



WINTER 2009

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# NEW PRESIDENT. NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY?

Memos to  
Obama



James  
Glassman  
Exits State



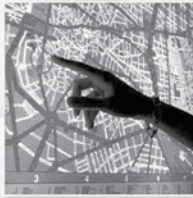
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**Public Diplomacy (PD)** is a publication of the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars at the University of Southern California, with support from the USC Center on Public Diplomacy and the School of International Relations.

Its unique mission is to provide a common forum for the views of both scholars and practitioners from around the globe, in order to explore key concepts in the study and practice of public diplomacy. *PD* is published bi-annually, with an accompanying web magazine, [www.publicdiplomacymagazine.org](http://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.org).

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## From the Editors

In the fall of 2006, the University of Southern California instituted the world's first Masters of Public Diplomacy (MPD) program in recognition that while public diplomacy is not a new practice, it is quickly becoming one of the most important elements of relating internationally.

The first MPD students created the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars (APDS), which seeks to promote the field of public diplomacy as an academic discipline as well as provide a forum for dialogue about its practice. This magazine was founded by APDS as part of our efforts to fulfill that mission.

Public diplomacy is both an area of theoretical study, and a trade with specific skill sets in which practitioners can be trained. Any publication that serves our discipline has to address this hybrid identity. We debated whether that should take the form of an academic journal or a trade magazine. What we needed, we realized, was a publication in which we could tackle everything from conceptualizing public diplomacy, debating its relevance, and discussing the roles of various actors, to developing evaluation methods, sharing best practices and even a little proselytizing. Such a tall order, we concluded, could only be fulfilled by something entirely new. That new creation is the publication that you are either holding in your hands or reading on your screen. *PD* is not an academic journal but it is not really a magazine either, although we chose to use that moniker because of the accessibility it suggests. We seek to carve out an innovative space that can be accessed between paper covers or clicks of a mouse, and that celebrates all comers—from academia, Foreign Service, volunteer ranks of NGOs, the blogosphere, and beyond.

Public diplomacy is at its best when scholars are in conversation with practitioners, and *PD* intends to host that dialogue. This magazine promises to address the challenges and issues of public diplomacy, not only for the United States, but wherever it is relevant in the world. It will feature the voices of practitioners and scholars with divergent perspectives, but whose unified goal is the continued evolution of the field. The exigency of this project is evidenced by the encouragement we have received from everyone who has heard about it, and reflected in the quality of the contributions that fill this inaugural issue.

It has been symbolic to work on the launch of *PD* on the heels of the inauguration of President Barack Obama who, for many around the world, represents a turning tide and renewed opportunity for the United States' engagement with the rest of the world. We began soliciting contributions for this issue during an election season that was rife with ideas about what a new U.S. presidency could mean for public diplomacy. Many of the recommendations and words of advice in our lead section, *Memos to Obama*, began to take shape before the identity of the next president was known and would be relevant regardless of who sat in the oval office. However as Barack Obama emerged as the new face of the union, our contributors also began to ponder what his unique contributions would be to American public diplomacy.

We'd like to express our gratitude to Ted Richane and Meg Young, who spent two years laying the groundwork for this publication, our advisory boards, the MPD program, USC's School of International Relations and the Annenberg School for Communication. Particular thanks go to the Center on Public Diplomacy staff for their unwavering support of the launch of this exciting new endeavor.

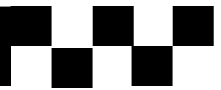
We look forward to hearing your comments and feedback, as we continue to shape this publication. Please send your comments to [dialogue@publicdiplomacymagazine.org](mailto:dialogue@publicdiplomacymagazine.org).

The conversation about the new public diplomacy has only just begun.

Anoush Rima Tatevossian  
Editor-in-Chief

Desa Philadelphia  
Managing Director

Lorena Sanchez  
Senior Issue Editor



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# A roundup of the latest events and happenings of significance to the evolution of public diplomacy.

Compiled by Iskra Kirova

## *New Technology and New Public Diplomacy*

The concluding months of 2008 saw dynamic discussions about the application of new technology in public diplomacy. Government in particular entered the realm of online social networking with at least two purposes: to promote collaboration and to organize messaging campaigns. The new trend was exemplified by the U.S. Department of State's Public Diplomacy 2.0 strategy – an umbrella term for a variety of new initiatives, including:

- Contests on the video-sharing site YouTube which encourage young people around the world to explore topics of democracy and intercultural dialogue
- A social networking website (ExchangesConnect - <http://connect.state.gov/>) for young people interested in interacting with past or potential participants in U.S. educational or foreign exchange programs
- A series of "Blogger Forums" which allowed bloggers to ask questions directly to the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy
- A global summit of grassroots organizations from around the world to share knowledge and experience on how to use online tools against violence and extremism.<sup>1</sup>

The 2.0 initiative represents the evolution of the fundamental concept of public diplomacy as a two-way process of engagement and exchange of ideas in an interactive environment. This new role allows the government to act as a mediator, opening channels for conversation and shaping an environment conducive to the achievement of its goals. This strategy is described as "indirection" by U.S. Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs James Glassman, and is demonstrative of how technology can become a tool for conducting what has been described as "new public diplomacy."<sup>2</sup> The public diplomacy toolbox is no longer confined to promotion campaigns and direct governmental contact with foreign publics but is much more focused on facilitating networks between grassroots parties at home and abroad.

Foreign Ministries have been venturing into the world of blogging over the last several years (European Commission Vice-President and Communication Commissioner, Margot Wallström launched her blog in 2005. In 2007 the State Department launched its official blog "DipNote" and the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched "FCO Bloggers"). The more recent explosion of the



microblogging website Twitter, however, made it the new hot platform for public diplomats. Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Colleen Graffy, utilized Twitter as a means to communicate her diplomatic agenda along with her private daily routines. She argued in a December 24, 2008 *Washington Post* piece that such online tools personalize her professional interactions and enhance her impact as an official.

Online networking tools have also been utilized for more traditional messaging and unidirectional dissemination of information. The added value of a platform such as Facebook or Twitter is its immediacy and informality that allow messages to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and other red tape, and to directly engage with audiences.

The Israeli Consulate in New York utilized Twitter and a microblogging website to organize a “Citizens’ Press Conference,” in an effort to state Israel’s case for its recent offensive in Gaza. The unprecedented debate was attended by thousands of bloggers and generated vast media attention.<sup>3</sup> The Consulate has further buttressed its social media presence with a Facebook page, a political blog, and a lifestyle and culture blog about Israel. These initiatives were but one aspect of an elaborate public diplomacy apparatus developed by Israel to get its message out and support its war effort in Gaza. Among its other web tools, for example, is a YouTube military channel set up by the Israel Defense Forces to broadcast Israel’s precision bombings in the Gaza strip. The entire information offensive which targets both traditional and new media is led by a newly established National Information Directorate. The Directorate was set up following a government-commissioned investigation into the communication failures during the 2006 war in Lebanon against Hezbollah.<sup>4</sup>

Twitter played another role in the recent conflict by enabling individual citizens to keep the outside world informed through feeds and blogs despite Israeli attempts to control foreign journalists’ access to Gaza. Al Jazeera, the only international broadcaster with reporters inside the Gaza war zone, began featuring “tweets” and text message updates on its Web site. These messages mainly directed users to new or in-depth sources of information available elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps an indication that with the advent of social media, attempts to “control” the message may be futile.

### ***International Broadcasting***

In the sphere of international broadcasting, aggressive government interventions have caused contractions in the free flow of information in certain parts of the world. In countries of the former USSR a number of international broadcasters have been forced off the air or have significantly reduced their services since summer 2008, in most cases as a result of pressure by authorities on local FM partners to end agreements. Voice of America (VOA) Russia terminated its radio broadcasts and is now an internet-only service. The BBC World Service Russia

is reorienting its programming by shortening and refocusing its radio time and expanding its internet production. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Russia is headed in a similar direction, with the broadcaster's offerings now only available on two local radio stations, downgraded by more than 30. As a VOA press release (29 September 2008) explaining the shut-down notes, the changes are due to intimidation by authorities of local radio stations that relay foreign broadcasts as part of a wide-spread crack-down on freedom of speech in Russia.

This phenomenon is not exclusive to the Russian Federation. Recently, Azerbaijan banned all foreign companies from broadcasting on its national FM frequencies, thus effectively blocking the BBC World Service, RFE/RL and VOA whose main audience tunes in to the services on FM radio. RFE/RL and BBC services have been halted in Kyrgyzstan. Reports of intimidation of journalists proliferate throughout the region. Most of these radio stations were originally founded to serve as Western public diplomacy tools during the Cold War and the current restrictive measures barely differ in impact from the once-practiced physical jamming of the services. Although public diplomacy nowadays can and has begun to explore alternative online venues, new media still has relatively low penetration in that part of the world. However, it is also noteworthy that even in cases where there is no pressure from local authorities, foreign broadcasters have gradually started relocating to newer platforms. On September 30, 2008, VOA ceased its radio broadcasts in Hindi, Bosnian, Serbian, and Macedonian to refocus resources on the growing internet markets and television. These developments might be signaling an end to government sponsored radio broadcasting for public diplomacy as more effective venues begin to emerge elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

In a unique example of how government control over information can be circumvented, Al Jazeera Network released hours of its unedited video footage of the war in Gaza by placing it in an online repository under the most permissive Creative Commons license, which allows for both commercial and non-commercial use. During the conflict, Israel restricted international media and journalists' access to Gaza.<sup>7</sup> In a response to the scarcity of news footage available, Al Jazeera—the only broadcaster with a presence inside Gaza— released its footage on the web making it “available for free to be downloaded, shared, remixed, subtitled and eventually rebroadcasted by users and TV stations across the world.”<sup>8</sup>

### ***Public Diplomacy and Foreign Policy***

After a host of U.S. policy centers and senior officials commented on the dire situation of human and financial capital at the U. S. Department of State and the high-jacking of public diplomacy by the U.S. Department of Defense<sup>9</sup>, Secretary-of-State Hilary Clinton has signaled intentions to re-invigorate the role of diplomacy in U.S. foreign policy. During her confirmation hearing before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary Clinton vowed to use “smart power, the full range of tools at our disposal— diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural — picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation”

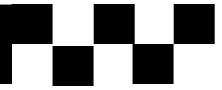
and promised to place diplomacy at “the vanguard of foreign policy”.<sup>10</sup> Similar positions have been voiced by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates who recently reiterated that diplomacy and communication at the Foreign Service have been “systematically starved of resources”.<sup>11</sup> The new administration’s plans coincide with other recent legislative and administrative actions aimed at the restructuring of U.S. public diplomacy, such as:

- U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Hearing on “A Reliance on Smart Power - Reforming the Public Diplomacy Bureaucracy”
- The introduction of a bill by Republican Senator Samuel Brownback to establish a National Center for Strategic Communication to advise the president regarding public diplomacy and international broadcasting
- A Government Accountability Office report ranking U.S. image abroad as the fifth most urgent issue to be tackled by the new administration

Other prominent figures have also affirmed the importance of synergy between public diplomacy and the foreign policy making. In October 2008, European Commission Vice-President and Communication Commissioner, Margot Wallström described communication as “one of the important tools for building and sustaining democracy.” She also defended the EU’s known preference for soft power and public diplomacy engagement on issues such as the environment, energy efficiency, development cooperation, free trade, democratization and human rights.<sup>12</sup>

One such policy, “Eastern Partnership,” aims to draw the EU’s Eastern neighbors—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus—even closer into the Union’s orbit, and to send a message of political solidarity. The partnership represents an ambitious example of the EU’s foreign policy approach of socializing, or “Europeanizing,” its near-abroad by providing incentives for the broad and deep political, social and economic transformation of its neighbours to match EU norms and values. The policy (which has been seen by some as redrawing spheres of influence in Eastern Europe<sup>13</sup>) provides a good case study for examining the scope and possible applications of soft power and public diplomacy for the achievement of greater security and stability.

Several new initiatives have also been launched in the sphere of nation branding. “United Russia”, currently the largest political party in the Russian Federation, has put forward a proposal to create a PR service that will ‘brand’ Russia to the West. The envisioned government communications agency would promote the Russian language as a communications and cultural tool for the preservation of a unified cultural space for Russian-speaking countries. New Russian cultural centers will be launched worldwide to promote Russian classical literature, poetry, ballet and theater. Among the premier national brands, United Russia also listed former Russian President Vladimir Putin and current President Dimitry Medvedev as exemplary national symbols, followed by the football team Chelsea and gas giant Gazprom.<sup>14</sup> Other recent nation-branding initiatives include the appointment of a high-level delegation to develop a country brand for Finland and the establishment of South Korea’s Presidential Council on Nation Branding.<sup>15</sup>



## *Cultural diplomacy*

The impact of the 2008 Olympics Games in Beijing on China's global image, including the promotion of Chinese cultural, has been much debated in public diplomacy spheres. While most of the media coverage in the West was focused on international reception of the Olympic torch relays, scholars such as Jeffrey Wasserstrom<sup>16</sup> noted the reintroduction of Confucianism through the Olympic branding and the launching of Confucius Institutes abroad. Domestic media in China also focused on projecting an image of China as modern political power with a rich cultural heritage and great economic promise. A report issued by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) did not stray far from this narrative, praising the execution of the Olympics as "indisputable success" and acclaiming their beneficial impact on press freedom, the environment and public health in China.<sup>17</sup> Human rights organizations strongly criticized the report for overlooking the suppression of domestic protest and censorship in the media of the contaminated milk scandal. IOC members justified their findings by referring to a long-term social change trend that had been set in motion as a result of China's exposure to global scrutiny. According to one national Olympic Committee CEO, the fact that Chinese authorities were forced to deal with controversial issues in the glare of media attention was, in itself, an influence for change. This type of examination may help to better understand the role of the Olympics spectacle as a public diplomacy tool.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

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- <sup>17</sup> The assessment is available upon request on the International Olympic Committee's website <http://www.olympic.org/>

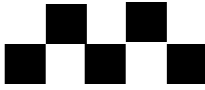
# MEMOS FOR OBAMA



A national debate about America's image abroad became a critical part of political discussion throughout the 2008 presidential election. Many reports and recommendations have been issued to the incoming administration, as well as to the Department of State, in the hope that a new President might embrace a new approach to public diplomacy for the United States.

In **Memos for Obama**, our contributors present their agendas for this new century of American public diplomacy. They range from changing the way we structure public diplomacy agencies, to gleaning lessons from the past, to how we can bring new actors into the practice.

Scholar Nicholas Cull breaks down lessons learned from the history of United States public diplomacy to inform a PD re-launch today. Kristen Lord contributes an adaptation of "Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century", her Brookings Institution report. She proposes the creation of a "USA-World Trust" which would leverage the support of the private sector to complement the U.S. government's public diplomacy efforts. Helle Dale, co-author of the Heritage Foundation's "Reforming U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century", outlines that report's key recommendations including the creation of a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications. A memo to Secretary of State Clinton, spearheaded by the Internews Network, highlights the importance of promoting independent media and access to digital communications technologies around the world as part of a comprehensive U.S. public diplomacy strategy.



# Designing Out the Mess: A Historically Literate Approach to Re-Booting U.S. Public Diplomacy

By Nicholas J. Cull

American public diplomacy is a mess. The President knows it. The practitioners know it. The voters know it. The think tankers and the legislators and the journalists within the Beltway know it. The global public with which the United States should be engaging knows it. Part of the problem is the budget, but that is not the whole story, and pouring increased funding into a mess just creates a well-funded mess. My decade-and-a-half delving in the unpublished and newly declassified archives of its past led me to conclude that, despite its share of flourishes and triumphs, in many ways American public diplomacy has always been a mess. Does this mean that it all ways will be a mess? Perhaps not. This short essay is an attempt to return to the systemic flaws in US public diplomacy identified in the conclusion to my study: *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency* and consider ways in which a redesigned public diplomacy structure might avoid the problems of the past and move effectively to address the challenges of the present and the future.

In the conclusion to my book I identified seven lessons from the past of US public diplomacy. These were: 1) Public Diplomacy does not exist in a vacuum. 2) The term Public Diplomacy has historical context. 3) The constituent elements of public diplomacy are often incompatible. 4) The United States is at its heart a skeptical participant in Public Diplomacy and the development of the practice was contingent on the anomalous politics of the Cold War. 5) US Public Diplomacy is especially dependent on its leader. 6)

Public Diplomacy is a specialist pursuit. 7) Public Diplomacy is everyone's job. Each of these lessons speaks to a deficiency in U.S. public diplomacy, but the impact of each can be minimized or even reversed by a historically literate redesign of the public diplomacy machinery. I will address each lesson in turn.

## 1) Public Diplomacy does not exist in a vacuum.

One of the first lessons of public diplomacy scholarship is to understand the limitations of the activity. Public diplomacy is not a magic bullet that can miraculously transform bad foreign policy into good. It is a dynamic process of engagement which can help to ensure that the best of a country's policies are known overseas and, if properly connected into the policy making mechanism can help produce better policy. The central flaw of American public diplomacy has always been the exclusion of the senior public diplomat from the inner-circle of foreign policy making. The Eisenhower years are the principal exception to this when the president invited his United States Information Agency (USIA) directors to participate in both cabinet and National Security Council (NSC) discussion. One vital precondition for the future success of U.S. public diplomacy, therefore, is that the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy be given a legislative mandate to sit on the NSC and inject an awareness of world opinion into the foreign policy process.



A related part of the puzzle is the challenge of inter-agency coordination. Many agencies now have a voice in the world and enact policies which affect America's global image. Eisenhower addressed this by appointing a Special Adviser to handle what were then termed Psychological Warfare matters within the National Security Council.

Initially C. D. Jackson held this post. Jackson managed inter-agency coordination by chairing a special committee called the Operations Coordinating Board or OCB, but at the price of infighting with the Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who eventually forced out Jackson and saw off his successors too. Kennedy abolished the OCB altogether. The time has come to revive Jackson and the OCB and appoint a public diplomacy 'quarterback' at the White House to chair an NSC inter-agency public diplomacy sub-committee. The State Department has learned to live with half a century of National Security Advisers and no longer claims the sort of monopoly on foreign policy that Dulles took as his right, so the prospects of success are stronger than in 1953. A half measure will not work. The late Bush administration experimented with double-hatting Karen Hughes as both Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and the inter-agency Czar, but the work load was beyond even her capacity.

**2) The term Public Diplomacy has historical context.**

Understanding the historical specificity of the term public diplomacy frees those who practice or study the art from a slavish devotion to some imagined ideal. The term fitted the needs of USIA in 1965. But as the lyrics of that great piece of cultural diplomacy Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* have it: 'it ain't necessarily so'

in 2009. Public diplomacy has moved on from the days of shortwave radio and air-freighted newsreel and its theoretical framework should reflect that. Specifically, any new public diplomacy legislation should be mindful of the emergence of the idea of the New Public Diplomacy - which highlights the transforming impact of new technology, of the blurring of the old boundary between a domestic and an international sphere, and necessity to adapt to a world where peer-to-peer communication is king.

One major feature of the world of the New Public Diplomacy is that foreign policy is no longer the monopoly of the nation state. Today international organizations, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, non-state actors and multinational corporations are players on the international stage and practitioners of diplomacy, public and otherwise. The nation state should not expect to 'go it alone' in its public diplomacy, but rather it should look to a future of a public diplomacy based on partnerships with like-minded fellow actors on the international stage whether other states or NGOs. It may be that on many issues and in many regions the United States government is not an especially credible voice and a partner would earn more traction than a long US government initiative. Hence, any agency aiming to work in the realm of the New Public Diplomacy should be positioned in such a way as to maximize partnership possibilities. This kind of function is not necessarily compatible with the highly politicized advocacy element of public diplomacy and suggests that at least part of the apparatus of the new public diplomacy should be located at arms length, perhaps taking the form of a quasi-non governmental agency or National Endowment for Public Diplomacy, empowered to broker collaborations in the sphere of public diplomacy.

**3) The constituent elements of public**



### **diplomacy are often incompatible.**

While the term Public Diplomacy served the needs of USIA in 1965 its very unity belies the fundamental diversity of the practice of public diplomacy. Public Diplomacy – the conduct of foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics – covers five distinct areas: Listening – the systematic collection, study and feeding back into policy of information about foreign publics; Advocacy – engaging foreign publics with the explication of the actor’s foreign policy; Cultural Diplomacy – the facilitated export of elements of an actor’s culture; Exchange Diplomacy – engaging foreign publics through mutual exchange of persons and International Broadcasting – engaging foreign publics by broadcasting news about the world, the actor or even as a surrogate service of local news for the target audience. Each of these elements has its own source of credibility, its own timeframe and its own relationship to the center of power. Listening needs to operate in short, medium, and long term, to be reflected in policy and hence to function close to the center of power. Advocacy is short term and requires a close connection to the epicenter of foreign policy to be credible. Cultural diplomacy is medium term and requires proximity to the sources of culture to be credible. It is tainted by too close a connection to the formal foreign policy process. Exchange diplomacy is long term and requires a mutual process to be credible. Its needs are not the same as those of cultural diplomacy. International broadcasting operates across a range of time, but relies for its credibility on conformity with the accepted mores of international journalism. It is wounded by any perception of political influence.

The history of US public diplomacy is essentially the history of the infighting between these elements. VOA’s struggle for independence from USIA; USIA’s struggle

to achieve dominion over cultural diplomacy; the struggle within USIA between the short term priorities of advocacy and longer term perspectives of culture and exchange sapped the agencies strength and wasted untold personnel hours. It also weakened the agency’s standing in the inter-agency process. The legendary spat between VOA director Richard Carlson and USIA director Bruce Gelb during the early part of the Bush 41 administration frittered away the institutional clout accumulated during the Reagan years and set up the agency for its decline into oblivion in the 1990s. The answer to this is a structure that accommodates the centrifugal forces within public diplomacy. This sort of structure already exists in most European countries, where advocacy rests within the foreign ministry, culture and exchange have their own agency, and international broadcasters are independent and protected agencies.

The time has come for the United States to move to a structure of public diplomacy that matches the European model. Keeping advocacy element (The Bureau of International Information Programs) within the Department of State; setting the cultural and exchange element (the Bureau of Education and Cultural Exchange) free to be an arm’s length agency to match the British Council or Goethe Institute with its own brand, perhaps a Benjamin Franklin Institute. International Broadcasting should retain its independence with further measures to orientate the membership of the Broadcasting Board of Governors toward journalism and away from the political agendas that have loomed so large in recent years. The membership of the BBG and of the board overseeing the Benjamin Franklin Institute should be drawn not on partisan lines but composed ex officio of leaders in the journalistic, cultural and educational field, whose professional standing gives them a mandate to oversee



these elements of public diplomacy and thereby enhance the credibility of these elements overseas. The National Endowment for Public Diplomacy would have its own independent parallel existence. It should include a listening and research function, subsuming such under-funded and neglected listening elements as exist at present, such as the Open Source Center and research service of Radio Free Europe. These elements would be coordinated though the NSC's public diplomacy board chaired by the Under Secretary.

**4) The United States is at its heart a skeptical participant in Public Diplomacy and the development of the practice was contingent on the anomalous politics of the Cold War.**

The United States has a deep seated and often demonstrated skepticism problem with the practice of public diplomacy. A government role in communication sits awkwardly with the national cult of the free market. The answer to this is to work to locate the process of public diplomacy more closely with the people and less with a narrow group in Washington DC. The natural allies for a National Public Diplomacy Endowment include the community-based organizations of citizen diplomacy – the International Visitor Councils. Public diplomacy has had few allies on Capitol Hill. Such allies as it has have been a mixed blessing. The support of Florida politicians for broadcasting to Cuba has skewed the international broadcasting agenda and led to the squandering of resources. History has shown that legislators look favorably on elements incorporated in their own constituency, witness Senator Joseph Biden's patronage of Radio Free Europe, incorporated in Delaware.

One way to both build constituency politics into the operation of Public

Diplomacy and strengthen the connection between the American heartland and the public diplomacy process is for the old and new agencies of U.S. public diplomacy to be geographically dispersed. The logical home city for a Benjamin Franklin Institute is in the cultural capital of the United States, New York, rather than staid old Washington DC. A National Endowment for Public Diplomacy might connect more effectively with creative partners from premises in Los Angeles than Foggy Bottom. CNN has prospered from Atlanta. Could premises there or in Chicago work for VOA? Certainly there are many metropolitan centers in the US with a wider range of the necessary foreign language speakers than that available in Washington DC. A further way to build the nation into US public diplomacy would be to build up regional resource centers for citizen diplomacy developing the network – nodal points to serve the International Visitor Councils – logically in Chicago, Atlanta, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles and Boston. These nodal points would strengthen the exchange element and could extend the functions of the foreign press centers, presently limited merely to Washington and New York City.

An awareness of the difficult domestic terrain in which public diplomacy operates should prompt a revamping of the President's Advisory Commission for Public Diplomacy. The commission (and its predecessor) has sometimes served not merely as a gentle body for the review of public diplomacy work, but a brains trust of leaders in the field of communications who have served as advocates for the cause of public diplomacy in the wider circles of the American elite, and lent kudos to its operation. Appointing prominent communicators – leaders in journalism, advertising and similar fields – to the commission would provide a resource for the practice of public diplomacy.

Turning to the problem of the ‘anomalous politics of the Cold War,’ we have seen how it is a mistake to justify public diplomacy purely in terms of a single over-arching crisis. When the Cold War ended the justification for US public diplomacy evaporated and an agency, whose true functions ranged much more widely, withered. Today, public diplomacy is now once again engaging a major international crisis which instantly justifies expenditure: the Global War on Terror. The challenge is to emphatically reject the limits of the crisis frame for U.S. public diplomacy and work to establish the notion that public diplomacy must be an ongoing element of US statecraft.

#### **5) US Public Diplomacy is especially dependent on its leader.**

Leadership in public diplomacy is a particular problem because the activity is, by its nature, a lightning rod for criticism and, as a relative newcomer, lacks muscle in inter-agency clashes. There has also been a problem of a revolving door in key positions. The George W. Bush years saw four Under Secretaries and a vacancy for much of the time. While scholars can stress the importance of a stable Under Secretary and urge the president to select someone with the personal clout of a Charles Wick, a Leonard Marks or a Karen Hughes, that is not a part of design. The contribution of historically literate design would be to distance the proposed outlying agencies of U.S. public diplomacy from the rigid four year political cycle and build personnel structures therein which would promote continuity and stability. One might take a lesson from the National Endowment for Democracy, which a quarter-century on from its founding remains under the presidency of Carl Gershman.

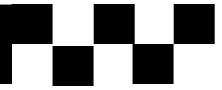
#### **6) Public Diplomacy is a specialist pursuit.**

Public diplomats spent too much of the Cold War as ‘second class citizens’ within their own government structure. USIA officers could not be full foreign service officers until 1967 and were still routinely disparaged following the merger with the State Department in 1999. Public diplomacy is not ‘diplomacy light’ or something for those who haven’t the head for figures necessary for trade or intellect for political work. Respecting public diplomacy as a specialist pursuit means encouraging and rewarding careers in public diplomacy. It means training experts with the languages and communication skills necessary to excel in public diplomacy. It means cycling serving public diplomats through mid-career training to keep their practice sharp and up-to-date.

Respecting public diplomacy as a specialist pursuit also means respecting the diverse skills within each element of public diplomacy: broadcasters, cultural diplomats, advocates and opinion analysts work very differently and have vastly divergent measures of success. This argues again for the diffusion of public diplomacy by function into the network of arms-length agencies already mentioned.

#### **7) Public Diplomacy is everyone’s job.**

The final lesson – that public diplomacy is everyone’s job – is perhaps the hardest to implement. Geography alone insulates Americans from the rest of the world and it is easy even for Americans with an interest in the global reputation of the United States to simply look to the government to fix any and all deficiencies. The truth is that fixing American public diplomacy requires not only a better structure in Washington but a better mechanism for involving the whole population. The travel industry is already working to remind its members of their role in building a positive image of the United

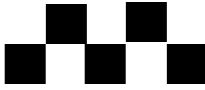


States. Schools and colleges can play an immense part by facilitating the learning of languages and the international exchanges that can start their students on a lifetime of global citizenship. Some way should be found to open broadcasting platforms to foreign material – perhaps through reciprocal access agreements that would open airwaves overseas to American programming in return for access to the American market. These similar initiatives are necessary to begin the process of globalizing the one thing that – as Thomas Friedman has noted – America has heretofore neglected to globalize: its own population. That process should begin a virtuous circle of a more internationally engaged population, demanding a better foreign policy, and themselves being the lynchpins of better public diplomacy. If the redesign process truly seeks to learn and apply the lessons of the past of American public diplomacy, the best of America’s public diplomacy is still to come.

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# The USA·World Trust: Bringing the Power of Networks to U.S. Public Diplomacy

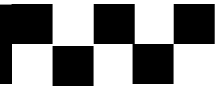
By Kristin M. Lord

President Obama will face enormous challenges in the area of public diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Though the success of President Obama's foreign policy will depend on the cooperation of foreign nations, global public opinion is not on America's side. A wide swath of the global public not only dislikes American policies, but also distrusts American intentions. According to 2008 polls by the BBC and the University of Maryland's Program for International Policy Attitudes, citizens in closely allied countries believe that American influence in the world is mainly negative (62% in Canada, 72% in Germany, 58% in Australia, and 53% in Great Britain).<sup>2</sup> Citizens of a NATO ally (64% of Turks) view the United States as the greatest threat to their country in the future.<sup>3</sup> Only 9% of Egyptians, 12% of Pakistanis, 19% of Moroccans, and 23% of Indonesians believe the primary goal of the U.S. war on terror is to protect the United States from terrorist attacks and not to militarily dominate the Middle East or weaken and divide the Islamic religion and its people.<sup>4</sup>

Fortunately, as President Obama seeks to rebuild America's relations with the world, he will find vast and still under-tapped resources at his disposal. Americans and other supporters worldwide are ready and eager to help. A key challenge is how to tap this energy and expertise to advance both American and global interests.

A recent Brookings Institution report, entitled *Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, presents a vision for how to accomplish this goal. Drawing on the advice of a distinguished and bipartisan board of advisers, extensive research and analysis, and discussions with over 300 individuals in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, it presents a vision for U.S. public diplomacy and concrete recommendations for reform. As part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen and re-imagine U.S. public diplomacy, *Voices of America* recommends a new non-profit organization to stimulate and harness the vast potential of the American people and foreign partners, engage partners perceived as trusted messengers among target audiences, fill critical gaps that current government agencies are not well suited to fill, and strengthen our government by providing targeted and useful research, analysis, technologies, and strategies drawn from a wide range of experts in a wide range of fields.

Despite the extraordinary power of the U.S. government, its public diplomacy activities are, and increasingly will be, only a fraction of the many images and bits of information citizens around the world receive every day. Moreover, they are only one part of the many ways *America* – through its culture, products, services,



philanthropy, people, and media – reaches foreign publics. That does not reduce public diplomacy’s importance; perhaps it increases it. But we need to maintain our perspective.

To be most influential, American public diplomacy should tap into and mobilize these private actors as much as possible – as advocated by countless recent reports. This should happen within current official structures. In addition, the United States should find new ways to engage private actors and employ technology, media, and private sector expertise.

### **The USA•World Trust**

More than ten other reports have called for an independent or semi-independent new organization to support public diplomacy, modeled on the U.S. Institute of Peace, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, National Endowment for Democracy, or the RAND Corporation. The Brookings report echoes these calls, recommending an independent and nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization called the USA•World Trust that serves the national interest but is not constrained by the day-to-day political and diplomatic operations of the United States government. It should be an honest broker, a credible voice that promotes sustained and purposeful global engagement, a nexus for new and even unlikely partnerships, and a center of gravity that attracts the goodwill, creativity, and initiative of the American people and foreign societies. It should be a hub of creativity and experimentation; though there are many creative people in government, large bureaucracies are not the natural habitat of innovation.

The mission of the USA•World Trust should be to promote U.S. national interests through efforts to:

- present a more accurate and nuanced vision of America to counterbalance the one-sided views sometimes promulgated by popular culture and foreign media
- contribute to an environment of mutual trust, respect, and understanding in which cooperation is more feasible
- promote shared values and their champions
- inform and support our government’s public diplomacy efforts through the sharing of knowledge regarding communications, public opinion, foreign cultures, and technology.

The Trust should focus on four key areas of engagement: grants and venture capital, research and analysis, media and technology, and outreach and government relations. These areas are described in detail below.

Two key elements should characterize these programs. First, the Trust should emphasize partnership, including partnerships between American and foreign groups. Drawing on the examples of Sesame Street, the Asia Foundation, and



other organizations, partnerships with local organizations overseas often build trust, increase the likelihood of positive local media coverage, and lead to quality programs that appeal to local populations. Second, the Trust should emphasize collaboration among experts with a wide range of perspectives and talents. A visiting fellow program will draw together practitioners and experts from both inside and outside of the government to support all of these initiatives.

### **Grant-making and Venture Capital**

Grants should support the annual strategy as well as core program areas. Five funds are suggested to advance distinctive objectives.

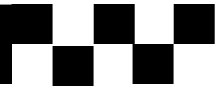
- *America Program* – funds American and foreign initiatives that present a more nuanced, complex, or appealing image of American society, institutions and values than is normally portrayed in popular culture.
  - o Examples include:
    - § A short Hollywood-style film so compelling that airlines would agree to show it before landing on American soil
    - § Foreign distribution of American news or documentary programs, such as the FX series *Thirty Days* or the documentary *Spellbound*
    - § Extra tour stops and community outreach programs by major cultural shows such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
    - § Speaking tours and media engagements by American authors, technology leaders, or Nobel prize winning scientists
    - § Translation projects that bring unfamiliar American perspectives to foreign audiences
    - § Tours of multi-media museum exhibits about American history or political philosophy
    - § Translation and dissemination of core documents such as the Constitution and Declaration of Independence
    - § A short program on U.S. foreign policy for the nearly 3,000 foreign researchers who already visit the National Institutes of Health on exchanges each year



- *Partnership program* – funds partnerships between American and foreign organizations that promote mutual understanding as well as shared interests or values. Most programs should include media outreach.
  - o Examples include:
    - § Co-produced news broadcasts for foreign distribution
    - § Co-developed social networking sites that link American and foreign communities to promote understanding
    - § Co-produced fundraisers, e.g. American and foreign musicians hosting a major televised concert to raise funds for an issue of common concern, e.g. AIDS or polio, in a third country
    - § Co-developed initiatives to advance women’s role in the global scientific community
    - § Exchange programs that link local elected leaders, especially those with future leadership potential
    - § Programs that link Americans and foreign societies where relations are poor through commonalities that transcend politics, religion, or ethnicity, e.g. lawyers, journalists, historians, and scientists all have strong professional codes or interests that bind them globally
    - § Co-produced films and television programs
    - § Co-written textbooks that present information in an objective manner
- *Micro-Grants Program* – quickly funds expenses of \$10K or less to support initiatives that promote USA•World Trust objectives
  - o Examples include:
    - Travel grants to support new university exchange programs, cross-cultural dialogues, or international initiatives by professional societies
    - Matching funds for small conferences or workshops
    - Translation expenses to extend the reach of valuable publications, websites, or radio or television programs



- Video recordings of inter-faith dialogues that allow mosque or church members to see programs in which their faith leaders participated
- Funds to allow a foreign journalist to report on a valuable initiative that supports the Trust's mission
- Support that allows documentary crews already filming overseas to bring in local filmmakers and film students for consultation or training
- *Voices for Common Values Fund* – supports foreign voices that advocate shared values, as identified by the Board of Trustees
  - o Examples include:
    - Grants to foreign filmmakers who wish to document the atrocities of radical Islamist extremists, in local languages for local audiences overseas
    - Funds to disseminate books or other media by foreign authors whose values and interests align with broad American values
    - Support for platforms for foreign opinion leaders, who may not agree with U.S. foreign policy, but support core values and interests
    - Foreign photography competitions that disseminate compelling or inspiring images
- *Venture Capital Fund* – invests in the launch of new organizations or projects with sufficient promise to be self-sustaining and long-lasting. The returns on this investment would be social and political rather than financial.
  - o Examples include:
    - Investment in expanding the operations of profit-generating enterprises into desired markets, where interests coincide with national interests, e.g. the expansion of social networking sites that engage desired audiences
    - Investment in new business associations that engage American businesses in emerging economies
    - Investment in new educational NGOs with a promising business plan for fee-for-service English instruction



- Projects incubated at the Trust then spun off to partner organizations that can sustain them
- Matching funds that encourage new corporate or foundation support for educational or professional exchanges
- Prizes for the best new technological application to accomplish a particular government agency's public diplomacy challenge
- The translation and sale of relevant children's books in new markets

### Research and Analysis

The USA•World Trust should conduct independent research and analysis, distribute relevant knowledge in a form useful to public diplomacy and strategic communication professionals, lead external evaluation teams by request, and collect and disseminate best practices. It should not simply be a passive repository for information, but rather it should set a research agenda and then actively commission, collect, and disseminate useful analyses to its constituents in government. To set that agenda, it should consult regularly with practitioners and policy leaders to diagnose their needs.

A central problem is not that useful information and insights do not exist, but rather that they are not in a form useful to practitioners. Thus, a key function of the Trust will be not only to collect and analyze information but also to work with practitioners to translate that information into actionable programs. As one government official put it, "I know how many people ages 18-25 use the Internet in the Middle East. That is different from knowing the best way for public diplomacy officers to use that information."

Examples include:

- Weekly electronic publication that summarizes new research on communications, public opinion, foreign societies and cultures, best practices, and successful programs or initiatives and distills it into a form useful to practitioners in the military or government
- In-depth studies of particular issues or regions
- Analysis papers that examine key issues such as the relationship between development assistance and public opinion, whether those who speak English as a second language get news from a more diverse range of sources, how to evaluate the impact of public diplomacy programs, where citizens of particular countries get their news and



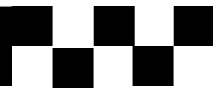
information, and new trends among the youth of particular countries or regions

- Polling and focus groups
- Detailed case studies intended to teach practitioners as well as case studies designed to capture lessons learned after major crises (for instance, the public affairs activities surrounding the provision of disaster assistance). This knowledge is often lost
- Useful training materials developed in consultation with the State Department's National Foreign Affairs Training Center, National Defense University, and the war colleges
- Papers that analyze trends and suggest practical responses, such as how to tap into the power of diaspora or expatriate communities, how to leverage respect for American science and technology, how to effectively engage foreign tourists, and how to develop media campaigns that cross platforms (e.g. printed books, television, media outreach, and online fora)
- On-line collections of resources contributed by stakeholders, such as companies and non-governmental organizations who volunteer to grant access to non-proprietary research if they had an easy way to share it.

### **Convening and Networking**

The Trust should support activities that bring together people, resources, and ideas. Again and again, study contributors argued that simply introducing the right partners to each other was an under-supplied public good and a powerful contribution to their success. The Trust should be especially mindful to support new initiatives that promote the mission, for instance helping successful diaspora groups in Silicon Valley that wish to reach out to compatriots worldwide, or introducing content developers to content distributors. It should also seek to bring groups with valuable knowledge together with those who would benefit, for instance commercial market research experts with government political analysts, or experts on foreign cultures together with government experts on post-conflict reconstruction. Examples include:

- Convene government agencies, marketing experts, pollsters, and NGOs to draft a multi-dimensional strategy for engaging Arab youth
- Network with public diplomacy professionals in the field to learn what information or tools they would need to be more successful



- Convene members of the tourist and travel industry to identify collaborative initiatives to attract more visitors to the United States, for longer periods of time
- Network with the independent public diplomacy institutions of allied countries (e.g. the British Council and Germany's Goethe Institute) and identify areas of possible collaboration in pursuit of shared interests

### **Visiting Fellows Program**

The Trust should host visitors from private companies, universities, non-governmental organizations, the armed services, and government agencies for short- or long-term assignments. Whether detailed for three months or two years, visitors would contribute new ideas, expertise, and contacts to the task of improving America's relations with the world. Visitors could work on research projects, address technology challenges, develop new media products, or assist with public opinion polling. Bringing together subject experts and public diplomacy practitioners will allow the Trust to extend its network, craft programs that are useful to policy makers and practitioners in the U.S. government and military, thereby ensuring access to cutting-edge knowledge, communication techniques, and technology. The visitor program will also provide needed professional development opportunities for talented employees in the U.S. government and build a network of public servants in this field.

### **Media and Technology Program**

The media and technology program should seek effective communication tools, compelling media content, and appealing new applications in support of the USA World Trust mission. In some circumstances, the program should commission products for radio, television, mobile phones, podcasts, on-line games, DVDs, print publications, web pages, or other vehicles of engagement. More commonly, the program should search for existing products, test them with overseas audiences, and adapt them for wider use by the Trust itself, government agencies, or appropriate third parties in the United States or overseas. The Trust should also monitor new and emerging technologies, what technologies are employed in different world regions, and where new technologies could be deployed effectively. This effort will require a deep knowledge of foreign cultures and preferences and how they differ. What appeals in Moscow may not appeal in Muscat.

### **Communications, Outreach, Government Relations, and Fundraising**

To be effective, the Trust must reach out to, energize, and engage new constituencies in the United States and overseas, understand and support national strategic communication needs, and bring new people and resources

to the mission. This will require an effective communications office, able to attract broad attention and participation, and disseminate useful information electronically, in print, and through person-to-person exchanges. It will also require a concerted and proactive government relations effort to ensure that the needs and interests of Congress, the full range of executive branch agencies (including overseas embassies and USAID field offices), and the military (including the combatant commanders) are served. Finally, it should have a professional fundraising office able to marshal private funds from corporations, foundations, and major individual donors. Funds need not be raised for the Trust itself. For instance, in response to foreign university requests for professorships in American Studies (reportedly a common request from foreign universities), the Trust could raise funds for that initiative, perhaps using its own funds as leverage.

### **Assessing and Achieving Impact**

Faced with an important task and limited resources, the USA•World Trust must focus, relentlessly and unequivocally, on impact. This impact will be earned through initiatives that influence either mass publics or highly targeted opinion leaders. In all organizations, but especially this one, public diplomacy programs should pass the “drop in the bucket” test. No matter how good the program’s quality or how much the participants or organizers like it, its worth should be measured against how much impact it is likely to have in an absolute sense, and how much it advances the mission at hand.

Success should also be measured in terms of how much impact can be bought with a given investment of time, energy, and funds. Taking a lesson from social entrepreneurs and new approaches to philanthropy, it should seek out opportunities to invest small amounts for big returns. For instance, instead of commissioning expensive documentaries, the Trust would identify appropriate documentaries that already exist, test them in target audiences, and ask what incentives would be sufficient to encourage private companies to distribute them in key countries overseas – a more efficient, market-based approach than traditional public diplomacy.

### **The Case for Independence**

In hundreds of conversations with experts and practitioners inside and outside government, the only significant area of disagreement was how close or far away from government the Trust should be. The *Voices of America* study concludes that the Trust should be independent *but* there should be many mechanisms in place to ensure the Trust remains accountable and in service to the national interest. Through a formula of formal independence, extreme transparency of operation, and potent instruments of “soft power” provided by government agencies and leaders, the Trust attempts to strike the balance that would serve our nation’s needs in the area of public diplomacy and strategic communication.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Formal independence is recommended for the following reasons:
  - Government needs an honest broker that can provide objective analysis and research, ask tough questions, and provide unpopular answers when necessary.
  - Independence will free the Trust from day to day policy concerns and crises. Staff in Washington and overseas report that they have little time for deep reflection and are often pulled from long-term projects to meet pressing short-term needs. The freedom to be ahead of the curve or move counter to current trends, e.g. developing programs in Russia or Latin America when most funding in government is directed at the Middle East, would be a valuable contribution to our nation's comprehensive public diplomacy effort.
  - A current gap in our nation's capabilities is the ability to take risks, a task that is understandably difficult in executive agencies charged with the responsibility of representing our nation to the world. The organization must be free to make mistakes and experiment, without the risk of embarrassing senior officials or the U.S. government. Like a good venture capital fund, if the Trust does not make mistakes, it is being too cautious to generate the desired return on investment.
  - Some formal distance from government allows the Trust to engage new or controversial groups (such as former terrorists now willing to speak out against terrorism), reach out to politically sensitive audiences (the Syrian public), experiment with new methods (how to best use tools like YouTube and social networking sites), or work with edgy media like MTV that can engage young people but provide awkward fora for dignified officials. Any of these projects might have the strong support of our government, but are either delicate or ungainly for senior diplomats to embrace publicly. The Trust can provide a "heat shield" for such projects, where there is a high potential return but also the risk of embarrassment.
  - The ability to be nimble and circumvent bureaucratic hurdles would be a valuable addition to our nation's capabilities. For instance, this study learned of an innovative and seemingly uncontroversial public-private partnership led by the State Department that required clearances from 30 different offices before it could even get started. This is not atypical and the requirements for such clearances exist for extremely valid reasons. However, this process is also cumbersome and impedes action.
  - Independence allows the Trust to accept and pool funds from multiple sources, including government agencies, and create multi-stakeholder partnerships with greater ease. Even where there are common interests, it is illegal to simply move money from one agency to another as needed.



Moreover, according to some government officials, there is a need for a “central bank” for some public-private partnerships.

- Independence will enable the Trust to work with groups that are reluctant to work with any particular administration or government agency due to political or policy disagreements, a desire to appear independent of government, or a desire to appear “multinational” rather than tied to a particular national government. Again and again, corporations and nongovernmental organizations reported that they would be happy to help the government if they could avoid association with core government agencies. For instance, one major technology company volunteered to send staff to help the government make better use of the Internet and social networking technologies, but did not feel comfortable sending them to the State Department, Defense Department, or intelligence community. Scholars too sometimes shy from public association with government agencies for fear that they will lose their credibility in the region they study.
- Showcasing America’s vibrant marketplace of ideas, one of the greatest and most effective symbols of our democracy overseas, presents public diplomacy practitioners with the challenge of striking a delicate balance between appearing not to contradict American policy and showcasing American diversity. This challenge is longstanding in American public diplomacy. Our country has struck this balance most comfortably when the functions of advocating policy and presenting a wide range of American voices have been separate. The USA•World Trust will not resolve this tension entirely, but it will offer government an alternate venue to accomplish these dual and sometimes competing objectives when it deems appropriate.
- An independent organization provides a neutral forum to convene short- and long-term visitors from U.S. government agencies, the military, the non-profit sector, universities, and the private sector to work as equals, regardless of their rank or status in home organizations.
- Finally, the Trust would be free of the many restrictions that (in many cases, correctly) impede the work of government: Federal Advisory Commission Act (FACA) restrictions, restrictions on accepting and moving funds, restrictions on sole source contracts, ethical restrictions on requesting assistance directly from companies and other organizations, requirements to gain multiple clearances across government agencies and offices, restrictions on hiring employees to meet short-term needs, the need to engage lawyers about any potential partnership, a lack of expertise about key issues, and a general culture of caution. To be clear, the Trust must adopt ethical practices, comply with its by-laws, and be subject to rigorous oversight. However, a small non-governmental organization should not need the same level of bureaucratic constraints

as major U.S. government agencies tasked with using lethal force or presenting the official position of the United States government overseas.

### **Organizational Culture**

The culture of this organization will influence its success. The USA•World Trust will prove its worth if it can:

- focus on making others successful instead of claiming credit
- leverage its own resources to multiply the impact of its investments
- claim “not invented here” as a badge of honor
- take pride in being proactive, agile, and forward-looking
- become a hub of innovation and excellence
- meld the talents and insights of those in government and the private sector in service to government and the national interest
- be sensitive to changing technologies and trends
- maintain a balance between asking hard but constructive questions and being of service to government, and
- emerge as a resource for leaders and public diplomacy professionals in all agencies of government.

To create the appropriate organizational culture, staff should be drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds and welcome into their ranks a regular cadre of visitors from sectors across our society. Like the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), program staff should be required to leave after a determined period of time to ensure the constant injection of fresh ideas. To remain nimble, the organization should build a staff of approximately 150 full-time staff in the short-term, with a large pool of visitors from government, the private sector, academia, and non-profit organizations.

### **Cost and Justification**

The Brookings report recommends that the Congress provide the USA•World Trust with a \$50 million annual budget, guaranteed for two years at a time to facilitate planning and good use of funds. This budget is expected to be supplemented by government contracts, foundation grants, private gifts, or other fee-for-service projects. As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Trust should be able to accept charitable donations, as does the British Council. If the Trust is successful, additional sources of revenue are likely to exceed this core operating budget many times over. Federal contracts, especially from the Departments of State and Defense, may be substantial if the Trust earns a reputation for good work. Private donors may also provide funding. As just one example, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars now receives only 30% of its

budget from the Congress. Other federally funded organizations like the Asia Foundation, East-West Center, and U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation also combine federal funding with non-governmental sources of funds.

This investment is important because the Trust will serve the national interest and contribute to a climate in which the success of specific foreign policy or national security objectives is more likely now and in the future. A tiny fraction of the defense budget, it would do much to support the national security interests of the United States by engaging a different range of audiences, voices, and tools. With the Iraq War costing an estimated \$434 million a day and the annual U.S. Information Agency budget in the 1990s reaching well over \$1 billion, this investment seems – if anything - too modest in comparison.<sup>5</sup>

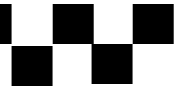
Investing in the creation of the USA World Trust, while worthy, should only be undertaken if it does not draw already limited resources away from civilian international affairs agencies or other public diplomacy efforts. Though reforms and reallocation are needed, resources are already in short supply, especially within the State Department. Moreover, a new organization should be created only if it is given enough resources to truly make an impact. A shell organization, with resources only sufficient to sustain itself, will not dent the substantial challenges America faces and would waste taxpayer dollars.

### **Conclusion**

America faces a rapidly evolving world, characterized by new centers of power, new ways of communicating, new opportunities, and new perils. Achieving national interests in this environment will require legitimacy and public support, domestically and around the world. America is well endowed to rise to this challenge. However, we will continue to need new thinking, new capacities, and new approaches that recognize the complex global environment we face now and the evolving threats we must brave in the future.

Public diplomacy is an important part of America's endeavor to engage the support of foreign publics in pursuit of common interests and values. But, of course, it is not the only -- or even the most important -- means of shaping our global future. To confront current and future challenges and lay the groundwork for policy success, America needs, and will always need:

- A foreign policy in line with our highest ideals
- A domestic policy that demonstrates our continuing commitment to our vision of America and invests in our future
- A comprehensive, forward-looking, and hard-headed strategy for how to engage and communicate with the world



- Strong but adaptable institutions, staffed by professionals who collectively possess the foreign language abilities, deep knowledge of foreign cultures, and wide range of skills necessary to conduct public diplomacy,
- Foreign policies that promote American interests, based on careful evaluation of the full costs and benefits, including the support or opposition of foreign stakeholders
- A comprehensive understanding of the global environment, including the beliefs and values of foreign societies
- Effective, creative, and evolving means to convey and build support for specific policies
- A carefully maintained balance between responding quickly to new opportunities and challenges, without overreacting or neglecting regions that fall out of the headlines
- The ability to project a nuanced and complex vision of America, our ideals, institutions, and society, in order to challenge simplistic assumptions that obstruct understanding
- Deep networks of personal relationships between Americans and foreign counterparts
- Growing support for universal values such as liberty, equality, justice, and tolerance
- An international environment of understanding, respect, and trust in which the pursuit of common interests is more feasible.

Though America has not yet achieved this vision, it is realistic and attainable. A re-energized national effort on public diplomacy – one that draws fully on the energy and talents of the American people, supports likeminded champions around the world, and is grounded in a stronger and better resourced government – will help America to achieve this vision. Our nation, and also the world, will be safer, more prosperous, and more honorable for it.



This article draws from a recent report published by the author. See Kristin M. Lord, *Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2008). The full report can be found at [http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/11\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_lord.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/11_public_diplomacy_lord.aspx)

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## NOTES

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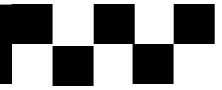
<sup>1</sup> Public diplomacy is defined here as the promotion of national interest through efforts to inform, engage, and influence foreign publics

<sup>2</sup> See "Global Views of USA Improve" BBC World Service Poll, April 1, 2008, available at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr08/BBCVals\\_Apr08\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr08/BBCVals_Apr08_rpt.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See "Why Turks Feel Threatened by the U.S." BBC and World Public Opinion.Org, September 5, 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafrica/393.php?lb=brme&pnt=393&nid=&id=>

<sup>4</sup> "Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," April 24, 2007, [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START\\_Apr07\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> David M. Herszenhorn and Eric Lipton, "As War's Costs Rise, Congress Demands That Iraq Pay Larger Share," *New York Times*. April 19, 2008. For the USIA budget, see Congressional Research Service Report to Congress, "State Department and Related Agencies FY1998 Appropriations," December 10, 1997, available at <http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/data/1997/upl-meta-crs-441/meta-crs-441.ocx>.



# Improving the International Marketplace of Ideas

By Helle Dale

Margaret Thatcher once said that America is the only nation in the world “built upon an idea.” This idea - liberty - has transcended geography and ethnicity to shape American identity and to inspire political discourse, both domestic and foreign, since the nation’s founding.

Indeed, John Adams wrote that the American Revolution occurred first “in the hearts and minds of the people.” Ideas lie at the very core of this country. Unfortunately, the U.S. isn’t doing a good enough job of explaining our ideas overseas.

Our leaders say they understand the problem. For example, in November 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates argued that “[w]e must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military.... We must also focus our energies on the other elements of national power that will be so crucial in the coming years.”

Our enemies already understand this.

In an age when information can be accessed easily and instantly via satellite television, the Internet and cell phones, *perception* heavily influences and sometimes even becomes reality, if it doesn’t trump reality outright. Al Qaeda and insurgent groups in Iraq have utilized these technologies to spread daily press releases, weekly and monthly magazines, video clips, full-length films, and even television programs.

Mainstream Arab media subsequently amplified the insurgents’ and terrorists’ efforts, spreading their messages to an audience throughout the Muslim world. These methods have proven so

effective that these groups have shifted their tactics on the ground. Rather than simply recording their exploits, these groups often conduct operations with no clear objective other than to provide additional footage to post online.

In contrast, the U.S. government often adds fuel to the fire. A recent study by Harvard economists Radha Iyengar and Jonathan Monten suggests a direct correlation between the number of insurgent attacks in Iraq and public statements in the United States that are critical of the war. The authors found that when U.S. political leaders seemed to demonstrate weakening resolve, anti-coalition attacks increased between 5 percent and 25 percent. These effects were strongest in Iraqi provinces with greater access to satellite television.

This example is cited not to suggest that criticism of the war should be silenced in the United States—free speech is a cornerstone of American democracy—and not as an argument to engage in propaganda. But the institutions involved in strategic communications (informing and influencing foreign publics) are given too little money and generally don’t work well together. Consequently, their messages are often ineffective, incoherent and sometimes contradictory.

As a first step, the United States must delegitimize the extremists’ message of hate and fear. As a second step, information campaigns should explain American values, especially religious freedom and individual responsibility.

Our nation’s failure to explain itself is inexcusable. Government officials,



policymakers and scholars have known about this problem for years. Since 9/11, government and non-governmental organizations have issued more than 30 reports that address the nation's inability to use its resources to win hearts and minds abroad.

The United States needs a new institutional framework focused on a new agency—a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications—as well as substantial reforms of the Department of State and greater utilization of the Pentagon's combatant commands.

Now, it's not often that a conservative calls for the launch of a new federal agency. But the point here isn't to create a new bureaucracy. It's to reorganize America's existing public diplomacy offices so they're able to work together to tell our national story and promote our national values effectively.

The U.S. lost an effective (although far from perfect) voice when the United States Information Agency was shut down in the 1990s. Established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953, the USIA conducted America's information campaigns and promoted the ideals of democracy, individual rights and free markets for more than four decades during the Cold War. In an effort to cash in on our supposed national "peace dividend," Congress and the Clinton administration abolished the seemingly useless USIA, carved up its various functions and assets and rolled them into the State Department bureaucracy, where they were promptly swallowed up.

Luckily, Congress has become increasingly aware of the inherent defects of the post-USIA framework. In the House, Reps. Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and Mack Thornberry (R-Texas),

offered an amendment last year aimed at strengthening interagency coordination and providing additional resources for strategic communications research. In the Senate, Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) has introduced the Strategic Communications Act of 2008 (S. 3546), which would comprehensively transform, rather than reform, the nation's strategic communications framework. Principally, the bill would centralize the government's strategic communications, including "information, educational and cultural activities," in a new agency, the National Center for Strategic Communications.

Both pieces of legislation contain critical and long-overdue reforms.

The Smith-Thornberry amendment addresses the lack of leadership, interagency coordination, defined roles and missions and adequate resources that have plagued U.S. informational outreach since the end of the Cold War. However, these proposals might not be enough. Strategic communications and public diplomacy would continue to be a subset of, and thus overshadowed by, the primary responsibilities of the State and Defense Departments.

The National Center for Strategic Communications proposed in the Brownback legislation would fill this gap. In addition, the bill addresses many of the problems that plagued the USIA by providing a clear and effective mission and set of principles. It also would empower the National Center for Strategic Communications as the lead implementer and coordinator for informational outreach. However, the bill doesn't address or even mention the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Defense, a key agency in informational outreach.



Further, both proposals fail to address a key problem—defining informational outreach—that has beset government strategic communications and public diplomacy efforts since the Cold War.

Too often, officials use their own communications capabilities to advance their own interests and ignore or contradict efforts both inside (public affairs vs. public diplomacy/information operations) and outside of their agencies (State Department vs. DOD). Without an interagency definition of strategic communications, dysfunction will likely continue regardless of structure or resources.

To address these problems, President Obama and Congress should:

**1) Establish a U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications.**

As described in the Brownback legislation, this agency should serve as the focal point for U.S. informational outreach capabilities. Under the guidance of the Director of Strategic Communications, who would report directly to the president, the center would craft and implement an interagency strategic communications strategy, oversee U.S. broadcasting and administer grants to nonprofit groups engaged in useful information operation activities. The director would also be responsible for interagency coordination of strategic communications, including coordinating the Pentagon’s regional information activities with the rest of the U.S. government. In addition, the research center advocated in the Smith-Thornberry amendment should be incorporated into the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications. Finally, Congress should fund and equip this new organization by transferring the State Department’s public diplomacy budgets and the BBG’s broadcasting assets.

**2) Establish a new strategic communications strategy that specifically defines the elements of information outreach.**

As one of its first tasks, the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications should establish a new national strategy and definition of strategic communications. Public affairs, public diplomacy, international broadcasting, and information operations should be specifically defined so that their implementers understand where they fit in the strategic communications strategy and process. The Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication has provided the most comprehensive and effective definition of strategic communications.

**3) Reform the State Department.**

In creating the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications, Congress should transfer all functions and assets of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to the Director of Strategic Communications, except for the Bureau of Public Affairs, which would continue to serve as the State Department’s public outreach arm. In addition, the State Department would no longer have a connection to U.S. broadcasting and would focus exclusively on its state-to-state, regional and multilateral foreign affairs functions.

**4) Make use of the Pentagon’s combatant commands.**

Strategic communications should be implemented not only at the country level, as advocated within the Brownback legislation, but also at the regional level through the combatant commands. Often, an ongoing crisis can overwhelm the capacities of a local country team or involve more than one nation, requiring a regional

response. The combatant commands are uniquely suited to providing such a regional response because they have evolved into one of the few established mechanisms capable of monitoring and coordinating government efforts across wide geographical areas. Consequently, the U.S. Agency for Strategic Communications needs to establish plans for informational outreach run through both the embassies and the combatant commands.

For the United States, whose purpose is rooted in the aspirations of freedom for everyone, winning hearts and minds is a critical part of any effective foreign policy. Yet without substantial reforms in its structures and methods of public diplomacy, the U.S. will remain, as Secretary Gates said, “miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies and our goals.”

Congress and the president must ensure that the United States fully engages in the war of ideas by creating a new agency and a comprehensive framework to use strategic communications as an effective, proactive tool.

**This article draws from a recent report co-published by the author and Tony Blankley, Helle C. Dale, and Oliver Horn. See *Reforming U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (Washington DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2008). The full report can be found at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/PublicDiplomacy/bg2211.cfm>.**

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**Helle Dale is Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.**

# MEMORANDUM

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**To: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton**

**Subject: Recommendations for the Obama administration**

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**This document recommends that the Obama administration significantly strengthen U.S. government support for local, independent media around the world and ensure access to digital communications technologies as a centerpiece of foreign assistance modernization.**

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Based on decades of experience in international development, we believe *a foreign policy goal of universal access to quality local information would reflect the strategies and values of an Obama presidency*. Local media and communications technologies can empower communities to make their voices heard, connect to the global marketplace of goods and ideas, and build grassroots democracy. Media and information technologies can exponentially amplify American "soft power" approaches to development, diplomacy and national security.

## Recommendations

- President Obama should declare that media and information technologies are a centerpiece of foreign assistance modernization.
- International media assistance should be adopted as a core development strategy across all sectors of development.
- Strengthening the capacity of locally owned media in the local language should be central to our overall strategic communications and public diplomacy agenda, with funding levels adopted accordingly.

President Obama should direct USAID and the State Department to accelerate the spread of independent media and digital communications technologies to everyone. This can be done through activities such as support for independent media outlets, especially those that reach the information-poor; distributing circumvention software in closed societies to avoid government censorship; advocating for laws and policies that open Internet and mobile phone markets and lower connectivity costs through telecom competition; and providing education and training for professional and citizen journalists to enhance the quality of news and information.

## The Case

**Development**— Reducing poverty requires good governance and empowerment of the poor with information they need and a voice in their future.

- Quality information strengthens **development**. It has been famously noted that no country with a free press has ever had a famine. Significant improvements in public health, the environment and humanitarian relief directly correlate with local media development and access to quality information.
- New **digital technologies**, especially **mobile phones**, have proven to be drivers of economic development and have unprecedented potential to empower the poor and dispossessed. (Every 10% increase in mobile phone use increases GDP 0.6 percent.)
- A free press is necessary to achieve **transparency, accountability and good governance**, which, in turn, improve economic development.
- Free and independent media are as important as elections in establishing **democratic civil society**.
- Ending **information poverty** benefits both the information-poor and the information-rich by creating larger markets, more efficient governance and a reduction of conflict.

**Public Diplomacy**—Barack Obama’s election presents a historic opportunity to build faith in America’s leadership. **Strengthening the capacity of local media** should be central to our overall strategic communications agenda, with funding levels adopted accordingly.

- In the digital age, government and “official” sources of information have less credibility than they used to, but the USG can help spread information tools that can empower grassroots democracy activists.
- Local media development is extremely cost-effective and impacts the people who are hardest to reach, in the countries we are most concerned about.
- Professional training of local journalists often results in coverage that is more consistent with U.S. values of openness and tolerance. U.S. media NGOs have trained tens of thousands of journalists and helped start thousands of independent television and radio stations, print and online publications which reach hundreds of millions of people in strategically important regions of the world. Yet there is still a need for vastly more media development.

**The information revolution must be an integral part of any 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign policy.**

We appreciate your consideration of this important element in foreign assistance modernization.

**Signed:**

Chris Boskin, *Board Chair, Corporation for Public Broadcasting*  
Jeanne Bourgault, *Chief Operating Officer/Sr. VP for Programs, Internews Network*  
Kathy Bushkin Calvin, *Executive Vice President and COO, United Nations Foundation*  
Doug Carlston, *Board Chair, Public Radio International*  
Gregory C. Carr, *President, Gregory C. Carr Foundation*  
Lorne Craner, *President, International Republican Institute*  
James X. Dempsey, *VP - Public Policy, Center for Democracy & Technology*  
Michelle and Robert Friend, *Friend Family Foundation*  
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Laurene Powell Jobs, *Philanthropist*  
Ambassador John Shattuck, *CEO, JFK Presidential Library Foundation*  
Suzanne Saunders Shaw, *former TV News Anchor at NBC and ABC, San Francisco*  
Tara Sonenshine, *VP, Planning and Outreach, U.S. Institute for Peace; Obama campaign core advisory foreign policy team*  
General Anthony C. Zinni (Ret.), *U.S. Marine Corps*

(Organizations and affiliations listed for identification purposes only)

*This memo was spearheaded by David Hoffman, President of Internews Network, a global non-profit organization that fosters independent media and access to information worldwide. Co-founded by Hoffman in 1982, Internews Network has worked in over 70 countries, and currently has offices in 23 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Mr. Hoffman has written widely about media and democracy, the Internet, and the importance of supporting pluralistic, local media around the world; he has also testified before US House and Senate committees on issues of press freedom and access to information. Mr. Hoffman is a founder of the Global Forum for Media Development, a cross-sector initiative of more than 500 leading media assistance organizations from over 100 countries.*



## Exit Interview

### *James Glassman Evaluates his Tenure at State*



#### **INTRO:**

**James K. Glassman was the last of several Under Secretaries of State who attempted to craft a Public Diplomacy strategy for the administration of President George W. Bush. He followed the two-year tenure of Bush insider Karen Hughes, whose close ties to the President helped elevate the post, giving the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs unprecedented access to foreign policy decision-making, including daily meetings with the Secretary of State and invitations to National Security Council meetings. During his six-month term Glassman has tried to leverage that access, as a visible and vocal advocate of Public Diplomacy's importance to International Relations and national security.**

**As Under Secretary Glassman prepared to exit State, PD asked him to recount**

**his time as the U.S. Government's leading public diplomat. He sat down with Editor-in-Chief Anoush Rima Tatevossian in October 2008 for a discussion about the State Department's approach to PD, his accomplishments, and "the war of ideas."**

***PD:* You've acknowledged that you were taking on a short-term position when you began. How much of your to-do list have you been able to accomplish?**

**GLASSMAN:** Quite a bit actually. To me the most important thing was to focus on one aspect of what we do here, which we call the war of ideas, or ideological engagement, and to try to build a structure that will last, we hope, for a long time; to set a strategy; and to start rolling out some war of ideas programs.

Within a fairly short period of time after I got here we put a structure in place—an interagency structure, because I am the lead in the interagency for the war of ideas. So we've done that, and we have a very clear strategy. Everyone understands what we're trying to do.

And we have started to roll out a program - some of which had been in the works before I got here. So I have to say I'm very happy with what we've done so far. You know there's still a lot to be done but I think what we have put into place—and, by the way, I said this to the President of the United States last week when I gave a briefing to him—what we have put in place is a strategy, a structure and some programs. And that didn't exist when this president took office. And it will exist for the

next president.

**You've mentioned that you want to leave some structures and programs in place for the new administration. Can you tell us what they are, and if they represent any key recommendations or priorities you would flag for the next administration.**

Well our prime recommendation is to keep the basic structure that we have built here. You know there's a lot of discussion in the public diplomacy community about how best to organize a public diplomacy effort: reconstitute USIA? Put the leadership of public diplomacy within the White House itself? Our very strong belief is that we have a good structure right now. It's not perfect, and it could certainly use improvement. But to make major structural changes would set back the war of ideas effort for years and it hasn't been easy to come up with this structure. So, my main recommendation to the next administration is to take advantage of what you've got here.

And the second recommendation, which goes hand in hand with the first, is that we need to scale up. A few years ago I would not have been in favor of throwing more resources specifically at the strategic communications part of public diplomacy—certainly more resources for exchanges and things that are established—because we didn't really have a war of ideas structure before. But now we've got it, and I just think it's time to scale up.

**Considering Edward Murrow's famous line about public diplomacy needing to be in on the take offs and not just the crash landings – would you say the structures you're working on instituting are getting public diplomacy closer to that wish?**

Well first of all, I think my predecessor

Karen Hughes did that. And I'm the beneficiary of that - of sort of putting Edward R. Murrow's dictum into practice. And so I would certainly encourage the next President to continue that. So, for example, as Under Secretary of State, I participate in the Secretary of State's eight o'clock meeting every morning, which may not sound like a big deal, but bureaucratically it is a big deal. We have, I think it's six Under Secretaries here and a Deputy Secretary, and only a few Under Secretaries participate at that level. I also have very, very good access to the National Security Council, the people who are really sending the policy decisions up to the president. So, I can say that this Under Secretary is someone who can't complain that he's only in on the crash landings rather than in on the take offs. And I would very strongly urge that that continue.

**Speaking of structure, since public diplomacy has been folded completely into State Department, how are you interfacing with those people on the ground that are implementing and conducting public diplomacy at the embassies around the world? How good is that communication?**

Well, I think it's very good, but I *do* think it is an area that needs tweaking. Essentially what happened was that when USIA was folded into the State Department, as I understand it, there was the anticipation that the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy would have more control over the people in the field than he or she—actually all my predecessors were 'shes'—has had.

I think in the private sector and the public sector you have bureaucratic organizations that by necessity are organized both geographically *and* functionally, and that's also true here. And it's not like one is better than the other, you just have to sort it out. At the State Department, I think it's safe to say that in the case of public diplomacy,

the geographical matrix has dominated. What we have done in the last few months is to get more authority over, for example, assignments by people out in the field.

Now, I think our relationship with the people in the field is very good but I think there are ways to make it better structurally. For example, we have one regional bureau out of the six, Europe that has a PD Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of European Affairs, Colleen Graffy. She reports both to me and to Dan Fried, who is the Assistant Secretary. That is a structure we'd like to see throughout. Now, I have to say what we've got in the other regional bureaus works very well. And if you were to ask me, whether making this change is an absolute necessity right now, I would say no. But I think that it would be good to institutionalize what we've got.

In the other bureaus, we do have somebody that we interface with that connects us down through the organizations. I think that works pretty well. And then we have people here, who have responsibility for individual regional bureaus; so they are the interface. They're pretty well connected.

But what I understand completely is that the great asset, the real value-added, that the State Department has, is this amazing network that reaches out to every country in the world. Our people that are on the ground have a better sense of what audiences are looking for. It would be impossible to recreate that, and impossible to find that anywhere else in the government, and really, we're in the communications business, more than anyone else in the government. So we're very appreciative of that network, and we utilize it.

**To give us a sense of priorities, could you offer insight on how the State Department's Public Diplomacy budget is allocated, percentage-wise,**

**between new media outreach, exchange programs, media management, broadcasting, etc.? Do you think certain areas need to be emphasized more than others?**

I think it's really important for the public to understand, which they don't, that we spend most of our money on exchanges—educational and cultural exchanges. That's really where about two-thirds of the budget goes. We like exchanges, we know that they work, we do a lot of research evaluating them. The best thing we can do, I think, in PD, is to put an American face to face with someone from a foreign country. The problem with exchanges is that they're *relatively* expensive—though, compared to what the government spends in other areas maybe not so expensive. So we'd like to do more, and we have increased those exchanges dramatically. They're up 50 percent in the last three to four years. It's a pretty dramatic increase. And we know they work, and it does make sense to put resources into things we know work. Just to give you an idea, you know we do 7,000 Fulbrights a year; 4,000 Fulbright Scholars come to the United States, 3,000 Americans go abroad. The Fulbright program costs about \$200 million, and our total budget is about \$900 million, so that one program is about 20 percent of our budget.

Ok, so that's where most of the money goes. Then, almost all the rest of the money goes to international information programs; outreach, plus the salaries that we pay, that are part of our budget for PD officers.

The outreach is very high-tech. We think that's the most efficient way to get out to the rest of the world. It's certainly not all we do. We send 800 speakers abroad every year. We do a lot of videoconferences. We have a website America.gov that is in seven languages.

So really what we spend almost all of our money on are those programs. Let's say that's 95 percent of the budget; its actually a little bit more than that.

And the rest is the part that I have been focusing on, which is the war of ideas, which tends to be more short term and medium term and more highly focused. There our resources are minimal. I mean, probably less than \$10 million a year. Now, some of the things that we do in exchanges and information programs clearly have a war of ideas effect—that is to say they are involved in engaging ideologically; engaging with ideas. So it's hard to actually quantify what we do for ideas, but it's safe to say its small compared to what we like to call sort-of the more traditional PD.

**You've mentioned the War of Ideas and that it's a very high priority at the moment. First, how do you ensure that 'diversion' and counter-terrorism does not undermine some of the long-term engagement opportunities for American public diplomacy? And second, you have previously noted that the largest misconception we are dealing with is that the United States is waging war on Islam. Has there been any concern that the phrase "war or ideas" may contribute to perpetuation about that misconception?**

Sure. First, I would say we are in no danger at all of having our short-term priorities overwhelm what we do in the long term. Because what we do in the long and medium term with exchanges and with international visitor programs, which have a long-term effect—you know, it takes Margaret Thatcher 20 years after her visitor program to become Prime Minister—those not only should not go away, and will not go away, but actually should be more important. But, we firmly believe that we are engaged in a very important contest

around the world and, by the way, its not only Muslim societies. This contest involves something much more important in many of these areas than bullets and bombs. It's ideas. And, I think this is a belief that's held throughout the government. Secretary (of Defense Robert) Gates has said we're not going to win this battle with bullets alone—I'm paraphrasing. So we think that it has been a deficiency, since the fall of the Berlin Wall until very recently, that there hasn't been enough concentration on this. But the idea that it's going to be too much, I don't think we have to worry about that. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

The second part, about the terminology: we don't like the term war of ideas, quite frankly. And I've said that many times. But we just haven't come across anything better. And so the way that I usually talk about it is to juxtapose it with actual war, the part where people get killed. What we're talking about is engaging at the level of ideas rather than at the level of gunpowder. But there is the implication of 'us' against 'them', which we're trying to get away from, frankly. We think our enemies have this maniacal view of the world where there are just two sides. And our view of the world is, in fact, quite different. What we're saying is that there is one pursuit that we are adamantly opposed to and that involves using violence to impose your will on other people, and killing civilians in the process. Whereas the rest of it, the other alternatives, are manifold and glorious. We think that individuals have lots and lots of choices and it should be left to their imagination and free societies to make those choices. They don't have to be like little Americans; we don't want them to be. They should be free to make those choices themselves. So we really don't think it's 'us' against 'them'.

The problem is, you know, war of ideas is something that people pretty much tend to understand—at least in English—

pretty much what it means. And so it's a convenience more than anything else. But we're trying to get away from it, and are open to others phrases if we could come up with something else. And let me tell you, people in the government have come up with a bunch of different things. For a while there was a vogue for "global ideological engagement" and we do call our little center the Global Strategic Engagement Center. But when you start using words like that you know, Congress and the public that pays any attention to this don't know what you're talking about.

**While we're talking about engagement, your office has been doing a lot of new media outreach. We see, and you've noted before, that in this new environment preaching at people does not work very well. Do you see more success with two-way dialogues, and how do you compare that with unidirectional old media/broadcasting, and the expense that goes into those.**

We think that the new technology is very, very beneficial to a free society like ours and the messages that we want to get across. So, people talk about how Al Qaeda has been using the new technology, and there's no doubt that they've used it to their own benefit. But they use it in an old way, which I think is less and less useful. They've used it as broadcast, as you say, unidirectional. You know, websites that are password protected. They're teaching people how to make bombs. They're preaching at them with propaganda. When there's pushback against them, for example when they post something on YouTube—and YouTube usually takes it down, but before it gets taken down they frequently get lots of criticism. And the last thing that a cult wants to have is criticism because their whole recruitment process involves sealing off their recruits and they're fighters from other ideas. They don't want that to happen. So

we benefit from the web 2.0 environment. And we see our role as a convener or a facilitator. We want more and more people to be pushed into this environment; we do whatever we can to get them there. That's a very risky thing for a government bureaucracy to do. Normally, your impulse is to have control. I don't know whether you're familiar with what we're doing with the Democracy Video project. And we actually have another project that the ECA [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs] is doing on culture—the video project's theme is "my culture + your culture = ". But it's pretty much the same thing. We have no idea what's going to happen, and we do not control it. But this is the perfect example of what we're trying to do.

**Given that evaluation is something PD practitioners are always concerned about, how do you measure the effectiveness of PD for different purposes, whether it's to secure funding or whether you're making an impact. In broadcast we've used ratings, but how, for example, do we know that ratings translate into influence?**

**Are you satisfied with the evaluation tools we have? What evaluation methods would you like to see developed that might be more useful?**

This is a big question. When I was on the Djerejian group five years ago, I was one of the few non-academics, non-experts in Muslim societies. My contribution was basically in this area: I kept saying we have to look at programs to determine whether they move the needle. Now, what is the needle moving? What is the subject matter or why do we say it's a needle moving at all. The title of our report, which I came up with, was *Changing Minds, Winning Peace* is basically because we are in the business of changing people's minds. And that's something that, you know, some people in



PD are a little squeamish about. But when you define PD as ‘understanding, engaging, informing, influencing’, I think that all those are important, but ultimately you’re in this in order to influence people. And again, that doesn’t mean influence them in a way that all their opinions are all the same as the average American or anything like that, but that’s really the business that you’re in.

So ultimately the question becomes partly, what do people think about, let’s say, the United States and how well do they understand the U.S.’ policies and our society? For example, we know through surveys that large numbers of people in Muslim societies believe that the United States is intolerant towards Muslims, that they’re not allowed to pray here or, you know, there are different degrees of misunderstanding. One of my predecessors, Charlotte Beers started by doing a lot of research on what are the misconceptions about the United States. One of them is that we’re not a family oriented society, and she wanted to go out and change those perceptions. So, I think if you do that kind of thing, it’s pretty easy to gauge whether what you’ve done is actually moving the needle, although there are other influences. But even if you isolate it and say, OK, we’re going to do a campaign—lets just say an advertising campaign. We don’t really do that but lets say we were doing an ad campaign. And we want to change perceptions about whether people think that the United States is a family oriented society, well, that’s easy to test. However, there are other influences. We don’t know whether it’s just the advertising campaign. But beyond that, it gets really difficult, and then there’s the question of somebody may change his/her understanding of the U.S., but does that translate into actual behavior?

Anyway, I’m not going to be able to go through all these here. But I would say, one major focus for research and deep thinking

at places like the University of Southern California ought to be on this question. We are committing a lot more in the way of resources to evaluation. We do a lot of evaluation of ECA programs, in other words, we talk to each person before they go into a Fulbright or a YES program, and then see what their understanding is afterwards. This is not consistent across all programs and so we’re trying to do that.

Broadcasting is a little dicey, because, what we do here is outright. There’s no doubt that what we’re trying to do is influence people and move the needle. In broadcasting, ultimately, that’s what we want to do.

But that is not the mission specifically of international broadcasting as Congress has defined that mission. And a lot of people think it is. A lot of people think that the job of U.S. international broadcasting is to advocate for U.S. policy. And if that were true, then the question would be how many people who didn’t like U.S. policy have now changed their mind. But that’s not what U.S. international broadcasting does. So what we have done is, we’ve looked at the basic metrics—what are the sizes of the audience and whether the audience feels that the broadcasts themselves were truthful and reliable. Do they trust what they’re hearing? Then the next level that we’ve been doing at the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG)—and this is relatively new—is the understanding level. Do you have a better understanding of, lets say, the American electoral system by listening to VOA broadcasts, or whatever it is, over the last two months? But, what we have not tested is ‘do you like American policy in Iraq?’ And I don’t think we would ever do that at the BBG, because that’s just not the mission of the BBG. It would be interesting to find out, though.

**As they say, where you sit is where you stand. How has this job changed your**



**ideas about public diplomacy, and has the job been changed because of your ideas?**

Well, the answer to the latter question is that I have definitely put more emphasis on ideological engagement, or the war of ideas. So I would say that my predecessors have put less stress on that part of what we do. And that's not a criticism of them, it's just my own background and what I see is the most important place to put my own energy. So I think that's a difference, I think it's a major difference. President (Bush), two years ago, designated the Under Secretary as the lead in the war of ideas, or strategic communications, and so my predecessors, pre- April 2006, didn't have this opportunity anyway. But I do, and I've taken it on.

Where you stand is where you sit. When I was on the Djerejian group, I felt that it made sense to put the focus on the leadership for the war of ideas in the White House. That was our recommendation. And we did that mainly because we thought that was the best way to elevate the importance of the war of ideas, or public diplomacy writ large, within the government. I no longer believe that—and maybe it's because of my experience here. I believe that for several reasons. One is that I think that the President can, as President (Bush) has, make it very clear that this is a high priority—no matter where the person who is the leader of it is located. And second, if we made that shift, let's say next month, it would take years, because of the way bureaucracies work, before you had a structure that was workable. And then finally, I think that it's very important that the lead in the War of Ideas have operational authorities. In other words, it's very important that I can do stuff. So, if you're in the White House and you're in the NSA, at least as it's currently constituted—and my guess is as will be constituted for the future—it's essentially not an operational

body. They don't go out and do things. They strategize, they tell other people what to do, they give advice, and then we go out and do it. And I think that it's important that the person who's in the lead not do everything, but to be able to do some things, even as a demonstration to other people—let's say DoD. And so, for all those reasons I've definitely changed my mind about that.

I think I've also changed my mind from my vantage point at the BBG about how active the BBG ought to be in U.S. policy itself. I think that journalistically it's a good idea to have the BBG as an independent institution; however, I think we can do a better job of linking it up with State as far as policy is concerned, as far as an understanding of policy. In other words, we haven't really institutionalized the connection between State and BBG on policy. I'm not advocating having State order BBG to do something—I would be very much against that; the Secretary of State has just one vote on the Board. But if State says, you know, Somalia is a really high priority for us, then the BBG can say 'we broadcast 3 hours a day in Somalia, that's enough.' That's fine, nothing wrong with that; but just to be able to have that channel of communication. And we have it now—partly because I'm here and I used to be the BBG Chairman, and partly because we have a really, really good board of Governors at the BBG that is absolutely willing and eager to listen to State. And the people at State are very cooperative. We have a great relationship back and forth. But you can imagine, going forward that might not be the case.

**Have you had a personal experience of public diplomacy? Were you ever on the receiving end of a public diplomacy program that which gave you the perspective of an outsider?**

I don't think in any kind of formal sense that I have. When I was at the American

Enterprise Institute for example I'd been on programs that the German party organizations and think tanks had sponsored; the German Marshall Fund. I guess in that sense I have, but I was never an exchange student or anything like that. Before I came here I was a speaker for the State Department.

I think it's important that the person in this position be exposed to the actual recipients of our exchange programs. I think two of the best experiences that I've had here were one, speaking to the YES (Youth Exchange and Study) students. The YES program is the program where we bring young people, mostly from Muslim societies to the U.S. to go to public high schools around the country and live with American families. They come here to Washington before they go out, and (return) when they're finished with school. So, I spoke to them on their graduation here. Three hundred kids just full of enthusiasm. I took 14 questions and there were still like 30 to 40 people lined up to ask questions. These are kids with open minds, open hearts. They don't necessarily buy the U.S. policy line-hook-and-sinker, and we don't want them to. But they asked excellent questions. I think as far as absorbing the notion of critical thinking, and all that, they were great. The main thing they wanted to be sure of was that we continued the program and extended it, so that more kids would be able to do what they did.

And then the second thing that I did was I went to 10 Downing Street for the sixtieth anniversary of the U.S.-UK Fulbright Commission. And I talked to a lot of Fulbright recipients. I've also done that in some other venues, and almost every single one of (the Fulbright participants) says exactly the same thing, and that is: 'this experience changed my life.' So, I don't have to be convinced about how important these programs are. What we're trying to figure out is how to amplify them. Even if

we doubled it we'd be doing 14,000 or so, but that's still a pebble in the ocean. So, are there ways that other people can experience an exchange through one individual's experiences? We want to broaden it through technology right now. Through videos, through blogs.

**In your view, what skills are most important for PD practitioners and how we could put them into practice?**

First of all, I absolutely believe that anybody who is a practitioner should have a broad liberal arts education—because you never know what you're going to run up against. And you really need the depth of understanding that you get from having that kind of education. And the second thing I would say is, it really would be good to have an understanding of, sympathy for, or engagement in new technology. I do think it's important to stay on top of that. In my humble opinion web 2.0 has completely changed this game. Not just in distribution methods, its actually changed the way we look at our job. So when I say the U.S. should be a facilitator and convener we actually believe that is a concept that we want to incorporate into our brand. We would like the world to see us as that. I wouldn't say it's only because of web 2.0 technology—you could certainly do that by having physical programs and debates. But, we don't want the world to see us as getting out there and preaching America to them: 'Hey we're great you ought to be like us.' I think that the technology has catalyzed that idea.

# Brand America or America the Beautiful?

## Public Diplomacy in the Obama Era

By Benjamin R. Barber



In this period of transition from the Bush to the Obama administration, those concerned with American public diplomacy are compelled to consider the deep erosion of America's reputation around the world. Indeed, it is the very policies that have tried to exploit America's exceptionalist past as a "beacon of liberty" and model of democratic independence for the world that have tarnished America's image. The use of force abroad in democracy's name, the seeming hypocrisy of a nation devoted to liberty and the open society operating Guantanamo and supporting the Patriot Act, and the general chilling of civil liberties and attitudes towards immigration have all conspired to undermine America's good name.

This raises the question that was the subject of *The Economist* magazine's recent debate on whether "Brand America Will Regain Its Shine," in which *Economist* editor-in-chief John Micklethwait, former *New Republic* editor and current Council on Foreign Relations Fellow Peter Beinart, Birnbach Chairman Emeritus Keith Reinhard, New American Foundation fellow Parag Khana and I participated in November 2008.

Beinart and Reinhard supported the thesis that the "shine" on America's good name can be fully restored. And certainly one of the most important and immediate effects of Barack Obama's election to the White House will be renewal of good will towards the United States, and an opportunity to restore the luster of its reputation. But as I argued at the *Economist* debate, to respond effectively to the question of whether America has lost its brand luster, we must know which "America" we are talking about. It was, and remains my view, that there are three quite distinctive "Americas," two of which have unquestionably lost their global appeal – and properly so. The third remains appealing, but is rarely front and center in efforts to market the United States.

These three models of America include, in shorthand, *Bellicose America*, *Brand America* and *America the Beautiful*. All three share in the exceptionalist mythology that has enveloped America since its founding. This mythology contends that the United States is endowed with special virtues and blessed with a special destiny that sets it apart from other nations and gives its actions a moral luster other countries lack. While many nations have a special view of their provenance – the French spoke of la mission civilatrice (civilizing mission) of French culture; the English Empire believed in the "White Man's Burden," its global responsibilities carried; even little Switzerland, with its special history in Europe, still speaks of *Sonderfall Schweiz* – Switzerland's role as a unique and special case.

Nonetheless, America is steeped from its very founding in an unprecedented

exceptionalist mythology that has helped to create the first and most dangerous of the American archetypes about which I want to speak: in this case, the boasting, boisterous, belligerent and bellicose America that, supported by its hard power foundation in the traditional industrial economy and in conventional military strength, is impelled by a kind of moral arrogance to think it has the right to change, reform, lead and even “democratize” the world by force of arms.

Ignoring President Washington’s counsel to “avoid entangling alliances,” *Bellicose America* had moved by the end of the 19th century to create an empire in democracy’s name, had fought Mexico and then the Germans in World War I to “make the world safe for democracy.” In its more recent history, it became mired in wars in Vietnam and then Iraq, in liberty’s good name. *Bellicose America* can do no wrong by virtue of its pure motives as a “second Eden” and “city on the hill” whose every design, however aggressive or self-serving, is rationalized by its putative exceptionalism and defining goodness.

Public diplomats, often trained in advertising and marketing, like to refer to *Brand America*. But to me, *Brand America* embodies a particular and quite recent American archetype, and one no better suited to making a case for the United States in the world than *Bellicose America*. It is an America of more recent vintage, defined by soft power rather than hard – what in another place I called “McWorld” (fast food, fast computers, fast music, fast films). This is an America more concerned with image than reality, an America in which public diplomacy is understood (misunderstood) as spin and marketing, an America uncertain about its identity and hence anxious to burnish its reputation.

Although *Brand America* is more interested in a global republic of consumers than an American empire, and is satisfied if others buy American whether or not they like America. It has been a defect of public diplomacy in the Bush administration that it has seemed more concerned with spinning the contrived “brand,” than portraying the underlying reality – perhaps because the reality has too often been tainted by Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, redaction and approaches to immigration, interrogation and torture at odds with traditional American approaches to civil liberties.

For better or worse, *Bellicose America’s* dominion of hard power has been superseded by the realities of interdependence and the limits of military power in addressing the ills of a polarized world plagued by inequality, environmental deterioration and terrorism. Not only is its luster dimmed, but its prospects for reasserting 19<sup>th</sup> century style unitary sovereign power are poor. Interdependence spells the eventual end of hegemony for every nation, even a superpower like the United States. As we move toward a post-sovereign world in which cooperation is likely to be more important than the projection by hegemonic nations of pure military or economic power, America is increasingly unlikely to buy good will or a lustrous image by acting the traditional role of superpower.

*Brand America’s* aspiration to make all the world America’s market, and to make America the world’s taste-maker, is also in trouble—and not only because the

American economy is in such desperate shape (after all, so is the global economy, precisely because of the new global interdependence). American brands are actually trying to distance themselves from the nation that once gave them their allure (McDonald's bought French national icon *Asterix* (the comic book Gallic character) to replace Ronald McDonald to sell Big Macs in Paris; other companies are trying to find indigenous niches for stores that sell "universal" American products).

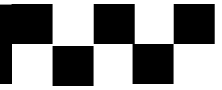
This leaves the United States without an easy archetype on which to hang its global reputation. To me, this points to the crucial importance of what I call *America the Beautiful* as the only model America still standing in the eyes of the world, and the only America worth fighting for and worth imitating. This is the America that takes its own liberal and democratic values seriously, not only boasting of its commitment to equality but committing itself to the ongoing historical struggles for civil rights, women's rights and human rights within the United States. This America leads by example rather than force or marketing. It is a nation defined not by the bellicose Star Spangled Banner, or the endless jingles devised by advertising gurus and marketing mavens, but of that anthem "America the Beautiful," that aspires to "crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea."

With the waning of *Bellicose America's* star as well as the dimming of *Brand America's* luster, the time of *America the Beautiful* may be at hand: the America of Walt Whitman, Toni Morrison, John Dewey, Langston Hughes, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and yes, perhaps Barack Obama. *America the Beautiful* will burnish no images and secure no power foothold for America in the world. But it may rekindle a sense that America is admirable if not imitable, worthy if not wondrous, and a pluralistic and multicultural symbol not of doing things the American way, but of doing things one's own way.

This may seem a modest proposal, indeed, but what a vast improvement it would be over America's current reputation as a tainted giant, more dangerous to the world than the enemies it fights in liberty's name!

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# Foreign Aid as Public Diplomacy

## *Is U.S. investment in the Middle East sowing goodwill?*

**Interview with Walid Maalouf**

Foreign or development aid has always been used as a tool of self-promotion. Undoubtedly, aid contributes to a country or organization’s soft power. The European Union and the EU Member States combined, for example, provide \$50 billion per year, accounting for more than half of all official development aid worldwide. This consistent stream of aid adds to the EU legitimacy as an honest broker in development matters, and enables the EU to leverage its reputation. The provision of aid, however, is often given only in exchange for cooperation in foreign policy objectives, or only after certain conditions have been met. Such was the case in 2003, when the President Bush pledged \$15 billion for HIV/AIDs prevention but required recipient countries to stress abstinence over the use of condoms—and after a Congressional amendment was added: condemn prostitution.<sup>1</sup>



Walid Maalouf at the Orphans Care Association on a USAID Public Diplomacy Tour in Jordan

American foreign assistance is formally administered through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which provides economic, development and humanitarian assistance globally. In doing so, USAID is the one of three key pieces of the U.S.’s foreign policy apparatus, the others being diplomacy and defense. While USAID does not have an explicit public diplomacy mission, its officers consider their work with foreign publics to be direct support of U.S. public diplomacy. They purport to promote American values through the programs they administer, describing them as opportunities for engagement. George Washington University’s Jerrold Keilson suggests that USAID reaching more publics around the world than any other U.S. government agency. Keilson argues: “USAID’s Office of Public Diplomacy is more aggressive than the States Department in dealing with misperceptions and misinformation about U.S. policy.”<sup>2</sup> The relevance of the organization was emphasized when Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in her first week on the job, pledged to overhaul U.S. foreign aid programs to increase assistance and give civilians a greater role in its delivery.



To further discuss the role of foreign aid in public diplomacy, particularly in the Middle East, *PD*'s John Nahas and Lorena Sanchez spoke with USAID Director of Public Diplomacy for Middle Eastern Affairs & the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), Walid Maalouf.

***PD*: What is your definition of public diplomacy?**

MAALOUF: Public diplomacy is dynamic. It's something you do everyday so it depends on the project. You need to be aware of what is going on in the world and be prepared to address it.

**In your opinion how can foreign aid contribute to the U.S.'s soft power? How is it used as a public diplomacy tool?**

The U.S. Agency for International Development, altogether, from its beginning to today and from all its efforts around the world, *is* a public diplomacy tool. USAID is doing public diplomacy day in and day out. Congress earmarks money at the administration's suggestion, and then the staff, directors, administrators and deputies all work together in awarding financial help to people in dire need around the world. Its responsibilities and duties range from education to humanitarian needs, building roads, schools, and societies, to shipping books. All of these USAID efforts are, and will forever be, the best public diplomacy for the U.S. government.

**How is U.S. aid perceived in the Middle East?**

From the four missions I have headed in public diplomacy to the region, U.S. aid in the Middle East is very much appreciated. They know about us, maybe not 100 percent of the population, but maybe 60 percent or 50 percent of people know that the U.S. is around, giving support and improving lives of people around the Arab world and the Muslim world. So, we are known. We are there. It doesn't mean that we have to stop right here. We still have a lot of good work to do. I took four public diplomacy centered missions to Egypt, West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan, talking about President Bush's policy in the broader Middle East and North Africa. His development policy has been taken well, and I believe that he has increased assistance yearly from around \$13 billion to \$23 billion in support for the international community.

**Do the perceptions change depending on the project? What kind of obstacles have you encountered?**

The main and only major obstacle I have encountered in the Middle East is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. People look to the U.S. from this angle and this is always the main issue. My response to this has been that the U.S. also has friends in the Arab world. Like we are friends with Israel, we are friends with Egypt, we are friends with Jordan, with Saudi Arabia and others. We have many



Arab friends. We have even more Arab friends than we have Israeli friends; USAID is not taking sides. Americans want freedom and democracy in the broader Middle East. They want stability and security and want people to accept each other in the Middle East.

During my recent trip to Jordan for example, I was in a Catholic school in Amman where 50 percent of the students are Muslim and 50 percent are Christian. I was surprised that the students got along but were very angry about Israel (being) there, and I tried to convey a message to them that we have to change this course and accept each other. In the way they coexist I think we will find a way for them to reach out to their neighbor and coexist. While in the West Bank, the Palestinian youth were more understanding of the Israeli existence and they are willing to live together and they want peace. While I was there they asked me to carry a message to the U.S. that ‘we are not terrorists or extremists, that we want peace and stability with Israel.’ The disconnect that I have been seeing between the Arab world, in particular in Jordan in this incident that happened, and the Palestinian youth that are the living in the West Bank needs to be addressed.

**What USAID projects have been the most successful in the Middle East?**

All the projects in the Middle East have been very successful. When I was in Egypt I went to two or three areas where people have been supported by micro-lending. We give them a loan and they start their own personal business; then they will graduate from the program carrying on the financial needs from their business without any USAID participation. There have been a lot of good projects in Iraq and in Lebanon. In Lebanon we are building a bridge that the Hezbollah-Israeli war destroyed and we are supporting Lebanon with up to a billion dollars in U.S. help. In Jordan we are up to 500 million dollars. In Egypt our budget was about 850 million. We also have a presence in Yemen. In addition, a Middle East partnership, the MEPI program initiative, is in Algeria and in Tunis. We are all over the Arab world. We are doing extremely well, and all of our work has been outstanding. I don’t see any one particular thing that is better than the other. What the U.S. taxpayers are doing is an awesome job.

**You have been saying that U.S. aid to the region is at a relatively high. However, U.S. public opinion in the region is at a relative low. How do you gauge the effectiveness of the U.S. public diplomacy and aid efforts when the image of the U.S. public is not so great in the Middle East?**

I think what is needed in this area, and what would make the U.S. look positive and up to date, is if the Department of State would hire more Arab Americans into public diplomacy positions. I think the Arab American community is the best bridge between the U.S. and Arab people. Arab Americans are the best spokesmen on behalf of the United States and its goodwill. I think this issue is where the Department of State and its hierarchy is lacking in its efforts. I strongly think, after (my) four years’ experience with USAID and the Department of State,



that this is the shortcoming of the Department. It must hire more Arab American and Muslim Americans to carry on public diplomacy efforts.

When I go to the Middle East as an Arab American myself, people do not believe that a Lebanese student who came to the this country 30 years ago when he was 21 could rise to a position such as mine and be named by the President of the United States to that position. The people of the Middle East are very proud of this, as are Arab Americans. This is where the United States Department of State is lacking, in hiring Arab Americans and giving them the trust and opportunity to help the United States.

**How does your role as an Arab American and a Lebanese American affect public diplomacy and aid to the region? Does your input help affect policy? Or is your role to convey the policy of the administration?**

In my position I more or less convey the policy of the United States of America to the region. I believe I did it well because (people in the region) respect my opinion, and they think I am one of them. When they think I am one of them and I understand them, then the United States will look better. I also did play a role behind the scene in pushing for some policies I believe are good for Lebanon, for the region, for peace and prosperity in the region.

**Do you think that your background does lend credibility to USAID?**

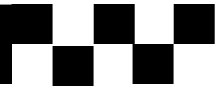
One hundred percent, and any Arab American with my credentials will give the U.S. and USAID and the U.S. Department of State the support it needs in the Arab world. When people talk to me they talk to me as a fellow Arab but I respond as an American. This (point) is key.

**How do the U.S. Government and USAID's public diplomacy bypass restrictions and reach the people?**

This issue must be really looked at and a decision from the White House should address these hurdles. Unfortunately people in Government positions sometimes feel their jobs are threatened when they see someone like me who has extremely good Arabic skills. The Anglo Saxons and traditional hierarchy of the U.S. State Department are scared that we will take their jobs away. Instead, they should think about protecting America and its good standing in the Arab world. In my upcoming book I speak at length about the shortcomings of the Anglo Saxons at the State Department.

**What are your opinions of Al-Hurrah and Radio Sawa, do you think they are doing a good job reaching their audience?**

I have mixed feelings about these two outlets and about our communication skills. I personally think we need to work more on existing Arab outlets and bring them on our side rather than creating our own TV and radio stations.



Nevertheless, Al-Hurrah and Sawa have done whatever they can to improve the standing of the U.S.

**What have you learned in working with Middle East publics that can help us better understand the public and in turn build better PD?**

I have a message to send to the Arab community in particular, and the Middle East community in general. I think they need to take the example of how the Jewish American community works together to better its community and help Israel. Unfortunately, the Arab Americans are not united and do not support each other. When a person rises to a position, instead of supporting him and pushing for him, they look to find whatever mistake they make and to hammer him and bring him down. This is what happened with me. Several Arab American institutions have unfortunately sent negative letters to high administration officials criticizing me instead of understanding my views and working together. Some people, not all, are really taking the low road. So I advise the Arab American community to do two things; One, if they want to excel and succeed in the U.S. they need to respect each other and support whoever the president names to a position and be behind him and proud of him. Two, I advise the youth in the Arab American community in particular and the Middle Eastern Arab community in general, if they want to play a positive role in the future of the U.S. in the region, they need to apply and become diplomats in the Department of State.

**If you were to personally advise president-elect Obama on USAID and public diplomacy in the Middle East what would be your primary advice?**

My primary advice to President Obama is to give the USAID administrator a cabinet position, not only an administrative role but also a cabinet level position. Give the United States Agency for International Development more money to take on other ideas in the region. Finally, to give an opportunity to other Arab Americans, and others, to push for his ideas and thoughts in development, and in doing so gain more friends around the world

**You were the first U.S. representative to the UN to deliver a speech in Arabic. In many ways you are a walking, talking form of public diplomacy. How has your own personal history affected the way you approach public diplomacy?**

I don't know. I think people like you and others will evaluate my efforts and see if I made a difference or not. I will leave it for the good people in universities and think tanks to look at my efforts from this small position and see what I have done and what kind of difference I have made, this is regarding USAID.

My belief in the U.S. is strong. The U.S. is an open and welcoming place that allowed me to do what I did, and President Bush was the first U.S. President in thirty years to implement what the U.S. has been promising Lebanon for 30 years—promising freedom and democracy. (He is) the only one who stood up



and said let's implement this; let's not just talk. I believe my appointment has played a major role in moving Lebanon out of the Syrian occupation. But I did it for history, the U.S., and for the people of Lebanon. I speak about these issues and my give my opinion in my book that was published in March 2007, *How Many Times...I Told You*.

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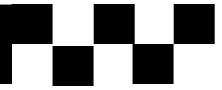
**Walid Maalouf was born in Beirut, Lebanon. Prior to his presidential appointment at USAID, Maalouf served as the Alternate Representative of the United States of America to the General Assembly of the United Nations. He was the first United States representative to deliver a speech at the United Nations in Arabic. He is the author of *How Many Times...I Told You: Reflections, Memories, and Hope for Lebanon*.**

## NOTES

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1 Julian Borger and Jeevan Vasagar. "Bush accused of Aids damage to Africa," *The Guardian*. August 30, 2005, <http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:63zrQpfZJBAJ:www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/aug/30/usa.aids+ush+aids+afrika+condoms&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=us&client=firefox-a> (accessed January 16, 2009).

2 Keilson, Jerrold, "Opportunities for Public Diplomacy Programs in USAID and the Peace Corps." *America's Dialogue with the World*. Washington, D.C.: Public Diplomacy Council, 2006. Pgs.129-143.



# Public Diplomacy and Local Staff: *The Cornerstone of Long-Term Relationship Building*

By Stacy Hope

## INTRO:

Public diplomacy contributes to a country's national security by building the sustainable influence of one nation on the citizens of another. One of the best ways to achieve such influence is through the development of long-term relationships between the two.

Long-term relationships require more than one-way communication that broadcasts a message to foreign audiences; more, even, than measuring the impact of such communication on its intended recipients, and then tweaking "the message." They require engaging in a two-way – or even multilateral – dialogue, with those who do not agree with us as well as those that share our ideals. To achieve that goal, public diplomats must strive to understand the audiences with whom we wish to interact, and build connections based on both shared challenges and different approaches.

In order to flourish and foster an enduring engagement, programs require local knowledge; specialized expertise; identification of the "right" participants; and long-term relationship management. Many, if not all, of these elements, are best achieved – and sometimes only possible – through the active involvement of *local staff*.

## Defining local staff

Thousands of local staff serve at public diplomacy operations around the world. Known variously as locally-engaged (UK), Foreign Service Nationals (US) or local agents (EU), some serve at embassies and consulates; others at quasi-governmental organizations like Voice of America or the British Council; still others with supranational entities such as the UN or EU.

At the British Embassy in Washington, DC, 172 of 268 staff (64 percent) are local hires. At the British Council, which is co-located with the Embassy, the proportion is even higher – more than 80 percent. At the European Commission Delegation to the United States, more than 60 percent of employees are local staff.

While there are many compelling arguments in favor of "hiring local," one major reason why local staff often comprise the majority of employees at a diplomatic mission is the cost differential—diplomats are expensive. An entry-level US Foreign Service Officer (FSO) can expect to be paid anywhere in the mid-thirty to high-sixty thousand dollar range, depending on education level and prior work experience. Allowances for housing, travel, and education, as well as other financial incentives (such as hardship pay) increase an FSO's compensation package. Depending on the destination, spouses and children may accompany FSOs abroad at government expense.

Comparable salaries and benefits are accorded to diplomats from other countries serving in the US and around the world.

Local staff fill a wide range of needs in a diplomatic delegation, from service and hospitality workers to expert advisors in areas such as trade, development, or the environment. In the public diplomacy arena, local staff are generally found in one of the following four areas:

**Support staff.** Local staff members frequently support public diplomacy programs by fulfilling essential administrative functions, such as those in human resources, accounting and finance, procurement, security, hospitality, IT and office administration.

**Program management.** Successful public diplomacy programs must not only be designed to facilitate long-term engagement, but also be created and delivered in a way that is appropriate to the target audience. In order to effectively penetrate the host country market, program managers are often recruited from among the local population for their expertise and contacts. Depending on the host country, areas in which local program managers are employed can include arts and cultural activities; academic and professional exchanges; educational initiatives; governance; and development. Duties may range from conceptualizing a program, to brokering the relationships a program requires to succeed, to implementation, delivery and evaluation.

**Communications staff.** Communications support is a vital component in any public diplomacy strategy. Drawing on expertise in the local market, local staff frequently develop in-country communications strategies; manage proactive and reactive media relations (though a diplomat may be positioned as the organizational

spokesperson); draft content for websites, newsletters and brochures; and develop speeches and presentations appropriate to local audiences.

**Teachers.** Language teaching and educational activities have historically served to effectively engage foreign publics, and sometimes even provide income used to subsidize other public diplomacy activities. For example, more than 40 percent (£232 million) of the British Council's annual turnover comes not through its grant from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but rather through its "enterprises," including language teaching centers and exam administration. Japan, Spain, Germany, France and China are among other countries that also feature language teaching as part of their public diplomacy portfolios.

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### **Advantages of Local Staff**

Local staff members bring a lot to the table, including their knowledge of the local market, specialized expertise in their profession, and the ability to identify, recruit and manage relationships with key target audiences. When even one of these components is missing from a public diplomacy operation, the potential for its programs to succeed is drastically reduced.

**Local knowledge.** Both international business and public diplomacy require a solid understanding of the local language and culture. Unfortunately, the rapid turnover and rotational postings of the diplomatic corps allow little time for new arrivals to develop local expertise. In 2003, General Motors planned to replace its Buick Regal with the Buick LaCrosse in Canada. In French-speaking Quebec, "lacrosse" was teenage slang for either sexual self-gratification or being swindled. General



Motors found out just in time to change the name to the Buick Allure for sales in Canada.

In traditional government-to-government diplomacy the majority of activity is concentrated within the “corridors of power” by networking with governmental and diplomatic counterparts. Local understanding is less central. But as the US has discovered in the past seven years, public diplomacy rests firmly on the ability to communicate with the local population, and a deficit in understanding language and culture is a serious weakness. A 2006 GAO study notes, “In Arabic language posts, about 36 percent of language-designated public diplomacy positions are filled by staff unable to speak Arabic at the designated level... as a result, many public diplomacy officers in the Muslim world cannot communicate as well with local audiences as their position requires.”<sup>1</sup>

An excellent command of the local language(s) – provided in so many cases by local staff – is only the first prerequisite to a successful public diplomacy operation. A comprehensive understanding of the environment in which a country’s public diplomacy program is being implemented is also central and local staff can bridge this gap on almost every occasion.

For example, it has become accepted practice in the United States that high-achieving college students undertake multiple internships prior to graduation. This is relatively unusual in the rest of the world, and can be confusing to public diplomats working in the United States. In one case I know of, a country we shall call Country A, operating in the United States, was targeting exceptional American university students for study and graduate opportunities in the home country. However, Country A was finding it challenging to attract enrollees and assumed there were other countries the

American students preferred to travel to.

A local, American, staff member suggested that – based on her own experience – maybe Americans weren’t comparing Country A to other destinations. Rather, the choice might be between studying abroad and staying in the United States in order to pursue an internship. Moreover, because securing an internship had visa implications in Country A, students would be even more discouraged. The local staff member’s instinctive understanding of audience behavior was later borne out by both quantitative and qualitative market research, and led to a redevelopment of Country A’s education marketing program in the U.S.

Local staff are in a position to not only offer insight on the motivations and behaviors of key audiences, but also on which ideas and communications will resonate most effectively. In his famous letters to his son, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield said, “The wit, humor, and jokes of most mixed companies are local. They thrive in that particular soil, but will not often bear transplanting.”

Knowing how – and when – it is appropriate to employ humor or criticism to deliver a narrative is almost always a local skill, and is often as important as the narrative itself. On more than one occasion, public diplomacy programs have backfired because the communications plan or outreach materials were developed without local input, leading the target audience to feel offended, patronized, or both.

**Specialized expertise.** In addition to depth and breadth of knowledge about the host country, language and culture, local staff also bring to bear the kind of specialized expertise that is not always practical for a diplomat to acquire.

Such is the case of cultural diplomacy—a branch of public diplomacy that includes

language teaching, book tours, exhibitions and performance art. The arts offer a good case study of the importance of sector-specific expertise.

A former colleague of mine at the British Council, a British expat who has been living in Washington for more than a decade, has established a reputation as one of the finest arts professionals in the United States. In 2006, she brokered a relationship between the National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch* and U.S. arts presenters that resulted in the introduction of that play into the US market. Because *Black Watch* is a controversial look at the experience of Scottish soldiers serving in Iraq, including harsh language, a number of the senior diplomats throughout the UK's public diplomacy network in the U.S. were visibly, and vocally, uncomfortable with the project.

Confident in my former colleague's expertise, the British Council forged ahead with its support of the project, as well as the development of a wraparound program designed to engage audiences with the thematic issues arising from the play – for example, the role of the media during wartime.

The play – along with the wraparound program – was exceptionally well-received by audiences and reviewers. In his comprehensive overview of the *Black Watch* initiative, University of Southern California PD expert Nicholas Cull states, "No one doubted that the American arts scene received an unmistakable indication of the rising cultural powerhouse of Scottish theatre and ample evidence of the British ability to separate international communication and engagement from spin and hype...this is the sort of the thing that the UK should be doing in its public diplomacy."<sup>2</sup>

Without a local expert's knowledge of the

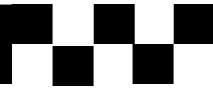
U.S. market, her experience and skill in the arts, and her network of contacts, *Black Watch* would not have been introduced under the British Council's aegis. It would not have become the centerpiece of provocative and engaging dialogues about the American and British presence in Iraq. In short, it would have been a great Scottish play about Scottish soldiers – not a great UK public diplomacy success story.

**Participant identification.** It takes time to build relationships and a network of contacts in a new place; diplomats find it no easier than anyone else. Even more challenging for public diplomacy officers is the need to interact with gatekeepers and influential audiences who exist outside diplomatic circles.

Local staff are often best placed to both identify gatekeepers and to create the strategies that will help secure their participation in public diplomacy projects. Not long ago, I was involved in developing a market research program designed to probe the characteristics and behavior of emerging leaders in Europe, Russia, and North America. A key objective was to secure the participation of "non-traditional" future influencers, particularly those who would not have been touched by existing public diplomacy programs.

The most effective way of identifying those non-traditional influencers in the U.S. was by canvassing local staff, who were then able to not only leverage their personal and professional networks, but also to suggest trend-setting Americans who were not yet on the mainstream radar. Many of the respondents identified by staff went on to become participants in a new transatlantic initiative designed to develop a long-term, sustainable network of future leaders.

**Long-term relationship management.** Because public diplomacy initiatives are



generally designed to foster long-term engagement with a country, as opposed to a personal relationship with a specific member of the diplomatic corps, the day-to-day maintenance and management of relationships in the long term frequently fall to local staff, who can maintain uninterrupted contact throughout the relationship cycle. Similar to how career civil servants in the US government provide continuity during the transition between Presidential administrations, local staff offer stability when diplomats come and go.

One of the local staff members at a prior post of mine had been with the organization since the late 1980s, and during her tenure, had skillfully managed a number of programs designed to engage future American leaders. She diligently maintained those relationships through the arrival and departure of multiple diplomatic directors of the organization, and as a result could identify at a moment's notice high-level contacts in almost any field with a long-standing commitment to transatlantic relations. On many occasions, the relationships she cultivated so carefully paid off at pivotal points in the development and implementation of new public diplomacy strategies.

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**Critical success factors**

Local staff are clearly crucial to the effective development and implementation of a public diplomacy program. However, in order to maximize the potential of local hires, their value to the organization must be recognized, and appropriate attention must be paid to the recruitment and retention of staff.

Additionally, given that local knowledge, specialized expertise, the ability to identify appropriate participants, and long-term relationship management responsibilities – all vital components in a successful public diplomacy program – are almost always held by local staff, strategic planning can only be effective insofar as the contributions of local staff are actively solicited and taken on board.

**Recruitment and retention.** There are as many methods of staff recruitment as there are diplomatic missions. Some organizations simply post the opening on their website; others advertise to generalist audiences via mass market vehicles like local Monster.com or local newspapers ; still others target specific professional associations or job boards that are most likely to attract a candidate with particular qualifications.

Securing the most talented and professional staff is a fundamental first step, so it is important to match the salary and benefits offered by comparable organizations. In my experience, public diplomacy operations offer local staff benefits that are superior to what can be found in the private sector (in the U.S. that would include health insurance, 401K matching and paid vacation time), a big advantage in recruiting strong public diplomacy staff at all levels.

The salary range, however, fluctuates wildly. According to Salary.com, someone in the Washington, DC, area with seven to 10 years of experience managing communications programs is likely to earn between \$67,000 and \$112,000 annually. I know of public diplomacy organizations that pay far less than that range, as well as operations where salaries fall comfortably in the middle percentiles. The former experience frequent turnover and find





continuity to be a challenge. The latter recruit – and retain – experienced and talented staff.

A recent survey found that the top three reasons people leave their jobs are inadequate compensation, lack of career advancement, and insufficient recognition. In many public diplomacy organizations, career advancement is limited for local staff, for the simple reason that they report to the diplomatic corps of another country. However, recognizing and acknowledging the contributions of local staff is paramount, whether it is through singling out local staff for their accomplishments, actively soliciting their input into both internal and external matters, or simply by ensuring that local staff are fully integrated into the organization's professional community.

A note on managing relationships between local and diplomatic staff: fostering a sense of equality between the two is important to keeping local staff engaged and feeling respected. A natural divide between diplomatic personnel and local staff is not unusual, but it can be managed in different ways with vastly different results. I know of one instance where local staff and diplomats had different holiday schedules (diplomats were given the days off; local staff were not). In another case, all staff had the same holiday schedule. Can you guess which office was happier and more productive? Such details have a significant impact on the way local staff viewed their value to the organization.

**Strategic involvement and the management structure.** The best management structures for public diplomacy operations fully integrate local staff with their diplomatic counterparts, leveraging local staff expertise and setting the stage for open and productive discussions. While

diplomats are responsible for agenda-setting, strategic direction, and making key decisions, senior-ranking local staff must be allowed real influence and authority in their areas of expertise for public diplomacy programs to succeed.

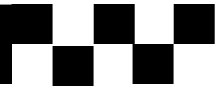
Some organizations resist this level of integration, but the benefits of local staff involvement on a structural rather than an occasional basis are manifold. Ensuring a program's success requires that the knowledge and expertise held by local staff be drawn on in the earliest stages of program development, when important decisions are made, as well as during execution.

Local staff must also be given not only the responsibility for implementing a project, but also the authority (whether financial, operational or supervisory) to ensure that it succeeds. Accountability without authority rarely breeds long-term achievement.

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The best diplomats are perpetual strangers in countries far from home who commit themselves to both the service of their country and the triumph of negotiation over war. But even the best cannot succeed without the aid of experienced and talented local staff.

From this perspective, the contributions of local staff to the support, development and implementation of public diplomacy programs are the cornerstone of the long-term engagement that such programs seek to foster. From program management to communications strategy to relationship-building, local staff have an important role to play. Public diplomacy operations that recognize this and take the steps to recruit the most talented teams, and leverage



their abilities, are best-equipped to build the sustainable influence upon which our national security rests.

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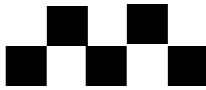
**Stacy Hope is the Senior Communications Advisor within the Press and Public Diplomacy team at the Delegation of the European Commission in Washington, DC. Prior to joining the Delegation, she led national and international marketing and communications programs for the British Council, and served as the external relations officer for the Fulbright Student Program at the Institute of International Education.**

(Endnotes)

1 *This article was prepared in a purely personal capacity and the opinions and views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of any current or former organizations with which the author has been affiliated.*

United States Government Accountability Office, *US Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communications Elements and Face Significant Challenges* (Washington, 2006) 37-38.

2 Nicholas J. Cull, *The National Theatre of Scotland's Black Watch: Theatre as Cultural Diplomacy* (2007) 21.



# The Geocultural Dimension of Public Diplomacy

By Tom Edwards

I recall a story from my years as a geopolitical strategist at a large software firm, where I was presented with what would seem to be a rather simple decision. The new general manager of a freshly opened subsidiary office in Nigeria had learned of a specific piece of content that, when added to a spreadsheet software product that would essentially win over the Nigerian market. Which piece of content you may wonder? Well, it was simply the unique symbol for the Nigerian currency, the *naira*: ₦. At the time, this symbol was not included in the product and the general manager knew that this addition would be a huge gain in public perception of the company. He knew that this one simple act would demonstrate to the local market that this multinational firm really cared and took local issues seriously. Yet, despite his pleas to headquarters and my fervent support to make the change, the simple fix was turned down by the product team (it should be noted that it was added in a later version, but the early opportunity had been lost).

A large part of my support for this basic content change was built upon one of the most common pieces of advice I would pass along to various product developers and managers over the years: as much as the company maintains subsidiary staff, spends millions on PR and image control, and strives to have a personal connection with the end-user; the reality is that the company's products (and the content contained therein) are its chief ambassadors and that the multinational corporate-consumer relationship is one of the broadest forms of public diplomacy. Global product distribution and end-user exposure to a company's product will always far surpass the ability of an organization to shape and influence a customer's perception. First impressions still mean a great deal in today's business environment, and if a customer in a particular market is culturally offended right out of the box or their geopolitical worldview is challenged by a product, then the company will find the task of regaining their trust to be extremely challenging. Thus companies need to realize that the corporate-consumer relationship is actually built upon an implicit form of public diplomacy wherein the geopolitical and geocultural values, assumptions and convictions of both sender and recipient will be open for interpretation.

In his book *Jihad vs. McWorld* (Ballantine Books, 1996, p.74), Benjamin Barber so appropriately pointed out that "even the form information takes – video-textual, digital, programmed, time-shifted, technology-dependent – will inevitably impact culture and politics and the attitudes that constitute them." This notion has proven itself time after time in the context of geocultural issues, where the content, as well as the delivery mechanism are so integral to the end-user perception of the intended message. Likewise, content providers often make assumptions about a local market's preferences on the basis of scant market research or even on the basis of perpetuating stereotypes about a specific culture. This is a very delicate interaction, as both sides stand to gain from the relationship, but the onus is truly

on the content/service provider to navigate the potential sensitivities of a new locale. Multinational corporations may think they are doing the local market a favor by providing their products and services. Rather, the local market is allowing the company the *privilege* of offering their goods within their geocultural context. This privilege can be (and often is) revoked if the goods provided go beyond what they are supposed to be, for example, when mobile phones come cluttered with irrelevant applications.

One austere reality of global business is learning how much governments really do care about protecting the perception of their local geographies. Sadly, the most common path to understanding this fact and learning the local boundaries of sensitivity, is through an arduous trial and error process where U.S. companies enter a market, make a critical mistake of some variety and then quickly try to make amends with the offended customers. This often includes the local government as well as displaced or ex-pat customers in other markets who represent that particular culture. This oft-repeated process isn't intended as a requirement for being considered a globalized business – i.e., it is not a military-style practice of earning one's 'global stripes' (yet, given the prevalence of errors made over the years by well-resourced, well-distributed firms, one may be inclined to think so). In addition to this vicious cycle, there are factors which also influence the dynamic, such as pre-existing local consumer and government perceptions of U.S. businesses, openness to non-local goods and services, past experiences with foreign powers, non-U.S. businesses and so forth.

Given the geopolitical environment in which business is conducted and the increasingly information and service-oriented economies in existing and emerging global markets, one may wonder exactly what political and cultural content challenges exist. Surprisingly, the challenges at present are, at their fundamental level, no different from those that have been present for centuries. They can be summarized very simply as: issues resulting from the conflict of two or more opposing viewpoints on a fact of geography, history, religion, language, and a myriad of other themes. To some 21st Century, digitally-connected "global thinkers", the existence of such fundamental differences is an amazing incongruence for our Age of Information where the emphasis on territory and cultural differences are supposedly diminished (at least perceptually). Yet those differences can be emphasized even more so by the extension of local perspectives and sovereignties onto a global stage via the empowerment of information technology. Thus the Internet, information products and content rich services become overt arenas for competing viewpoints into which transnational corporations often step unaware. This could result in a company anxiously, and/or ignorantly, adopting one local viewpoint at the complete exclusion of another, based on a short-term decision to gain market share in one locale while unwittingly risking business in an adjacent locale (a dynamic which I once labeled as "information geopolitics").

So to what am I specifically referring in terms of "geocultural challenges" and how might they impact the nature of content-based public diplomacy? I think it would help to further set the context by providing a few general categories of content and associated examples, as follows:

- Text: This can involve a wide range of possible problems, from historical references to cultural descriptions to photo captions to geographic names (even in fictional material).
  - o Using controversial technical terms such as “master/slave” (for a computer hard drive or server device) can be viewed as being quite insensitive.
  - o The use of “Republic of China” as the geographic name of Taiwan is a serious problem for a product targeted for release in China and potentially Hong Kong as well, as this name is forbidden from use in China.
- Icons & Graphics: Simple graphics to aid in navigation and other user interface guidance are very necessary, yet many times the U.S. conventions and meanings are deployed seemingly without thought towards their potential non-U.S. meaning.
  - o Hand gestures are one of the most culturally varying expressions, thus using the open palm hand gesture for “Stop” or “Alert” or using the thumbs-up hand gesture for “Okay” are inappropriate in many cultures. These two common hand icons are commonly misused, as each can be interpreted as the equivalent of the middle finger gesture in the U.S.
  - o Liberal borrowing of religious symbols for indicating holidays or other cultural occasions can be an issue, depending on how the symbols are displayed as well as which ones are included (the issue of inclusion/exclusion is a huge factor in geocultural concerns).
- Maps & Geography: As they are very visual devices, maps can be a flashpoint for consumers who will readily identify any errors. Maps of countries and/or regions often have the propensity to inflame deep-seated nationalism if the boundaries or full extent of local sovereignty isn’t clearly recognized. Relying upon the United Nations and other sources can be helpful, but ultimately each company must make cartographic decisions based on their specific needs and market strategies but without appearing too arbitrary.
  - o Showing the disputed Jammu and Kashmir territory as wholly a part of India works great for the India market (and is actually required) – but the same map version will be severely problematic in Pakistan.
  - o Maps of Argentina intended for use in that country – even if basic clip art in nature – are

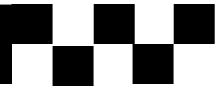


connections, which can then imply a form of commentary (either positive or negative depending on context).

In terms of consequences for geocultural content error, the outcome will depend on several factors, some of which are as follows:

1. The general standing of a company's diplomatic relationship with the local government and/or consumers; e.g., Disney initially faced significant challenges when introducing its theme park to France (the presence of Disney early on was labeled as an impending "cultural Chernobyl") but over time the company has done well to maintain good government relations and localize its product to become one of the most popular European tourist destinations.
2. The degree to which the local government controls information and/or regulates international business within its boundaries; e.g., China is well-known to have laws and regulations which apply more control over content available to its citizens and the government expends great energy to control how it is perceived beyond its borders.
3. The severity of the cultural issue that was present in the content (i.e., how deep was the offense); e.g., in 2002, the Cadbury chocolate company, based in the UK, released a marketing campaign in India for a chocolate bar called "Temptations." In the advertisements for the product, a colorful map of northern India was shown and the entire Jammu and Kashmir region was colored bright red and contained the phrase "Too good to share", in an attempt to draw a parallel between their irresistible candy and the fiercely disputed region. As you can imagine, this inflamed sensitivities over the issue and caused a lot of backlash (and it certainly didn't help that it was a British company making the faux pas!).
4. The discoverability of the cultural issue in your product or service (i.e., how easy it was to find); e.g., in 2003, the video game *Kakuto Chojin* contained an audio track with chanted lyrics from the Islamic Qur'an, which was considered highly sensitive. The lyrics were not completely obvious within the game's content, but an adherent of Islam and/or an Arabic speaker would have easily discerned the content. This audio was fixed, but unfortunately not before the issue became widely known within the Middle East.

Most typically, all of these factors combine into an overall assessment of the potential risk (if viewed proactively) or potential backlash (if viewed reactively). Because every locale is different, and the formation of successful corporate public diplomacy depends upon so many factors, there really isn't an easy formula that will determine the outcome of making a geocultural error. Thus many companies learn through painful experiences, working through both small and large-scale backlash events before finally and hopefully attaining a level of actionable understanding. And more importantly, developing a critical diplomatic relationship with both local government and consumers. Here's a look at some of the more likely outcomes from geocultural content issues:



- **Local Consumer Reactions:** If the issue isn't overt, this could manifest as slow or non-existent sales for no apparent reason. In more overt cases, consumers can choose to complain loudly, boycott and escalate their concerns to their government for action.
- **Local Government Sanctions:** A local government may choose to impose restrictions on a business, perhaps restrict sales of the offending product permanently or temporarily or shut down the offending company entirely from conducting local business.
- **PR and Image Backlash:** Negative exposure in the local press is almost a guarantee in the majority of cases, with exposure determined often by the degree of offense. As with consumers, the local press may act as an agent of government escalation or as a force to simply denigrate the trans-national business.

Given the nature of geocultural content and the challenge it poses to effective public diplomacy in the business realm, some readers may feel daunted at the task of navigating this sensitive minefield. However, it's important to note that steps can be taken to improve one's chances in dealing proactively and prudently with such issues:

1. **Be aware:** Comprehension of the reality of geopolitical risks in content is often half of the challenge in starting to address them. Often times in a U.S.-based company, heavy reliance may be placed on subsidiary employees, localization teams and/or non-U.S. employees to provide the required local insight. All such resources are important to leverage, but ultimately the awareness of each employee – regardless of origin – is critical to long-term success. While much is said about the relatively low geographic literacy of U.S. citizens (see the latest National Geographic-Roper Survey of 2006), there exist flows of geographic literacy between regions that amounts to a general need for greater cross-cultural understanding in all locales. Corporate diversity efforts in many companies have shown progress in beginning to broaden perspectives, but the bridge to more effective public diplomacy in the corporate arena begins with each individual's baseline comprehension of global geography and culture.

2. **Be proactive:** Time and again experience has shown that finding and resolving such issues as early as possible during content creation and production will directly affect the time and costs expended to fix the problem later in the process; i.e., the earlier issues are identified, the cheaper the resolution costs. Any exposure of unintended sensitive content to the end consumer will exponentially increase the cost for achieving a resolution. As many in the localization industry who must respond too late to any content changes are well aware, it's never too early to start considering the impact of the geopolitical dimension on content.

3. **Be committed:** The key to long-term success in developing a company's successful approach to geocultural diplomacy is to make the commitment to invest in resources, training and processes that are necessary to stay aware and proactive. Business- and market-specific experience with such issues will demonstrate the need for specific resources, tools and more efficient processes to effectively



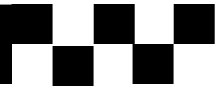
manage geopolitical content. The forms and combinations of resources and subject-matter expertise will greatly depend on your specific company, specific products/services, target markets, and such variables.

In closing, I'd like to mention what I believe is perhaps the most critical aspect of public diplomacy in geocultural issues, and that is the issue of intent. Even if you take all the proactive steps to become aware, to create proactive and responsive diplomatic structure within your organizational process, there remains the powerful force of local market perception – a fact that's common across all transnational businesses from the petroleum industry to IT to entertainment. In the author's experience, 99 percent of geocultural errors are the result of completely unintentional circumstances (note unintentional – *not* excusable), and yet in 99 percent of those cases the local market perceived the errors to be completely intentional on the part of the content developer. Customers often raise questions such as "Why did your company do this to us?", "How could a huge multinational corporation possibly get this wrong?," and so forth. Taking these comments in the context of the age-old differences between viewpoints, it's a natural reaction. However, while functioning in today's interconnected world, the affected company can't fall back on the age-old excuse of a lack of information (it might have worked in the Age of Exploration, but it's not very credible in the Age of Information). Intent is always a key issue to remember with geocultural content issues. Ultimately responding to the local market's perception of the company's intent is the pathway for developing a truly diplomatic approach to such risks.

By proactively considering the dynamic geopolitical landscape and how it affects your specific product or service it is entirely possible to more safely navigate the content issues and prepare for the uncertainties. With diligent planning and appropriate resources to develop the geopolitical rationale, content developers can achieve a strategy of informed defensibility for their content choices and begin to view geopolitical content risks as positive opportunities to better serve the local customer.

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# At Post

## Q&A with Andy Pryce

*At Post features first hand accounts of the mechanics of public diplomacy.*

Andy Pryce is the First Secretary, Head of Public Affairs at the British Embassy in Washington, D.C.. He has previously served in the United States, Karachi and Helsinki. In between posts he worked at the Foreign Office in London, primarily on modernizing the British Diplomatic Service. In February of 2009, he will be taking a new posting in Houston, TX as Deputy Consul General.

### 1. Definitions of public diplomacy, including the role of public diplomats, abound. What, in your own words, is your job description?

My job is to help our Embassy in Washington deliver on its country business plan by advising on and then implementing strategic communication initiatives.

### 2. What activities are imperative to doing your job and reaching your PD goals?

Listening and consulting are the two most important activities in my job. Before I position UK policy objectives or develop cross-medium ways of getting messages out to our selected target audiences, I need to understand the policy context in the United States.

### 3. Describe a recent project that is demonstrative of your organization's PD initiatives.

The work we did around promoting the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) publication *Engagement* is an example of targeted public diplomacy.

In short got our team together and agreed an objective: to have a two way exchange on the book with the U.S. administration, Congress and those who influence on U.S. public diplomacy. We selected key target audiences and mapped out ways of connecting with these audiences. Activities included a visit to the U.S. by our Minister responsible for Public Diplomacy, contact with bloggers, an appearance on bloggingheads.tv, a reception on Capitol Hill, an event hosted by the Brookings Institution, and a visit with then Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Jim Glassman. We received a lot of feedback on the book. The Brookings event in particular drew a good audience. We concluded that our objectives had been met and there were a number of lessons learnt for future projects.

### 4. How does your organization establish its public diplomacy goals? Who

**sets the priorities? Is there an emphasis on specific issues or regions?**

The UK Foreign Service has a set of Departmental Strategic Priorities; these priorities inform individual country business plans.

In the U.S., we have a Public Diplomacy Board that meets before the start of a financial year to discuss priorities. The political context in the U.S. is also taken into account when looking at possible PD objectives. A draft of the plan is then shared around the UK network in the U.S. to gain a sense of where all of our practitioners (we have Communication staff in our Consulates around the country) can add value. Key input also comes from the Head of Post and our policy leaders in the States. Most key stakeholders are represented on our Board, which then agree on our strategy. A similar, to scale, process takes place in most of our Embassies. In many there is less need for a formal board.

**5. Who are your strategic partners - within and outside your organization - in executing your projects?**

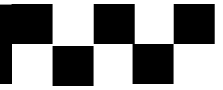
This could be a very long list. Internally the key partners are the Ambassador and other senior staff; policy owners; holders of program funding and our communication officers around the United States. We do work with the British Council – who have managerial independence from the Embassy so are not bound to work to our plans. We also work with a very wide range of think-tanks, universities and some US government partners.

**6. What is the most constructive piece of advice you have received for practicing public diplomacy?**

Ensure you get the right team together at the inception of each project—policy, communication, administration, network, external, etc.

**7. Share a personal experience (good or bad) about PD in practice. Something that was surprising, interesting or otherwise influenced the way you practice public diplomacy.**

I once attended a UK event that was promoting a general theme. The organizer had no clear, measurable objective; there was no follow-up planned; no buy-in for in-country management and it achieved very little. It aroused interest in the theme but for the staff time spent on building the event this was a very small return. That event convinced me that integrated strategic communication is essential if there is to be good return on investment for Foreign Services.

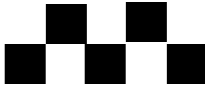


# Case Study: Beijing Olympics

Photo illustration by Robert McDavid



In the summer of 2008, China opened its doors and invited the world in. The images that it presented to its guests created a new conception of modern China that is still being digested and debated—both by foreigners, many of whom were peering in for the first time, and by China’s own citizens, who found themselves reevaluating their homeland. In this section, three commentators analyze what the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games revealed about China’s distinct approach to public diplomacy.



# Public Diplomacy: China's Grand Foreign Strategy

By QIU Huafei

What role does public diplomacy play in international politics? This has become a major topic of discussion in the international relations community. The term public diplomacy has been closely associated with the United States Information Agency, which first used the term to define its mission.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly used to refer to aspects of international diplomacy other than the direct interaction between national governments. More specifically, public diplomacy is defined as some combination of the level of influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies; the diplomatic process carried out between a government and its foreign publics through the instruments of information transmission and intercultural communication; and the diplomatic interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another. As a new pattern of diplomacy, public diplomacy relies on alternative methods, often indirect, for tackling foreign affairs. Its activities move beyond traditional diplomacy to include cultural exchange programs, international broadcasting and Internet outreach.

The development of public diplomacy reflects the diversity of contemporary international political actors and the complexity of their behavior. It also signals the development and innovation of diplomatic systems contemporary politics, the perfection of diplomatic systems and the innovations of diplomatic fashion. As aspects of Chinese culture and politics have presented major obstacles for traditional Chinese diplomacy, the flexibility of public diplomacy provides new avenues for Chinese people to be able to remove the negative perception of a "China threat."

Chinese public diplomacy has had great successes since 1990s. China has developed a keen eye for symbolic events and persuasive policy initiatives. One such event was China's first manned space flight, launched in October 2003. Not only did this play well at home; its reception overseas encouraged the government to continue building on China's international image. Sporting events can also provide opportunities for public diplomacy. Stadiums can be branded, and matches can carry a particular significance that is then further transmitted by the athletes themselves. Sporting events, especially international competitions, can also be ideal for exchanges: the shared experience of viewing or participating in an event with foreign publics is a powerful tool for people-to-people relationship construction in world affairs.<sup>2</sup> For example, Beijing's successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games not only ignited Chinese patriotism, it provided a greater understanding of China's public diplomacy strategy.

As China emerges as a world power, its desire to present itself as a responsible, upstanding nation has become a fundamental to its public diplomacy. An example of this is China's determined public relations campaign emphasizing its efforts to undertake environmental and food safety issues. This campaign is intended to show that China is fulfilling its responsibilities as a major power. The spread of Chinese culture through the establishment of Confucius Institutes around the world is another manifestation of Chinese efforts to demonstrate cultural sophistication and give reassurance that China's drive to gain major-power status is based not simply on military and



economic might, but also on the sound foundations of China's soft power. Public diplomacy is, of course, one important way to showcase these foundations.

China's public diplomacy links the external and internal effects of the government's diplomatic efforts. Public diplomacy surrounding the Beijing Olympic Games suggests that China has been aware of its image problems and thus seeks to develop the Olympic experience as a counter-example and thereby reposition the Chinese brand. The Chinese government has approached the organization of the Beijing Olympics with conviction that the Games can be used to educate the world about modern China. The heart of the plan is a blending of ancient Chinese culture, which seems to strike a positive note around the world, with images of modern China and the spirit of the Olympic movement.

Today the Chinese government has encouraged people to participate in the activities of public diplomacy. The Beijing Olympic Games have provided an opportunity to improve Chinese public diplomacy. The Olympics represent an encounter between peoples and between their cultures and, therefore, promote a grand gathering of human civilization. Hence, the diplomacy beyond that which is conducted by the government, comprising all forms of nonofficial dialogues, is the most crucial component.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the Chinese government has already erected a multi-layer "stage" for the general public and people-to-people organizations to perform and exchange views during the period of Beijing Olympic Games, and provided many opportunities to display the national image and convey Chinese culture.

At same time, the Chinese government has made efforts to be public-oriented, serving its own citizens in the spirit of "giv-

ing top priority to the people, seeking truths and being pragmatic." However, there is still a long way to go before China can meet the requirements of the times, satisfy the expectations of the people and catch up with those countries that have the most developed public diplomacy policies. In order to meet these challenges, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up the Division for Public Diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> Many academic seminars have been held to explore ideas, channels and measures for public diplomacy, so as to bring about a new era of public diplomacy in China.

Although Chinese civil society is far from reaching a level of independence comparable to that of most industrialized countries, China's new public diplomacy strategy seems to have taken careful note of how to strengthen the country's image abroad through cultural relations. Backed by the Chinese government, Confucius Institutes are now present on five continents,<sup>5</sup> fulfilling the global ambitions of Chinese public diplomacy and proving the success of highlighting China's cultural sophistication and providing traditional Chinese philosophy and ideology to the world. The total number of Confucius Institutes on four continents reached 120 in May 2007. The image of Confucius and the ideals of his philosophy are now linked to the image that China wants to project to the rest of the world: harmony with other countries, virtuous government, mutual respect, loyalty, humanity and restraint. The resurgence of the figure of Confucius also evokes the soft-power influence that China exerted over Asia in ancient times and its growing presence in the region today. China's public diplomacy is also connected with the issue of China's socialist characteristics. For example, its doctrine of noninterference in countries' internal affairs is another feature of China's public diplomacy.



The Chinese government has paid increasing attention to its public diplomacy. The grand strategy of China's peaceful rise has sought to integrate Chinese hard power and soft power in order to create a good image of China in the international community. In order to be able interact on the same level with Western countries, China must construct an increasingly effective public diplomacy strategy and improve its skills to make full use of modern media.

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**QIU Huafei is a professor of School of International and Public Affairs, Tongji University, Shanghai.**

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Stacy Michelle Glassgold Public Diplomacy: the Evolution of Literature, 2004, Los Angeles/Cal.: USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2004. - 83 S., Lit. Hinw [http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/pdfs/Stacy\\_Literature.pdf](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/pdfs/Stacy_Literature.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Gyorgy Szondi, Public Diplomacy and Nations Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Zhao Qizhen, "Beijing Olympic Needs Fair, Objective Opinion Environment", <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91345/6373387.html>

<sup>4</sup> Academic Seminar on China's Public Diplomacy, ,2004, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wshd/t80368.htm>.

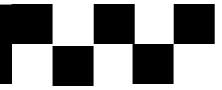
<sup>5</sup> Distribution of Confucius Institutes

Region/Continents	No. of Confucius Institutes
AMERICA	26
ASIA-OCEANIA	42
AFRICA-MIDDLE EAST	8
EUROPE	44
TOTAL	120

Source: [www.hanban.edu.cn](http://www.hanban.edu.cn), May 2007.

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# Through the 2008 Olympics Looking Glass: *What Beijing taught the Chinese people about themselves.*

By Jian Wang

By most accounts, the Beijing Olympics was a resounding success. It was, to borrow sociologist Erving Goffman’s phrase, an “idealized” but convincing performance on the part of China. It showed the country at its best. Its significance lies not in representing what China’s reality is, but in conveying what is possible for its people and society.

Admittedly, skeptics have criticized this Olympics on a variety of grounds, from not being green enough, to China’s human rights record. But, what did the Olympics mean to the people of China? How was their experience as a host nation?

Needless to say, the Olympics with all its fanfare was, first and foremost, a “feel-good” moment for China. Any host nation would have felt the same. Given the remarkable transformation of the city of Beijing and the smooth operation of the games, there was certainly no shortage of civic pride inside China.

The events surrounding the games also bolstered national pride. The occasion not only served to reaffirm Chinese national identity, but also became a platform for ordinary Chinese to experience national dignity and respect. For them, it spoke volumes about their country’s return to the world stage that the leaders of more than eighty countries gathered in Beijing for the opening ceremony.

In China, people often like to use the

Photo by Enrico Campitelli Jr.



phrase “let the world better understand China.” It implies that the country remains terra incognita to outsiders. The Olympics therefore afforded a rare glimpse into contemporary China—a dynamic, forward-looking country that is also full of contradictions and challenges.

Second, the national pride demonstrated during the games intersected with China’s newfound national confidence, both superficial and profound. The Olympics took place at a time when China was riding a tidal wave of optimism. As a Pew Research Center study before the Olympics found, among the citizens of two dozen countries surveyed, the Chinese were by far the most positive about the direction their country was heading. Another Pew survey suggested that there was overwhelming confidence among the Chinese that Beijing



would be a successful host of the Olympics and that the games would help to lift China's image globally.

From a political standpoint, such great expectations of a single event were a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the government needed to build the momentum and anticipation for the event; on the other, it ran the huge risk of under-delivering, in light of its scale and complexity. But in the end, they pulled it off.

China's confidence was also enhanced from the punches it took during the Olympic torch relay that preceded the games. In the aftermath of the disruptions on the streets of London and Paris, the Chinese government and media leveled some rather harsh rhetoric at the Dalai Lama and various Western media outlets. However, despite the initial response, in the final analysis, China overall took a decidedly more pragmatic approach in addressing the negative publicity generated by the disruptions. Obviously, the country realized, that as a major power on the world stage, it needed to be a bit more "thick skinned," and that over-reacting to others' criticisms, valid or misplaced, would be counter-productive.

As the progressive paper *Southern Weekly*, in Guangdong, declared on the front page of its special edition on the Olympics: "Only with confidence, will a nation begin to have dreams and imagination."

Furthermore, the Beijing Olympics provided a vehicle for fostering civic culture in China. Chinese hospitality was in full display during the games as more than 100,000 Chinese citizens pitched in and assisted. And although this army of volunteers was mobilized by the government, their enthusiasm was no less genuine. They

were dedicated, professional, and outwardly friendly.

As the world watched, the Chinese general public also did their part in projecting a positive image of their country. Certain Chinese manners and behaviors—from spitting and smoking to littering and jostling—can be off-putting to visitors from other cultures. The Chinese government enacted its standard practice of social engineering by launching etiquette campaigns months prior to the games. Whether it was a result of these campaigns or due in part to the increasing awareness of appropriate public behavior by China's growing middle class, there was noticeably more courtesy and order in public spaces during the games.

In addition, China's hosting of the Olympics helped to make visible to the Chinese people some of the complex and difficult ethnic issues in the country. The Chinese government has always touted unity and harmony among all the ethnic groups in China. But the riots and disturbances in Tibet and Xinjiang before the games brought into focus for the Chinese public the ethnic strife facing their country. Tensions in Tibet and Xinjiang became the *de facto* subtext of the Beijing games. More importantly, this time the Chinese public became aware of these troubling issues through a more pluralistic lens, thanks to their growing access to digital and international media.

Finally, China's Olympic experience has given rise to the Chinese public's higher expectations of their government in improving matters of concern to people in their everyday lives. The Chinese government marshaled its resources and made great strides toward improving the air quality in Beijing, reducing traffic congestion, and ensuring food safety at



the games. Although some of the means employed may have inconvenienced and irked many of the residents of Beijing, the populace ultimately came to appreciate the cleaner environment and their enhanced quality of life.

While the Beijing Olympics is now part and parcel of the story of a rising China, it will indeed be a tough act to follow. The country continues to have a grave agenda in economic development, social justice, political reform, and sustainable growth; and 2009 may prove to be a particularly challenging year for its people and government.

Amidst the global economic slowdown which has already affected China as well, 2009 is better known as the year of anniversaries of politically significant and sensitive events in modern Chinese history, including the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen Square incident. The year will likely be defined by celebrations and controversies, with many variables and uncertainties.

As Victor Cha, former director of Asian affairs for the White House, wrote, "the biggest political story about the Olympics will continue to be written long after 2008: the extent to which China's authorities will meet the world's [and Chinese people's] expectations, which they raised with the Games."

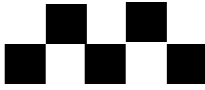
For instance, how will the Chinese government strike a balance between pursuing shared Chinese values and asserting national identity in the international arena? How will the country effectively manage its people's rising expectations of the role of the government

in addressing a wide array of deep-rooted as well as emerging socio-economic issues, even as the centers of power within China are increasingly diversified? How will the government handle pressures and tensions from within China, with the growing number of protests and social disturbances? How can China sustain civic spirit and culture in its drive towards building a "harmonious society"?

In short, the Chinese national pride, confidence, civic spirit, and rising expectations, which the Olympics so very well captured and fostered, will be put to test in this year of anniversaries; so will the government's credibility and legitimacy.

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# Choreographing the Image

## *What China Wanted the World to See*

By Meg Young



The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games seem distant now. The fall of 2008 was incredibly eventful: Barack Obama was elected President of the United States – providing perhaps the greatest single day boost to U.S. soft power; the world economy collapsed – threatening public diplomacy capital that had been built on championing the values of the free market system. But these things are still happening and changing, and their impacts cannot be evaluated yet. Obama’s presidency will shift from the world of idealistic dreams to the real world of compromise and concession. Global economic mayhem will continue to play out and we have no way to predict what the ultimate outcomes of this chaos will be.

It is difficult to understand the value, importance, and impact of any event while it is happening. It is only after the event that one can reflect with some perspective and evaluate what transpired, and the Olympics are no exception. The 2008 Games are no

longer a shifting, difficult to grasp moment; they have now become an artifact that can and should be studied. They were a worldwide spectacle showcasing a sleek modern China as well as offering the Chinese government an opportunity to establish a preferred historical narrative for how China should be understood. The opening ceremony made it clear to viewers the world over that we should connect today’s innovative and productive China with the great achievements of ancient China and not with the Communist legacy of Mao Zedong.

The 2008 Olympics offered the People’s Republic of China an unparalleled stage to demonstrate past achievements and future potential to a global audience. They also demonstrated intriguing lessons for public diplomacy practitioners. It is easy to say the Olympics were a success, and by most measures they were: China won the most gold medals (51), the games brought in the most television viewers ever (4.7 billion), they generated incredible press coverage and introduced Beijing as a world class city on par with Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Certainly the global public received greater exposure to China, its people, and culture in 2008 than in any year prior. However, public diplomacy isn’t just about exposure; it has many facets. During the 2008 Games two of these facets came into interesting tension: image creation and credibility. In the world of public diplomacy, any image that is created or promoted to a foreign public must be able to stand up under scrutiny in order to become truly credible. Some of the images that China sought to



create were supported and even enhanced by the greater scrutiny brought by the international press during the Games. Other images were destroyed and harmed the credibility of the state.

The opening ceremony provided two examples of image creation and credibility. First, the world was impressed by the “movable type” portion of the ceremony. Many thought it must have been automated, but it was revealed at the end of the performance to be a group of Chinese citizens. The next day, stories of that act highlighted the months of work that went into preparing and perfecting the performance. China’s image of innovation and precision was strengthened and made even more credible by the revelation that it was hundreds of citizens behind the engineering of this spectacular feat.

In another instance a member of China’s politburo demanded that the voice of a pretty, young Chinese girl who had been selected to sing *Ode to the Motherland* “had to change.” The director of the ceremony, Zhang Yimou, played a recording of another girl’s voice over the loud speakers. It appears that the young girl who was in the ceremony was unaware that her real voice was not used until after the event. This push for perfection created a sense that what people were seeing was a fraud and highlighted the extreme lengths the Chinese government would go to ensure a flawless Olympic Games. By striving too hard for perfection of its image China harmed its credibility.

China’s Government, accustomed to choreographing and managing images, spared no expense in putting on the best Olympic Games possible, and was able to create a spectacular image of modern China. However, the international press was always on the lookout for cracks in the perfect veneer, and when they found them

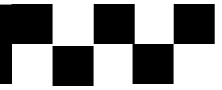
it was worldwide news. For every story of the Beijing’s improved air quality during the games, there were at least two detailing China’s environmental profligacy. For every story mentioning China’s efforts to create a more open environment for the press, there were many more describing the limits imposed on reporters. For every feel-good cultural piece about ethnic minorities there were dozens of articles and exposés about separatist efforts in Xinjiang and Tibet.

It is likely that the double standards exposed through China’s efforts at image creation—cleaner air for the international athletes while Chinese people suffer daily with some of the world’s worst pollution, free press access for western journalists while some Chinese reporters are punished for writing about the wrong thing, or having Tibetan representation in the opening ceremony but refusing to meet with the Dali Lama—have harmed China’s public diplomacy efforts. If China had actually undertaken effective environmental protection reforms, or truly established protections for a free press, or perhaps agreed to meet with the Dali Lama, then the Games would have presented an opportunity for the world audience to witness an alignment of China’s image and reality, thereby raising its soft power credibility.

China’s Olympics missteps don’t seem to have been detrimental enough to significantly disrupt its coming out party. Because of the games, the world has been exposed to modern China, and even this superficial knowledge will benefit China as it continues to assert itself internationally. People fear the unknown, and China is certainly no longer that. International perception will continue to be influenced by the image of China we became familiar with in the summer of 2008.

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**Meg Young will be joining the United States Foreign Service in March 2009. She has been working as a Research Associate at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy with a focus on projects related to China, the 2008 Olympics, and U.S. public diplomacy. Meg is a member of the first graduating class in the Master of Public Diplomacy program at the University of Southern California. She also served as the first president of the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars at USC.**



## EDWARD DJEREJIAN

### *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador’s Journey through the Middle East* [Simon & Schuster]

By Paul Rockower

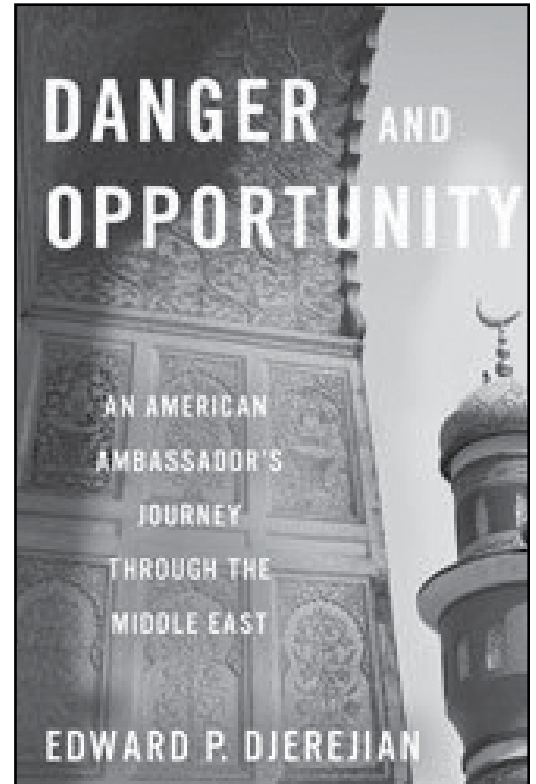
Former Middle-East ambassador Edward Djerejian’s new book, *Danger and Opportunity* offers exceptional insight into the maelstrom that is U.S./Middle East relations. Beyond recounting a lifetime of service at the highest levels of the fascinating but troubled region, Djerejian examines American diplomacy and public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East with unparalleled insight. Equal parts memoir, policy analysis and prescriptions for moving forward from the current malaise, *Danger and Opportunity* weaves across the Levant, through hot desert sands and labyrinth bazaars, and into the closed drawing rooms of the power brokers’ palaces. It is an engaging assessment of the geo-political, geo-strategic and public diplomacy challenges that face the incoming Obama administration, and offers clear judgments and strategies on where to go from here.

Djerejian offers a fascinating survey of the various currents shaping the present situation in the Middle East. He draws on his considerable experience, which includes Ambassadorships to both Israel and Syria, to offer insight from the eye of the storm, deftly using past anecdotes and personal history to comment on the present situation.

The book opens with “A Letter To The Incoming President,” a description and appraisal of current U.S. policies and predicaments related to the Middle East and Muslim world, and their public diplomacy challenges. It continues with a recounting of the speech Djerejian delivered in 1992 at Meridian House in Washington, in which he outlined a policy for simultaneously advancing political and economic stability in the Middle East, and undermining Islamic radicals. Themes from this address (both in terms of rhetoric and policy considerations) would later be adopted by the Clinton and Bush administrations.

In subsequent chapters Djerejian discusses the historical tension between Islam and advances in Western culture, particularly Islamic governments’ grappling with the concepts of democracy and modernity. He also focuses on Lebanon, painting a nostalgic portrait of Beirut, the “Paris of the Middle East” and his life as a young diplomatic in the enigmatic city as the country descended into a civil war that would last for a decade and a half. He also gives witness to Lebanon’s struggle to put the pieces back together again.

Of particular interest is Djerejian’s recounting of his dexterous diplomatic jousts with the “Sphinx of Damascus,” the late Syrian President Hafez al-Asad. It was this work that led to Syria’s inclusion in the U.S. coalition in the first Gulf War and its seat at the Madrid Peace Conference, the groundbreaking summit that





marked the first time Israel, Syria and the Palestinians met at a negotiating table. As well, Djerejian details his interactions with Hafez al-Asad's successor son, the current Syrian president Bashar al-Asad. With a nod to the Middle East maxim, "you can't have war without Egypt, you can't have peace without Syria," Djerejian stresses the importance for the United States to engage Syria in order to bring it back in from the diplomatic cold in the pursuit of peace with Israel.

During Djerejian's term as Ambassador to Israel, the late-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin attempted to steer the Jewish state towards peace with Syria and the Palestinians. Djerejian recounts the complexities that led to the breakdown of peace negotiations then, and lays out some practical steps to help move the sides back towards conflict resolution in the future.

Regarding Iraq, Djerejian chronicles his role and interactions with two separate high-level study groups designed to help guide American policy in Iraq. He hammers home the message that it is important to carry out proactive diplomacy with players in the region, including engaging with Syria and Iran; yet he doesn't pretend that such engagement won't be difficult. He advises that the diplomacy be done with a realistic eye on the challenges.

Beyond calls for bolder American diplomacy, Ambassador Djerejian also advocates for a far more robust American public diplomacy in general. He offers strategies and proposals, ranging from increased educational exchange and English language teaching, to the creation of an academic center to promote U.S.-Arab/Muslim scholarship and dialogue. These suggestions originated in part from *Changing Minds, Winning Peace*, the seminal 2003 report from the bipartisan Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, which Djerejian chaired. That document was intended as a blueprint for reinvigorating America's public diplomacy towards Arabs and Muslims. Djerejian notes which of the committee's suggestions have been implemented in the five years since the report, and which strategies and instruments are yet to be adopted.

This is a fascinating memoir, largely due to Ambassador Djerejian's unmatched vantage on U.S./Middle East engagement. His rich anecdotes paint a Middle East mosaic that shows the region in its true colors—celebrating its beauty and hospitable traditions, and pointing out its shortcomings. For public diplomats, especially those interested in righting America's public diplomacy ship with regard to the Middle East and Muslim world, Djerejian offers an absorbing account of what has transpired, accounting for the successes and the failures. But perhaps most important, he offers a plan for a more buoyant public diplomacy towards the Middle East, just as a new administration takes up the challenge.

## Addendum: Djerejian Report



### INTRO:

Former Ambassador Edward Djerejian has served eight presidents, on both sides of the political aisle. He served as ambassador to Syria and to Israel – the only person to do so. Following his 1994 retirement from a forty-year career in the U.S. Foreign Service, Djerejian served as the founding director of the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. Djerejian chaired the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, the bipartisan, congressionally-mandated, commission convened in 2003 to address America’s public diplomacy deficiencies in the Middle East.

Five years after the commission’s groundbreaking *Changing Minds, Winning Peace* report that became widely known as the Djerejian report, Ambassador Edward Djerejian is once again offering recommendations for how the United States can improve its relationship with Arab and Muslim audiences, this time in a new memoir *Danger and Opportunity: An Ambassador’s Journey Through the Middle East*. He spoke to PD about practicing diplomacy, what should top the State Department’s public diplomacy agenda, the importance of media, and the opportunities that still exist for forging a lasting peace in the Middle East.

**PD:** Knowing who the new president is, how might you revise the introductory “Letter to the Incoming President” that begins your book?

**DJEREJIAN:** Well, I wouldn’t change anything in the “Letter to the Incoming President.” I think it stands on its own. It was written in a comprehensive sense that plays out the geo-political landscape of the greater Middle East, and what the United States’ interest and foreign policy objectives should be. And so I think that remains the same, without change.

Obviously, when you write a book, you publish it in certain deadlines. Certain things have changed, but they’re details; they are not the general crux of the policy recommendations. For example, if you take a look at what I say on Pakistan—things have changed a bit in Pakistan in terms of Musharraf being out of power, those are details. But the general and basic recommendation is that the United States administration, in this instance Obama’s administration, focus in a sustained manner on South Asia, and especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where I see the real, so-called “war on terror” is being waged; and to also deal with India and Pakistan and Kashmir in terms of conflict resolution. Those are recommendations that are basic.

**Could you speak to whether you see an “Obama effect” on public diplomacy, and whether there is something the new administration could do to sustain that overall welcome that the world has given to President Obama.**

I think that the election of Barack Obama is one of the most powerful statements of public diplomacy that the United States could make, because it demonstrated that we are truly, and remain truly, the nation of possibility. That we are a country that lead not only in word but, as has been demonstrated by his election, in deed; in equality of opportunity, in equality before the law. That we are a nation that is open to people from all the world, in terms of migration and immigration, and that anybody can come to this country and even if fifty percent is luck, if they work hard enough, the possibilities for growth and reaching the top are there. And I think his election is truly historic in terms of the very particular history of the United States in terms slavery, the civil war, Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction, segregation, the Civil Rights movement. You have this line, this progression that has now culminated in the first African-American President elected. That speaks volumes.

And I think already we see, in terms of public diplomacy, the world reacting to this. Certainly in the African continent. Certainly in the Middle East. Certainly in Europe, where European groups and individuals, especially youth, are beginning to question the European model of equality before the law and the ethnic separation of groups in cities. So his election automatically, in my view, enhances our public diplomacy overnight.

**Could you give our readers a summary of the ideas expressed in the chapter in your book titled *Public Diplomacy—The Voice of America*. What improvements have you seen, and what areas do you think still need drastic improvement?**

When Condoleezza Rice became Secretary of State, she asked me to give her a strategic game plan on public diplomacy. And she actually worked very closely with Karen Hughes, who became Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy. And to their credit, they took nearly all the recommendations that I gave them and really translated them into action. One of the reasons they were able to do that bureaucratically is that both Condoleezza Rice and Karen Hughes had the ear of the president. Therefore, they could slice through bureaucratic opacity and get things done.

For example, they increased the financial human resources in public diplomacy. They enhanced the chain of command of ambassadors and assistant secretaries for more direct responsibility in public diplomacy. Because as I explained to them, in the private sector you are paid for performance; you get stock options and bonuses. In the government, especially in the Foreign Service, if you get good efficiency reports you get promoted. And we have to make public diplomacy one of the requirements for good performance. So ambassadors were notified

that their embassies would also be ranked and graded by how effective they were in achieving the public diplomacy aims of the administration; likewise for assistant regional Secretaries of State. Also, a Deputy Assistant Secretary was designated, either wholly or partially, for public diplomacy in each regional bureau.

And there was, how can I put it, a reinvention of the USIA function within the State Department. I attach a lot of importance to this, because it may seem just like bureaucratic organization, but its very important; and it has already had an effect.

I had a bit of a hobby horse in the recommendations—both in the 2003 report and in the recommendations I gave them most recently. It was what I call the “Islamic Media Unit”, which they call the Rapid Response Unit. I told Condoleezza Rice and Karen Hughes that I was so impressed by what I saw in London in the Foreign Office that we have to replicate it somehow in the State Department. And they did. Some nine months after I made my recommendations, Karen Hughes asked me to come up and they showed me the Rapid Response Unit on the second floor of the State Department. I was really moved by that experience, because it’s very rare that you make a recommendation and actually get to see something happen; something tangible, that you could put your arms around. There in that room were all these TV screens: one Al Jazeera the other one al Arabiya, the other one Turkish television, Iranian TV, one Urdu. There was one Syrian-American Foreign Service officer, native in Arabic, who was monitoring Arab blogs. And all this information of what was being said, what the critical media were focusing on and what they were saying about America policy, was sent up through the political channels of the Assistant Secretary of State of the Middle East and South Asia. And then talking points were crafted to respond. The talking points were used in Washington and in the field. Now, that organizational structure is what the Obama administration is going to inherit. It will be helpful as they can hit the road running with it - especially given the impetus that Obama’s going to have for change and for reaching out more into parts of the world, and engaging not only our friends but our adversaries.

**There’s still quite a debate about the recreation of USIA. In your opinion is that feasible? Or should we drop this discussion and move forward with what we have?**

Well, when I presented Colin Powell our [*Changing Minds, Winning Peace*] report in 2003, he said to me: ‘Ed just tell me. Was it a mistake to dismantle USIA in 1999?’ And I said, ‘Mr. Secretary, Absolutely.’ And again, I go back to my Meridian House Speech—[which I write about] in an early chapter of my book—where I said it is false to think that with the fall of Communism that the ideological culture wars are over. We unilaterally disarmed ourselves from our instruments of persuasion, and that was a mistake.

But, given the political and financial/fiscal realities of Washington at the time when I was chairing the Advisory Group, a Congressionally mandated commission, Congress was telling me that in no way would they authorize reestablishing USIA. So my task was to see how we could reinvent USIA within the State Department in the most effective manner possible.

That option is always there—to recreate a new USIA—but I don't think it's as necessary today if we have a well functioning foreign service. But those are the only two options. I don't know which way the Obama administration will go, but again, I think a lot of progress has been made in the infrastructure. It's how far they want to carry that forward. And they should carry it forward because it's very important.

**Speaking of what's been done, we had an opportunity to interview U.S. Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy James Glassman and he is a big supporter of web 2.0 and new media engagement. You're known to be a big supporter of person-to-person engagement, the "last 3 feet." But what is your opinion on PD 2.0 and the potential benefit of engagement on the web and other new media?**

Well I think its vast, its very important. And it should be really focused on and enhanced because the internet is an incredible media. Sattelite communications and even cell phones, you know, they're very important instruments of communication. In fact, in our 2003 report we have a chapter on high-tech communications and technology, but we thought that we should be getting a text messages out to people, getting a list of addressees and sending text messages out to journalists, for example. Arab journalists, on their cell phones. Keeping abreast of fast breaking events, etc. So I'd say I'm a big supporter of doing all that.

I'm also a supporter of reinventing the BBG [Broadcasting Board of Governors] and the whole issue of Alhurra and Sawa. We had our own view, which was not adopted by the Bush administration, or by the BBG. I thought it was a mistake to create an independent sattelite Arabic television station when you have over a 150 television stations in the region, all competing with one another. Especially given the region's cultural history of state-supported television as instruments of propaganda for the State. So we suggested that a better way forward was to establish a public-private-nonprofit foundation that would obtain the intellectual copyrights to high quality television programs from the United States—the History channel, Discovery, the Sunday talk shows, etc.—and provide them gratis to the multitude of Arab sattelite TV stations and channels. The rich ones like Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera don't need the money and can afford high class programming, but the vast majority of these radio and TV stations in the Middle East often live from hand to mouth, and this would enable them to plug in high quality American programming. That's something I think the new administration should look at, and I'm certainly going to be urging them to do it.

**One last PD question which is relevant to this moment in time. Given the deep financial crisis that the US is mired in, how do you see the economic situation affecting the public diplomacy changes that you advocate?**

Well there are going to be budget deficiencies in the department because of the financial crisis. But again, in this instance we're not talking about mega-bucks, but the amounts of money if intelligently used can really have a tremendous impact in the pursuit of US foreign policy interests, in the field of Public Diplomacy. So I think they should not tear down, they should build up. And it's going to be a real competition for money within the agencies, but I think this is one in which we can't afford to let down our guard.

**Finally, do you think the Obama administration will really take on more direct engagement with Syria and bringing it in from the cold?**

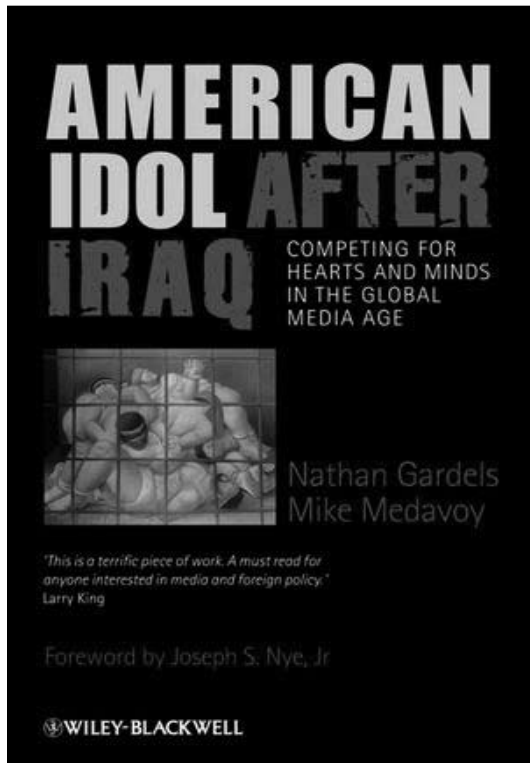
Well I certainly take Obama's word that he wants to engage his adversaries. As you know from reading my book I'm a very strong proponent of that. I mean I think talk is not a concession unless you have such a low opinion of yourself that you think you're going to give away the barn by just talking to people. That's not my definition of engagement. It's tough-minded diplomacy. Indeed like we did when I was Ambassador to Syria with the Hafez regime. We had an adversarial relationship when I arrived in Damascus in 1988, but we built on that relationship, we engaged from the president to the Secretary of State, to the Ambassador in the field and we accomplished a great deal. Was it easy? No. Did it take a major effort? Yes. But at the end of the day we were able to help end the civil war in Lebanon through our consultations with the Syrian regime, the Taif Agreement. We were able to begin to get our hostages out of Beirut because of Syria's relations with Iran. We were able to get Syria to join a US-led coalition against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, both politically and militarily. I was even able to negotiate the freedom of travel of Syrian Jews. And the big prize amongst others was the Madrid Peace Conference where we got Hafez al-Assad to agree to direct face-to-face negotiations with Israel for the first time in history, which allowed us to go to [former Israeli Prime Minister] Yitzhak Shamir, one of the hard-liner Likud Prime Ministers to come to the table with Arab neighbors. That I think was a model of a successful engagement of an adversary.

Now, history has moved on and the current conditions are different, but fundamentally, the reasons for engagement have not changed.

# NATHAN GARDELS and MIKE MEDAVOY

## *American Idol after Iraq: Competing for Hearts and Minds in the Global Media Age* [Wiley Blackwell]

By Noah Chestnut



*"[There] is more power in blue jeans and rock n' roll than the entire Red Army"*

*-Regis Debray*

Journalist Nathan Gardels' admiration of Debray's observational acumen is evident in his most recent book, *American Idol after Iraq*. Gardels teamed up with Hollywood executive Mike Medavoy to explore the world of American public diplomacy outside of the beltway. Unlike many scholars who prefer to dilute the complexity of soft power as a foil to hard power, Gardels and Medavoy argue that the dissemination of American culture, not military might or diplomatic savvy, is the primary factor in shaping foreign publics' opinions about the United States. The films, music and television programs exported by American firms to all corners of the globe eclipse the impact of the more traditional institutions of public diplomacy, such as the State Department, the Pentagon and the bully pulpit of the White House. Gardels says you cannot underestimate Hollywood's importance:

*Film and fiction do the same thing in the sense that they allow you to get inside the mind and experience of other people. It is far more powerful than journalism...(because) imaginative knowledge is not communicated in facts. If you go to Iraq, you talk to people about the American occupation [and] they talk to you about the Mongols at the gates of Baghdad in 1258. It's a link to the fall of the great Arab empire. It's not a fact, it's an emotional memory.*

Gardels and Medavoy's finding that entertainment not only influences but usually determines foreign public's perceptions of the United States is a much needed contribution to the recent flurry of reports and books offering recommendations for how the Obama administration should reform public diplomacy. *American Idol after Iraq* can be distilled into two primary themes. First, conflicts over contending cultures will increase in severity and frequency. For example, the clash over political cartoons published by the Dutch newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* depicting the prophet



Muhammad, they say, is a harbinger for the future. Gardels and Medavoy predict controversies over culture as "part of the process of negotiation that is forging a global cosmopolitan commons." The expansion of readily available images in an increasingly interconnected world establishes the conditions for more potential clashes to occur. Gardels expands on this idea:

*There is a clash of civilizations but it's not the way Sam Huntington put it. It's not between Islam and Hinduism and Christianity, it's between this kind of postmodern anything goes to get market share entertainment culture and your mainstream religions and traditional cultures. The way we put it in the book is the Pope versus Madonna. The Pope is not crazy. The Pope says we need certain values, we need certain anchors [and] we need certain reference points.*

A priority for public diplomats will be to identify potential sources of conflict and then utilize all available tools, including fictional narratives, to dispel falsehoods and establish respect for values promoting tolerance and freedom. Gardels and Medavoy drastically expand on the traditional mission of public diplomacy by elevating the importance of engaging fictional narratives to the same, if not a greater, extent as information broadcasted by the media and the government. The majority of *American Idol after Iraq* is concerned with how to craft an appropriate response to these culture conflicts. The second theme of the book is that American mass culture institutions have a responsibility to educate both at home and abroad. In our interview, Gardels said there are two challenges for public diplomacy that Hollywood exposes.

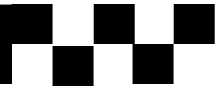
*The challenge for public diplomacy for the next president is to deal with this challenge of American Idol after Iraq, which is to do two things. [The first] is to recognize Hollywood's power. Going back to fascism and World War Two, you had Harry Warner and the wartime movies he made. Warner said that filmmakers have a role, just like teachers, educational institutions, churches; a responsible role to educate as well as entertain. The same thing is true after 9/11. America's one main genius is that we are a hybrid cosmopolitan culture that works. That is our competitive advantage. That is one theme that needs to come through in American mass entertainment that really helps the world be safe for interdependence.*

*The second thing, the innovative thing [is] the reinventing of public diplomacy. Joschka Fisher, the former German minister, said, 'in the old days, a foreign minister used to represent his country to the world, now he represents the world to his country.' In America, all disasters since 9/11, the Iraq war, pre-emptive war, Guantanamo, torture, all the disasters in American foreign policy have come from one thing: the insularity of the American public in not understanding the rest of the world. The key goal of public diplomacy is not*

*to present America's image abroad, it is to present the world to America, so Americans understand the world. Not just information but imaginative knowledge. Imaginative knowledge means fiction, it means getting into the lives and souls of others. That is a key goal: to invert public diplomacy and understand that educating the American public is [to create] empathy.*

There are many examples demonstrating how mass entertainment can both educate and corrupt. The latter is relatively easy to do. The hit television show *24* exemplifies the worst of Hollywood. Its reliance on vague stereotypes to depict otherness and its propensity to normalize violence and torture stymies the efforts of public diplomacy. The primary perspectives from which many Americans see the world is through the eyes of Jack Bauer (the hero of *24*), James Bond and even Rambo. In a post-textual society where people's opinions are increasingly determined by the images of places rather than actually visiting them, a dangerous situation is brewing whereby stereotypes become reality. Luckily, Gardels and Medavoy prove that there is reason to have hope. Artists, such as Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu are creating films that manage to demonstrate the complexity of the human condition while retaining their commercial viability. Inarritu's *Babel* exemplifies Hollywood's potential to show individuals' places outside of their immediate location and the multitude of ways in which their own lives are interconnected to persons living on the other side of the world.

The inclusion of concepts such as emotive memory, hybrid identities and empathy distinguish *American Idol after Iraq* from the majority of public diplomacy scholarship. Gardels and Medavoy's text succeeds in challenging the philosophical assumptions of public diplomacy while remaining accessible and practical. They envision public diplomacy not as the evolution of propaganda, but as a mechanism to actualize a cosmopolitan international order. Their reinvention of public diplomacy via empathy and education not only reveals the potential of Hollywood, it reminds all Americans of the responsibilities of being a global citizens. The difficulties facing public diplomacy are nicely summarized up by a Tariq Ramadan quote that Gardels invokes: "The age of information is the age of non-communication." *American Idol after Iraq* promotes avenues for communication in a time where voices are too often drowned out by white noise.



# Managing Brand Obama

By Nancy Snow

Photo courtesy Reuters

*Like it or not, you are a negotiator.*  
- *Getting to Yes*

No doubt young Harvard Law School student Barack Obama was familiar with the national bestseller by the Harvard Negotiation Project called *Getting to Yes*. The 1981 book is the most popular book on negotiation of all time with over 2 million copies sold. Maybe authors Roger Fisher and William Ury even suggested the “Yes We Can” slogan for Obama’s campaign.

Or maybe Barack Obama didn’t need that negotiation manual. His oratory skills alone took him from the abyss of “Who’s that guy?” to the mountaintop of “You are looking at the face of the first black president of the United States of America.”

Brand Obama has trumped Brand America. Barack Obama’s candidacy, from the time he gave his memorable speech “The Audacity of Hope” at the 2004 Democratic Convention to his inaugural speech on January 20, 2009 was a triumph in marketing a relatively obscure political neophyte into a figure whose visage is likely to grace Mount Rushmore, if not his own mountain. Barack Obama has become the most iconic American president since Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy.

Right now the nation, the world, and possibly even Mars (if there is extraterrestrial life there) are still soundly on Obama’s side. He’s got the whole world in his hands, especially since he’s just at the first policy proposal stage of his presidency. For the most part, the country and the world highly approved Obama’s executive order to close Guantanamo in a year’s time,



outlaw the infamous Cheney dark side of waterboarding and other forms of torture in prisoner interrogations and remove the CIA from running secret prisons. In his first post-White House interview, the newly retired Vice President Cheney warned that these changes made the country at risk to a nuclear or biological attack. He called these policy choices “campaign rhetoric” and said they reflect a “naive mindset” among Obama’s new team in Washington. In his own take on public diplomacy, Cheney said, “The United States needs to be not so much loved as it needs to be respected.”

I don’t worry about Cheney’s retirement years. He plans to get right to work on his memoirs in order to set the record straight on the unpopular Bush-Cheney administration. I do worry how the new president will fare in all the churning waters ahead. As I teach my “All Obama, All the Time” graduate course at Syracuse



University on the First 100 days of his administration, I think a lot about Bette Davis' character Margo Channing in *All About Eve* and that famous warning she gave: "Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy night!" Night after night.

Already, "Yes we can!" seems so 2008. Congressional Republicans in 2009 have started to reply, "No, you don't." European leaders show hesitancy toward taking up the multilateral slack after a mostly unilateral eight years. Their answer to whether they will contribute more to the "war on terror" seems to be "Maybe we won't."

So how smoothly will Obama's transition go from messianic change agent to just another Washington insider? His status from candidate to president-elect went as smoothly as Torville and Dean's Bolero in the 1984 Olympics, save for that piece of rock on the ice, impeached Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich.

Wow, he moves fast, we all thought. Well, we've long expected some of these moves since they were cornerstones of his new smart power approach in foreign policy. The world is certainly hopeful that the Obama administration will bring back American know-how and leadership to many far-flung places, but there is some looming doubt. Two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan rage on, the Middle East still rattles its cages in the Gaza strip and elsewhere, while America maintains its devotion to Israel. And with a global economy in the toilet, any new ideas will have to take a back seat to just surviving the downturn.

Obama's persuasive style is very public diplomacy chic. He told Al Arabiya Television in his first White House television interview that the U.S. must first listen to the Middle East. His confidence, coupled with an unflappable composure that U.S. Airways Captain Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger

III would admire, spell relief for a nation and world fatigued by divisive rhetoric and Manichaeian labels. Even his indictment of excessive executive pay, which he said came from a "culture of narrow self-interest and short-term gain at the expense of everything else," could hold just as true just for a Bush-Cheney public diplomacy approach that put narrow national security and war on terror agendas ahead of global goodwill.

Obama's administration suggests—it's still too early to tell—the possibility of a nation reborn, maybe even rebranded as one that earns respect and admiration. George W. Bush and Dick Cheney made it sound like we had to choose between love or respect, which reminds us of the damnable choices we had between (a) support for the terrorists or (b) support for the Bush administration. I chose (c) none of the above, though that answer was not part of the White House exam between 2001-2008.

We expect our new president to be all things to all people—a great speaker, persuader, negotiator, savior of the domestic economy, peace broker in the Middle East, loving husband, doting dad, like Lincoln, FDR, or Reagan when needed, bipartisan or nonpartisan if it can help get legislation passed. He's even become an opinion writer. His Washington Post op-ed on February 5, 2009 ended with this: "We can place good ideas ahead of old ideological battles, and a sense of purpose above the same narrow partisanship." As if to add levity, the Post added, "The writer is president of the United States."

What may really surprise us is when the iconic man, sometimes superhero, falls back to earth and reveals himself to be a president, a man, and a negotiator who has to work his way out of the cacophony of "No, we can't!" responses he'll experience once the sheen wears off. These no's

won't just come from Washington and GOP circles. They will come from American and global antiwar leftists impatient with President Obama's timeline to bring the troops home and end wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They will come from allies reluctant to step forward and fill in as a true coalition of the willing that during Bush-Cheney was more public relations than action. At that point I doubt Obama bottled water, chocolate, soap bars, or Shepard Fairey posters will do much convincing.

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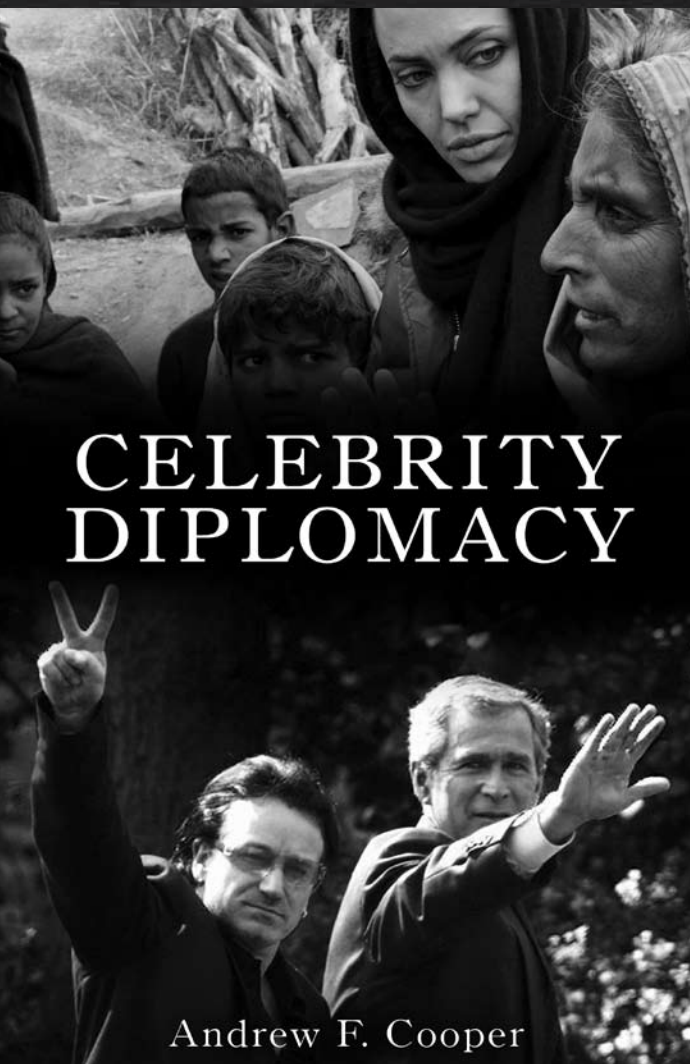


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