

Nov 04, 2016 by [Alvin Snyder](#)

Public Diplomacy's Mid-Year Report Card ^[1]

It's mid-year report card time!

Sadly, there are some failing "F" grades thus far this year for international media, but others show improvement.

Sir David Frost knows the "F" grade first-hand, as he continues to await his long overdue breakfast, which he ordered many months ago. The British TV star of yester-year was to debut his breakfast show on Al-Jazeera's International English service early in 2006, but there is speculation that Sir David's pancakes may not flip until year's end, if then. The reason: Al-Jazeera has yet to secure a major domestic U.S. cable or satellite-to-home carrier to transmit its program.

So it's an "F" thus far for Al-Jazeera International, whose parent channel touts itself as "free from the shackles of censorship and government control," although it's funded by the tiny, gas-rich Gulf state of Qatar, which has not held a democratic election for over 35 years. If Al-Jazeera produced a sound journalistic piece on that, it might peak the interest of Cox Cable or DirecTV, and succeed in getting the channel into American homes, while leaving the channel without any Qatari Riyals for Sir David's meals.

But America is also failing to communicate abroad, as the polls suggest. And this is especially bothersome to those who remember when America was getting straight A's by effectively reaching into the global psyche through the now-defunct U.S. Information Agency. This recollection for many prompts the publication of at least one article per week entitled "Bring Back the Old USIA."

I do not wish to be disrespectful, but I must react by saying, "Will you please get a life! The USIA is kaput! It would take 10 years to write and enact legislation to re-create a USIA, and to get it up and running again. And you may not recognize it. The time is now." An "F" goes to the idea for bringing back the old USIA, one part of which -- its publications -- were sent packing to the State Department in the 1990s. This included the USIA's Internet magazines. So let's take a look at how those are doing, several years later.

Today, the State Department includes the publication of 12 monthly Internet magazines per year under the "eJournal USA" masthead.

EJournal USA is targeted to young people abroad, with a typical issue describing "a little of how Americans think about their country and the world." Issues contain original essays, such as last month's piece in which "five young Americans (write) about what they want international readers to know about the United States," and an essay from a recent college graduate describes "her perception of the American dream." A Department spokesperson said eJournal USA is based on the original USIA model of targeting elite opinion-makers abroad,

and especially young people.

But because the Internet can be accessed from practically everywhere, we are informed that a sizable number of eJournal USA's monthly readers come from the U.S. One recent issue for which a breakdown of readers was made available to us showed 26 percent of the issue's readers coming from America and 74 percent from abroad, the latter where France had the largest number of readers, or page uses, followed by Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Canada, the U.K., Venezuela, and Colombia.

The list does not include a single country from the most recent State Department listing of its highest priority locations abroad where communication is paramount, reported to include Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Egypt, among other Middle Eastern countries. No page uses for eJournal USA were reported from Arab-Muslim states, which are particularly targeted by the State Department's Arabic Internet magazine, "HI."

A grade "C," for average, awaiting further clarification from State as to whether it is still using the USIA's Cold War playbook.

The good news for the White House is that President Bush has not been blamed lately for the would-be failings of America's Arabic satellite broadcast services, Radio Sawa and TV Alhurra, which appear to be finding their legs as every day warriors in America's public diplomacy efforts. They have established a satellite-delivered broadcast beachhead throughout the Arab/Muslim world in advance of other countries that have announced plans to enter the Arabic TV news market, including Russia, the UK, France, Germany, Spain and Denmark. While not yet able to compete head-to-head for massive audience share against Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, Alhurra has collected a respectable weekly audience base that can view original documentaries and keep abreast of breaking news, such as Alhurra's live coverage of last week's Kuwaiti Parliamentary elections. Radio Sawa has a sizable audience of young listeners and has expanded its news briefs and special coverage. So they each receive a "B" grade for the first semester of 2006.

More grades will be posted outside the classroom next week.
