When Director General Jamie Lambert invited me to meet with a group of Canadian diplomats in Ottawa a few weeks ago, I quickly welcomed the opportunity for two reasons. First, it was the prospect of conversation with diplomats outside the United States who would have contrasting views – but who perhaps would share some common ground – about ways to map changes in public diplomacy.

Second, it is a chance to acknowledge the contributions of two Canadian diplomats to the thinking of former practitioners in the U.S. who have been teaching and writing about public diplomacy since the mid-1990s. I’m referring to Canada’s former ambassador in Washington, Allan Gotlieb, whose 1991 book, *I’ll be with you in a minute, Mr. Ambassador: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington* was an early breakthrough in the literature on transforming diplomacy. “The new diplomacy,” Ambassador Gotlieb wrote, “is, to a large extent public diplomacy and requires different skills, techniques, and attitudes than those found in traditional diplomacy, as it is practiced in most countries, including Canada.”

I’m also referring to Gordon Smith, a former deputy minister of Foreign Affairs for Canada, whose speeches and writings were part of the early Virtual Diplomacy Initiative at the U.S. Institute of Peace. In a 1999 paper, *Reinventing Diplomacy: A Virtual Necessity*, he called for a “Revolution in Diplomatic Affairs,” arguing that
... diplomacy is at present undergoing a major transformation, close to a revolution, in response to the recent rapid changes in information technology, the evolving global agendas of states, and the sudden explosion of new international ‘nonstate’ actors... Today, diplomacy refers not only to the advancement of national interests and the practice of persuasion but also to the management of global issues.²

These words are as compelling today as they were in the 1990s. Ambassador Gotlieb recognized that public diplomacy is not only the work of press and cultural attaches – or of public affairs officers. It is central to the daily activities of ambassadors and political counselors – and presidents and foreign ministers – if they are to be successful. Smith understood that fundamental changes were afoot – changes that were challenging states, ministries, embassies, and diplomats. He speculated that the “sweep of change” was not widely accepted, much less welcomed by many traditionalists. Given this resistance – and if a revolution in diplomacy is indeed occurring – he argued, “scarce resources will be misspent, opportunities will be missed, and the results will be judged to be generally unsatisfactory.” I cannot speak to the accuracy of Gordon Smith’s forecast for Canadian diplomacy. But to a considerable extent he had it right as far as American diplomacy is concerned.

When I left graduate school to work for the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the words “public diplomacy” had no currency among professionals and scholars – or in the media. USIA was a small government agency. America’s educational and cultural exchanges were headquartered in the State Department and managed by USIA in embassies and consulates overseas. Traditional diplomats in Washington placed a low priority on cultural diplomacy. Press and information activities were left to USIA, although the gap between traditional and public diplomacy was not as great on embassy country teams.

Back then, states were the primary actors on the international stage. Western soft power was a powerful magnet for many in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China. Information was a scarce resource. A resource much in demand in many parts of the world. This made things somewhat easier – or at least so it seems in retrospect – for the conduct of public diplomacy.
Fast forward to 2005.

States today are not what they used to be. States still matter of course. But they are losing power to markets, NGOs, networks, and empowered individuals. Networked jihadists and ethnic and nationalist conflicts have replaced the Cold War. The U.S. has lots of military power, but U.S. soft power is waning.

Importantly for our profession, information is no longer a scarce resource. In a world of information overload, as Harvard’s Joseph Nye points out, *attention is the scarce resource.* Professor Nye calls this the “paradox of plenty.” He writes:

> A plenitude of information leads to a poverty of attention . . . Attention rather than information becomes the scarce resource, and those who can distinguish valuable signals from white noise gain power . . . credibility is the crucial resource and an important source of soft power . . . political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility.

Today, power flows to the credible. Reputations matter. Brands matter. Sources of information matter. What’s around information matters. And fewer issues are susceptible to solution through military power.

It’s no accident then, that public diplomacy is now part of a global conversation. A growing number of universities, including my own George Washington University, have institutes and courses that focus on public diplomacy as an academic field of study. Since 9/11, some 30 expert reports in the U.S. have called for fundamental changes in public diplomacy. The American private sector is paying attention. Indeed, we have reached the point of “report fatigue,” and it is time to move from reports to business plans and action.

Organizationally, much has changed in the United States. The U.S. Information Agency no longer exists. Its activities were scattered about the State Department in 1999. This merger has been less than a complete success. Until Karen Hughes arrived last summer, the job of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy was filled by a Senate-
confirmed appointee for only 18 months during the first 4 ½ years of the Bush Administration.

A part time private sector Board of Governors tries to manage U.S. international broadcasting services that now include Radio Sawa and the Al Hurra television network. Radio Free Europe broadcasts to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Vigorous debate occurs on the future of the Voice of America; on the future of state owned broadcasting generally; on the future of radio, television, and web-based broadcasting; and on the future of the mass audience.

There are new issues and new actors.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funds Fulbright Scholarships in Pakistan, Voice of America broadcasts in Africa, and Sesame Workshops in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. USAID’s public outreach officers work side-by-side in U.S. embassies with the State Department’s public diplomacy officers.

The U.S. military tenders multi-million dollar contracts to private sector companies “to improve foreign public opinion about the United States” and constructs websites to bring news and information to countries in the Balkans and elsewhere.

The U.S. government’s Center for Disease Control in Atlanta consults on ways to weave health-related narratives into the entertainment programs of U.S. and foreign media.

Educational, cultural, and professional exchanges are funded not just by the Department of State, but by practically every U.S. government agency.

And a vast network of mayors, governors, Canadian premiers, and other government actors make up a large part of how countries understand, engage, and influence on foreign policy and global issues.

This is not your grandparents’ public diplomacy.
These changes are challenging all of us to think and act in new ways. Whether or not we need a Revolution in Diplomatic Affairs, I believe we can say without doubt that diplomacy requires new ideas, new solutions, and new networks.

I would like briefly to suggest two ways to think about public diplomacy and two proposals for transforming public diplomacy.

**Thinking About Public Diplomacy**

*First, we need to think about public diplomacy as an instrument of statecraft in three time frames.* One time frame is the news cycle. Diplomats cannot ignore the demands of 24/7 news and media relations. On many issues, breaking news requires more than “no comment, I’ll get back to you.” The news cycle is relentless. Global media and greater global transparency accelerate public reactions. Tactical events become strategic problems at the touch of keyboard. If diplomats and political leaders do not get inside the news cycle, others will -- usually to the disadvantage of diplomacy.

A second time frame relates to public diplomacy campaigns on high value policy issues that may last months and years. Here diplomats need to make choices. Not all policies require strategic campaigns. Nor do we have the resources to carry them out on all policies. Questions abound. What policies? What narratives? How should consistent themes be tailored to different countries and regions? When is the ambassador the best messenger? When are “third party validators” more credible? What themes, messages, messengers, symbols, and communication tools are best suited to persuade, to tap favorably into emotions, and to serve political objectives?

A third time frame is long-term engagement – the development of relationships between people, groups, and institutions. Shared knowledge, common ground, discourse norms, reasoned dialogue, ideas and the arts, and vigorous debate about issues are critical. Here, public diplomacy investments are made for years, decades, and generations.
Public diplomacy in each of these time frames has limits. Public diplomacy does not trump flawed policies or weak political leadership. Shared understandings may not overcome deep disagreement on interests. Cross cultural experiences may reinforce hostilities and competing values. Sayyid Qutb, the leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, whose ideas inspired a generation of Islamist radicals including Ayman al Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, studied for several years in Washington, DC and Colorado. On the other hand, recent obituaries of Alexander Yakovlev – a man who greatly influenced the perestroika and glasnost impulses in the Soviet Union – remind that he had close ties to Canada, was a good friend of Pierre Trudeau, and studied at Columbia University as an exchange student, where he was influenced by theories of democratic pluralism taught by political scientist David Truman.

I argued in a paper last summer at an American Political Science Association conference, that each of these public diplomacy dimensions is instrumental. Each serves state interests. In varying degrees, each has a government nexus. And each imports discourse norms from other parts of society (education, the arts, journalism) to succeed. Accordingly, there is a need for institutional shields, often called firewalls, to protect discourse norms in public diplomacy. For example, the selection of scholars and artists to participate in government funded exchanges should be based, not on policy criteria, but on rigorous peer review. A decision to fund more exchanges in Mexico and fewer exchanges in Germany, however, is a strategic decision for governments.

**A second way to think about public diplomacy is that it’s an instrument of statecraft with multiple components.** Public diplomacy is analytically distinguishable from other instruments available to strategists. At the same time, it cuts across all political, economic, and military instruments and is essential to their implementation and success. Although we can define and think about public diplomacy as a single instrument, it has multiple components, each with their own organizations, budgets, tribal cultures, and rules for applying principles to behavior. Labels vary for these components, but my short list includes *diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, political communication, democracy building, and open military information operations.*
When Canada’s Prime Minister or a Canadian ambassador give a newsmaker interview on satellite television, we have little trouble identifying their actions as public diplomacy. When a Canadian minister of defense or military commander appears on camera, however, the optic shifts. By my reasoning, this too is public diplomacy, although it may be called public affairs or a military information operation. In each case political actors are seeking to understand, engage, and influence the citizens of Canada as well as other governments and other publics. Issues vary. Relevant actors change.

British scholar Brian Hocking calls diplomats in today’s world “boundary spanners” – in contrast to their traditional roles as gatekeepers between governments. Hocking’s model is a team based or networking model, not a hierarchical model. But networks need quarterbacks. As do embassies, foreign ministries, and governments.

Building on these frameworks for thinking about public diplomacy, let me suggest two proposals for transforming its implementation.

**Transforming Public Diplomacy**

*First, we should map public diplomacy to interests and values in three interlocking dimensions at embassy and national levels.* Many diplomats recognize they now work in an accelerated, mediated world. Many are adapting and improvising quickly and well. Similarly, many political leaders understand that shaping public perceptions is essential to building consent for what they want to achieve. And many spend large parts of their day doing just that. But I submit that diplomats and political leaders have been less successful at institutionalizing and systematically mapping policy and public diplomacy connections over time. To do this, we need a strategy with three interlocking dimensions. First, we need to:

- **Comprehend cultures, public attitudes, memories, segmented demographics, media trends, and influence networks at a very high level.** U.S. diplomat Barry Fulton suggests this means not just a rich appreciation of cultural differences, but seeing
ourselves the way others see us. Canada and the U.S. have long-standing ties with Western educated leaders in Pakistan, for example, but do we understand the 76 million people in Pakistan under the age of 20 who will determine its future? Governments invest disproportionately less in the tools they need to understand cultures than in the tools they use to engage and influence cultures. This means investing more in penetrating cultural analysis, hard languages, polling, focus groups, data bases – and “knowing what we know.” Often the “understanding” we need can be found in NGOs or in other governments willing to share their knowledge, or in our own stovepiped government agencies where shared knowledge is an after thought at best.

- **A second dimension is to set policy priorities.** Before coming to Ottawa, I looked at “The New Diplomacy” section in *Canada’s International Policy Statement*, a document provided by your embassy in Washington. “The international strategy presented here relies on the capacity for choice,” it says. “We cannot be everywhere and do everything while also making a difference on the issues that mean most to Canadians.” Exactly! Mapping public diplomacy means choosing high priority policies. We can not and should not try to do it all.

In the U.S. there is also another problem. Whether it was fighting communism during the Cold War or a myopic focus on terrorism and Iraq today, the U.S. with some justice often stands accused of preoccupation with one thing at a time. Diplomats must steer a course between doing too much and not enough. The policy buffet – nuclear proliferation; China’s projection of hard and soft power; famine, disease, and genocide in Africa; global pandemics; trade; emerging scientific, environmental, and energy issues -- may not exceed our appetite but it surely exceeds our capacities. The challenge for diplomats and policymakers is to make choices and set priorities.

- **The third dimension is to use messages, messengers, channels, instruments, and other public diplomacy means tailored to situations and linked to comprehension of cultures and policy choices.** What works in Brazil may not work in Japan.
Leveraging partnerships with NGOs may be just the thing in South Africa. It is less likely to work in North Korea. Investment in the near and mid-term may detract from investments in the long term. And vice versa. If public diplomacy is about ideas and people, then we must think about the ideas and engage the people that will shape tomorrow’s world as well as today’s. At the same time, we cannot ignore the challenges of news cycles and the next 18 months.

This strategic approach to public diplomacy is tough work.

Ambassadors and embassies – and their political leaders in headquarters – have critical roles to play in mapping these three interlocking dimensions. Public diplomats must be at the table – and have something useful to say – when policy options and priorities are considered. Their roles are critical as well when policies are implemented. The question of who is a public diplomat is also important. Bright lines between career paths for political, commercial, economic, and public diplomacy officers matter less in today’s world. Resistant organizational cultures and legacy career paths require strong leadership and building rewards and penalties into the career systems of diplomacy.

This mapping process means more than *coordination*. Indeed, I have argued that the case against mere coordination is strong. In the U.S. coordination has never worked on a sustained basis. This is not to say that cooperation, teamwork, and information sharing are not desirable. They are. But it also means that *strategic direction* is required. In public diplomacy there must be authority to direct and task, to assign operational responsibilities to departments and embassies (but not to manage the execution of 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. At home national experiences will differ. Whether strategic direction is best placed in the foreign ministry or the President or Prime Minister’s office should be considered with care. In the United States, I have questioned whether the “quarterback” for today’s multi-agency, multi-issue
public diplomacy should be placed over time in a sub-cabinet position in the Department of State. Only rarely do Under Secretaries advise President’s directly. Cabinet departments typically do not think and act in interagency terms.

In his new book, *Illicit*, which looks at how criminal enterprises are hijacking the global economy, Moises Naim, the editor of the journal *Foreign Policy*, borrows from the language of computers and talks about the need to defragment government. He writes:

> 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.8

Arguably Naim’s defragmenting logic has relevance for how we map public diplomacy to interests, values, and policies.

*A second proposal for transforming public diplomacy is that governments must do more to marshal private sector creativity.* If there is a common thread in the 30 some reports on U.S. public diplomacy issued in the past four years, it is that government must leverage private sector talents and creativity.

One approach being considered in the U.S., on which I would welcome your views, is to create a government-funded, non-profit center to tap into knowledge and skills in the academic, business, media, and NGO communities. This center would not duplicate effective government activities. It would provide a focal point – related to but outside government – to harness expertise on foreign cultures and languages, education and training, media creativity and skills, consultative services, 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 data bases, and technology development . . .
- **Evaluation:** Studies of changes in attitudes and public diplomacy metrics . . .

It has become widely accepted that much of what governments need to know exists outside government. We can take this another step and say that much of what public diplomacy needs to be successful lies outside government. Studies by the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and — counter intuitively — the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board make the case forcefully for a private sector focus in public diplomacy. Academic and research communities offer untapped resources for education, training, area and language expertise, planning and consultative services. The commercial sector has a competitive edge in multi-media production, opinion and media surveys, information technologies, program evaluation, and measuring communication impact.

Effective partnerships between 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 and media training programs. But arguably we need to take this collaboration to a whole new level. Whether it is developing video games that support public diplomacy objectives or analysis of web-based networks that present threats and opportunities, or understanding cultures in Central Asia, we need to leverage more effectively the knowledge in our universities, the skills of NGOs, and the imagination of our media industries.
Conclusion

I have suggested two ways to think about public diplomacy: (1) as an instrument of statecraft in time frames ranging from news cycles to generations, and (2) as an instrument with multiple components requiring new approaches and strategies.

I have also offered two proposals for how we transform public diplomacy: (1) we should map public diplomacy to interests and values in three interlocking dimensions linked to strategic direction at embassy and national levels, and (2) we should do much more to marshal private sector creativity.

Americans and Canadians are working hard to transform their diplomacy because, as Canada's International Policy Statement convincingly states, “the issues that dominate the global agenda have been transformed.” These issues “importantly have proven too complex to be treated by the traditional ‘silos’ of government.” We need, your Statement continues, to “create a new framework for international policy making that engages multiple departments and levels of government” -- and that leverages our citizens and societies “through the vehicle of public diplomacy.” When I read this, I was struck with how much we have in common in thinking about the transformation of diplomacy. But I suspect we also have contrasting perspectives.

I thank you for the opportunity to meet with you. In the time that remains, I’d welcome a conversation -- especially on issues where we may differ or on challenges that all us may have underestimated or overlooked.

# # #
ENDNOTES

1 Allan Gotlieb, *I’ll be with you in a minute, Mr. Ambassador: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington*, (University of Toronto Press, 1991).


7 *Canada’s International Policy Statement*, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2005, p. 28. [www.international.gc.ca](http://www.international.gc.ca)