

A REPORT OF THE PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY COUNCIL

**A CALL FOR
ACTION ON
PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY**

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Public Diplomacy in Crisis

United States public diplomacy is in crisis. Buffeted by a decade of budget cuts, hampered by bureaucratic structures that marginalize it and call on its expertise too late in the policy process, public diplomacy as currently constituted is inadequate to perform the urgent national security tasks required of it—to inform, to understand and to influence world publics. America faces foreign hostility and misunderstandings that threaten to eclipse the positive legacy of U.S. leadership in World War II and the Cold War.

Effective public diplomacy is vital to a successful American foreign policy. In the war on terrorism, public diplomacy can play a critical role combating misinformation, enabling us to better understand our world, providing accurate information about the U.S. and helping people around the globe to understand this nation, our values and our policies.

The Public Diplomacy Council, a non-partisan group of professionals with extensive experience in public diplomacy, calls upon the Administration and Congress to revitalize public diplomacy efforts, to integrate them into all of our foreign policy deliberations, and to support them in contributing to the security and well being of the United States. In that spirit we put forth the following five Action Recommendations to the Administration and the Congress to effect a necessary transformation of public diplomacy for the 21st century:

Recommendations

- 1. Establish an agency within the Department of State and the National Security Council process, the U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy (USAPD), to manage the U.S. government's civilian information and exchanges functions and to coordinate all U.S. government public diplomacy efforts.**
- 2. Increase public diplomacy overseas staffing by 300 percent over five years, through increased recruitment, contracts and recall appointments for necessary skills; expand language and cultural awareness training to ensure public diplomacy officers fluent in the local language at every overseas post; and increase program budgets for public diplomacy, including international broadcasting and exchange programs, four-fold over five years.**
- 3. Provide the long-term resources necessary for global international broadcasting capability, including 24 hour per day English language world wide broadcasting, as well as a range of language service broadcasts, innovative broadcast and internet programs for youth, and interactive radio programming. Integrate international broadcasting more closely with other elements of strategic communication.**

4. Establish by Presidential Directive an Interagency Committee on Public Diplomacy at the Cabinet Level to coordinate and direct the national public diplomacy strategy, with a permanent secretariat and associated working groups, co-chaired by the Deputy National Security Advisor for Communication and the Director of the new USAPD agency.

5. Create a public-private partnership “Foundation for the Global Future” to provide permanent off-budget funding for international exchanges conducted by civilian and military federal agencies. Encourage broad private sector participation in funding the Foundation.

Introduction

Public diplomacy seeks to promote the national interest and the national security of the United States through understanding, informing and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.

If it is to remain a global leader, the United States must significantly strengthen its public diplomacy programs around the world and do so immediately. With a responsibility to wage war on international terrorism, to increase global stability, and to provide accurate information to counter those who distort the facts, the United States must both support existing public diplomacy programs and create new tools and structures that utilize new technologies. An expanded public diplomacy or strategic communication effort requires substantial additional resources; it also requires a new organizational structure and relationships. Information should have priority among policy makers as an essential element of national power along with its diplomatic, economic and military elements.

Public diplomacy embraces the core programs—exchanges, broadcasting and information activities, and cultural affairs—that reach international audiences and educate them about America. But more significant than its support of specific U.S. policies, a vibrant public diplomacy program can improve the global image of the United States. That improvement, in turn, gives governments, opinion leaders and democratic publics a positive perspective about the United States. Changes in their perceptions of the United States lead to corresponding changes in their attitudes towards the United States and towards U.S. policies. In short, effective U.S. public diplomacy over time can change behavior toward the United States.

This has already happened. During the Cold War, public diplomacy proved itself an effective instrument of American foreign policy. It efficiently disseminated information about the United States, countered Soviet propaganda and gave hope to people living behind the Iron Curtain. From the “kitchen debate” between Vice President Nixon and Premier Khrushchev on American values and productivity to Voice of America broadcasts that brought jazz music and current events into Soviet homes to traveling exhibits about American society and the more than 50,000 Soviet scholars, students, scientists, journalists, officials and musicians who visited the United States on government-sponsored exchange programs, these efforts to reach out to the citizenry of the Soviet Bloc cumulatively undermined the propaganda and credibility of their governments.

Why is Public Diplomacy Important Today?

A robust public diplomacy program can be an effective weapon in the war against terrorism. Favorability ratings of the United States have fallen dramatically since 9/11 in many countries around the world. In the Middle East for example they are now in the single digits but America’s prestige and credibility have seriously declined almost everywhere. Such low numbers may be a short-term reaction to specific U.S. policies and actions, or a more general response to Western values as represented by the United States. Whatever the cause, our low standing is exacerbated by distorted, negative reporting and the lack of a coherent response. The United States is in a war not only of guns but also of ideas in the Middle East and around the world. Public diplomacy programs that offer balanced information, and foster increased understanding of the United States, are a proven weapon in that war.

The number of democracies around the world has increased dramatically. But democratic governments are guided by the attitudes and behaviors of their electorates: a nation whose voters are constantly fed misinformation regarding U.S. policies will not ally itself with the United States. In the past, traditional diplomacy tried to influence other nations’ policies by engaging their leadership. As democracy spreads, that approach is not enough. Today, the voters influence policy. To persuade the leaders of other nations and their parliaments to support U.S. policies we must persuade their publics. Even in those remaining non-democratic and authoritarian societies with state-controlled media, public diplomacy programs have proven to be effective in affecting public perceptions. Today, even rulers in non-democratic states must take public opinion into account.

If public diplomacy is the best means to do this, it should also be clear that public diplomacy is no silver bullet. It will not change foreign audiences’ perceptions of the United States overnight. It is a long-term effort that requires years to influence others’ views. But resourceful public diplomacy communicates skillfully and powerfully. Over time, with multiple opportunities for contact, it brings

balanced, accurate information to foreign audiences with honesty, reliability, and conviction. Over time, increased understanding grows and behavior changes.

Long-term exchange programs expose international participants to long-standing values that are held by Americans. They understand that they and we share the common values of spirituality, family, economic opportunity, justice, equality and freedom.

Not all policies can be made appealing. A sophisticated public diplomacy program has to take that reality into account. It must focus on explaining the rationale behind such policies, recognizing that they may not be supported by a foreign public and directing its programs to combat misinformation about them even while recognizing that they may not be welcomed in some societies.

Public diplomacy programs must target mass audiences as well as elites, and must do it in a sophisticated manner. Reaching out to mass audiences is critical in a world where democracy is flourishing. But we must reach out as well to young educated elites, the future leaders of society, by providing them with more nuanced information.

If we take the path of avoidance and do not engage with foreign audiences in a thoughtful, mature, intelligent, respectful manner then we necessarily cede the ground to those who rely on distortion and misinformation. By remaining silent, we allow an information vacuum to be filled by those who hate the United States.

What Can Public Diplomacy Do?

Public diplomacy has been an effective foreign policy tool in the past. As we look to the future, an enhanced, robust, effective public diplomacy program must rely on a combination of traditional and new tools.

Public diplomacy has an arsenal of programs that work well, but they lack the direction, resources and scale necessary for the current situation. Two-way exchange programs, one of the most effective means by which the U.S. can foster long-term changes in perception, attitude and behavior, is an existing approach that must be supported at much higher levels and with a long-range perspective. The International Visitors Program, Fulbright Academic Programs and other exchanges, especially youth exchanges like the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program in the former Soviet Union that have a proven record of effectiveness must be expanded and enhanced.

Programs that were successful in the past should be reexamined and the best of them reestablished, reinvigorated or expanded. For example, media placement or direct projection of videos on American life and institutions can give foreign

audiences another, more balanced perspective on a society that they otherwise might see only through mass market films depicting a violent and decadent America. American Corners, the innovative smaller information centers headed by foreign nationals, provide print, internet, audio and video information about the United States. These programs are an extension of efforts to reach out to mass audiences by placing information in the community, where the people are.

Broadcast programs, like the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), and, more recently, Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra TV, have had significant impact. The latter two stations have succeeded in attracting substantial audiences in the Arab world with their programs of music and light features. However, an effective public diplomacy broadcasting effort must also include programs of real substance directed to elites and democratic reformers just as RFE and RL did earlier. This means more serious coverage of events in the targeted region, cross-reporting, and in-depth discussion programs and features. As the means and media of influence change, so too must our public diplomacy programs and initiatives.

Public diplomacy professionals must develop new programs to take advantage of new technologies. Broadcasting should be made more interactive, engaging audiences rather than simply talking at them. The ubiquity of cell phones and wireless technology in much of the world suggests that programs should increase use of that technology to provide information. The Internet is still largely an untapped resource for innovative public diplomacy.

Finally, there is no substitute for reliance on public diplomats posted overseas and their expertise. These professionals are ultimately the best strategic communication tools. They have a vast amount of information and knowledge at their disposal; most importantly they are the most interactive tool available. Public diplomacy professionals in U.S. embassies and consulates can aggressively provide information as well as respond immediately to the concerns of their local audiences. As a fundamental prerequisite, equipped with language and regional expertise, they can engage in dialogue in real time. And by listening to the concerns of both leaders and average citizens they are able to provide insight into how policies are being received, what popular concerns in their countries are, and feed that information back to decision makers in Washington.

Why Is Public Diplomacy Not Working?

Given the need for public diplomacy today and its track record, why is public diplomacy not as effective as it was and as it needs to be?

---Public Diplomacy efforts lack direction and understanding in the State Department's bureaucratic culture that clashes with that of public diplomacy.

Until 1999 public diplomacy programs resided within an independent agency, the United States Information Agency (USIA). In 1999 the USIA was absorbed into the State Department for purposes of administrative streamlining. The unintended result, however, has been to weaken strategic communication as an effective, cohesive foreign policy tool. There are many reasons for this, including limited understanding by the State Department of public diplomacy's program needs and utility, and a significant difference in methods of operation between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy.

In the post 9/11 world, it has become all too evident that the diminished, fragmented and under resourced public diplomacy in the State Department was just not adequate to the task. Some minor adjustments and new (or new once again) programs were created under the new Under Secretary, but they proved to be much too little and far too late. There is near universal agreement that public diplomacy is broken and something must be done and done quickly to fix it. A number of thoughtful solutions have been proposed to solve the "PD problem" in recent years, including those put forward by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, the Congressionally-mandated Djerejian Report, the Heritage Foundation, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the USIA Alumni Association. Each of the studies notes, or at least implies, that there are chronic and systemic problems within the Department of State that must be addressed in any renewal of American public diplomacy. The most serious of these problems are:

- Misunderstanding of the nature of public diplomacy *vis-à-vis* public affairs;
- No true integration within the State Department;
- No central authority over public diplomacy operations;
- Insufficient funding for public diplomacy programs.

Recent efforts by the State Department to enhance the role of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy & Public Affairs in response to Congressional pressures by creating a new office to serve as a "focal point" for management and personnel issues and a "clearinghouse" for issues, however well intentioned, miss the point. Without direct control of public diplomacy personnel and financial resources, an Under Secretary will continue to be held responsible for yet have no real authority over public diplomacy—a prescription for failure. A new structure, one that more accurately reflects the nation's requirements for effective public diplomacy in the 21st Century must be built.

---Public diplomacy programs do not have sufficient financial and personnel resources.

At its height during the Cold War twenty years ago, the public diplomacy programs of the United States had budgets of just about \$1 billion. Today, U.S. Government public diplomacy programs are, in real dollars, a fraction of that amount. Funding for exchange programs, including the flagship Fulbright and International Visitor Programs have remained stagnant since the end of the Cold War that is a reduction of more than 40 percent in real dollars. Support for libraries, cultural programs and similar efforts was cut drastically or in some cases eliminated entirely. In addition, the number of public diplomacy Foreign Service Officers overseas was also drastically reduced, often from a staff of ten to twenty or more diplomats serving in a critical mission to one or two officers. Effective public diplomacy cannot be done on the cheap.

---The absence of 24/7 VOA broadcasting in the world's dominant language deprives most of the world's listeners of a reliable and authoritative source of information about the US. And, in an effort to reach broader audiences, U.S. broadcasting is investing resources in youth programming at the expense of substantive programs for current elites and decision makers.

Perhaps the time has come to merge all U.S international broadcasting into a single adequately funded, comprehensive, full service, multimedia global broadcaster that maintains the principles laid down in the VOA Charter as well as its journalistic code. Such an entity would reduce waste, overlap and competition among the many current U.S. government-funded broadcasters. It would provide better allocation of resources in programming and transmission and would provide credible information and programming based on our culture, our political ideals and our policies. At a minimum, U.S. international broadcasting should have the funds necessary to be heard in English 24/7 around the world.

There has been an over emphasis on youth-oriented, music and entertainment programs directed to key regions such as the Middle East. Young people as the future decision makers of the world are important audiences and must be addressed but there is an urgent need for an expansion of substantive news and feature programming to the region. Today, because of an overall lack of funding, there is an either/or choice between youth programming or substantive programs for elites. The emphatic choice of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) is youth but young people cannot be the only audience for targeted U.S international broadcasting. Our international broadcasting must address elites and current decision-makers; it must reach out to a broader demographic including women and young people. In some parts of the world, such as Africa, it must serve also as a credible source of local as well as regional and international news. The administration and the Congress should take a hard look at how U.S. international broadcasting is managed to serve broad U.S. public diplomacy goals and the American taxpayer. Our international broadcasting should be integrated more closely with other public diplomacy tools.

---Public Diplomacy is not integrated into Cabinet level decision-making.

Public diplomacy has not been at the table with other elements of the U.S. Government during deliberations of policy initiatives and their implications for many years. Even when it was present, the participation was uneven, inconsistent and often reactive rather than integrated from the outset. For example, the Clinton administration's PDD 68 set up a senior working level interagency process but it was convened only rarely during its existence. Currently, information sharing and coordination on public diplomacy exist only at the working level through a so-called "fusion" group meeting. A new presidential directive on public diplomacy and a global communication strategy is needed to provide authoritative guidance. The President should clearly and unmistakably direct and require that public diplomacy play a key role in the foreign policy decision making process.

---Essential and proven educational and citizen exchange programs that build mutual understanding over the long-term suffer from shifting levels of funding from year to year and from reliance on annual appropriations.

There is striking unanimity among public diplomacy professionals, Members of Congress, and the Executive Branch that long-term exchange programs are truly essential to building and sustaining an accurate, positive view of the United States and its goals in the world. Shifting budgetary winds, however, have made it hard to keep funding and interest levels at the steady high point that all agree is necessary. Whenever a region captures the public's attention, whether it was the former Soviet Union in the 1990s or the Arab and Islamic worlds today, scarce funds for exchanges are diverted from the rest of the world to build up worthy but hastily created exchanges for the favored region at the expense of areas of future crisis. Removing this key component of the nation's public diplomacy from the year-to-year vagaries of the budget cycle would lead to the reliability and predictability that a multi-generational program really requires.

How Do We Improve Public Diplomacy?

To return public diplomacy to its place as a crucial tool of U.S. foreign policy, to take advantage of its strengths in the war on terror, and to utilize it effectively in the effort to better explain the United States and its policies to the world, we call for the following:

- 1. Establish an agency within the Department of State and the National Security Council process, the U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy (USAPD),**

to manage the U.S. government’s civilian informational and exchanges functions, to coordinate all U.S. government public diplomacy efforts. The Agency Director would be equivalent in rank to the Deputy Secretary of State and report to the President through the Secretary of State.

This approach would move significantly beyond the 1999 reorganization, which fragmented and undermined U.S. public diplomacy management. Public diplomacy would have central direction over its budget and personnel resources and a renewed sense of commitment. As an agency of the State Department analogous to USAID or the FBI in the Justice Department, the agency would have sufficient distance from the Department’s bureaucracy yet, under direction of the Secretary of State, would be “in on the take offs as well as the crash landings” from the beginnings of policy formulation through to its implementation.

Most importantly, the agency would be free of the incompatible State Department culture that has been ineffective, slow and reactive in addressing the challenge of spreading anti-Americanism around the globe. State and USAID now share a unified Strategic Plan and the agencies’ goals are closely coordinated at all levels of the bureaucracy. A similar process should be adopted to ensure that policy direction from the Department of State is integrated into the public diplomacy carried out by the separate agency and that input from the new agency is integral to the formulation of that policy from its earliest stages. This level of integration must ensure that there is a flow in both directions as every State Department diplomat, every USG official and every deployed member of the uniformed military abroad, must be, in part, a public diplomat in order that American values and policies –and the relationship of values to policies—is clearly understood.

While it would be most efficient if the agency also included international broadcasting elements, it is unlikely that a single public diplomacy agency including broadcasting could be re-created at present. While we encourage closer integration of international broadcasting with other elements of public diplomacy, the proposed structure does not include international broadcasting as a component of the new agency.

The new agency—with the working title of the U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy or USAPD—would include the current State Department Bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and International Information Programs (IIP), all public diplomacy elements within the Regional & Functional Bureaus, the Office of Research (INR/R) and portions of the Bureau of Public Affairs that migrated to State from the USIA in 1999. Other components of the new agency would be drawn from various support offices and bureaus of the Department of State that gained staff from the 1999 merger as well. Like the Political-Military Bureau of the State Department, elements of the new agency would benefit in terms of consistent and continuing coordination from regular and significant levels of

exchanges of personnel with the uniformed military and with other agencies, particularly in the areas of public affairs and civil affairs.

The goal would be a Washington level of Full Time Employees roughly equivalent to the pre-1999 USIA minus its broadcasting bureau—approximately 1500 Foreign Service and Civil Service employees. The largest component of the new Agency, however, would be stationed overseas and be comprised of approximately 1800 Foreign Service Officers and Specialists and 7000 Foreign National Employees. The U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy would be “field-driven” not “Washington-driven” in its approach to its Mission in that field offices would not merely receive instructions from Washington headquarters to carry out specific programs but rather provide input into Washington decision making and be able to choose those programs most effective under local conditions. All programs would be subject to rigorous and continuous measurement and evaluation.

United States Agency for Public Diplomacy

