

U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Middle East

Lessons Learned from the Charlotte Beers Experience

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"How can a man in a cave outcommunicate the world's leading communications society?"

- U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke

Introduction

Charlotte Beers, former chairperson of advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, and former head of public relations firm, Ogilvy and Mathers, was hired by the Bush administration as the new Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy in the hopes that she could apply her successes in the private sector to the public sector to enhance the U.S. image abroad. Secretary of State Colin Powell selected Beers for the position because he believed the U.S. needed someone who knows how to sell American ideas and values to the world. Charlotte Beers was hired to resuscitate and re-invent “brand U.S.A”.

Immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001, all eyes turned to Charlotte Beers to see how she could change the hearts and minds of people who hate Americans so much that they turn to terrorism. While Beers was actually appointed to the position of Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy on March 29, 2001, it was only after the attacks that she received extensive media attention, was given additional resources, and was expected to wage a public diplomacy front for the war on terrorism. Whether Charlotte Beers’s campaigns succeeded or failed, it is important to recognize that the role she played after September 11 became strikingly different from the job she initially accepted. It is also important to remember that Charlotte Beers was responsible for creating campaigns to convey strategic messages created by the Bush administration. It would be unfair to criticize her campaigns without also criticizing the messages behind the campaigns. Only from these starting points can the Charlotte Beers experience be truly examined.

What is Public Diplomacy and How is it Different from Traditional Diplomacy?

Textbooks define traditional diplomacy as the “putting of foreign policies into practice” via “political contact between governments of different nations.”¹ The word diplomacy itself stems from the Greek work diploma, meaning folded paper.² Alan K. Henrikson, notable Professor of Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, makes the point that the word diplomacy, tracing back to its roots, implies a certain level of secrecy.³ Traditional diplomacy was generally done by high level government ministers behind closed doors and only the results were made available to the public. Author and Professor of International Relations, Royce Ammon, refers to traditional diplomacy as “old diplomacy” and says this form of diplomacy was practiced from the Renaissance period until World War I. Following the war, “new diplomacy” emerged relying instead more on newsprint and global television than hand written notes.⁴

The communications revolution has shifted the paradigm of diplomacy. Ammon argues that advances in communications have affected the way diplomacy is conducted in three ways: “first, by displacing traditional methods; second, by increasing the diplomatic influence of non-traditional sectors; and third, by accelerating diplomacy’s pace.”⁵

Today’s modern version of diplomacy, what Ammon calls “telediplomacy,” is characterized by its reliance on real time television. Global television not only defines

¹ Donald Snow and Eugene Brown, *The Contours of Power: An Introduction to Contemporary International Relations* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 486, as found in Royce Ammon, *Global Television and the Shaping of World Politics* (Jefferson, NC; London, 2001), 8.

² *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

³ “Public Diplomacy and U.S. Foreign Policy.” Remarks by Alan K. Henrikson as part of the World Boston Great Decisions Series. Held at the Boston public library. April 20, 2004.

⁴ Royce Ammon, *Global Television and the Shaping of World Politics* (Jefferson, NC; London, 2001), 6.

⁵ Royce Ammon, 7.

the method of diplomacy, it also plays a significant role in shaping policy outcomes.⁶ Secretary of State Powell made this point clearly in remarks he gave at the NetDiplomacy 2001 Conference on September 6, 2001. Addressing an audience of Foreign Service officers from around the world he said, “And I used to tell all of the members of my staff, ‘Remember, when we are out there on television, communing instantaneously around the world, we're talking to five audiences.’”⁷ He identified these five audiences as: the reporters, the American people, 170 capitals around the world, the enemy, and the troops on the ground. Powell’s comment illustrates that today, the public must be considered more than ever before in foreign policy decisions. Traditional diplomacy has been overshadowed by telediplomacy, which is a form of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy acknowledges that foreign public opinion plays a role in foreign policy and seeks to influence these publics.

The founding definition of public diplomacy came from Edmund Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, when the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy was established in 1965. The Fletcher catalogue described public diplomacy as “the role of the press and other media in international affairs, cultivation by governments of public opinion, the non-government interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another, and the impact of these transnational processes on the formulation of policy and the conduct of foreign affairs.”⁸ While this definition accurately describes the major players that influence public opinion around the world, it is too broad and all encompassing. It is true that the public is influenced by the

⁶ Royce Ammon, 6.

⁷ Remarks of Secretary of State Colin Powell at the NetDiplomacy 2001 Conference in Washington, D.C. on September 6, 2001. Accessed April 27, 2004. Available from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/4838.htm>.

⁸ Hans Tuch, *Communicating with the World* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 8.

media, non-governmental actors, and the private sector, however, democratic governments cannot expect to control actors outside the government. Public diplomacy is a government effort therefore a more narrow definition is needed.

Former U.S. Public Affairs Officer, Hans Tuch, provides a more appropriate definition of public diplomacy as “a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about an understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies.”⁹

This definition is in line with the State Department’s view of its public diplomacy role.

The State Department claims it uses public diplomacy and public affairs to:

understand, inform, engage, and influence foreign audiences by reaching out beyond government-to-government relations to establish a foundation of trust upon which specific policy and societal issues can be addressed in a context of informed understanding and mutual respect.”¹⁰

This is consistent with Tuch’s definition by stating it is a government process while also acknowledging that other actors also have a role in influencing foreign publics.

Joseph Nye, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government, simplifies Tuch’s definition by describing public diplomacy as a policy expression of soft power.¹¹ Soft power, Nye states, is the power of getting others to want the outcomes you want; it is the power of attraction. Instead of resorting to threats or physical force, soft power rests on the ability to seduce people into creating certain outcomes.¹² Nye also acknowledges there are a variety of factors that contribute to soft power in addition to government policy including culture, attitudes, and values.

⁹ Tuch, 3.

¹⁰ *Strategic Goal 11: Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs* (accessed April 15, 2004); available from <http://www.state.gov/m/rm/rls/perfplan/2004/20495.htm>.

¹¹ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 18.

¹² Nye, 5-6.

Dimensions of Public Diplomacy

Nye breaks down public diplomacy into three dimensions.¹³ The first dimension is daily communication. At a basic level, this involves being present to offer a country's story to journalists, diplomats, and the media as a whole. This ability to offer "our side of the story" is essential. In addition, the messages conveyed must be seen as credible by the audience and must be consistent with the national position. Strategic communications is the second level of public diplomacy. In order to ensure consistency, a single theme or strategic message must be conveyed by all outlets. Strategic messages are usually conveyed and reinforced through a series of events and messages. In this phase, it is crucial that the message is constant and consistent. Finally, at the heart of public diplomacy lies the third dimension, the development of long term relationships. These relationships are built over long periods of time through exchanges, training exercises, conferences, scholarships, and access to media channels.

In addition to direct government public diplomacy efforts, there is also indirect public diplomacy. The brands and representatives of American companies often are more available to people around the world than government officials.¹⁴ American culture as conveyed by Hollywood, McDonald's, or Tiger Woods can have a significant impact on public opinion. Real time television can also exert an indirect effect on policy. Global television's influence first shapes public opinion, which subsequently influences foreign policy.¹⁵

¹³ Nye, 107-109.

¹⁴ Nye, 114.

¹⁵ Ammon, 143.

The History of Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy has received a lot of academic and media attention in the past few years and especially immediately following September 11, however the concept of public diplomacy is not a recent phenomenon. Public diplomacy has existed and has been used by the U.S. Government to vary degrees since the First World War. In order to put the public diplomacy campaigns following September 11 in context, following is a brief overview of the history of U.S. public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy first came into use during World War I when President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information. The mandate of this organization, called the Creel Committee for its chairman, George Creel, was to make U.S. war aims widely known throughout the world. Wilson was the first President to realize that it was important to consider public opinions in other countries because they could influence the policies of their governments.

During the Cold War, public diplomacy gained significant attention. In the war of ideas, it was seen as essential to win the hearts and minds of people living under communist regimes. In 1950, President Truman launched a public diplomacy campaign aimed at exposing communists to western ideas and values. In his famous “Campaign of Truth” speech, he warned that freedom was being challenged by the forces of “imperialistic communism” and that “this is a struggle, above all else, for the minds of men...this [communist] propaganda can be overcome by truth – presented by newspapers, radio, newsreels, and other sources that the people trust...We must make ourselves heard round the world in a great campaign of truth.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Tuch, 15.

The Voice of America (VOA) was created in February 1942 as a WWII propaganda radio network. It was joined by Radio Liberation and Radio Free Europe. VOA was the official U.S. Government radio channel and was generally targeted at communist countries. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberation, by contrast, were initially financed by the U.S. government in secret. The original missions of Radio Liberation and Radio Free Europe were different from VOA in that they were designed to provide information to “enslaved nations” as though they were domestic stations that could provide information the state prohibited.¹⁷ Today all three, in addition to several other stations, are part of one radio and television network operated overtly by the Board of International Broadcasting and financed through congressional appropriations.

In addition to targeting communist countries, public diplomacy after WWII was also focused on reorienting defeated totalitarian nations toward democracy. This was done through exchanges, libraries, cultural centers, schools, social programs, and universities. The concept of cultural exchanges as a government practice came into existence with the creation of the Division for Cultural Cooperation in the Department of State in 1938 when Cultural Affairs Officers were assigned to some Latin American posts to organize exchange programs. It wasn't until after World War II that the government began to see a bigger role for cultural exchanges. The Fulbright Act of 1946, named for Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas, was created to facilitate exchange opportunities for young people, professionals, trade unionists and artists in the hopes of exposing people in defeated totalitarian countries to freedom and democracy.

The initial law legitimizing public diplomacy was the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, known as the Smith-Mundt Act. The purpose of

¹⁷ Tuch, 15.

the act was to “promote the better understanding of the United States among people of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations.” The act provided for the “preparation and dissemination abroad, of information about the United States, its people and its policies through press, publications, radio, motion pictures, and other information media, and through information centers and instructors abroad.”¹⁸

The United States Information Agency (USIA) was created in August 1953. According to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, USIA’s mission was “to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace.”¹⁹ The USIA was prohibited by law from using any of its resources domestically as the lawmakers in Washington wanted to make sure these tools would never be used to influence the U.S. public. Theodore Streibert, the first director of the USIA came from the advertising industry. The tone of the organization’s messages was often simplistic and propagandistic reflecting advertising trends of the time.²⁰

Public diplomacy gained significant respect and acknowledgement during the Kennedy years. With world renowned journalist Edward R. Murrow, as its director, the USIA commanded a high level of acceptance within the administration. Murrow thought of public diplomacy as an art of conveying messages from the loudspeaker to the mind of

¹⁸ Public Law 584 – 79th Congress (Chapter 723 – 2nd Session), S 638 as found in Tuch, 17.

¹⁹ Statement by the President, The White House, 28 Oct. 1953; and “Directive Approved by the President for the Guidance of the United States Information Agency,” 28 Oct 1953, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States – Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Record Service (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1960) 728. as found in Tuch, 21.

²⁰ Tuch, 21.

the foreign listener or from the book into the consciousness of a foreign reader. He believed in the importance of personal relationships and personal communication.

In 1963, the mission of the USIA was altered significantly. The mission was changed from informing foreign audiences and explaining U.S. objectives to “help[ing] achieve United States foreign policy objectives by... influencing public attitudes in other nations.” The new policy also included a responsibility of “advising the President, his representatives abroad, and the various departments and agencies on the implications of foreign opinion for present and contemplated United States policies, programs and official statements.”²¹

Under the Carter Administration the idea of mutuality was introduced. Instead of focusing on the dissemination of information, resources were allocated to listening to foreign publics and learning about their concerns. The role of public diplomacy was redefined under Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1977. Five main tasks were outlined in President Carter’s memorandum of March 13 to USIA Director John Reinhardt:

1. To encourage, aid and sponsor the broadest possible exchange of people and ideas between our country and other nations
2. To give foreign peoples the best possible understanding of our policies and our intentions, and sufficient information about American society and culture to comprehend why we have chosen certain policies over others
3. To help insure that our government adequately understands foreign public opinion and culture for policy making purposes, and to assist individual Americans and institutions in learning about other nations and their cultures
4. To assist in the development and execution of comprehensive national policies on international communications, designed to allow and encourage the maximum flow of information and ideas among the peoples of the world...
5. To... conduct negotiations on cultural exchanges with other governments, aware that the most effective sharing of culture, ideas and information

²¹ Memorandum for the Director, United States Information Agency, from John F. Kennedy, The White House, 25 Jan 1963. As found in Tuch 27,

comes between individual people rather than through formal acts of government.

Additionally, the plan stated, “the Agency will undertake no... covert, manipulative or propagandistic [activities]... [It] can assume... that a great and free society is its own best witness, and can put its faith in the power of ideas.”²²

Under President Reagan, the agency changed dramatically. A former actor, Reagan understood the importance of image. Charles Z. Wick, Reagan’s USIA Director focused the resources of the USIA on building the image of the president around the world in the fight against communism. Wick was able to significantly increase the budget of the agency under Reagan. One of his big projects was the initiation of new cultural exchange programs between the U.S. and industrialized nations including Reagan’s International Youth Exchange Program, launched in 1982. Wick will also always be remembered for creating and championing television as a tool for public diplomacy. He argued it was necessary to get the American side of the story out in Western Europe where Europeans were allegedly getting distorted versions of the American story.

With the end of the Cold War, many questioned the continued need for public diplomacy. If the enemy was defeated, it seemed a waste to continue to spend funds to preach to the choir. Under President Clinton, funds for public diplomacy were cut and exchanges programs were scaled back. Between 1995 and 2001 alone, academic and

²² The White House Memorandum for Director, International Communication Agency, 13 March 1978. As found in Tuch, 32.

cultural exchanges dropped from 45,000 to 29,000 a year.²³ In 1998 the USIA was merged with the State Department in an effort to cut costs and reduce redundancy.

Why Public Opinion Matters

History shows that public diplomacy has been used to varying degrees but doesn't answer why governments chose to spend money on public diplomacy efforts in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of foreign publics and why soft power matters. Monroe Price argues that states compete in a "market of loyalties" for the hearts and minds of citizens. Price explains that states have an interest in political stability and require citizens to "buy in" to their messages in order to maintain control. The "sellers," or the people who control the means of communication, are those for whom myths and dreams and history can be converted into power and the "buyers" are recipients of the information who "pay" for the identities with "loyalty" and sense of identity.²⁴ Public diplomacy is a government's attempt to sell its values and messages in the hopes that it will pay off by creating stability.

The public opinions of foreign countries matter to the U.S. as it battles terrorism. Without buy-in from Arab and Muslim publics, U.S. security will continue to be threatened. Countries that foster and feed anti-American rhetoric provide the environment for terrorists to conduct their work. New generations of children are being raised believing that America really is the enemy. Unless the U.S. acts to change these perceptions, it will continue to face image and security problems well into the future. In addition, in order to prevent future terrorist attacks, it is essential that the U.S. have

²³ U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. "Building America's Public Diplomacy Through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources." U.S. Dept of State. 2002.

²⁴ Monroe Price, *Media and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002), 32.

partners to work with to identify and destroy terrorist threats. Countries with publics that demonstrate strong anti-American feelings will find their governments less likely to support the U.S. war on terrorism.

While those engaged in public diplomacy efforts already realized the importance of maintaining healthy relationships and dialogues across cultures, the immediacy was lost when the Cold War ended. It wasn't until September 11, that the U.S. Government placed a renewed emphasis on public diplomacy and reaching out to foreign publics. Discussions of improving the U.S. image abroad were being held in the late 1990s but it took the attacks of September 11 to move the government to create policy and allocate additional resources to this end.

Public Opinion of the U.S. in the Middle East

Public opinion of the U.S. has reached dangerously low levels around the world in recent years. The Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Reports in 2002 and 2003 showed global decreases from the year before in favorable opinions of the U.S. worldwide.²⁵ Dislike of the U.S. was especially apparent in Muslim countries. In Indonesia, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, less than 15% of Muslims surveyed responded that they had a favorable opinion of the U.S. in 2003. Each of these countries represented a decline from 2002.

The Council of Foreign Relations sponsored Independent Task force identified several root causes of anti-Americanism in the world. First, they identify structural factors. Because the U.S. is the world's sole superpower, other countries resent this

²⁵ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. "Pew Global Attitudes Project: Views of a changing World." June 2003. Accessed April 29, 2004. Available at <http://people-press.org/>

power and envy its position. The report identifies this type of resentment as being particularly apparent in countries that are struggling economically. Second, culture is a factor. Many around the world perceive U.S. practices such as the death penalty and U.S. culture as portrayed in movies as offensive and appalling. The ubiquity of American products, advertisements, and television adds fuel to this fire by placing cultural values with which the public does not agree in their countries.

Third, many foreigners object to U.S. policy which they perceive as unbalanced, unjust, and hypocritical. Specific policies, such as the U.S. policy towards Israel and the U.S. backing of authoritarian regimes, stand out as particularly offensive. Along the same lines, U.S. rhetoric is identified as the fifth cause of anti-Americanism. Many see U.S. actions internationally as obstructionist and selfish. From the rejection of the Kyoto Climate Change Protocol to President Bush's use of the phrase "axis of evil" to describe three unique and culturally distinct countries, the U.S. has not gained favor internationally. Finally, the Task Force identified government sponsored media channels that intentionally provoke and encourage anti-American sentiment.²⁶

How to win the hearts and minds – Selling the U.S. Image

Secretary of State Colin Powell understood the importance of public diplomacy and was concerned with improving U.S. communications with the world even before September 11, 2001. In a conference in early September 2001, he introduced Charlotte Beers, former chairperson of ad agency J. Walter Thompson and head of global public

²⁶ Peter Peterson, Chair, "Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating U.S. Public Diplomacy" Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. 2003.

relations powerhouse Ogilvy and Mathers, as the new Under Secretary of Public

Diplomacy saying:

I wanted one of the world's greatest advertising experts, because what are we doing? We're selling. We're selling a product. That product we are selling is democracy. It's the free enterprise system, the American value system. It's a product very much in demand. It's a product that is very much needed. It is our job to be salespersons, and one of the best tools we are going to have is the Internet, web design, NetDiplomacy, all of the things you're working on. It is vital that we do it well. It is vital that we do it right.²⁷

The initial reaction to Charlotte Beer's appointment was skepticism and surprise, as was her initial use of marketing lingo in Washington. Conversations on branding and image had been taking place before September 11, 2001 but they had not yet become policy. Ad Agency MBP DDB's Chairman Chris Powel said that his experience has demonstrated that foreign offices hate marketing jargon. "It's like quoting the business of baked beans and applying it to a country. The foreign office speaks in terms of national reputation."²⁸

Powell was not opposed to applying private sector techniques to the public sector. He wanted to enhance the U.S. brand abroad and encouraged working with people in the private sector who knew how to promote and sell brands. Many notable speakers at the NetDiplomacy 2001 conference also came from the private sector including Steve Hayden, Vice Chairman, Ogilvy & Mathers Worldwide, who spoke about "Brand Stewardship in a Global Marketplace." Colin Powell brought in Charlotte Beers because he believed she could help re-brand the U.S. internationally.

²⁷ Remarks of Secretary of State Colin Powell at NetDiplomacy 2001 conference in Washington, D.C., September 6, 2001.

²⁸ "Branding War and Peace." *Brand Strategy*, January 2, 2003, 26.

Branding 101

Philip Kotler, author of several textbooks on marketing and branding states, “brands are more than just names and symbols. Brands represent consumers’ perceptions and feelings about a product and its performance – everything the product or service means to consumers.”²⁹ Secretary of State Powell was interested in the perceptions and feelings people around the world had toward the U.S. Products, countries and brands each possess identities, or ways in which the companies or countries want them to be perceived. Each one develops an image of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people hold about the product or country. The image is subjective and is the way the public perceives the good or country.³⁰

If public diplomacy at its core is about winning the hearts and minds of people around the world, it would seem that branding the U.S. to form positive perceptions and feelings would be a logical move. Brands and public diplomacy are both based on conveying information and maintaining relationships. Kotler argues that “the fundamental asset underlying brand equity is customer equity – the value of the customer relationships that the brand creates.”³¹ Public diplomacy is also about creating and fostering relationships of understanding.

Maintaining a strong brand requires strong brand management. A brand becomes powerful through effective positioning and continuous communication with consumers. In marketing, brands are often introduced by advertising to create name recognition, brand knowledge, and, ideally, brand preference. Once the brand is established, it must

²⁹ Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong, *Principles of Marketing* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2004), 291.

³⁰ Eugene Jaffe and Israel Nebenzahl, *National Image and Competitive Advantage* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business Press, 2001), 13.

³¹ Kotler and Armstrong, 292.

be maintained to ensure it continues to communicate the right message to the consumer. Brand maintenance is focused on ensuring that the consumer's experience with the product meets the expectations they formed from the advertising. Brand maintenance requires monitoring a wide range of contacts and "touch points" the consumer has with the brand, including advertising, personal experience with the brand, word of mouth, personal interactions with company employees, call centers, and company web pages. The company must put as much care into managing these touch points as it does into producing its ads. This suggests that brand management cannot only be left to brand managers. It is also important for companies to audit their brands' strengths and weaknesses so they make sure they are excelling at delivering the benefits that consumers truly value.³²

Brand USA - Charlotte Beers

Charlotte Beers knew the importance of advertising, controlling touch points, and the power of word of mouth. Few would disagree that she was very adept at brand management of products but managing a country brand was another story entirely. Charlotte Beers confessed that her new job would be "the most sophisticated brand assignment I have ever had. It is almost as though we have to redefine what America is."³³ With no previous government experience, Charlotte Beers made the switch from the private to the public sector with the intentions of enhancing the U.S. image abroad.

³² Kotler and Armstrong, 297.

³³ Joshua Muravchik, "Hearts, Minds, and the War Against Terror," *Ethnic News*, May 1, 2002, 25.

Applying concepts of branding to the public sector, however, was not an idea introduced to the State Department by Charlotte Beers. In fact, branding was initially introduced when the USIA was merged with the State Department in 1998³⁴. At that point, State Department officials began to talk of the need for branding the State Department and ensuring the Department was communicating a consistent message and appearance to the world.

September 11 – A New Focus on Public Diplomacy

The appointment of Charlotte Beers to the newly created position of Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy went relatively unnoticed until September 11, 2001. Immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon, questions were asked about the perpetrators of the attacks. “Why Do They Hate Us?” read the cover of the *Christian Science Monitor* two weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001³⁵. The government realized immediately that public diplomacy was still needed.

At a U.S House of Representatives Hearing entitled “the Message is America: Rethinking U.S. Public Diplomacy,” The Honorable Henry Hyde opened the hearing saying “It is by now obvious to most observers that the role of public diplomacy in our foreign policy has been too long neglected.”³⁶ While this was obvious two months after September 11, this was far from obvious for most outside of the Foreign Service just two

³⁴Comments of Arabic Media Outreach Coordinator at the Office of Strategic Communications Center, Baghdad, May 1, 2004.

³⁵Peter Ford. “Why Do They Hate Us?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2001. Accessed April 6, 2004. Available from LexisNexis.

³⁶Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *The Message is America: Rethinking Public Diplomacy: Hearings before the Committee on International Relations*. 107th Cong., 2nd sess., November 14, 2001. Remarks of the Honorable Henry Hyde.

moths earlier. He went on to say that public diplomacy should “enlist the populations of the world into a common cause and to convince them that the goals that they seek for themselves—freedom, security and prosperity—are the same as those the United States seeks.”³⁷ Throughout the hearing, representatives spoke of the need to learn from those in the private sector how to convey messages of public diplomacy. All five featured speakers at the hearing came from the private sector with experience in public relations, television, or print journalism.

In a speech given to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush posed the very same question, “why do they hate us?”³⁸ In his answer we find one of the core reasons for the failure of U.S. public diplomacy under Charlotte Beers. The Bush team began public diplomacy outreach campaigns believing that people around the world hate America because they don’t understand us. With this as the foundation, Charlotte Beers began to implement campaigns of information dissemination.

Representative Tom Lantos foreshadowed the problems Charlotte Beers would face when he blamed public diplomacy for anti-American attitudes in the Middle East. One month after September 11, in a hearing on the role of public diplomacy in fighting terrorism, he stated, “And I think the fundamental answer truly lies in our appalling failure to conduct public diplomacy with the seriousness and with the resources that this very important function desperately calls for.”³⁹ He echoed the feelings of many

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Congress, Joint Session, *Presidential Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*. 107th Cong., 2nd sess, September 20, 2001. Remarks of President George W. Bush.

³⁹ Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *The Role of public Diplomacy in Support of the Anti-Terrorism Campaign: Hearings before the Committee on International Relations*. 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 10, 2001. Remarks of the Honorable Tom Lantos.

Americans following the attacks who viewed the attacks as the result of failed of public diplomacy and looked to the administration for answers.

On October 10, 2001, only eight days after she was officially sworn in to the post of Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy, Charlotte Beers outlined four key points she and the Bush administration designated to communicate to the world. Addressing the House Committee on International Relations, she said:

And this is our message to the world: The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were not attacks on America but were attacks on the world. This is not a war against Islam. The war is against terrorists and those who support and harbor them. America supports the Afghan people, which is why President Bush is providing \$320 million in humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. All nations must band together to eliminate the scourge of international terrorism.⁴⁰

Public Diplomacy Efforts under Charlotte Beers

With these four points in mind, Charlotte Beers was to create a series of public diplomacy campaigns. After September 11, additional resources were made available to her and policies were put in place to allow public diplomacy the means to take action. Congressmen Tom Lantos and Henry Hyde struggled to answer why the media abroad portrayed the U.S. as an evil force. They sponsored House Resolution 3969, known as the Freedom Promotion Act of 2002, which instructed the U.S. Secretary of State to “make public diplomacy an integral component in the planning and execution of United States foreign policy” and to establish “fully capable multimedia programming and distribution including the capacity to acquire, produce audio and video feeds and Internet streaming to foreign news organizations.” In addition to sponsoring cultural exchanges

⁴⁰ Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *The Role of Public Diplomacy in Support of the Anti-Terrorism Campaign: Hearings before the Committee on International Relations*. 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 10 2001. Remarks of the Honorable Charlotte Beers.

and programs to train foreign journalists, the bill set aside \$135 million for broadcasting pro-US television programs into the Middle East.⁴¹

Charlotte Beers was responsible for several campaigns intended to meet the four goals outlined by the Bush administration. To communicate the first message, that the terrorist attacks were on the world, not just the U.S., Charlotte Beers created a pamphlet entitled “the Network of Terrorism.” The pamphlet featured photos of September 11 and negative comments about Al Qaeda and the Taliban. It also provided a map of Al Qaeda’s global terrorist network showing 45 countries in which they have operated.⁴² The pamphlet, created in 36 languages, was the most widely distributed State Department document ever produced and was intended to send a message to the world that terrorism is a serious global problem requiring a global response.

In 2002, Beers unveiled a television program entitled “Shared Values.” This \$15 million dollar campaign was intended to communicate the second message: this is not a war on Islam. The commercial length programs, which were aired in December 2002, showed Muslim Americans going about their daily lives as firefighters, bakers, and doctors. Actors in the program talked of tolerance and religious freedom in lines including, “In my neighborhood all the non-Muslims, I see that they care a lot about family values just as much as I do. I didn’t quite see any prejudice anywhere in my neighborhood after September 11.”⁴³ Several countries in the Middle East refused to air the programs entirely.

⁴¹ Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 10.

⁴² See Appendix A

⁴³ Office of the Under Secretary For Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. “Public Diplomacy After September 11: Shared Values Collage Transcript.” Accessed April 30, 2004. Available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/obs/vid/16555.htm>.

The “Muslim Life in America” campaign was another public diplomacy effort intended to demonstrate to the Muslim world that Muslims living in America are able to practice their religion as they please and that diversity is welcome here. This pamphlet included pictures of ordinary Muslim Americans going about their daily lives, demographics of Muslim participation in American society, and an article on Muslim rap. Beers hoped the campaign would dispel myth in the Muslim world that women in America could not wear veils or practice their religion as freely as they did in their home country.⁴⁴

One of the most famous and lasting efforts made by Beers was to re-brand the existing Voice of America channel in Arabic into Radio Sawa. Based in Dubai, Radio Sawa broadcasts into the Middle East on AM, FM, medium wave and satellite radio. The station is geared toward reaching younger, non-elite Arabs by mixing U.S. and local pop music. Interspersed between the music, is U.S. news and commentary. Radio Sawa received \$35 million from the US government in 2003. According to newspapers, reaction has been mixed in the 18-30 target audience. In Qatar the programming is popular whereas in Jordan, where the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has soured public opinion of the US, the reaction is “yes” to the music “no” to the programming. Some papers even report that taxi drivers play the music and turn off the programming.⁴⁵

Other campaigns under Beers included an expansion of the American corners programs. American corners are American-style libraries and cultural zones in embassies intended to foster an understanding of American life and culture. Currently, 150

⁴⁴ “Muslim Life in America” Office of International Information Programs. (accessed April 28, 2004); available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/>.

⁴⁵ Jane Perlez, “Threats and Responses: Public Relations; U.S. Is Trying to Market Itself to Young Suspicious Arabs” *The New York Times* September 6, 2002. Accessed March 31, 2004. available from LexisNexis.

American corners are functioning or planned. She also prompted the development of the American Room, a multi-media room intended to appeal to young people between 16 and 25.

Finally, Beers was also involved in planning some longer term exchange programs including the Partnership for Learning (P4L) and Youth Exchange and Study (YES) initiatives funded at \$61 million and focused more on youth in the Muslim world, specifically, non traditional, non elite often female and non English speaking youth. Both programs advertise themselves on their websites as being “in direct support of the war on terror.”⁴⁶

Failed Attempts

Charlotte Beers was hired to rebrand the U.S. and improve its image abroad but she failed for seven main reasons. First, her mental map of the region and her audience was inadequate. Beers made a classic marketing mistake by failing to truly understand her audience. Starting from the erroneous and naive assumption that “they hate us because they don’t understand us” she created a series of primarily one way information campaigns. Her “Shared Values” and “Mosques of America” campaigns may have made some headway in terms of opening a few eyes to the reality of Muslim life in America but they ignored the underlying reasons behind anti-American sentiment.⁴⁷ American media and movies are extremely effective instruments for conveying American values, culture, and visions of life in America. The problem was not, as the Bush administration

⁴⁶“Key Initiative: Partnerships for Learning (P4L)” State Department Website. Accessed May 1, 2004. Available from www.state.gov/education/P4L/.

⁴⁷ Edward Djerjian. *Changing Minds Winning Peace Report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World*. Submitted to the Committee on Appropriations, Oct 2003.

asserted, that Arabs and Muslims lacked information, the problem was that they objected to American foreign policy. The “Changing Minds Winning Peace” report suggests Arabs and Muslims admire the universal values for which the U.S. stands for, as well as its technology, entrepreneurial zeal, and the achievements of individual Americans. The panel defines the challenge of public diplomacy as reconciling the difference in perceived American values and the reality of American foreign policies.⁴⁸

Public diplomacy efforts under Beers did almost nothing to explain and justify American foreign policy in the region and in ignoring to do so failed to address the basic needs of the audience. Professor Lee McKnight, former head of the Edward R. Murrow Center at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy made this point well, saying, “No amount of media management will matter if the U.S. is not also seen – and actually working on – ways to resolve some of the intractable conflicts which have served to feed fanaticism and anti-U.S. sentiment throughout many Arabic and Islamic nations.”⁴⁹

Rudy Jafar, a first year Lebanese student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy voiced this well when he wrote in an article for Fletcher’s online journal, the Fletcher Leger:

So far, as a recent student in America, I have only had wonderful experiences in this country. I, as an Arab who fundamentally disagrees with this country's foreign policies, have been treated with the utmost respect and professionalism by every single American I have met....But, to the other, dark side of America, I have also been a witness. In the Middle East and elsewhere, I have seen, together with hundreds of millions of people, the destructive nature of its foreign agenda.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Djerjian. *Changing Minds Winning Peace Report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World*. Submitted to the Committee on Appropriations, Oct 2003.

⁴⁹ Amol Sharma, “U.S. Hones in on Propaganda War,” *Earth Times*, October 13, 2001. Available from www.earthtimes.org. As found in Rampton, 13.

⁵⁰ Rudy Jafar, “The Myth of Iraqi Freedom,” *The Fletcher Leger*, April 27, 2004. Accessed April 27, 2004.

It is to this audience, educated and cosmopolitan Arabs, to whom Charlotte Beers's message should have resonated, yet Jafar had the following to say about the U.S. public diplomacy campaigns in the Middle East:

Last year, the U.S. government tried to counter anti-U.S. hatred in the Arab/Muslim world by a series of TV commercials relating the good life of Muslims in America. After spending millions of dollars on this enterprise, the government realized their complete inefficacy and pulled them off the air. Muslims and Arabs know that America is a great place to live; they just do not understand why they are oppressed by her and her clients on their land.⁵¹

A second reason for the failure of U.S. public diplomacy under Charlotte Beers was that, in marketing terms, the "brand experience" did not match with the "brand message." If, broadly defined, the brand message was freedom, tolerance and democracy, the brand message was not consistent with the experience of publics in the Middle East who witness U.S. occupation of countries, bombing, and support for undemocratic regimes. When a brand message consistently agrees with and reinforces the brand experience, a relationship can be built. If, on the other hand, the brand experience is not consistent with the message, it will backfire and lead to mistrust of the brand. Brands are valuable to consumers because they project the promise of meeting expectations. People go to Starbucks instead of the local coffee shop because they know what they are getting and feel confident that Starbucks will meet their expectations. When a customer's expectations are not met at Starbucks, they will lose trust in the company and be less likely to trust them again. In the same way, when the U.S. messages of democracy did not mesh with U.S. policies in support of authoritarian regimes, credibility was lost.

⁵¹ Rudy Jafar.

Thirdly, a successful branding campaign requires a high level of control over the dissemination of the message. When a large company unveils a new product, they start with a massive advertising campaign and then ensure that all points of contact the consumer has with the product reinforce the same message. "In the corporate world," writes Naomi Klein, author of anti-branding book *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, "once a 'brand identity' is settled upon, it is enforced with military precision throughout a company's operations. ... At its core, branding is about rigorously controlled one-way messages, sent out in their glossiest form, then sealed off from those who would turn corporate monologue into social dialogue." This approach may work for corporations, Klein says, but not for governments. "When companies try to implement global image consistency, they look like generic franchises. But when governments do the same, they can look distinctly authoritarian."⁵²

As a functioning democracy, The U.S. government simply cannot wield this level of control over a message nor should it strive to do so. In marketing, controlling the message includes not only managing internal touch points, it also means removing external messages that could tarnish or dilute the brand message and otherwise affect the brand experience. Not only is it unrealistic to expect the U.S. to be able to manage all touch points that would affect the message, there is also no way they could rid themselves of the external messages from sources such as influential religious leaders or Al Jazeera.

Fourth, a fatal mistake Beers made in her public diplomacy attempts was in directly applying modern advertising techniques that came off as shallow to an already skeptical public. Beers failed to learn from her predecessors and repeated the experience

⁵² Naomi Klein, "America is Not a Hamburger." *The Guardian*, March 14, 2002. Accessed April 27, 2004. Available from LexisNexis.

of the USIA's first director, Theodore Streibert, whose campaigns, also employing advertising techniques of the time, failed to resonate with publics and were seen as nothing more than state sponsored propaganda. The key to reaching audiences in the Middle East, according to the Arabic Media Outreach Coordinator at the Office of Strategic Communications Center in Baghdad, is to send smaller messages more often, rather than focusing on one time, flashy Madison Avenue campaigns.⁵³

Fifth, as Charlotte Beers pointed out, the U.S. is a tough brand assignment. Countries are not toothpaste. They are complex entities that mean many things to many people. In the same breath, one can extol the virtues of the American education system and denounce its foreign policies. Instead of capitalizing on this as a strength, branding seeks to send out and reinforce a homogeneous message. When applied to public diplomacy this not only can be ineffective, it can actually backfire and turn more people away from a country they see as hypocritical or inconsistent.

Sixth, funding was not sufficient for the task. While resources were increased after September 11, they remained inadequate for the task. The State Department currently spends \$600 million on public diplomacy, \$540 million is spent by the Broadcasting Board of Governors to run international radio and television stations such as Voice of America, and \$100 million is spent on the Middle East Partnership, a program intended to expand economic, political, and educational opportunity to women. The report found that only \$150 million of the \$600 million was spent in Muslim countries and of that amount, the vast majority went to exchange programs and the salaries of public affairs officers and other employees involved in public diplomacy in

⁵³ Comments of Arabic Media Outreach Coordinator at the Office of Strategic Communications Center, Baghdad, May 1, 2004.

embassies. Only \$25 million was spent on public diplomacy outreach programs.⁵⁴ In total, U.S. public diplomacy spending totaled slightly over 1 billion in 2002. In contrast, the defense budget for the same year was 347 billion.⁵⁵ Resource allocation illustrates the level of importance governments attach to initiatives and policies. Our military proudly exists as a testament to the value our government attaches to military strength. Until our government decides to attach a higher level of importance to public diplomacy, we cannot expect the results we desperately need nor can we expect to understand or attract the hearts and minds we have lost already.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, public diplomacy is not a short term solution. Even the most effective campaigns cannot be expected to change opinions in months. Charlotte Beers, herself, recognized this when she said, “while some issues do require instant turnaround, we have to be mindful that we are in a long-lived engagement to reach new audiences in different ways.”⁵⁶ Public diplomacy needs to be regarded as a long term commitment to building and maintaining relationships between countries. Of the three layers of public diplomacy laid out by Nye, only the first has any implications for the short term and even that is really only intended to produce long term relationships. As Simon Anholt, a leading expert in the field of place branding, writes:

because a country’s brand is usually highly complex and highly robust and built up over centuries, it is relatively hard to alter or damage it except through major political, social, or economic upheaval. Like a supertanker, a country’s brand image takes miles to pick up speed, but equally, takes miles to slow down again, change directions, or stop.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Nye, 124.

⁵⁶ Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *The Role of Public Diplomacy in Support of the Anti-Terrorism Campaign: Hearings before the Committee on International Relations*. 107th Cong., 2nd sess., October 10 2001. Remarks of the Honorable Charlotte Beers.

⁵⁷ Simon Anholt, “The Nation as Brand.” *The Economic Times*, India, January 2, 2002. Accessed April 27, 2004. Available from http://www.placebrands.net/DreamHC/Download/placebrands_EconomicTimes_India_TheNationAsBrand.PDF.

Re-branding a country and hoping to win the hearts and minds of people both take significantly longer than the American public and its leaders had hoped. While funds were increased after September 11, no amount of money and no campaign of information could be expected to immediately alter attitudes and values.

Public diplomacy must be seen as a long term tool, not a tool of crisis management. Regarding September 11 as a failure of public diplomacy or judging public diplomacy as useless because it did not immediately change opinions is the wrong way to assess the value of public diplomacy. The warning issued in the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim report should be heeded. They adeptly caution that “the U.S. Government needs to view public diplomacy – just as it views state to state diplomacy and national security – in a long term perspective. Transformed public diplomacy can make America safer, but it must be sustained for decades, not stopped and started as moods change in the world.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ “Changing Minds Winning Peace” Report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World. October 1, 2003.

Conclusion

Only two years have passed since Charlotte Beers resigned as Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy so it might be slightly premature to judge the effectiveness of her campaigns in the long term, however, we can assess her efforts in the short term. Independent surveys of global attitudes declined during the time she served as Under Secretary.⁵⁹ In addition, in 2003, the Bush administration proposed a net decrease in State Department spending on public diplomacy despite the universally recognized need to improve the country's image abroad.⁶⁰ The general consensus in Washington and in the press is that public diplomacy efforts under Beers failed. The blame however, should not be placed entirely on the shoulders of Charlotte Beers. The campaigns created under Beers were based on flawed assumptions that led to shallow information campaigns instead of in depth explanations of U.S. foreign policy.

The fact that Charlotte Beers's experience turned many in Washington away from the tools of public relations and marketing will have negative consequences into the future as Washington backs away from these seemingly superficial tools and strategies. While America is certainly not a hamburger, it can still stand to learn from the private sector. There is much from marketing and advertising that could apply to public diplomacy when applied appropriately. Market research, understanding target audiences, and the ability to appeal to young people are skills many U.S. companies have mastered and if applied correctly, could benefit the public sector tremendously.

⁵⁹ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. "Pew Global Attitudes Project: Views of a changing World." June 2003. Accessed April 29, 2004. Available at <http://people-press.org/>.

⁶⁰ Robert Satloff, "How to Win Friends and Influence Arabs. Rethinking Public Diplomacy in the Middle East." *The Weekly Standard*, August 18, 2003. Accessed March 3, 2004. Available from LexisNexis.

The tragedy of the Beers experience is not in the failure of the individual campaigns. The tragedy is that because of her failed campaigns, the administration and the U.S. public has lost confidence in public diplomacy as a tool for fighting terrorism and preventing conflict. Public diplomacy continues to be seen as a crisis management tool instead of a crucial investment in future peace and stability. Public diplomacy is a tool which, if given adequate resources and allowed to flourish, could produce peaceful long term solutions to many international problems. The failure of information campaigns under Beers has now made it harder for public diplomacy officials to gain the recognition and resources they need and deserve. It is now more crucial than ever before to invest in public diplomacy, not for the short term, but for the long term, yet public diplomacy has failed to win the hearts and minds of lawmakers to make this a reality.

Appendix A – Page 12 of the “Network of Terrorism” Brochure

Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda

"Before These Remarks, Bin Laden Was Innocent. However, Now He Is Condemned"
Faisal Salman, As-Safir, Lebanon, October 9, 2001

"Misuse of the Palestinian Issue"
Al-Ayyam, West Bank, October 9, 2001

"Bin Laden Disturbs Us; However, He Doesn't Convince Us"
La Vie Economique, Morocco, October 12, 2001

"Al Qaeda Is Not Authorized to Speak on Behalf of Muslims"
Akhbar Al-Arab, United Arab Emirates, October 15, 2001

"A Confession Is the Most Conclusive Piece of Evidence"
Al-Ra'i, Jordan, October 9, 2001

Countries Where al Qaeda Has Operated



Albania
Algeria
Afghanistan
Azerbaijan
Australia
Austria
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belgium
Bosnia
Egypt
Eritrea
France
Germany
India

Iran
Ireland
Italy
Jordan
Kenya
Kosovo
Lebanon
Libya
Malaysia
Mauritania
Netherlands
Pakistan
Philippines
Qatar
Russia

Saudi Arabia
Somalia
South Africa
Sudan
Switzerland
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Tunisia
Turkey
Uganda
United Arab Emirates
United Kingdom
United States
Uzbekistan
Yemen

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