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Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia's public diplomacy

**Public Diplomacy: Developing Road Rules**

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This submission seeks to contribute, through the Senate Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy, to the development of a possible framework for Australian participants in the arena of public diplomacy – in the context of accelerated processes of diplomacy. In doing so it will address the following questions: In what ways should public diplomacy be driven by the state? Are there possible areas for partnership in public diplomacy with the public sector by other sectors? Before developing and discussing a framework this submission engages briefly with the geopolitical tectonic shifts and the climate of globalisation that have altered diplomacy in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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The vehicle of public diplomacy is best viewed today in the context of fast capitalism and a shifting postmodern symbolic landscape. The term fast capitalism is associated with technologically supported acceleration of social processes along with increasingly digitised “imagery embedding mythic meanings onto the banality of mass produced consumer items”.<sup>1</sup> When news becomes a commodity, international issues and events are presented as hot topics in the media with ‘live’ coverage. New communications technology may be singled out as the key factor in the acceleration in the pace of diplomacy, but the transformation of diplomacy is linked inseparably with the alteration of social space in all its dimensions, including state, corporate, public and private spheres and their interrelationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Babe. “The Political Economy of Knowledge: Neglecting Political Economy in the Age of Fast Capitalism (as Before)”. *Fast Capital*. 2, No 1 (2006). Available from <http://www.fastcapitalism.com/>; Internet; Accessed on 27 January 2007.

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The velocity of diplomacy is a compelling reason for investing in public diplomacy. Nothing exemplifies recognition of the acceleration in the pace of diplomacy in more concrete terms than does the establishment of a Rapid Response Unit by Karen Hughes, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the U. S. State Department. The Rapid Response Unit monitors web and media from around the world and draws the attention of Hughes and her team to messages that need a response. According to Hughes, previously America did not know what others were saying about their country.<sup>2</sup> This would be true of the Digital Age because of the roadblocks to sense-making caused by the explosion of information on one's desk top. Up to the 1980s embassies were technically able to monitor local media at a more leisurely pace and respond with letters to the editor. Hughes found US ambassadors to be restricted from responding to the media on sensitive issues; they needed to obtain clearance from the State Department. In the Digital Age news traffic on the web is so enormous, borderless and potentially explosive that monitoring by and response from a Rapid Response Unit controlled by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has become a necessity. Hughes' mission is to explain American policy and win hearts and minds of those who oppose such policies. She has:

... made it easier for ambassadors to give interviews overseas without getting clearance from Washington and regularly distributes "echo chamber" messages to overseas posts -- canned talking points that officials can use on emerging controversies. She is creating a regional spokesman's office in Dubai to handle inquiries from Arab media, and she has lifted the informal ban on U.S. officials appearing on al-Jazeera television.<sup>3</sup>

All this looks very much like public relations and certainly there is a view that "[p]ublic diplomacy is a euphemism for public relations by governments".<sup>4</sup> The ordinary understanding of public diplomacy is that it is a public sector driven form of

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2 Karen Hughes. "Delivering Diplomacy". On The Record With Greta Van Susteren. *Fox News*; Foxtel Cable Television; Viewed in Sydney, Australia on 03.February.2007.

3 Glenn Kessler. "Hughes Tries Fine-Tuning to Improve Diplomatic Picture". *Washington Post*. April 19, 2006, page A15. Accessed on 03. February 2007; Internet; Available from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/18/AR2006041801420.html>

4 "Public Diplomacy". Sourcewatch: A Project of the Center for Media and Democracy. Available from [www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Public\\_diplomacy](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Public_diplomacy); Internet; Accessed on 26 January 2007.

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public relations that should be directed externally in order to influence foreign publics.<sup>5</sup> The apical skills for the Hughes brand of public diplomacy are public and media relations and intercultural skills within a matrix of political savvy.

There is no debate about the skill sets that are required. The debate is about whether public diplomacy should be externally directed and driven solely by the public sector. To address the first point, my own view is that public diplomacy, from a government's point of view, is about engaging with important publics, external or domestic, in order to develop positive responses to foreign policy initiatives of the government with a view to effective implementation of foreign policy. One has only to take a cursory look at the Middle East to see how it has connections to domestic as well as international flashpoints. From an Australian point of view Middle East policy cannot be parked away from other related issues such as, for instance, immigration and multiculturalism. A public diplomacy that targets Middle East publics and ignores domestic publics will not be very useful. To add to a quote from the terms of reference of this inquiry, "...[a]dministrative arrangements relating to the conduct of public diplomacy within and between Commonwealth agencies and where relevant, the agencies of state governments" need to be reviewed in relation to 'intermestic' dimensions where the international and domestic are closely interconnected.

Diplomacy has in modern times been practised largely by designated state officials behind closed doors. It has historically been associated with international systems that were constituted by nation states. Diplomacy is the set of tools used within a framework of rules that enables a nation state to operationalise its foreign policy. This operationalisation has historically been achieved through bilateral communications and negotiations conducted between foreign offices and through multilateral meetings. The apical skills in this type of diplomacy are negotiation, political surveillance and reporting.

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5 Injy Galal. "The History and Future of US Public Diplomacy". *Global Media Journal*. American Edition, 4, No.2 (2005). Available from: <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/fa05/graduatefa05/gmj-fa05gradinv-galal.htm>; Internet; Accessed on 27 January 2007.

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International relations scholars have in the past dichotomized policy into high political and low political issues. High political issues are those that are deemed to be related to national security and the sovereignty of the nation state. Low politics refers to all else. Diplomats viewed themselves as the protectors of their nation state's sovereignty. However unlike their military colleagues, they employed communication rather than military deployment or engagement as their method. Even though a wide area of the activities of diplomats was not high political, the hermetic nature of diplomacy spilled over into this area as well.

There are various worldviews and modus operandi in international relations. 'Realists' discern the problem of an anarchic world and prescribe a Hobbesian solution underwritten by military power. They select a realpolitik that sanctions the use of force. 'Liberals' look for other ways of constructing cooperation - through communication, law and trade. After the Second World War trends of technologically accelerated and networked social change that link individuals, communities and organisations across the globe, became evident. These fast, networked processes have been called globalisation.<sup>6</sup> Globalisation incorporates a term that was popular in the 1980s, interdependence, with its emphasis on economic cooperation. The traditional liberal economic paradigm of international relations questioned the salience afforded by 'realist' international relations perspectives to the state as a class of actor. Neo-realists, neo-liberals and neo-functionalists converged around a regime theoretic perspective in the late 1980s, a perspective that accommodated various ratios of unilateral and multilateral state power within an international network of rules.<sup>7</sup>

Regime theory developed alongside obituaries for US state power. The disintegration of Soviet state power contributed to the resurgence of US perceptions of its own symbolic and material power, demonstrated in the two Gulf Wars. Both Prime Minister John Howard and President George W. Bush have subsequently expressed

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the ideation involved in this naming carries with it a constructivist dimension which is in itself a world order projection.

<sup>7</sup> Regime theory emphasizes "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given area of international relations". S. D. Krasner. 'Structural causes and regime consequences: Regimes as intervening variables', in S. D. Krasner (ed) *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) 1 -22.

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commitment to liberal economics and the primacy of the state in world politics. The instrumentalist advantage of the state in relation to nationalist projects continues to fire the political imagination of the great powers, despite advocacy of other perspectives, ranging from Burton's<sup>8</sup> cybernetic view of world politics (emphasizing conflict avoidance and cooperation through communication and mutual understanding by states) to more recent visions of soft power<sup>9</sup> and post-realism.<sup>10</sup> Despite the theoretical shifts, the United States, more than any other country today, acts as the coordinator of traffic on the global political highways and in the city of world politics. It is largely instrumental in developing the road rules. While there are clear limitations to U.S. power, the replacement of a *realpolitik* approach to world politics by one that relies solely on information sharing, dialogue and cooperation and employs 'soft power'<sup>11</sup>, cannot be discerned on the horizon. Soft power, or power derived from information, culture and prestige, contrasts with hard power that is based on military or economic strength.

World politics continues to be a web, one that grows inexorably in complexity, of bilateral, multilateral and multidimensional relations (multiple actors and issues) that often reflect *realpolitik*. Soft power more often than not is conceived of as one of three power options for the nation state - the military stick, the economic carrot or the seductive symbol. One difference between the contemporary period and the period when Burton wrote about communication and diplomacy is that today, while the nation state, particularly the powerful nation state, remains a key actor, other actors have grown in importance. These actors include international organisations, multinational corporations, non-government organisations, religious organisations and movements, publics, markets, high profile individuals and even terrorist networks. Soft power has its limitations, for nation states, under these circumstances.

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8 John Weir Burton. *International Relations: A General Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

9 David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla. "What if there is a revolution in diplomatic Affairs ? " United States Institute of Peace. Available from <http://www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/publications/reports/ronarqISA99.html> ; Internet; Accessed on 30 January 2007.

10 Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman. "Postrealism, Just War, and the Gulf War Debate," In Francis A. Beer, *Meanings of War and Peace*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001) 83-92

11 The concept was introduced by Joseph Nye. Joseph Nye. "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics". *Public Affairs*, (2004).

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Reasons for the development of soft power include the technological imperative of telematisation and the political economic imperative of liberalisation in all its forms. Specifically, two developments have made soft power important:

1. The omnipresence and omniscience of new information technologies.
2. The spreading internationally of the values of civic society:
  - a. High value placed on a healthy public sphere, where politics can be discussed outside of government without fear of retribution.
  - b. Development of public opinion polling and the use of poll results as commodities by news organisations and political capital by political organisations.

The consequence of telematisation and political and economic liberalisation is that electronic networks have become available internationally and nationally for governance.<sup>12</sup> Indeed the ideation of governance is very much a product of reflection on cybernetic aspects of technology and power relations. It should be pointed out that while electronic networks are potentially useful for participatory forms of governance, they do not necessarily produce conditions for equal participation. On the one hand large numbers exclude themselves from active participation in decision-making even in potentially participatory systems. On the other hand experts and leaders participate more actively and cannot and should not be excluded from participation.

The vast majority of members of the public have little interest in personally researching about international affairs. This is despite the fact that cyberspace is rich with information on international issues and they potentially have access to an enormous quantity of information from agencies within all three sectors (state, corporate and non-profit) and the media as well as individuals around the world. They therefore tend to form opinions based on what reaches them via the media, through the filters of their own circles of opinion.

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<sup>12</sup> Etzioni, Amitai. "Are Virtual and Democratic Communities Feasible?" In Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (eds). *Democracy and New Media*. Cambridge, (MA: MIT Press 2003).

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I return to the debate about whether public diplomacy should be driven solely by the public sector. In terms of foreign policy, the state is clearly the institution that manages this area on behalf of its people. The foreign policy of a state and the images of world politics held by various internal publics and by political and other institutions (that form foreign policy, international trade, international development policy networks) within a country are at various degrees of concordance and discordance. The images of world politics held by individual members of the public (forming the vast majority) are based on readings (from within particular circles of opinion) of mediated images and other texts. An individual member of the public's knowledge of specific global or international issues is also based on mediated images and other texts. Such opinions are based on media reports and the views circulated in opinion networks that include those of opinion leaders such as politicians and experts. Experts may be from academia, media, government (first sector), the corporate world (second sector) and the third sector (incorporating philanthropy, civil society and non profit ventures).<sup>13</sup>

Should and could foreign policy development be a matter of public debate and public opinion? Regarding the first part of the question, the internet presents an intriguing opportunity for public participation. However, while it does provide opportunities to democratise expertise to a large extent, it has not contributed significantly to the democratisation of large governance structures.

According to Bruce Bimber, the complexity of the Internet and modern governance systematically undermines the public's capacity "to participate in the formation of political agendas, engage in the policy process, and monitor and ultimately control democratic institutions." Instead, this complexity provides "experts" a technical and political advantage over the public, making democracy "vulnerable to drift toward a state of Platonic guardianship." For Bimber, the question is whether a sufficiently savvy subset of informed and engaged citizens (net activists?) can counterbalance the inevitable power of experts.<sup>14</sup>

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13 International Society for Third-sector Research. "Welcome". Available from: <http://www.istr.org/index.htm>; Internet; Accessed on 01 February 2007.

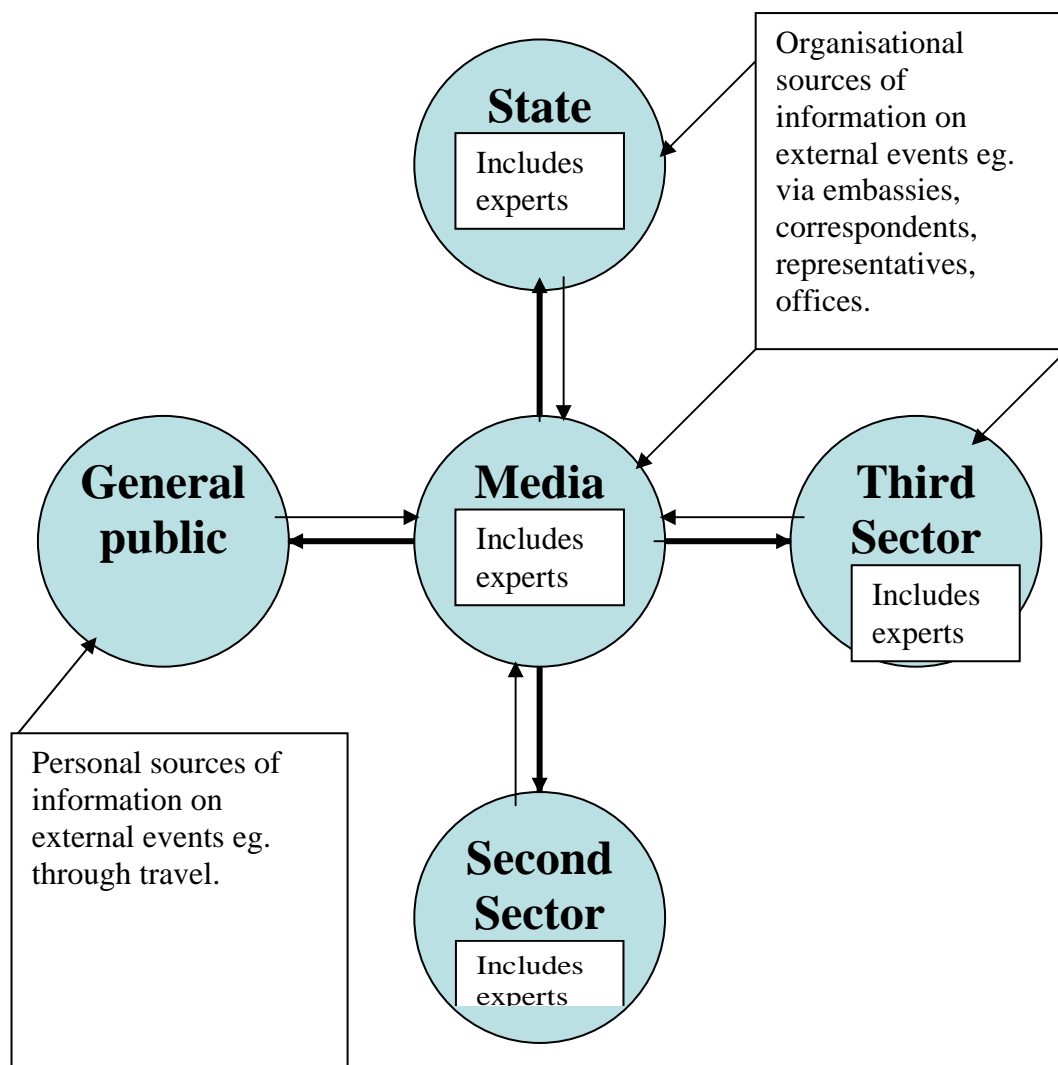
14 Mark E. Kann. "From Participatory Democracy to Digital Democracy". *Fast Capitalism*. 1:2 (2005). Available from <http://www.fastcapitalism.com/>; Internet; Accessed on 27 January 2007.

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There is a co-dependency relationship among experts, media, the public and the state (vide Table 1). Experts, media and the state have access to information about external events through various sources and are information rich. Experts undertake research or have access to their organisation's data, media has access to field reporters and to media networks, the state has access to its diplomatic, commercial, intelligence and other information gathering networks overseas.

In a democratic society, foreign policy should be debated in public and views of the public must be taken into consideration in foreign policy development. Whereas reliance on public opinion polls for day-to-day management of foreign policy may not be in the best interest of a state, enjoying public support for the foreign policy of a state is a strength. This public relations component is, in my view, within the ambit of public diplomacy. Deep and sustained public disapproval of particular policies is likely to influence policy formulation. This area, which I would like to characterise as that of foreign policy governance, will naturally be an area of political debate for political parties, media and third sector organisations.





**Table 1. Flows between the three sectors, media & the public**

A distinction is made between cyberspace (internet and other nets), infosphere (cyberspace; non- net electronic environments; mediasphere; libraries and other non-electronic information collections) and noosphere (global web of thought) by Ronfeldt and Arquilla who view cyberspace, infosphere and noosphere as being connected with the political, economic and cybernetic notions respectively.<sup>15</sup>

	Cyberspace	Infosphere	Noosphere
Ideational tenets	Interconnectivity and democracy	Prosperity and interdependence	Primacy of information sharing

<sup>15</sup> David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla. "What if there is a revolution in diplomatic Affairs? " United States Institute of Peace. Available from <http://www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/publications/reports/ronarqISA99.html> ; Internet; Accessed on 30 January 2007.

Organisational exemplars	Internet Society, EFF, CPSR	CNN, BBC, Radio B-92 (Yugoslavia)	Activist NGOs, USAID, UN
Technological conduits	Internet, WWW, NII, GII	Radio, TV, cable, FLAG project	Educational institutions, (GIS)

**Table 2. Information Realms across three levels**<sup>16</sup>

Their table of ideational tenets, organisational exemplars and technological conduits is reproduced above as Table 2. An organisation such as the United Nations operates in the noosphere by sharing information, but also in the infosphere through its UN Radio narrowcasts and in cyberspace through its use of the internet for interacting with civil society organisations. In fact cyberspace, infosphere and noosphere, as information repositories and delivery systems, all carry cultural, economic, political and other information. Democracy may be promoted and economies energised through the export of cultural products within any of these spheres.

<b>Type of Diplomatic Context</b>	<b>1. High Politics</b>	<b>2. Medium Politics-</b>	<b>3. Low Politics</b>
<b>Character</b>	Closed	Arena for state. Policies contested by political parties and civil society organisations	Open Arena for state, political parties and civil society organisations
<b>Example</b>	Military intelligence	- Energy - Environment - Immigration - Military engagement	- Commerce - Culture - Education - Health - Media - Sports

**Table 3. Types of Diplomatic Context**

<sup>16</sup> David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla. Ibid.

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Though soft power (noopolitik) is becoming increasingly important, great powers continue to emphasize the importance of realpolitik. In practical terms within parliamentary democracies some issues are deemed to be unquestionably at the very pinnacle of high politics. An example of this would be defense intelligence. The sole actors in this regard need to be the designated state agencies. From the point of view of the state, these are not areas for public debate. There are other areas where the state would seek support for their policies that are relatively high political but where different parties would hold differing views of what is the national interest. These would be areas where public diplomacy on the part of a government might be to seek support from the electorate at large for its policies. Other political parties and third sector organisations may contest these policies. A governance structure that draws in third sector organisations would be useful in such contexts for different issue areas such as foreign policy, development and trade. There are other low political areas where NGOs and corporations are better suited to engage in public diplomacy under government regulation. These include education, cultural exchange and health.

The British Government has invited third sector organisations to engage with it in developing a framework for the third sector in relation to voice, public service, community building and social enterprise. The Office of the Third Sector and HM Treasury's Charity and Third Sector Finance Unit are currently conducting a review "on the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration". The following is an extract from the interim report:

First, campaigning and voice. As we recognise the pioneering and culture changing role you play, we want the sector's voice to be heard more loudly over the coming years. Secondly public services, through greater third sector delivery and reforming the way the state delivers itself, to focus on the users of public services. Thirdly to build strong and active communities with the sector's ability to reach out, engage, provide support and networks for people who often find themselves isolated and alone. In a world where people are more mobile and traditional institutions have broken down, this is more important than ever. Fourthly social enterprise. The Government's vision is of dynamic and sustainable social enterprises, contributing to a stronger economy and fairer society. This is critical to the successful economic and social regeneration of many communities. Finally, the Government needs to create the right environment in which organisations are empowered and enabled to achieve these changes. We hope that organisations around the country will engage with the

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Government over the coming months to debate and discuss how we can work together to put in place a framework to enable the third sector to flourish in the years ahead.<sup>17</sup>

It would be expedient for democratic states to conceive of different types of responses to the three types of diplomatic contexts identified in Table 3. The Type 1 context must necessarily be controlled by military and national security agencies under the supervision of the government of the day. We are aware that senior members of relevant parliamentary committees need to be briefed on national security issues. Type 2 and 3 are contexts for public diplomacy but with varying emphases. The Type 2 context can require both externally and internally oriented public diplomacy. From a government's point of view the externally oriented public diplomacy can involve the complete PR tool box including a vision and strategic plan, a Rapid Response Unit, media professionals in public diplomacy positions and special envoys. It could also incorporate tried and tested cultural strategies involving exchanges and scholarships. Importantly, this area provides an opportunity for involving third sector organisations in a consultative process. Type 3 is a context where the balance could tilt toward the state supporting the role of the third sector and being supported by the second sector.

Public diplomacy in the contemporary world is an important bundle of approaches for the public sector, in engagement with second and third sector organisations, in winning over domestic and external public opinion in relation to foreign policy.

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<sup>17</sup> H.M. Treasury & Cabinet Office. "The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration: Interim Report". December 2006. Available from [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector/third\\_sector\\_review/](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/third_sector_review/) Accessed on February 1, 2007.

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