Popular culture will define what’s right and what’s wrong with American society.

What distinguished this cultural diplomacy from traditional cultural exports was that it engaged principally in the battle of ideas. Intellectuals from the former Soviet bloc have often understated the importance of these programs.

But with the collapse of Soviet Communism, the battle of ideas was declared won. Aaron budgetary support for cultural diplomacy evaporated. By the late 1990's, when the United States Information Agency was folded into the State Department, Congress forced the cancellation of most cultural exchanges and the closing of American libraries and cultural centers worldwide.

Then came 9/11 and the Iraq war and the abrupt realization that the United States needed soft power as well as military might. Washington's first response was to adapt the cold war model of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe; it created Radio Sawa and al-Hurra satellite television for Arab audiences and Radio Farda for Farsi speakers in Iran and Afghanistan.

Ms. Hughes also sees a role for propaganda — she did not, of course, use the word — on the frontline of global politics. "We can’t expect people to give a fair hearing to our ideas if we don’t advocate them very aggressively," she noted last month. On recent "listening tours" of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Indonesia, though, she had a chance to measure the cultural gap separating the United States and the Muslim world.

Clearly, just as Islamic fundamentalism poses a threat different from Communist totalitarianism, the cold war model of cultural diplomacy — designed essentially for Europe — needs revising if it is to win over key opinion leaders in the Middle East and Muslim Asia.

"The new situation is much more multipolar," said Frank Rodolfo, who led the National Endowment for the Arts under the Reagan administration and is now chairman of the Center for Arts and Culture in Washington. "There’s a need for more effort in a lot more places where cultures are much more different.

In a joint study last year, Mr. Hodor- soli’s center and the Coalition for American Leadership Abroad offered suggestions: increasing cultural exchanges, facilitating visits to the United States by foreign artists and scholars, sponsoring trips abroad by American artists, reopening libraries and cultural centers and expanding English-language programs and cultural workshops.

It also proposed adding $10 million to cultural funding by the State Depart- ment (which stands, this year, at a modest $4.65 million) and called for greater involvement by the private sector. "Corporations could be doing much more," said Stefan Toepfer, director of the Center for Arts and Culture. "They have a big stake in this. They have markets to protect."

Still, more than money will be necessary for cultural diplomacy to be effective; entrenched anti-Americanism will take years of persuasion — and, in some cases, policy changes by Washington — to be reversed. And here experts add a caveat: for cultural diplomacy to be effective, it must emphasize broader American values over the specific interests of any administration. In the cold war, at least, patience was rewarded.