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## U.S. Public Diplomacy

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### Its History, Problems, and Promise

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The U.S. reputation has become tarnished during recent years. Public attitudes toward our country are now reported to be at a fifty-year low. Fewer people abroad consider the United States as their best friend. Fewer people believe that our nation shares a mutuality of interests with them. And fewer have trust and confidence in the ability of the United States to provide wise and steady leadership in the current world upheaval. Simultaneously, the negative aspects of America's image have gained new prominence. The mental picture that many foreigners have of our nation is increasingly that of a violent, lawless, overbearing, even a sick society. According to one recent survey, one-fourth of Italians and British, three of ten Japanese, and four of ten of the French and Germans say that their opinion of the United States has fallen appreciably during the past two years.<sup>1</sup>

One might think that such a statement was made in the twenty-first century. In fact, this is from the summary report of expert witness testimony before a House subcommittee that sponsored a one-day symposium on July 22, 1968, called "The Future of United States Public Diplomacy." At the time, three factors were linked to the rise of such a poor mental picture of the United States: Vietnam, race relations in the United States, and crime and lawlessness, presented so vividly to the world by the 1968 assassinations of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy. While the words

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of those experts are equally applicable to today's environment, what three factors might we link now to such a dismal picture of the image of the United States: Iraq, preemptive strikes, and unilateralism?

U.S. public diplomacy addresses ongoing questions of a nation's image and credibility in the world as well as tracks, monitors, and builds upon the government and nongovernmental contacts, transactions, and influences that shape the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of global publics. As a concept, it is closely linked to U.S. foreign policy and communication outcomes from elites to influential and street-level foreign publics as opposed to just traditional elite-elite communication common in official diplomatic communications. Public diplomacy was first coined in 1965 by former U.S. Foreign Service Officer Edmund Gillion, then Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, at the establishment of the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy. Murrow, a broadcasting legend at CBS News, directed the U.S. government's independent public diplomacy agency, the United States Information Agency, from 1961 to 1963. At the time, the Murrow Center brochure explained public diplomacy as "including the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another . . . (and) the transnational flow of information and ideas."<sup>2</sup>

Dante Fascell, chairman of that 1968 subcommittee overseeing its future, said then that "by 'public diplomacy' we mean the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction, outside the framework of government channels, of groups and interests in one country with those in others; communication between those whose job is communications; and the result of these processes for the formulation of foreign policy and the conduct of foreign affairs."<sup>3</sup> Some thirty-three years later after September 11, 2001, public diplomacy once again came to the forefront in the American public's minds and in U.S. foreign policy circles, particularly in response to troubling anti-American sentiment in the Arab and Muslim world. The 2003 war in Iraq only amplified those negative feelings toward the United States, and not only in the Middle East. As the Pew Research Center reported in 2004, "A year after the war in Iraq, discontent with America and its policies has intensified rather than diminished. . . . Perceptions of American unilateralism remain widespread in European and Muslim nations, and the war in Iraq has undermined America's credibility abroad."<sup>4</sup> U.S. public diplomacy programs were initiated post-9/11 to inform, engage, and influence people around the globe and included multimedia assets such as international radio broadcasting as well as government-sponsored exchanges to the United States to help explain American culture and society to VIP visitors. Altogether, only about \$600 million was spent by the U.S. State Department in 2003 on

public diplomacy efforts, nearly half in educational exchanges and about \$150 million to the target audience outreach in the Arab and Muslim world, an amount considered “absurd and dangerous” by the U.S. Advisory Group for the Arab and Muslim world, led by former U.S. Ambassador Edward Djerejian.<sup>5</sup>

Public diplomacy today is as difficult to implement and measure for effectiveness as it is to define. Placing an emphasis on diplomacy, its history suggests an official government process designed to enhance national security interests:

Public Diplomacy seeks to promote the national interest of the United States through understanding, informing and influencing foreign audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Public diplomacy is as important to the national interests as military preparedness.<sup>7</sup>

At other times, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) defined public diplomacy as a two-track process, both one-way informational and declaratory in purpose and two-way educational and mutual in outcome:

promoting the national interest and the national security of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening the dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.<sup>8</sup>

The Smith-Mundt Act, also known as the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, is one of the linchpins of U.S. public diplomacy. It has two-way communication strategies in its language: “The objectives of this Act are to enable the Government of the United States to correct the misunderstandings about the United States in other countries, which constituted obstacles to peace, and to promote mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries, which is one of the essential foundations of peace.”<sup>9</sup> One of its authors, Karl Mundt, clearly viewed the act more as a one-way informational counter to Soviet propaganda. He wrote, “Immediately following the close of World War II when we realized that we were leaving a hot war only to enter a cold war, many of us recognized the importance of fashioning programs to meet effectively the non-military challenge confronting us. It was out of this era that the Smith-Mundt Act emerged.” These Cold War weapons of words were needed because the United States faced “an alien force which seeks our total destruction.”<sup>10</sup>

The other U.S. public diplomacy linchpin, the Fulbright Hays Act of 1961, incorporated provisions of Senator Fulbright’s amendment in 1946 and the

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Smith-Mundt Act to establish a new educational and cultural exchange policy:

to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.<sup>11</sup>

This view of mutual understanding and mutuality in public diplomacy would likely emphasize very different approaches and measures of effectiveness than one placing public diplomacy squarely in the midst of a national crisis. Over the past fifty years, however, no single consensus has emerged to define the direction of U.S. public diplomacy aside from the goals and whims of the incumbent executive branch of the U.S. government. As Michael Holtzman observed in the *New York Times*,

United States public diplomacy is neither public nor diplomatic. First, the government—not the broader American public, has been the main messenger to a world that is mightily suspicious of it. Further, the State Department, which oversees most efforts, seems to view public diplomacy not as a dialogue but as a one-sided exercise . . . America speaking to the world.<sup>12</sup>

Holtzman belongs to a school of thought on U.S. public diplomacy advanced by Senator J. William Fulbright and Edward R. Murrow that suggests a far wider array of participants, practitioners, and perspectives than just those seen or heard in the armed forces, foreign service, or inside the beltway of Washington. As Murrow defined the field when appointed director of the USIA in 1963,

Public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in that it involves interaction not only with governments but primarily with non-governmental individuals and organizations. Furthermore, public diplomacy activities often present many differing views represented by private American individuals and organizations in addition to official government views.<sup>13</sup>

Murrow's definition suggests that public diplomacy in practice is as much at home in corporate boardrooms, pop concerts, and peace rallies as it is inside the halls of Congress. Nevertheless, U.S. public diplomacy is still often

assumed to be linked in some way, peripherally or dead center, with traditional diplomatic goals of national governments. As Christopher Ross, U.S. State Department special coordinator for public diplomacy and public affairs, writes,

The practitioners of traditional diplomacy engage the representatives of foreign governments in order to advance the national interests articulated in their own government's strategic goals in international affairs. Public diplomacy, by contrast, engages carefully targeted sectors of foreign publics in order to develop support for those same strategic goals.<sup>14</sup>

Whenever public diplomacy definitions are overtly linked to official outcomes of national governments, this tends to connote a more negative interpretation linked to propaganda outcomes. Public diplomacy is then perceived, rightly or wrongly, as a set of mostly mass communication techniques that use emotional appeals over rational facts to change attitudes; conceals information that does not favor the sender; and spreads messages promoting a certain ideology such as the social, economic, or military goals of the state. As British scholar J. A. C. Brown says, with propaganda, "answers are determined in advance."<sup>15</sup> American sociologist and propaganda scholar, Leonard Doob, argues the same. What separates propaganda from other forms of communication (education) is the power of suggestion that he defines as the "predetermined conclusion."<sup>16</sup> It uses strategic communications to lead a person to a specific conclusion as determined by the propaganda sponsor.

The hybrid nature of public diplomacy and propaganda outcomes and definitions makes it difficult in some circles to separate the two. Heritage Foundation analysts Johnson and Dale argue that propaganda, in contrast to public diplomacy,

is information deliberately propagated to help or harm a person, group, or institution, regardless of whether the information is true or false. To many not aware of its exact meaning, propaganda suggests disinformation. Public diplomacy and public affairs officers have always maintained that any information they convey must be truthful. Propaganda or not, it must deal with the facts.<sup>17</sup>

Johnson and Dale adopt a "meat and potatoes" approach to American public diplomacy that involves a whole menu of communication interactions to encourage mutual understanding and cooperation between nations and their publics. These include foreign media briefings, publishing materials such as books and pamphlets that explain the United States and its values, sponsoring educational and cultural exchanges, and international broadcasting.

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Internationally, public diplomacy is often seen as a both/and equation, both helpful to governmental purposes and useful to private organizations or companies that are involved in all aspects of international persuasion. Consider the words of Sir Michael Butler, former British permanent representative to the European Union:

The purpose of public diplomacy is to influence opinion in target countries to make it easier for the British Government, British companies, or other British organizations to achieve their aims. The overall image of Britain in the country concerned is of great importance—but this is not to say that it is the only factor. The most important factor will usually be the actual policies of the British Government and the terms in which they are announced and explained by the Ministers. A narrow and open pursuit of national interests at the expense of others will be negative.<sup>18</sup>

This British definition of public diplomacy contrasts with American versions that are often associated with appeals made during national crisis or wartime that are put to rest at conflict's end. A distinct historical pattern in U.S. public diplomacy has emerged over the past century: (1) conflict arises that requires a public diplomacy/propaganda response, (2) new resources are allocated to alleviate the conflict/national crisis, and (3) at the end of the conflict, either congressional or executive action is taken to dissolve the public diplomacy agency. Woodrow Wilson's Creel Committee was shut down by Congress within months of World War I's end. Truman's Office of War Information (OWI) was abolished at the end of World War II. At the end of the Cold War, the USIA came under congressional scrutiny as a relic of a bygone ideological era and was finally abolished in 1999, with its remnants transferred to the State Department.

Today, public diplomacy, both nationally and globally, is viewed as more important than even during the Cold War era due to changes in global communications that have given rise to the global audience:

It is the end of the Cold War which has made public diplomacy more important: the spread of democracy, the media explosion and the rise of global NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and protest movements have changed the nature of power and put ever greater restraints on the freedom of action of national governments. This means that—even more than during the Cold War—we need to invest as much in communicating with foreign publics as with the governments that represent them if we are to achieve our objectives.<sup>19</sup>

The post-Cold War Information Age has forever altered the public face of public diplomacy. Behind-closed-doors traditional diplomacy has given way

to a swinging door answerable to global publics and global media. As the Center for Strategic and International Studies points out in its study of the post-Cold War diplomatic ethos, "The public dimension receives less attention, yet it may be the most significant of the changes that affect the conduct of diplomacy. Virtually no major foreign affairs or domestic initiative is taken today without first testing public opinion."<sup>20</sup>

U.S. public diplomacy's legacy goes back to the early to mid-twentieth century. For two decades (1930s to 1950s), one paradigm dominated American scientific research in communication: persuasive communication—specifically, attitude change from mass media effects. Radio and then later television were thought to have effects that could "enlighten" the population, while government and military were concerned more with war propaganda efforts to challenge totalitarian ideologies. During this period, diplomacy was shaped by elites in the foreign service of their respective governments; the public had very little role to play, except as passive observers of democracy and media. The kingpin of mass communications research at this time was Harold Lasswell, who saw himself and others such as Walter Lippmann becoming witnesses to a worldwide growth of an agitated public aroused by mass persuasion. As a result, the study of public opinion formation and propaganda processes in a democratic society had to become a major concern of American social scientists. The goal of the propagandist was the "manipulation of collective attitudes," and questions associated with propaganda were not about morality or ethics but always efficiency: (1) How may hate be mobilized against an enemy? (2) How may the enemy be demoralized by astute manipulation? (3) How is it possible to cement the friendship of neutral and allied peoples? Propaganda represented total information warfare and the "mobilization of the civilian mind." Democracies achieve unity not by "regimentation of muscles" but "by a repetition of ideas rather than movements. The civilian mind is standardized by news and not by drills."<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the Cold War, scholars began to note a shift from traditional diplomacy and government-to-government relations toward public diplomacy public-to-public relations:

The actors in public diplomacy can no longer be confined to the profession of diplomats but include various individuals, groups, and institutions who engage in international and intercultural communication activities which do have a bearing on the political relationship between two or more countries.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Signitzer and Coombs in 1992 noted a distinction in public diplomacy between the so-called "tough-minded" school, which holds "that the purpose of public diplomacy is to exert an influence on attitudes of

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foreign audiences using persuasion and propaganda,” and the “tender-minded” school, which “argues that information and cultural programs must bypass current foreign policy goals to concentrate on the highest long-range national objectives. The goal is to create a climate of mutual understanding.”<sup>23</sup> Neither school of thought can stand entirely on its own but must be synthesized. A further breakdown from tough and tender is what practitioners in public diplomacy engage in on two tracks—political communication that is administered by a section of the foreign ministry, embassy, or State Department (in the U.S. context) and cultural communication that may be administered by a cultural section of the foreign ministry, embassy, or State Department but also by a quasi-governmental or nongovernmental body (e.g., the British Council, Sister Cities International, National Council of International Visitors). They further distinguish between two types of cultural communication: (1) cultural diplomacy, which aims to present a favorable national image abroad, and (2) cultural relations, which have mutual information exchange and no unilateral objective in mind, just “an honest picture of each country rather than a beautified one.”<sup>24</sup>

A fascinating empirical measurement study of the nexus between the changing face of public diplomacy and international communication was completed by W. Phillips Davison almost thirty years ago, in which he interviewed both diplomats and diplomatic correspondents—those journalists who write about international affairs, regularly interact with diplomats, and attend and write about international conferences. These correspondents, Davison argues, belong to the foreign affairs community, and their observations are respected among foreign service officials. A State Department official explained, “They [the correspondents] can give you more information than you can give them. Their job is to know everybody; and some of them keep excellent files.”<sup>25</sup>

Davison describes the existence of a “diplomatic reporting network,” a network of mutually dependent relationships that puts both diplomat and correspondent into an elite category of foreign affairs specialists. To what extent such a network is in existence today is called into some question with the end of the Cold War, the decline in international bureaus of major news media outlets, and the wide availability of electronic information that precludes international travel and face-to-face contact between these two interdependent communities. A useful study might be to survey foreign correspondents and foreign nationals about the most respected diplomatic correspondents in their communities and how much influence these correspondents have on cultural relations. Davison’s scholarship puts a kibosh on using public diplomacy campaigns to influence attitudes:



When it comes to influencing attitudes, we know that information is a very weak reed to lean on. When a predisposition already exists, communications can sometimes whip up greater enthusiasm. Communications can occasionally affect weak attitudes. But when important attitudes on subjects we and they really care about are concerned, one can blast away twenty-four hours a day and still achieve very little. We repeat: this is one of the best documented findings of communication research that information or propaganda is not an effective instrument for influencing strongly held attitudes.<sup>26</sup>

Davison suggests that public diplomacy campaigns be measured for effectiveness the way a candidate for high public office (who is well funded of course!) monitors public opinion on a systematic basis. "If the USIA could spend for research at the same rate as U.S. political candidates spend, we would have a very much larger overseas research program, the Agency's output would be more on target, and U.S. foreign policy would be in better shape."<sup>27</sup>

Not until the events of September 11, 2001, did U.S. public diplomacy become seen again as a critical component to winning a war as had the nearly fifty-year battle of imagery and words between the United States and Soviet Union. Defined as the promotion of national interest through informing, engaging, and influencing global publics, at the end of the Cold War, interest in public diplomacy withered as Clinton administration priorities shifted away from ideological battlegrounds to commercial engagement and expanding markets. The executive branch responsible for explaining and supporting U.S. foreign policy, influence, and values overseas, the USIA, had no domestic constituency to lobby for its survival, in part due to a 1948 congressional mandate, the Smith-Mundt Act, that prohibits the domestic propagandizing of the American people. Furthermore, the USIA in the early 1990s was particularly vulnerable to partisan one-upmanship as the Democratic White House battled with Republicans in Congress such as Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, who saw an opportunity to streamline foreign affairs and put an independent agency on the chopping block. On October 1, 1999, USIA's days of independence were over, and the leftovers were shifted to the U.S. Department of State with barely a whisper in the national press.

Almost two years later to the day, the U.S. government and the American people awakened to the reality that the world was not fully embracing either American policies or values. In a series of horror-filled images captured live during the East Coast morning rush hour, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda became names linked instantaneously not only with global terrorism but with global communications. On October 4, 2001, just days before the United

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States attacked bin Laden's hideout in Afghanistan, the London-based *Economist* wrote that

another sort of war is already under way, one in which journalists are already playing an important role as a conduit or filter, though not just the scribblers and broadcasters from the West. It is the propaganda war. That word has come to have a derogatory meaning, of the dissemination of untruths. In this case, America's task is (in truth) to disseminate truths, about its motives, about its intentions, about its current and past actions in Israel and Iraq, about its views of Islam. For all that, however, this part of the war promises to be no easier to win than the many other elements of the effort.<sup>28</sup>

To counter bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, the United States pulled out all the stops in its propaganda war. The Pentagon initiated Orwellian-sounding entities like Total Information Awareness and Office of Strategic Influence, which were designed to use covert, anything-but-the-truth information campaigns to track and monitor enemies, potential and real. The public outcry quickly shuttered both. The U.S. military deployed food and leaflet drops and initiated short-wave radio broadcasts from the Air Force C-130 Commando Solo, the only airborne radio and television military aircraft engaged in psychological operations such as warning civilian populations not to collaborate with enemy targets. The U.S. State Department tasked a Madison Avenue veteran in advertising, Charlotte Beers, who formerly sung the praises of Uncle Ben's Rice, to now do the same for Uncle Sam. As the undersecretary for public diplomacy and public affairs, Beers's brainchild of her eighteen-month tenure was the \$15 million paid media ad campaign, Shared Values. Presented as a series of mini-documentaries to the Muslim world in December 2002 during the Muslim Holy month of Ramadan, the goal was to illustrate how happy and well treated Muslim Americans were after 9/11: "The thing I value most living here is the freedom and dignity I enjoy as a human being," says Abdul-Raouf Tawfik Hammuda, a bakery store owner from Toledo, Ohio. He, along with a journalist, schoolteacher, renowned scientist, and rescue worker, represent archetypes of American Muslims who illustrate U.S. "universal" values of free speech, education, entrepreneurial enterprise, science and technology, and public service. Accompanied by a State Department-sponsored front group, the Council of American Muslims for Understanding (CAMU), Shared Values was shut down permanently in the weeks before the outbreak of war with Iraq in March 2003. Many governments rejected the mini-docs as paid political ads of the U.S. government, which are banned on most state-run television broadcast outlets. The one formal press conference Beers gave to roll out the Shared Values campaign was interrupted by six American

protesters who chanted a “You’re selling war, we’re not buying” slogan of their own.

“For someone who scorned modernity and globalization, and who took refuge in an Islamic state [Afghanistan] that banned television, bin Laden proved remarkably adept at public diplomacy,” wrote Internews Network president David Hoffman in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* magazine.<sup>29</sup> His words were echoed by the perplexed thinking-out-loud rhetoric of Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL), who wondered, “How is it that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue has allowed such a destructive and parodied image of itself to become the intellectual coin of the realm overseas?”<sup>30</sup> The United States has offered its own communications response, but so far few are listening, and they counter with cries of no more information, let’s talk policy.

In January 2003, the White House announced the formation of the Office of Global Communications (OGC), an offspring of the Coalition-Information Centers that were used to coordinate messages from Kabul to London to Washington during the Afghanistan war. The first publication of OGC was “Apparatus of Lies: Saddam’s Disinformation and Propaganda 1999–2003,” designed to build public support for a U.S.-led war against Iraq. “In the weeks ahead, as the international community seeks to enforce UN Security Council resolutions and disarm the Iraqi regime, governments, the media, and the public are urged to consider the regime’s words, deeds, and images in light of this brutal record of deceit.”<sup>31</sup> One year later, the Western regimes of George W. Bush of the United States and Tony Blair of Great Britain would be accused of using their own misinformation and disinformation campaigns to change public sentiment from ambivalence to decisively pro-war. Against the backdrop of a prisoner-of-war abuse scandal, U.S. public diplomacy has become an unmitigated disaster. The converse of the proverbial “success has a thousand mothers while defeat is an orphan,” U.S. public diplomacy’s failure has a thousand mothers in the form of critical domestic and international editorials, *Nightline* specials, Council on Foreign Relations conferences, special task forces, and reports such as “Changing Minds, Winning Peace” that wax negative about the United States being out-communicated by primitive, roving bands of terrorists who want to kill everything connected to the West.

To combat anti-Americanism, the United States sent out a broadcast signal version of a Valentine’s Day greeting card on February 14, 2004, to win Arab hearts and minds. No Hallmark sentimentality like, “I’m thinking of you,” but rather this greeting came in the form of a U.S. government-funded Arabic-language network with the very propagandistic moniker of “The Free One.” President Bush has said that Al Hurra will help combat “the hateful propaganda that fills the airwaves in the Muslim world and tell people the

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truth about the values and policies of the United States.” It seems to be doing so from a safe distance. Al Hurra is based not in the Middle East, but in Springfield, Virginia, just fifteen miles from downtown Washington, D.C. So far, the Arab-speaking public is not fully embracing the “free one” version, despite financing of \$62 million in congressional funding for the first year alone. Al Jazeera still holds the comparative advantage, and Arab newspaper editorials have been universally thumbs down on the U.S.-based broadcast alternative, with the not unexpected negative reaction of “it’s all American propaganda, anyway.”

In American-led global communications, the phone is, more often than not, off the hook. First, there exists a disconnect in the official propaganda campaign coming out of Washington, D.C., between how the administration shapes its motives in the world and how others see U.S. actions in the world play out. In part, the Washington “dialogue of the deaf” is due to the reality that American values are incongruous with American interests. U.S. interests that emerge from Washington and New York are largely about economic access and advantage and using our global military presence to protect our economic interests. U.S. values are more political, cultural, and social. This battle, between interests and values, is a battle between Realpolitik (might makes right) and Soft Power (right makes might). So far, Realpolitik has always won because a sole superpower can change the rules of the game at will. The United States is so powerful that it can be inconsistent in its foreign policy applications and get away with it. More than any other reason, this is why America is hated today. Second, in true Hollywood fashion, U.S. national security goals and interests and American power in the world come across as the triumph of good over evil. Any ambiguity or dissenting points of view from a truly complex world are dismissed. Instead, America’s propagandists hand down the Manichean dichotomy—“us and them,” “good and bad,” “those who are for us and those who are against.” In that context, the world dialogue becomes one of “a clash of civilizations,” as Samuel Huntington claims, but even more, a clash of propagandas and perceptions between what is perceived as “America’s Imperial War” and “Operation Iraqi Freedom.”<sup>32</sup> U.S. public diplomacy efforts are marred by a lack of global consensus about how to wage a battle against global terrorism. As the White House has so often made clear, what happened on September 11, 2001, was immediately declared by the president as an act of war, not treated as a law enforcement issue. Such a war declaration shifted thinking toward a public diplomacy mired in war rhetoric and crisis communications and away from a public diplomacy led by exchanges, relationship building, active listening, and efforts to promote mutual understanding and peace. As Rumsfeld told the 9/11 Commission investigating the terrorist attacks, “When our nation

was attacked on September 11th, the President recognized that what had happened was an act of war and must be treated as such—not as a law enforcement matter. He knew that weakness would only invite aggression; and that the only way to defeat the terrorists was to take the war to them—to go after them where they live and plan and hide, and to make clear to states that sponsor and harbor them that such actions will have consequences.”<sup>33</sup>

## Toward a New U.S. Public Diplomacy

U.S. public diplomacy should not be viewed by global publics as directed exclusively by the U.S. government or any official source of information. We are misunderstood and increasingly resented by the world *precisely* because it is our president and our top government officials whose images predominate in explaining U.S. public policy. Furthermore, U.S. foreign policymakers are criticized for being intransigent on core policies such as unflinching support for Israel, with no evidence that dialogue about policy is even possible. While the U.S. policy of supporting Israel is not going to change, there is certainly room for U.S. policymakers to show more sympathy for Palestinian deaths as often as the United States condemns the killing of Israelis. One of the avenues by which goodwill and dialogue can be strengthened is through citizen diplomacy and international exchanges. While the penultimate purpose of official U.S. public diplomacy is a government marketing campaign to foreign publics in order to present U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives in the best light, an important secondary source for America’s public diplomacy campaign is citizen diplomacy. This calls on the American public to play its part and not watch foreign policymaking from the sidelines. Mike McCarry of the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange writes,

A globally literate and internationally engaged American public should be one of the strongest links in our national security. Mutual understanding and respect have never been more essential to our country’s well-being, as the threat of terrorism demonstrates. There is no better way to address the dangerous two-way knowledge deficit than by enlisting the American public in advancing U.S. foreign relations through citizen exchange.<sup>34</sup>

U.S. public diplomacy’s vision and energy must be drawn directly from the American people generally and in private, voluntary organizations in particular. It is the private citizens of the United States who are more comfortable acknowledging, with some degree of humility, that the United States has made mistakes in its past. Government officials seem to have a hard time with

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that one. Open criticism of a country's policies tends to embarrass government leaders. Over time, it can be the trump card in the deck of negotiating a peaceful (and lasting) settlement of international conflicts. The American people can better illustrate that we are a people willing to learn from our mistakes and can redirect our dealings with other nations to mutually beneficial ends, not just purposes that serve official Washington. The American people can better initiate direct contact with people in other countries whose support and understanding we need on the stage of world opinion. The American public is the best ad campaign going for the world. We have the greatest diversity in people and culture, and it shows in our receptiveness to learning, our generosity, and our creativity. We need to magnify these qualities to the world but, in the same spirit, listen more, talk less.

Over the long term, we need to build a global public diplomacy for peace. Ours is an age of propaganda, an age of manipulation to this cause or that cause. People are joiners; they choose sides, so why not make peace a side to choose? If so, then nations, both their governments and private citizens, need to keep advocating for peace, and not the peace that it is just something that is not war. Peace is coexistence, mutual interdependence. Peace is a requirement of the nuclear age. How might we establish a public diplomacy for peace? To begin, like a public policy version of the Hippocratic oath, we need to first do no harm. Why not reflect upon every public diplomacy program on its value to furthering not strictly national interests but, in addition, global security interests? This would require a stronger emphasis on cultural mediation and mutual understanding initiatives such as cultural diplomacy, cultural and educational exchanges, and strengthening sister city partnerships and civic and neighborhood organizations.

We need to continue to tell our stories to one another and support people-to-people dialogue and exchange, efforts that are based on mutual learning and mutual understanding. What this means is a Marshall Plan for International Exchange, a ten-fold increase in programs such as the Fulbright, International Visitor Program, and Arts exchanges. For too long, and perhaps in part due to our incredible comparative advantage in communications technology, the United States has emphasized amplification over active listening, telling America's story to the world over promoting international dialogue. Anti-Americanism and general ill will toward the United States are driven more by the perception that we talk first before we listen. For a change, it would not take much for the United States to listen first, talk second. It certainly would not make things worse if we tried harder to be citizen diplomats in our relations with our overseas counterparts. This is what international educational and cultural exchanges expect from those who travel across

national boundaries. Why haven't we tapped these alumni as citizen ambassadors? We are simply not doing as much as we could.

Edward Djerejian, chair of the Advisory Group on the Arab and Muslim World, responded to the 9/11 Commission Report with a similar charge:

I use the Woody Allen adage that, you know, 90 percent of life is just showing up. And we are not showing up in a significant manner in the Muslim world in a daily debate and discussion about US values and US policies. And basically one of the best instruments we have is this traditional public diplomacy, which are educational exchanges, getting students over here that have been seriously hindered.<sup>35</sup>

That hindrance refers to the U.S. visa restrictions following September 11 and the U.S. Patriot Act, which have made life more difficult for international students to enter the United States. Despite these new security restraints, international educational exchange numbers remain strong.

There is so much we still do not know, and we need to unite partnerships among government, the private sector, and universities to study social influence, changes in mind-sets, how to teach tolerance and mutual respect, and methodologies that will measure current public diplomacy programs in an effort to find best practices. We could start by undertaking efforts to identify the best practices used by other countries. Some of the world's leaders in soft power diplomacy include the Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Norway, as well as the Netherlands, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

Finally, to have a lasting and effective public diplomacy, the United States must consider its legacy of strategies of truth. The short-lived and ill-conceived Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) was a here-today, gone-tomorrow debacle, but there remains plenty of public concern that some within the Department of Defense would just as soon continue to use such strategies of deception under the "whatever works" rubric. It is one thing to use deception against the enemy, but the OSI sought to use deception to plant false stories in reputable overseas news markets. Any approach based on falsehoods and deception will not have long-lasting, enduring outcomes but only short-term, tactical advantages. My public diplomacy experience at the USIA and my propaganda research has convinced me that the more transparent and genuine U.S. public diplomacy strategies are, the better off our national security and long-term strategic interests will be. As John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt write, "Truth must be the polestar of American strategic public diplomacy."<sup>36</sup>

## Notes

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