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Public Diplomacy: Reinvigorating Our Strategic Communications

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During a visit to Russia last year, I was asked to speak at our America Center in Moscow. There was a large crowd and I was a bit uncertain how I would be received. I launched into my background--growing up in Santa Barbara, California, my education and so on. It soon became apparent during my remarks that I was receiving an exceedingly warm reception--everything I said seemed to be interesting and delightful and I left quite pleased with my success. The next day I was interviewed by a reporter from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and, after a lengthy interview he hesitated and said, "Please, I must ask you one more question on behalf of our listeners. We understand you are from Santa Barbara--is everything really as wonderful as it is in the soap opera?"

I have the feeling that just being from Santa Barbara doesn't carry quite the same cache here as it does in Russia and Eastern Europe where the soap opera is still in reruns. But it is a good reminder of the power of television and of the challenges we face in strategic communications today.

Many view the strategic communications of the Cold War as the solution to our public diplomacy challenges today. But, unfortunately, many of the solutions that were valid then, fall short now. Yes, of course, there are similarities between the two struggles. Then, as now, we fought an implacable enemy opposed to our entire liberal value system. Then, as now, we talk about existential struggles between enemies with opposite belief systems.

But there are important differences.

During the Cold War we fought an enemy that used power to exercise totalitarian control. Communism contained its people behind an iron curtain and controlled information within it. The populations in the Soviet Union and other communist nations were either kept in the dark about what was happening outside or had imperfect information.

All we needed to do was get facts through the censors' wall. Our truths, in the words of the Founding Fathers, were "self-evident." Censorship was a tool in the battle of ideas then; breaking through it defined success.



It is hard to believe that less than 20 years ago half of Europe and about half mankind lived behind such censors' walls. Today only small isolated pockets like Cuba and North Korea remain.

In the new battle of ideas, there is censorship to be circumvented, to be sure. Iran is an example that comes to mind but Radio Farda and VOA TV (which reaches 1 in 5 Iranians each week) circumvent the censorship--also via the internet, with great success.

But in most of the rest of the world, what we are doing is fighting for space in people's ears and, more importantly, their minds. We are competing against not just al Jazeera, but the Internet and iPods, Nintendo Wii, Xbox Playstation, film, videos and, of course, soap operas.

And we're fighting al Qaeda, which uses all forms of media to get its message out. As the President's nominee to replace Karen Hughes, Jim Glassman, said in his testimony, al Qaeda "disseminates its messages through mass media and the Internet, and our job is not merely to explain and advocate American values and policies but to counter the disturbingly persuasive ideology of the enemy."

Today, we are actually not doing so badly. But the title of this event--"**RE**-invigorating America's public diplomacy" is a good reminder that most people don't know what we have **already** done to invigorate public diplomacy. In addition to **doing** public diplomacy, we also need to **communicate** what we are doing on public diplomacy. **We need to do more PD on our PD!**

Do they know about the media hubs in Brussels, Dubai and London I wondered? Do they know about the TV studio that is now completed and about the first broadcast that took place last week? Do they know about the 30% increase in U.S. Government officials on television? Or the emphasis on "getting visual"? Or the increasing number, as Edward R. Murrow described them, of "take offs" where public diplomacy is not only **on** the plane, but **in** the co-pilot seat along with policy?

For those who **are** aware, I am delighted. For those who are not, I am grateful to Ed Feulner, Helle Dale, and the Heritage Foundation for inviting me to join this distinguished panel and share what we have been doing on the public diplomacy front in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs.

A top priority of the Bush Administration's second term has been to elevate the role of public diplomacy and to fuse it with policy. The first step was to appoint a high-level communicator as Under Secretary--Karen Hughes--and create dual-hatted Deputy Assistant Secretaries (DAS) in each geographic Bureau who would report to both their Assistant Secretary on the policy side and the Under Secretary on the public diplomacy side. The importance of public diplomacy was underscored by having a full-time, front office Deputy Assistant Secretary to oversee public diplomacy throughout the entire Bureau working side by side with the policy makers.

As a law professor who had been living in London for over 15 years teaching international law at Pepperdine University, I had done a significant amount of media and understood the necessity and challenges inherent in communicating complex issues in the new media environment. I was therefore delighted to be parachuted back into America for the fused policy and public diplomacy position--and ecstatic not to have to grade any law exams. Further integration took place when we embedded our Public Diplomacy Desk Officers into each of their geographic regions. Rather than sitting together in the public diplomacy office being on the receiving end of their region's distribution list and appearing for their staff meetings, they are now **a part** of the policy team doing public diplomacy right there from the take-off.

For example, our Balkans Public Diplomacy Desk Officer plays an indispensable role on Kosovo. She is working side-by-side with the office director and the Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for that policy portfolio. She is able to respond on guidance

taskings for the daily State Department briefings and recommend media strategies because she has the minute-by-minute knowledge of what is happening on the policy side. Likewise our Public Diplomacy Desk Officer for Poland and the Czech Republic was able to pick up the missile defense issues and develop communications strategies to be used interagency including creating an intranet website by which to keep everyone informed.

Strategic communications that use public diplomacy to promote our policies cannot take place when the two are estranged. It is hard to do when you are in a separate office, on a different floor--when you are in a separate office **in a different building** I would say it is well nigh impossible.

We can't be there on the take-off--if we are at different airports.

It is for this reason that I am alarmed when I hear calls for the revival of USIA which was not only in a separate location from the State Department; it had a separate email and computer system! Rather than merging policy and public diplomacy, the reporting line created confusion between the Ambassador at post and the officer's USIA superior in Washington. The CSIS Commission on Smart Power's report recommends an "autonomous organization" which would be a "quasi-independent entity...responsible for the full range of government public diplomacy initiatives, including those formerly conducted by USIA." This too would pull public diplomacy away from the power base of US foreign policy and diminish its influence.

Although the merger pains of USIA and State are still apparent, it is healing and we are headed in the right direction. These well-intentioned recommendations pull us in exactly the wrong direction.

Public diplomacy is the art of communicating a country's policies, values and culture to other peoples. It is an attempt to explain why we have decided on certain measures, and beyond that, to explain who we are.

But there are two sides to this public diplomacy coin:

One is short-term, the immediate, 24/7 media side where we engage through tv, internet, and radio.

The other is long-term relationship building where we engage through cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, student exchanges and Muslim engagement.

We have **invigorated** our public diplomacy by fusing policy and public diplomacy and creating new tools by which to effectively operate in these two--short-term/long-term frameworks. Our new tools include:

Getting outside of the Washington bubble by listening to the conversation in Europe via the **EUR Early Alert**, a compilation from 11 posts of the key headlines and issues --received by the opening of business in Washington each day.

The **Rapid Response Unit** which follows the top two or three global issues with policy responses each day.

A stream-lined **clearance process to allow Ambassadors** and Embassy staff to respond immediately to domestic media requests. Changing the default position favoring off-the-record print roundtables to more on-the-record print, television and new media.

The creation of a **Media Hub in Brussels** to get us inside the media cycle and to facilitate pan-European communications. For example, we will take advantage of an official visiting Spain for discussions on Cuba by also doing interviews on that topic for media in London, Prague, Budapest or Warsaw. We also have **hubs in Dubai and London**.

A new **TV Studio** that is allowing us to have targeted messaging for specific distribution.

A new **European Media Liaison position** to work with the hubs in identifying interagency voices in Washington for interviews and working interagency on principals who will be going abroad to get media on their schedule.

A new “**Pre-active**” approach to media that anticipates and helps shape stories.

A new **TV and Video Adviser** Position that is helping to transition our posts and websites to using film and video and trainers in Europe to help train individual posts and regions.

Another new position: a **Senior Adviser on Muslim Engagement** whose task is to concentrate on the issues surrounding integration, assimilation, Democracy and Islam. Farah Pandith reaches out to Muslim communities in Europe full-time to talk about America and our respect for all faiths.

And, as mentioned earlier, an emphasis on “Getting Visual” to communicate our message.

And to conclude, it seems appropriate that I end with some *visual* representations of the work that we are doing:

*[For those reading this, you can see public diplomacy-in-action by going to <http://europe.state.gov> and clicking on the **Newsletter: Public Diplomacy in Europe** button in the lower left side. You can get monthly updates of the newsletter by subscribing on the top of the [europe.state](http://europe.state.gov) page.]*

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