

U.S.-Muslim World Relations

Engaging the Muslim World

A Communications Strategy to Win the War of Ideas

Background

America's standing in the Muslim world has sustained a deep and rapid deterioration in the past few years. 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; but rather, American foreign policy is identified as the main cause of the negative sentiments. Negative ratings are even higher in the key moderate countries of Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey.

More than a lost popularity contest, the deepening divide between the United States and Muslim nations and communities 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 militancy.

Recommendations

The next President should initiate an immediate strategic planning process that leads to a National Security Presidential Directive for improving our relationship with the Muslim world.

Five broad principles *must* guide our strategy to influence foreign publics and strengthen 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. It should emphasize "listening" as much as "talking."
- *Outreach:* Rather than "preaching to the choir," the United States should engage a varied set of regional constituencies, including social conservatives who may be controversial but carry the greatest influence within the target populations
- *Integration:* Diverse U.S. agencies should develop a coordinated goal-oriented communications approach, in order to maximize effectiveness.
- *Nimble response:* Strategies and programs should be flexible and responsive to changing events, and findings, and should use new technologies and tactics.
- *Investment:* The investment should reflect the high strategic priority of the war of ideas to ensuring American security.



The strategy should then be institutionalized, backed by specific policy initiatives that include:

- creating an America's Voice Corps
- establishing American Centers in predominantly Muslim countries
- 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

Key Facts

- 80% of citizens of predominantly Muslim countries have solidly negative views of the United States
- Out of a small federal budget of about \$1.5 billion for core public diplomacy, only about 9.5% are devoted to the Near East and South Asia, core areas of the Muslim world. Meanwhile 16% were spent on the U.S. mouthpiece television and radio stations Al Hurra and Radio Sawa which have limited impact.
- The U.S. State Department's office for public diplomacy did not include a single American Muslim on its staff until 2006

The full version of this paper is available along with supporting background material at www.opportunity08.org.

About the Authors 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 and is the former director of the Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World. He has written two books on changes in modern warfare and served on the Balkans Task Force in the U.S. Department of Defense. He is also the author of the Brookings analysis paper, "The 9-11 War Plus 5."

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