



Highlights of [GAO-06-535](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Public opinion polls have shown continued negative sentiments toward the United States in the Muslim world. Public diplomacy activities—led by the State Department (State)—are designed to counter such sentiments by explaining U.S. foreign policy actions, countering misinformation, and advancing mutual understanding between nations. GAO was asked to examine (1) what public diplomacy resources and programs State has directed to the Muslim world, (2) whether posts have adopted a strategic approach to implementing public diplomacy, and (3) what challenges remain to be addressed.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State develop (1) implementing guidance for its public diplomacy strategy modeled on private sector best practices, (2) a sample country-level communication plan that could be adapted for local use by posts, and (3) a systematic mechanism for sharing best practices data to address long-standing program challenges. State agreed with the report's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-535](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-535).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

## U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

### State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges

#### What GAO Found

State has increased public diplomacy resources to countries with significant Muslim populations in recent years and launched three major initiatives directed at the Muslim world. Comparing data for fiscal years 2004 and 2006, overseas operations budgets have increased, with the largest percentage increases going to regional bureaus with significant Muslim populations. However, the number of authorized overseas positions in all regional bureaus increased slightly or not at all. As part of the Secretary of State's newly announced transformational diplomacy initiative, the department intends to reposition staff to better align with policy priorities. Since 2002, State has initiated three public diplomacy activities focused on the Muslim world—a media campaign, a youth-oriented magazine, and a group of youth-focused exchange programs—but these initiatives have been largely terminated or suspended. However, several exchange programs continue to target youth in the Muslim world. In addition, posts in the Muslim world use a range of standard programs and tools which the Under Secretary plans to supplement with several new initiatives.

GAO's fieldwork revealed that posts' public diplomacy efforts generally lacked important strategic communication elements found in the private sector, which GAO and others have suggested adopting as a means to better communicate with target audiences. These elements include having core messages, segmented target audiences, in-depth research and analysis to monitor and evaluate results, and an integrated communication plan that brings all these elements together. These findings were reinforced by State's own post-level review. State established a new strategic framework for public diplomacy in fiscal year 2006, calling for, among other things, marginalizing extremists and demonstrating respect for Muslim cultures. However, posts have not been given written guidance on how to implement this strategy. Such guidance is a critical first step to developing in-depth communication plans in the field.

Posts in the Muslim world face several challenges in implementing their public diplomacy programs, including the need to balance security with public outreach and concerns related to staff numbers and language capabilities. For example, we found that 30 percent of language designated public diplomacy positions in the Muslim world were filled by officers without the requisite language skills. State has begun to address many of these challenges, but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of many of these efforts. Further, State lacks a systematic, comprehensive means of sharing best practices in public diplomacy, which could help transfer knowledge and experience across posts.