political freedom. Progress on these issues will steer the next generation of Muslims toward or against militant radicalism.

Creating the Strategy

Key Principles

For the last six years, the United States has all but conceded the field in the war of ideas to the radicals. To win this war, the next President must clearly recognize the importance of America's voice and good standing as elements of its power and influence in the world. As a matter of the highest national security importance, the next President should undertake a major, integrative initiative in public diplomacy and strategic communications to reach Muslim states and communities from Morocco to Indonesia, including Muslim minority communities in Europe and India.

Public diplomacy—promoting the national interest and national security through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad

Strategic communications—communications initiatives that strengthen relationships, enhance influence with key groups, and manage popular perceptions

Winning the war of ideas and creating better relations with the Muslim world require more than tired tactics, immobility, and budgetary pocket change (the current \$50-

million cost is less than 1/1,000th of our Iraq-related expenditures). The next President should designate this effort as a matter of the highest national security importance. The campaign as a whole should be self-critical, regularly evaluating its own performance, and ready and willing to change in response to evaluation results.

Five broad principles *must* guide our strategy to influence foreign publics and broaden and deepen relationships between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad:

- *Dialog*: Instead of just producing propaganda, the effort should be audience-centered and designed to build dialog, assure mutual respect, forge partnerships, and place a premium on joint participation and planning. This is the only way to restore and secure damaged credibility. It should be two-way—emphasizing “listening” as much as “talking.”
- *Outreach*: Rather than merely “preaching to the choir,” the United States should engage a varied set of regional players and constituencies, including Islamists and other social conservatives who may sometimes be controversial but carry the greatest influence within the target populations. Beyond traditional vehicles for discussion, which target government counterparts and standard news media, the communications should engage opinion leaders in a variety of forums, including universities, the arts, business and professional associations, labor groups, and non-governmental organizations.
- *Integration*: Diverse U.S. agencies should develop a coordinated goal-oriented communications approach, in order to maximize effectiveness and resources and to speak with a single, credible voice.
- *Nimble response*: Strategies and programs should be flexible and responsive to changing events, findings, and trends, and should use new technologies and tactics.
- *Investment*: The investment should reflect the very high strategic priority of the war of ideas to ensuring American security.

Initial Steps

The success of any program begins with a central vision. Within the first 100 days in office, the new President should order a reexamination of public diplomacy and strategic communications goals and programs, to be carried out at the senior levels of the National Security Council and affected departments and agencies, especially the State Department. This effort should include seeking and integrating input from legislative bodies, universities, think tanks, and friends in the Muslim world. Good advice should be welcomed, not cast aside (In the past, policymakers have ignored reports on the issue from groups as varied as the congressionally-mandated Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Center for the Study of the Presidency.). In order to ensure both high-level support and durability, the main findings and recommended core strategy should be embodied in a National Security Presidential Directive, presenting an agenda for building positive relations with Muslim countries and communities, using public diplomacy and strategic communications.¹

With the strategic goals established, policymakers could then develop a more systematic approach to ascertain how far short the United States now falls from this target state, and what exactly is required to attain it. This analytical and planning process will also identify tangible courses of action in the most important issue areas (e.g. alleviating the intensity of anti-Americanism in key countries, increasing levels of cooperation on anti-terrorist activity, etc.). The objective is to create not merely a methodological approach to evaluating our successes and failures, but also a guide to steer the right course in the future.

As important as the substance of the strategy is in rebuilding the shattered foundations of trust, it is time to get back our style as well. Many Muslims say they find the style and tone of communication often used by senior American officials arrogant, patronizing, and needlessly confrontational. Unfortunately, they are right. Simply

¹ The focus here is on public diplomacy and strategic communications involving the Muslim world. However, it can serve as a model for more broad efforts at restoring America's leadership and credibility on a global basis.

returning the *art* of diplomacy to our *public* diplomacy could have an immediate impact. Within this, it is important to demonstrate respect: the empathic and measured tone that Secretary of State Rice used after the alleged Koran desecration incident in 2005 was all too rare and should serve as a model. Cultural insensitivity, boasting, and finger-wagging, displayed by other senior leaders on countless occasions, need to be avoided. Similarly, U.S. leaders should avoid displaying an openly hostile attitude toward the major Arab media outlets; like it or not, these channels are the means of conveying our message to the broader community, and attacking them only undermines our efforts.

Specific Ways to Strengthen Relations with the Muslim World

Applying the quintet of principles presented above, the next President can improve U.S.-Islamic relations through many interrelated initiatives. Eleven suggestions follow:

- exerting Presidential leadership in public diplomacy
- creating an America's Voice Corps
- establishing American Centers across the region
- implementing an American Knowledge Library initiative
- privatizing Al Hurra and Radio Sawa
- launching "C-SPANs" for the Muslim world
- bolstering cultural exchange programs while improving the visa process
- harnessing America's diversity, by engaging Arab- and Muslim-Americans
- involving the whole federal bureaucracy in public diplomacy
- developing military exchange networks
- incorporating public diplomacy into the Pentagon budget

Exert Presidential Leadership in Public Diplomacy

Much of America's recent crash in credibility and standing in the Muslim world has focused on the actions of the current administration, with President Bush cited by name in various regional public polls, as well as conversations with key leaders. Fair or not, this focus on President Bush does present a limited window for his successor. The next President will have a unique opportunity to personally "reboot" the

relationship between the United States and Muslim populations. And, the President should seize it.

As a sign of the importance of relations with the Muslim world to our long-term security, full consideration should be given to including stops in Muslim states in the new President's first international trip. There, the President could deliver a major policy address outlining goals and revealing a vision of future relations between America and the Muslim world, and could meet with forward-looking leaders, civil society reformers, and youth.

After the new administration's initial weeks and months, continual Presidential effort will be needed. According to the Pentagon's Defense Science Board, "only White House leadership ... can bring about the sweeping [communications] reforms that are required," and "nothing shapes U.S. policies and global perceptions ... more than the President's statements."^{ix} Given the importance of the war of ideas to the battle against terrorism and the risks of a greater, long-term rift between the United States and the Islamic world, efforts should be made to bring the President into personal contact with reform and civil society leaders. These efforts include hosting delegations at the White House, to demonstrate respect and bolster both parties' standing as well as understanding of each other. In addition, the President should schedule time for regular interviews with news media from the Muslim world.

Further, the President should use the bully pulpit of the Presidency to condemn hate speech. Shortly after 9/11, President Bush took the compelling personal step of visiting the Islamic Center of Washington, the capital's leading mosque, to show Americans and the world that the Administration understood that Islam was not to blame for the attacks. Unfortunately, the clarity of this message was quickly lost. A series of anti-Muslim statements have since been made by various policy-makers and close Administration supporters.² Even though media in the Middle East give extensive

² For example, Christian Coalition founder and Bush Administration associate Pat Robertson's called Islam a "violent religion." Similarly, Franklin Graham called Islam a "very evil and wicked religion." Likewise, Lt. General William Boykin set off a firestorm of attention in 2003, when, comparing his faith with a Muslim's, he said, "I knew that my God was

coverage to these statements, the Administration usually fails to condemn them or separate itself from the speakers. The next President must not repeat this failure of leadership, as it weakens America's moral standing. *Bigotry in our midst is not just distasteful; in the age of globalization, it directly undermines our security.* We live in an era where the world constantly watches to see whether we actually live up to our ideals. At a time when many in the world expect the worst of us, such statements only supports the enemy's propaganda and recruiting efforts.

Create and Deploy an America's Voice Corps

Perhaps the most shocking finding of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy's 2005 report was that the State Department had only five Arabic speakers capable of appearing on behalf of the U.S. government on Arabic-language television.

Presidential support is needed for the rapid recruitment and training of at least 200 fully fluent Arabic speakers with public diplomacy skills—on average, about 10 per Arab country. Constituted as an America's Voice Corps, members of this cadre could become prized guests on Arabic-language talk shows and news analyses. Further, it is equally important to train speakers in other languages—such as Bahasa Melayu, Bahasa Indonesia, Farsi, Urdu, and Turkish—used by some 500 million Muslims in strategically important countries like Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Establish American Centers across the Region

Young people are the most critical audience in a war of ideas that may last for generations. This is all the more important since many of the countries involved have a higher than normal percentages of their population under age 25. The frustration that Muslim youth feel with the *status quo* could be harnessed into a demand for progressive reforms. U.S. foreign policy must be deeply engaged not only in developing a real sociopolitical alternative to offer this next generation, but also in articulating this alternative through strategic communications. Otherwise, their pent-up rage will continue to focus on us.

bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol." Boykin has since been promoted to Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence.

There is an historical model to emulate in reaching foreign youth, and, indeed, citizens of all ages. After World War II, the United States launched dozens of “America Houses” across Germany as focal points to build democracy and form a bond with the German people. Located in city and town centers, “America Houses” also served as community hubs. After 40 years under American stewardship, many of these centers evolved into German-American institutes under private German control.^x

Today, American youth centers and libraries are needed throughout the broader Muslim World: perhaps at least one public American center in every major city. These centers should be staffed partly by members of the America’s Voice Corps, and should serve as distribution points for translated works from the American Knowledge Library initiative, discussed below. The centers should offer state-of-the-art English-language training programs, seminars, discussions, and a wide selection of current periodicals, newspapers, and literature. They should offer free Internet access and moderated programs that promote direct exchange with Americans through the use of modern information technology. The centers should not just provide a window into American life, but also enable open and critical dialog on issues of local and international concern explicitly—including dialogue about U.S. policy in the Middle East—and thereby demonstrate the value of free discourse so essential to democracy. Further, the rise of local Indonesian-American, Iraqi-American, or Moroccan-American institutes, if jointly run, would create a community sense of ownership with minimal security risks, in contrast to America’s current mode of locking its voice behind barbed-wired embassy compounds.³

Implement an American Knowledge Library Initiative

The Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy also pointed out the dearth of Arabic translations of major works of American literature and political theory. While certain U.S. embassies do undertake translations of books into Arabic, the scale of these efforts is miniscule compared with the need. The absence of widely available

³ Some may object that the security situation in the Muslim world is simply too volatile and that any American center providing easy access to locals would be an easy target for terrorists. But, if we are serious about engaging the terrorists on their turf instead of on ours, we must balance these potential losses against those we would incur if we fail to engage. Additionally, the sense of local ownership of an American center, resulting from joint ownership, planning, and conceptualization, would lead many residents to interpret any attacks as assaults on local interests and citizens, causing the attacks to backfire on the terrorists.

translations means that many Arabs are cut off from American history, political ideas, literature, and science. An expeditiously run project to translate 1,000 books and journals would soon make such works widely and inexpensively available. Partnerships with Arabic publishers (perhaps through a consortium of Arab and American publishers, with the government paying start-up costs, such as copyright payments) could facilitate public acceptance and help leverage existing distribution channels and marketing capacities. The American Centers could also help out, by hosting book groups and discussions of the translated works.

Privatize Al Hurra and Radio Sawa

One of the few major U.S. public diplomacy initiatives in the last five years was the launch of American government-organized satellite TV and radio stations, called Al Hurra and Radio Sawa, broadcasting in Arabic and intended to supplement or even supplant indigenous media in the region. Despite their massive launch costs, which ate up most of the public diplomacy budget, neither has found its footing, and no credible study has found them to be influential among the populace. Clearly, their problem is not inadequate funding but rather the overt association with the U.S. government, which effectively de-legitimizes these media in the eyes of most Arabs. Moreover, Al Hurra and Radio Sawa actually undermine broader reform efforts, as the United States is in no position to challenge Arab government control of media while itself running its own government-funded media there.

Following significant U.S. investments in these stations' state-of-the-art broadcasting facilities, now is the time to let the stations compete in the Arab media environment on their own. America should have a voice in the region, but this voice will more likely be heard, and believed, if people understand that it is being transmitted through a non-government source. More collaboration is needed with the private sector, which, as the Defense Science Board has noted, can often be a more credible messenger than the U.S. government. Privatization of Al Hurra and Radio Sawa is a good place to start.^{xi}

Launch “C-SPANs” for the Muslim world

At the same time, there is a need for credible media. Sources of unfiltered information are sorely lacking throughout the Muslim world, even though there is a palpable appetite for them. For example, during the Abu Ghraib crisis, the public in the Middle East watched live coverage of U.S. congressional hearings on Arabic news channels with great interest. Scenes of American policymakers and military leaders directly answering the probing questions of legislators and reporters presented a powerful illustration of democracy in action as well as a sharp contrast to the authoritarian practices predominant in the region.

Seeking to tap this interest, Al Jazeera recently launched a new channel, Al Jazeera Live, which features coverage of events in Arabic. Still, the marketplace for ideas and information in the Middle East and beyond is not saturated by one channel. Just as there are multiple C-SPANs and C-SPAN imitators within the United States, including local cable equivalents that cover state and municipal politics, there can be multiple channels that provide live video of public affairs events across the Arab and Muslim world, ranging from legislatures to local events hosted by non-governmental organizations to book discussions at the American Centers. By being unfiltered, and, ideally, coordinated with local organizations, such Arabic channels will leap across the credibility gap that has undermined Sawa and Al Hurra. And, similar opportunities exist for public affairs channels targeting speakers of other Muslim world languages in Iran, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Turkey, and elsewhere.

Bolster Exchange Programs and Improve the Visa Process

Very early in the next administration, the new President should ask the Secretary of State for recommendations for expanding our people-to-people interaction with the Muslim world. To win the war of ideas, we must enlist all means in the public diplomacy and strategic communications toolbox and provide a role for every American willing to play a part. As in the Cold War, when U.S. outreach programs created allies around the world, the new Administration should enlarge educational and cultural exchange programs, increase exchanges of youth and young professionals, boost incentives for cooperative business and media ventures, and support investments in development, technology, and science initiatives in the Muslim world.

The media in the United States and Islamic countries—television, print, and Internet—can multiply the effects of these exchanges. Not only should exchange initiatives like the Fulbright and Humphrey programs be expanded, but also virtual youth exchanges, harnessing Internet and video-conferencing applications, should be initiated.

The Secretary of State's review should include recommendations for fixing a broken visa process that presently undermines national security. Current visa procedures impose onerous requirements and delays that humiliate rather than welcome Arabs and Muslims from abroad; in turn, the cumbersome procedures subvert efforts to reach out to our natural ambassadors—namely, visitors and students who can then attest to the depth and reality of American goodwill.^{xii}

Special attention should also be given to integrating official visitors programs across agencies. All too frequent, high-profile visa delays, and, in particular, the erroneous detention of officially invited leaders and representatives from the Muslim world, have proved embarrassing and detrimental to America's image.⁴ Visa denials in high-profile cases should be truly based on security concerns and not simply, for example, due to pressure from interest groups that like or don't like the views of a potential visitor. When the United States hosts Muslim opinion leaders with whom we aren't in 100-percent alignment, we have a chance to engage directly with them and their ideas and to prove to the world that we are, as we claim, a tolerant and open society, confident in our beliefs and values in a way that nations that resist open debate are not.

Harness American Diversity: Engage Arab and Muslim-Americans

At a time when the U.S. government lacks both credibility abroad and local language speakers to represent our views, the distance between our government and *domestic* Arab and Muslim communities is stunningly wide. The State Department's office for public diplomacy, for example, did not include a single American Muslim on its staff

⁴ For example, Ejaz Haider, the editor of one of Pakistan's most moderate newspapers, was arrested in Washington, DC, in 2003 by Immigration and Naturalization Service agents on visa charges, even though he was in the United States at the direct invitation of the State Department to build goodwill. Those sympathetic to the United States could only charitably conclude that one American hand did not know what the other was doing. Unsurprisingly, those less favorably inclined took a darker view, and made sure to publicize their conspiracy theories in regional media.

until 2006. The Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and State should all examine how they can better tap the strengths of these communities, both in programming and recruiting, and move beyond symbolic respect for Muslim rituals, such as convening annual Iftar dinners, to real programming. To offer one example, just as political donors and corporate executives often join official travel delegations, Arab-Americans and American Muslims could also help brief and even accompany officials when they visit the broader Middle East.

Create Public Diplomacy Expectations in All Agencies

The war of ideas should engage the entire federal bureaucracy. The next President should impart to Cabinet and sub-cabinet-level officials the priority of improving America's standing in the world. Leaders of the executive branch should conduct regular interviews with the foreign press and engage in genuine dialog, even with those who hold negative views of our government. In other words, public diplomacy must go beyond "preaching to the converted."

For example, visits by senior U.S. officials to the region should include meetings not merely with government officials, but also with local students, civil society leaders, reformers, and even conservative religious or social leaders. Similar efforts should be made by Department of Defense civilian and military leaders at both the Pentagon and regional command levels. They should follow the Cold War model of a wide engagement strategy to expand and deepen relationships with U.S. allies and counterparts in what were then considered "battleground states" in the developing world.

Develop Military Exchange Networks

Foreign military training and exchanges offer another opportunity to greatly expand U.S. relationships and alliances and build up friendly local networks. Although association with the United States is viewed negatively in most social spheres of the Muslim world today, military personnel in most Muslim countries consider military-to-military exchanges and contacts with the United States military as positive and career-enhancing. The U.S. military is the most respected in the world, and participants in U.S. military training programs typically advance to more senior levels. Therefore, the

full value of such programs—both as vehicles for imparting official U.S. policy and as unofficial channels of communication and influence—should be realized, in order to ensure that the United States develops close working relationships with the Muslim world’s next generation of military leaders.

Currently, only about 20 percent of International Military Education and Training program trainees come from mostly Muslim countries, and most of these come from just two states, Sierra Leone and Turkey, both outside the Middle East and not at the center of the “war of ideas.” Clearly, a far more strategic use of the limited slots can be made in terms of allocation, and there is certainly scope to expand the overall number of students brought to the United States. Just as we increased the number of links with Latin America and Asia during the Cold War, and with the states of the former Warsaw Pact in the 1990s, we should be strategically building our partnerships with, and the professionalism of, the next generation of young leaders from Muslim states.

The next administration also should expand the structure and funding of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA), now located in Washington, D.C. Despite being highly capable, NESA is only about one-fifth the size of the Europe and the Pacific security centers, which have been located in those regions since the Cold War. It’s time to re-evaluate NESA’s size and structure, consider expanding its activities, and explore relocating it to a site in the region.

Formalize Public Diplomacy in the Pentagon Budget

The Defense Department engages, at both the regional and ground levels, in a wide range of civil military activities that, broadly speaking, could be considered public diplomacy or strategic communications. Too often, though, these activities are an after-thought or undertaken only during emergencies. For example, the Navy sends hospital ships to key zones, but only on an *ad hoc* basis, typically in response to an earthquake or other crisis, and only if the ship is not committed elsewhere. Yet, these visits—most remarkably, the deployment to Southeast Asia after the 2004 tsunami—are powerful examples of American goodwill and demonstrate the U.S. military’s

professionalism. Indeed, the then-Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Ryan Henry, called the tsunami relief effort the principal U.S. victory in the war on terror to date.

Such strategic and high pay-off programs are not included in long-term planning or supported as separate budget items. Instead, they are seen as an afterthought that takes away funds from operational budgets. The result is that such relief efforts are all too rare and certainly not regularized. Consequently, when, in 2005, an earthquake slammed Pakistan—a hub of extremist groups and the only nuclear-armed Muslim state—the U.S. response was, at best, meek. Military assets that were already nearby, mostly a small group of helicopters in Afghanistan, were used to move aid, but with minimal follow-through. Overall, the United States committed just \$26 million for relief from the earthquake, which was a mere 3 percent of the amount given to affected regions following the tsunami. By contrast, a relative “who’s who” of Al Qa’eda-affiliated groups ran a wide range of their own aid efforts to Pakistan. At best, the failure to use such an opening to reset relations in possibly the most important location in the war on terrorism was a missed opportunity. At worst, we ceded key moral ground to radical forces.

In future, unfortunately, more natural disasters will strike the Muslim world, while populations there will continue to struggle with the day-to-day challenges of development. The next President should make sure that the U.S. government is ready and able to show American goodwill with swift and abundant assistance at any opening that presents itself. The new Secretary of Defense should investigate how to recognize such activities as part of counter-insurgency and force protection measures, and assess whether they could be regularized in budgeting, perhaps through the humanitarian operations budget. The investment made should, at the very least, be equal to that of the current psychological operations campaigns organized by the military.⁵

⁵ For example, the Joint Psyops Support Element of the U.S. Special Operations Command has a projected budget of \$77.5 million over the next years to spend on creating TV, radio, and print advertisements to burnish the U.S. image.

Concluding Observations

In no area could the Bush Administration's foreign policy be described as meek, except for public diplomacy and strategic communications. The Administration's combination of an aggressive foreign policy and a feeble effort to maintain our voice and credibility in the world leaves the next President with a historic challenge. The next President will inherit a series of complex and difficult decisions, at the heart of the war on terrorism, about engaging with Muslim states and communities, along with only a short window of opportunity to "reboot" the relationship.

Simply put, there is a glaring need for the United States to undertake a proactive strategy aimed at restoring long-term security through the presentation of American principles as part of U.S. foreign policy. The tools of public diplomacy and strategic communications can be valuable weapons in America's arsenal. It is not yet too late to wield them.

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About the Author and the Project

Hady Amr

Hady Amr is a fellow at the Brookings Institution and is the author of the 2004 Brookings analysis paper "The Need to Communicate: How to Improve U.S. Public Diplomacy with the Islamic World". He has served in the U.S. Department of Defense Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies. He was senior advisor to the World Economic Forum Council of 100 Leaders on Western-Islamic World Relations.

P. W. Singer

Peter Warren Singer is a senior fellow and director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at Brookings. He has written two books on changes in modern warfare. Singer lectures frequently to U.S. military audiences. He also has served on the Balkans Task Force in the U.S. Department of Defense.

Opportunity 08 aims to help 2008 presidential candidates and the public focus on critical issues facing the nation, presenting policy ideas on a wide array of domestic and foreign policy questions. The project is committed to providing both independent policy solutions and background material on issues of concern to voters.

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^v Ibid, page p. 7.

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^{ix} U.S., Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. "Final Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication." September 2004, p. 3.

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