

May 2009

U.S. PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY

Key Issues for
Congressional
Oversight



GAO

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Abbreviations

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DOD	Department of Defense
ECA	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
PCC	Policy Coordinating Committee
State	Department of State
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VOA	Voice of America

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

May 27, 2009

Congressional Committees

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. government has spent at least \$10 billion on communication efforts designed to advance the strategic interests of the United States. However, foreign public opinion polling data shows that negative views towards the United States persist despite the collective efforts to counteract them by the State Department (State), Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of Defense (DOD), and other U.S. government agencies. Based on the significant role U.S. strategic communication and public diplomacy¹ efforts can play in promoting U.S. national security objectives, such as countering ideological support for violent extremism, we highlighted these efforts as an urgent issue for the new administration and Congress.² To assist Congress with its oversight agenda, we have enclosed a series of issue papers that discuss long-standing and emerging public diplomacy challenges identified by GAO and others.³

While the prior administration issued a national communication strategy in June 2007, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 requires that the President issue a new comprehensive strategy by December 2009 to guide interagency efforts. The issues discussed in the enclosures to this report should be considered in the development of the new strategic plan, related agency and country-level plans, and other areas such as State's human capital and security policies. Key issues include the following:

- **Strategic and operational planning**—The United States' current national communication strategy lacks a number of desirable characteristics identified by GAO, such as a clear definition of the problem, desired results, and a delineation of agency roles and responsibilities. We believe the inclusion of

¹We use the terms “public diplomacy,” “outreach,” and “strategic communication” interchangeably in this report.

²This report expands on issues discussed on GAO's transition Web site, <http://www.gao.gov/media/video/gao-09-679sp2>.

³These papers are based on the continuing work of GAO, the 10 related reports we have issued since July 2003 (see list of related GAO products), and select studies conducted by outside groups.

these and other key elements could have helped address several of the challenges and issues discussed below. Prior GAO reports have discussed the need for agency-specific and country-level plans that support national-level planning efforts. We found that such supporting plans have generally not been developed. In the absence of an improved strategy and supporting plans, it remains doubtful that agency programs are strategically designed and executed in support of common goals.

- **Performance measurement**—While agencies have made some progress in developing performance measurement systems, limited data exist on the ultimate effect of U.S. outreach efforts relative to the top-level goals outlined in the national communication strategy.
- **Coordination of U.S. communications efforts**—Although several mechanisms have been established to coordinate U.S. strategic communication policy and programs, concerns remain regarding the roles and responsibilities of State and DOD; the extent of outreach to the private sector; and whether new leadership mechanisms or organizational structures are needed.
- **State’s public diplomacy workforce**—State faces a number of human capital challenges that influence the effectiveness of its public diplomacy operations. Specific challenges include staffing shortages, a shortage of experienced public diplomacy officers to fill mid-career positions, administrative burdens and staffing policies that limit the time public diplomacy officers can devote to outreach efforts, and ongoing foreign language proficiency shortfalls. Collectively, these challenges and concerns raise the risk that U.S. interests are not being adequately addressed.
- **Outreach efforts in high-threat posts**—Security concerns around the world have led to building practices and personnel policies that have limited the ability of local populations to interact with Americans inside and outside the embassy. For the past several years, State has experimented with alternative outreach mechanisms such as American Corners to alleviate this forced isolation. These efforts raise significant policy, funding, and operational questions, which remain to be fully addressed.
- **Interagency efforts to adopt a new approach to public diplomacy**—Dynamic shifts in how target audiences obtain and use information have led many public diplomacy practitioners to conclude that the United States must more fully engage emerging social networks and technologies (such as Facebook and Twitter) in order to remain relevant. Referred to as “Public Diplomacy 2.0,” this new approach to strategic communications is exploring ways to operate in this evolving information environment. However, substantial questions exist regarding the challenges associated with this new approach.

We reviewed current agency documents related to the issues discussed in the attached enclosures. We discussed these issues with State, BBG, USAID, and DOD officials in Washington, D.C. We reviewed reports related to public diplomacy by various research institutions. We also applied national planning criteria developed by GAO to the United States' current national communication strategy to highlight deficiencies that we believe should be addressed in the President's new interagency strategy. Further information on the scope and methodology for this particular analysis can be found in appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2008 through May 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions.

We provided a draft of this report for review and comment to State, BBG, USAID, and DOD. Each agency declined to provide formal comments. State, BBG, and USAID provided technical comments, which we incorporated in the report, as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees. In addition, we are sending copies of this report to the National Security Council and executive branch agencies. The report also is available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you have any questions, please contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or FordJ@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs can be found on the last page of this report. For press inquiries, please contact Chuck Young at (202) 512-4800. Key contributors to this report are included in appendix II.



Gene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General of the United States

Enclosures

List of Congressional Committees

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chair
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Chair
The Honorable Richard G. Lugar
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
Chair
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chair
The Honorable Judd Gregg
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable George V. Voinovich
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government
Management, the Federal Workforce, and
the District of Columbia
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chair
The Honorable John M. McHugh
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Howard L. Berman
Chair
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable John Tierney
Chair
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

Enclosure I: Background

The overall goal of U.S. strategic communication efforts is to understand, engage, inform, and influence the attitudes and behaviors of global audiences in support of U.S. strategic interests. U.S. strategic communication efforts are distributed across several entities, including State, BBG, USAID, and DOD, and function under the broad guidance of the White House and National Security Council. Within the U.S. government, State's Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has the lead for U.S. strategic communication efforts.

Agency Programs

State's public diplomacy efforts are managed by the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, who oversees the Bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), International Information Programs, and Public Affairs. ECA aims to foster mutual understanding between the United States and other countries through International Visitor, Fulbright, and other academic and professional exchange programs. The Bureau of International Information Programs communicates with foreign publics about U.S. policy, society, and values through speaker programs, print and electronic publications, and Internet outreach. The Bureau of Public Affairs informs audiences about U.S. foreign policy through activities such as media outreach and news management. State's workforce of over 1,000 public diplomacy officers is divided between Washington and overseas posts, where public diplomacy staff report through the ambassador to their respective regional bureaus in Washington. State embassy officers engage in information dissemination, media relations, cultural affairs, and other efforts.

The BBG, as the overseer of U.S. international broadcasting efforts, aims to support U.S. strategic communication objectives by broadcasting fair and accurate information, while maintaining its journalistic independence as a news organization. The BBG operates 75 language services divided among its five broadcast entities—Voice of America (VOA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

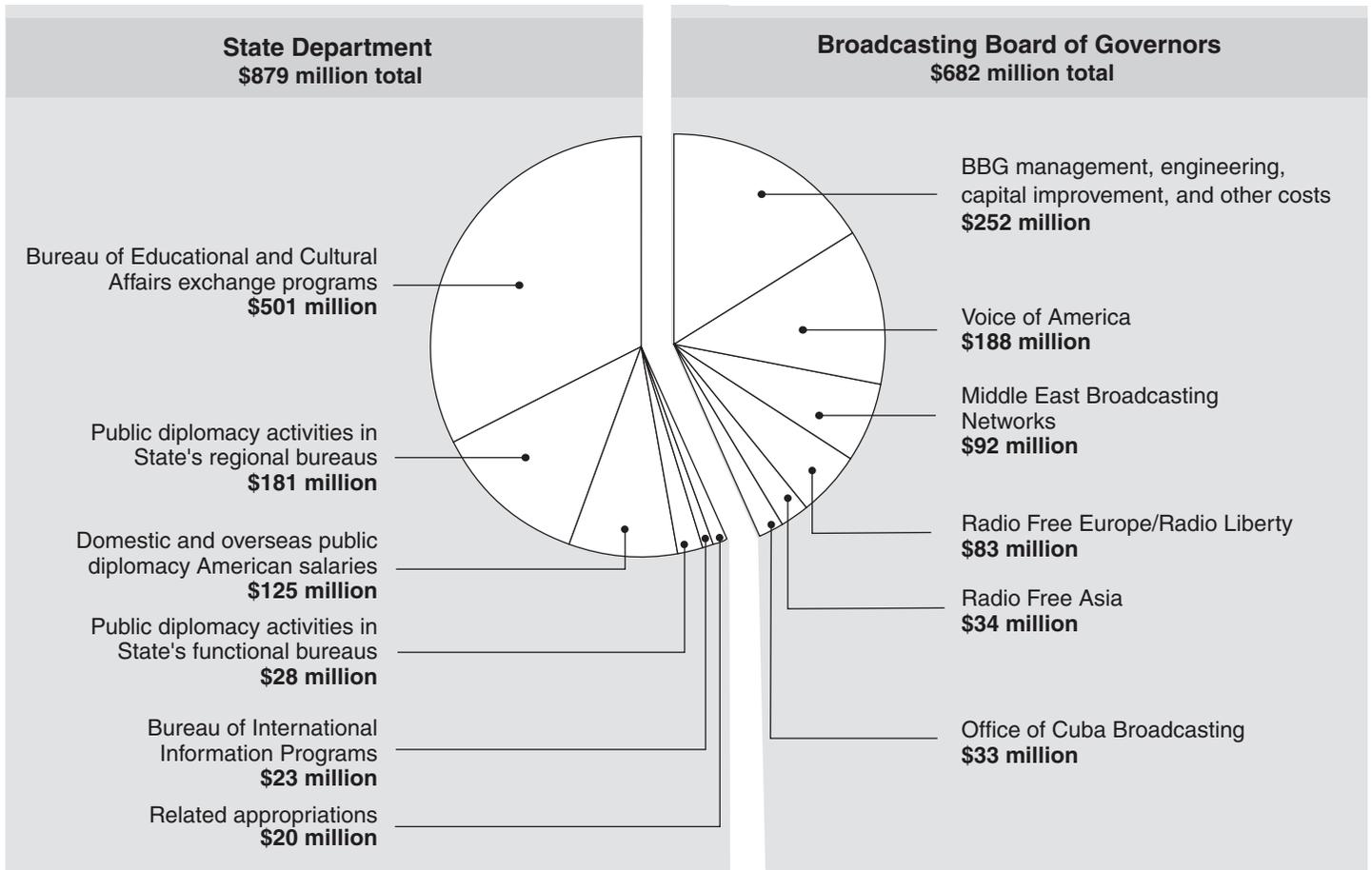
USAID's communication mission is to inform host country audiences about U.S. assistance. To fulfill this role, USAID maintains a public affairs office in Washington, D.C., and a network of 111 communication specialists at USAID missions worldwide. The communications specialists' outreach functions include responding to inquiries about USAID programs, collaborating with the embassy public affairs office, speech writing for the USAID mission director and others, preparing press releases, and coordinating Web site updates.

DOD's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Joint Communication is responsible for overseeing DOD activities directed at shaping departmentwide communications doctrine, organization, and training for the joint force; but this office has not issued formal policy regarding its strategic communication operations. Among other efforts, DOD has developed a predoctrinal document called the "Commander's Handbook," which provides strategic communications principles, techniques, and procedures, and has launched some strategic communication education and training initiatives to help institutionalize strategic communication. DOD's strategic communication operations are divided among public affairs activities, information operations (which includes psychological operations), and defense support to public diplomacy offices.

Agency Funding

As shown in figure 1, State and the BBG shared a total strategic communication budget of about \$1.6 billion in fiscal year 2008, with \$501 million going to State's exchange and cultural affairs programs, \$378 million going to State's nonexchange programs, and the balance of \$682 million going to the BBG to support its global broadcasting efforts.

Figure 1: Key Uses of U.S. Strategic Communication Budget Resources for the State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Fiscal Year 2008



Source: State Department and BBG.
 Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

USAID funds all domestic and some foreign audience communications out of limited agency operating expenses. There is no stand-alone budget for agency communications other than the operational budget amount allotted to USAID's headquarters public affairs bureau through the annual budget process.¹ USAID's main resource for communicating to foreign audiences is its worldwide network of communications specialists, most of whom

¹In 2008, this amounted to \$1.7 million.

are Foreign Service Nationals. USAID missions usually establish a program budget for mission or country communications based on amounts left over within the mission budget or through use of hard-to-utilize local currency accounts maintained by the embassy or mission, or both.

DOD does not have a separate budget covering its strategic communication activities. DOD officials said that they consider strategic communication to be a process instead of a discrete set of programs, and as a result, cannot identify DOD's spending on its strategic communication efforts. Nonetheless, DOD officials acknowledge the department spends hundreds of millions of dollars each year to support its outreach efforts, and DOD has identified strategic communication as a critical capability it intends to develop and support with related policy and doctrinal guidance, training, and staff and program resources.

Enclosure II: Strategic and Operational Planning

Issue

A national strategy is a critical planning tool that provides policymakers and implementing agencies with direction and guidance on goals, resource allocations, program implementation, and evaluation and ensures effective oversight and accountability. Beginning in 2003, we reported on the importance of a national communication strategy to ensure agency efforts are properly coordinated, convey consistent messages to target audiences, focus on achieving concrete and measurable objectives, and lead to mutually reinforcing benefits overseas.¹ In 2005, we specifically recommended such a strategy be developed.² In June 2007, the previous administration released a national communication strategy, which established three objectives: (1) offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity, (2) nurture common interests and values, and (3) help isolate and marginalize violent extremists. The strategy also provided guidance on such topics as target audiences, public diplomacy priorities, and interagency coordination, and outlined implementation plans for each communication objective. However, the strategy failed to include a clear definition of the problem, desired results, and a delineation of agency roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the strategy is not adequately supported by agency-specific plans and country-level plans modeled on private-sector best practices that could help increase the coordination and effectiveness of U.S. communication efforts that are distributed across four major agencies, dozens of discrete programs, a diverse range of communication objectives, and assorted target audiences around the world. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 requires that the President issue a new comprehensive strategy by December 2009 to guide interagency strategic communication efforts.³ It is important that the President and Congress, in devising this new strategy, incorporate the need to (1) address key planning elements such as a desired end-state with clear outcome and subordinate goals, and (2) develop plans and policies regarding the need for supporting department and country-level planning efforts that incorporate private-sector best practices. Absent the development of such a detailed strategy, the U.S. government runs the risk that its communication efforts will lack coordination and focus, and fail to achieve strategic objectives.

¹GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, [GAO-03-951](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2003).

²GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy*, [GAO-05-323](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 4, 2005).

³Pub. L. No. 110-417, Sec. 1055(a).

Key Findings

2007 National Strategy Only Partially Addressed Key Planning Elements

In 2004, GAO identified a set of desirable characteristics to aid in the development and implementation of national strategies, enhance their usefulness as tools to help make policy and program decisions, guide resource allocations, and assure better accountability for results.⁴ However, the June 2007 communication strategy did not address or only partially addressed such key characteristics as defining the purpose of the document, describing the nature and scope of the problem, developing a hierarchy of strategic goals and performance objectives, describing future costs and needed resources, and delineating U.S. government roles and responsibilities. Table 1 lists all six characteristics identified by GAO and our assessment of whether the June 2007 strategy generally addresses, partially addresses, or does not address the key elements that support each characteristic.

Table 1: June 2007 National Strategy’s Conformance with GAO’s Desirable Characteristics

Characteristics	Extent of conformance	Examples of missing or incomplete elements
Clear purpose, scope, and methodology	Partially addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purpose• Methodology
Detailed discussion of problems, risks, and threats	Does not address	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problem definition• Risk assessment
Desired goals, objectives, activities, and outcome-related performance measures	Partially addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall desired results, or “end-state”• Hierarchy of strategic goals and subordinate objectives• Milestones and outcome-related performance measures
Resources, investments, and risk management	Does not address	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources and investments associated with the strategy• Sources of resources• Risk management principles

⁴GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004).

Characteristics	Extent of conformance	Examples of missing or incomplete elements
Delineation of U.S. government roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms	Partially addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead, support, and partner roles and responsibilities of specific federal agencies, departments, or offices Discussion of how conflicts will be resolved
Description of strategy's integration among and with other entities	Partially addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses integration with relevant documents from other agencies and subordinate levels

Source: GAO analysis.

The new administration needs to fully consider these characteristics in drafting the new strategy called for by the National Defense Authorization Act to ensure the strategy more extensively guides key planning, decision-making, and oversight processes in line with strategic communication objectives.

Supporting Agency Plans Have Generally Not Been Developed

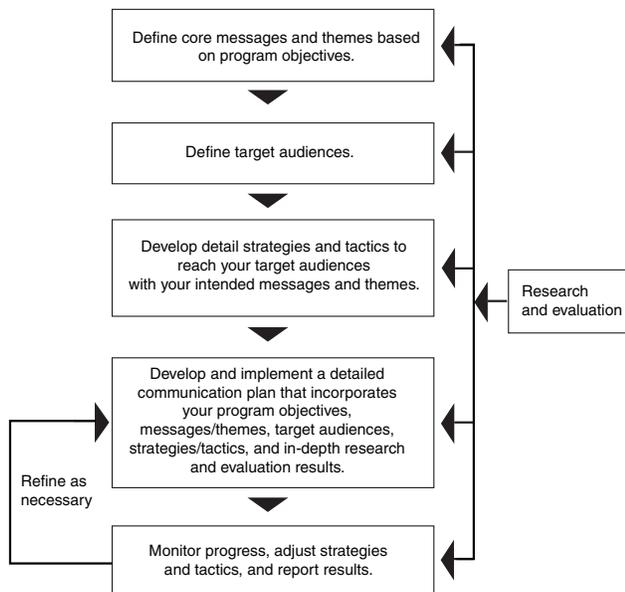
Beginning in 2003, GAO recommended that State develop an agency-level plan to integrate its diverse public diplomacy activities and direct them towards common objectives. We noted that the absence of a strategy may hinder the department's ability to guide its programs towards the achievement of concrete and measurable results. State responded to this recommendation with improvements to its strategic planning process; however, the department still lacks an agency-level plan that specifically supports the current national strategy. Significantly, the June 2007 national communication strategy calls for the development of such agency-level plans. The strategy indicates agency plans should identify key programs and policies that support the national strategy's objectives, identify key audiences, assign agency responsibility, outline specific implementation plans, and develop criteria to evaluate effectiveness. Among the four nonintelligence agencies (State, USAID, BBG, and DOD) involved in U.S. strategic communication efforts, only DOD responded to this call for an agency-specific plan. However, DOD's plan only lists programs and policies that support the national strategy's objectives, while omitting any details on target audiences, DOD's role in relation to other agencies, implementation plans, and performance measures. In the absence of supporting agency plans, no clear link can be established between national communication objectives, agency programs, and results, raising doubts about whether agency programs have been strategically designed to support a common purpose in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The new administration should require the development of

supporting agency plans as it drafts the new strategy called for by the National Defense Authorization Act.

State Department Lacks Country-Level Plans

We have recommended that State develop detailed country-level plans that incorporate strategic communication best practices—which we refer to as the “campaign-style approach.”⁵ As shown in figure 2, the campaign-style approach includes defining a core message, identifying target audiences, developing detailed communication strategies and tactics, and using research and evaluation to inform and redirect efforts as needed.

Figure 2: Key Elements of the Campaign-Style Approach



Source: GAO.

Though we have reported that both USAID and DOD have sought to develop country-level communication plans that generally adhere to the campaign-style approach, State has not yet developed such plans. Our 2006 review of public diplomacy operations in Nigeria, Pakistan, and

⁵GAO has also discussed the use of a “program logic model” to further improve planning efforts at the interagency, department, and country level. A logic model systematically outlines program activities, inputs, outputs, outcomes, and program effect in a direct relational path.

Egypt found that this approach and corresponding communication plans were absent, and that in-country public diplomacy planning efforts represented top-level statements of intent with little detailed planning to support post communication goals. In 2007, we reported that State's attempt to improve country-level planning through a pilot effort at 18 posts served as a useful exercise, but the country plans lacked key elements of the campaign-style approach. State officials told us a new initiative will be launched this year requiring embassies to develop "public diplomacy implementation plans" that address post outreach efforts. State intends to pilot test these plans in 12 countries. It remains to be determined whether these new plans will fully incorporate the campaign-style approach to strategic communication.

The new administration should require the development of supporting country-level plans as part of its new strategy. In the absence of such plans, program officials will likely fail to effectively harness available resources towards explicit communication goals and objectives.

Oversight Questions

1. What is the status of current agency efforts to meet the December 2009 deadline for a new national communication strategy?
2. To what extent will the President's new communication strategy incorporate key planning elements such as a clear definition of the problem, desired results, and a delineation of agency roles and responsibilities?
3. What is the status of developing agency-level plans that support the national strategy's communication goals and objectives?
4. To what extent does State plan to develop country-level communication plans that adhere to the campaign-style approach recommended by GAO?

Enclosure III: Performance Measurement

Issue

It is critical that agencies comprehensively measure the performance of their strategic communication efforts to understand which efforts are most effective and, in turn, determine how to make most efficient use of limited resources. However, U.S. agencies have not fully demonstrated the effect of their strategic communication efforts on the national communication goals, such as countering ideological support for violent extremism. Since 2003, GAO and other organizations have called on agencies to fully embrace a “culture of measurement” for their strategic communication efforts, beginning with a comprehensive communication strategy that would better enable agencies to direct their multifaceted efforts towards concrete and measurable progress. While agencies have made some progress in this area, including evaluating some programs, such as exchanges, the United States still lacks a national strategy that includes desired results, performance objectives, and outcome-related indicators.

Key Findings

Limitations of Prior National-Level Performance Planning

The 2007 national communication strategy identifies three key strategic goals—(1) offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity, rooted in the most basic values of the American people; (2) nurture common interests and values; and (3) marginalize extremism. However, this strategy does not identify target “end-states,” which are the desired results of such efforts, nor are the strategic goals supported by subordinate performance objectives and indicators that would allow agencies and others to gauge progress. In addition, agencies have adopted varying performance management systems that do not link back to the national communication strategy.

- BBG’s performance measurement system is not explicitly linked to the national strategy. According to BBG officials, the board’s statutory mandate of broadcasting accurate and objective news and information sets it apart from other strategic communication efforts. BBG officials told us BBG supports the national strategic communications goals when they are consistent with BBG’s mandate and strategic plan. BBG has a standard set of performance indicators it uses to measure progress towards its overarching strategic goal to “deliver accurate news and information to significant audiences in support of U.S. strategic interests.”
- USAID has not established a standard set of performance indicators for measuring progress towards the national strategic communications goals. USAID officials noted that their strategic communications do not

constitute a separate program or budget line item; thus these efforts are generally not monitored or evaluated separately. However, USAID’s field-based communications specialists are expected to develop communication strategies that include goals and objectives as well as performance monitoring plans for their outreach activities.

- While DOD strategic communication has a substantial role in marginalizing extremism, DOD has not established standard performance indicators to assess its effectiveness in contributing to this key strategic goal. DOD officials said this is because the department considers strategic communications to be a process instead of a discrete program, thus they are not separately monitored. However, DOD has measured the effectiveness of its communications at the project level.
- In contrast to the other three agencies, State’s performance measurement system provides a set of outcome-oriented performance indicators linked to the national strategy’s goals as shown in table 2. However, State has not established subordinate objectives in support of the national goals that could better illustrate the linkages between the broad strategic goals and its performance indicators.

Table 2: State Department’s Linked Performance Indicators

National strategic goals	State’s outcome-oriented performance indicators
Offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity, rooted in the most basic values of the American people	Increased understanding of U.S. policy, society, and values.
Nurture common interests and values	Percentage of exchange program participants who increased or changed their understanding of the United States immediately following their program.
Marginalize extremism	Reduction in the level of anti-American sentiment among participants of State information programs.

Source: State’s Fiscal Year 2008 Performance Report.

Agencies’ Ability to Measure Results Limited by Inherent Challenges and Varying Use of Research

Agencies cite three inherent challenges in measuring the effectiveness of their strategic communication efforts. First, strategic communications may only produce long-term, rather than immediate, effect. Second, it is difficult to isolate the effect of strategic communications from other influences, such as policy. Third, strategic communications often target audiences’ perceptions, which are intangible and complex and thus difficult to measure. GAO and others have identified some potential best practices for assessing strategic communications programs that address

some of the inherent difficulties in measuring these programs' effect on attitudes and behaviors. For example, in 2007, we reported that in-depth actionable research at every step of the communications process is critical to monitoring and evaluating progress.¹ Common private-sector measurement techniques that are used to measure results include the use of surveys and polling to develop baseline data, immediate follow-up research, and additional tracking polls to identify long-term changes over time.

In addition, agencies' funding and use of research to measure performance varies. We reported in 2007 that State has generally not adopted a research-focused approach to evaluate the effect of its thematic communications efforts. State conducts and contracts for audience research, including broad public opinion polling and focus groups, in over 50 countries each year through its Office of Research, which has an annual research budget of about \$5.5 million. However, such generic research is not used to evaluate the effectiveness of public diplomacy programs. By contrast, BBG uses research to help its broadcast services plan and evaluate their programs. BBG has a research budget of about \$10 million per year, which funds audience surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and listener and monitor panels to support its broadcasting activities throughout the world. In our prior work, we identified shortcomings with BBG's audience research methodology. In our August 2006 report on the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, we recommended that several steps be taken to correct methodological concerns that could affect the accuracy of its research data regarding Alhurra's viewing rates and Radio Sawa's listening rates.² BBG has since taken steps to address some of these methodological concerns, including identifying significant methodological limitations. While USAID does not have a central research office that conducts audience research, staff at some missions contract for polling and focus groups to support specific, targeted public awareness campaigns. Finally, some of DOD's combatant commands have recently initiated their own polling and focus group efforts.

¹GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research*, [GAO-07-904](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 18, 2007).

²GAO, *U.S. International Broadcasting: Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved*, [GAO-06-762](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 4, 2006).

Limited Evaluation of State Public Diplomacy Programs

State has evaluated its public diplomacy programs to varying degrees. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) has its own staffed and resourced internal evaluation unit and has been a leader in performance measurement and evaluation for several years. While this bureau has extensively evaluated its programs using its annual evaluation budget of \$1.8 million, State has sponsored limited evaluation of the rest of its public diplomacy programs. For example, the Bureau of International Information Programs' Speakers Program, which it describes as its "largest and single most powerful instrument for engaging foreign publics on a person-to-person basis," has not yet been evaluated, although State is planning an evaluation of the program later in 2009. Further, embassy public affairs officers generally do not conduct systematic program evaluations and receive only limited audience polling data to help measure progress. The lack of a comprehensive system for evaluating public diplomacy performance hinders State's ability to correct its course of action or direct resources toward activities that offer a greater likelihood of success.

In order to bring measurement and evaluation for the rest of public diplomacy up to the ECA bureau's high standard, State recently established an Evaluation and Measurement Unit within State's Office of Policy, Planning and Resources for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The unit is charged with developing performance measurement instruments and conducting independent evaluations of the effectiveness of all State public diplomacy programs. This unit has established a core set of public diplomacy performance indicators and launched a global public diplomacy tracking system as well as a pilot study to attempt to quantify the aggregate effect of public diplomacy programs and products.

State Department Country-Level Reporting on Results Is Inconsistent

State has inconsistent reporting requirements for its public diplomacy activities undertaken at the country-level and therefore does not ensure these efforts are measured by comparable standards, or at all. State mission performance planning guidance allows public diplomacy staff in the field to focus on public diplomacy as a stand-alone strategic goal aimed at promoting mutual understanding, to integrate public diplomacy into another strategic goal, such as counterterrorism, or do both. When treated as a stand-alone goal, posts are expected to generate related performance indicators and targets. When public diplomacy efforts are integrated with other strategic goals, posts are not required to develop

related performance targets and indicators. In 2003, we administered a survey to the heads of public affairs sections at U.S. embassies worldwide covering a range of issues.³ Survey results indicated that about 87 percent of respondents integrated public diplomacy into the missions' other strategic goals, which means that the majority of missions were not required to measure the performance of their public diplomacy programs.

Oversight Questions

1. How do agencies track their contributions towards common communication goals such as marginalizing extremism?
2. To what extent have agencies incorporated in-depth, actionable research into their performance evaluation efforts?
3. To what extent do available resources meet agency needs for in-depth, actionable research?
4. What effect do embassy communications efforts have beyond supporting the traditional goal of promoting mutual understanding, and how is this measured?

³GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, [GAO-03-951](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2003).

Enclosure IV: Coordination of U.S. Communications Efforts

Issue

When agencies conduct communications programs in a fragmented, uncoordinated way, it can result in a patchwork of programs that can waste funds, lead to inconsistent messaging, and limit the overall effectiveness of the effort. Interagency coordination of U.S. strategic communication efforts is limited by several challenges, including unclear agency roles and responsibilities, a lack of sustained leadership to direct agencies' efforts, minimal interagency sharing of research, and the lack of a strategy to engage the private sector. Due, in part, to concerns about the lack of effective interagency coordination, several reports have questioned whether new leadership mechanisms and organizational structures are needed to improve U.S. strategic communication efforts. Several reports have proposed creating an independent or semi-independent organization to support the government in achieving its communications goals, while other reports propose establishing a new government agency to consolidate U.S. government communications.

Key Findings

Roles and Responsibilities Have Not Been Defined

The national communications strategy identifies the principal mechanism for the coordination of U.S. government strategic communication activities, namely the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication led by State's Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, but does not address which agencies, departments, and offices will implement the strategy and their roles and responsibilities. The lack of guidance on DOD's and State's respective roles and responsibilities is of particular concern. Both departments have made marginalizing extremism—one of the three national communication goals—their top communications priority and are undertaking activities in this area. While State has been formally designated as the lead for all U.S. government strategic communications, DOD has more resources than State to apply to the strategic communications goal of marginalizing extremism. In 2006, DOD established the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy to support and coordinate public diplomacy efforts, and serve as the lead for developing policy within DOD on countering ideological support for terrorism. DOD officials said this office was disbanded in early 2009 and it is unclear what existing or new mechanisms, if any, will conduct its functions. Further, despite internal planning initiatives that began in 2006, DOD has not defined the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of its internal military capabilities that

support strategic communications, such as public affairs, information operations, and defense support for public diplomacy.

Lack of Leadership

We reported in 2005 that a lack of leadership has contributed to agencies independently defining and coordinating strategic communications programs.¹ Some reports note that a unifying vision of strategic communications starts with sustained senior leadership from the White House focusing exclusively on global communication. In January 2003, the then-President established an Office of Global Communications to facilitate the strategic direction and coordination of U.S. public diplomacy efforts. However, this office was ineffectual in fulfilling its intended role and no longer exists. In addition, State officials told us the lack of sustained leadership at the under secretary level has also hindered interagency coordination. These officials estimate the position of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has been vacant about 40 percent of the time since 2001, and said the PCC did not meet when the position was vacant. A recent report on this issue notes that neither a lead organization nor lead individual has the authority to command independent departments or agencies, and the PCC structure is incapable of fostering coordination and strategic planning.² The report recommends alternative options to integrate government efforts, such as the creation of decentralized interagency teams made up of a small full-time staff to formulate and implement policy and support collaboration.

Minimal Interagency Sharing of Research

Several U.S. agencies conduct and sponsor audience research and media monitoring; however, they have not yet developed interagency protocols or a central clearinghouse for sharing such research as recommended by GAO in 2007.³ Agency officials told us that barriers to sharing research include classification of documents and concerns about the release of sensitive and proprietary information. A PCC subcommittee on “Metrics and Polling,” the main interagency forum for research staff to discuss issues of concern, has recently taken steps to encourage greater sharing of research information, particularly through conducting two applied research seminars in which various U.S. government agencies shared and

¹GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy*, [GAO-05-323](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 4, 2005).

²Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield* (Arlington, Va., Nov. 26, 2008).

³GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research*, [GAO-07-904](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 18, 2007).

analyzed audience, market, and opinion data with the aim of informing communication strategies for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The BBG has also recently provided other U.S. agencies with access to its audience research.

Lack of a Comprehensive Strategy to Engage the Private Sector

In 2003 and 2005, we recommended the Secretary of State develop a strategy to engage with the private sector in pursuit of common public diplomacy objectives to help ensure private-sector resources, talents, and ideas are effectively utilized in support of U.S. strategic communications. In 2005 we reported that State had engaged the private sector in the area of international exchange programs, but other efforts led by State's Under Secretaries for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs had not yielded significant results. Since then, a former under secretary established an Office of Private Sector Outreach for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, which has partnered with the private sector on various projects, hosted a Private Sector Summit on Public Diplomacy in January 2007, invited private-sector experts to assist U.S. government officials in marketing public diplomacy programs, and identified action steps the private sector can take to support and improve U.S. public diplomacy. However, the office has not worked with the private sector to implement those additional action steps. While State's efforts thus far have merit, their effect may be limited if not backed by the type of comprehensive strategy to engage the private sector we have recommended.⁴

Oversight Questions

1. What is the appropriate role of DOD in relation to State in strategic communication? What are DOD's and State's respective authorities, comparative advantages, and capabilities in conducting strategic communication?
2. Given the disbanding of DOD's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy, what mechanisms, if any, will be instituted to carry out its functions?
3. When will DOD issue policy guidance regarding its internal strategic communication structure?
4. What are State's plans for future engagement with the private sector? When will State develop a strategy for engagement as recommended by GAO?
5. What criteria can be used to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of creating new organizational structures for conducting strategic communication?

⁴GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, [GAO-03-951](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 4, 2003); and [GAO-05-323](#).

Enclosure V: State's Public Diplomacy Workforce

Issue

Having the right people, with the right skills, in the right place is essential to the effective management of any government program. Beginning in 2003, GAO has reported that State's public diplomacy operations have been hampered by insufficient numbers and types of staff, administrative burdens and time constraints, and language proficiency shortfalls. These problems have compromised State's ability to fully execute its public diplomacy mission, led to minimal coverage at certain posts, placed a strain on more-junior staff filling positions above their pay grade, and diminished effectiveness where target language proficiency levels have not been met. The department has sought to respond to these challenges by instituting a number of initiatives including a requested increase of 2,400 in American and Foreign Service National staff over the next 2 years, various financial incentives to attract and motivate staff, and increased training opportunities. It remains to be determined whether these assorted initiatives will fully address the human capital challenges identified by GAO; a failure to do so by State will compromise the effectiveness of its public diplomacy operations for the foreseeable future.

Key Findings

Staffing Shortages and Lack of Mid-Level Officers Hinder U.S. Outreach Efforts

State has experienced a shortage of public diplomacy staff since 1999 when the United States Information Agency was merged into the department. In 2003, GAO reported that State experienced a 13 percent vacancy rate in its public diplomacy positions. Similar findings were reported by GAO in May 2006, and data from November 2007 show a vacancy rate of over 13 percent. In our 2003 report, we noted that more than 50 percent of those responding to our survey of public diplomacy officers felt the number of Foreign Service officers available to perform public diplomacy duties was inadequate. Our May 2006 report noted that while several recent reports on public diplomacy had recommended increased spending on U.S. public diplomacy programs, several embassy officials told us that, given current staffing levels, they lacked the capacity to effectively utilize increased funds.

In August 2006, we reported that State's consular and public diplomacy positions were the hardest to fill, with 91 percent of the vacancies in these two tracks at the mid-level. We noted this staffing gap placed pressure on State to appoint junior officers to so-called "stretch positions"—whereby they serve in a position above their pay grade—to fill as many of these vacancies as possible. For example, at the time of our visit in 2006 the U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria—which had the third largest mission in Africa with

nearly 800 employees—told us the embassy had only three senior officers, and public affairs were handled entirely by first-tour junior officers. Ambassadors at posts GAO visited stated that junior officers, while generally highly qualified when entering the Foreign Service, lack sufficient training to handle some of the high-stress situations they encounter and therefore often end up making mistakes. A January 2008 analysis by State's Human Resources Bureau indicates that mid-level shortages continue. The report notes the public diplomacy cone has the highest mid-level deficit among the five generalist cones, and public diplomacy officers are being promoted through the mid-levels at higher rates than other cones. State officials expect it will take several years before the mid-level deficit is erased. One senior State official noted accelerated rates of promotion have led to concern that some public diplomacy officers may not have the requisite experience and expertise to perform effectively at their current levels.

Administrative Burden and Lack of Time Cited as Limiting Factors

In 2003, we reported public diplomacy officers at posts were burdened with administrative tasks, and thus had less time to conduct public diplomacy outreach activities than they did when the United States Information Agency was responsible for U.S. public diplomacy efforts. More than 40 percent of the 118 public affairs officers responding to our survey reported the amount of time they had to devote exclusively to executing public diplomacy tasks was insufficient. During our overseas fieldwork, officers told us that, while they managed to attend U.S. and other foreign embassy receptions and functions within their host country capitals, it was particularly difficult to find time or staff resources to travel outside the capitals to interact with ordinary citizens. In May 2006, we noted one senior State official overseas told us administrative duties, such as budget, personnel, and internal reporting, compete with officers' public diplomacy responsibilities. Another official in Egypt told us she rarely had enough time to strategize, plan, or evaluate programs.

This challenge is compounded at posts with short tours of duty, including many posts of strategic importance in the Muslim world, as officials stated it is difficult to establish the type of close working relationships essential to effective public diplomacy when in the country for only a short time. In May 2006, we reported the average length of tour at posts with significant Muslim populations was 2.1 years, compared with 2.7 years in the non-Muslim world. Noting the prevalence of 1-year tours at such posts, a senior official at State said public affairs officers who have shorter tours tend to produce less effective work than officers with longer tours.

Language Proficiency Shortfalls Remain

Beginning in July 2003, GAO reported that 21 percent of officers in public diplomacy language-designated positions did not meet the language requirements for their position. We reported similar findings in May 2006, and as of October 2008 this figure stood at 25 percent. Our May 2006 report noted this problem was particularly acute at posts where Arabic—classified as a “superhard” language by State—predominates. In countries with significant Muslim populations, we reported 30 percent of language-designated public diplomacy positions were filled by officers without the requisite proficiency in those languages, compared with 24 percent elsewhere. In Arabic language posts, about 36 percent of language-designated public diplomacy positions were filled by staff unable to speak Arabic at the designated level. In addition, State officials said there are even fewer officers willing or able to speak on television or engage in public debate in Arabic. The information officer in Cairo stated his office does not have enough Arabic speakers to engage the Egyptian media effectively.

Effect of Several Recent Initiatives Remains to Be Determined

State is seeking to increase its total staffing by over 2,400 individuals over the next 2 years to, in part, create the “personnel float” needed to allow staff to take language and other forms of training, fill vacant positions, and ease the burden on existing staff. State has also repositioned several public diplomacy officers as part of its transformational diplomacy initiative, and is increasing its overall amount of language training and providing supplemental training for more difficult languages at overseas locations. The department has also increased its language proficiency and hardship-post service incentives and requirements. However, it remains to be determined whether these efforts will collectively resolve State’s long-standing human capital challenges.

Other groups have reported that additional human capital challenges help to explain State’s long-standing difficulties filling open public diplomacy positions with fully qualified staff. For example, the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy issued a report on the status of State’s human capital operations since the integration of the United States Information Agency into the department in 1999.¹ This report addresses a range of topics that the commission believes have significantly contributed

¹United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *Getting the People Part Right: A Report on the Human Resources Dimension of U.S. Public Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C., June 25, 2008).

to State's human capital problems. Discussed topics include hiring, training, promotion practices, and the degree to which the 1999 merger of the United States Information Agency into State has resulted in better integration of the public diplomacy function into the work of State—in particular as measured by the presence of public diplomacy officers in the department's decision-making ranks.

Oversight Questions

1. What is State's strategy to obtain a sufficient number of staff to create the desired training float needed to fill vacant public diplomacy positions and meet all required language training needs?
2. What is State's strategy to address the deficit in mid-level management expertise?
3. Are public affairs officers at posts overburdened with administrative duties? If so, what can be done to alleviate this situation?

Enclosure VI: Outreach Efforts in High-Threat Posts

Issue

Conditions in high-threat posts have led to security precautions that limit public access to U.S. embassies and reduce the number of external facilities open to local populations—thereby limiting the effectiveness of U.S. outreach efforts. Beginning in the late 1990s, security concerns led to the fortification of preexisting and new embassies, which in many cases entailed increased physical barriers around the embassies, as well as the location of embassy complexes to more remote locations. These measures have had the ancillary effect of making the United States seem unapproachable and distrustful, according to State officials, leading to increased anti-American sentiments amongst local populations. Compounding this problem, security and budgetary considerations brought about the closure of publicly accessible facilities outside the embassy compound, such as American Centers and Libraries. While little has been done to change the forbidding presence associated with many embassies, State has responded to the lack of external facilities by exploring a variety of outreach mechanisms such as American Corners, which are centers that provide information about the United States, hosted in local institutions and staffed by local employees. It is important that State determine the relative effectiveness of these alternative outreach mechanisms and, in turn, find the right balance between security and mission concerns.

Key Findings

Enhanced Security Measures and the Closure of Public Facilities Have Limited Outreach Efforts

Since the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Congress has provided State hundreds of millions of dollars annually for embassy construction to secure facilities around the world. Among the many embassy security-related construction requirements is that facilities be further offset from the street, leading to the building of many new embassies several miles from urban centers. Such sites tend to be in remote areas poorly served by public transportation, and these relocations have diminished the ability of local citizens and U.S. embassy personnel to interact. As we reported in May 2006, the new security architecture has created heavily-protected structures that make embassies seem less welcoming to local citizens. Congress has also mandated that sites selected for new U.S. diplomatic facilities abroad meet a colocation requirement designed to ensure all U.S. government agencies, except those under the command of a United States area military commander, be located on the same compound, complicating attempts to establish diplomatic venues outside the compound.

In addition, due to security concerns and other factors, State closed or eliminated funding for many publicly accessible facilities that provided an opportunity for local populations to interact directly with Americans with the goal of promoting mutual understanding.¹ Beginning in the late 1990s, the United States began to close its worldwide network of American Cultural Centers operated in downtown locations in capital cities around the world, which offered reading rooms; group lectures; film, music, and art series; and English language instruction.² With the closure of these facilities, their operations were transferred to Information Resource Centers located within heavily fortified embassy compounds, many of which are now open by appointment only or have hours of operation and security policies limiting public access. In May 2006, we reported that, in Pakistan, for example, all American Centers closed for security reasons and selected operations moved to the embassy's Information Resource Center.³ Our report noted that concrete barriers and armed escorts outside the embassy compounds contribute to a perception that visitors are not welcome, as do requirements restricting visitors' use of cell phones and pagers within the embassy. According to one official in Pakistan, the number of visitors to the embassy's Information Resource Center has declined to as few as one per day because many visitors feel humiliated by the embassy's rigorous security procedures. We also reported the Information Resource Center in Abuja, Nigeria, is open only to students and other specific demographic groups, and access is granted by appointment only. The head of the center in Abuja said accessibility was one of his primary challenges.

¹According to State, only about 30 American Cultural Centers remain open today. U.S. funding for binational outreach centers in Latin America was also eliminated; however, about 110 centers remain open with other revenue sources. Congress is now considering the option of reopening American Cultural Centers where security conditions permit and resuming some level of funding for binational centers where appropriate. See Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *U.S. Public Diplomacy—Time to Get Back in the Game*, 2009.

²As we noted in our May 2006 report, in 1990 the majority of posts had such publicly accessible facilities; now, however, few do.

³We reported in May 2006, that State's Bureau of International Information Programs operates more than 170 such centers worldwide.

State Has Responded to Security Concerns and Actions by Establishing a Range of Alternate Outreach Mechanisms

Over the past two decades, State has experimented with a number of alternative outreach mechanisms designed to offset the increasingly isolated nature of U.S. diplomatic operations. These alternative mechanisms generally consist of small outposts with no or few U.S. staff, or virtual, internet-based efforts supported by in-person travel to a city or region. Specific alternate outreach mechanisms include the following:

- *American Presence Posts*: Headed by an American officer, these posts provide citizen, commercial, and public diplomacy outreach services to a major city or region. There are currently nine such posts worldwide. While plans to create additional posts are on hold for budgetary and other reasons, State would like to add more American Presence Posts over the next few years.
- *American Corners*: These provide the United States with a physical public diplomacy outpost, which includes internet access, a small reference collection, and a discussion forum. Sponsored by a host country's municipal or national government, the U.S. government is only required to fund the equipment and materials used. Staff are provided by the host institution. There are approximately 410 American Corners throughout the world, and State plans to develop up to 30 more corners over the next 2 years.
- *American Discovery Centers*: These are small kiosks that provide information on America. The prime example of the use of these kiosks is Pakistan. In May 2006, we reported there were over 180 such kiosks, primarily in schools. State is considering the expanded use of such kiosks.
- *Virtual Presence Posts*: Virtual Presence Posts are generally designed to combine virtual presence through an embassy-hosted Web site with coordinated outreach, programming, and travel targeted at a particular city or region.
- *Other outreach mechanisms*: In our May 2006 report on outreach to the Muslim world, we noted that in Nigeria several embassy staff, including the Ambassador, often travel together to cities lacking a permanent American presence; according to embassy officials, these "embassy on the road" tours typically last 3 or 4 days and can involve dozens of individuals. A variation on this theme are embassy "circuit riders," who are staff who travel from the embassy on a scheduled basis to cover an assigned city or territory.

To date, only American Corners have been formally evaluated by State. State's evaluation was generally favorable; however, in May 2006, we reported that, while one State official told us American Corners are the best solution given the current security environment, others have

described them as public diplomacy “on the cheap.” The American Corner we visited in Nigeria was confined to a single small room housing a limited reference library and a small selection of donated books. At a meeting with a focus group of Nigerians in Abuja who had participated in U.S.-sponsored exchanges, no one present was familiar with the American Corner. Other posts we visited have had difficulty finding hosts for American Corners, as local institutions fear becoming terrorist targets.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has recommended that State systematically determine and coordinate how and where to locate alternative outreach mechanisms on a country by country basis.⁴ According to CSIS, each country mission should conduct this assessment, in coordination with the relevant State regional bureau, and integrate it into the post’s strategic planning process. To support the effective development of these country-level strategies, CSIS recommended that State establish a federally-funded research center to assist with a number of related data analysis tasks.

Oversight Questions

1. To what extent has State evaluated the effectiveness of alternative outreach mechanisms such as American Corners, American Presence Posts, and Virtual Presence Posts?
2. What process guides post decisions on the need to establish outreach mechanisms and how are decisions made regarding the mix, number, and placement of these facilities? How is this process linked to post efforts to reach specific target audiences?
3. How would reestablishing American Centers contribute to fulfilling U.S. strategic communication goals?

⁴Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Embassy of the Future* (Washington, D.C., Oct. 15, 2007).

Enclosure VII: Interagency Efforts to Adopt a New Approach to Public Diplomacy

Issue

The United States needs to consider new approaches to conducting its strategic communication efforts in response to dynamic changes in the ways people around the world receive and use information. In particular, the rise of social networking, namely through Internet sites such as Facebook and Twitter, has transformed the nature of communications globally. State's prior Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs recently endorsed a new public diplomacy approach, referred to as Public Diplomacy 2.0, that could more fully engage these new and evolving communication trends. Key issues that remain to be addressed include the level of resources the United States should devote to this new approach, how agency operations will be guided when there is limited knowledge or agreement on how to operate in this new information environment, and how results will be measured when message control is partly or completely ceded to other groups that can distribute information through hundreds or thousands of diverse communication channels. These and other considerations should be incorporated in the President's new communication strategy, which could provide the best means for outlining a vision for Public Diplomacy 2.0 efforts. While GAO has not previously assessed this issue, current information suggests a failure to adapt in this dynamic communications environment could significantly raise the risk that U.S. public diplomacy efforts could become increasingly irrelevant, particularly among younger audiences that represent a key focus of U.S. strategic communication efforts.

Key Findings

Public Diplomacy 2.0 Initiatives Are Underway

The most recent Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs noted in December 2008 that the United States should place a greater reliance on dialogue and collaboration, enabled by emerging social networks, in addition to the traditional model of public diplomacy that has focused on building a positive image of the United States, mainly through long-term programs like cultural and educational exchanges and efforts to

tell America's story.¹ State, the BBG, and DOD have begun to respond to this and earlier calls for change. State has been most active in this new approach, and the BBG's international broadcasting has the potential to help form social networks of like-minded people who listen to services such as the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia and then pass along this information through word of mouth, blogs, Internet sites, and other means. DOD has chosen to engage in this new approach to a certain degree; however, DOD officials said it would represent a "sea change" in the department's culture to allow its staff to fully engage in Public Diplomacy 2.0-style activities.

Specific examples of agency Public Diplomacy 2.0 initiatives include the following:

- In December 2008, State joined with major new media companies and the Columbia University School of Law to bring together a number of youth movements from around the world to New York City to launch an Internet-based global network to mobilize people against violence and oppression. (See <http://www.gao.gov/media/video/gao-09-679sp> for an independently produced, State-endorsed video clip of the event that was edited by GAO.)
- State has also held blogger-only press conferences, started its own blog, established a page on Facebook and a social networking site called Exchanges Connect, created a digital outreach team to participate in blogs and Web chat rooms with the goal of countering ideological support for terrorism, and hosted YouTube video contests on such topics as "what is democracy."
- VOA maintains pages on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in multiple languages. According to BBG officials, there have been 4 million views of VOA-produced videos in the past year. VOA also distributes its content through podcasts, syndicated feeds to users' desktops, and mobile phones. For example, VOA has an agreement with Nokia to distribute English language content on mobile phones sold in China.

¹In articulating his support for Public Diplomacy 2.0, State's most recent Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs highlighted the example of a social movement directed against rebel forces in Colombia, which illustrates the power of the collaborative, social networking approach in action. In this instance, according to the Under Secretary, an unemployed computer technician in Colombia started a Facebook page that grew quickly to more than 400,000 members. The group, called One Million Voices against the FARC, was able to mobilize 12 million people to engage in street protests on a single day in 190 cities around the world, just 2 months after it was set up.

- VOA created a special U.S. election Web site in 2008 that attracted traffic from more than 200 countries and resulted in thousands of users joining an online VOA community, where they were able to share photos, ask questions, and comment about the U.S. electoral process.
- DOD plans to hold a conference on emerging Web technologies in July 2009 to gain a better awareness and understanding of these tools, identify barriers to their adoption (such as restrictions due to policy, organizational culture, and other factors), and determine implementation strategies. Many DOD commands now have their own official blog sites and use tools such as Twitter and Facebook. The U.S. Army has also had success using online games and a variety of mechanisms to reach out to younger audiences.

Challenges and Practical Considerations

Agencies seeking to implement this new approach to public diplomacy face several key challenges. First, there is a general lack of adequate research and understanding of how government entities can and should operate in a social network environment. Second, agencies will generally lose control over content since participants in a dialogue or collaborative project are free to voice their own opinions and distribute information as they choose. As noted by one senior State official, however, a difference in opinions is one of the core strengths of the approach and the underlying basis for its effectiveness. Third, views expressed by U.S. officials on, for example, social networking sites or blogs, become part of the permanent discussion record, which raises practical questions about how best to mitigate potential instances of miscommunication. Fourth, the level of available resources is small compared to the magnitude of the global communications environment. For example, State's Digital Outreach team consists of eight individuals seeking to provide a U.S. point of view into a communication environment consisting of millions of personal blogs and discussion forums on thousands of Web sites. Finally, this approach is likely to pose technical challenges, as agency efforts to plan, coordinate, fund, implement, and evaluate their Public Diplomacy 2.0 efforts could strain systems and capabilities that have had difficulty operating smoothly in the less complex environment of traditional public diplomacy efforts.

Oversight Questions

1. To what extent will the Public Diplomacy 2.0 approach be included in the President's December 2009 national communication strategy?
2. What criteria should be used to guide strategic investment decisions regarding this new approach to public diplomacy?
3. How do agencies intend to address the challenges identified by GAO such as the lack of in-depth research on social networking and resource constraint issues?
4. Are there other challenges and practical considerations that should be considered in adopting this new approach?

Appendix I: Extent to Which the June 2007 National Strategy Addresses GAO's Desirable Characteristics

In a 2004 GAO testimony, we identified six desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy that would enable its implementers to effectively shape policies, programs, priorities, resource allocations, and standards that would enable federal departments and other stakeholders to achieve the identified results.¹ We further determined in that testimony that national strategies with the six characteristics can provide policymakers and implementing agencies with a planning tool that can help ensure accountability and more effective results. To develop these six desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy, we reviewed several sources of information. First, we gathered statutory requirements pertaining to national strategies, as well as legislative and executive branch guidance. We also consulted the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, general literature on strategic planning and performance, and guidance from the Office of Management and Budget on the President's Management Agenda. In addition, among other things, we studied past reports and testimonies for findings and recommendations pertaining to the desirable elements of a national strategy. Furthermore, we consulted widely within GAO to obtain updated information on strategic planning, integration across and between the government and its partners, implementation, and other related subjects. We developed these six desirable characteristics based on their underlying support in legislative or executive guidance and the frequency with which they were cited in other sources. We then grouped similar items together in a logical sequence, from conception to implementation. Table 3 provides these desirable characteristics and examples of their elements.

¹GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004).

**Appendix I: Extent to Which the June 2007
National Strategy Addresses GAO's Desirable
Characteristics**

Table 3: Summary of Desirable Characteristics of an Effective National Strategy

Desirable characteristic	Brief description
Purpose, scope, and methodology	Addresses why the strategy was produced, the scope of its coverage, and the process by which it was developed.
Problems, risks, and threats	Addresses the particular national problems and threats the strategy is directed toward.
Desired goals, objectives, activities, and performance measures	Addresses what the strategy is trying to achieve; steps to achieve those results; as well as the priorities, milestones, and performance measures to gauge results.
Resources, investments, and risk management	Addresses what the strategy will cost, the sources and types of resources and investments needed, and where resources and investments should be targeted by balancing risk reductions and costs.
U.S. government roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanism	Addresses who will be implementing the strategy, what their roles will be compared to those of others, and mechanisms for them to coordinate their efforts.
Integration among and with other entities	Addresses how a national strategy relates to other strategies' goals, objectives, and activities—and to subordinate levels of government and their plans to implement the strategy.

Source: GAO.

To assess U.S. strategic communication planning efforts, we examined the *June 2007 U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*. To determine whether this national strategy contains all six desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy that we developed and used in our prior work, we first developed a checklist of these characteristics, along with their 27 component elements. Two GAO staff members then independently assessed the national strategy for its inclusion of the 27 elements, recorded their findings on separate checklists, and met to reconcile any differences in their assessments. Once these assessments were reconciled, one additional GAO staff member reviewed this analysis for completeness and accuracy. To determine the extent to which the national strategy addressed GAO's six characteristics of an effective national strategy, we developed the following three categories: the strategy (1) generally addresses a characteristic when it explicitly cites all elements related to that characteristic; (2) partially addresses a characteristic when it explicitly cites at least one, but not all, of the elements related to that characteristic; and (3) does not address a characteristic when it does not explicitly cite any of the elements related to that characteristic. By applying these categories to our checklists of the 27 elements, we developed a consolidated summary of the extent to which the strategy addressed the six characteristics of an effective national strategy. Figure 3 shows the results of our assessment of the national communication strategy.

**Appendix I: Extent to Which the June 2007
National Strategy Addresses GAO's Desirable
Characteristics**

Figure 3: Extent to Which the June 2007 National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication Addresses the 27 Elements of the Desirable Characteristics of a National Strategy

1. Clear purpose, scope, and methodology	●	
Purpose		
1a. Identifies the impetus that led to the strategy being written, such as a statutory requirement, mandate, or key event.		○
1b. Discusses the strategy's purpose.		○
Scope		
1c. Defines or discusses key terms, major functions, mission areas, or activities the strategy covers.		●
Methodology		
1d. Discusses the process that produced the strategy (e.g., what organizations or offices drafted the document, whether it was the result of a working group, or which parties were consulted in its development).		○
1e. Discusses assumptions or the principles and theories that guided the strategy's development.		●
2. Detailed discussion of problems, risks, and threats	○	
Problem definition		
2a. Includes a detailed discussion or definition of the problems the strategy intends to address.		○
2b. Includes a detailed discussion of the causes of the problems.		○
2c. Includes a detailed discussion of the operating environment.		○
Risk assessment		
2d. Addresses a detailed discussion of the threats at which the strategy is directed.		○
2e. Discusses the quality of data available (e.g., constraints, deficiencies, and "unknowns").		●
3. Desired goals, objectives, activities, and outcome-related performance measures	●	
Goals and subordinate objectives		
3a. Addresses the overall results desired (i.e., an "end state").		○
3b. Identifies strategic goals and subordinate objectives.		●
Activities		
3c. Identifies specific activities to achieve results.		●
Performance measures		
3d. Addresses priorities, milestones, and outcome-related performance measures.		●
3e. Identifies process to monitor and report on progress.		●
3f. Identifies limitations on progress indicators.		●
4. Resources, investments, and risk management	○	
Resources and investments		
4a. Identifies what the strategy will cost.		○
4b. Identifies the sources (e.g., federal, international, and private, and types of resources or investments needed, e.g., budgetary, human capital, information technology, research and development, and contracts).		●
Risk management		
4c. Addresses where resources or investments should be targeted to balance risks and costs.		○
4d. Addresses resource allocation mechanisms.		○
4e. Identifies risk management principles and how they help implementing parties prioritize and allocate resources.		○
5. Delineation of U.S. government roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanism	●	
Organizational roles and responsibilities		
5a. Addresses who will implement the strategy.		●
5b. Addresses lead, support, and partner roles and responsibilities of specific federal agencies, departments, or offices (e.g., who is in charge during all phases of the strategy's implementation).		○
Coordination		
5c. Addresses mechanisms or processes for parties to coordinate efforts within agencies and with other agencies.		●
5d. Identifies process for resolving conflicts.		○
6. Description of strategy's integration among and with other entities	●	
6a. Addresses how the strategy relates to the strategies of other institutions and organizations and their goals, objectives, and activities (horizontal).		●
6b. Addresses integration with relevant documents from other agencies and subordinate levels (vertical).		●

- Generally addresses
- ◐ Partially addresses
- Does not address

Source: GAO analysis.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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Staff Acknowledgments

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