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Conducting a War of Ideas with Public Diplomacy: An insider's view

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The purpose of U.S. public diplomacy is to reach the audiences of key foreign countries, outside of the bilateral channels of traditional diplomatic relations, with ideas that are powerful enough to form their disposition toward the U.S. and its ultimate objective of advancing freedom and democracy in the world. This broad objective, emanating from the Founding documents of the U.S., encompasses the promotion of U.S. policies as they are related to it. However, public diplomacy is, essentially, the defense and promotion of the Founding principles of America. Anything less is an exercise in public relations related to the advancement of a particular policy at a specific time, for example, a free trade agreement or an arms control measure. This is why, at times of national peril, the call goes forth not for more public relations, but for a public diplomacy that can engage in the war of ideas. It is vital to get public diplomacy right because modern wars are most often manifestations of wars of ideas. The final victory takes place not on the battlefield, but in the human mind.

How to conduct a war of ideas

There are several fundamental maxims for the successful conduct of a war of ideas. In order to fight a war of ideas, one has to have an idea. This is not as simple as it may sound. A war of ideas is a struggle over the very nature of reality for which people are willing to die. Therefore, the first thing one must do is formulate the ideas that are so central to one's life that one is not willing to live without them. For a

nation successfully to project such ideas, there must be a broad consensus within it as to what those ideas are.

Second, one cannot go into a war of ideas until one understands the ideas with which one is at war. Such wars are always conducted in terms of moral legitimacy. The defense of one's ideas and the attack on those of the enemy are conducted with moral rhetoric. "Axis of evil" is a perfect example, as is "the great Satan." All moral differences are at root theological, even if secular society pretends that they are not.

Third, wars of ideas, by definition, can only be fought by and with people who think. This defines the natural target audience for this war, the so-called "elites." The term "elite" is not determined by social or economic status, but by intellectual capabilities. Trying to use ideas to influence people who do not think is an exercise in futility. Such people are led and influenced by those who do think. The effort to reach these people is more properly the purview of public relations. This is not to demean that necessary effort but to define it and to distinguish it from public diplomacy.

Fourth, along with a consistency of purpose, one must have the organizational and financial means for conducting a war of ideas over the course of generations. Ideas, when they are profound enough to form the basis of a civilization, have a prolonged gestational period. K.P.S. Gill, India's foremost authority on counter-terrorism, has said that, in Kashmir, radical Islamists taught their doctrines in madrassas for two decades before the occurrence of any terrorist acts. After this period of gestation, *the war of ideas was already won* in the minds of the students who then formed the cadre of Islamist terrorist organizations. The same is true in other parts of the Islamic world. The war of ideas requires institutions that are capable of countering this kind of indoctrination over similarly lengthy periods, i.e. decades.

The United States is currently bereft of such institutions. A few private foundations do what they can on private donations. Since the elimination of the U.S. Information Agency, the government has lacked a platform from which to conduct a war of ideas in any consistent way. What passes for public diplomacy seems more preoccupied with short-term public relations problems than with the long-term inculcation of the principles of freedom.

How we got it wrong

Today, U.S. public diplomacy is in disarray, failing in some essential way to observe each of these maxims. Both President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice admitted that U.S. public diplomacy performed poorly on their watch. One reason for the

failure was dramatically illustrated by the testimony of Margaret Tutwiler, during her six month stint as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, before the House Appropriations Subcommittee, on February 4, 2004. Though occupying the senior appointed position in the U.S. government for the conduct of the war of ideas, Tutwiler failed even to mention the war of ideas or the global war on terrorism. Her testimony consisted of a litany of State Department programs without an enunciated purpose beyond that of demonstrating how nice Americans are, so as to clear up the misunderstanding that Americans are not so nice. If you get the war of ideas wrong at this level – the level of principle – you will certainly get it wrong at the level of execution. This chapter examines how we got it wrong in both respects, and then suggest how we can get it right.

Let us take the first maxim. What is the American "idea" over which the war of ideas is being fought? How do we formulate the view of reality over which we are willing to fight and die so we can communicate it to the world? How, to put it vulgarly, do we "advertise" ourselves to the world?

Unfortunately, American advertising is not only the primary means by which we present ourselves to the world, but the preferred model for doing so. And after 9/11, it is to the advertising world and its executives, including from MTV, that the State Department and U.S. international broadcasting first turned to meet the enemy in the war of ideas. Surely, it was thought, the country whose commercial brands dominate the world economy can, with the same means, promote the cause of freedom. Typically, this approach was translated into TV commercials showing happy Muslims in the United States, under the rubric of "Shared Values," and new radio stations playing pop music to Arabs and Iranians, under the same assumption of whatever "shared values" such music expresses.

While advertising techniques have valuable contributions to make in pubic diplomacy and may be particularly useful in tactical situations, the general approach of advertising is aimed at influencing an audience with a short attention span with subliminal messages to affect short-term behavior. In other words, the means of advertising determines the message. It reduces the war of ideas to slogans that are of marginal use in persuading thoughtful people concerning matters of life and death. The advertising approach shows a misunderstanding of the nature of this war. It assumes that the war of ideas is based upon a misunderstanding. If we can only convey a more favorable impression of our "brand," the problem will go away.

Not only do the means restrict the message. The message itself is wrong. When the rainbow of diversity that is popularly celebrated in

America leads the message, it leaves the impression upon foreign audiences that the United States is indifferent to the various claims to ultimate truth that its assorted representatives put forth. Islam is just another item on the shelf of American consumer society, chosen for its level of personal satisfaction. The happy Muslims are simply happy shoppers in the cafeteria of religions. The implied demotion of the importance of what is believed to be true inadvertently inflames the believers. America is seen as shallow.

The objective of the TV ads presenting happy Muslims in the U.S. was laudable in so far as it intended to demonstrate tolerance and the fact that the U.S. does not consider itself at war with Islam, both important points. However, it was the wrong message for the audience. The fact that Islam is tolerated here is not a particularly persuasive message to a Muslim who thinks that Islam is true. In fact, it is likely to be seen as condescending. Also, a demonstration of tolerance is not a convincing message to those who do not think tolerance is a virtue, but a sign of indifference. In fact, tolerance is taken by many in the audience as a sign of our moral decline. What we see as a virtue is perceived as a moral failing.

Because of their inherent limitations, these ads could not begin to suggest the moral principles from which such tolerance is drawn. Muslims are not free in the United States because the United States thinks Islam is the source of happiness, but because the United States recognizes Muslims as human beings with inalienable rights. It is precisely that recognition that is absent in many of the Muslim countries that deny such rights to its heterodox Muslims and non-Muslim citizens. The sanctity of the individual and the inviolability of conscience are not doctrines necessarily recognized by an audience that does not have a framework in which to receive them. That is why several Muslim countries prohibited the ads. The problem has to be addressed at a higher level.

In other words, contending claims to truth are often incompatible. That is why there is a war of ideas in the first place. It is a mistake to fudge this issue and to offer a derivate virtue – tolerance – in place of the larger truth from which it stems. If there is to be a war, let it be of one truth against another – not of a seeming indifference to truth on our side against an absolute claim to it on the other. For if it be the latter, the former will lose.

Another example of the failure to formulate and convey ideas in a compelling way was manifested by the changes in U.S. international broadcasting after 9/11. This is particularly important since broadcasting absorbs roughly half of the U.S. public diplomacy budget of around $1.2 billion. At a time during which Americans showed their

willingness to die for their country and what it represents, how did government broadcasting portray the U.S.?

The Voice of America (VOA) is the premier broadcasting arm of the U.S. government. VOA's mission is to express and serve the enduring interests of the United States, which includes, most importantly, the spread of its democratic principles. A Broadcasting Board of Governors, which exercises executive powers, oversees it. Its members are largely drawn from journalism and the U.S. commercial broadcasting industry. To their credit, the members successfully sought the funds to update the obsolete broadcasting infrastructure to the Middle East, which had consisted almost solely of short wave, so that radio could be heard in AM and FM.

Since 9/11, the board has spun off from VOA several of the language services especially critical to the war of ideas, Arabic and Farsi, and transformed them into primarily music stations, Radio Sawa and Radio Farda. The model for doing so is commercial. The most successful members of the board made their millions in U.S. domestic broadcasting and they are only doing what they know. Large audiences, demographically defined in the Arab and Persian worlds as youth audiences, are attracted by popular music formats, like youth audiences everywhere. Since numbers mean survival for a commercial broadcaster, it is hardly strange that this perspective was brought to bear on U.S. international broadcasting. However, this approach shares the same faulty assumptions of the "Shared Values" TV ad campaign, albeit in a different manner.

Numbers of listeners certainly matter, but not as much as *who* is listening – and to *what*. The Voice of America was designed to operate without the financial pressures of commercial media in order to be able to afford to tell the whole truth about the United States, including its full cultural depth and spiritual resonance. VOA has always used music to attract audiences. For example, Willis Conover's jazz program broadcast on VOA to Soviet audiences during the Cold War was one of the most successful radio programs in history. However, it was offered within a format devoted mainly to substance – news, editorials, and features. That ratio has now been reversed with music occupying as much as, or more than, 80% of the hour in Radio Sawa.

The more like commercial radio U.S. broadcasting becomes, the less reason it has to exist. After all, the image of America created by the popular media is the cliché that often repels much of the world. U.S. broadcasting has the duty to portray the character of the American people in such a way that the underlying principles of American life are revealed. Music with a sprinkling of news cannot do this. U.S. broadcasting owes it to its listeners to show how a free people live –

and to correct the image of the U.S. that our own popular culture has sometimes created in their minds, a false image that has often helped fuel anti-Americanism.

However, the level of confusion on the Board has been so profound that its leading members do not even consider broadcasting to be part of U.S. public diplomacy. At a town hall meeting at the Voice of America on September 10, 2002, Chairman Ken Tomlinson told the employees, "You can't intertwine public diplomacy with broadcasting." Board member Ted Kaufman responded, "I couldn't agree with the chairman more... we've got to start thinking about ourselves separate from public diplomacy." This loss of a sense of mission has been reflected in the changes the board has made.

Radio Sawa, for example, has two brief, bulletin-style newscasts in the hour. The rest is American pop and Arabic music, including, according to Sawa's progenitor, Governor Norman Pattiz, "everyone from Eminem to J.Lo to Britney Spears." Mr. Pattiz told the *New Yorker* magazine that "it was MTV that brought down the Berlin Wall," a statement of breathtaking ignorance. In October 2002, Chairman Tomlinson approvingly quoted his Naval Academy graduate son: "her [Britney Spears'] music represents the sounds of freedom." Based upon this extraordinary assumption, the Board of Governors transformed the substantive programming of VOA's and RFE/RL's Farsi services into another mostly music station modeled on Sawa. The war of ideas has been demoted to the battle of the bands. Will MTV help win the war of ideas?

Instead of appealing to reason as recommended by the Declaration of Independence, "out of a decent respect for the opinions of mankind," the new nearly all-music formats pander to another part of the human anatomy. The act of condescension implicit in this new format is not lost on the very part of the audience that we should wish to influence the most – those who think. Only those who think have the potential of affecting the future of their societies.

The change in format has provoked questions from the Middle East: is America playing music because it has nothing to say to us? Alternatively, others who believe that the United States is a degenerate country suspect that the U.S. is consciously attempting to subvert the morals of Arab youth through this kind of music. As one Islamic scholar put it, American pop exemplars are "torchbearers of American society with their cultural and social values . . . that are destroying humanity. They are ruining the lives of thousands of Muslims and leading them to destruction, away from their religion, ethics, and morality." Curiously, when American journalist Charles Glass was kidnapped by Hezbollah in 1987, he reported that his young captors

"liked Michael Jackson and Madonna." Apparently, MTV and terrorism are not necessarily incompatible.

Another irony was noted by Abdallah Schleifer, director of the Adham Center for TV Journalism at the American University in Cairo. In August 2003, he noted that "MTV, which may get to their kids, appalls them [the Muslims]. This is one of the weird things, to hear the U.S. administration – which rests on a silent majority of churchgoers – talking about American culture in its Hollywood and New York television manifestations, which is utterly devoted to undermining the values of a conservative Christian society." If it can undermine a Christian civilization, why not a Muslim one? This is the antithesis of a "shared values" campaign.

One of the facile explanations for why U.S. government broadcasting has been reoriented to huge youth audiences and away from elites is because "democracy is a mass movement" – a tautology that overlooks the fact that mass movements are formed and led by leaders who think. *The Federalist Papers* were not the result of a mass movement, but the foundation for one. Would someone immersed in Eminem ever consider reading *The Federalist Papers*, or even know what they are? Those who worry over the moral health of their own societies despise the vulgar part of American popular culture. Since that part of American culture is already available in their societies, why should it be officially reinforced by a U.S. government broadcast? Becoming the caricature of ourselves is bad U.S. public diplomacy. Rather, the job of VOA is to present *before* a 9/11 what much of the world saw only after it – the sacrifice, bravery, charity and piety of the American people as part of a complete picture. By presenting this picture, VOA might even prevent the miscalculations of those who believe they can attack the U.S. with impunity because they have been led to believe, often by our popular media, that it is a weak and morally corrupt country.

The success of Radios Sawa and Farda should be tested by more than sheer audience numbers among the youth. After several years of broadcasting Brittany Spears to the Levant, did the average radical mullah die of apoplexy and the average Abdullah come to love democracy and forsworn all but internal jihad? Apparently, not. According to a State Department draft report on Radio Sawa by the inspector general, cited in the October 13, 2004 *Washington Post*, "it is difficult to ascertain Radio Sawa's impact in countering anti-American views and the biased state-run media of the Arab world." Or, as one expert panel assembled to assess its value concluded, "Radio Sawa failed to present America to its audience." This is not to say that Radio Sawa has not done some good. Ensuing years saw few very

encouraging changes. Certainly, it is better if some Arab youth listen to Sawa's non-toxic news broadcasts rather than to their own highly toxic state media. But if the price for this small accomplishment is the elimination of all other U.S. radio broadcasting in Arabic, and other languages like Russian and Chinese, it is too high a price to pay.

Radio broadcasting is needed in the war of ideas, but it has to deal in ideas to be effective. The "MTV message" is not only something that commercial broadcasting can do, it can do better than government-funded radio. Government broadcasting is needed when the United States must communicate an important message to a key audience that it would otherwise not hear. Music, appealing to the emotions, may have a role in this kind of broadcast mission, but only if it is part of a larger idea-based strategy. Commerce-based strategy is profit dominated. Government-based strategy is policy and idea dominated. Only when the policy is to make a profit are the two the same. Combating terrorism and winning the war of ideas are altogether about something other than profit. As broadcast journalist and former USIA chief Edward R. Murrow said, when someone changes his mind, the cash register does not ring.

Structural dysfunctionalism

As mentioned before, engagement in a protracted war of ideas requires institutions that are capable of countering radical Islamist indoctrination and other ideas inimical to democracy over lengthy periods, i.e. decades. Today, there is no single government institution whose sole responsibility is the conduct of the war of ideas. As a result, no government agency feels responsible for it. This mission used to belong to the United States Information Agency, which at the height of the Cold War had some 10,000 employees and a $1 billion budget. After the Soviet collapse, USIA's functions were dispersed to the State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Within the State Department, public diplomacy functions were further dispersed to regional and other bureaus, making coordination and control by the new Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy problematic.

This is structurally dysfunctional in several ways. Diplomacy and public diplomacy often conflict. Diplomacy may at times require tacit support for an authoritarian government, while at the same time public diplomacy may be reaching out to its citizenry to support democracy. In one infamous episode, VOA created a diplomatic furor by broadcasting an editorial listing Iraq as one of a number of "police states." Saddam Hussein, who was being courted at the time of the Iran-Iraq war, complained bitterly to the State Department. This is not

likely to be the only time that principle-based public diplomacy and diplomacy will collide. For that reason, the two missions should not reside in the same institution. The State Department does not, and should not be expected to, give priority to public diplomacy. Even a spike in funding for public diplomacy programs in the Near East and South Asia bureau at State since 9/11 has not produced discernable results. The State Department should concentrate on the implementation of the broad range of the President's policies. Public diplomacy should concentrate on the longer-range goal of winning the war of ideas.

Another consequence of the dissolution of USIA, of which VOA was a part, is that the Broadcasting Board of Governors was left virtually as a freestanding institution with little accountability. Though it meets only once a month, the board was invested with executive powers. As a result, broadcasting is ruled by eight part-time CEOs, with all the attendant chaos such an arrangement would bring to any organization. Board members horse-trade with each other, peeling off favorite parts of the agency, which they then run as personal fiefdoms.

Also, because of the emphasis on appointing members with domestic broadcasting experience, few have any in-depth knowledge of foreign policy, much less of the war of ideas. For example, in 2002, the board attempted to eliminate the Turkish, Thai, Uzbek, and Portuguese to Brazil language services of VOA. The political implications of eliminating broadcasts to Turkey, a key U.S. ally and the premier Muslim democracy, while retaining the Greek service, are staggering to contemplate. Thailand is the most important U.S. ally in Southeast Asia, with its southern most region seething with Islamist activity. Uzbekistan is so centrally located in Central Asia that, within months of the board's attempt to kill the service, U.S. servicemen were posted there. The Secretary of State, who is an *ex officio* board member, tried to intervene. The chairman of the board sent Secretary Colin Powell a condescending letter telling him to come to the next meeting where his views would be considered along with everyone else's. Sanity finally prevailed, and the board was only successful in eliminating Portuguese to Brazil, South America's largest country and the world's 11th largest economy, awash in anti-American sentiments.

All of this happened because there is no central U.S. government institution within which policy, personnel, and budget can be deployed coherently to implement a multifaceted strategy to win the war of ideas over an extended period of time. As a result, the U.S. is largely absent from the field. Tinkering with the current system will not work because it is not set up to work. In the case of broadcasting, the lawyers at the USIA General Counsel's office, which was tasked with

drafting the legislation for establishing the Board of Governors, told the staff of the National Security Council that the proposed structure would not work. They were told to draft it anyway because it reflected a compromise agreement that had been reached on Capitol Hill.

How to get it right

Understanding our ideas

To repair the damage, we must return to first principles. Though its form has changed, today's war of ideas is not new. On our side, it has its provenance in the American Founding, at which time our Founding Fathers explicitly declared the source of our moral legitimacy. Why did the Founders of the United States feel it necessary to address the Declaration of Independence to the entire world? After all, a revolution against the British Crown in 13 small colonies on the eastern seaboard of North America would hardly seem to have been an event requiring the world's attention. The Founders were bold enough to turn to the world in setting forth the justification for their undertaking because the principles to which they were appealing are based upon truths that they claimed to be universal. By universal, they meant true everywhere, at all times, for everyone. These self-evident truths are the God-given, inalienable rights that each human being possesses and that governments are instituted to guarantee and from which alone they derive their just powers. Somehow, our public diplomacy people have difficulty with that message.

In effect, the Declaration of Independence was the first public diplomacy document of the United States. Everything done in U.S. public diplomacy is, or should be, an elaboration of this pronouncement. For instance, the U.S. government's radio and TV broadcasting efforts are an outgrowth of the Declaration in their efforts to address the world as to the moral legitimacy of the United States. The underlying presumption is that members of the audience possess these rights no less than we, and that is why we speak to them with respect and without condescension. It is why we appeal to their reason in our attempts to present, "out of the decent respect for the opinions of mankind," our case before them. The case now, as it was then, is for freedom and democracy, for the exercise of those inalienable rights for all people. President George W. Bush was referring to this mission when he said in his first inaugural address, "Our democratic faith is more than a creed of our country… Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations."

This message has inspired and given hope to millions of people around the world. However, the people who hate the United States understand it as well, and deeply fear it. The last thing they wish their people to hear is that they, too, possess these same God-given, inalienable rights and ought to have the free exercise thereof. The enemies of freedom find this truth to be the most dangerous weapon we employ. It is far more powerful than a cruise missile. And that is why U.S. broadcasting continues to be jammed by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, such as North Korea, Iran, China, Cuba and Russia, which understand wars are really won or lost in the minds of people.

Since 1776, the nature of that war has changed in terms of the character of the enemy opposing these truths. For a large part of the last century, it was totalitarian ideologies that dehumanized people: because of their race, in the case of Nazism; because of their class, in the case of Communism. Now, it is through a perverted deformation of a great religion that people are dehumanized as infidels. We have to recall that it is the same self-evident truths that have upheld this nation that remain our greatest weapons against this latest lie about humanity.

Understanding their ideas

In this particular war, the character of the enemy is defined by a new term, *Islamism*, as distinct from Islam. Like all "ism"s, this term indicates a transmogrification of reality. Islamism is the political ideologization of Islam. Drawing on several of the many strands of Islamic tradition (among them Kharijites, Asharites, al-Ghazali), radical Islamists reduce God to his omnipotence, concentrating exclusively on His unlimited power, as against His reason. God's "reasons" are unknowable by man. God rules as He pleases. There is no rational order invested in the universe upon which one can rely, only the second-to-second manifestation of God's will. This view results in anti-rationalism, which, in turn, produces irrational behavior.

For these theological reasons, radical Islamist fundamentalists reject the relationship of cause and effect. This denial has undermined the foundations of modern science and aborted the development of natural law thinking that is necessary for constitutional, democratic government. It is the principal reason that parts of the Islamic world have become a backwater. Several years ago, an Imam in Pakistan instructed physicists there that they could not consider the principle of cause and effect in their work. Many people in the Muslim world who still refuse to believe men have been to the moon do so not because they are ignorant, but because it is theologically unacceptable to them.

Radical Islamists translate their version of God's omnipotence into a politics of unlimited power. As God's instruments, they are channels for this power. As the former deputy prime minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, put it: "By juxtaposing the exercise of state power with the sovereignty of God, this view confers on tyranny the mantle of not only worldly legitimacy but divine ordination." The primacy of force, on which their endeavor is based, necessitates the denigration of reason as a means to know the world or God. Once the primacy of force is posited, terrorism becomes the next logical step to power, as it did in the 20th-century secular ideologies of power, National Socialism and Marxism-Leninism. This is what led Osama bin Laden to embrace the astonishing statement of his spiritual godfather, Abdullah Azzam, which Osama quoted in the November 2001 video, released after 9/11: "Terrorism is an obligation in Allah's religion."

The direct link between the denial of causality and the development of terrorism is illustrated in the bedside reading of Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 and an admirer of the Nazi Brownshirts. His daily reading included the works of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, author of the eleventh-century work *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, written to rebut the Mu'tazilite school and its successors who fought for the primacy of reason. Ghazali insisted that God is not bound by any order and that there was, therefore, no "natural" sequence of cause and effect, as in fire burning cotton.

The radical Islamists are the new totalitarians, with the ironic twist that, unlike 20th-century totalitarians, they are not secular. However, this is a distinction without a difference because they share with atheist ideologues the belief that power is the primary constituent of reality. Every totalitarian program flows from the premise that unlimited will is the basis of reality. The Arab jihadist volunteers who went to Iraq to fight for the fascist regime of Saddam Hussein – a cynical secularist who simply manipulated Islam for his own purposes – did not do so simply because they shared his anti-Americanism. Saddam Hussein and the Islamist fighters met at the nexus at which the secular and the theological views of unlimited power coincide. Like 20th-century totalitarians, radical Islamists also use this shared view of reality to dehumanize large portions of mankind, justifying their slaughter – albeit in their case as "infidels," rather than as non-Aryans or bourgeoisie.

Because democracies base their political order on reason and leave in play questions radical Islamists believe have been definitively settled by revelation, radical Islamists regard democracies as their natural enemies. No amount of aid to persecuted Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo,

and Afghanistan or changes in American foreign policy can remove this stigma.

The response: Judeo-Christian belief holds that the natural order in the universe is a reflection of God as reason, not some blasphemous restriction of His omnipotence, and thus an invitation to explore the universe as a means of knowing Him. The primacy of reason in Western thought is the principal cause for its success in developing science and constitutional government, both of which emanate from natural law. The primacy of reason is also the source of tolerance, as it is only within this worldview that one can "reason" together over even fundamental differences with an adversary.

Reason is compatible with many strains and schools of Islam that share this point of view (indeed, this view was often dominant during Islam's golden age) and that comprehend why some areas of the Islamic world have been frozen in time. The single most important thing is to support their advancement and encourage, through third parties (since non-Muslims are not welcome as direct interlocutors in this debate), the resuscitation of natural law thinking. This may sound like an abstruse endeavor, but without it, as many Muslims know, there is no hope for the Islamic Umma to enter the modern world. The radical Islamists are violently opposed to Muslim thinkers who espouse a development of Islam's dormant natural law tradition because it represents a potent threat to them from within Islam itself.

Ironically, an unprecedented act of terrorism by radical Islamists may have helped move things within Islam in a direction exactly opposite to the terrorists' intentions. As Turkish intellectual Haldun Gulalp told the *Washington Post* in February 2003, "September 11 came as the turning point that sealed the end. It is perfectly all right to recognize Islam as a cultural, religious identity but quite another to build a political project based on it, because it reduced a diverse group of people to one meaning. People in Islamist movements started saying: 'This has nothing to do with us. We have to dissociate ourselves from September 11.' It is not an accident that a lot of people are talking about liberalism in Islam. Liberal elements have always been there; what is politically significant is what you make of it now, how you teach it."

It is exactly based upon such thinking that we must facilitate the creation and reinforcement of an anti-totalitarian social and intellectual network throughout the Islamic world. A microcosmic example of what can be accomplished was offered by Judge Hamoud al-Hitar in Yemen. He and four other Islamic scholars challenged Yemen's Al Qaeda prisoners to a theological contest. "If you study terrorism in the world, you will see that it has an intellectual theory behind it," said

Hitar. "And any kind of intellectual idea can be defeated by intellect." Hitar won the debate and the terrorists renounced al Qaeda. Since December 2002, Yemen has used this approach successfully with more than 360 young men.

Afghanistan demonstrated the impact of military victory as a powerful rebuttal to radical Islamism, and Saddam's defeat disillusioned some of his Islamist allies. Within their theological viewpoint, defeat by a superior power must be interpreted as a judgment from Allah that they have deviated from his path. Therefore, when necessary, the United States must not hesitate to use force to eliminate opponents on the battlefield. However, the ultimate victory in the war of ideas, as Hitar demonstrated, will only be won by ideas. Many in the West seem not to have a clue as to the nature of the struggle at this level. They had better learn fast. Otherwise, our military victories will turn out to be hollow indeed.

Organization

> "I think one of the things that we will want to look harder at is how we do better on the public diplomacy side. We are obviously not very well organized for the side of public diplomacy."
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> *Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, August 19, 2004*

In this time of crisis, a new USIA-like organization should be created that can articulate and promulgate American ideals and institutions to the world and counter hostile propaganda. A new cabinet-level "Strategic Communications Agency" could maintain a strategic focus on aiding Muslim liberals and moderates, and not get lost in daily "spin" control. As stated, it should be independent of the State Department, which may be inclined to downplay differences for the sake of overall relations with a particular state or group of states. It should also be independent of the Defense Department and the CIA in order to avoid entanglement with their respective missions. Its director should report to the President.

This new agency should have the funds to promote the free exchange of ideas in the Islamic world (and elsewhere) and to support our friends there. Currently, U.S. public diplomacy expenditures approximate McDonald's corporate budget for promoting its burgers globally, and roughly half of what Saudi Arabia has spent yearly for the past two decades to spread Wahhabism around the world, including in the United States. The $1.2 billion budget is 1/450th of the Pentagon's budget. It is grotesquely inadequate and needs to be trebled for starters.

There should be grant mechanisms within this new agency, like the National Endowment for Democracy, but far better "endowed," that would provide concrete support to Islamic liberals and moderates, and even non-extreme traditionalists, as well as to others in vital regions of the world. This would allow others, such as private foundations both here and abroad, to make approaches by providing them with the financial means for their programs. This one (or two)-step removed approach would raise the comfort levels for some overseas partners whose effectiveness might be compromised by a closer U.S. government association. The new agency should have the authority and funds to purchase and provide to responsible broadcast and print journalists in Muslim societies the equipment and operating funds to initiate news and features broadcasts via, for example, FM transmitters, or to start up newspapers or journals with the necessary print equipment.

The organization needs to be staffed by people who know substantively what the "war of ideas" is about and have the regional expertise to operate across the Muslim world and in other vital regions. All involved must get over the self-imposed paralysis that has made current message-making so ineffective: the official squeamishness about dealing with religion. In earlier wars of ideas where religion was an issue, the U.S. handled the problem directly and without apology, whether destroying Europe's most powerful Catholic monarchies in the early 20th century, subduing Muslim guerrillas in the Philippines, re-casting the Shinto religion by forcing the Japanese emperor to renounce his claim as a deity, defeating an adulterated Christian-Leninist "liberation theology" in Latin American counterinsurgency operations of the 1980's, or openly battling the Roman Catholic church head-on in 1990's abortion battles at the United Nations conferences on population and development.

A new Strategic Communications Agency could be organized functionally, as was the USIA, into four separate bureaus, with additional offices arranged regionally. The regional offices would replicate the State Department geographic bureaus: African; European and Eurasian; Near Eastern; Western Hemisphere; East Asian and Pacific; and South Asian. These offices would coordinate with the field public affairs officers (PAOs) and civic affairs officers (CAOs) in each region to insure they received appropriate support from the functional bureaus. They would also coordinate with their counterparts in State, Defense, Homeland Security, and the intelligence community.

The Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau would oversee all exchanges: academic (Fulbright), cultural, and the International Visitors Program. If we wish our ideas to win, or think they deserve to

win, we must at least present them, if not inculcate them. This requires recruiting suitable candidates and exposing them to coherent programs that are intellectually substantive enough to change their lives and create long term relationships. Indiscriminate exposure to the U.S. is not sufficient to influence "youth" in a way favorable to us. (Sayyid Qutb, the chief ideologist of the Al Qaeda movement, was the product of a teacher program in Colorado where he deepened his intense dislike for the U.S.) A great deal of effort is required to identify the potential intellectual and political leaders in Muslim societies and to reach them. Influencing people without any influence is a waste of time and resources.

More important than the quantity of exchanges is the quality and substance of what is exchanged. These exchanges should include an in-depth explication of the ideas of the American Founding, to include the development of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and an examination of *The Federalist Papers*. Exposing visitors to "a slice of life" in the U.S. is often insufficient to have a profound influence. It is necessary to make clear the moral and philosophical principles that allow life in the U.S. to be lived as it is, or as the Founders believed it should be.

The Information Bureau would supervise: overseas American Centers; press guidance and the wireless file; foreign press centers; the speakers program; and research and evaluation for press reaction, opinion research and resource research, print presses for books, magazines, and newspapers; and Internet-related resources.

The Private Sector Programs Bureau would engage private sector organizations both here and abroad to undertake and coordinate public diplomacy projects on the Agency's behalf through grants and/or contracts. This bureau would be able to act fast to get specific programs in the field.

The Broadcasting Bureau would subsume all non-military government broadcasting (radio, TV and Internet) and maintain the distinctions between VOA and surrogate broadcasters, such as Radio Free Asia and RFE/RL, as appropriate. The Bureau should resume VOA's mission to explain and promote U.S. foreign policy.

The only effective way to combat the biased media coverage in the Muslim world is to offer our own alternative media (but with substance, not an overdose of music) or, if the country in question legally allows free media, to support the start up of an indigenous broadcaster or media outlet that will provide a more accurate portrayal of the U.S.

Conclusion

The United States is conspicuous in its absence from the war of ideas. If the U.S. sent its troops into battle without armor or ammunition, there would be a political outcry, as there was when that was thought to be the case in Iraq. Such negligence would be deadly. If our soldiers are willing to die, we ought to be able to explain to others what they are dying for. Our failure to do so has not provoked a similar outcry. Why? The question is particularly poignant in that, if we were able to do so effectively, fewer Americans would have to die abroad – or in possible terrorist attacks here at home. One reason for this failure is that, within the scope of the federal budget, the size of the budget for public diplomacy is so small that not much attention is paid to it. Also, public diplomacy has no domestic constituency that lobbies on its behalf. Those who do lobby, such as members of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, have vested interests that they are able to bring to bear with the members of Congress to whom they have given generously over the years. Therefore, their well-intentioned but profoundly mistaken views are able to prevail.

The only other possible reason for failure is that we do not have a consensus in this country over what it represents – that we are so confused over essential issues concerning the meanings of life, family, and moral worth that we cannot coherently articulate a set of ideas to project. Some of the debates in the worlds of academe and politics make this explanation unfortunately plausible – plausible, but not persuasive. Threats to national existence have a marvelous way of concentrating the mind on exactly why we do have a moral right to exist, in fact, an imperative to exist in a certain way. A President of the United States can effectively articulate these reasons as well in the short space of a speech. But a president is only the tip of the spear. Where is the rest?