

Executive Memorandum

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A Plan Forward for U.S. Public Diplomacy

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Seven years after the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) was dissolved, America's international communications efforts still lack coordination and a guiding strategy. Instead of one agency speaking to the world, various entities including the Department of Defense, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) compete, and public diplomacy functions are spread across many bureaus in the U.S. Department of State.

In October 2006, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen P. Hughes circulated a draft National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication for interagency review. If the final plan skips the lofty rhetoric and vague tasking typical of broad policy analysis, such a strategy could improve U.S. public diplomacy by simply:

- Defining the public diplomacy mission;
- Establishing guiding principles by which the mission will be accomplished;
- Specifying lines of authority, functional organizations, and relationships;
- Naming important audiences and channels to reach them; and
- Creating processes for targeting, clearing, and assessing messages.

Lingering Problems. Conducted piecemeal throughout the federal foreign affairs bureaucracy,

America's public diplomacy (PD) has become reactive and narrowly focused. The Bush Administration was in office a scant nine months when faced with a major terrorist attack. Foreign communication functions were still in disarray when the White House announced a global war on terrorism. Slow action at

the State Department prompted the Pentagon and USAID to develop competing efforts. Coordination at the White House level focused on getting senior Administration officials to use approved messages in remarks to the press.

At State, Charlotte Beers, the Administration's first Public Diplomacy Under Secretary, tried making television commercials to polish America's image among Arab Muslims. Her successor, Margaret Tutwiler, stayed six months—just long enough to begin expanding foreign exchanges from a historic low of 29,000 per year. Karen Hughes arrived in 2005 and conducted overseas listening tours and press encounters. She also strengthened internal PD coordination by creat-

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- A national public diplomacy strategy should clearly define the mission.
 - Well-articulated guiding principles will be needed for its implementation.
 - Lines of authority, functional organizations, and audience research are vital components.
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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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ing positions for public diplomacy deputy assistant secretaries in key departmental bureaus.

Still, public diplomacy at State is a far cry from PD at the USIA. Proactive operations languish. A once-useful book translation program has no central home and lacks leadership. Congress cut off assistance to U.S. storefront libraries in foreign countries in the 1990s. Internet-based outreaches such as eDiplomacy and State Department kiosks in foreign university libraries cater to elites, while contact with poor and uneducated majorities is infrequent and inconsistent. Meanwhile, the BBG has gutted the Voice of America to fund targeted broadcasting of popular culture to the Middle East, and the Pentagon's strategic communications blend psychological operations with overseas public relations, sometimes clashing with State's PD efforts.

Toward a Coherent Strategy. To restore America's voice, Hughes and fellow government communicators must understand that public diplomacy is a long-term program to promote dialogue with foreign audiences, nurture institutional relationships, help educate young democrats and prospective friends, and share ideas. Without this foundation, advocacy for current policies will have little resonance. A model strategy should therefore:

- **Define the public diplomacy mission** as promoting U.S. interests and security by understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics as well as broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad on a daily, long-term basis. The global war on terrorism should be a priority within this broad mandate.
- **Establish doctrinal principles** to explain how to accomplish the PD mission. These include responding to audience needs, never misleading, disseminating bad news quickly and completely, and ensuring that information always comes from a credible source.
- **Specify lines of authority.** The PD strategy should clearly specify who calls the shots and who acts, or nothing will get done. With collateral agencies engaged in international communications, guidance and arbitration of tactics must come from someone who speaks for the White House and can de-conflict competing, multi-agency PD strategies.

- **Target desired audiences.** Priority audiences vary by country and region. A national strategy should identify classes of opinion leaders and populations that are vulnerable to anti-American messages around the globe, not just in the Middle East. The strategy should task U.S. embassy country teams with further segmenting their audiences and specifying the best approaches to dialogue, as USIA diplomats once did.
- **Identify multiple channels.** Illiterate populations are likely to listen to radio. Elites may rely on phone text messaging and the Internet. Students get information from textbooks, which are usually in short supply outside industrial democracies. Compact disks and satellite TV appeal to middle classes, while meetings and exchanges help to form opinions one person at a time. The Bush Administration needs to go beyond reliance on the press and utilize different means of outreach more fully.
- **Create planning, clearing, and assessing processes** to establish a workflow across agency boundaries. Polling and country team assessments should tell planners what channels and messages apply to certain audiences. Common clearance procedures known to all agency communications leaders can facilitate rapid reaction to breaking news. Finally, research should be used to assess the effectiveness of all PD efforts. At present, each agency conducts its own limited polling, planning, and evaluation efforts. Research and broad planning should be more centralized and accessible to all PD actors.

Conclusion. Developing a national public diplomacy and strategic communication strategy is an essential first step, but for it to do any good, the strategy must look beyond short-term needs, assign clear authorities and responsibilities, and establish sensible processes to aid PD research, planning, clearing, and assessment. Congress can nudge this process along by reauthorizing funds for the now-defunct U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, which can provide outside input to keep involved agencies from just serving themselves.

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