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U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

State Department and Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Post-9/11 Efforts but Challenges Remain

Statement of Jess T. Ford, Director
International Affairs and Trade



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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-04-1061T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations; Committee on Government Reform; House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Polls taken in Islamic countries after 9/11 suggested that many or most people had a favorable view of the United States and its fight against terrorism. By 2003, opinion research indicated that foreign publics, especially in countries with large Muslim populations, viewed the United States unfavorably. GAO issued two studies in 2003 that examined (1) changes in U.S. public diplomacy resources and programs since September 11, 2001, within the State Department (State) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG); (2) the U.S. government's strategies for its public diplomacy programs and measures of effectiveness; and (3) the challenges that remain in executing U.S. public diplomacy efforts.

GAO made several recommendations to State and the BBG to address planning and performance issues. Both agencies agreed with these recommendations and have made some progress in implementing them.

On July 22, 2004, the 9/11 Commission released its report and recommendations. Two of the Commission's recommendations relate to the management of U.S. public diplomacy. For this testimony, GAO was asked to discuss its prior work as it relates to these recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1061T.

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.

What GAO Found

Since September 11, 2001, State has expanded its public diplomacy efforts in Muslim-majority countries considered to be of strategic importance in the war on terrorism. It significantly increased resources in South Asia and the Near East and launched new initiatives targeting broader, younger audiences—particularly in predominantly Muslim countries. These initiatives are consistent with the 9/11 Commission's recommendation that the United States rebuild its scholarship, library, and exchange programs overseas. Since 9/11, the BBG has initiated several new programs focused on attracting larger audiences in priority markets, including Radio Sawa and Arabic language television in the Middle East, the Afghanistan Radio Network, and Radio Farda in Iran. The 9/11 Commission report highlights these broadcast efforts and recommends that funding for such efforts be expanded.

While State and BBG have increased their efforts to support the war on terrorism, we found that there is no interagency strategy to guide State's, BBG's, and other federal agencies' communication efforts. The absence of such a strategy complicates the task of conveying consistent messages to overseas audiences. Likewise, the 9/11 Commission recommended that the United States do a better job defining its public diplomacy message. In addition, we found that State does not have a strategy that integrates and aligns all its diverse public diplomacy activities. State, noting the need to fix the problem, recently established a new office of strategic planning for public diplomacy. The BBG did have a strategic plan, but the plan lacked a long-term strategic goal or related program objective to gauge the Board's success in increasing audience size, the key focus of its plan. We also found that State and the BBG were not systematically and comprehensively measuring progress toward the goals of reaching broader audiences and increasing publics' understanding about the United States. The BBG subsequently made audience size a key performance goal and added broadcaster credibility and plans to add other performance measures that GAO recommended.

In addition, State and BBG face several internal challenges in carrying out their programs. Challenges at State include insufficient public diplomacy resources and a lack of officers with foreign language proficiency. State officials are trying to address staffing gaps through increased recruitment. The BBG also faces a number of media market, organizational, and resource challenges that may hamper its efforts to generate large audiences in priority markets. It has developed a number of solutions to address these challenges.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss GAO's issued work on U.S. public diplomacy efforts and to focus specifically on the Middle East and related recommendations by the 9/11 Commission report. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a dramatic reminder of the importance of cultivating a favorable public opinion of the United States abroad. Recent opinion research indicates that foreign publics, especially in countries with large Muslim populations, view the United States unfavorably. Last September, we reported to the House International Relations Committee on the State Department's public diplomacy efforts.[1] In July 2003, we issued a report for that committee on the progress that the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG)—the agency responsible for nonmilitary U.S. international broadcasting—has made in developing a new strategic approach to reverse declining audience trends and support U.S. strategic objectives such as the war on terrorism.[2] The Department of State and the BBG share an annual budget of more than $1 billion for public diplomacy activities. While neither of our reports focused exclusively on the Middle East, each identified systemic problems that would apply to public diplomacy activities there.

Mr. Chairman, on February 10, 2004, I testified before you and this Subcommittee on public diplomacy.[3] Today, I will present a similar statement updated in light of the 9/11 Commission recommendations on public diplomacy. I will address (1) changes in U.S. public diplomacy resources and programs since September 11, 2001; (2) the government's strategies for its public diplomacy programs and measures of effectiveness; and (3) the challenges that remain in executing U.S. public diplomacy efforts. My testimony will highlight our findings that are relevant to specific 9/11 Commission recommendations to (1) rebuild our scholarship, exchange, and library programs overseas, and increase

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

[2]GAO, *U.S. International Broadcasting: New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audience but Lacks Measurable Program Objectives*, GAO-03-772 (Washington, D.C.: July 2003).

[3]GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Efforts in the Middle East but Face Significant Challenges*, GAO-04-435T (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 10, 2004).

support for broadcasting to Arabs and Muslims; and (2) better define the U.S.'s public diplomacy message.

As part of our past work underpinning our issued reports, we surveyed top officials of public affairs sections at U.S. embassies worldwide on such issues as guidance from various State Department offices; sufficiency of budgetary, staff, and other resources; and ability to adequately measure performance.[4] We met with relevant State officials, members of the BBG, and senior members of each broadcast entity to discuss management issues. We also met with academics specializing in public diplomacy and international affairs issues, and private sector officials from U.S. public relations and opinion research firms with international operations. While several government entities conduct public diplomacy activities, my comments will focus on State's and BBG's efforts since they were the subject of our work. We conducted our work from May 2002 to May 2003 and in August 2004 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Summary

Since September 11, 2001, both State and the BBG have expanded their public diplomacy efforts in Muslim-majority countries considered to be of strategic importance in the war on terrorism. In the 2 fiscal years since the terrorist attacks, State has increased its public diplomacy funding and staffing and expanded its programs in two regions with significant Muslim populations—South Asia and the Near East. Among other efforts, State is emphasizing exchange programs targeting young and diverse audiences, including high school students. State is also expanding its American Corners program, which provides information about the United States to foreign audiences through partnerships between U.S. embassies and local institutions. These efforts are consistent with the 9/11 Commission report recommendation that the United States rebuild its scholarship, exchange, and library programs for young people. In addition, since September 11, 2001, the Broadcasting Board of Governors has initiated several new programs focusing on attracting larger audiences in priority markets, including Radio Sawa in the Middle East, the Afghanistan Radio Network, and Radio Farda in Iran. Estimated start-up and recurring costs for these three projects through fiscal year 2003 totaled about $116 million. The Board also launched an Arabic language television network (Alhurra) in

[4]GAO surveyed 156 public affairs officers from March through May 2003; of these, 118 responded for a 76-percent response rate.

mid-February 2004. The 9/11 Commission report endorses Board requests for additional resources to expand its broadcast efforts targeted at Arabs and Muslims. However, although Board research indicates that these initiatives have garnered sizeable audiences, it is unclear whether program content is changing audience attitudes or increasing knowledge and awareness of issues of strategic interest to the United States.

In September 2003, GAO reported that that the U.S. government lacks an interagency public diplomacy strategy that defines the messages and means for governmentwide communication efforts targeted at overseas audiences. Likewise, the 9/11 Commission report recommended that the United States do a better job of defining its public diplomacy message. Because of their differing roles and missions, the State Department, Department of Defense, USAID, and others often focus on different audiences and use varying means to communicate with them. An interagency strategy would provide a framework for considering the foreign publics in key countries and regions, the relevant U.S. national security interests there, the U.S. government communication channels available, and optimal ways to convey the desired communication themes and messages. We also reported that State does not have a strategy that integrates its diverse public diplomacy activities and directs them toward common objectives, and that neither State nor the BBG has focused on measuring progress toward long-term goals. The absence of an integrated strategy may hinder State's ability to channel its multifaceted programs toward concrete and measurable progress. Finally, State is not systematically and comprehensively measuring progress toward its public diplomacy goals and thus has a limited ability to correct its course of action or direct resources toward activities that offer a greater likelihood of success. In comparison, the Broadcasting Board of Governors in July 2001 initiated a 5-year strategic approach to international broadcasting known as "Marrying the Mission to the Market," which emphasizes the need to reach large audiences by applying modern broadcast techniques and strategically allocating resources to focus on high-priority broadcast markets, such as the Middle East. However, we found that this plan lacked a long-term strategic goal or related program objective to gauge the Board's success in increasing audience size. Further, there were no measurable program objectives to support the plan's strategic goals or to provide a basis for assessing the Board's performance with regard to changing audience views toward the United States.

In addition, State and BBG face several internal challenges in carrying out their programs. According to public affairs officers at the State Department, these challenges include insufficient resources to effectively

conduct public diplomacy and a lack of public diplomacy officers with foreign language proficiency. More than 40 percent of the public affairs officers we surveyed said that the time available to devote exclusively to public diplomacy tasks was insufficient, and more than 50 percent reported that the number of Foreign Service officers available to perform such tasks was inadequate. Further, about 21 percent of the officers posted overseas in language designated positions have not attained the level of language speaking proficiency required for their positions, hampering their ability to engage with foreign publics. In addition, about 58 percent of the heads of embassy public affairs sections reported that Foreign Service officers do not have adequate time for training in the skills required to effectively conduct public diplomacy. The Broadcasting Board of Governors also faces resource issues, as well as a number of media market, organizational, and resource challenges that may hamper its efforts to generate large audiences in priority markets. These challenges include outmoded programs and poor signal quality; the disparate structure of the agency, which consists of seven separate broadcast entities and a mix of federal and grantee organizations collectively managed by a part-time Board; and the resource-intensive job of broadcasting 97 language services to more than 125 broadcast markets worldwide. The Board has developed a number of solutions to address these challenges.

GAO made several recommendations addressing planning and performance issues that the Secretary of State and the BBG have agreed to implement. GAO recommended that State develop a strategy that considers the use of private sector public relations techniques to integrate its public diplomacy efforts, improve performance measurement, and strengthen efforts to train Foreign Service officers in foreign languages and public diplomacy. Among GAO's recommendations to the BBG were that the Board revise its strategic plan to include audience size and other key measurable program objectives, implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project time frames, as well as a clear vision of the Board's intended scope of operations, particularly plans to reduce overlap.[5] In response to our recommendation that State develop a strategy that considers private sector techniques, State agreed, but no such strategy has been developed to date. However, State has begun the process of establishing a new office of strategic planning for public diplomacy.

[5]We reported overlap in 55 percent of the BBG's language services, meaning more than one service was reaching the same target audience in the same language.

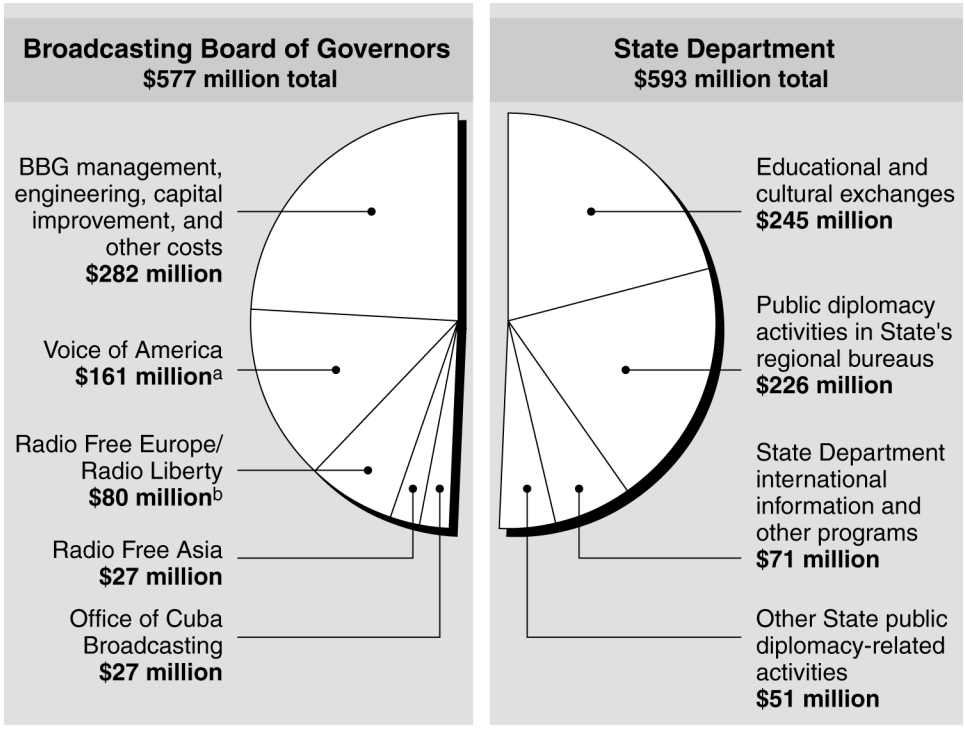
Regarding our recommendation to strengthen performance measurement efforts, State officials said that they are exploring ways to do so and State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has, among other things, begun conducting limited pre- and post-testing of its program participants' understanding of the United States. State acknowledged the need to strengthen training of Foreign Service officers and told us that the primary obstacle to doing so is insufficient staffing to allow time for training. Officials said they have already begun to address staffing gaps by stepping up recruitment efforts as part of the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative. In response to our recommendations to the BBG, the Board has revised its strategic plan to create a single strategic goal of maximizing impact in priority areas of interest and has made audience size a key performance measure. The Board has added broadcast credibility and audience awareness to its array of performance measures and plans to add a measure to determine whether its broadcasting entities are achieving their mission. Finally, the Board recently completed a review of language service overlap that identified about $9.7 million in potential savings. However, the Board has yet to revise its strategic plan to include details on implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project time frames for the various initiatives supporting its strategic goal of maximizing program impact.

Background

The key objectives of U.S. public diplomacy are to engage, inform, and influence overseas audiences. Public diplomacy is carried out through a wide range of programs that employ person-to-person contacts; print, broadcast, and electronic media; and other means. Traditionally, U.S. public diplomacy focused on foreign elites—current and future overseas opinion leaders, agenda setters, and decision makers. However, the dramatic growth in global mass communications and other trends have forced a rethinking of this approach, and State has begun to consider techniques for communicating with broader foreign audiences. The BBG, as the overseer of U.S. international broadcasting efforts, supports U.S. public diplomacy's key objectives by broadcasting fair and accurate information about the United States, while maintaining its journalistic independence as a news organization. The BBG manages and oversees the Voice of America (VOA), WorldNet Television, Radio/TV Marti, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Farda, the Middle East Television Network (which consists of Radio Sawa and Alhurra, the Board's new Arabic language television station), the Afghanistan Radio Network, and Radio Free Asia. Radio Sawa, Alhurra, and Radio Farda (Iran), provide regional and local news to countries in the Middle East.

Together, State and the BBG spend in excess of $1 billion on public diplomacy programs each year. State's public diplomacy budget totaled an estimated $628 million in fiscal year 2004. About 51 percent, or $320 million, is slated for the Fulbright and other educational and cultural exchange programs. The remainder covers mostly salaries and expenses incurred by State and embassy officers engaged in information dissemination, media relations, cultural affairs, speaker programs, publications, and other activities. BBG's budget for fiscal year 2004 is $546 million. This includes more than $42 million for radio and television broadcasting to the Middle East. Since initiating the language service review process in 1999, the Board has reduced the scope of operations of more than 25 language services and reallocated about $19.7 million in funds, with the majority redirected toward Central Asia and the Middle East, including $8 million for Radio Farda service to Iran.

Figure 1: Key Uses of U.S. Public Diplomacy Budget Resources for State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Fiscal Year 2003 Estimates



Source: State Department and BBG.

[a]Estimate includes $11 million for Radio Sawa.

[b]Estimate includes $3 million for Radio Farda.

More Public Diplomacy Resources Shifting to Muslim-Majority Countries

Since September 11, 2001, State has expanded its efforts in Muslim-majority countries that are considered strategically important in the war on terrorism. State significantly increased the program funding and number of Foreign Service officers in its bureaus of South Asian and Near Eastern Affairs. State has also launched a number of new initiatives targeting broader, younger audiences—particularly in predominantly Muslim countries—that include expanding exchange programs targeting citizens of Muslim countries, informing foreign publics about U.S. policies in the war on terrorism, and demonstrating that Americans and Muslims share certain values. The BBG has also targeted recent initiatives to support the war on terrorism, including Radio Sawa in the Middle East; the Afghanistan Radio Network; and the new Radio Farda service to Iran. In addition, the Board expanded its presence in the Middle East through the launch of the Alhurra satellite television network in mid-February 2004. The 9/11 Commission recommended that the United States rely on such programs and activities to vigorously defend our ideals abroad, just as the United States did during the Cold War.

State Has Increased Resources and Programs in the Middle East

Since September 11, 2001, the State Department has increased its resources and launched various new initiatives in predominantly Muslim countries. For example, while State's bureau of Europe and Eurasia still receives the largest overall share of overseas public diplomacy resources, the largest percentage increases in such resources since September 11 occurred in State's bureaus of South Asian and Near Eastern Affairs, where many countries have significant Muslim populations.[6] Public diplomacy funding increased in South Asia from $24 million to $39 million and in the Near East from $39 million to $62 million, or by 63 and 58 percent, respectively, from fiscal year 2001 through 2003. During the same period, authorized American Foreign Service officers in South Asia increased from 27 to 31 and in the Near East from 45 to 57, or by 15 percent and 27 percent, respectively.

Furthermore, in 2002, State redirected 5 percent of its exchange resources to better support the war on terrorism and to strengthen U.S. engagement with Muslim countries. In 2003, State has continued to emphasize exchanges with Muslim countries through its Partnership for Learning

[6]These countries include Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Program—designed to target young and diverse audiences through academic and professional exchanges such as the Fulbright, International Visitor, and Citizen Exchange programs. According to State, under this program, 170 high school students from predominantly Islamic countries have already arrived and are living with American families and studying at local high schools. State has also carried out increased exchanges through its Middle East Partnership Initiative, which includes computer and English language training for women newly employed by the Afghan government and a program to assist women from Arab countries and elsewhere in observing and discussing the U.S. electoral process. In addition, State is expanding its American Corners program, as recommended by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy in October 2003.[7] This program uses space in public libraries and other public buildings abroad to provide information about the United States. In fiscal year 2004, State is planning to establish 58 American Corners in the East and South Asia. In fiscal year 2005, State plans to open 10 in Afghanistan and 15 in Iraq.

State's Office of International Information Programs has also developed new initiatives to support the war on terrorism, including a print and electronic pamphlet titled The Network of Terrorism, distributed in 36 languages via hard copy, the Web, and media throughout the world, which documented the direct link between the September 11 perpetrators and al Qaeda; and a publication titled Iraq: From Fear to Freedom to inform foreign audiences of the administration's policies toward Iraq.

New BBG Initiatives Target Large Audiences in Priority Markets

Several of the BBG's new initiatives focus on reaching large audiences in priority markets and supporting the war on terrorism. The first of these programs, Radio Sawa in the Middle East, was launched in March 2002 using modern, market-tested broadcasting techniques and practices, such as the extensive use of music formats. Radio Sawa replaced the poorly performing VOA Arabic service, which had listening rates at around 2 percent of the population. According to BBG survey research, Radio Sawa is reaching 51 percent of its target audience and is ranked highest for news and news trustworthiness in Amman, Jordan. Despite such results, it remains unclear how many people Radio Sawa reaches throughout the entire Middle East because audience research has been performed only in

[7]Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds Winning Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 1, 2003).

selected markets. Further, the State Inspector General and the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World have raised questions about whether Radio Sawa has focused more on audience size and composition than on potential impact on attitudes in the region. The BBG has also launched the Afghanistan Radio Network and a language service to Iran called Radio Farda. Estimated costs for these three initiatives through fiscal year 2003 are about $116 million. In addition, the Board started Alhurra, an Arabic language television network in the Middle East, in mid-February 2004.

Planning Deficiencies, Inability to Gauge Progress Toward Goals Hinder U.S. Public Diplomacy Efforts

While the growth in programs to the Muslim world marks the recognition of the need to increase diplomatic channels to this population, there still is no interagency strategy to guide State's and all federal agencies' communication efforts and ensure consistent messages to overseas audiences. In addition, as of June 2004, State still lacked a comprehensive and commonly understood public diplomacy strategy to guide its programs. We agree with the 9/11 Commission recommendation that the U.S. government must define its message. State also is not systematically or comprehensively measuring progress toward its public diplomacy goals. In addition, we found that , although BBG has a strategic plan, the plan lacks a long-term strategic goal or related program objective to gauge the Board's success in increasing audience size. Further, the BBG's plan contains no measurable program objectives to support the plan's strategic goals or to provide a basis for assessing the Board's performance. Since our report, however, the Board revised its strategic plan and has improved its ability to gauge its program effectiveness measures by adding broadcast credibility and audience awareness measures. The Board also plans to add additional performance measures, such as whether broadcast entities are achieving their mandated missions.

Interagency Public Diplomacy Strategy Has Not Been Established

No interagency public diplomacy strategy has been implemented that lays out the messages and means for governmentwide communication efforts to overseas audiences. The absence of an interagency strategy complicates the task of conveying consistent messages and thus achieving mutually reinforcing benefits. State officials told us that, without such a strategy, the risk of making communication mistakes that are damaging to U.S. public diplomacy efforts is high. They also said that the lack of a strategy diminishes the efficiency and effectiveness of governmentwide public diplomacy efforts.

Our fieldwork in Egypt and Morocco underlined the importance of interagency coordination. Embassy officers there told us that only a very small percentage of the population was aware of the magnitude of U.S. assistance provided to their countries. Egypt is the second largest recipient of U.S. assistance in the world, with assistance totaling more than an estimated $1.9 billion in 2003. Assistance to Morocco totaled more than $13 million in 2003.

Most interagency communication coordination efforts have been ad hoc in recent years. Immediately after September 11, 2001, the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, and other agencies coordinated various public diplomacy efforts on a day-to-day basis, and the White House established a number of interim coordination mechanisms. One such mechanism was the joint operation of the Coalition Information Centers in Washington, London, and Islamabad, set up during the early stages of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan in 2001. The centers were designed to provide a rapid response capability for correcting inaccurate news stories, proactively dealing with news items likely to generate negative responses overseas, and optimizing reporting of news favorable to U.S. efforts.

In January 2003, the President established a more permanent coordination mechanism, the White House Office of Global Communications, which is intended to coordinate strategic communications from the U.S. government to overseas audiences. The President also established the Strategic Communication Policy Coordinating Committee, co-chaired by the State Department and the National Security Council and to work closely with the Office of Global Communications, to ensure interagency coordination in disseminating the U.S. message across the globe. Although it is the committee's long-term objective to develop a National Communications Strategy, according to recent conversations with U.S. officials, the committee has not met since March 2003.[8]

[8]In July 2004, the State Department established the Policy Coordinating Committee on Muslim World Outreach, according to State officials. This Committee has taken on much of the role of the Strategic Communication Policy Coordinating Committee.

State Does Not Have an Integrated Strategy to Guide Public Diplomacy Operations

After September 11, State acknowledged the need for a strategy that integrates all of its diverse public diplomacy activities and directs them toward common objectives, but to date, that strategy is still in the development stage. State officials told us that such a strategy is particularly important because State's public diplomacy operation is fragmented among the various organizational entities within the agency. Public affairs officers who responded to our survey indicated that the lack of a strategy has hindered their ability to effectively execute public diplomacy efforts overseas. More than 66 percent of public affairs officers in one region reported that the quality of strategic guidance from the Office of the Undersecretary at the time of our review (10/01-3/03) was generally insufficient or very insufficient. More than 40 percent in another region reported the same. We encountered similar complaints during our overseas fieldwork. For example, in Morocco, the former public affairs officer stated that so little information had been provided from Washington on State's post-September 11 public diplomacy strategy that he had to rely on newspaper articles and guesswork to formulate his in-country public diplomacy plans.

During our audit work, we learned that private sector public relations efforts and political campaigns use sophisticated strategies to integrate complex communication efforts involving multiple players. Although State's public diplomacy efforts extend beyond the activities of public relations firms, many of the strategic tools that such firms employ are relevant to State's situation. While it is difficult to establish direct links between public diplomacy programs and results, other U.S. government agencies and the private sector have best practices for assessing information disseminating campaigns, including the need to define success and how it should be measured. Executives from some of the largest public relations firms in the United States told us that initial strategic decisions involve establishing the scope and nature of the problem, identifying the target audience, determining the core messages, and defining both success and failure. Subsequent steps include conducting research to validate the initial decisions, testing the core messages, carrying out pre-launch activities, and developing information materials. Each of these elements contains numerous other steps that must be completed before implementing a tactical program. Further, progress must be measured continuously and tactics adjusted accordingly.

State Lacks Measures of Progress Toward Public Diplomacy Goals

We also found that 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 gauging progress toward changing foreign publics' understanding and attitudes about the United States. Some posts judge the effectiveness of their public diplomacy efforts by simply counting the number of public diplomacy activities that occur in their host country—for example, the number of speeches given by the ambassador or the number of news articles placed in the host-country media. While such measures shed light on the level of public diplomacy activity, they reveal little in the way of overall program effectiveness.

State currently has no reporting requirements in place to determine whether posts' performance targets are actually met. At one overseas post we visited, the post had identified polling data showing that only 22 percent of the host country's citizens had a favorable view of the United States—a figure the post used as a baseline with yearly percentage increases set as targets. However, a former public affairs officer at the post told us that he did not attempt to determine or report on whether the post had actually achieved these targets because there was no requirement to do so. Officials at the other two overseas posts we visited also cited the lack of any formal reporting requirement for following up on whether they met their annual performance targets. An official in State's Office of Strategic and Performance Planning said that they have now begun to require posts to report on whether they have met performance targets.

Furthermore, public affairs officers at U.S. embassies generally do not conduct systematic program evaluations. About 79 percent of the respondents to our survey reported that staffing at their missions was insufficient to conduct systematic program evaluations. Many officers also reported that staffing at posts was insufficient to carry out the long-range monitoring required to adequately measure program effectiveness. Even if sufficient staffing were available, State would still have difficulty conducting long-range tracking of exchange participants because it lacks a database with comprehensive information on its various exchange program alumni. State had planned to begin building a new worldwide alumni database with comprehensive data linking all of its various exchange programs. However, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs officials told us they had received insufficient funds to do so, and thus are seeking to improve existing information systems for individual exchange programs.

BBG Has Strategy for International Broadcasting and Has Made Progress in Measuring Performance

In contrast to State's lack of strategy, BBG has introduced a market-based approach to international broadcasting that aims to generate large listening audiences in priority markets that the Board believes it must reach to effectively meet its mission. Early implementation of this strategy has focused on markets relevant to the war on terrorism, in particular the Middle East. The Board's vision is to create a flexible, multimedia, research-driven U.S. international broadcasting system that addresses the many challenges we noted in our report, including an organizational structure that consists of several broadcast entities with differing missions, broadcast approaches, and constituencies.

In conducting our work on the BBG strategic plan, we found that the plan did not include a single goal or related program objective designed to gauge progress toward increasing audience size, even though its strategy focuses on the need to reach large audiences in priority markets. We also found that the plan lacked measurable program objectives to support its strategic goals, including a broadcaster credibility measure. The Board has taken several steps to address the recommendations we made in our report. First, the Board created a single strategic goal to focus on the key objective of maximizing impact in priority areas of interest to the United States and made audience size a key performance measure. Second, the Board has added broadcast credibility and plans to add the additional performance measures we recommended, including audience awareness and whether broadcast entities are achieving their mandated missions.

A Number of Internal Challenges Hamper U.S. Public Diplomacy Activities

Mr. Chairman, I have discussed the expansion of U.S. public diplomacy resources to areas of the world thought to breed terrorist activities and the need for a more cohesive, integrated U.S. public diplomacy strategy with measurable indicators of progress. There are other challenges our government faces in executing successful public diplomacy activities. According to public affairs officers, these challenges include insufficient time and staffing resources to conduct public diplomacy tasks. In addition, many public affairs officers reported that the time available to attend public diplomacy training is inadequate. Furthermore, a significant number of Foreign Service officers involved in public diplomacy efforts overseas lack sufficient foreign language skills. The Board's key challenge in executing its strategy is how to generate large audiences while dealing with a number of media market, organizational, and resources issues.

Insufficient Time and Staff

More than 40 percent of the public affairs officers we surveyed reported that 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 manage to attend U.S. and other foreign embassy receptions and functions within their host country capitals, it was particularly difficult to find time to travel outside the capitals to interact with ordinary citizens. More than 50 percent of those responding to our survey reported that the number of Foreign Service officers available to perform public diplomacy duties was inadequate. Although State increased the actual number of Americans in public diplomacy positions overseas from 414 in fiscal year 2000 to 448 in fiscal year 2002, State still had a shortfall of public diplomacy staff in 2002, based on the projected needs identified in State's 2002 overseas staffing model. In 2002, State's overseas staffing model projected the need for 512 staff in these positions; however, 64 of these positions, or 13 percent, were not filled.[9] In addition, about 58 percent of the heads of embassy public affairs sections reported that Foreign Service officers do not have adequate time for training in the skills required to effectively conduct public diplomacy.

We reported in 2002[10] that as part of its Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, State has launched an aggressive recruiting program to rebuild the department's total workforce. Under this initiative, State requested 1,158 new employees above attrition over the 3-year period for fiscal years 2002 through 2004, and according to State officials, the department has met its hiring goals under this initiative for fiscal years 2002 and 2003. However, it does not have numerical targets for specific skill requirements such as language proficiency or regional expertise. Although State officials are optimistic that enough new hires are being brought in to address the overall staffing shortage, there are no assurances that the recruiting efforts will result in the right people with the right skills needed to meet specific critical shortfalls.

Shortfalls in Foreign Language Skills

Insufficient foreign language skills pose another problem for many officers. As of December 31, 2002, 21 percent of the 332 Foreign Service officers filling "language-designated" public diplomacy positions overseas did not meet the foreign language speaking requirements of their

[9]State's overseas staffing model operates on a 2-year cycle. Fiscal year 2002 was the latest year for which data were available on the numbers of positions filled.

[10]GAO, *State Department: Staffing Shortfalls and Ineffective Assignment System Compromise Diplomatic Readiness at Hardship Posts*, GAO-02-626 (Washington, D.C.: June 18, 2002).

positions.[11] The highest percentages not meeting the requirements were in the Near East, where 30 percent of the officers did not meet the requirement. Although State had no language-designated positions for South Asia, it had eight language-preferred[12] positions, none of which was filled by officers who had reading or speaking capability in those languages. It is important to note that most of the foreign languages required in these two regions, such as Arabic and Urdu, are considered difficult to master. In contrast, 85 percent of the officers filling French language-designated positions and 97 percent of those filling Spanish language-designated ones met the requirements. Officers' opinions on the quality of the foreign language training they received also varied greatly by region. The Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy noted this challenge and recommended an increase in public diplomacy staff dedicated to issues of the Arab and Muslim world, with specific emphasis on enhancing fluency in local languages.

Foreign Service officers posted at the overseas embassies we visited and other State officials told us that having fluency in a host country's language is important for effectively conducting public diplomacy. The foreign government officials with whom we met in Egypt, Morocco, and the United Kingdom agreed. They noted that, even in countries where English is widely understood, speaking the host country's language demonstrates respect for its people and its culture. In Morocco, officers in the public affairs and other sections of the embassy told us that, because their ability to speak Arabic was poor, they conducted most embassy business in French. French is widely used in that country, especially in business and government. However, embassy officers told us that speaking Arabic would provide superior entrée to the Moroccan public. The ability to speak country-specific forms of Arabic and other more obscure dialects would generate even more goodwill, especially outside the major cities.

According to the department, the largest and most significant factor limiting its ability to fill language-designated positions is its long-standing staffing shortfall, which State's Diplomatic Readiness Initiative is designed

[11]Language-designated positions are graded for both speaking and reading proficiency. Most officers who do not meet one requirement do not meet the other one either, so the percentages are similar. For purposes of clarity, our figures refer only to the requirements for speaking proficiency.

[12]These are positions for which language capability is preferred but not required.

to fill. Other planned actions include bolstering efforts to recruit job candidates with target language skills, sending language training supervisors to posts to determine ways to improve training offerings, and developing a new "language continuum" plan to guide efforts to meet the need for higher levels of competency in all languages, especially those critical to national security concerns.

Outdated Broadcast Services and Structure Pose Challenges to Expanding in Priority Markets

The Broadcasting Board of Governors has its own set of public diplomacy challenges, key among them is how to gain large audiences in priority markets while dealing with (1) a collection of outdated and noncompetitive language services, (2) a disparate organizational structure consisting of seven separate broadcast entities and a mix of federal agency and grantee organizations that are managed by a part-time Board of Governors, and (3) the resource challenge of broadcasting in 97 language services to more than 125 broadcast markets worldwide. Although its strategic plan identifies a number of solutions to the competitive challenges the Board faces and provides a new organizational model for U.S. international broadcasting,[13] we found that the Board's plan did not include specifics on implementation strategies, resource requirements, project time frames, or a clear vision of the Board's intended scope of operations. The Board recently completed a review of the overlap issue and identified six approaches to addressing the problem while still meeting the discrete missions of the Voice of America and other broadcast entities. All of the Board's overlapping services were assessed against this analytical framework, and more than $9.7 million in potential savings for priority initiatives were identified. However, the Board has yet to revise its strategic plan to include details on implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project timeframes for the various initiatives supporting its overarching strategic goal of increasing program impact.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have at this time.

[13]The Board views the separate entities as part of a "single system" under the Board's direct control and authority.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

For future contacts regarding this testimony, please call Jess Ford or Diana Glod at (202) 512-4128. Individuals making key contributions to this testimony included Robert Ball, Lynn Cothern, and Michael ten Kate.

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