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Memorandum for President-Elect Biden Public Diplomacy: Re-engaging the World

While international faith in America's global leadership is much diminished, there is residual affinity around the world for our values, goals, and democratic heritage. On that foundation, we must rebuild our credibility as a world leader and as a society worthy of emulation.

The Biden-Harris Administration faces many global challenges and will need to reinvent and revitalize the instruments of American statecraft. Increasingly in this connected age, the public dimension of U.S. global leadership will be decisive, because publics abroad are indispensable players in policy. Leaders ignore public opinion at their peril.

As it restores America's global relationships, the Biden-Harris Administration should emphatically embrace U.S. public diplomacy. Through purposeful interactions with foreign publics, public diplomacy conveys American values and helps our leaders understand the range and roots of global opinions. Public diplomacy provides tools and platforms to rebuild critical relationships through effective programs and dialogues that build trust.

As associations of accomplished public diplomacy practitioners, we believe that the United States needs to engage international publics and project more effectively its policies and values.

We respectfully recommend that the Biden-Harris administration invest considerable thought, resources, and effort to reinvigorate U.S. public diplomacy.

Priorities

There is a vital need to strengthen public diplomacy within the Department of State, led by a dynamic Under Secretary with enhanced authority to work not only within the Department but with other agencies to support a "whole of government" approach. We recommend that this effort include the following elements:

- **Build consistent leadership** - Appoint a respected Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs who (1) understands both foreign policy and communication, (2) can navigate the Department and the interagency environment, (3) enjoys the evident confidence of the President and the Secretary of State, and (4) intends to stay in the job. After the Secretary, this is the second most important appointment in the State Department.
- **Open doors** - Eliminate recently erected barriers to international education and exchange, notably the proposed federal rulemaking on "duration of status" that would have an enormous

negative impact on U.S. higher education, and the June 22 White House proclamation halting issuance of several categories of nonimmigrant visas. America's academic and business communities will be vocal allies for the Administration on these issues.

- **Coordinate International Communication** - Strengthen Department of State strategic public diplomacy planning and support for major Administration global policy initiatives (e.g., managing the pandemic, climate change). The Bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA) is best positioned to manage substantive development of international public communication of global issues in liaison with regional and functional bureaus within the State Department and relevant interagency representatives.
- **Engage the American public** - The American people, and especially our youth, are the President's finest diplomats - capable of making friends and allies in every corner of the globe. Devise programs on compelling topics (e.g., climate, race, public health, the arts) that involve both travel and an ongoing virtual component. Long-term U.S. interests will be served by encouraging more young Americans to engage with the world.
- **Restore broadcasting** - Restore protections for U.S.-funded international broadcasting against politicization, enabling it to perform its true function: to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.
- **Expand counter-disinformation efforts** - Take hold and focus the USG effort to counter the growing wave of disinformation. Attacked by propaganda on steroids, America has fought back with aspirin. There is a pressing need to: coordinate the Global Engagement Center and PD's social media work with the intelligence community and DOD's information operations; fully document hostile disinformation efforts mounted by foreign governments; assist NGOs and the private sector to conduct prevention efforts to inoculate susceptible groups and individuals against the appeals of national adversaries and violent extremists.
- **Enhance professional culture** - Reinvigorate and update public diplomacy staff training, including opportunities to pursue advanced degrees and "excursion tours" in the private sector. More public diplomacy training should be provided to all Department officers. These expanded opportunities will attract talented officers and, over time, build a cohort of accomplished public diplomats who will compete for ambassadorships and senior domestic assignments.
- **Augment resources** - To fuel this process of more effectively engaging with the world, reenergizing the PD function, and attracting top talent, substantially increase resources for all elements of public diplomacy, and reinforce the "firewall" that protects exchange funding. Part of this effort should be a review of PD staffing abroad that assesses the potential need for expanded presence.



Sherry Lee Mueller, Ph.D., President, Public Diplomacy Council
mueller@american.edu



Joel Anthony Fischman, President, Public Diplomacy Association of America
fischman@comcast.net

Media Contacts:

Ambassador Brian E. Carlson (ret.), Vice President, PDC, PDAA member
carlsonbe@vestniek.com

Michael McCarry, PDC Board member, PDAA member
mmccarry.1@gmail.com

The Public Diplomacy Association of America is a nonprofit, voluntary association for public diplomacy professionals, with some 400 members. PDAA members have worked in or with the information, education, and cultural programs, which the U.S. Government incorporates into the conduct of its diplomacy abroad.

The Public Diplomacy Council is a U.S.-based, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded in 1988. Its members are committed to promoting excellence in professional practice, academic study and advocacy for public diplomacy.