CHAPTER 17

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Bruce Gregory

Americans “discover” public diplomacy in wartime. Seeking allies and loans for the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams worked as hard to gain support from the citizens of France and Holland as they did to persuade their governments. In the twentieth century, U.S. international information and cultural agencies came and went with two world wars and the Cold War. Combating terrorism is having a comparable impact in the twenty-first century. Political and military leaders are transforming instruments of national security in response to new threats and opportunities. Again they are finding it necessary to understand, engage, and influence what publics think and do, not just their governments. Public diplomacy is not the instrument to combat terrorists directly. This is work for coercive instruments of power. Public diplomacy is a means to challenge ideas that give rise to terrorism. Importantly, public diplomacy must also be an adaptive and resourceful way to engage global publics on consequential issues other than terrorism.

Although turning to public diplomacy in times of conflict is not new, the conditions in which public diplomacy instruments are used today are radically different. First, there are differences on the level of ideas. Twentieth-century wars were state-sponsored contests between democratic and authoritarian visions of society rooted in secular worldviews. The Cold War was fought by competing heirs to the Enlightenment traditions of reason and science—and the legacies of Karl Marx and Thomas Jefferson. Ideas are no less influential in today’s conflicts. But they compete in multiple public spheres on a broader range of diverse and complex issues. Much attention justifiably is given to contending views within Islam and to mindsets of extremists who use violence and utopian visions in support of
public diplomacy’s 24/7 goals. Fixation on terrorism, however, risks missing public diplomacy’s relevance to contested ideas about democracy, global governance, the distribution of public goods, and many other cross-border challenges.

Second, there are differences on the level of political process. Central governments are less powerful relative to nonstate and substate actors. Vertical, state-centric models matter less. Horizontal, network models matter more. Diplomats still act as gatekeepers between states, but more often they are what Brian Hocking calls “boundary spanners,” mediators between states and nonstate actors on multiple issues in changing patterns of interaction. There are many more democracies in the world. Scholars debate the problems democratization creates in fragile societies and the benefits of “efficiency gains” ranging from zones of democratic peace to collaboration on common concerns. Coinciding with these changes are sustained high levels of anti-Americanism based on policy disagreements and resentment of U.S. power, which have been documented by the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project and other surveys. Declines in favorable attitudes also reflect what one analyst calls a “secession of elites,” meaning a loss of support from opinion leaders, driven by generational change. These trends have immediate and long-term costs. When global publics—elites and masses—become more powerful and hold negative opinions at the same time, public diplomacy becomes more important and more difficult to execute.

Third, there are differences on the level of media and information technology. Fifty years ago, much of the world lacked access to credible news and information. Today, information saturation is the norm. This creates, in Joseph Nye’s words, a “paradox of plenty.” Attention is the scarce resource, and “those who can distinguish valuable signals from white noise gain power.” When there is too much information, “political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility.” Thomas L. Friedman tells us the “world is flat,” by which he means a new generation of software applications linked to fiber-optic networks is enabling many more groups and empowered individuals, especially non-Westerners, to collaborate and compete globally. Media coverage, and rapid public reactions to that coverage, occur in relentless 24/7 news cycles. Public diplomacy must adapt to an environment shaped by greater transparency and by greater opacity. Multiple state and nonstate actors gain access to public spheres made more transparent by the Internet, satellite television, and an array of low-cost communication technologies. Transparency creates advantages for those skilled at shaping perceptions with credible narratives. It creates disadvantages when tactical events, such as prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, become a global strategic problem at the touch of a keyboard. Public spheres are opaque as well. Individuals and terrorist groups hide their identities on the Internet. Web-based
content (text, audio, and video) is detached—to a greater degree than content in earlier media—from the social contexts that provide meaning and credibility.

The significance of mediating technologies in shaping thoughts and actions is not new. Nearly a century ago, Walter Lippmann diagnosed problems arising from the influence of industrial-age information technologies in the space between a complex world “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind” and the “pictures in our heads.” The hot and cold wars of the twentieth century became metanarratives for citizens, the media, and political leaders looking for ways to simplify and frame national security issues. Presidential speeches—including Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” (1918), Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” (1941), and Truman’s “Campaign of Truth” (1950)—were emblematic of these metanarratives and used by policymakers, diplomats, and military commanders to set agendas, explain threats and opportunities, advocate policies, and shape public diplomacy strategies. The absence of a comparable metanarrative after the Cold War created two problems for strategists. First, it deprived them of a way to frame national security issues simply, powerfully, and advantageously. Second, as political scientist Robert Entman points out, it gave citizens and the media more power to frame the national security environment independently. Recognizing this, the Bush administration settled on terrorism as a new metanarrative immediately after 9/11. “Our war on terror . . . will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated,” President Bush stated a week after the attacks. Five years later, the National Security Strategy of the United States, began with the words “America is at war” and outlined a strategy grounded on two “inseparable priorities—fighting and winning the war on terror and promoting freedom as the alternative to tyranny and despair.” There are reasons for skepticism about the “war on terror” as a dominant narrative. Its adequacy is challenged by its oversimplification in a multi-issue, multipolar political environment and by the National Security Strategy’s own description of many other problems and cross-border challenges. Its appropriateness is questionable on the grounds of rhetorical excess and misunderstanding by the global publics that political leaders seek to persuade.

Because public diplomacy faces very different conditions on the levels of ideas, political process, and mediated information, its instruments and institutions must change. Five years after 9/11, U.S. political leaders have begun to recognize the need for change, and they are looking critically at legacy tools and structures. They promise “transformational public diplomacy,” by which they mean both increased resources for “programs we know work” and “fundamentally changing the way we do business.” Questions occur on the scope, durability, and scale of their reforms.
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AFTER 9/11

A few forward-looking practitioners and scholars wrote thoughtfully about public diplomacy’s new strategic environment in the decade after the Cold War.\textsuperscript{14} Their efforts were largely ignored. The attacks of 9/11, however, turned this analytical trickle into a fire hose of reports, articles, and opinion columns. In contrast, most political leaders on a bipartisan basis did little more than lament “Why do they hate us?” or “Why can a man in a cave out-communicate the world’s leading communications society?”\textsuperscript{15} Some useful early initiatives did occur. In October 2001, the State Department created a 24/7 Public Diplomacy Task Force with links to agencies, embassies, and U.S. combatant commands to coordinate participation in a “strategic information campaign.” Secretary of State Colin Powell led a stream of White House officials and cabinet secretaries in appearances on Al Jazeera and other global media. The White House, adapting methods used in U.S. and British political campaigns and by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Kosovo, created a Coalition Information Center network linking Washington, London, and Islamabad. For a few months, the United States and the United Kingdom used this network to respond to breaking news and communicate messages within news cycles. These efforts had merit, but they were tactical and were discontinued following the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the departure of key players, and the inability of executive branch organizations to turn temporary measures into durable institutional changes.

Attempts were also made to transform public diplomacy at the strategic level. The House of Representatives passed bills that would require the State Department to develop a public diplomacy strategy. No counterpart measures passed the Senate. In 2002, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice created an interagency Strategic Communication Policy Coordinating Committee to develop “strategic communications capabilities throughout the government.” The committee met twice. By executive order, the White House created an Office of Global Communications in 2003 to develop a strategic approach to public diplomacy among “appropriate agencies” of the government. It failed to do so, and the office closed in 2005. The Department of Defense (DOD) created an Office of Strategic Influence for its “strategic information campaign in support of the war on terrorism.” Opposition from U.S. government public affairs officials and widespread negative press coverage forced Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to dissolve the office in February 2002. Until the appointment of Karen Hughes in August 2005, the position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs was filled by a Senate-confirmed appointee for only 18 months during the Bush administration’s first four and one-half years in office.\textsuperscript{16}
While the government was dithering, the private sector was paying attention. Driven by 9/11 and surveys showing widespread anti-Americanism, public diplomacy became part of a national and global conversation in the media, on college campuses, and in research organizations and advisory panels. Journalists and opinion writers found much to criticize in the United States’ information, cultural, and international broadcasting activities. Universities in the United States and abroad added courses on public diplomacy. Task forces and advisory panels wrote reports.

There was a consensus among the experts: public diplomacy is vital to national security; it was broken and strategic-level change was needed. Opinions about what to do, however, varied widely. For some, the rear-view mirror was the best optic. Public diplomacy is what Foreign Service Officers, cultural diplomats, and international broadcasters had done well in the past, often very well, usually in separate competing organizations. By focusing on past accomplishments, advocates could justify priorities and budget increases advantageous to the tribal cultures in which they were comfortable. Others, however, want to retain what is best from the past, but view public diplomacy as an instrument that requires new thinking and new tools. Some are turning to networking and strategic direction models.\textsuperscript{17} Reports of the Defense Science Board, Council on Foreign Relations, and U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy recommended a presidential directive to advance a variety of implementing strategies. An advisory group led by former Ambassador Edward Djerejian urged “a new strategic direction” for public diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports addressed deficiencies in the strategic approach of U.S. international broadcasting, the absence of a State Department public diplomacy strategy, and the lack of a “national communication strategy.” By the summer of 2005, these and other studies had offered a rich tapestry of recommendations for reform, leading some observers to suggest “report fatigue” and call for moving beyond recommendations to business plans and action.\textsuperscript{18}

Exogenous events and the outpouring of private sector interest had an impact on government. Rhetorically, the United States’ leaders no longer neglect public diplomacy. The time for public diplomacy reform is “now,” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated emphatically when she announced the appointment of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld argued, “We are engaged in a test of wills, and it will be won or lost with our publics and the publics of other nations.”\textsuperscript{19} The need to engage publics and the ideas that are underlying sources of threats and opportunities is reflected in actions as well as speeches. U.S. leaders show greater concern about “listening” to others and “understanding” their opinions and cultures. There have been modest gains in public diplomacy
resources. A “Strategic Language Initiative” encourages professionals and U.S. citizens to learn foreign languages. New public-private partnerships are emerging with the United States’ universities, corporations, and media industries. There is greater emphasis on recruiting and training public diplomacy professionals. Government agencies pursue imaginative efforts to leverage the Internet and other communication technologies. As Hughes summarized, “There were 30-plus reports that had made very sound recommendations about what we should do, and I view my job as trying to get it done.”

Defining Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication

Definitions are a first step in “getting it done.” Beginning in the 1960s, a few practitioners and scholars used the term public diplomacy to describe information and cultural activities of U.S. missions, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Voice of America, and other U.S. broadcasting services. During the next 40 years, public diplomacy came into widespread use in the United States and abroad through its use in congressional hearings, reports of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, and increasing acceptance of the term by practitioners. Recently, the term strategic communication has gained traction primarily in national security circles. The position of Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications and Global Outreach was added to the National Security Council staff in March 2005. On April 8, 2006, President Bush established a Policy Coordination Committee on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications led by Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff updated the U.S. military’s information operations doctrine in 2006 to define strategic communication as “focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives.”

These labels prompt analytical questions. Are the terms public diplomacy and strategic communication interchangeable? Or is strategic communication an umbrella concept that embraces distinct components such as public affairs, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, democratization, international broadcasting, and open military information operations? Organizational missions and structures provide no easy answers. For example, when remarks by a military commander at a Pentagon press briefing are carried on global media platforms, is it public affairs, public diplomacy, or a military information operation? These activities are distinguished less by audience and conceptual differences than by doctrines, budgets, and bureaucratic turf. Should strategic communication, as one scholar suggests, be used to describe short-term instrumental activities as
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a subset of public diplomacy, separating them from long-term exchanges of people and ideas? Do public diplomacy and strategic communication describe only what governments do, or do they also describe global governance activities of nonstate actors? What is the meaning of related terms such as advocacy, propaganda, spin, branding, and perception management, and how are understandings shaped, positively or negatively, by their use? These are not trivial questions. Naming is part of a struggle over meaning. In naming, we judge as well as describe.

I propose defining public diplomacy and strategic communication as analogous terms that can be used separately and synonymously to describe activities by governments, groups, and individuals, intended to understand attitudes, cultures, and mediated environments; engage in a dialogue of ideas between people and institutions; advise political leaders, diplomats, and soldiers on public opinion and communication implications of policy choices; and influence attitudes and behavior through communication strategies and messages. These are core components of an instrument of statecraft that embraces a variety of means: diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, political communication, democracy building, and open military information operations. Analytically, these components and means comprise one instrument among a range of persuasive, cooperative, and coercive instruments available to strategists. At another level, public diplomacy and strategic communication cut across all political, economic, and military instruments of statecraft and are critical to their use and success.

Public diplomacy is instrumental and essential to governance. Its purposes are broadly political. It serves interests and values. Public diplomacy differs from education, journalism, advertising, public relations, and other ways groups communicate in societies apart from governance. To succeed, public diplomacy imports discourse norms from society and depends greatly on private sector partnerships. Education norms matter in Fulbright scholarship programs. Peer review ensures that scholars funded by government grants are chosen on the basis of academic merit, not for partisan reasons or their policy views. International broadcasters value journalism norms and institutional shields that protect them from interference by policymakers in news gathering and reporting. Public diplomats and military public affairs officers know they cannot operate effectively unless they are truthful and credible. Institutional firewalls are needed to separate what they do from deception techniques used legitimately in war. Firewalls are not appropriate, however, as shields against strategic direction, management, and oversight. Choosing to fund more exchanges in Pakistan and fewer exchanges in Germany or trade-offs among broadcasting languages and technologies, for example, are strategic decisions to be made by political leaders.
Public diplomacy operates in three time frames. One is the news cycle. Policymakers and communication strategists cannot ignore the relentless demands of 24/7 news and media relations. If diplomats, soldiers, and political leaders do not get inside news cycles, others will, often with disadvantageous perspectives. A second time frame relates to communication campaigns on high-value policies that may last months and years. Here strategists need to make choices. Not all policies require public diplomacy campaigns. Nor are resources available to carry them out effectively on all policies. Choices raise questions. What policies are most important? What are the best narratives? How should consistent themes be tailored to different countries and regions? When is an ambassador the best messenger? A cabinet secretary? A combatant commander? A credible third party? What themes, messages, messengers, symbols, and communication tools are best suited to persuade, tap favorably into emotions, mobilize alliances, and serve political objectives? A third time frame is long-term engagement—the development of relationships between people, groups, and institutions—in the realms of ideas, culture, shared knowledge, common ground, discourse norms, reasoned dialogue, and vigorous debate about issues. Here, investments must be made for years, decades, and generations.

Each time frame is essential to a comprehensive understanding of public diplomacy and strategic communication, whether the policy issue is combating terrorism, nuclear weapons proliferation, bilateral relations between countries, or many other important national security concerns. Public diplomacy in each time frame has limits. Public diplomacy does not trump flawed policies or weak political leadership. Shared understandings may not overcome deep disagreements or interests in conflict. Cross-cultural experiences may reinforce hostilities and competing values. Governments are constrained because much of what their citizens and societies project—and much of what global publics perceive—is beyond government control. Results can take years to achieve or may never be achieved. Success is difficult to measure, although not impossible with appropriate methods and sufficient resources. Without longitudinal studies of U.S. civilian and military exchanges in Indonesia, it is difficult to draw sturdy conclusions. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that years of investment in academic exchanges and International Military Exchange and Training programs have contributed positively to civil society and democratization in the world’s largest Muslim country.

Public diplomacy agencies could not function without private sector partnerships. Most government-sponsored international exchange and democratization programs are administered by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Many exchange programs receive funding from corporations as well as foreign governments. Foreign opinion research is
done through contracts with commercial polling organizations. Increasingly, public diplomacy seeks to leverage private sector talents and creativity to enhance operational capacity in knowledge domains, product identification and development, services and skills, and evaluative feedback.

Public diplomacy is also used by nonstate and substate actors and by international organizations when they act in ways that further regional and global governance. Political party institutes, labor unions, and corporations conduct public diplomacy when they support civil society and democratization programs. The governor of Washington engages in public diplomacy when she proposes a Chinese cultural center in Seattle and a Washington state educational center in China. It is public diplomacy when the European Union influences citizens in member states on trade and monetary policies and when the United Nations shapes perceptions on its governance activities in Kosovo.

**Institutions and Tribal Cultures**

The goals of public diplomacy are well established and relatively non-controversial: comprehending other cultures, encouraging dialogue about ideas on issues of common concern, fostering mutual understanding, expanding democracy, reducing anti-Americanism, and influencing attitudes and actions in support of interests. These goals have deep historical roots; Ben Franklin would recognize each. The institutional means to achieve these goals, however, are diverse, changing, and contested. There is consensus that public diplomacy includes legacy activities of the USIA, distributed throughout the Department of State: press briefings, ambassadors’ media interviews, foreign opinion research, conferences, book translations, embassy Web sites, and exchanges. Most observers also include U.S. international broadcasting services directed by the independent Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), although many broadcasters are not comfortable with the public diplomacy label. The BBG directs a suite of federal and corporate international broadcasting services that include the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Sawa and Al Hurra (Arabic language radio and television networks), Radio Free Europe or Radio Liberty, (broadcasts to Europe, Russia, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran), Radio Free Asia, Radio Farda (radio and television broadcasts to Iran and other Farsi-speaking areas), and Radio or TV Marti (broadcasts to Cuba).

Public diplomacy institutions have multiplied since USIA and VOA were the primary actors. Press officers in the White House, National Security Council, DOD and other cabinet departments, and the military’s combatant commands focus increasingly on global publics in briefings and outreach activities. Many U.S. agencies fund educational and professional
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exchanges. According to the U.S. General Accountability Office, “An interagency working group meets quarterly to coordinate the exchange and training activities of 12 federal departments and 15 independent agencies.” The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in addition to funding democratization programs, funds Fulbright scholarships in Pakistan, VOA broadcasts in Africa, and Sesame Workshops in Egypt. More than 100 USAID “Development Outreach and Communications Officers” work side by side in U.S. missions with the State Department’s public diplomacy officers. The National Endowment for Democracy and other publicly funded private entities engage in democracy building. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) consults on ways to put health-related narratives in the entertainment programs of U.S. and foreign media. The DOD provides Military Information Support Teams to assist with outreach in some embassies and contracts with U.S. private sector companies to fund projects intended to improve foreign public opinion about the United States. The U.S. Central Command seeks to communicate its regional vision “to a global audience” in “winning the war of ideas.” The proposition that these departments and agencies engage in public diplomacy is contested. Not all diplomats agree that the CDC, USAID, and U.S. combatant commands can be said to carry out public diplomacy activities. Soldiers and civilians in the DOD debate whether they “execute” or “support” public diplomacy.

Another way of looking at public diplomacy is through its tribal cultures—groups whose identity and behavior are associated with particular norms, rules, and skills. These include:

1. foreign service officers in embassies and foreign ministries who emphasize face-to-face communication, the priority of “the field” over headquarters, language skills, opinion elites, and the importance of dialogue;
2. cultural diplomats and professionals in academic institutions and NGOs who privilege exchanges, educational norms, fostering of private cultural connections, deep knowledge of other cultures, and long-term results that are difficult to predict or measure;
3. international broadcasters who stress mass audience communication, journalism norms, audience research, gaining of market share, and media channels (radio, television, and the Internet in descending priority);
4. communication strategists and public affairs advisors to presidents, cabinet secretaries, and agency directors, who focus on press relations, messages and talking points, occupation of space advantageously within news cycles, the relevance of political campaign strategies, and building of domestic consent (a priority) and foreign consent for policies;
5. military officers who specialize in strategic communication defined to include public affairs, defense support for public diplomacy, and open information operations and who value communication strategies, doctrine, training and
education, media tools, innovative technologies, leveraging of NGOs, and information as an instrument of national power; and

6. democracy-building professionals in government and private sector organizations who give priority to civil society initiatives, partnerships with NGOs, training, and working with indigenous groups.

Each group has a distinct self-identity and operational preferences. Each competes for resources and freedom of action. Each tends to exclude rather than include: members of different groups seldom attend the same conferences, participate on the same task forces, or value interagency assignments. Some relationships do exist. The Secretary of State sits ex officio on the BBG, and the State Department hosts useful interagency fusion teams that share information. Foreign Service Officers carry out press and cultural activities sequentially and simultaneously. Diplomats are assigned to military units; soldiers serve in embassies. Overall, however, public diplomacy is executed by a maze of diverse institutions and competing tribal cultures. Expertise, experience, and focused effort are strengths of this specialization. Homogeneity is both impossible and unwise. But laissez faire has its price: missed collaborative opportunities, weak interactive networks, and the absence of overall strategic direction.

Transforming Public Diplomacy

How should we think about transforming public diplomacy and its role in combating terrorism? First, it is important to recognize that these are separate questions. Transformation matters because public diplomacy supports not only counterterrorism, but other important interests. Second, it is prudent to consider that strategic transformation may not be achievable. Karen Hughes during her first year in office as under secretary accomplished more than her predecessors in institutionalizing public diplomacy reforms in the State Department and at U.S. missions abroad. These reforms are important, especially if they help to transform the State Department’s traditional diplomacy culture. Reforms in one organization, however, will not achieve changes on the scale required for a public diplomacy instrument comprised of diverse actors, each of whom is facing complexity in a world of states and networks. The United States’ tradition of episodic commitment to public diplomacy and preference for military and economic instruments of power are reasons for prudence. Other reasons are grounded in the U.S. political system. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), political scientist Amy Zegart has voiced doubts about achieving reforms in the intelligence community. Her reasons are instructive for public diplomacy. Organizations, especially government agencies, seldom adapt from within to changes in their external environment.
Separation of power in the federal government makes reform legislation rare and difficult. Presidents and lawmakers value effective organizations. Nevertheless, with limited time, finite political capital, and few electoral benefits to be gained, they seldom take on the hard work of institutional reform.27

These barriers are not insurmountable. Public diplomacy transformation has occurred, but only when presidents and congressional leaders, driven by war and the inability of institutions to adapt to their external environment, made transformation a personal priority. Studies of public diplomacy recognized the need for presidential leadership in achieving reform long before 9/11.28 Recent studies have done so as well. Seldom if ever, however, have these studies offered roadmaps leading from general recommendations to outcomes that could prevail over political and bureaucratic obstacles. Detailed roadmaps are beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is possible to identify four characteristics essential in their construction.

First, map change in three convergent dimensions. Public diplomacy actors at all levels—in embassies, in regional networks, and in national departments and agencies—have three strategic communication requirements. They must listen. They must choose. They must adapt. Transformation roadmaps must connect and strengthen all three.

*Listening* means comprehending cultures, attitudes, memories, beliefs, demographics, media trends, and social networks at a very high level. This means more than just a rich appreciation of others. It means seeing ourselves the way others see us rather than through the “looking-glass perceptions” of our own views and beliefs.29 It means recognizing that countries, cultures, subcultures, tribes, religions, influence structures, and virtual communities are extraordinarily diverse and require a variety of interpretive tools. It means investing much more in penetrating cultural analysis, ethnographic studies, hard languages, social network analysis software, media analysis, and polling—and sharing what is learned from these efforts among agencies and coalitions. It also means anticipating: the United States has strong ties with elites in Pakistan, for example, but not with millions in Pakistan’s successor generation who will determine its future.30 Stakeholders in public diplomacy minimize both the difficulty and the desirability of listening. Diplomats tend to think they understand indigenous cultures sufficiently through their own perceptions. Military doctrine only recently has begun to include the need to “understand” others in strategic communication and information operations. Political leaders spend large sums on opinion and media research to win elections; then, when in office, they routinely ignore these tools in their public diplomacy. The State Department’s paltry annual worldwide budget for foreign opinion surveys was estimated by the GAO in fiscal year 2005 to be $4.4 million.31
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Choosing means deciding where to concentrate effort. With finite resources and political capital, policymakers, diplomats, soldiers, democratsizers, and broadcasters cannot be everywhere and do everything. The United States’ buffet of issues—nuclear proliferation, counterterrorism, China’s projection of hard and soft power, famine, genocide in Africa, global pandemics, trade, energy, science, climate change, and much more—may not exceed the nation’s appetite, but it surely exceeds its capacities. The challenge in determining priorities is two-fold: first, to avoid preoccupation with one thing (e.g., combating terrorism and the war in Iraq) while consigning everything else to checklists of threats and opportunities and, second, to concentrate resources effectively in time horizons that range from news cycles to generations.

Adapting means using approaches, narratives, messengers, technologies, and instruments tailored to situations and linked to listening and choosing. What works well in Mexico may not work in Egypt. NGO partnerships may be just the thing in South Africa but not in North Korea. Shortwave broadcasting may reach publics in parts of Africa but not young people in Russia occupied with video games. Political leaders, ambassadors, and combatant commanders play different roles in adapting actions to situations. Each needs talented strategic communication advisors with something useful to say when options are considered, decisions are made, and policies are communicated.

Second, design roadmaps that connect hierarchies and networks. Scholars and forward-leaning practitioners have been clear for some time: networks are dominant social structures in information societies. In Manuel Castells’ pathbreaking account, all societies are “penetrated, with different intensity, by the pervasive logic of the network society, whose dynamic expansion gradually absorbs and subdues pre-existing social forms.”32 Networks, Castells argues, are flexible and better than hierarchies in adapting to interactive complexity in human relationships. NGOs (good and bad) have adopted network structures more quickly than governments. Doctors Without Borders and al Qaeda are emblematic of networks capable of adapting to complexity and using information technologies to their advantage. Recent organizational changes in U.S. national security agencies consist almost entirely of establishing new hierarchies (e.g., the Department of Homeland Security and the Director of National Intelligence) and making changes in old hierarchies (such as the DOD’s emphasis on Special Operations Forces and the State Department’s transformational diplomacy). Flexibility, shared knowledge, and adaptability are stated goals of these changes. Achieving these goals in new and old hierarchies is far from certain.

Missing in the U.S. government’s organizational changes are robust networks that connect government and civil society, diplomats and soldiers, and public diplomacy’s institutions and tribal cultures. Eliminating
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hierarchies in governance is neither desirable nor possible. Changing organizations so they act more like networks and less like hierarchies, however, is both desirable and possible. In public diplomacy this means knowledge sharing and operational collaboration. Broadcasting research should be made available routinely to diplomats. Cultural analyses by the military’s foreign area officers should be shared with broadcasters. Embassy analyses of social networks are useful to military public affairs officers. Knowledge products developed by civil society NGOs can help all government entities. Bright lines between career paths for political and public diplomacy officers matter less, because much more of what ambassadors and political officers do involves outreach beyond government ministries. Canada’s diplomats are merging these career paths. U.S. diplomats could learn from their example. Adapting hierarchies to networks means more interservice, interagency, and private sector assignments. Diplomatic career systems could achieve this by making such assignments career enhancing and by emulating military personnel practices in which senior officer promotions have long been contingent on experience in cross-service assignments. Changes in recruitment and training are needed if organizational cultures are to blend the strengths of networks and hierarchies.

Strategic communication networks require more than coordinating committees and fusion teams. Indeed, the case against mere coordination is strong. Public diplomacy coordination committees occasionally worked well for short periods of time with presidential interest and strong leadership, but they were never effective on a sustained basis. This is not to say teamwork and information sharing are not desirable. Clearly they are. But successful networks require strategic direction as well. There must be authority to direct and task, to assign operational responsibilities to departments and embassies (but not to manage the execution of their programs), to concur in the appointment of senior public diplomacy officials, to set priorities, and to move resources. In embassies, the chief of mission must provide strategic direction. Whether the “quarterback” for today’s multiagency, multi-issue public diplomacy should be placed over time in a subcabinet position in the Department of State is a question that needs to be addressed. Cabinet departments typically do not think and act in interagency terms. Departments are organized around preferences, outputs, and constraints that make it difficult for them to set interagency priorities and move resources. Reformers need also to guard against reorganizations as panaceas driven by frustration. Moises Naim, in his analysis of countering global criminal enterprises, talks about defragmenting government:

This is what defragmenting means: bring together scattered efforts in order to be more effective. But just as an overreliance on technology can create the illusion of a solution, integrating government efforts by just moving
organizational “boxes” around and placing them under the authority of a “czar” can be an equally dangerous illusion. . . . Defragmenting government can work only if there are clear plans, multiyear budgets that extend the time horizons beyond the most immediate emergencies, and solid, competent leadership.\textsuperscript{33}

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, concerned that the United States’ enemies have adapted more skillfully to the global information environment, argues the United States will need “new institutions to engage people across the world.” What, he asks, “should a U.S. Information Agency, or a Radio Free Europe for the 21st century look like?”\textsuperscript{34} Structures that answer the secretary’s question should look more like networks than hierarchies. Roadmaps are needed that bridge hierarchies and networks, provide strategic direction, avoid reorganization for the sake of doing something, and map public diplomacy to interests, values, and policies. Reformers clearly have more intellectual and practical work to do.

Third, institutionalize private sector collaboration. Much of what public diplomacy needs to know and to be successful lies outside the government. Academic and research communities offer untapped resources for education, training, area and language expertise, and planning and consultative services. The commercial sector has a competitive edge in multimedia production, opinion and media surveys, information technologies, program evaluation, and measuring of communication impact. Most recent studies of public diplomacy recommend that government agencies do more to leverage private sector talents, creativity, and best practices. A few also recommend that agencies adopt sophisticated private sector strategies used in planning and integrating complex communication efforts involving multiple actors. There are two basic approaches to collaboration. One is for each department and agency to continue to contract with private sector organizations as needed for program support and ad hoc projects. This is business as usual.

The second approach would be to create an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan center to serve as a magnet for knowledge and skills in the academic, business, media, and NGO communities. This approach has been recommended by the Defense Science Board, the Council on Foreign Relations, and others.\textsuperscript{35} Beyond general agreement that such a center should not duplicate what governments do best, proponents differ on questions relating to structure, funding, and purpose. Some focus on attracting creative imagination in developing media products and communication technologies. Others emphasize research and analysis. Still others accentuate a center’s role in crisis response and providing supplementary skills and credible voices. It is possible to imagine a single multipurpose public diplomacy center—related to but outside the government—that would harness expertise on foreign cultures and languages, education and
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training, media creativity and skills, consultative services, and opinion and media analysis. It would serve embassies and multiple government departments in four areas:

- **Knowledge**: cultural influences (values, religion, entertainment, education), demographics, global public opinion, and media trends;
- **Products**: support for communication strategies, plans, themes, messages, and media products;
- **Services**: support for cross-cultural exchanges of ideas and people, deployment of temporary communication teams, language and skills databases, and technology development; and
- **Evaluation**: studies of changes in attitudes and public diplomacy metrics.

Effective partnerships between the government and society in the conduct of public diplomacy are not new. Government grants to private organizations have long been a way to carry out exchanges, foreign opinion polling, democratization programs, and media training. An independent public diplomacy center would institutionalize the relationship in areas that go beyond traditional program support and take collaboration to a new level. Whether it is developing video games that support public diplomacy objectives, analysis of Web-based networks that present threats and opportunities, understanding cultures in strategically important areas, or maintaining databases of language-qualified participants for crisis response teams, a public diplomacy center has the potential to leverage more effectively the knowledge in U.S. universities, the skills of NGOs, and the imagination of its corporations and media industries.

The initiative to build flexible, adaptive networks within the government must come from the president and Congress. The initiative to create flexible, adaptive public diplomacy institutions outside the government must come from the private sector. Governments often fund private sector entities. They seldom build them. A roadmap to a successful partnership requires receptive government agencies and collaboration by private sector groups in developing a business plan that will build on the best ideas of those calling for increased support for public diplomacy.

Fourth, engage the political will of the president and Congress. Transformation occurs in public diplomacy when presidents and lawmakers provide strong personal leadership. VOA, Radio Free Europe or Radio Liberty, the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, USIA, the Fulbright program, and the National Endowment for Democracy would not have become cornerstones of twentieth-century public diplomacy without the efforts of Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Reagan; Senators Karl Mundt and J. William Fulbright; and Congressman Dante Fascell. Presidential and congressional leadership are needed in two areas: connecting actions
and words and building a durable strategic communication structure at the White House level. Analysts have long recognized that deeds count more than words in public diplomacy. As President Eisenhower’s “Jackson Committee,” established in 1953 to examine the State and Defense Departments and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) “information and propaganda activities,” put it,

The United States is judged less by what it says through official information outlets than by the actions and attitudes of the Government in international affairs and the actions and attitudes of its citizens and officials, abroad, and at home.36

A half century later, opinion polls correlate anti-Americanism to U.S. policies such as the war in Iraq, to actions such as rendition and prisoner interrogation tactics, and to attitudes such as resistance to management of the nation’s harbors by an Arab-owned company. Conversely, opinion research suggests a positive correlation between actions such as the United States’ tsunami relief efforts and favorable attitudes in Indonesia. It is no accident that Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes made working with U.S. CEOs to raise millions for earthquake relief in Pakistan an important part of her work.

In combating terrorism and other threats, U.S. strategic communicators face two quite different strategies: emphasize better communication in hopes of improving the United States’ image and focus on actions, anticipating favorable attitudes as a long-term by-product. Both are important. Geography, time to react, and military dominance are no longer sufficient to ensure national security. Nor is the episodic pattern by which public diplomacy instruments are permitted to rust after wars—only to be “rediscovered” when the next challenge occurs. There has been no presidential directive on public diplomacy since President Clinton’s Presidential Decision Directive 68 in 1998. Other than appropriations bills, which provide funding and some policy direction, there has been no legislation on public diplomacy authorities and structures since the merger of USIA with the State Department in 1999.

Americans are combating terrorism by using and transforming instruments of hard power on a scale comparable to national security initiatives taken in the 1940s and 1950s. Military, intelligence, and law enforcement instruments are changing in response to leadership from the White House and Congress. In contrast, the transformation of public diplomacy has been subcontracted to departments and agencies. Reforms within organizations are not substitutes for the kind of public diplomacy transformation that can only occur when led at the presidential level. Nor are organizational reforms substitutes for enduring networks that connect policies and public diplomacy, departments and agencies, and the government and the
private sector. Transformation of this kind requires political will and a presidential directive on strategic communication that is reinforced and made permanent with bipartisan congressional support and legislation.

NOTES


4. For example, see the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitude’s Project Website http://pewglobal.org.


12. Francis Fukuyama argues that “The rhetoric about World War IV and the global war on terrorism should cease. We are fighting hot counterinsurgency wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and against the international jihadist movement, that we need to win. But conceiving the larger struggle as a global war comparable to the world wars or the Cold War vastly overstates the scope of the problem, suggesting
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that we are taking on a large part of the Arab and Muslim worlds.” See America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 184.


16. For a discussion of these and other public diplomacy efforts after 9/11, see Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication, 20–25. The Task Force noted that achievements did occur at the tactical level: creation of the U.S. government’s Arabic language Radio Sawa and Persian language Radio Farda broadcasting services, the embedded media policy of the Department of Defense, and extraordinary amounts of personal time devoted by the president, cabinet secretaries, and other senior leaders to “advocating policies and shaping perceptions at home and abroad.”

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21. U.S. General Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, Testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies (Washington, DC, May 3, 2006): 6–7, http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-707T. According to State Department officials, the GAO observed, one of the Policy Coordinating Committee’s tasks is to issue a formal interagency public diplomacy strategy, adding, “It is not clear when this strategy will be developed.”


23. Joseph Nye uses the term “strategic communication” to mean one of three “dimensions” of public diplomacy: “a set of simple themes, much like what occurs in a political or advertising campaign . . . over the course of a year to brand the central themes, or to advance a particular government policy.” Nye’s other two dimensions are “daily communications,” which explain “the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions,” and the “development of lasting relationships with key individuals, over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels.” His dimensions are distinguished by two central characteristics: time and “different relative proportions of government information and long-term cultural relationships.” *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 107–110.

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26. Here Graham Allison’s account of how individuals behave in “organizational cultures” is helpful. Their identity is tied to a particular mission, to a set of beliefs and norms, and to “rules for matching actions to situations,” which they “have inherited and pass on to their successors.” Given public diplomacy’s multiple institutions, its functional distribution in larger organizations (e.g., State and Defense), and its operational dependence on the private sector, I prefer to capture Allison’s logic with the term “tribal cultures.” Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999), 145–158.


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by what he calls “fiction absolutes” meaning that individuals adopt “a set of values which, if truly absolute in the world – so ordained by some almighty force – would make not that individual but his group . . . the best of all possible groups, the best of all inner circles.” Wolfe cites examples in which scholars and politicians failed to appreciate the impact of this phenomenon on social and political outcomes in New York City and southwest Ohio. The difficulties are greater of course in understanding value sets in Cairo and northwest Pakistan. “The Human Beast” (National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson Lecture, Washington, DC, May 10, 2006), http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/ wolfe/lecture.html.


31. A roundtable of experts assembled by the GAO in 2003 “estimated that State would need to spend up to $50 million to conduct adequate opinion research and performance measurement given the size of its public diplomacy budget and scope of operations.” The GAO, State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences, 2006: 24.

32. Manuel Castells, End of Millennium, vol. 3 of The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 350. In various studies, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt have argued the utility of networks advocating changes in diplomacy. See especially The Emergence of Noopolitik.


36. The President’s Committee on International Information Activities, “Report to the President,” June 30, 1953. The so-called “Jackson Report,” named for the committee’s chairman, William H. Jackson, is available in the manuscript collection of the Public Diplomacy Institute at George Washington University.