

---

# The Washington Times

---

FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 2005

---

Editorials/Op-Ed

## Winning the war of ideas

---

By David Hoffman  
and Helle Dale

---

The world still does not trust us. According to new findings by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, the image of the United States has improved slightly since last year but remains decidedly "negative." Large percentages of people continue to express deep resentment of America, particularly in the Muslim world. The Pew study is the latest in a string of blue-ribbon reports, commissions and public hearings about America's failure to win hearts and minds. The problem is not new. Nor are the solutions up to date.

Yes, we need more Arab linguists. Yes, we need to expand our foreign visitors program and upgrade our Foreign Service training programs. And yes, public diplomacy has a role to play. Some demand that we spend more money on U.S. international broadcasting, although we've invested hundreds of millions of dollars already in Arab-language satellite channels that are often ignored or dismissed as crude propaganda tools.

America should not be losing the war of ideas. It is bewildering that a country that invented nearly every revolution in communications, from the modern postal system to television and the Internet, has utterly failed to get across its message. Ironically, the quintessential free-enterprise society has been trying to solve its public diplomacy conundrum by relying on big government. What distinguished American media and made them the engine of the global communication revolution was precisely their foundation in the private sector. While Europe and most of the rest of the world relied on stodgy state broadcasters and the Soviet-bloc-built government-run monopolies, America unleashed a worldwide information revolution built on private independent media.

Yet after September 11, we reverted to clumsy attempts to tailor our message to the Muslim world with marketing and programs produced by the government. Few of these attempts have been fruitful. Nor do they reflect the instincts of a confident nation. What is needed is a free-enterprise approach that

is based on good old American values of free speech, entrepreneurship and the engagement of the private sector.

This is a great time to expand private, nongovernmental television and radio broadcasting in the Muslim world. Pakistan, Indonesia, Morocco, Afghanistan, Yemen, Algeria and Jordan have recently made significant moves to liberalize their broadcast media. Even Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have taken some tentative steps in this direction. Iraq's interim government passed the most modern media law of any country in the region. Experience throughout the former Soviet Union has shown that new independent commercial stations, especially when their employees are given journalism and business training, are significantly more objective and have far less of a political agenda than state broadcasters. The popularity of new commercial TV and radio stations in Muslim Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indonesia confirms this.

The U.S. government succeeded in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union with its hands-off support for

---

independent media outlets. There are now thousands of broadcasters throughout the former Warsaw Pact, which received financial, technical and managerial assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Tens of thousands of journalists and owners of newspapers, TV and radio stations honed their skills with American trainers under U.S.-funded projects.

Indigenous local broadcasts are always more effective than foreign broadcasting. People everywhere prefer to get their news from local sources in their local dialect. People who have been propagandized their whole lives are exquisitely sensitive to propaganda messages. Yet, the United States proposes to spend \$652 million next year on the Broadcasting Board of Governors for international

broadcasting, more than 10 times what it will spend to support local broadcasters.

The issue is not simply foreign broadcasts versus support for local, indigenous, independent media. Both matter. But when thinking about the funding tradeoffs, it gets down to a question of faith — faith in the values of a free society. If we trust the free marketplace of ideas, if we believe that people will generally make good decisions if they have good information and real choices, then we must be confident that our values will prevail.

How do we win the war of ideas? Resist the temptation to control the message. Depend instead on two pillars of American democracy — free enterprise and free media. The federal government should support the role of private enterprise in meeting the challenge. Private enterprise is better equipped to

win hearts and minds than anything that governments produce. While there may still be a need for U.S. broadcasting for strategic reasons, the bulk of public funding should go towards local, private broadcasters. Use our traditional diplomatic muscle to encourage and support legal reforms in the Muslim world, which are moving these societies out of the darkness of anti-Western and anti-Semitic scapegoating into the modern world of global communications. Let the marketplace take it from there.

*David Hoffman is President of Internews Network, an international nonprofit organization that fosters independent media around the world. Helle Dale is Director of the Allison Center for Foreign Policy at the Heritage Foundation and a columnist for The Washington Times.*

## **ABOUT INTERNEWS**

Internews® works to improve access to information for people around the world by fostering independent media and promoting open communications policies. Internews' programs are built on the conviction that providing people with access to vibrant, diverse news and information empowers them to make their voices heard and to participate effectively in their communities.

Internews projects currently span Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Formed in 1982, Internews Network, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in California. It is a founding member of Internews International, whose members work in 51 countries worldwide.

## **INTERNEWS NETWORK**

P.O. Box 4448, Arcata, CA 95518 USA · Tel. +1 707 826-2030 · Fax +1 707 826-2136 · info@internews.org · www.internews.org  
1640 Rhode Island Ave. NW, 7th Floor, Washington, DC 20036 USA · Tel. +1 202 833-5740 · Fax +1 202 833-5745