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**Statement for the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and State, the  
Judiciary, and Related Agencies of the House Appropriations Committee**

**February, 2004**

Mr. Chairman:

Congress has received several reports and testimony about the ineffectiveness of American public diplomacy, especially in the Arab Middle East. You have heard primarily about ideas to improve the use of last-generation (i.e., mass media) technology. I would like to suggest three fresh ideas to use America's leadership in next-generation, global Internet technology. In brief, I suggest that your Committee:

Summary

- 1.) A Health Strategy. Ask the National Library of Medicine to help, by creating an Arabic translation and adaptation of its [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov) consumer health information Website. And to work with the State Department and other appropriate government agencies to extend the new physician alliance/information prescription service throughout the Arab Middle East and Muslim world. The project will help to make American institutions daily partners in a commitment to the health of people throughout the region.

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- 2.) An Education Strategy. Ask the Annenberg Foundation to extend its [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org) project with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, with appropriate Arabic translations, to make American institutions daily partners in bringing the best and latest curriculum materials to K-12 educators and students throughout the Muslim world.

- 3.) A Link-Up Strategy. Ask leaders of American multinational corporations, including the telecommunications industry, to make a philanthropic commitment to basic school and village-level Internet links for health and education in Muslim countries.

## Discussion

### 1.) Health Strategy

In America, we have learned that one of the most frequent uses of the Internet is to search for health information - for the individual searcher, their family, and friends. The searches are triggered by specific conditions, people are serious, and they want detailed and reliable information. The leading for-profit Internet sites failed, for various reasons. The best and most trusted source is the US government itself - [www. medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov), which offers basic consumer health information, updates concerning treatment of chronic conditions, and the capacity to search the world's medical literature online.<sup>2</sup> There are more than 100 million "hits"/year. The service already is available in Spanish. Given America's reputation for leadership in health, Arabic translations of text - and audio options for people with limited literacy or handicaps - are

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<sup>2</sup> A new "information prescription" system and alliances with local physicians are being prototyped in two states. Background information is on [www.policyscience.net](http://www.policyscience.net).

likely to be widely consulted by individuals and health professionals in the region. Advisory committees could help to adapt content to Muslim cultures and health priorities.

For the long-run, the success of public diplomacy requires conveying an attractive image of America, and a belief that American power, values, and achievements are beneficial to the lives of ordinary men and women in other countries. Especially with the success of genome mapping and the benefits we can expect, visible leadership for international health is one of our strongest emerging strategies.<sup>3</sup> We could run for office on this platform.

## 2.) Education Strategy.

Over half of the population of the Muslim world is under 17. Yes, there are ways to reach them via American popular/teenage culture (e.g., MTV, and VOA efforts). But we also can reach them by making America, and American institutions, daily allies with their teachers in a commitment to a high quality education that prepares them for lives and opportunities in the modern world, and with curriculum materials equal to the best anywhere in the world.

For example, the Annenberg Foundation's [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org) initiative with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is an extraordinary and visionary investment to form alliances with US (K-12) teachers and provide them with ideas and resources. It is very helpful in this country, and

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<sup>3</sup> American leadership in areas like women's health also could make a notable contribution.

Of the many attractions of America in the Arab world, one of the strongest may be to women - new opportunities for women in a modern world, as well as to health and education for their families.

especially in rural districts and smaller schools. As a next step, why not extend the idea to the Arab world, with Arabic translations and a regional advisory committee?<sup>4 5</sup>

### 3.) Link-Up Strategy

There are many ways to assure basic school-level and village-level Internet linkups in the Muslim world for health and education. (A startup investment is justified: American public diplomacy strategies in the Cold War built upon an earlier investment to make low-cost shortwave receivers widely available in Eastern Europe.) American multinational corporations who do business in Muslim countries can take the lead, either directly or through the kind of institution proposed by Mr. David Abshire in his recent testimony. It would be easy to create an online map of the countries, with each school or village without Internet access marked in red and - like raising money for charities everywhere - we can build momentum as the maps turn to green and corporations, foundations, and individuals in America are motivated and work together to meet the challenge.

As you may know, Mr. Chairman, at the end of the Cold War we discovered that our most successful political arguments were not restricted simply to explanations of American foreign

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<sup>4</sup> It would be straightforward - if desirable - to sponsor competitions among leading K-12 textbooks in each field, in the US, with the winners translated into Arabic and available online.

<sup>5</sup> There is a satellite television component to the Annenberg project, which might become available for the Muslim world by using part of the 24 x 7 global capacity of the US government's WorldNet satellite television channel. As part of an education strategy, our children's programming on PBS (e.g., Sesame Street) could be adapted, and online resources added, to assist the teaching of English in Muslim countries.

policy. Rock-and-roll and jazz turned-out to be powerful political arguments - about self-expression and freedom. Likewise, I think that adding an expanded Internet component to public diplomacy will be a revolutionary argument. And that new and bold strategies for health and education will be one of our wisest investments to send the right messages, convey American values, and build international relationships.