



Highlights of [GAO-03-951](#), a report to the House Committee on International Relations

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges

Why GAO Did This Study

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, focused attention on the need to improve public diplomacy efforts to cultivate a better public opinion of the United States abroad. However, recent opinion research indicates that many foreign publics, especially in countries with significant Muslim populations, view the United States unfavorably. GAO examined changes in the State Department's (State) public diplomacy efforts since September 11, whether State has an overall strategy for its public diplomacy programs, how it measures their effectiveness, and challenges it faces in implementing these programs.

What GAO Recommends

Among GAO's recommendations are that the Secretary of State develops a strategy that considers private sector public relations techniques in integrating its public diplomacy efforts and directing them toward common and measurable objectives; and strengthens efforts to train Foreign Service officers in foreign languages and public diplomacy. State generally concurred with our recommendations.

What GAO Found

Since September 11, State expanded its public diplomacy efforts in Muslim-majority countries considered to be of strategic importance in the war on terrorism. It significantly increased program funding and the number of Foreign Service officers in South Asia and the Near East. It also launched new initiatives targeting broader, younger audiences—particularly in predominantly Muslim countries—and plans to continue them in the future.

After September 11, State acknowledged the lack of, and the need for, a comprehensive strategy that integrates all of its diverse public diplomacy activities. Such a strategy is still in the development stage. The absence of an integrated strategy could impede State's ability to direct its multifaceted efforts toward concrete and measurable progress. Furthermore, an interagency public diplomacy strategy has not been completed that would help State and other federal agencies convey consistent messages and achieve mutually reinforcing benefits overseas.

State is not systematically and comprehensively measuring progress toward its public diplomacy goals. Its overseas performance measurement efforts focus on anecdotal evidence and program outputs, rather than indicate progress in changing foreign publics' understanding and opinions of the United States. (See table below.)

State's efforts face significant challenges, including insufficient time and staff to conduct public diplomacy tasks. Public affairs officers responding to our survey said that burdensome administrative and budgetary processes divert their attention from public diplomacy programs. In addition, about 21 percent of Foreign Service officers in language-designated public diplomacy positions overseas lack sufficient foreign language skills. We also found that about 58 percent of public affairs officers responding to our survey believe the amount of time to attend public diplomacy training is inadequate.

Public Opinion of the United States in Selected Muslim-majority Countries (percentage favorable view)

Countries	1999/2000	Summer 2002	Spring 2003
Morocco	77%	*	27%
Lebanon	*	35	27
Indonesia	75	61	15
Turkey	52	30	15
Pakistan	23	10	13
Jordan	*	25	1

Legend

*=no data available

Source: GAO, developed from The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press information.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-951.

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.