Taking the Pulse of American Public Diplomacy in a Post-9/11 World

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The highly negative attitude of much of the Arab world and the Muslim world towards the United States in the last few years represents the underlying source of threat to American national security, often referred to only by its overt manifestation in the war on terrorism." -- Stephen P. Cohen

Introduction

From 1998 to 2003, more than a dozen think tank studies and government reports chronicled the decline of American public diplomacy. With the end of the Cold War, Congressional and public interest in sustaining America's international presence dissipated. USIA and ACDA vanished in the interest of efficiency and policy management. Recruitment and training shrank. Open libraries and American cultural centers were closed, while embassies were fortified. As educational exchanges and international broadcasting were curtailed, America retreated from a 50-year engagement with international publics.

Early in his tenure, Secretary of State Colin Powell promised to attend to public diplomacy and selected a trusted colleague to take charge. Before she was confirmed, terrorists struck the Twin Towers -- and the world changed.

The term "public diplomacy" appeared on the front page of the Washington Post a few weeks later, and has since appeared in the popular press with increasing frequency. How could large majorities in the Islamic world show such hostility to the United States? How could they show support for bin Laden? What went wrong? Was it a failure of public diplomacy? Was there a coincidence between anti-Americanism as measured by respected pollsters and the decade-long decline of American public diplomacy? Could a few TV ads in the Middle East repair the deterioration of respect for America? Were decades of scholarly exchanges and professional visits undermined by America’s insensitivity to other cultures?

There is broad agreement -- from the Council on Foreign Relations to the General Accounting Office, from the State Department to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee -- that American public diplomacy has not met the challenge.

This paper will summarize the recommendations of several key studies and examine the response of the U.S. government including the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. In summary, the paper will ask whether the U.S. government’s increasing appreciation for public diplomacy will reinvigorate its conduct and restore America’s influence with foreign publics.
Findings

The Center for Strategic and International Studies urged the Department of State in 1998 to "move Public Diplomacy from the sidelines to the core of diplomacy," asserting that it "must be proactive in promoting American policies and values, and interactive in engaging domestic and foreign publics." Every study since then, nearly all driven by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, has echoed and elaborated that advice.

The common themes among the several studies are (1) strategy, (2) structure, (3) personnel, (4) technology, (5) programs, and (6) resources.

The report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Managed Information Dissemination, completed before 9/11, called for recognition of American's information capabilities as "strategic assets vital to national security" and urged improved coordination of international information activities at the senior levels of government. Co-sponsored by the Department of Defense and the Department of State, the study said: "The U.S. Government's information dissemination organizations today are understaffed and underfunded. They suffer from poor coordination, and they are not integrated into the national security planning and implementation process." The study concluded: "Information is a strategic resource -- less understood but no less important to national security than political, military, and economic power. In the information age, influence and power go to those who can disseminate credible information in ways that will mobilize publics to support interests, goals, and objectives. What is required is a coherent approach as to how we think about managed information dissemination and the investments that are required for its more effective use by America's diplomats and military leaders."

The shock of 9/11 was amplified by reports of celebrations in the Middle East and polls that showed Osama bin Laden more popular than the United States. The American public concluded that something was awry -- and journalists and scholars began to question the efficacy of America's public diplomacy. The administration's new Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs didn't add confidence when she spoke about branding America -- and the press recalled that her prior experience involved selling Uncle Ben's rice.

Polls conducted by Gallup, Zogby International, and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press demonstrated that attitudes toward the United States plummeted after it launched its war on terrorism. For example, only six percent of those surveyed in Egypt in 2002 had a favorable opinion of the United States. After the beginning of the Iraq war, "solid majorities in the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia and Jordan -- and nearly half of those in Morocco and Pakistan -- say they have at least some confidence in Osama bin Laden to "do the right thing regarding world affairs."

These plummeting opinions stirred further interest in America's public diplomacy efforts. The Council on Foreign Relations, in a study initiated in 2002 and published in 2003,
heightened attention to the issue: "This growing anti-Americanism is a deep and systemic problem that cannot be 'managed' with a quick fix, nor with an episodic, defensive, after-the-fact, crisis-driven approach. If not checked, its future consequences will be even more serious."9

The study concluded that "anti-Americanism is on the rise throughout the world" and "growing anti-Americanism is increasingly compromising America's safety and constricting our movements."10

Among the causes of this tide of anti-Americanism, the CFR study identified the following:11
- Public diplomacy is treated as an afterthought.
- The U.S. government underutilizes the private sector.
- U.S. foreign policy is often communicated in a style that breeds frustration and resentment.
- The United States allocates too few resources to public diplomacy.

Recommendations included:12
- Rethink how the United States formulates, strategizes, and communicates its foreign policy.
- Build new institutions to bolster public diplomacy (including a new Corporation for Public Diplomacy).
- Improve the practice of public diplomacy.
- Improve funding and allocation. A budget is needed far in excess of the approximately $1 billion current spent by the State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors in their public diplomacy programming.

At the request of Congressman Frank Wolf, the State Department also initiated a study that was published in October 2003 as Changing Minds, Winning Peace.13 Its conclusions were stark: "At a critical time in our nation's history, the apparatus of public diplomacy has proven inadequate, especially in the Arab and Muslim world."14 It said, "first and foremost, public diplomacy requires a new strategic direction -- informed by a seriousness and commitment that matches the gravity of our approach to national defense and traditional state-to-state diplomacy."15

Among the numerous recommendations for change were the following:16
- A new operating process and architecture.
- A new culture of measurement.
- A dramatic increase in funding.
- Additional resources to help Arabs and Muslims gain access to American education.
- Expansion of traditional and innovative new programs.
- Further study of the Middle East Television Network initiative.
The General Accounting Office, the auditing arm of the Congress, also published a study in 2003 on the conduct of Public Diplomacy in which it said "the absence of an integrated strategy could impede State’s ability to direct its multifaceted efforts toward concrete and measurable progress. Furthermore, an interagency public diplomacy strategy has not been completed that would help State and other federal agencies convey consistent messages and achieve mutually reinforcing benefits overseas." Reflecting the conclusions of other studies, the GAO said that "State’s efforts face significant challenges, including insufficient time and staff to conduct public diplomacy tasks."

While none of these studies focused on policy, it was never far beneath the surface. For example, when Ambassador Edward Djerejian was asked about the relation between policy and public diplomacy, he said: "We were not mandated to make recommendations to the Administration on policy, but -- and as we say in the report, policy is the major determinate. There is no question about it. But at the same time, let’s say policy forms 80 percent of people's perceptions about us. There is that other 20 percent, which is the message -- the manner in which that message is conveyed, the content of that message, the effectiveness of the dialogue; and public diplomacy is the expression of American values and policies."

There is a broad consensus among the several reports that public diplomacy, properly resourced and conducted, can be a strategic asset in support of the national interest. Indeed, the Changing Minds, Winning Peace study says: "Public diplomacy is the promotion of the national interest by informing, engaging, and influencing people around the world. Public diplomacy helped win the Cold War, and it has the potential to help win the win on terror."

**Government Reaction**

The studies tend to agree that American public diplomacy currently lacks (1) strategic direction, (2) adequate resources, and (3) proper coordination. Although the State Department is in general agreement with the findings of these reports, change is slow for a variety of reasons, among which is lack of effective coordination between the State Department and the Department of Defense, shrinking budgets, a deficit of trained personnel, and recent change in public diplomacy leadership in the State Department after a hiatus of nearly a year. The White House Office of Global Communications has focused on message, but has not served to coordinate overall public diplomacy strategy abroad. While DOD's ill conceived Office of Strategic Influence was short-lived, DOD nonetheless was given the responsibility for managing public diplomacy in Iraq, including establishment of a contract broadcast service. Funding for the Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative, which parallels public diplomacy efforts, is not coordinated by State’s public diplomacy professionals. Recent legislation initiated by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the International Free Press and Open Media Act of 2004, gives the National Endowment for Democracy the responsibility for foreign media training aimed at creating a free press. In short, funding and responsibility is becoming more disparate, thereby reducing the chances of either an overall strategic direction or effective coordination. For the same reason that democratic countries seldom establish
information ministries, it may be that a dispersion of information assets is more reflective of our national character, even at the expense of efficiency. If this is the case, of course, the requirements for additional resources are even greater. The United States spends 400 billion dollars on defense, some 40 billion dollars on information gathering through its intelligence activities, and 28 billion dollars on international affairs -- of which little more than one billion dollars is directed to public diplomacy. It is impossible to say what it would cost to build trust within the international Islamic community. However, to compare the task with past successes, consider that expenditures for public diplomacy in Germany and Austria were approximately one dollar per person after World War II. Applying that formula to a billion people and adjusting for inflation would require a budget of seven billion dollars for public diplomacy in the Islamic world alone. By spending only a fraction of that today, America’s voice has been reduced to a whisper.

There is, however, one bright spot: broadcasting. Radio Sawa and the Middle East Television Network, Alhurra, have the ambitious goal of building audiences and creating new broadcast standards in a news environment that frequently amplifies distrust of the United States and its policies.

Radio Sawa, operated by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, began broadcasting to the Middle East in March 2002 on a network of FM and AM stations. Since then it has succeeded in capturing a large share of its intended audience through a mix of Western and Middle Eastern popular music, punctuated with news and special features.

An A.C. Nielsen study, completed last fall in Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, showed that Radio Sawa is reaching an average of 32 percent of the fifteen plus audience in those countries. The Nielsen study showed that 75 percent of the listeners consider the Radio Sawa news reliable and credible. Earlier research in Amman showed that 50 percent of radio listeners identified Radio Sawa as their favorite radio station, and 41 percent said it was the station they listened to the most for news. Norman Pattiz, chairman of the BBG’s Middle East Committee, says that Radio Sawa is in the news business, not the business of changing attitudes -- but the Nielsen study showed that listeners, by a three-to-two margin, had a much more positive attitude toward the United States than did non-Sawa listeners or listeners from the general population.  

Despite reservations by American critics, there is little doubt that Radio Sawa has found a significant market in the Middle East. Whether it succeeds in making a difference remains to be seen.

Its companion television service, Alhurra, began broadcasting to viewers in 22 countries across the Middle East on February 14, 2004. Pattiz promised that “Alhurra will present fresh perspectives for viewers in the Middle East that we believe will create more cultural understanding and respect . . . . A key part of our mission is to be an example of a free press in the American tradition.” Initial reaction from the Middle East was swift. For example, the New York Times reported from Cairo that “an American-sponsored satellite television station broadcasting in Arabic, probably Washington’s biggest propaganda effort since the attempts to undermine the Soviet bloc and the Castro government, is drawing mixed reviews in the Middle East, ranging from praise for slick packaging to
criticism for trying to improve the image of "Satan." As an example of the many early critics of the American television network, The Arab News reported from Jeddah that Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Sudais, the imam of the Grand Mosque in Makkah "blasted the newly established US-run Al-Hurra television channel for causing “intellectual chaos and confusion” among Muslims. The following day, The Arab News, reporting that the television service lacks credibility, quoted a 22-year old student: "If the US policy in the region were acceptable, they would not have to improve their image in this way. The US government has been a great supporter of Israel, which killed thousands of Palestinians, and is now occupying Iraq — most people in the region won’t forget that.”

Without reliable polling data at this stage, it is too early to say whether Alhurra will warrant the $62 million operating budget. It is nonetheless clear that the Broadcasting Board of Governors has taken bold steps to be heard in the Middle East.

**Challenges for Engaging Publics Abroad**

With the new threat to international stability, the unprecedented decline in America's international image, and the unrelenting attention to public diplomacy offered by the press and the academic community, there is a rare opportunity for transforming the way United States communicates with the world.

Marshall McLuhan's Global Village has not yet materialized. Nor has Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's noosphere, that global consciousness that promises to join humanity across borders. Nonetheless, academics and practitioners alike recognize that we are in the midst of a global transition, driven by high-speed computer chips and broadband connectivity. Silicon and fiber are changing the environment in which diplomacy is conducted.

While government-to-government diplomacy must often remain private, diplomacy is increasingly conducted in the public arena. In recognition of this change, I will (modestly) suggest seven propositions for transforming the conduct of diplomacy.

**Proposition 1 -- Develop a national strategy for the conduct of public diplomacy.**

Practically every study has commented on the failure of the federal government to develop an overall strategic direction for the conduct of public diplomacy. While there is no agreement on the boundaries of public diplomacy, there is broad agreement that it is not about spinning today's news, but is about engaging international publics on both policy and cultural issues. While the disparate pieces may well contribute value, a carefully planned strategy will ensure that plans and resources are in harmony. As recommended by the Defense Science Board Task Force, planners could begin by adopting a "three-dimensional influence space describing publics, channels, and U.S. national interests for each country or sub-region. Planners should ask who are the influential, what media do they use, and how important is it to U.S. interests that the U.S. Government can communicate with them." With adequate resources and committed leadership, a global public diplomacy strategy will complement other elements of statecraft. Without a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy, however, we
should not be surprised to find that international public opinion continues to frustrate America’s leadership.

**Proposition 2 -- Map the organization to the environment.** This proposition, internal to the Department of State, is the need to map State’s mission to the realities of today’s world. While the Wesphalian order of nation-states remains, its preeminence is challenged by:
- the proliferation of new media, from the Internet to direct satellite broadcasting, including the CNN Effect (or, as they might say in the Middle East, the Al-Jazeera effect);
- the influence of non-state actors, from corporations to NGOs;
- the economic consequences of globalization, driven by non-governmental forces.

This is not the world of John Foster Dulles.

Scholars have noted two competing paradigms that have emerged from the information revolution: technologies that distribute power and technologies that concentrate power. An organization’s capacity to deal with the external world is determined in part by the balance it strikes between the center and the periphery, between headquarters and the field. Field units, possessing more information about the immediate environment, can act independently of headquarters. Conversely, headquarters can require that key decisions be reserved for it. In the past, the distinction was enforced by time and space. Today, a conscious decision must be made to delegate tactical decisions and operations to the field; that is to say, the State Department must insist that Ambassadors operate once again with plenipotentiary authority, bounded only by a common strategy. Otherwise, our Embassies will be reduced to message carriers.

Military planners, of course, respect the difference between strategy and tactics, and the level at which each is exercised. But in this new environment, the lines between strategy and tactics can become easily blurred, even in the U.S. military. The nascent Revolution in Military Affairs is confronting these challenges. The Marine Corps, for example, has introduced new training techniques, where tactical units are given far more autonomy than they had in the past. Special forces are provided real-time information and more authority to act. DOD is currently conducting several exercises to confront the "nature of command in a networked environment" in two experiments known as Desert Bloom and Strong Angel II.

For the State Department, the questions are (a) how does a hierarchical chain of command operate efficiently with rich peer-to-peer connectivity? And (b) how can the Department effectively engage non-state actors when it is currently organized to focus on other governments? The borders have shifted outside of Foggy Bottom; to map that new world, they must shift inside as well.

**Proposition 3 -- Engage in a dialogue of ideas.** The third proposition concerns how we engage abroad. From CSIS to the Council on Foreign Relations, from GAO to the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, from the
Brookings Institution to the Heritage Foundation -- and all have concluded that our public diplomacy is failing. And no one dissents. Indeed, Under Secretary of State Margaret Tutweiler, recently testifying about public diplomacy before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, acknowledged that we have "a problem that does not lend itself to a quick fix or a single solution or a simple plan." In his provocative book on *Terror and Liberalism*, Paul Berman suggests that the struggle between the West and the radical Islamists is mental. Earlier conflicts with totalitarianism "came to an end when the apocalyptic ideologues, in a fit of lucidity, gave up at last on their apocalypses." The Terror War, as Berman calls it, will be fought "on the plane of theories, arguments, books, magazines, conferences, and lectures. It was going to be a war about the 'cultural influences' that penetrate the Islamic mind, about the deepest concepts of modern life, about philosophies and theologies, about ideas that draw on the most brilliant writers and the most moving texts. It was going to be, in the end, a war of persuasion ... While appropriate for countering terrorism, the metaphor of a war of ideas is too restrictive for a universal approach, as it suggests winners and losers. What is required is a dialogue of ideas -- by which I mean a respectful, vigorous engagement in the international marketplace of ideas. Neither slogans nor branding will do. We need to engage artists, intellectuals and editors. We need to engage feminists, imams, and political activists. We need to engage young women and young men whose ideas about the world are still in flux. Indeed, we must remember as we engage the Arab street, that it is a two-way street. Unless we listen, the dialogue we seek will become a monologue.

**Proposition 4 -- Comprehend cultures to a high level of organizational self-consciousness.** Samuel Huntington has attracted worldwide attention with his thesis on the clash of civilizations, which many claimed was validated on 9/11. But, it need not be such. My fourth proposition is to engage comprehensively in understanding other cultures. Of course, some will say we do that now. And I agree that our most effective policies have been formed with a rich appreciation of cultural differences. And that our most effective diplomats need no lesson in understanding foreign cultures. On the other hand, at least some of our diplomatic failures and many of our misunderstandings can be attributed to this cultural abyss.

George Herbert Mead, the prominent social philosopher who lived from 1863 to 1931, showed that communication is grounded in culture. Indeed, social control is exercised through the dialogue within families and other social groups of which one is a member.

When, in the 19th century, diplomacy was conducted primarily by Western nations among men of similar education, appreciating cultural differences -- while far from trivial -- was not critical. Today, in Pakistan for example, we have a common bond with the Western-educated leadership, whether it is Benazir Bhutto or General Pervez Musharraf. But can we understand the 76 million people under the age of 20 who will determine its future? Can we communicate with this half of the Pakistani population?

If we follow George Herbert Mead's teachings, the answer is "no." As he has observed, we develop *self-consciousness* in the full sense of the term" when we can view ourselves
from the standpoint of what Mead calls the "generalized other" -- that composite understanding that grows through interaction with others.

Are we able to see ourselves the way Pakistanis, for example, see us? I don’t mean from one-dimensional opinion polls (as useful as they may be), but through experience. Robert McNamara, in the documentary film *The Fog of War*, credits Ambassador Llewellyn "Tommy" Thompson’s first-hand knowledge of Khruschev with preventing a nuclear war. McNamara has come to the conclusion that our policies in Vietnam resulted in part from a failure to understand how the Vietnamese viewed us and our motives. We not only have to understand other cultures, but must go a step further: understand how other cultures see us. Although we have a *plenitude of information*, it is no substitute for seeking the *authenticity of experience*.

**Proposition 5 -- Engage the academic community.** From the late thirties through the sixties, the academic community and the government shared an interest in defeating Nazi and Communist propaganda, as well as accurately representing the United States to the rest of the world. Research informed programming, and practitioners looked to academe for advice. However, the distrust that developed during the Vietnam War interrupted that collaboration. Research on public diplomacy from the academic community is tepid. And the government is frequently satisfied to rely on a seat-of-the-pants judgment. Exceptions include the marketing research for *Radio Sawa* and *Alhurra* as well as the solid research now being conducted by State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange on the consequences of exchanges. But, far more could be done if the two communities recognized what each has to offer in this age of terrorism. Numerous inhibitions -- political, organizational, cultural -- must be overcome in academe and government before a change in the status quo can be expected. Mutual trust must be reestablished. That both government and academe serve the public may be the basis from which collaboration can be rebuilt.

**Proposition 6 -- Engage the private sector.** Practically every study has recommended engaging the private sector, but what this means has not been thoroughly explored. It is self evident that the American private sector has no equal in media production, marketing, and survey research. It is far less evident that the government knows how to exploit this knowledge apart from short-term political campaigns. The $15 million *Shared Values* advertising campaign launched by Under Secretary Charlotte Beers is a model of how not to proceed. Given their unprecedented reach, a synergetic relationship with NGOs and the business community would vastly expand the international dialogue. The proposal embraced by two of the studies to develop a Corporation for Public Diplomacy warrants consideration, insofar as it is integral to a national strategy for the conduct of public diplomacy. There should be no limit to the number of flowers that are nurtured and encouraged to bloom.

**Proposition 7 -- Redefine public diplomacy.** In this moment of transformation, clarity is imperative. But, that may not suffice. Redefinition may well be in order. If public diplomacy is only about shaping images, it is insufficient. If it is about ideas, as I have argued, then its practice must encompass the ideas that will shape tomorrow’s world.
Public diplomacy should address those universal issues that will affect the United States as well as the rest of the world -- including (1) democracy and human rights; (2) weapons of mass destruction; (3) terrorism, drugs, and global crime; (4) environmental concerns; (5) population, refugees, and migration; and (6) disease and famine. To reflect America’s policies and values, public diplomacy must expand its traditions of engagement to encompass emerging scientific and educational issues. The *Arab Human Development Report 2003* on building a knowledge society should signal that Western slogans and images are insufficient in a world where hope is absent.

**Conclusion**

There is virtual unanimity that public diplomacy is broken and must be fixed. As NSC Advisor Cond0leezza Rice recently said, "It is absolutely the case that the United States needs to put new energy into its public diplomacy." I have suggested seven propositions for energizing 21st century diplomacy:

- develop a national strategy for the conduct of public diplomacy;
- map the organization to the environment;
- engage in a dialogue of ideas;
- comprehend cultures to a high level of organizational self-consciousness;
- engage the academic community;
- engage the private sector; and
- redefine public diplomacy.

Each will challenge the status quo. Each will require more resources. As the study *Changing Minds, Winning Peace* asserts, the transformation of public diplomacy "requires an immediate end to the absurd and dangerous underfunding of public diplomacy in a time of peril, when our enemies have succeeded in spreading viciously inaccurate claims about our intentions and our actions."
5 Ibid, p. 7.
9 Ibid., p. 4.
10 Ibid., p. 5.
11 Ibid., pp. 6-8.
12 Ibid., pp. 8-16.
16 Ibid, pp. 69-71.
21 Drawn from remarks by Norman Pattiz at the UCLA International Institute, posted on November 3, 2003 at http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=5087
29 Ibid., p.185.
31 Remarks at The McConnell Center for Political Leadership, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, March 8, 2004.
32 Changing Minds, p. 8.

Barry Fulton. "Communications Researchers and Policy-Making," Public diplomacy, also called people’s diplomacy, any of various government-sponsored efforts aimed at communicating directly with foreign publics. Public diplomacy includes all official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support or tolerate a government’s strategic objectives. Methods include statements by decision makers, purposeful campaigns conducted by government organizations dedicated to public diplomacy, and efforts to persuade international media to portray official policies favourably to foreign audiences. There are two basic kinds of public diplomacy. The first is public diplomacy as a means of communicating official policies and initiatives to foreign publics. The second is cultural diplomacy, which involves the promotion of cultural values and ideas to foreign publics. Cultural diplomacy must be a significant element of a comprehensive program to retool American foreign policy and thereby repair America’s global reputation. At core is the need for a fundamental shift in both the substance and tone of American foreign policy, in both the realms of strategic statecraft and cultural and other public diplomacy efforts. This shift is critical to restoring our ability to play an effective leading role in international affairs.