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New CNAS Report Assesses Obama's Engagement Strategy

WASHINGTON, D.C., MAY 19, 2010 - Engagement is a guiding principle of President Obama's foreign policy. While the Obama administration has achieved its initial objective of "re-starting" America's relationship with the world, it has struggled to capitalize on its early promise and so far has failed to make lasting reforms necessary to ensure public engagement strategies further key national security objectives, according to a [report](#) released today by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS).

[*America's Extended Hand: Assessing the Obama Administration's Global Engagement Strategy*](#), which is based on dozens of interviews with administration officials at all levels and agencies, analyzes the public engagement dimension of three key foreign policy areas – relations between the United States and the Muslim world, combating violent extremism and promoting democracy and human rights – and four countries of strategic importance including Iran, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. By focusing on these salient aspects of foreign policy, the authors – CNAS Vice President and Director of Studies [Kristin Lord](#) and Non-Resident Senior Fellow [Marc Lynch](#) – identify strengths and weaknesses of the Administration's efforts to date, and glean early lessons learned to ensure the administration's foreign policy goals are met.

"In many ways, the administration is on the right track in its efforts to rebuild and reorient America's relationship with foreign publics. [But] many challenges remain. As the Obama administration continues into its second year, it is time to ... move beyond organizational reform and strategizing and on to implementation, a task for which it is still insufficiently equipped. In so doing, the administration will need a coherent global vision as well as detailed strategic engagement plans to accomplish its major foreign policy initiatives."

Key recommendations from the [*America's Extended Hand*](#) include:

- Develop public engagement strategies in support of all major policy initiatives, especially those identified in the forthcoming 2010 National Security Strategy.
- Devote more attention to following through on major policy speeches by the president; lay the groundwork in advance and engage all relevant government agencies as well as the private sector.
- Recognize President Obama's important role in public engagement but build the U.S. government's capacity for public engagement across agencies and in the field as well as in Washington.
- Do not recreate a separate U.S. Information Agency but do create a small, grant-

giving non-profit organization to empower the private sector and support U.S. strategic public activities.

- Conduct a major independent review of U.S. government broadcasting and the Broadcasting Board of Governors; develop a strategy for the future. Make the chairmanship of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, an agency with a 700 million dollar budget, a full-time position.
- Coordinate mutually reinforcing global engagement and counter-terrorism activities more effectively.
- Rebalance the roles of the Defense and State Departments in public engagement.
- Avoid the temptation to make the National Security Council an operational agency and focus on setting a unified strategy and coordinating agencies across the government.
- Develop, within the State Department, a more unified public engagement strategy and organization that coordinates public affairs, public diplomacy, and countering violent extremist ideologies across the Department's many sources of power and with other government agencies.
- Strengthen oversight over information operations at the Department of Defense. Assess public engagement activities of the combatant commands and determine which public engagement functions are best left to civilian agencies.

[Download America's Extended Hand here.](#)

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The [Center for a New American Security](#) (CNAS) is an independent and nonpartisan research institution that develops strong, pragmatic and principled national security and defense policies. CNAS leads efforts to help inform and prepare the national security leaders of today and tomorrow.

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