



# Hudson Institute

## Organizing the U.S. Government to Counter Hostile Ideologies

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As Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from July 2001 until August 2005, he helped devise the U.S. government's strategy for the war on terrorism and contributed to policy making for the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns.

Mr. Feith's duties included managing the Defense Department's international relations and representing the Department in interagency policy making.

Mr. Feith helped plan the worldwide changes in the U.S. defense posture, develop new U.S. strategic partnerships with India and Pakistan, promote NATO enlargement and reform and craft U.S. policy toward China. Mr. Feith advised President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld on the range of national security issues, including the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran, the counter-insurgency in Colombia and Palestinian-Israeli peace diplomacy.

Before President Bush appointed him in July 2001, Mr. Feith was for fifteen years the managing attorney of the Washington, D.C. law firm Feith & Zell, P.C.

In the Reagan Administration, Mr. Feith worked at the White House as a Middle East specialist for the National Security Council and then served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Negotiations Policy.

After each of his Pentagon tours, Mr. Feith received the Distinguished Public Service Medal, the Defense Department's highest civilian award.

Mr. Feith's writings on foreign and defense affairs have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Commentary*, *The New Republic* and elsewhere. He has contributed chapters to a number of books, including James W. Muller, ed., *Churchill as Peacemaker*; Douglas J. Feith, et al., *Israel's Legitimacy in Law and History*; and Uri Ra'anana, et al., eds., *Hydra of Carnage: International Linkages of Terrorism*.

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Dr. Shulsky is the author of the first edition of a college text book on intelligence, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, and the co-editor, with Gary J. Schmitt, of the second and third editions. His articles on intelligence and arms control have appeared in a number of journals. Dr. Shulsky received his undergraduate education at Cornell University, majoring in mathematics, and did his graduate work at the University of Chicago, where he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in political science.

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**Organizing the U.S. Government to Counter Hostile**  
**Ideologies**

**I. SUMMARY**

After 9/11, the Bush administration strove to understand the nature of the terrorism threat. Officials recognized that it was a far-ranging challenge with military, law enforcement, economic, philosophical, and ideological components. The strategy for responding to 9/11 produced vigorous activity in many arenas, but countering the enemy's ideology remained the least developed element of the Bush administration's war on terrorism. This was a significant deficiency because (as discussed in the next section) ideology is not only a key to al Qaeda's importance in the world but one of its main potential vulnerabilities as well.

Inadequate attention to the ideological dimension of the terrorism challenge is a problem still today, though the Obama administration's national security strategy emphasizes "soft power." In a revealing speech – "A New Approach to Safeguarding America"<sup>1</sup> – John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, advocated "a political, economic, and social campaign to meet the basic needs and legitimate grievances of ordinary people," so as to deny extremists the ability to recruit among them. "Soft power" should include efforts to counter the extremists' ideology. Yet that has not been acknowledged by Brennan or others in the administration. Brennan notes that, to isolate the extremists, it is necessary that "mainstream clerics and scholars ... teach that Islam promotes peace, not extremism," but he does not discuss a role here for either the U.S. government or American non-governmental organizations.

There are *organizational* challenges to integrating efforts to counter extremist ideology into U.S. national security strategy. How can operations regarding information become a key tool of national security policy? How can the government ensure that such operations receive the necessary resources and high-level attention and are properly coordinated with other policy tools? Would these purposes be served by the creation of a governmental agency like the old U.S. Information Agency? If so, what should its charter and activities be? What would be its relationship to the State Department? What should be the role of other U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan, John O. "A New Approach to Safeguarding Americans," Speech given at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, August 6, 2009. Available at [http://csis.org/files/attachments/090806\\_remarks\\_john\\_brennan.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/090806_remarks_john_brennan.pdf).

government departments and agencies – for example, the Defense Department and CIA?

The Hudson Institute Project Team, led by Douglas J. Feith and Abram N. Shulsky, has approached these questions by conducting our own research and by reaching out to experts in strategic communications, public diplomacy, and Islam. We conducted a series of interviews and, on September 16, 2009, hosted an off-the-record, not-for-attribution workshop in which current and former government and NGO officials and academics participated.

The Project Team considered various concepts for how the government should be organized to counter hostile ideologies, including, initially, the re-creation of a new agency along the lines of the former United States Information (USIA) and the creation of a non-governmental (but congressionally-funded) organization along the lines of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). In the course of the project, a new concept was developed: an international non-governmental organization to promote moderate thought – that is, favorable to individual rights, anti-extremist, anti-totalitarian, conducive to economic prosperity – in predominantly Muslim societies.

The case for an overhaul of American governmental and non-governmental structures is strong. In preparing our report, we did not limit our thinking to ideas that seemed immediately politically feasible. While the current political climate may not appear propitious for extensive reforms, it is hard to be certain until specific proposals are made and debated. In any case, we believe it is valuable to present meritorious proposals that could be acted on quickly should political circumstances change – as they might do, for example, if another large-scale attack occurred in the United States.

## **II. THINKING ABOUT "STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS"**

Commentators across the political spectrum have noted that the U.S. government has fared poorly in recent years in its efforts to counter hostile ideologies. This has been the conclusion of studies done inside and outside the government. Often, the problem is misconceived simply as a requirement to counter anti-Americanism in general or to handle criticism of specific, controversial US foreign policies. During the Cold War, the United States had a robust capability to conduct ideological campaigns through strategic communications and information operations. There has been little serious analysis of how our Cold War efforts should inform today's ideas-related strategies and activities.

A common criticism of U.S. strategic communications efforts is that we address Muslim audiences from an American point of view, in terms foreign to them. In devising a strategy for fostering thought and debate in the Muslim world, U.S. officials should consider that the counter-terrorism message may have to arise from within the Muslim world. It may be important that that message reflect aspirations,

and be expressed in terms, that resonate within Muslim communities. If that is the case, then the essential issue for U.S. officials is *not* what messages they should be transmitting into the Muslim world; rather, it is how they can *stimulate* and *shape* a debate among Muslims over the extremist ideologies promoted by al Qaida, Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations.

Given the importance of the dialogue among Muslims – as opposed to that between Muslims and non-Muslims – we should consider the role that private organizations (e.g., universities, think tanks, foundations, religious organizations) ought to play in a national U.S. strategic ideas effort. Careful thought is required as to how the government might help educate, inspire and mobilize private organizations without controlling them or compromising their independence – or being (wrongly) perceived to be pulling their strings.

The voluminous literature since 2001 on the subject of strategic communication does not address the organizational and operational requirements of a comprehensive government effort to counter a hostile ideology. Much of that literature frames the issue as essentially a public relations challenge, not a problem of countering an affirmative worldview antagonistic to the way of life of Western liberal democracies. For example, a prestigious group established by former Secretary of State Colin Powell to study the issue of public diplomacy defined the problem largely in terms of opposing “anti-Americanism.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, a Brookings Institution report presents the problem as one of “present[ing] a more accurate and nuanced vision of America” and “promot[ing] shared values and their champions.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, this report recommends supporting the initiative of a wide variety of institutions for “carry[ing] America’s values around the globe...”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World. *Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World*, 1 October 2003, p. 25. Accessible at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf>. (Hereafter, "Djerejian Report").

The report defines the problem as follows:

In the mid-1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States abandoned many of the tools of public diplomacy that had helped win the Cold War.... When the terrorists attacked on September 11, the importance of *opposing anti-Americanism* with words as well as weapons became obvious, but the United States was caught unprepared.”  
(Emphasis supplied.)

<sup>3</sup> Lord, Kristin M. *Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Brookings Institution, November 2008, p. 1. Accessible at [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/11\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_lord/11\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_lord.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/11_public_diplomacy_lord/11_public_diplomacy_lord.pdf). (Hereafter, "Lord Report").

<sup>4</sup> Lord Report, p. 4.

By contrast, the Defense Science Board recognized that “the United States is engaged in a generational and global struggle about ideas,...”<sup>5</sup> and that “Islam’s crisis must be understood as a contest of ideas and engaged accordingly.”<sup>6</sup> However, the Board’s report nevertheless sees the issue as one of American *credibility*, and of “open[ing] a working channel of communication,”<sup>7</sup> rather than our ability to affect the debate within the Muslim world by amplifying moderate voices and countering extremist ones.

### III. KEY THEMES

Drawing on its interviews and the September 16 conference, the Project Team developed a number of key themes.

- ***The key objective is not to induce Muslims to like the U.S., but to encourage them to reject understandings of Islam that condone and even encourage violence and subversion against the U.S. and the West.***

The Bush administration emphasized a public diplomacy campaign that focused on improving the United States “brand,” *i.e.*, encouraging an audience to view the United States, its values and its policies in a more favorable light. For example, a signature public diplomacy initiative was an advertising campaign depicting happy American Muslims. Though well intentioned, this self-referential effort didn't resonate with most Muslims. The campaign seemed remote and irrelevant to their everyday lives. It certainly didn't engage with their problems, whether they were economic, political, or related to US foreign policy.

Reducing anti-Americanism in the Muslim world is surely a desirable goal. But fiercely anti-American publics can still offer stiff opposition to Islamist extremist forces. In Pakistan, polling that registers near 70% disapproval<sup>8</sup> of the U.S. also shows 70% support<sup>9</sup> for military operations against the Pakistani Taliban. As of last

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<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, pp. 2, 17, 29. Accessible at [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic\\_Communication.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf). (Hereafter, Defense Science Board Report).

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<sup>6</sup> Defense Science Board Report, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Defense Science Board Report, pp. 41, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ramsay, Clay et al. "Pakistani Public Opinion on the Swat Conflict, Afghanistan, and the U.S.," WorldPublicOpinion.org, University of Maryland, 1 July 2009, p. 10. Accessible at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jul09/WPO\\_Pakistan\\_Jul09\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jul09/WPO_Pakistan_Jul09_rpt.pdf). (Hereafter, WorldPublicOpinion.org Report.)

<sup>9</sup> WorldPublicOpinion.org Report, p. 4.



February, approval ratings of the United States in Afghanistan had declined markedly<sup>10</sup>, but the Taliban's approval rating were less than 10%.<sup>11</sup>

- ***An effort to affect debate about Islam within Muslim societies is an appropriate component of an ideological campaign.***

Since 9/11, U.S. officials have been uneasy in commenting on Islam. Part of the reason is that the U.S. Constitution constrains officials regarding matters of belief and interpretation that are properly the concern of a religion's adherents and other private parties. Yet it is important to recognize that Islamist extremism is essentially not a religion but an ideology that exploits religious ideas and sensibilities for totalitarian political ends. The U.S. can deny the Islamists a "theological safe haven" by challenging their exploitation of religious doctrine and tradition. The question is how best to do this.

In a debate about interpretations of Islam and the duties of Muslims, the voices of non-Muslim Americans are not and cannot be of paramount importance. Rather, the most credible voices would be those of religious leaders and scholars within the Muslim world. They possess the credibility and knowledge needed to discredit Islamist extremists. But U.S. government agencies are often reluctant to support such individuals or organizations for fear of violating the principle of separation of church and state. (During the Cold War, however, USIA supported anti-Communist religious figures in various ways.) A non-governmental actor might more easily provide resources to amplify voices opposed to Islamist extremism.

- ***The United States should launch a campaign to promote anti-extremist Muslim voices to isolate Islamist totalitarians.***

In many Muslim societies, opportunities exist to isolate Islamist extremists. In Iran, the recently-deceased Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri criticized the Iranian government and questioned the legitimacy of Ayatollah Ali Khamanei's regime in a July 11, 2009 *fatwa*.<sup>12</sup> Ayatollah Montazeri's bold stand encouraged clerics opposed to the Iranian regime's violent suppression of protests. Iraqi Sunnis began to reject al Qaeda in Iraq by the summer of 2006, which was an important factor in the success of the U.S. troop surge. After the Pakistani Taliban violated a peace deal in Swat Valley, the Pakistani people strongly supported military operations in Swat and in South Waziristan. This public support was crucial as the Pakistani Army scored victories and removed Taliban militants from those regions.

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<sup>10</sup> ABC News, BBC, and ARD German TV. "Afghanistan: Where Things Stand," 9 February 2009 pp. 2-3. Accessible at <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1083a1Afghanistan2009.pdf>. (Hereafter, ABC/BBC/ARD Poll.)

<sup>11</sup> ABC/BBC/ARD Poll, pp. 20, 22.

<sup>12</sup> The fatwa is accessible at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/grand-ayatollah-montazeris-fatwa.html>.

These examples show the benefits of breaking down the Islamist extremist problem into small pieces. Instead of treating the extremists only as the bearers of a single ideology, the United States can use specific grievances against local extremist groups to spur resistance against them. In some cases, appeals to nationalism can undermine pan-Islamic aspirations. In other cases, it can be more effective to highlight the physical and cultural devastation wrought by the extremists. In still others, reconstruction and development assistance can serve as "communications" to turn local Muslims against the extremists. From Somalia to the Philippines, opportunities exist to counter the Islamist totalitarians.

The United States could do a great deal more to support networks of anti-extremist Muslims (including former Islamists) as it supported leftist anti-Communists during the Cold War. Two particularly notable Cold War examples of support of that kind were the Congress on Cultural Freedom and *Problems of Communism*. By sponsoring conferences, publications, and other forums, the United States amplifies constructive voices and encourages others to become involved through ideological and financial means.

- ***An ideas strategy should counter violent Islamist extremists and also those Islamists who, while not espousing violence, nevertheless seek to subvert democratic government.***

Support for peaceful Islamists may be part of a U.S. ideas strategy. Nevertheless, a comprehensive ideological effort should deal with nonviolent as well as violent extremists. The long-term health of democratic societies requires that their citizenry embrace values supportive of them, values which the Islamist extremists reject.

- ***The United States government currently lacks the personnel to conduct an effective ideological campaign.***

With the end of the Cold War and the abolition of USIA in 1999, the U.S. Government lost its cadre of officials with experience in the ideological struggle against Communism. This pool of talent no longer exists in the USG, and its absence adds to the difficulty of launching a new ideas campaign. The Project Team considered how a new agency could build its human capital. While strategic communications and public diplomacy experts disagree about the precise mix of personnel a new agency would need, they agreed that diverse skills are necessary.

A new agency should combine operational and regional expertise. It could include political operatives, intellectuals who specialize in the Muslim world and enterprising people capable of participating in covert information operations.

Building a cadre of ideological warriors will take time. Among other things, it will be necessary to establish a cooperative relationship with various sectors of American life, such as academia, religious organizations, and the international business community, that have expertise to contribute. In the meantime,

mechanisms can be developed to encourage current personnel to become more active in this area. For example, though many ambassadors don't see ideological work as part of their mission, an "Innovators Fund" could incentivize embassies to leverage their contacts, resources and technology to contribute to the ideological effort. The fund might be able to spur State officials by providing awards, resources, and direction from superiors.

#### **IV. CASE STUDY: BUREAUCRATIC DYSFUNCTION DURING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION**

After 9/11, Bush administration officials recognized the importance of the War on Terrorism's ideological component, and they moved to confront this issue.

At the State Department, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Charlotte Beers launched a public affairs blitz in the foreign media.<sup>13</sup> She also inaugurated a campaign called the Shared Values Initiative to show "happy Muslims" living in the United States.<sup>14</sup> The objective was to improve the U.S. "brand." The reference to the world of Madison Avenue is not by accident. Ms. Beers was herself a former advertising executive, and, in defending her appointment and approach to the problem, Secretary of State Colin Powell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "She got me to buy Uncle Ben's rice and so there is nothing wrong with getting somebody who knows how to sell something."<sup>15</sup>

The State Department's failure to deal with the extremist ideology is unsurprising. The Department is not well suited to counter hostile ideologies. In general, State tends to view problems as conflicts over negotiable issues - not ideologies - because ideological problems are more difficult (or impossible) to solve diplomatically. State also lacks an effective *operational* capability – its primary function is reporting of diplomatic communications.

For most of the Bush administration, the Public Diplomacy mission at State lacked strong and consistent leadership. Two other Bush administration Under Secretaries, Margaret Tutwiler (a public affairs professional) and Karen Hughes (a political operative) had relatively short tenures, and also focused on improving the American "brand." Leadership better-suited to dealing with the ideological challenge arrived only at the end of the Bush administration, with the appointment of James Glassman.

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<sup>13</sup> Becker, Elizabeth. "In the War on Terrorism, A Battle to Shape Opinion," *New York Times*, 11 November 2001. Accessible at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/11/us/nation-challenged-hearts-minds-special-report-war-terrorism-battle-shape-opinion.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>14</sup> The "most important" element of the Shared Values Initiative was a set of five television commercials. "Advertising's War on Terrorism — About SVI," Accessible at <http://www.osu-tulsa.okstate.edu/sharedvalues/svi.aspx>. The commercials are available at <http://www.osu-tulsa.okstate.edu/sharedvalues/commercials.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing: *The International Campaign Against Terrorism*, 25 October 2001, p. 25. Accessible at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107\\_senate\\_hearings&docid=f:75947.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107_senate_hearings&docid=f:75947.pdf).

Glassman recognized the importance of discrediting Islamists and treating Muslims as protagonists, not passive recipients of US messages. Despite the change in emphasis, Glassman's work had limited effect because he was in office for only a short time and was severely underfunded.

Though he recognized that State was the government's lead agency for public diplomacy, Project Team member Douglas J. Feith established the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) at the Department of Defense in late 2001. Led by Air Force Brigadier General Simon "Pete" Worden, OSI was designed to conduct operations to counter the ideology of our jihadist terrorist enemies. The office developed innovative plans to distribute tens of thousands of satellite radios and "Internet-in-a-box" laptop computers to Pakistan's border areas. Worden viewed information as the decisive weapon in the War on Terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

Public affairs officials at the Pentagon resisted OSI, however. They saw its existence as an intrusion into their bureaucratic turf. Perhaps as a result of this dispute, an unnamed Pentagon official reportedly gave a story to the *New York Times*<sup>17</sup> accusing OSI of planning to plant disinformation in foreign newspapers. Even though the accusation was entirely false, political pressure compelled the shutting down of the office.

The OSI episode had a lasting chilling effect on strategic communications efforts at the Department of Defense. Along with the criticism that the Pentagon received for "militarizing" foreign policy, that episode is among the reasons why the Pentagon cannot lead a government-wide effort to counter hostile ideologies. There were some other initiatives, including the Joint Psyop Support Unit and the Office of Support to Public Diplomacy, but they were either small in scale or did not survive the transition to the Obama administration.

## V. CASE STUDY: THE COLD WAR MODEL

The current situation has some similarities to the circumstances in which the U.S. Government found itself at the beginning of the Cold War. While, in general, the U.S. Government could openly propagate the values of liberty, it faced the objection that such activities constituted interference in the internal affairs of other countries. This became a major issue in various parts of the world.

Thus, in cases such as the Italian election of 1948, in which strong Communist Party gains were feared, much of the U.S. effort to influence the election's outcome was

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<sup>16</sup> Kaplan, David E. "How the rocket scientists got into the hearts-and-minds game," *US News and World Report*, 17 April 2005. Accessible at [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050425/25roots.b1\\_print.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050425/25roots.b1_print.htm).

<sup>17</sup> Dao, James and Eric Schmitt. "A National Challenged: Hearts and Minds; Pentagon Readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad," *New York Times*, 19 February 2002. Accessible at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/19/world/nation-challenged-hearts-minds-pentagon-readies-efforts-sway-sentiment-abroad.html?pagewanted=all>.

conducted covertly, via the newly-created CIA Office of Policy Coordination. Similarly, the CIA's Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty – designed to serve as “surrogate” domestic broadcasting services for populations living under Communist governments – were set up and operated as ostensibly non-government organizations.

Of particular relevance to the current situation is the fact that, in the aftermath of World War II, there was an important debate in which the U.S. Government couldn't intervene directly – the clash in European leftist circles between Communists and democratic socialists. It was very much in the American interest that the latter hold their own in that debate, something made more difficult by the funding their opponents received from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, open U.S. Government involvement would have “tainted” the democratic forces and made them less effective.

This led to a CIA covert action effort to enable the democratic socialists to wage an “ideological struggle” against Communism, for example by providing them resources for conferences and publications. This support facilitated the establishment of such organizations as the Congress of Cultural Freedom and the publication of journals such as *Encounter*. Also supported were various U.S. organizations – most notoriously the National Students Association – so that they could confront Soviet-backed groups in international meetings.

Revelations of these CIA covert activities in the 1960s and 1970s forced an end to them. In some cases, such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, U.S. Government support was provided openly, by means of Congressional appropriations through, first, the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) and, then, after 1995, through the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

## **VI. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT LEGISLATION**

### **A. Brownback Bill**

The most significant strategic communications legislation before the last Congress was S. 3546, the "Strategic Communications Act of 2008." Introduced by On September 23, 2008, Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) introduced the “Strategic Communications Act of 2008” (S. 3546).<sup>18 19</sup> The bill would establish the "National Center for Strategic Communication" - essentially a new USIA. The Center would:

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<sup>18</sup> Brownback, Senator Sam. "S. 3546 - Strategic Communications Act of 2008," 23 September 2008, US Government Printing Office, Washington. Accessible at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:s3546is.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_bills&docid=f:s3546is.txt.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> There is an updated draft of the legislation, but the new version has not been presented before the Senate. This is the reason for any difference between the terms used in this report and those used in the September 2008 bill.

- Serve as the primary organization in the U.S. Government for conducting strategic communications;
- Develop and oversee the execution of the national strategic communications strategy;
- Encourage private institutions in the U.S. to develop their own exchange activities, and to provide assistance for such activities;
- Direct and coordinate foreign broadcasting by the U.S. Government; and
- Conduct research in relevant areas.

A Director would run the National Center for Strategic Communication. Beneath the Director would be three directorates headed by Assistant Directors. The first would be the Global Communications Corps, to serve as the connection between the Center and the U.S. presence overseas. Global Communications Corps members would deploy to embassies or consulates as members of the CIA do and as USIA personnel used to do. They would maintain contact with the Chief of Mission but also report back to the Center in Washington. By integrating with embassies and consulates, Corps members could take advantage of military and diplomatic contacts and exchanges.

The second directorate would be for Information Operations. The Assistant Director would supervise all U.S. government international broadcasting. The chief objectives of the office would be to preserve the distance between government and surrogate radio and to make the Voice of America a more strategic instrument.

The third directorate would deal with Global Networks, with responsibility for private sector and NGO outreach and for educational and cultural exchanges. The Global Networks directorate would build networks of foreigners who have participated in exchange programs and encourage them to speak and write about the United States in their home countries.

The Brownback legislation calls for the creation of an interagency board which would have representatives from across government with the goal of coordinating and obtaining buy-in from the federal agencies. Because the Director of the Center would report to the President, the Center would be a bureaucratic "free agent." In the absence of a cabinet member responsible for the Center, it might find itself disadvantaged in interagency disputes concerning budget and legislative authority.

Although the Brownback bill did not attract co-sponsors, there is bipartisan interest in the concept.

## B. Thornberry Bill

Representative William "Mac" Thornberry (R-TX) introduced H.R. 489, the "Strategic Communication Act of 2009," on January 13, 2009.<sup>20</sup> The bill draws from the results of the Defense Science Board September 2004 report. Its centerpiece is the creation of a private, federally-funded "Center for Strategic Communication" to undertake a wide range of activities.

These activities would be wide-ranging, including:

- providing decision makers with information and analysis relevant to strategic communications;
- developing plans, themes, products, and programs for communication strategies;
- contracting with NGOs, academics, and other private sector organizations for products and programs that communicate strategic messages to target audiences;
- developing tools and techniques for evaluating government messages; and
- providing support services to the U.S. Government, including the ability to deploy temporary communication teams.

The Secretary of State would have the authority to select a private non-profit institution to create the Center. The scope of activities assigned to the Center is extremely broad, and the bill recognizes this by authorizing an annual budget of \$250 million, to be administered by the Department of State. Additional funds could be provided via task orders from U.S. Government departments and agencies for additional projects and programs.

The current draft raises the question of whether it would be politically feasible to assign such vast responsibilities to a private institution, and what oversight mechanisms would be necessary. The Department of State, as the contracting agency, would be accountable to Congress for the activities of the Center but, given the nature of some of them, Congress might wish to have a more direct oversight role.

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<sup>20</sup> Thornberry, Representative William "Mac." "H.R. 489 - Strategic Communication Act of 2009," 13 January 2009, US Government Printing Office, Washington. Accessible at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:h489ih.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:h489ih.txt.pdf).

## **VII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. The Need for a Two-Pronged Approach**

The U.S. Government is not now postured to conduct a successful ideas campaign to deal with the problem of terrorism in today's world. As the recommendations below suggest, we believe that some restructuring – including the creation of new government and non-governmental organizations -- is necessary. The political climate may not be propitious for extensive reforms, though it is hard to tell until serious reform proposals are put forward and debated. But that climate can change quickly. These recommendations are developed in the belief that, even if not practical now, these ideas would enable us when the time is right to come forward quickly with well-thought out proposals that could be implemented.

We think a new agency modeled on USIA would improve U.S. ideological efforts. It could focus such efforts and promote their importance alongside other instruments of national power. It could also foster the development of a cadre of strategic communications professionals, improve U.S. international broadcasting, and bring other benefits. But by itself, the new agency couldn't solve the problems mentioned above.

In all events, government action alone is insufficient for a comprehensive ideological effort. The USG is ill-suited to perform many activities necessary for such a campaign. It is difficult, for example, for the USG to engage with religious subject matter. But discussion of religion is essential in an ideological conflict in which Islamist extremists lay false claim to religious legitimacy. Dealing with the Islamist extremism problem involves discrediting such claims and promoting the voices opposing the extremists.

Furthermore, there are instances where USG communications lack credibility with particular audiences. In such cases, the USG must deliver its messages (or support those delivering messages) indirectly. One way of doing this would be through a private, non-profit organization supported by the government. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a private, non-profit organization which provides support for advocates of democracy abroad, is an example of this type of indirect support.

A solution, therefore, is the establishment of both a new governmental agency and a non-governmental agency to contribute to an ideological campaign.

#### **1. Create a New USIA**

Even if a new private, federally-funded, organization were created, it could not conduct the more traditional types of public diplomacy, which would remain in the State Department's bailiwick. These activities, which were in the purview of USIA



before its abolition in 1999, now fall under the authority of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

It is generally agreed that the public diplomacy mission has not fared well within the State Department. For example, in its report, the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, chaired by Edward Djerejian, noted that the integration of USIA into the State Department has not achieved the goal of coordinating public diplomacy with policymaking:

First, the institutional culture of much of the department has persisted in viewing public diplomacy as a secondary function and career path. Second, the clarity of coordination and communication that characterized the relationship between USIA's strategic center in Washington and its operational posts in the field has yet to be duplicated within the new structure.<sup>21</sup>

There are additional reasons why State might not be the appropriate place to house the public diplomacy function:

- Public diplomacy requires a long-term strategic perspective. The effects of individual actions may take years to bear fruit. For example, a student exchange program may bear fruit only decades later when the foreign students who spent time in the U.S. rise to positions of influence in their countries.<sup>22</sup> The State Department, on the other hand, tends to take a tactical approach to problems.
- Public diplomacy may require actions that anger foreign governments with whom the U.S. has good diplomatic relations. Thus, there will frequently be good tactical diplomatic reasons for postponing or cancelling a public diplomacy initiative.
- As an organization whose primary function is traditional diplomacy, the State Department tends toward a realist-school interpretation of international relations. It analyzes the world in terms of state power and state interests, the concepts with which diplomacy can most effectively deal. The *ideological* motivations for behavior are correspondingly downplayed. Yet it is precisely with problematic ideas that public diplomacy must grapple.

Many of the recent public reports on public diplomacy recognize the deleterious effects of USIA's abolition, but none calls for its re-creation.<sup>23</sup> A RAND report<sup>24</sup> summarizes the state of the debate as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> Djerejian Report, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the pay-off for programs that enroll promising young foreign military officers in U.S. military schools comes only decades later, as those students rise to positions of power within their own military establishments. Thus, cutting off such programs for immediate diplomatic reasons, such as to express displeasure with a specific policy of the foreign government, can be a very expensive proposition in the long run.

<sup>23</sup> See Lord Report, p. 4.

While the disestablishment of USIA in 1999 is widely viewed as unfortunate, commentators also identified several significant barriers to its reestablishment. First it would take some time... Second, and compounding the first, is that the new agency would, by necessity, strip personnel from existing organizations and dismantle the existing network, thus resulting in a step backward and lost time before the next step forward is taken. Third, it is not clear that the new USIA would be a complete solution.

Clearly, the arguments against creating a new USIA do not address the specific predicament of the public diplomacy function within State today, but are the kinds of points one can direct against any reorganization. Such points have some validity – reorganization is a messy business that imposes serious costs and should not be undertaken lightly. But just as obviously, it is wrong to think it is never justified.

We recommend giving serious consideration to the creation of a new government agency along the lines of the former USIA.<sup>25</sup> To ensure coordination with foreign policy objectives, and to provide the new agency some clout for budget battles, it would make sense for the USIA Director to report to the Secretary of State. Nevertheless, the creation of a separate organization would have some significant advantages:

- It would facilitate the development of a corps of public diplomacy/strategic communications specialists, and give them a career path leading to positions of responsibility within the new agency.
  - These individuals would serve in the field at U.S. embassies and consulates abroad as well as in the agency's Washington headquarters. This would facilitate coherent execution of programs.
- A new agency would develop its own training curriculum, and could help spark the development of training programs in non-government academic institutions. This would facilitate the development of expertise in this area.

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Though some now regret the demise of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and we might be pleased with that organization if it existed today, we should not simply recreate it now.

See also Kerry, Senator John F. "U.S. Public Diplomacy – Time to Get Back in the Game," S. Prt. 111-6 — A Report to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 13 February 2009, p. 1. Accessible at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_senate\\_committee\\_prints&docid=f:47261.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:47261.pdf).

... most agree that U.S. focus on Public Diplomacy began to diminish from this point on [abolition of USIA in 1999]. (Nonetheless, re-creating USIA, or something similar, is neither feasible nor affordable in today's budgetary environment.)

<sup>24</sup> RAND Report, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Senator Brownback (R-KS) has been a proponent of establishing such an organization.

- The new agency could be a vigorous sponsor of research on issues relating to our strategic communication efforts.
- A new agency would be better positioned to develop and execute long-term strategic communications strategies. While overall coordination with foreign policy would be secured by having the agency director report to the Secretary of State, the working levels would be insulated from any attempts by State Department country desks to modulate the strategic communication efforts to serve day-to-day tactical diplomatic interests.

## **2. Create a Private Organization**

We recommend that a private, non-profit organization be created as a mechanism for influencing the debates within Muslim societies in favor of those who reject extremist Islamism. A private, nonprofit organization would be better postured than the USG to support groups and individuals who propound moderate views and oppose extremist ones. Such support could include fellowships for scholarship and writing, sponsorship of conferences and other venues for networking, establishment and financial support for platforms (publications, broadcasting, etc.) for voicing moderate views and other means for carrying on the debate.

A private organization could provide this support without “tainting” recipients as direct U.S. Government beneficiaries.<sup>26</sup> It could also help mobilize the efforts of private groups and individuals across the U.S. and in other countries. The most important progress in this type of campaign will come from bold and creative individual religious thinkers and groups – and private organizations would be more likely to recognize and be willing to support such individuals and groups than would a government agency. In addition, the creation of such an organization would support the building up of expertise and provide continuity across Administrations.

## **3. The NED Model**

Such an organization could be created on the model of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), along the following lines:

- Incorporation of a non-profit organization in the District of Columbia by a group of prominent U.S. citizens.
  - The organization could be governed by a self-perpetuating board of directors, whose initial members would be chosen by the incorporators.

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<sup>26</sup> One could object that, given that the organization would be funded by the U.S. Congress, the U.S. “taint” is inevitable. This is true to some extent, but it would be a matter of degree. The new organization would not be directly involved in pursuing specific U.S. foreign policy interests, and its leadership would include prominent individuals not associated with, and perhaps publicly known as being opposed to, the Administration of the moment. It is a common trope of many anti-U.S. governments and groups that they are not opposed to the American people, but only to the policies of its government. This form of organization is an attempt to leverage that position.

Its articles of incorporation could list the organization's objectives, along the lines discussed above.

In analyzing the NED model, the Project Team examined the July 1983 report that led to NED's formation. Entitled *The Commitment to Democracy: A Bipartisan Approach*<sup>27</sup>, it was produced by the American Political Foundation's (APF) Democracy Program, a bipartisan team co-chaired by Ambassador William E. Brock III and the heads of the Republican and Democratic National Committees, Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr. and Charles T. Manatt, respectively. It detailed the history of U.S. democracy promotion efforts; emphasized the importance of reaching out to nongovernmental actors; and included a proposal for NED and four subordinate institutes.

After its establishment in 1979, the APF leadership worked to build bipartisan interest in building a democracy promotion "quango" (quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization). Between 1979 and 1982, support for U.S. democracy promotion efforts increased. President Reagan's election in 1980 marked a turning point.

On June 4, 1982, APF leaders wrote a letter<sup>28</sup> to President Reagan recommending a study to resolve questions about establishing a democracy promotion quango. President Reagan's enthusiasm for the idea was evident from his having made it a key part of his famous democracy speech to the British Parliament<sup>29</sup> on June 8. The Democracy Program commenced the study in the following November.

#### **4. Problems in Adopting the NED Model**

The NED itself has been remarkably successful in involving non-governmental organizations in an effort of major strategic significance for the United States. There are several reasons, however, why the model might not be suitable for the mission of countering hostile ideologies.

First of all, there would be considerable overlap between the activities of the NED and of the new organization. The NED's current activities promote the ideas on which democracy rests and aim to strengthen the institutions which make democracy possible. Throughout the Democracy Project Report, it is clear that ideological and institutional efforts complement each other.<sup>30</sup> The creation of a new organization on the NED model could create confusion and lead to unnecessary duplication.

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<sup>27</sup> The Democracy Program. *The Commitment to Democracy: A Bipartisan Approach* (Hereafter, The Democracy Project Report), 27 July 1983. Accessible at <http://www.ned.org/about/democracyProgram.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> The Democracy Project Report, Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> The Democracy Project Report, Appendix G.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see the Democracy Program Report, pp. 39-42.

Second, and more significantly, the NED does most of its work through four affiliated institutions, representing the two major political parties, the AFL-CIO and major business organizations. These four affiliates have their own status as private organizations that are major constituents of U.S. “civil society.” The NED can therefore persuasively claim that it represents and acts of behalf of the U.S. as a society, rather the U.S. Government. This structural feature is helping in presenting its activities as promoting U.S. principles and ideals rather than promoting U.S. foreign policy interests.

It is not clear, however, that a new organization on the NED model could duplicate the NED affiliate system. In the case of NED, for example, the AFL-CIO had long experience in helping democratic labor unions abroad. As for the political parties, there was already the precedent of the West German pro-democracy *Stiftungen*, run by the main political parties. For the new organizations, there would be no such already-existing private organizations that could serve as “affiliates.”

### **5. *An Alternative to the NED Model – An International Organization***

An alternative approach would be to facilitate the creation of *an international organization* by a group of prominent U.S. and foreign citizens. Especially if it could obtain funding from foreign governments or other foreign sources, as well as from the United States, an international organization might have greater credibility than a U.S. organization would.

A new international organization could make grants to private U.S. or foreign organizations or individuals. It could also enter into cooperative arrangements with private groups (such as universities, academic associations, and other non-profit organizations) to support programs to further its objectives. It could consult with officials of the governments providing funding; in the case of the U.S., it could consult with the Secretary of State or other USG officials on its projects.

One advantage of establishing a *non-governmental* organization would be greater flexibility in supporting projects, especially regarding interpretation of religion. As it gains experience, the new organization could develop new ideas for countering Islamist extremism. Such an organization could engage in the following types of activities:

- Support for private counter-radicalization organizations, such as:
  - Quilliam Foundation (UK)
  - WORDE - World Organization for Resource Development and Education
  - Wahid Institute (Indonesia)
  - American Islamic Congress

- Facilitate creation of similar organizations where none exist.
- Translation and distribution of anti-al Qaeda, anti-jihadist and anti-takfirist literature by Muslim clerics. (For example, a former al Qaeda theorist, Dr. Fadl, has written extensively rebutting his previous theological justifications for terrorism.)
- Support for anti-extremist Muslim writers, including novelists, playwrights, etc.
  - Facilitating publication and translation of their works.
  - Facilitating the use of their works in U.S. broadcasting to Muslim countries.
- Projects promoting anti-extremist education in Muslim countries (direct support, facilitating networking, etc.)
- Support for conferences and publications allowing anti-extremist Muslim thinkers to network and communicate with each other.
- Organize ways to fund projects through “micro-granting,” possibly through the Internet.

The organization could also create a research arm, which could help develop “doctrine” for the new organization, including:

- More precise definitions of categories of extremists groups.
- Criteria for prioritizing groups and ideologies as to effort that should be devoted to countering them.
- Study of approaches and techniques for countering extremist ideologies, including historical research on past cases of successful ideological campaigns. Subjects of such research could include:
  - The ideological struggle against Communism in the Cold War.
  - Examples of the de-legitimation of deeply-entrenched institutions such as slavery and dueling.
  - Lessons to be learned from other examples of philosophical “sea changes” such as the Enlightenment, environmentalism, and feminism.

## **6. Consider a Possible Role for Covert Action**

As compared to the early Cold War period, the tendency in the past several decades has been to shift away from covert support for international political activity. For example, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) now operates under the

authority of the Board of Broadcasting Governors rather than as “independent” radio stations covertly supported by the CIA. Similarly, much of the type of work supported by the National Endowment for Democracy might, in the early Cold War years, have been funded covertly.

The new non-governmental organization we are proposing, while not controlled by the U.S. Government, could be openly funded by it.

Nevertheless, there may be a useful role for covert action in a fully developed strategic communication strategy.

- One of the most potent weapons of the Enlightenment in its battle against religious fanaticism and intolerance was ridicule. While Western expressions of anger directed against al Qaeda and similar groups may have the counterproductive effect of making those groups seem more important and powerful than they really are, ridicule could help cut them down to size.
  - According to one study,<sup>31</sup> “Arab, Iranian and Indonesian stand-up comics already perform stinging political satire but few are well-known and even fewer have outlets, though if they were ‘discovered’ their listenership could be in the hundreds of millions.”
  - It might be useful to provide covert support through, for example, private media corporations that would facilitate the broadcasting of their work.
- Similarly, other entertainment formats (e.g., “soap operas” or sitcoms) could be highly effective in spreading anti-extremist messages, covert support may be sensible.
- The extremists’ use of internet websites and “chat rooms”<sup>32</sup> to communicate among themselves is a vulnerability that U.S. covert action could exploit. If a covert action operative could pose convincingly as an extremist group representative, for example, he or she could sow dissension and confusion as part of an overall strategy to discredit extremist ideas.

We recommend further consideration of possible activities in this area.

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<sup>31</sup> Waller, J. Michael. “Ridicule: An instrument in the war on terrorism,” Institute of World Politics, Public Diplomacy White Paper No. 7, 9 February 2006, p. 9. Accessible at [http://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20060209\\_RidiculeasaWeapon2.2.1.pdf](http://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20060209_RidiculeasaWeapon2.2.1.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> While some of these chat rooms may be password-protected, this should not be an insuperable obstacle.

### ***7. Strengthen the Defense Department Role***

Although it is in a supporting role with respect to strategic communications, the Defense Department has a great deal it can contribute. In theaters of conflict, of course, psychological operations (PYSOPS) are a recognized component part of military operations. However, Defense Department peacetime activities can also contribute to a strategic ideas campaign.

For example, military-to-military activities (such as the attendance of foreign military officers at U.S. professional military education programs) are important elements of public diplomacy: they bring a key foreign constituency, the military's officer corps, in close contact with Americans. While the formal education program is not ideological as such, the experience of living in the U.S. and interacting closely with American counterparts can influence the participants in beneficial and long-lasting ways. Relationships develop with large pay-offs over time, as the foreign-officer participants rise through the ranks of their countries' military establishments. At least some military-to-military activities should be recognized as long-term investments that should not be disrupted for tactical reasons.

Similarly, the major unified military commands (such as CENTCOM) have established websites and other means of communicating with the populations of the countries in their areas of responsibility (AORs). A strong government-wide strategic communications effort can provide a framework and guidance for these activities.

### ***8. Strengthening Coordination Role of Deputy National Security Adviser***

There is no substitute for strong and consistent White House involvement in a strategic ideas campaign. The most important communicator for the U.S. Government is, of course, the President himself, and President Obama has embraced this role.

The mechanisms of the interagency process for coordinating strategic communications efforts are less important than the clear demonstration of Presidential interest in the subject. The process should therefore be headed by someone at the level of the Deputy National Security Adviser. This level of involvement should suffice to ensure that a newly created USIA-type agency would receive adequate budgetary support and would be able to exercise interagency leadership in implementing policies.



## VIII. CONCLUSION

The United States confronts an Islamist extremism problem. The ideological component is a key, if not *the* key, dimension. The U.S. should afford the same priority to a strategic ideas campaign as it does to capturing or killing violent Islamist extremists.

A successful campaign requires the coordination of public and private effort at both the domestic and international levels. This type of coordination occurred in a number of historical examples of effective strategic ideas campaigns – such as movements against slavery, against dueling, for feminism and for environmental causes. Individual and group advocacy created overlapping networks and a more or less ubiquitous presence in key societies.

Members of the Obama administration have spoken frequently of their interest in "smart" power, giving greater emphasis to the softer instruments of national power. A strategic ideas campaign to combat Islamist extremism and the related terrorism problem would be an application of the smart power concept. But even if the President were determined to launch such a campaign, and thereby correct a deficiency in President Bush's war on terrorism, he would find that the U.S. government lacks the necessary tools.

This report has focused on questions crucial to providing the President with the tools to counter ideologies hostile to the United States, including Islamist totalitarianism. How should the government be organized to wage an ideological campaign? What should such a campaign aim to accomplish? What are acceptable means and themes? How can our country develop a cadre to do such work skillfully? What are the roles of private entities – and of international organizations? The Project Team has offered preliminary answers. The ideas developed by the Project Team have won a respectful hearing in various quarters in official Washington. It may be possible to translate those ideas into practical results. More work is required. The stakes are high. The Project Team remains committed to the task of creating capabilities that the U.S. government can use to engage in a battle of ideas against our ideological enemies.

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