America's Public Diplomacy Deficit

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America's Public Diplomacy Deficit

--Purposeful communication with the world matters more than ever in the post-Cold War world -- if the foreign affairs community can learn to think strategically about public diplomacy.

As the world adjusted in the 1860s to the invention of the telegraph, a British diplomat was heard to remark that the new era of instantaneous international communication heralded the demise of the ambassadorial role What, after all, would be the role of envoys when governments could communicate directly? As an analysis of governments' needs of the day, the remark was reasonable enough And yet, it could not have been further off the mark Far from shrinking, America's diplomatic establishment a century later has mushroomed, with embassies in key capitals numbering their employees in the several hundreds What that 19th-century diplomat had failed to anticipate was the fact that the telegraph -- and the communications revolution it presaged -- was the beginning of a revolution in the scope and intensity of how nations interact As a result, the diplomat's role a century later may have changed -- becoming simultaneously more mundane and more complex -- but it has hardly gone away On the contrary, our forebears a century ago would be startled to learn how central the diplomat's skills have become to managing inter-related economies [1]

Today, however, American foreign affairs strategists risk repeating the same analytical error about public diplomacy as our forebears made about diplomacy itself, this time by failing to foresee how the changing nature of international relations now places as much importance on the capacity to persuade as the power to coerce As a result, both the budget and the mission of public diplomacy -- defined here as the ways and means the government uses to

communicate both specific policy objectives and larger national values to foreign publics -- have been under fire since the end of the Cold War The Cato Institute led the attack, proclaiming in 1994 that, "the war between the ideologies is over Public diplomacy is largely irrelevant to the kinds of challenges now facing the United States "[2] Cato went on to add that, "if it is important to publicize American perspectives on such issues, private media outlets are more than adequate a government-run propaganda apparatus is unnecessary "[3] Although the Cato Institute report did not attract widespread public attention, its perspectives were echoed in Congressional efforts to greatly reduce spending for public diplomacy initiatives and to force the consolidation of a shrunken USIA into the State Department Furthermore, although the administration did eventually oppose consolidation, it did not appear to disagree with the central premise of the Republicans public diplomacy is no longer so important in the post-cold war world

As a result, the debate on public diplomacy in Washington has focused more on institutional reorganization than on broader, conceptual questions There has been no real discussion of the validity of the assumptions behind the Cato Institute's recommendations Is it true, for example, that there are no longer any ideological conflicts in the world? With the demise of communism, do all regimes subscribe to Western liberal-democratic ideology? Are international disputes today purely power conflicts in which the need to present one's own point of view is of little importance?

This essay will argue that the Cato approach represents a fundamental misunderstanding of both the nature of the new world order and the kinds of tools that American foreign policy needs today Instead, this essay will offer an alternative framework for understanding the world order, resting on the following premises

--The nature of world leadership in the post-Cold war era is evolving in a manner that places as much importance on our ability to persuade as to coerce

--The foreign affairs community, still wedded to the importance of power projection, has been slow to understand the range of issues where well-conceived public diplomacy can be effective

--Public diplomacy's capacity to reduce tensions and build international support for American objectives can be a powerful tool in the post-Cold War environment,

--However, we must learn how to think about public diplomacy in strategic terms

These are more than academic issues, for they run to the heart of how we perceive threats to our interests and how we allocate scarce resources Indeed, despite the absence of a clear threat to national survival, the central dilemma for the national security strategist today is the growing imbalance between the number of American commitments around the world and our ability (and willingness) to pay for them For the military, that imbalance is becoming particularly acute -- with troop levels down 40 percent since 1989 and the deployment tempo up 300 percent, the military is operating at a frenetic pace that is not sustainable over time The result, senior officers worry, will be a large number of early retirements among the experienced soldiers that the services so desperately need to keep

Unfortunately, it is clear that the objectives-resources imbalance will not be resolved anytime soon Instability in the world is likely to increase before it declines, while the military budget is unlikely to climb substantially How, therefore, do we square the circle? The obvious alternative is to work closely with our allies, both to promote world economic growth and share the security burden, and try harder in the developing world to prevent conflict before it arises

Furthermore, the complexity of transnational issues virtually demands a global approach That, in fact, is the thrust of the Clinton administration's policy of enlargement and engagement Engagement, however, demands first and foremost communication If we want the cooperation of others, we must first talk to them, then convince them If we want to reduce the demands for military intervention in the future, we must find a way either to reduce conflict or enlist the cooperation of others in doing so In short, our need to communicate with the world is increasing even as our budgets for public diplomacy are decreasing

Why, then, has so little attention been paid to public diplomacy in recent years? One key difficulty is that many in the foreign affairs community don't understand very well what well-conceived public diplomacy can do For some, public diplomacy is little more than high school exchanges and scholarships for foreigners to study in the US pleasant little programs that may win us brownie points in heaven, but are not very relevant to national security strategizing For others, the concept of influencing overseas publics brings to mind Tokyo Rose a hard-edged attempt to psychologically wear down an opponent by freely interspersing truth and falsehood From this perspective, public diplomacy may be occasionally useful, but always distasteful

The most recent trend, particularly in vogue among future war visionaries, has been to fold public diplomacy into "information warfare", a concept that posits that American superiority in the *technology of information delivery* will enable it to dominate what people are thinking about on virtually any subject, anytime, anywhere As one information theorist writes, "when images are transmitted instantaneously worldwide actively using the power of information will significantly enhance our ability to maintain peace, expand dialogue and understanding, encourage the process of democratization, lessen tensions, inhibit proliferation, contain conflict or end it as

rapidly as possible and accelerate the re-establishment of stability and peace "[4] This is a tall order indeed -- but is it realistic? Such vast claims rest on the assumption that the major hurdle to communication is technical -- that once information is transmitted to (or conversely withheld from) a subject, it will be absorbed, understood and acted upon in the way that you originally intended

In fact, although technology may create the capability, it fails to consider why overseas audiences would *want to listen* After all, the unique aspect of public diplomacy among the instruments of national power is that it must be perceived as *a dialogue of mutual benefit* If a neighbor masses military forces along your border, you ignore him at your peril, an envoy bearing unpleasant tidings may be received unpleasantly, but received he will be Public diplomacy, however, requires "two to tango" -- if the message is inarticulate, culturally-offensive, or just irrelevant, it will simply be ignored

To public diplomacy professionals, therefore, the confidence placed on the power of information technology is misplaced It fails to understand how people process information, and just as importantly, it represents a fundamental misunderstanding of what governments are trying to accomplish when they communicate with foreign publics Public diplomacy programs are rarely intended to provide facts alone -- such information is generally available elsewhere -- but rather to promote understanding Whether explaining trade policies to skeptical Japanese journalists, the Iraqi sanctions to an angry Middle East public, or American commitment to Bosnia to a hostile Belgrade audience, the goal is always to provide context, cut through cultural barriers, and establish, if not agreement, at least the mutual understanding that can make a continued dialogue possible

Furthermore, even those who accept the need for public advocacy on issues of immediate import frequently fail to appreciate the fact that the best public diplomacy rests on a foundation of long-term relationships The ability to explain American policy will go for naught if the key opinion-leaders in a given country will not receive you It is precisely the role of the long-term tools of public diplomacy -- exchanges, libraries, books and cultural programs -- to create the deep ties that make it possible to effectively advocate American positions on specific problems

The historical case against public diplomacy

Clearly, however, public diplomacy has never been totally accepted as an instrument of national power by a large segment of the foreign affairs community One reason is that our historical understanding of how nations interact is based on the realist/neo-realist theory of international relations Realism teaches that all nations are bound to compete with each other in an incessant pursuit of relative power, prestige, and survival Consequently, international relations are always a function of power, regardless of what political, cultural or ideological creeds nations might otherwise hold in common The realist school -- which has had a powerful influence on American foreign policy thinking -- thus had little patience for public diplomacy Ideas, after all, were simply not relevant to a power politics equation [5]

For national security strategists whose philosophical framework is based on realist history, therefore, it is hard to take public diplomacy seriously For them, it is either propaganda or just "do-goodism", in neither case relevant to a realistic perspective of the way the world works Even those who have come to accept the utility of public diplomacy in principle, rarely think to incorporate it into their basic conceptions of national strategy

The problem with realism the changing nature of wealth and power in the new world order.

Realism, however, fails in several ways to explain how nations interact today To begin with, its depiction of nations as hostile competitors does not take into account how the globalization of the economy has transformed the very concept of national interest While balance-of-power strategists were preoccupied with the beginning of the Cold War, very important changes were taking place in the nature of economic realities The most important of these changes was the steady progression, beginning in the 1940s, of the American and British-led effort to replace protectionism with a new approach a world trading system based on open markets, the legalization of trading rules, and the joint management of trade through newly-established multi-lateral institutions These principles were enshrined in the Atlantic Charter, a long-forgotten document that, notes John Ikenberry, was based on "the most basic conviction that the closed autarkic regions that had contributed to the world-wide depression and split the globe into competing blocs must be broken up and replaced by an open, nondiscriminatory economic system "[6] The second major change of the post-World War II years was the rapid shift in the developed world to wealth creation based on knowledge and technology rather than on land and population As land became less valuable than technology and knowledge, developed states lost interest in territorial acquisition As Richard Rosecrance writes in the July issue of Foreign Affairs, "Wars of aggression [lose their impact when] the taking of real estate does not result in the acquisition of knowledge, and aggressors cannot seize needed capital "[7] As a result, Rosecrance argues, developed nations -- the nations with the greatest military power potential -- are precisely the nations with the least incentive for using it While an Iraq may see

potential gains in land acquisition, "developed nations would rather plumb the world market than acquire territory "[8]

Third, the rapid evolution of trade from a series of small regional systems to a single global market not only added to efficiency, it also reduced the strategic value of physically controlling the sources of raw materials Even World War II, despite the passions it engendered, was at root fueled by a drive by Germany and Japan to secure new sources of land and natural resources In 1997, Japan can buy cheaply the oil supplies it once sought to conquer at great cost, Germany can now freely invest in Central European countries it once tried to annex

Thus, the transformation in the nature of wealth creation and the American-led institutionalization of international relations, combined with the increasing convergence in political values among Western nations, created a powerful impetus for an explosion in world trade Over time, this became a self-regenerating process -- the new institutions provided a degree of regularity, legality and predictability in trade relations that led to rapid expansion in trade and growth in economic prosperity Increased trade in turn demanded expansion of institutional frameworks, which once again fostered more trade By the mid-1990s this process has advanced so far that much of the world, led by the developed Western nations, is so intricately tied together in a web of formal and informal relationships that the very concept of national sovereignty has been affected

In sum, the pursuit of national interest in an interdependent world frequently requires co-optation rather than coercion With prosperity more a function of knowledge than land, of the quality rather than the quantity of population, the incentive to become a traditional hegemon is greatly reduced It is no accident that America has been the leading proponents of such multi-

lateral institutions as NATO, the GATT, and APEC -- multi-lateral solutions allow us to share the burden of maintaining world order

Not everyone gets to play: the Third World dilemma

A second challenge to our understanding of the post-Cold War order is the growing evidence that Western-inspired political and economic reform is on the verge of collapse in many countries, both in the traditional Third World as well as in the old Communist bloc Where once we believed that the defeat of Communism was also a victory for democracy and capitalism, it is now clear that the former promised nothing about the latter In retrospect, this should not have been surprising both market economies and political pluralism are the most institutionally-complex societies ever devised In many respects, they resemble massively-parallel processing supercomputers -- millions of decisions are made every second, each independent but each made within an agreed upon framework and subject to the same norms In society, these frameworks and norms become institutions and laws -- when they work correctly, pluralistic societies are the most efficient and successful the world has ever known

Unfortunately, many of the developing countries that so recently abandoned central planning got only half the recipe right As the Peruvian writer Vargas Llosa has written, in the Third World, "reformers are confusing private enterprise with free market capitalism [and] focusing on macroeconomic management without considering institutional frameworks "[9] As a result, reform and development efforts have failed to deliver on their promise in many parts of not only the Third World, but the transitioning Communist bloc as well Instead of growth and prosperity, these states have been plagued by corruption, the channeling of national resources to a small elite, and growing repression as regimes attempt to counter growing popular dissatisfaction

Notes Llosa, when the people see the country's richest men benefiting from state-granted privileges, they "see little reason to bless a reform process that has left them impoverished and disenfranchised "[10]

Such grass roots disenchantment, however, has more than economic consequences for the West As publics come to perceive the Western reform process as benefiting only a venal elite, they inevitably turn their anger against not only their rulers but Western ideals -- and in the end the West itself A telling example of this process comes from a recent USIA focus group study in the Ukraine, in which the respondents not only equated private enterprise with theft, but suspected the West of using economic reform to strip the country of its natural wealth [11] Left untended, such popular misunderstanding does not augur well for future East-West relations

Greater contact does not mean greater understanding

A third reason for the rising potential of public diplomacy is the fact that world economic integration greatly multiplies human contact -- and contact means opportunity for friction Indeed, one of the central misconceptions about the role of public diplomacy is that it loses importance as private sector interaction increases On the contrary, the political history of nations such as Canada, Belgium, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia makes clear that when peoples with different languages, cultural baggage and competing economic interests are thrown into greater contact, the results can be explosive

International integration can be just as troublesome, even among nations that share general political and cultural values For example, the final stages of the Uruguay Round negotiations engendered enormous passions, becoming headline news in much of the Western world as various interest groups fought for advantage The proliferation of interests was not the only obstacle to

the final GATT agreement, however No less important was the xenophobia that characterized media coverage in each country of the treaty's progress toward signature An observer watching US, French and Japanese coverage of the Uruguay Round, for example, would have had difficulty recognizing that these three media were talking about the same negotiations Not only did national media portray the key issues in fundamentally different terms, but they made only the feeblest of attempts to present external points of view The "expert commentators" for this historic international initiative remained resolutely national -- and largely nationalistic It was not surprising, therefore, that many Japanese perceived the Round as a surreptitious Western attack on its sacred rice market, while many French believed that America's principal goal was to crush French cultural defenses in order to promote the export of Hollywood film

Nor did the much-discussed emergence of the "international" media do much to promote a common understanding of the issues It is true that CNN can be found in hotel rooms throughout the world -- but that fact will be of comfort only to those who follow the stock market in real time or desire eyewitness accounts of the world's latest natural disaster If one is searching for information about the progress of the market economy in Russia, the pros and cons of promoting human rights in China, the value of surrendering national sovereignty to the WTO, the case for NATO enlargement in Europe or almost any other issue of concern to world politics today, it will not be found on CNN or any other news medium that professes to be international The discussion of policy issues and the business of opinion-molding will certainly be influenced by ideas in the international arena, but the actual process is, and will remain, decidedly local

The difficulty of defining national interest

What the foregoing analysis suggests is that it is very difficult for nations to decide just what their national interest should be -- and therein lies another opportunity to exploit effective public diplomacy Realism theory notwithstanding, history shows that national interest is not immutable, but rather the product of the varying perceptions of those in power Witness the 180 degree policy changes with the coming to power of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the mullahs in Iran, and even Willy Brandt in Germany In each case, it was not the situation of the nation that had changed, but rather the fact that different parties and interest groups interpreted national interest very differently In pluralist countries, the competition of forces within a country, each with its own perspective and stake in the outcome, is even more complex In protecting its rice market, for example, is Japan defending a true "national interest", or merely responding to the political clout of a small group of aging farmers?

If, therefore, a constant competition exists to determine what national interest will be, it follows that adroit US public diplomacy can impact another government's choice of policies, and even eventually weaken that government's ability to pursue policies contrary to our own That is in fact just what America did with radio broadcasting and exchanges in Eastern Europe during the Cold War the Eastern European public did not view their interests in same way as did the leadership, and we exploited that gap to our advantage

Conversely, the failure to understand how internal forces will shape foreign policy can dramatically reduce our ability to achieve our own goals One recent example of the failure to sell a policy abroad was USTR's campaign to open the Japan auto market in 1995 Though the negotiations could have been couched in terms of offering benefits to Japanese consumers -- an

argument to which the Japanese public had been receptive in the past, the negotiations were instead billed as an American demand to end "unfair" Japanese business practices Though no doubt popular in the short-term with American voters, that tactic not surprisingly aroused strong xenophobic emotions in Japan, making it impossible for Tokyo to give ground, even if it had wished to The Japanese government, meanwhile, cleverly found common ground with import auto dealers in America, who argued vociferously the Japanese case for "free markets" In the end, USTR was forced to walk away with considerably less than it had asked for The key to that result, however, was that the Americans had been mauled on the field of public diplomacy before they even got to the negotiating table What this example suggests, therefore, is that it is not enough to believe that the US has right on its side -- in an environment where coercion is not an option, it is critical to devise strategies that seek common ground

In sum, the above analysis implies that the critical role that economic integration now plays in economic growth gives states a powerful incentive to cooperate rather than confront Indeed, the paradox of wealth creation today is that it is very difficult to achieve prosperity today without being integrated into the international trade system, yet once integrated, there are enormous disincentives to take any action that would harm the system For example, Japan and Germany today have the technological prowess to create new, regional spheres of influence, but the integration of their economies into the larger world makes such a choice prohibitively costly

At the same time, it is clear that nations face a number of imposing obstacles in their quest to cooperate governments are subject to conflicting pressures from internal interest groups, publics in different countries perceive issues in different ways, and the media, left to its own devices, is far more likely to be xenophobic rather than internationalist in outlook Finally, the

growing failure of many Second and Third World nations to master the intricacies of political pluralism and economic growth has set the stage for future world instability as well

In short, despite its success during the past half century in ensuring world prosperity, the future of an Atlantic Charter-based order is by no means assured Managing both our trade relationships and common security problems will not be easy for the developed nations -- in the absence of a supreme authority, they will inevitably be riven by disagreements over what to do, how and when to act, and who should be in charge In effect, the world has developed the equivalent of a state-level civil society, but without a world-government entity to serve as both final arbiter and ultimate enforcer If America does not wish to play forever the role of world policeman -- and it seems clear that it has neither the will nor the resources to do so -- it must build coalitions and find non-confrontational ways to diffuse conflicts and solve regional crises To do so, it will be more dependent than ever before on its skill in explaining policies to publics abroad

Looking over the horizon: understanding the uses of public diplomacy

To be sure, policy-makers are not always insensitive to the use of public diplomacy's toolbox When they do so, however, it naturally is on those occasions where spirited public advocacy can advance overseas support for immediate US policy objectives The exposure of the Soviet shootdown of a Korean airliner and radio broadcasts into China at the time of Tianmen square are the type of public diplomacy tools that tend to win high-level recognition Far less appreciated are the tools of patient, long-term communication the academic who studies in the US and then returns to his home country to teach American government, the centers and libraries that provide critical sources of information in the Third World, and, most importantly, the public

affairs professional who spends years in a country, preparing the foundation of public understanding that can be instrumental in making government-to-government communications more effective These are the tools that, if effectively designed, clearly linked to achievable national objectives, and pursued over time, constitute the most effective utilization of public diplomacy resources The following section will suggest several arenas where a long-term public diplomacy perspective would be a particularly valuable contribution to a national security strategy

1. Managing friction with allies

As the example of the auto-parts negotiations makes clear, some of the most difficult international conflicts that the US faces today have their roots neither in ideology nor in pure power competition Instead, they are the outgrowth of our very success in creating a world more governed by legalized norms Inevitably, we come into conflict with other developed nations -- nations with whom we have no ideological conflict -- but who do not accept our interpretation of the rules Recently, for example, American efforts to impose sanctions on foreign firms doing business in Cuba under the Helms-Burton act have been criticized harshly by European elites across the political spectrum Amplified by the media, such conflicts can quickly polarize public opinion and make government-to-government resolution of the problem more difficult In the short term, a well-conceived public diplomacy effort can play a key role in resolving such disputes for example, during the period before INF deployment in Europe in the 1980s, a concerted public diplomacy campaign played a critical role in overcoming broad-based popular opposition to the missiles in Western Europe Without that campaign's success in galvanizing

pro-deployment forces, it is clear that European governments would have had a much more difficult time in winning the necessary political support for deployment

It is important to note here, however, that the INF campaign's success -- and indeed our ability throughout the Cold War to build international coalitions for security policy -- was aided immeasurably by the existence of a group of security experts in those countries who had studied in America under the Fulbright program, continued to maintain contacts with American colleagues who regularly traveled overseas under USG auspices, and may even have paid return visits to America under the USIA visitor program The fact that such relationships were maintained and enhanced for decades created very strong ties that were often key to overcoming distrust and misunderstanding on the public level Thus, the remarkable public diplomacy effort that preceded the INF deployment in the 1980s relied heavily on such relationships

Unfortunately, the steady decrease in resources for targeted, long-term programs suggests that the same degree of opinion-leader relationships will not be available to future generations Targeted academic exchange funding is decreasing, and the USIA's centers and libraries, which frequently acted as the critical go-between in maintaining contacts over the years, are much reduced As the US approaches the task of coalition-building on issues such as NATO-enlargement, and managing trade and financial market friction, therefore, it will have fewer behind-the-scenes relationships to rely on

2. Reducing prospects of instability by fostering an understanding of political and economic pluralism

Much of the scholarship on development now posits that the barriers to growth are primarily conceptual in nature Indeed, as long as the right policies are not in place, foreign

assistance only strengthens repressive and venal regimes -- leading in turn to greater political polarization and instability That process is already much in evidence, not only in Third World failed states such as Zaire, but in old Communist nations such as the Ukraine, Bulgaria and Russia itself Despite the intractability of development problems, public diplomacy's ability to reach larger audiences can have an impact Indeed, over the last ten years, USIA and USAID programs have devoted increasing resources to civil society, rule of law and journalism training programs Such programs can have a major impact for small amounts of money In Madagascar, for example, a small USIA-USAID journalism training program was instrumental in increasing journalistic professionalism to the point where reporters were finally able to analyze and criticize government policy

A public diplomacy-based strategy to foster political pluralism and economic growth, therefore, would shift resources away from project assistance in favor of information, education, and civil society training programs that would help create the basis for good government NGOs such as Transparency International would play a part in such a strategy, but significant increases for libraries, which are almost non-existent in many countries, and exchange programs would be important as well Though this might entail a considerable increase over the minuscule resources presently available, it would still be small change in the overall security budget For example, despite the overwhelming evidence that Eastern Europe publics do not understand how a pluralistic society and economy should work, the USIA has spent only $30 million dollars a year on exchanges *for the entire bloc of CIS countries* [12] Such a low level of investment is neither adequate to ensure the growth of pluralistic values in the region nor proportionate to the enormous stake that the West has in long-term stability there

3 Co-opting future hegemons: the case of China

Is China the next great threat to American security, a threat that the US must plan now to deter and contain in the future? Much of the national security community's debate about future US-Chinese relations makes that assumption its starting point Although such a confrontation may eventually occur, however, it is hardly inevitable A public diplomacy strategy for China, therefore, would begin with the premise that there are also compelling grounds for bilateral cooperation For one thing, China's major preoccupations are internal stability and economic growth -- not an increase in its territorial hegemony More importantly, China realizes that in order to grow it needs certain things it can find only in the West -- not just access to markets, but Western concepts of economic organization, civil society, and the rule of law -- concepts that are the basis of a market economy A public diplomacy-based strategy therefore would build on the foundation of the current policy of engagement -- but vastly increase the pace of exchange It would include, for example, programs to develop democratic governance, civil society, and law concepts at the grass-roots level, military-to-military exchange, and an expanded exchanges program, all of which would target the successor generation Such a public diplomacy initiative would not be a cheap program -- the Chinese population is so large that, to have any effect, the program would have to be given a far larger scale than what we are currently doing But, combined with the steadily increasing integration of the China into the world economy, it offers the prospects of co-opting Chinese to the point where they could eventually no longer distinguish their own interests from those of the larger world

4 **Establishing a dialogue with successor generations**

Because public diplomacy's focus is not just government officials, but the larger public, it can play a valuable role in balancing short-term pressures to maintain friendly relations with authoritarian regimes with the long-term imperative to manage change in a stable manner For example, although the implementation of a strong human rights policy in Latin America in the 1970s was strongly opposed by many in the US foreign policy establishment, the shift was extremely effective from a public diplomacy perspective By forcing American officials away from an exclusive focus on an often-repressive power elite, the human rights policy set the stage for a stable transition to political pluralism in the region

Today, as well, such a long-term perspective could make a useful contribution to our perspective on the Middle East The US has a clear interest in stability of this oil-producing region However, whereas our current policy emphasizes using military force to protect friendly regimes from external threat, the greater long-term threat is likely to be internal instability as opposition grows to regimes that can neither deliver economic growth nor countenance internal dissent Although the US rightly fears instability in the region, it must come to terms with the fact that stability is not the same as the absence of change On the contrary, exploding demographics alone will make change unavoidable, the efforts of friendly regimes to repress dissent is simply an admission of their inability to manage change successfully In this situation, the greatest risk to American interests in the region may be a repeat of the Iranian debacle, in which America allowed itself to become so closely identified with the Shah that relations with the opposition were irrevocably damaged

In the Middle-East, therefore, a public diplomacy-based strategy would recognize that the US has relations with regimes -- but interests with entire nations It would therefore use public diplomacy assets, libraries, exchanges, cultural programs etc to reach far beyond the traditional elite In reality, USIA's centers have often served this function in the past because of the cultural image of USIA centers, those who often are afraid to visit embassy officials are more accessible to USIA personnel A public diplomacy strategy would systematize and expand this work, however, directing USIA to move beyond "opinion gate-keepers" to target younger audiences At the same time, public diplomacy could aggressively promote the rule of law and anti-corruption campaigns in these countries, thereby making a sharp distinction between the practices of local elites and American values It is a delicate task, for it must be undertaken without adding to local instability However, America cannot afford to create another state in the region as viscerally anti-American as Iran is today

5 **Public diplomacy can make the difference between success and failure in military operations other than war**

As the US increasingly attempts to manage crisis interventions through multi-lateral frameworks, the ability to sell foreign publics on the quality of our proposals becomes paramount In the Gulf War, for example, a concerted public diplomacy effort was imperative for convincing skeptical Arab publics that the American-led effort was not anti-Islamic Indeed, in four recent cases of military intervention -- the Gulf War, Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti -- the US clearly had the resources to act alone, but chose not to do so for political reasons the Gulf because the cost of unilateral action to our political standing in the region would have been enormous, in Bosnia

because a unilateral American action would have undermined NATO, and in Somalia and Haiti because the inclusion of a UN peace-keeping force avoided the costs of a long-term American presence in either country

Furthermore, once on the ground in a crisis situation, the tools of public diplomacy are just as critical In Somalia, for example, a 100-man unit, jointly managed by military special forces and USIA, blanketed the local population during the initial deployment Indeed, it was the closure of that mission when the United Nations took charge that allowed the Aideed forces to control the information airwaves the UN lost the public information battle before it lost control of the streets [13] In Bosnia, military units operate a radio station and publish a 125,000-copy weekly newspaper, while USIA officers have initiated a long-term program of civic education and conflict resolution

Unfortunately, US efforts to manage the public affairs aspect of crisis interventions is handicapped by the lack of interagency contact and coordination Part of the problem is simply operational -- because of tight budgets, USIA details to CINCs and other military units have virtually disappeared As a result, there is virtually no coordination at the critical planning stages More serious, however, is the fact that each agency's public diplomacy efforts are driven by internal demands and resources, not by a common public diplomacy strategy If, for example, the bulk of US troops depart next year, bureaucratic considerations suggest the military's media units would leave as well That, however, would create a large hole in the effort to influence public opinion in the region, a hole that USIA does not have the resources to fill

6 **A targeted exchanges program, because it is both two-way and overt, fulfills America's growing need to understand the world far more effectively than a covert intelligence system**

Over the years, USIA exchanges, scholarships and speaker programs have sent hundreds of thousands of Americans overseas as Fulbright researchers, teachers and speakers The information they bring back is invaluable for several reasons they are usually scholars who are particularly skilled in analyzing foreign societies and their work often gives them great entree and insight Indeed, many of the leading scholars on the Third World today began their work under USIA funding Many of the leading American scholars on particular regions of the world began their work under USIA funding Furthermore, experts who participate in speaking tours abroad under USIA auspices frequently have unparalleled opportunities to meet opinion leaders in those countries On key initiatives with our allies, such meetings give invaluable feedback on how American policy is perceived abroad

In contrast, covert intelligence -- which now costs the US in the neighborhood of $30 billion a year -- is not only expensive to collect, but because of its extremely limited distribution, is inherently less useful Indeed, the intelligence community itself acknowledges that the large majority of information it uses is available from public sources Although, covert collection does have its unique roles, the kinds of raw data in which it specializes are only useful to the extent that we understand the cultural and political context -- and exchanges programs are a key foundation of such contextual understanding That is particularly true in the Third World, where private sector funding is weak It is therefore ironic that, at a time when the US government is spending

billions of dollars on peace-keeping and humanitarian aid in politically unstable regions, it is devoting only a tiny fraction of that amount to the exchange programs that could provide the building blocks of long-term stability At a time when management of the world order is becoming ever more complex, the US needs to re-evaluate spending priorities that allocate vast sums to covert intelligence programs that were conceived for the Cold War, but little to the exchange programs that loom so large in our understanding of the larger world

Implications for national security strategists

None of the above is meant to imply that public diplomacy is a panacea As long as there are Saddam Husseins in the world, there will be a need for power projection What the preceding examples are designed to illustrate, however, is that long-term public diplomacy programs can be a far more effective instrument of national policy, and over a far wider range of situations, than the foreign affairs community commonly realizes Furthermore, these examples suggest that there are several concepts critical to understanding how and when public diplomacy can be effective

First of all, it is clear that, even after the demise of the Soviet Union, *ideas are still important* in international relations The end of history is not yet at hand -- although American concepts of political and economic pluralism dominate the intellectual debate today, their influence is already fading in countries where their adoption -- however imperfect -- has not led to material improvement in people's lives The nature of the ideological competition is already clear in the Islamic world -- and it may soon be evident in failing states in other regions as well

Secondly, it is equally clear that America's loss of influence in the ideological sphere will diminish the power and effectiveness of its traditional diplomatic tools as well The perception of ideological primacy can be a powerful one in international affairs Indeed, one reason that the

Soviet Union was perceived to be a superpower for fifty years was the perception in much of the world that Marxism was the wave of the future In essence, the Soviets success in dominating the ideological agenda allowed them to play an otherwise weak strategic hand for a very long time Similarly, the perception that democracy "triumphed" after 1989 has been a powerful motivation for weaker nations to be more friendly to the US, and that in turn makes it easier for the US to build support for its policies In short, efforts to promote American values can be critical to our success in pursuing more immediate foreign policy objectives

Third, because long-term public diplomacy has a low profile, it can be used as a conflict prevention tool long before a given dispute has reached a critical stage For example, the use of NGOs to support grass roots understanding of democracy and the rule of law in China can be couched in terms that are not threatening to the Chinese leadership today Indeed, the Chinese have indicated a strong interest in developing legal frameworks at the local level that would improve the efficiency of their markets Over time, however, our success in creating a grass roots understanding of the principles of accountability would circumscribe the Communist leadership's freedom of action

Fourth, it is important to remember that, because public diplomacy is very low cost, it can be used in situations where no vital American interests may appear to be at stake, but where a later outbreak of violence could create irresistible pressure for a costly military intervention Indeed, one of the ironies of the most expensive American interventions of recent years -- Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda are the major examples -- is that in no case was a vital American interest deemed to be at stake prior to the outbreak of violence If the US is prepared to spend billions of

dollars *after* the onset of fighting, therefore, why not spend a few million dollars on preventive public diplomacy *before* the violence begins?

The importance of thinking strategically

The greatest impediment to using public diplomacy effectively, however, is the difficulty of thinking about it strategically Strategy is the task of determining what national objectives are, what tools should be used, and what resources should be applied to accomplish that end Unfortunately, because national security strategists, for reasons outlined at the beginning of this essay, do not think of public diplomacy in strategic terms, they rarely use it very well For example, a policy of engagement with China would suggest that we think systematically about just what exchange resources, applied to what sectors of Chinese society, and over what time frame, are needed to move China towards a fuller integration with the Western world Instead, however, the US pursues exchanges with China -- as with the rest of the world -- on an ad hoc basis, without a clear linkage to long-term foreign policy interests Similarly, if we are truly worried about the prospects of authoritarianism reasserting itself in Russia, then it would make good strategic sense to attempt to systematically improve the capacity of Russia's political and legal institutions Yet, our efforts in that direction have been feeble and poorly-financed Indeed, despite the widely-recognized obstacles that the former Communist world faces in changing public attitudes about the political and economic pluralism, America is devoting few resources to making that transition easier Instead of thinking innovatively about how to stabilize the current situation, therefore, the foreign affairs community devotes most of its planning resources to worrying about how to deter Russia should it once again become a hostile power

In short, thinking strategically about public diplomacy will require a major paradigm shift in the foreign affairs community It will require that we begin to think through our goals for public diplomacy, decide what our objectives should be, and be prepared to redirect resources to where they will be most needed That is not to imply that there is no rhyme or reason to the present use of public diplomacy resources At the operational level, the US has some of world's best public diplomacy practitioners USIA posts abroad have no parallel in their experience and sophistication in analyzing communications issues, and they are rigorous in planning the use of limited resources And USIA is not alone Both the military and USAID also have active programs, the former to foster increased professionalization and respect for civilian rule, and the latter in a wide array of democratization programs

Unfortunately, the overall effectiveness of these programs is substantially less than the sum of their parts Lacking any systematic link to larger national objectives, military missions may pursue one mission and civilians another with very little coordination More serious problems arise in the making of strategy in Washington on many issues with public diplomacy implications, no one with public diplomacy expertise attends key strategy sessions USTR, for example, has no public diplomacy specialists, nor is one included in the White House meetings where trade issues are debated In short, although the foreign policy community may talk about the importance of engagement and enlargement as a principle, it has no organizational concept for implementing it in practice

What this suggests is that there are in fact costs to *not* thinking strategically about public diplomacy -- costs that will be paid over time in the form of less productive cooperation with allies, more hostility from potential state-competitors, and greater costs as we attempt to contain

international instability One implication of this perspective is that it is important to stop the hemorrhaging in the public diplomacy budget Public diplomacy may be cheap, but it's not free We are not only far from realizing the potential for using public diplomacy capability today, but we are in the process of dismantling large portions of what assets we do have This makes little sense Exchange programs and libraries are a minuscule line item in the Federal budget, but they can provide a vital link to emerging elites in the developing world In many posts in Africa, the need for information is so tremendous that every book in the USIA library is checked out 4-5 times a year

Money, however, is only half the problem As long as the main organizational entity charged with public diplomacy, USIA, is out of the policy-making loop, we will not use it effectively On the other hand, integrating USIA into State, as widely discussed at the moment, is unlikely to be a major improvement Although such a merger would in theory make public diplomacy a part of the policy-making circle, a State-controlled information service would likely concentrate on what State knows best -- media guidance All the tools of longer-term public diplomacy -- exchanges, libraries, speaker programs etc -- which are so critical to building the long-term foundation of communication are not likely to fare well in a State Department that does not understand their value

Alternatively, USIA itself could take a much more active lead in developing, coordinating, and promoting a national public diplomacy strategy That would not be easy, as USIA has neither the staffing nor the experience to play such a role Accustomed to focusing on overseas operations, USIA is driven by a bottom-up approach to its work, in which staffing and funding needs are driven by regional and post perspectives rather than a global strategy To play a

stronger role in the Washington policy debate, therefore, will require a major restructuring of the USIA, including training more officers to think in broader strategic terms

Ultimately, however, any organizational change that would be truly effective can not take place as long as the larger foreign affairs community does not believe in public diplomacy as a strategic tool It is not after all organizational savvy that underpins the military, but rather the consensus among opinion leaders that a strong military is a good thing Similarly, public diplomacy will not become an effective strategic asset until the foreign affairs community -- those who think, speak, and write about national security -- begin to conceptualize it in a strategic framework For the moment, a perusal of the titles of recent foreign affairs seminars and think tank papers makes clear that the old Cold War, realist perspective on international relations continues to dominate the thinking of most foreign affairs strategists Until that changes, the US will have trouble mustering the resources needed to put into practice the policies of "engagement and enlargement" that it already espouses in principle

Word count 8,200

Notes

[1] For a more extensive discussion of historical failure to understand the uses of information, see Johanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War Is Media Technology Driving International Politics?*, (St Martin's Press, New York, 1996)

[2] The Cato Institute, The Cato Handbook for Congress, 1994, p 308

[3] Ibid

[4] Jeffrey Jones, *The Third Wave and the Fourth Dimension,* unpublished paper, 1995

[5] For a more extensive discussion of the difficulties in applying a realist perspective to international relations, see Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy,* The AEI Press, Washington, DC, 1991

[6] G John Ikenberry, *The Myth of Post-War Chaos*, Foreign Affairs Volume 75 No 3 (May/June 1996), 83

[7] Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Virtual State,* Foreign Affairs, Vol 75 No 4 (July/August 1996), 58

[8] Ibid

[9] Alvaro Vargas Llosa, *To Give Latins Real Reform, Start With Property Titles,* The Wall Street Journal (January 3, 1997), A9

[10] Ibid

[11] USIA focus group study, December, 1996

[12] Anne Sigmund, testimony to the House Committee on Intelligence Relations, June 13, 1996

[13] For a more detailed look at the problems of communication during the Somalia intervention, see Cynthia Efird and Carl Sahlin, *Using the information instrument to leverage military force: a need for deliberate interagency coordination.* National War College Research Project, 1993/94

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