

Dear Mr. Charney,

I read with great interest your recent report, “A New Beginning—Strategies for a More Fruitful Dialogue with the Muslim World,” sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. I especially applaud your emphasis on cultivating a culture of listening among American interests and your call for a humbler tone in our diplomatic voice.

Speaking for Business for Diplomatic Action, our board and our advisors share your opinion that it is possible to improve the image of the United States in the Muslim world by addressing, with actions, the needs and concerns of Arabs and Muslims, primarily in the areas of education and employment. Our own effort to mobilize the private sector to “out-recruit bin Laden” focuses on first, listening and engaging young people in broad-based dialogues throughout the region, then working with them to devise specific action steps to move forward with together. At present, we are working with a group of young Arab business leaders to advance this program.

Your recommendation for global coordination of communications is well taken and, in that respect, consistent with our own testimony last August to the House Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, National Security and International Relations. It is our strong opinion, however, that any such coordinating structure should not be housed within the State Department or the White House. As your focus groups confirm, the federal government has little credibility in the region, plus we must be aware that government proposals are often tied to short-term political interests. We endorse the CFR’s proposal for a Corporation for Public Diplomacy and feel that we are in many respects what Pete Peterson and the CFR initially envisioned, as we are comprised of preeminent communications professionals who work separately but in parallel to the government’s public diplomacy activities.

We do take exception to your recommendation that there be extensive paid advertising in the Middle East. Even though many of the BDA members come from the advertising community, our strong feeling is that while communications play an important part in sensitizing U.S. citizens to the worsening problem of anti-Americanism, and while public relations can play a key role in correcting misperceptions, it is actions, not ads, that will provide the answer in the end. I’ve attached the text of an op-ed piece by BDA board member John McNeel, Director of Worldwide Accounts for the TBWA Worldwide advertising network, who expands on our position. I would be interested in your response to John’s article and would welcome further discussion.

Sincerely,

KLR  
c Pete Peterson  
c Richard Haas  
attachment