Get ready for a new and worse world. And you’re hearing that not from a sky-is-falling personality. Not that the sky is already falling, but it is growing dark—dark in terms of serious threats to flawed but civilized societies, dark regarding opportunities for democracies and economic prospects, dark and terribly confusing about the information and ideas we will need to fight through this nasty stretch of history.

For the Council to help with the good information and ideas that are its strengths, we have to partially reinvent or redirect ourselves once more. We’ll have to devote a good proportion of our talent and resources to working for a new and wider audience. This audience, of course, will continue to include our members and the policy community as leading priorities. But now times require us to go beyond our historically primary audiences, to reach out to interested Americans and others who want and need a hand in sorting out what the government and the experts know and don’t know—reliably and clearly, and without partisanship or ideological deformation. The interested public will also want help in understanding proposals for managing the challenges of a world tinged by the daily threat of terrorism.

It is not so easy to be saintly and fair. But the Council’s Board and staff believe with me that our organization has a good chance to do this hard and demanding work. So, what’s so special about the Council, and exactly how do we propose to do this reaching out?

Our membership is highly diverse in politics and backgrounds and, quite simply, they would not let the Council (as distinguished from an individual senior fellow) put its name behind anything not fair and reliable. The staff takes this tradition and obligation seriously and has not and would not abuse it. We’ve had two mighty tests of this in the last few years. One was our Campaign 2000 website, and the other is our current Terrorism Q&A website. Both addressed highly sensitive information. In both enterprises, we have
been free of serious criticism. (Only my natural modesty prevents me from sharing the tales of praise and prizes.) Nor were these products neutered in the name of “politics” and “balance.” We didn’t balance for balance’s sake. We were fair and called balls and strikes when the evidence was clear. We’ve built up a franchise for fairness.

What’s more, we know what we’re doing and how to do it. We’ve been practicing on lots of fronts for years now. Been there, made the mistakes, fixed them, done that. Based on these experiences and our expertise, the Council has undertaken a new outreach strategy. It has four components.
The President’s Message


Presider Fouad Ajami with the Kuwaiti delegation at the February 1, 2002, Meeting, “Assessing the Consequences of American Victory in Afghanistan.”

First, the Council’s existing public website will be the centerpiece and home base for people who want current, reliable, nonpartisan, authoritative, readily understandable information and background. During election season, under the Campaign 2004 rubric, we’ll post full texts of statements by candidates and their gurus, then break it all down by issue, and then provide background papers on these issues. In so doing, we will effectively walk readers through the minefields of gobbledygook. During extended crises, like the one now involving terrorism, we’ll devote a portion of the website to an encyclopedia explaining what we know and don’t know, in a question-and-answer format. Before major
events like G-8 meetings, or Arab summits, or environmental conclaves, we’ll provide short and useful background papers.

Our web audience is already huge, and we expect substantial further growth. We’ve raised our exposure by convincing major news outlets to link their websites to our Terrorism Q&A site. They haven’t done it for anyone else. They do it for us because our work is strong and nonpartisan and easy to understand. These are just some of the websites that have linked to our terrorism site: CNN.com, Newsweek.com, AOL, Slate, Washingtonpost.com, and ABC.com. We’re now seeking to link our resources with universities and colleges as well.

Our viewership is potentially in the millions, mainly composed of people who are both interested in good information and ideas and utterly bewildered by the bombardment of ill-reported and conflicting facts and badly explained ideas. These are the people who read the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and good regional papers, and who watch quality television news like the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, Charlie Rose, and Nightline. These readers and viewers are looking for what we’re offering. We have heard the frequent good reactions from them. I just can’t resist, at this point, mention-
CNN.com has highlighted the Council’s Terrorism Q&A website content since the terrorism site’s launch in January 2002.

The Council on Foreign Relations, in cooperation with the Nasib Foundation, has launched an online encyclopedia of terrorism and the U.S. response to the September 11 attacks to give the public an easy-to-read, authoritative overview of what the experts know and don’t know. The site includes a look at state sponsors of terrorism, terrorist groups, the process of U.S. military tribunals and other aspects of terrorism.

Terrorism: An overview >>
Read the terrorism question of the day >>

ING THAT Earthlink, a major Internet service provider, listed our terrorism site as a “Website of the Week,” a great boost. And the Council’s website was nominated, unbelievably, for a “Webby,” like an Academy Award for websites. There, I’ve thrown all modesty aside.

Second, we’ll also continue to schedule briefings for the Washington, D.C., and New York City press corps. They want, and they need, help sorting out complicated issues as well. We already do background papers for them. Our press briefings present the best minds around, and we make sure the press gets the full range of views. We’ll be doing more of these.

Third, we’ll start a program of briefings and conversations with editors of regional
newspapers and television stations. This is near-virgin territory and a great opportunity. We'll ask them what they want to hear and talk about; this won't simply be an "us-to-them" game.

Fourth, we will use all the Council’s programmatic tools to focus on two or three issues of overriding importance so as to stimulate a sustained policy discussion and work toward concrete proposals. Each year we will pick the central concerns: this year, they will be homeland security and U.S.-European relations. Then, we will plan and make a commitment to developing the issues and energizing members, policy wonks, media figures, legislators, and the public to engage in a serious debate on these matters. We have plenty of proven Council avenues to work through: our general meetings programs in New York and Washington, our National Program roundtables, our term member seminars and debates, our Corporate meetings, our dedicated use of senior fellows for in-depth roundtables, and our very successful Congressional Roundtable Program that brings together key internationally oriented staffers of all political stripes and from both houses. We already possess these mechanisms for getting people to pay attention—and we will use them.
We call this new outreach plan “Goal Four.” It will be led by Irina A. Faskianos, whom I have just promoted to vice president for National and Outreach Programs. This new goal builds on our other goals of the last nine years: (1) add value to the debate on international affairs in the form of new information, new analytical approaches, and new policy ideas; (2) energize foreign policy discussions nationwide by making the Council a truly national organization with membership across the country; and (3) identify and nurture the next generation of foreign policy leaders. Goal Four—make the Council the source for ideas and clear and accurate information on key international issues for the interested public—is a vital addition to our institutional arsenal. It demonstrates our commitment to maintain our good country as an informed democracy. We are prepared to do our share.

Leslie H. Gelb
President