



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

## Why GAO Did This Study

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

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

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

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1061T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1061T).

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

## U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

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

#### What GAO Found

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

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

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