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AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
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February 4, 2004

## **MEMORANDUM**

To: Members of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations

From: Richard C. Lundberg, Fellow, and Thomas Costa, Professional Staff

Re: Briefing memo for the hearing “Public Diplomacy in the Middle East” scheduled for February 10, 2004 at 2:00 p.m. in room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building.

## **PURPOSE OF THE HEARING**

To examine U.S. government efforts to conduct public diplomacy in the Middle East.

## HEARING ISSUES

1. **How can the U.S. communicate effectively with Middle East audiences?**
2. **To what extent are U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East coordinated?**

## BACKGROUND

For many years, aspects of U.S. Middle East policy have been criticized as being tone deaf to local concerns. Critics claim that the U.S. neither listens to nor understands what is being said about America in the Middle East region. While U.S. public diplomacy programs have not always succeeded in conveying America's message to the elites of the region, critics say they have been especially ineffectual in addressing the ordinary citizens of the Muslim Middle East, those people whose popular sentiment and opinions mass to form the so-called "Arab street." "The United States government," says one study on public diplomacy, "is losing its voice before foreign audiences and needs to get it back." **(WR Heritage)**

Following the events of September 11, the need for strengthening public diplomacy became that much greater as the Administration strove to make Muslim publics in the Middle East, and elsewhere, aware that America's war on terrorism is not a war on Islam. The war in Iraq has exacerbated our public diplomacy challenges in the region.

### Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is defined as "the cultural, educational, and information programs, citizen exchanges, or broadcasts used to promote the national interest of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign audiences." **(WR Adv. COMM.)**

One of the Administration responses to growing resentment in the Arab world includes reemphasizing and reinvigorating public diplomacy efforts. In 2002, "(I)n the National Security Strategy of the United States, President George W. Bush recognized the importance of adapting public diplomacy to

meet the post-September 11 challenge: ‘Just as our diplomatic institutions must adapt so that we can reach out to others, we also need a different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts that can help people around the world learn about and understand America. The war on terrorism is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world. This is a struggle of ideas and this is an area where America must excel.’ ” **(WR Adv. GROUP)**

Last year, the House recognized the need to increase and improve understanding of the U.S. among overseas audiences and change attitudes. The Freedom Support Act of 2002 (H.R. 3969), adopted by House vote on 9/22/02, was a comprehensive attempt to restructure and refinance public diplomacy and rationalize the diverse elements making up U.S. international broadcasting. It would have, for example, amended the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 to make public diplomacy an integral element in the planning and execution of U.S. foreign policy. **(WR Heritage)** The bill has been resurrected in H.R. 1950, the Foreign Relations Authorization Bill.

### Department of State

Following the consolidation of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) into the Department of State on October 1, 2002, the delivery of America’s message overseas fell to the State Department. **(WR 105-277)**

Charlotte Beers, a former chairwoman of two of the world’s top ten advertising agencies, became Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in October 2001. During her tenure, which began just three weeks after 9/11, there was a rapid growth in public diplomacy directed toward the Middle East and the entire Muslim world. The tools employed included: overseas speaker programs, digital video conferences (DVCs), a website, and publications designed to address the perception that Muslims were not treated equally in the U.S., portraying them as leading culturally, economically, and religiously fulfilling lives in a tolerant U.S. While these programs supported the President’s message that America’s struggle was with terrorists, not with Islam, they also engendered messages to State from some ordinary citizens and think tank members who took issue

with an official focus on Islam in America in a nation where there is supposed to be clear separation of church and state.

Controversy swirled around Under Secretary Beers (who resigned in March 2003 for personal reasons) when her “Shared Values” initiative employed techniques of the advertising world in public diplomacy (TV spots showing Muslim Americans leading productive daily lives in an open, tolerant America). However, the *Changing Minds, Winning Peace* study on U.S. public diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim world found the campaign to be well-conceived and based on solid audience research, although the production of the finished product took too long and was too expensive.

**(WR Adv. GROUP)**

State uses the full array of public diplomacy tools in the Arab and Muslim world, including a variety of educational and professional exchange programs and the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) website, [usinfo.state.gov](http://usinfo.state.gov). During the Iraq war, the site carried an Iraqi Update Site, the Iraqi Human Rights Report, and a link to Radio Free Iraq.

**(WR CFR)**

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is engaged in public diplomacy activities, primarily through its involvement in media development. Media development efforts comprise technical and journalism training, the fostering of reform of media laws and regulations, and the capitalizing of media. Media development work takes place in those countries where U.S. democracy and governance activities make up an important element in the work of USAID.

### Broadcasting

All U.S. government and government-sponsored -- but non-military -- international broadcasting is overseen by the bipartisan Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). Among the broadcasting services falling under the oversight of BBG are the Voice of America, Persian-language Radio Farda, and Arabic-language Radio Sawa. Radio Sawa is a 24/7 Arabic-language radio station geared toward young listeners throughout the Middle East. It broadcasts a mix of Western and Arabic pop music plus the latest news, news analysis, opinion pieces, interviews, features, and sports.

**(Attachment Radio Sawa)** While BBG points to a poll showing 42% of

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young people who listen to pop music preferred Radio Sawa, critics say that Sawa's audience listens to the music but not to the news and opinion pieces designed to both inform and change the negative attitudes of listeners. **(Attachment CRS/METN)**

A soon-to-be-launched multi-million dollar BBG initiative – with \$30 million of U.S. government startup money – will take on Al-Jazeera and other regionally-based, Arabic-language satellite television stations. The Middle East Television Network (MTN) schedule will include everything from morning talk and evening news shows to a variety of acquired programming (American shows and movies). BBG and others have great hopes for MTN, but others say that its U.S. government ties – through BBG – will discredit it in the region. **(Attachment CRS/METN)**

Iraq, the Department of Defense (DoD), and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime created a media free-for-all in Iraq, with over 200 newspapers launched. Many subsequently died or became dormant. Iraqis can watch Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya via satellite. **(Attachment CSR/Iraqi Media)** According to the State Department's first poll in Iraq, carried out in late August 2003, 93% of Iraqis claim to own a TV and 33% have access to a satellite dish at home, at a friend's house, or at work. The seven-city survey showed 62% of Iraqis watch local Iraqi television (the Coalition Provisional Authority's Iraq Media Network), making it the most relied upon medium for obtaining news and information about Iraq, with much smaller percentages turning to newspapers (5%) and radio (2%). **(WR DoS Poll)**

In its oversight of the Iraq media, CPA has the difficult task of deciding when print and broadcast media have crossed the threshold of acceptable journalism. Inciting violence against ethnic and religious groups or attacks against CPA is clearly prohibited. As part of CPA efforts to rebuild Iraq's media, in February 2003 a year-long, multi-million dollar grant was awarded to Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to build the Iraqi Media Network (IMN), comprising news bureaus, a satellite TV network, a national newspaper, and training for Iraqi journalists. Observers noted "SAIC had little experience in training journalists and establishing independent media and has previously performed defense functions such as

psychological operations.” (Att. CSR/Iraqi Media) “Until U.S. officials fundamentally decide whether the IMN is to be a public –relations organ of the provisional authority, or a U.S.-funded but independent and objective Iraqi media voice, experts warn, it is destined to founder as a hybrid that performs neither mission very well.” (Att. Natl Jour. Art.)

### Public Diplomacy Studies and Reports

During the past two years, several significant studies have been issued dealing with the conduct of U.S. public diplomacy in the post 9/11 era. The reports call for new initiatives and approaches to public diplomacy and greater coordination among those agencies responsible for explaining and advocating U.S. policies and values to foreign publics.

In September 2002, the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (a bipartisan, congressionally-created, presidentially-appointed panel providing oversight of U.S. government public diplomacy activities) released *Building America’s Public Diplomacy through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources*. The report emphasized the need for restructuring, and enhancing the resources devoted to, public diplomacy. The Commission recommended greater coordination among U.S. governmental entities carrying out public diplomacy, as well as an assessment of America’s public diplomacy readiness worldwide combined with strategically-focused funding. (WR Adv. COMM.)

The Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, affiliated with the Advisory Commission, issued its report on October 1, 2003. (WR Adv. GROUP) *Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World* called for a new architecture for public diplomacy beginning at the White House, with the State Department being the lead agency in public diplomacy. Public diplomacy, the Advisory Group said, should involve long-term thinking and should be involved in policy formulation from the outset. The report emphasized the need for measurement and evaluation designed to determine success in influencing people’s views and attitudes. The Advisory Group called for greater private sector involvement in public diplomacy.

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The Advisory Group recommends the creation of a Cabinet-level position of Special Counselor to the President for Public Diplomacy in order to improve coordination of U.S. public diplomacy activities. The Special Counselor, in consultation with the President, would establish strategic goals and messages, oversee the implementation focusing on these goals, and ensure effective measurement and evaluation of these goals. The Special Counselor would participate in policy formulation within the National Security Council and preside over another recommended new entity, the President's Public Diplomacy Experts' Board. That Board would be made up of 16 outside-of-government distinguished citizens with relevant expertise plus the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy as ex-officio members.

The Advisory Group further recommends the sending of a presidential letter of instruction to embassy Chiefs of Mission that would "emphasize the critical importance of public diplomacy to national security and to highlight the expectation that Chiefs of Mission will personally participate in public diplomacy activities and ensure that members of their staffs do likewise." **(WR Adv. GROUP)** The Advisory Group also calls for an Arab and Muslim Countries Communication Unit which, under the direction of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, would provide: daily coordination of U.S. government media outreach to Arab and Muslim nations; and "rapid response" ability regarding information dissemination and the countering of foreign media inaccuracies.

In September 2003, the General Accounting Office (GAO) published its study of public diplomacy as practiced by the State Department. **(WR GAO)** The findings in the study *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges* included:

- Following 9/11, State funding for public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East rose by more than half;
- The Department of State was only in the developmental stage of creating a strategy that would coordinate and integrate its diverse public diplomacy activities and direct them toward common goals;
- State had failed to develop performance measures to gauge attitudinal change toward the U.S. among foreign publics.

In June 2003, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) published *Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating U.S. Public Diplomacy*, a report put together by an independent task force. **(WR CFR)** The CFR task force said one important reason for the lack of effectiveness of the U.S. response arises from treating public diplomacy as an afterthought in the policy formulation process. The study spoke of U.S. government underutilization of the private sector, noting the private sector lead in “the key strategic areas required for effective public diplomacy: technology, film and broadcast, marketing research, and communications.”

The Council on Foreign Relations public diplomacy task force also stressed the need for the involvement of the President in public diplomacy as the first step toward improved coordination of U.S. public diplomacy. The Council called for a Presidential decision Directive (PDD) on public diplomacy. The PDD should include:

- A clear strategy and policy designed to strengthen the ability of the U.S. government to communicate with foreign publics;
- Provide a strong coordinating structure for the government's civilian and military public diplomacy assets;
- The effects of policy options on foreign public opinion should be taken into consideration by all regional and functional NSC Policy Coordinating Committees;
- A schedule of tasks and benchmarks for evaluation of progress toward the achievement of public diplomacy reforms.

CFR also suggested beginning a Quadrennial Public Diplomacy Review, similar to the existing Quadrennial Defense Review, that would establish a structured evaluation of diplomatic readiness and spending priorities. **(WR CFR)**

The Heritage Foundation issued a report, *How to Reinvigorate Public Diplomacy*, in April 2003. **(WR Heritage)** The report underscored the need for recognition of public diplomacy by policymakers as “a strategic, long-term effort that requires consistent application.” The Foundation report called for a restoration of public diplomacy’s pre-consolidation independent reporting and budget channels within the Department of State, “so that public diplomacy officers may conduct their overseas mission without begging for table scraps from a bureaucracy that hardly understands it.”

### WITNESSES

Margaret Tutwiler, Under Secretary of state for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, is expected to discuss State Department public diplomacy activities in the Middle East and her ideas regarding areas for improvement and measurement of effectiveness.

Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), is expected to discuss current BBG radio and TV broadcasting in the region and the new Middle East Television Network.

Harold Pachios, a member of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, is expected to discuss the public diplomacy findings and recommendations contained in studies produced by the Commission and the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World.

Jess T. Ford, Director, International Affairs and Trade, General Accounting Office, is expected to address the conclusions and recommendations contained in GAO reports on State Department-conducted public diplomacy and U.S. international broadcasting.

Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain at Georgetown University, is expected to address the effectiveness of State Department public diplomacy activities and how overseas and domestic Muslim audiences receive U.S. public diplomacy messages.

Stephen Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst at The Heritage Foundation, is expected to discuss the findings and recommendations contained in the Foundation's study of U.S. public diplomacy.

David E. Morey, President & CEO of DMG, Inc. a member of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) public diplomacy task force, is expected to discuss the task force's public diplomacy study and private sector involvement in public diplomacy.

Stephen Cohen, President of the Institute for Middle East Peace and Development and Visiting Professor of International Relations at Lehigh University, is expected to discuss his view of the public diplomacy study of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World and how best to communicate with Middle East audiences.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. How can the U.S. communicate effectively with Middle East audiences?**

Some Middle East experts question the ultimate value of the heightened U.S. public diplomacy effort, citing evidence that reliance on public diplomacy will never address the underlying problems and pierce the mistrust on the street. Instead, they call for enhanced listening by the U.S., rather than the one-way communication that has been the norm. They claim our message is not understood because we do not understand our audience. We rely far too much on logical arguments, which in the Arab world can be perceived as deception. Instead, the U.S. needs to reassess government policies so they better reflect American ideals of justice, liberty, freedom, human rights, and fairness to an Arab audience. **(WR Zaharna/Anal.)**

Middle East experts point to the U.S. failure to take into account the cultural divide in our Middle Eastern public diplomacy. The results of the June 2003 Pew Global Attitudes Project underscore the challenges for U.S. public diplomacy posed by the communications cultural divide. In the wake of the Iraq war, majorities in 7 of 8 Muslim nations expressed worries that the U.S. might become a military threat to their nations. Solid majorities in several predominantly Muslim countries say they have at least some confidence in Osama bin Laden to “do the right thing regarding world affairs.” And, 71% of Palestinians say they have confidence in bin Laden doing the right thing regarding world affairs. **(WR Pew)**

U.S. public diplomacy, say the experts, mirrors an American cultural communication style, relying on the mass media, print and broadcast, to get our message out. Authorities on the Middle East point out that there is wide distrust of the Arab mass media in the region and, in the Arab world, face-to-face meetings are the most effective means of communication. Whereas the U.S. focuses on one-way messages designed to inform and/or convince, Arab culture tends to connect people through “two-way, relationship-building strategies.” While “the facts speak for themselves” for Americans, metaphors, analogies, and rhetorical questions are, for Arabs, the most effective persuasive devices. Americans value straightforwardness but Middle Easterners perceive directness in a public setting as “confrontational.” In public diplomacy efforts designed to counter the

perception that the war on terrorism was a war on Islam, we pointed to U.S. assistance to Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. However, say experts on the region, most Muslims frown upon highlighting one's charitable giving or good deeds. **(WR Zaharna/Comm.)**

Although our communication style and our Middle East policies may not resonate with Muslim audiences, opinion studies show there is a mystique surrounding American culture and democratic values and the American economy. The Council on Foreign Relations public diplomacy study suggests promotion of a better understanding of U.S. policies could be improved by finding "ways to tie ... [policies] more closely to American cultural values, including the nation's democratic traditions and extraordinary capacity for self-criticism and self-correction. Values that should be highlighted include strength of family, religious faith, expansive social safety nets, volunteerism, freedom of expression, the universal reach of education and its practical consequences in economic prosperity, and America's achievements in science and medicine." **(WR CFR)**

The importance of shared values in public diplomacy was noted in other reports. The face-to-face discussion of shared values and of divisive issues is often impossible due to the current emphasis on security over engagement, with our public diplomacy officers residing in protected fortresses, far from their natural audiences. The *Changing Minds, Winning Peace* study suggests increasing the number of multi-functional "American Corners" programming facilities – housed in libraries, universities, chambers of commerce, etc. – to partially address U.S. diplomacy's self-imposed isolation. According to the same study, American Studies organizations, university programs and courses, and centers are strikingly absent – and needed – in the Middle East. The authors of the study believe American Studies Centers should be created in the region through a collaborative effort of the U.S. government, the private sector, and local universities. The American Studies center at Cairo University, being a local initiative, enjoys credibility among scholars and students. **(WR Adv. GROUP)**

The *Arab Human Development Report*, a July 2002 United Nations study written by Arabs for Arabs, highlighted Arab isolation from the world of ideas and the fact that about a fourth of all Arabs are illiterate (two-thirds of them are women). **(WR UN study)** The findings of the U.N. study underscore the importance of increased funding for traditional, bedrock

public diplomacy programs such as educational, professional, and cultural exchange programs and English teaching programs, as called for by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World and The Heritage Foundation.

## **2. To what extent are U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East coordinated?**

With so much recent attention devoted to the failings of U.S. public diplomacy, one would think that it is impossible to counter the spread of virulent anti-Americanism. However, none of the studies is entirely negative. All delineate the problems and provide concrete ideas for reform. We certainly cannot ignore the importance of the struggle for the hearts and minds of overseas publics. As the Advisory Group was told in Morocco, “If you do not define yourself in this part of the world, the extremists will define you.”

The major studies of public diplomacy call for greater coordination of U.S. public diplomacy efforts carried out by such organizations as the Department of State, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Some see it as a new organizational architecture for public diplomacy. The coordination called for concerns U.S. public diplomacy activities worldwide.

# “Public Diplomacy in the Middle East”

Tuesday, February 10, 2004, 2:00 p.m., room 2154 RHOB

## WITNESS LIST

### PANEL ONE

**Margaret Tutwiler**

Under Secretary of State for Public  
Diplomacy and Public Affairs  
Department of State

### PANEL TWO

**Kenneth Y. Tomlinson**

Chairman  
Broadcasting Board of Governors

**Harold Pachios**

Chairman  
Advisory Commission on Public  
Diplomacy

### PANEL THREE

**Jess T. Ford**

Director, International Affairs and  
Trade  
General Accounting Office

**Imam Yahya Hendi**

Muslim Chaplain  
Georgetown University

**Stephen Johnson**

Senior Policy Analyst  
The Heritage Foundation

**David E. Morey**

President & CEO  
DMG, Inc.  
(& member of the Council on  
Foreign Relations public  
diplomacy task force)

**Stephen P. Cohen**

President  
Institute for Middle East Peace and  
Development  
(& member of the Advisory Group  
on Public Diplomacy for the Arab  
and Muslim World)

## **ATTACHMENTS**

## **WEB RESOURCES**