

**The Benefits of Public Diplomacy and Exchange Programs**  
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Public diplomacy abroad and international visitor programs at home share a serious intent – both underscore the virtues of American values and the well meaning of our global engagement. During the Cold War, these initiatives were considered critical. They underpinned diplomatic and security efforts to contain a totalitarian competitor and to build a stable international system. Great resources and talent were expended. Mistakes were made. But overall, the results were beneficial.

Regrettably, a strategic miscalculation opened the post-Cold War chapter in the story of public diplomacy and citizen engagement. The United States cut back funds and personnel devoted to information and exchange services. They seemed less necessary after the disappearance of the Soviet threat and Communist competition. The world was expected to be more peaceful, less conflicted. The value of democracy and market economics would need less promotional push. Overall, American involvement in the world could be reduced

Such expectations unraveled amidst the low level conflicts of the nineteen nineties and crumbled altogether on September 11, 2001. Instead of peace and tranquility, ethnic conflicts, international terrorism, proliferating weapons of mass destruction beset us. And anti-Americanism flourishes, running from resentment in Europe to rage in the Middle East.

This startling turn of events has bred a sense of inadequacy, not only about homeland defense, but also about public diplomacy and related efforts. Our neglected information assets have been slow to respond to gross distortions of American actions and purposes. Top government officials, over several administrations, have paid too little attention to foreign journalists, Language skills, needed in new areas of concern, have been found wanting.

Funds for broadcasts and international exchange programs have been trimmed and are targets for further cuts. Senator Lugar has pointed out that for every dollar spent on the military, only seven cents is spent on diplomacy and only a fraction of that goes for public diplomacy.

America is paying a price, both in attracting the support of other countries and in sustaining a constructive view of our nation. Most unsettling, is the rejection of our professed values and good intents, particularly among the young in troubled regions. According to the Pew Research Center, favorability ratings of America have dropped since 2000 in 19 of 27 countries for which data is available.

Clearly, there is an urgent need to rejuvenate public diplomacy in all of its parts. It should begin with the understanding that public diplomacy must be an integral part of foreign policy and not an under-funded afterthought.

## II

But before recommending the expenditure of more energy and resources on public diplomacy, exchange programs and the like, one should answer the question, "why bother?" After all, the United States is the sole superpower. It can employ coercion and need rely on persuasion less than others. But there is a catch. Eventually, a bully on the world stage leads other to coalesce in resistance. Achieving one's goals then becomes harder despite overwhelming military power.

On the constructive side of the ledger, effective public diplomacy can help gain allies for policies and values that we believe will make the world safer, freer and more prosperous. Support is particularly needed today to drain the swamp of disaffection and the outburst of terrorism that are so prevalent in the Middle East and other troubled regions.

## III

If there is value in public diplomacy there is also a limit on what it can accomplish.

As a lone superpower, the United States will be resented, feared and suspected in varying degrees around the globe no matter how it behaves. Secondly, the United States has global interests in countering serious threats to peace and stability that are bound to conflict with the intentions and desires of some international players.

A part of the public diplomacy challenge is to better explain why the United States does what it does even though many will continue to differ. Some hostility can be offset but not eradicated. All differences are not bridgeable and cannot be dissolved by empathetic public relations. A certain amount of flack goes with being a great power.

## IV

Since 9/11, some bolstering of information resources has taken place. But outside critics think much more ought to be done. They call for additional funding and greater coordination of public diplomacy efforts undertaken by various government agencies and private sector organizations. And some think a separate agency, like the USIA of old, should be reconstituted.

Of initiatives taken, the most noticeable is the creation of a 24-hour White House communications center to explain US policy to the rest of the world. The State Department also has raised its efforts, including beefing up research and public-opinion polling. And the US Broadcasting Board of Governors has launched a Middle East radio initiative and plans a television counterpart.

Increased resources are also available for supporting media and civil societies in troubled countries. In the long run, strengthening indigenous voices in the media and social sectors of developing countries is a vital supplement to public diplomacy. Independent voices, emanating from within these societies, comprise an essential building block for progressive governance, both political and economic.

For such initiatives, non-governmental organizations, supported by private and government funds, are key tools. A good example is the work of The International Center for Journalists, of which I am chairman and therefore a tad shy of total objectivity. Nevertheless, I believe that ICFJ's impressive performance over eighteen years underscores the importance of people to people contact. ICFJ has sent veteran American journalists and media managers into more than 80 countries to train some 15,000 persons in the skills of independent, fact-based journalism. It has also brought foreign journalists to this country to learn our ways and absorb our culture and values while advancing their skills. Several other programs, administered by ICFJ, do the reverse. They send American journalists overseas, not to train, but to learn about the world.

These programs have the constructive use of journalism at their core. But I think they illustrate some of the virtues of all exchange and visitor initiatives.

Listen to what some of our visiting foreign journalists have said about their experiences:

Federico Arellano of Argentina said of his internship in Washington: "my mind is bursting with sights and sounds I won't forget in a lifetime. I learned to know and understand another culture. I changed."

Freia Peters of Germany, after working at the New York Daily News, said, "Being in this incredible city I was watching all those different cultures living together. My neighbors were Armenians. The taxi drivers were Afghan. I lived with a Chinese woman. I met French people. They took me to an Ethiopian restaurant. My colleague from Haiti introduced me to her Hungarian friend. And the Russian hairdresser in Coney Island gave me a good price. The multicultural way of life was one of the things in America that I discovered a new enthusiasm for."

Mile Bosnjakovski of Macedonia, after completing a six-week broadcast program, reflected on lessons learned. "I realize that back home in Macedonia it is going to be hard to practice independent journalism, but I'm also sure like never before that this is my future. I will fight with every legal journalist 'weapon' against any political or economic pressure that will be a threat to journalism in my country."

Many of the journalists that go through ICFJ-administered programs move up the career ladder to become influential observers and commentators in their societies. And after returning home, many stay in touch with their American hosts.

These characteristics can be duplicated in many other exchange and visitor programs. Just think of the power of having your eyes opened and your mind and heart changed through personal interaction.

## V

One of the frustrating limits to public diplomacy stems from flourishing anti-Americanism. If allowed to fester uncontested, it can adversely affect our ability to play a constructive role in the world. Anti-Americanism has a variety of roots --- resentment over predominant power; disagreement with policy; irritation with style. In some cases, it is manufactured by autocratic regimes to divert their subjects who cannot express anger over their depressed lot in life and their corrupt and inefficient governments. Still, a respect for American values of freedom and democracy persists, as well as admiration for the country's free market prosperity and dynamic popular culture. That the two thoughts can exist in parallel --- dislike of American policy and envy of its values and riches-- is succinctly summarized in the title of a lecture given in New York several years ago by an Indian politician: "Yankee Go Home, But Take Me With You."

John Waterbury, president of the American University of Beirut, presented a fuller treatment of this sentiment in a recent Foreign Affairs article. He wrote, "America is admired for its transparent politics, independent judiciary, adherence to due process, encouragement of economic opportunity and rapid social mobility. Perhaps no single institutional feature of American dominance is more admired than its system of higher education. Even radical Islamists are not shy about sending their children to be educated in the United States." This extensive admiration of American institutions therefore presents an under-exploited opportunity for a rejuvenated public diplomacy.

Let me conclude with a large caveat. A more effective public diplomacy will not be able to justify policy flaws and hypocrisies to the outside world. It would be a mistake to think the only obstacle is misconception. Many people in other countries understand US foreign policy pretty well. They simply do not like the substance, sometimes for well-founded reasons and other times for ill-founded ones.

The Bush administration came into office signaling an awareness of a need to reconsider both policy and behavior, with the emphasis on treading the world stage humbly, while listening and consulting with others. Those guidelines remain good advice that would make the task of public diplomacy a lot easier and the rewards of exchanges and visitor programs a lot fuller.