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Bush's Global Cultural Initiative: A Step Toward Revitalizing U.S. Public Diplomacy

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Ten years ago this month, the 24-person Arts America bureau within the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) got the budget ax—condemned as a Cold War relic. Now, the Bush Administration is wisely reviving it as the Global Cultural Initiative, which launched on September 25.

Spending U.S. tax dollars on fluff is never acceptable, but America's security can't rely exclusively on guns and fences. Cultural exchanges are part of our first line of defense, helping to bridge ideological gaps and policy disagreements with person-to-person contact and close-up views of the United States. Such programs helped end the Cold War and could have reduced costly complications for America in the global war on terror.

For about \$3.5 million annually, the original Arts America program organized traveling American art exhibitions, sponsored tours for U.S. performing artists, and arranged subject matter expert exchanges for museum curators and residencies for theater directors. Often USIA officers were able to grab major artists making commercial appearances in world capitals and pull them aside to visit nearby lesser cities and developing nations, thereby spreading goodwill.

Now, the Global Cultural Initiative will link private art institutions with federal cultural agencies in coordinating artist exchanges and exhibitions in support of U.S. diplomatic efforts. The Initiative establishes international literary exchanges to attract writers from Russia, Mexico, Pakistan, and other key countries to the United States. The Amer-

ican Film Institute will bring in foreign filmmakers and send Americans abroad to participate in cinema workshops.

While such efforts represent a step forward in reviving past international communications capabilities, the Bush Administration needs to do much more:

- Public diplomacy (PD) funding should help maintain and expand once popular bi-national storefront libraries, in addition to current Web pages and hundreds of electronic kiosks in foreign universities and chambers of commerce. Since everyone does not have access to or familiarity with computers, small consumer-friendly libraries may be a more effective opening to American culture and politics in information-starved environments.
- The Administration should revive USIA's once-robust book translation program, which now operates sporadically and mostly in Spanish. Expanded offerings on U.S. history, economics, and culture should be directed at essential target audiences in Arabic, Russian, and Chinese and involve private foundations and industry in donating and distributing materials.

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- Now housed in the U.S. Department of State, the Bush Administration's central public diplomacy hierarchy needs its own budgetary and personnel reporting authority. Thanks to Public Diplomacy Under Secretary Karen Hughes, regional bureaus now have deputy assistant secretaries assigned to ensure public diplomacy programs are carried out in the field. However, separate budgets and supervision tracks are needed where traditional secretive diplomats are still hostile to the idea of engaging in foreign public relations.
- U.S. international broadcasting needs reorganization and fresh leadership. Members of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) run their own pet projects instead of providing policy guidance to staff directors. Although the BBG increased America's presence over Arab airwaves by creating Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra-TV, it did so by taking resources from the Voice of America. As a result, U.S. programming in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America now lacks content, lively discussion, and airtime.
- U.S. foreign operations agencies need a doctrine and strategy for foreign communications.

A re-authorized U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy should direct this work. Lacking guidelines, training requirements, and coordinated tactics, PD efforts in such agencies as the State Department, the Defense Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Broadcasting Board of Governors can sometimes work at cross-purposes.

Many foreign policy experts thought that cutting back public diplomacy programs, and closing USIA itself in 1999, was a mistake—particularly after the 2001 terrorist attacks revealed lingering anti-American sentiments around the globe. The Bush Administration's Global Cultural Initiative is one step toward revitalizing America's lost communications expertise. Beyond it, the White House must strengthen public diplomacy through dedicated lines of authority, streamlined structure, and doctrinal guidelines.

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