

Dear Pete,

We read with great interest the recent Charney report, “A New Beginning—Strategies for a More Fruitful Dialogue with the Muslim World,” sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. I was especially pleased to see the report’s emphasis on cultivating a culture of listening on the part of Americans and the call for a humbler tone in our diplomatic voice.

We applaud several of the recommendations contained in the report. The suggestion that our country’s global communications should be better coordinated is obviously well taken and consistent with recommendations made previously by the Council on Foreign Relations and by other commissions. Indeed it is consistent with our own testimony last August to the House Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, National Security and International Relations. From our standpoint, however, it would be wrong to house any such coordinating structure within the State Department, the White House, or a DC-based NGO or think tank. As you know, the federal government has little credibility in the Middle East and its communications instincts are too often tied to short-term political interests. I’m sure you agree that public diplomacy efforts must be more broadly strategic and long term.

The CFR-recommended Corporation for Public Diplomacy is a proposal we have publicly endorsed in our testimony to Congress as well as in our recommendations made to the GAO last spring when they were assessing public diplomacy activities. The GAO further asked us to outline what an ideal communications structure led by the private sector might look like. Our draft for such a structure is attached to this letter for your review and comment.

Finally, while we applaud the Charney report in general, we take strong exception to its recommendation for paid media advertising at this time. I’ve attached a copy of my letter to Mr. Charney along with a copy of a recent op-ed piece by one of our members, which expands on our position.

Pete, I’d love to get half an hour of your time to gain your reaction to our points of view and to explore ways we might work more closely together to advance our mutual goal of a more coordinated communications voice for our country.

Best regards,

Keith

cc: Richard Haas
attachment