



Highlights of [GAO-06-707T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Public opinion polls have shown continued negative sentiments toward the United States in the Muslim world. Public diplomacy activities—led by the State Department (State)—are designed to counter such sentiments by explaining U.S. foreign policy actions, countering misinformation, and advancing mutual understanding between nations. Since 2003, we have issued three reports on U.S. public diplomacy efforts that examined (1) changes in public diplomacy resources since September 11, 2001; (2) strategic planning and coordination of public diplomacy efforts; and (3) the challenges facing these efforts.

What GAO Recommends

We have made several recommendations in the last 3 years to the Secretary of State to address strategic planning issues, private sector engagement, and staffing challenges related to public diplomacy. For example, today's report recommends that the Secretary develop written guidance detailing how the department intends to implement its public diplomacy goals as they apply to the Muslim world. State has consistently concurred with our findings and recommendations for improving public diplomacy, and the department, in several cases, is taking appropriate actions. However, the department has not established a timetable for many of these actions.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-707T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

State Department Efforts Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Persistent Challenges

What GAO Found

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, State has expanded its public diplomacy efforts globally, focusing particularly on countries in the Muslim world considered to be of strategic importance in the war on terrorism. Since 2001, State has increased its public diplomacy resources, particularly in regions with significant Muslim populations. That funding trend has continued more recently, with increases of 25 percent for the Near East and 39 percent for South Asia from 2004 to 2006, though public diplomacy staffing levels have remained largely the same during that period. The Secretary of State recently announced plans to reposition some staff to better reflect the department's strategic priorities, including plans to shift 28 public diplomacy officers from posts in Europe and Washington, D.C., to China, India, and Latin America, as well as to the Muslim world.

In 2003 and again in 2005, we reported that the government lacked an interagency communication strategy to guide governmentwide public diplomacy activities, and it continues to lack this strategy. We also noted that State did not have a strategy to integrate its diverse public diplomacy activities and that efforts to effectively engage the private sector had met with mixed success. In 2005, State developed a strategic framework to focus its public diplomacy efforts and related tactics to achieve its goals, including marginalizing extremists and promoting understanding of shared values. However, the department has not issued guidance to its posts abroad on how to implement these strategies and tactics. In addition, posts' public diplomacy efforts generally lack important strategic communication elements found in the private sector, which GAO and others have suggested adopting as a means to better communicate with target audiences. These elements include having core messages, segmented target audiences, in-depth research and analysis to monitor and evaluate results, and an integrated communication plan to bring all these elements together. State officials indicate that the department has begun to develop communication plans for 15 pilot posts, but it remains to be seen whether these communication plans will contain all of these strategic elements.

Posts throughout the world, and particularly in the Muslim world, face several challenges in implementing their public diplomacy programs, including concerns related to staff numbers and language capabilities and the need to balance security with public outreach. For example, we found that 24 percent of language-designated public diplomacy positions worldwide were filled by officers without the requisite language skills. Furthermore, security concerns have limited embassy outreach efforts and public access. State has begun to address many of these challenges, but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of many of these efforts.