Reforming American Public Diplomacy
A Report of the Annual Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology

Richard Kessler, Rapporteur
Reforming American Public Diplomacy

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Contents

FOREWORD, Charles M. Firestone ............................................................... v

REFORMING AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, Richard Kessler
  Summary Recommendations ................................................................. 1
  Stumbling Blocks to Greater Effectiveness ........................................... 3
  American Authenticity in a Risk-Averse Environment ......................... 7
  Recommendations on Reforming Public Diplomacy ......................... 12
  Conclusion ....................................................................................... 16
  Endnotes ......................................................................................... 17

APPENDIX
  Roundtable Participants .................................................................... 23
  About the Author .............................................................................. 25
  The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program .......... 27
  Previous Publications from this Series .......................................... 29
This report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology. Unless attributed to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the Dialogue.
Foreword

This report emanates from the third annual Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology. After exploring issues of public diplomacy in the Middle East and the use of technology in the global diplomatic rivalry with China in the two prior years, the Dialogue turned inward. Why is the United States seemingly ineffective in winning the hearts and minds of key audiences it is seeking to persuade? How can it better employ newer social and mobile media? What should the public diplomatic apparatus of the United States look like going forward?

The Aspen Institute was fortunate to attract a group of 24 outstanding leaders in the diplomatic and technology fields to address these problems. They met at a time when Russian media can successfully misinform their diaspora across the Russian borders, when a small but significant number of people are actually attracted to ISIS videos of people playing football with severed heads, and where other credulous audiences receive messages that, if taken as true, undermine American interests. Despite its many dollars and divergent approaches, the U.S. government still seems to be catching up to the new realities of the world of 2015.

The group set out a mission and vision of public diplomacy. The mission, set forth in this report, is to “further the interests of the United States by building networks of shared interests and shared values.” It is to explain American policies and practices and “to build relationships through interaction and engagement” with foreign governments and societies. The vision of the future is centered on what the group called “Network Diplomacy,” (and I call “Netpolitik”). It focuses on building open platforms for the world’s billions to access the global network, encouraging dialogue among diverse peoples and viewpoints, and using public-private partnerships and network-savvy principles and practices to engage with new voices. It also calls on the United States to use creative approaches to reach uninformed or otherwise hostile audiences, and to create honest feedback loops.

But most of the Dialogue addressed the practicalities of American agencies and personnel whose job it is to convey American values and viewpoints to the world. Aware of the many policy reports on public
diplomacy that have preceded this meeting, the participants focused their recommendations on current legislation proposing reform of the apparatus.

Starting with the need for an authentic voice to the rest of the world, the participants observed that American officials face a risk-averse environment created by the increased need for security (fortified embassies) and by some senior officials and Congressional pressures. Public diplomacy needs to reinforce the American narrative as the “incubator of people’s dreams,” highlighting traditional American values of entrepreneurship, innovation, opportunity, freedom, openness, empowerment, democracy, economic development, dignity and choice. It needs to listen to other peoples’ concerns and engage at that level and on those issues.

To do this, Dialogue participants recommended reforming both the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) and the State Department’s public diplomacy apparatus, what they refer to as the “R Bureau.” They recommended, as a needed first step, the adoption of H.R. 4490, which has been passed in the House of Representatives and was pending in the U.S. Senate. It would replace the BBG with a new International Communications Agency (USICA), with its own Chief Executive Officer, managing the daily operations of Voice of America and the Cuban broadcasting entity. And it would create the Freedom News Network, with its own CEO, to operate the surrogate broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks.

Another forward looking recommendation was to create an Innovation Fund, allowing the government to fund outside entities, in competition with existing international broadcasting entities, to accomplish certain specific goals. The goal here is to give the CEOs the flexibility through short-term funding grants or contracts to address public diplomacy goals that cannot or are not being achieved through current approaches.

The Dialogue owes its origins and thanks to the support of Aspen Institute Trustee Marc Nathanson. Since his tenure as the first Chairman of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, Nathanson has been concerned with how American diplomacy could more rapidly embrace the changing world of social media and other technologies. We also acknowledge and thank Ambassador Christopher Hill,
Dean of the Josef Korbel School of International Relations at the University of Denver; Aspen Institute Trustee Madeleine Albright; and Aspen Institute President, CEO and former Chair of the BBG, Walter Isaacson. We are thankful for our association in this Dialogue with the Korbel School and the guidance and leadership of Secretary Albright, whose father is the namesake of the school.

As is the case with almost all of our Communications and Society dialogues and roundtables, the aim is to frame issues, gain insights and make recommendations for important public policy issues at the cutting edge of our society. We do not take votes, however, and the report is the rapporteur’s take on the topic as amplified by participants’ remarks. Therefore, not all the opinions expressed in the report are subscribed to by each of the participants or their employers. Unless someone is specifically quoted, it should not be assumed that he or she adheres to a particular position, but rather such statements are the rapporteur’s sense of the group in general. The group did, however, specifically endorse the pending legislation on reform of the BBG and the U.S. State Department diplomacy apparatus.

In addition to the above leaders of the Dialogue, I would like to thank Richard Kessler, our rapporteur; the Nathanson Scholars, Elizabeth Caruth and Emily Winslow, who created the background materials; and Kiahna Cassell, Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program Senior Project Manager, for organizing and managing the dialogue and this report itself. Finally, we thank the Jane and Marc Nathanson Foundation, which is the senior sponsor of this project.

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The Aspen Institute
Washington, D.C.
March 2015
REFORMING AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Richard Kessler
Reforming American Public Diplomacy

A report of the 2014 Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology

Summary Recommendations

• Support passage of H.R. 4490, the United States International Communications Reform Act of 2014
• Provide financial and technical support for American-designed open communications platforms
• Use public-private partnerships to ensure privacy of communications and accessibility to communications links in denied areas
• Reform the U.S. Department of State R Bureau
• Centralize the research and evaluation section at U.S. Department of State
• Create regional teams to message in the field and mobilize third-party validators
• Create an operations center at U.S. Department of State for counter-messaging
• Increase funding for U.S. Department of State and BBG programs
• Train and equip all foreign service officers in public diplomacy and new media technologies

Since the inception of the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Voice of America (VOA) and other international broadcasting and public diplomacy entities, multiple studies have proposed reforms. Yet the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), in its latest iteration,
remains faced with a number of questions and problems. These include questions about the effectiveness of current means of communicating with populations abroad, the role of politics in the overall organization, the impact of union rules and the need for infusing American public diplomacy with greater capacity in the newer types of social and mobile media. Similar problems affect bureaus of the Department of State’s (DOS) Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. To address these issues, i.e., the need to reinvent American public diplomacy, the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program convened 24 diplomatic and technology leaders at its annual Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology in August 2014.

In past discussions in other fora there was agreement that it was time for a positive change, but there had been no clear agreement on the strategy for that change. The Aspen meeting of distinguished, bipartisan experts was an opportunity to frame the challenges and to propose concrete actions to meet them.

One of the first steps agreed to at this meeting was to endorse passage of H.R. 4490, the House-passed United States International Communications Reform Act of 2014, which attempts to streamline America’s international broadcasting media. Passage was not seen as a panacea for all the problems facing public diplomacy, but it was seen as an immediate step that could be taken in addressing some of the challenges to America’s public diplomacy.

These challenges, as former BBG Chairman Marc Nathanson observed in his opening remarks: “How can the United States reach people in turbulent territories of the globe and get our message across effectively? How do we embrace new technologies that change every six months?” Further, the group also considered related questions, including the following: is public diplomacy, including State and BBG, just a public relations machine with the U.S. government its client? Are we just mouthing propaganda as part of a larger defense strategy, and if so, should public diplomacy be an arm of the Defense Department or, as more recently suggested, the CIA? Are surrogate journalism networks advisable in a world of extensive penetration by commercial networks? Shouldn’t America listen as well as talk? There is an imperative national security need to solving these questions immediately.
Stumbling Blocks to Greater Effectiveness

Three key points emerged from the initial discussion, pointing up the problems that American public diplomacy faces in the current environment: voice, audience, and authenticity

America’s Voice. First, America’s voice is being heard but not being listened to. Even though American culture is pervasive and dominant throughout the world, it does not translate into support for American policies. Other cultures are becoming equally influential.

The unprecedented media sophistication of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a Sunni jihadist group now dominating parts of Syria and Iraq, and known for its extreme brutality, is the most recent example of how America’s enemies are using information as an essential part of their growth strategy and to emasculate America’s security strategy. As one participant pointed out, ISIL “sets the information space before it moves to kinetic action.”

ISIL’s strategy is also aided by other competitors in the information space. Rising Chinese and Russian capabilities have narrowed the opportunities for the American voice to be listened to. As was seen in the recent Russian incursions into Ukrainian territory, Russia mobilized hundreds of bloggers in support of a greater Russian political and military strategy. In contrast, the U.S. has no historic precedent for using citizen media as a political tool in foreign policy.

The United States needs different messages for different audiences. Other voices, including that of its enemies’, are more effective than the United States in reaching their target audiences—even if their message is disparaged by the majority of the world. For example, Russia Today is effective with Russians and Russian-speaking populations, and ISIL is effective with wannabe terrorists, even though the rest of the world remains hostile to their messages. However, it is easier for authoritarian governments and terrorist groups to develop and target their messages because they do not need a transparent, open process requiring consensus before making policy.

The American message is limited by its limited embrace of new communications tools and technology, by the messages it is using, and also by the deafening sense of silence of America on the world stage. As a State Department participant observed, even as the United States is
being challenged as to what it is doing, there is a sense that it does not care. As another noted, America is paying less attention and playing less of a role even in the international organizations that the United States was instrumental in creating. These organizations may mean little to the U.S. Congress or American public, but they are important to everyone else. Not being engaged in these institutions signals a wider American lack of concern to non-Americans. Why listen to someone if they are not listening to you?

...the new information space means that America’s traditional democratic narrative is being lost in an echo chamber of other voices.

It is a self-reinforcing paradigm: equivocating over our response to international problems feeds the perception of a lack of concern. Furthermore, the new information space means that America’s traditional democratic narrative is being lost in an echo chamber of other voices. As Freedom House’s 2014 report noted, this is the eighth consecutive year of a decline in freedom around the world.4 Authoritarian actors have learned to hijack democratized communications platforms to spread their messages, making it difficult for the United States to counter them. While the message still matters in this era of new information technologies and platforms, unfortunately, the message is often not the one America intends.

As a Congressional participant suggested, “The person who comes up with the best hash tag on Twitter has more impact than the professional journalist.” The State Department has more than 100 social media accounts, with active Twitter, Facebook and Flickr feeds. But communications research consistently shows that journalists are still the gatekeepers and the agenda setters around the globe. Hash tags are normally based on news articles and news programs, which legitimate issues.

The high ground of the information battlefield is won by the entity or individual who can control the delivery of a message, with the appearance—if not the reality—of authenticity, which appeals to the
population receiving it. As ISIL’s success on the battlefield has demonstrated, freedom is not relevant to a jihadist. What matters is the authenticity of the jihadist message, even if it includes beheading. But authenticity is usually lacking in messages delivered by government entities, concluded a non-American conferee. Rapid response requires the capability to voice a discriminating and authentic message, in multiple languages over multiple web links, to capture the hearts and minds of foreign listeners. Authenticity is one of the key drivers of communications success, which means that the United States may often do better showing its disagreements than a packaged line.

The United States has been able to address this in some instances. As a Congressional participant commented, for example, President George W. Bush demonstrated American interest and support for Africa with the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). American commitment to the success of this program was essential to the perception of American interest in Africa and its problems. U.S. commitment is once again being challenged by the spread of the Ebola virus. The question is, are there other policy issues or developmental or humanitarian challenges that have the same degree of consensus elsewhere in the world and would not be open to politicization?

In responding to international challenges, the United States should focus on the credibility of its actions, which demonstrate American leadership; the authenticity of the measures taken, which show the truth of American values; and the creativity of American responses, which are evidence of the vitality of the American system. More simply, walk the walk and talk the talk.

**The Audience.** Secondly, the traditional focus of public diplomacy has become more complex. The audience for American policy has become amplified by technologies for which there are no barriers to entry. American policymakers are constrained by the need to engage the traditional audience of foreign governments first, and then foreign publics.

Foreign officials and elites remain the primary raison d’etre for official diplomatic engagement. The formulation of American policy requires, as one former senior American official commented, a painful bureaucratic process of internal debate, interagency discussion and finally public issuance. The second tier of official American engagement in public diplomacy has been the foreign public. This engagement has
traditionally been the focus of cultural exchanges, cultural programs and American libraries—now named “American Spaces.” There was a consensus among conferees that these and the traditional international exchange programs still remain vital focal points for American public diplomacy efforts, but they need to be reinvigorated and expanded.

The conundrum of this complex environment is that the United States may be concentrating its resources on maintaining relationships with governments that have lost touch with their own people.

The Cold War broadened the audience for American public diplomacy efforts. The rise of the Iron Curtain forced American diplomats to seek alternative ways to reach beyond totalitarian governments and directly to the people. VOA and the other radio broadcasters were and remain, according to participants, important components of efforts to reach and educate publics in denied areas. However, there was agreement that the audience for those forms of communication is diminishing and that they are less effective in reaching the vast numbers of people who may live in restrictive societies but who have other means for accessing information that even their governments have trouble limiting. As one participant with a technological background noted, to some degree governments have lost control over their publics, too.

The conundrum of this complex environment is that the United States may be concentrating its resources on maintaining relationships with governments that have lost touch with their own people.

Strong views were expressed that the United States is spending a large portion of its public diplomacy budget on activities that are not relevant or are not reaching the vast new and complex audiences that American policymakers must reach if the United States is going to remain competitive in today’s global market for ideas. This is especially true of the younger, under age 25 audience.

There was a consensus that in this new world of multiple networks and instantaneous communications with no barriers to entry—in which any person can be a reporter or any person can become a move-
ment—governments need to seek new approaches to achieving credibility for their message. One former State Department official asked, “What is the ability of the United States to grow power and influence in the future as non-state actors grow in influence?” Is the allocation of power changing from states to non-state actors? The power of illusive networks of sometimes vaguely affiliated individuals and organizations is growing in influence. The focus of military power is away from states towards these new organizations. The demographic shift to cities is concentrating power as never before. An oft-quoted statistic is that by 2050 cities will contain almost three-quarters of the world’s population.7 Indeed some of the credibility of non-states is derived precisely because they are not states.

**American Authenticity in a Risk-Averse Environment**

The problem for public diplomacy is that it has become easier for outside observers to note the difference between what a government says and what it does. When others perceive that the United States only reacts when something happens to its own citizens abroad they become cynical about American intentions.

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**Authenticity...is critical.**

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Authenticity, as one foreign participant noted, is critical. There is no way to modify the State Department’s public diplomacy apparatus to communicate more effectively until honesty is introduced into assessing how our policy is viewed from abroad. Accordingly, the State Department needs to introduce a feedback loop into its policy so the United States can see how others see it. There is no debate about how difficult it is to do this in hostile environments. The rise of a risk-averse environment for American diplomats abroad has constrained the ability of the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) to be America’s eyes and ears in the community and to use contacts to help win “hearts and minds.” No one wants to endanger American lives; however, it is one thing to take needless risks and quite another to allow the fear of any risk to inhibit action.
Fear of disaster by senior management can cripple Foreign Service officers in the pursuit of their mission. The concern has been exacerbated by Congress, which has developed an obsession with no-risk environments, investigating tragic incidents such as the deeply unfortunate death of Ambassador Stevens and other Americans in Benghazi, Libya, in 2012. Now even cultural affairs officers giving speeches in friendly, non-hostile environments have to be escorted in armored SUVs designed to shock and awe the local citizenry. But this is not designed to inspire a sense of shared values and mission. It creates a physical wall between the United States and its audience that undermines immediately the authenticity of the American message. Conferees agreed that there needs to be a renewed emphasis on getting beyond the fortified walls of American embassies to cultivate contacts to enrich our knowledge of what is happening, understand how American policy is being perceived and stimulate more support for U.S. policies. Participants offered several suggestions for how to overcome these barriers to communication.

First, several former officials at the conference urged that Foreign Service officers be given training in risk assessment so they can make their own judgments. Right now, the high risk assessment has led to using contractors instead of Foreign Service officers to engage with foreign audiences. Poor training, inadequate hiring criteria and high security barriers can all be reasons not to accomplish a goal-oriented public diplomacy program at the local level.

Second, the United States was urged to support local networks and third-party validators to create traction on the information terrain so its message will be heard.

States are at an information disadvantage from the point of view of credibility. The State Department’s Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications posted an Arabic language video on YouTube in July 2014 to counter ISIL’s message. That video was seen more than 42,000 times, but ISIL’s video of the beheading of journalist John Foley was viewed hundreds of thousands of times. One way to alter this equation is by developing alternative social networks and creating third-party validators, identifying individuals and organizations who have the credibility to reach targeted audiences. In the past this was one of the objectives of the Public Affairs Officer in America’s embassies: meeting and greeting individual citizens, business groups, cultural organizations, the media, etc.
One approach to foster new networks is to use the diaspora in the United States to communicate back to their countries of origin. Several television programs originating from the Iranian-American community in Los Angeles broadcast daily to Iran. The diaspora becomes a living link to local groups otherwise difficult for American diplomats to reach.10

Another approach is to use technology creatively. For example, the United States admitted 500 students as Mandela Washington Scholars, but the 49,500 applicants not accepted are being given access to the Young African Leaders Initiative online forum and access to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which focus on entrepreneurship and leadership. The sometimes “subversive” nature of American education can be seen from the Chinese government protests regarding the SAT exams. They complain that Chinese students who take these tests in order to enter American colleges have questions about the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights instead of Mao’s Little Red Book.

One suggestion was to consult American experts in advertising, marketing and public relations to gain their insights on how to merchandise the American story, though this has sometimes backfired in the past.11 Still another approach is to use new technologies and data analytics to ensure a real-time understanding of how messages are being received by target audiences.12 This means deploying into the field people skilled at using new media techniques and in analyzing results in real-time interacting with American embassies and local audiences and working under the direction of public diplomacy officials.13

Mission of Public Diplomacy. The consensus that America’s enemies and competitors were being more effective at conveying their message and convincing others to follow them through the more efficient use of new technologies and platforms led the conferees to articulate a new mission for public diplomacy:

The mission of public diplomacy is to further the interests and understanding of the United States by building networks of shared interests and shared values. It seeks not only to explain United States policies and practices but also to build relationships through interaction and engagement with the government and other parts of foreign societies.
The mission of public diplomacy is to support the larger foreign policy mission and message. That message needs to come from the President. But there will always be tension between American ideals and American foreign policy. Sometimes the gap will appear cavernous. In some places, the disconnect between American policy and American values delegitimizes any effort by American policymakers to win support for its actions. This is particularly true in the Middle East where America directly supports non-democratic regimes.

In some places, the disconnect between American policy and American values delegitimizes any effort by American policymakers to win support for its actions.

The group discussed various ways of articulating a narrative of America that people could aspire to as well as be inspired by. The concept of a “shining city on a hill” still draws thousands of visa applicants to American embassies and causes many more to risk their lives in crossing American borders illegally. But it has lost some of its shimmer among the hundreds of millions for whom a visa is not even a dream. In response to this, efforts by the White House and the Department of State to speak to America’s strength by focusing on young leaders and entrepreneurship overseas were encouraging if not necessarily sufficient.

The American Narrative. Answering the question what does America stand for? – becomes a critical issue when trying to articulate an alternative message in a world where many people view the United States in negative terms. Having a consistent message that resonates is a vital component of public diplomacy. The group believed that the message needs to speak to America’s openness, vitality and creativity as a nation. This message has been strengthened with new programs such as the Young African Leaders Initiative network (YALI), the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) and the Global Entrepreneurship Summits, which all began under the Obama Administration.

In competing against the rise of non-democratic states and brutal, repressive non-state actors, the United States should use Chinese phi-
The Report

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Lososopher Lao Tze’s philosophy of countering the hard with the soft. It should focus on how America remains, in the terms of one participant, the “incubator of people’s dreams.” New technologies can reinforce the values traditionally important to the American narrative: entrepreneurship, innovation, opportunity, freedom, openness, empowerment, democracy, economic development, dignity and choice.

Defining what America stands for also means entering into a dialogue with other peoples about their concerns. One opportunity would be to lead a discussion on global concerns such as world poverty, climate change, disease and nuclear proliferation. The United States could change the focus of the global debate, but it would mean paying attention to what others think the solutions should be to these global issues.14

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New technologies can reinforce the values traditionally important to the American narrative: entrepreneurship, innovation, opportunity, freedom, openness, empowerment, democracy, economic development, dignity and choice.

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So, the group agreed, the United States needs to know what people want in order to develop its policy. Knowing what motivates other people is critical to understanding the impact of American policy even if it does not translate into what it does, as its national interest imperatives may differ. As one former senior State Department official stated, “We are not using networks for information coming in….We are not listening to people….The information ‘silos’ at State need to be broken.”

Multi-front engagement is critical to beginning this dialogue. There needs to be a commitment to leadership, reallocation of budgets, and more structural and cultural change to be in a position to consider the impact of American policies on foreign publics and a deployment of people into the field to message and monitor local reactions.15 For that reason, the reforms proposed by the conferees ranged from ideas to technologies to organization to personnel.
Recommendations on Reforming Public Diplomacy

Concrete recommendations for reforming public diplomacy focused on changes proposed to the international broadcasting community under the BBG and to changes to the operations of the State Department’s public diplomacy role, or the “R Bureau.”

International Broadcasting

- The Dialogue participants, including two former chairs of the BBG and its current chair, the current Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, a former Secretary of State, current and former members and staff of Congress from both sides of the aisle, various industry experts and former government officials from State, the NSA, the FCC, and Commerce, on a bi-partisan basis strongly recommend that the Senate support the House-passed United States International Communications Reform Act of 2014 (H.R. 4490).
  - The legislation would replace the BBG with the U.S. International Communications Agency (USICA), with a separate chief executive officer (CEO) managing the daily operations of the VOA and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.
  - The legislation would create the Freedom News Network (FNN) with its own CEO, consolidating operations of the surrogate Radios (Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks).
- The Dialogue supports creating a more flexible system capable of adapting rapidly to emerging crises and anticipating trends. An example is the “pop-up” radio station the BBC deployed when Thailand was in crisis.
- The Dialogue supports creating an Innovation Fund. This fund would give the CEOs the flexibility to respond and anticipate, through grants or contracts with outside contractors (including diaspora groups) in competition with the existing international broadcasting entities. The fund would provide
short-term funding, or it could offer five-year seed money for longer-term initiatives. One thought is to create this fund from the funds that would otherwise be used for legacy systems. An alternative would be to increase the budgets for State, BBG, and the independent networks to cover both the legacy international broadcasting entities and the new grants.

Network Diplomacy: A Tool and a Medium for Better Connectivity

- The Dialogue agreed that the United States needs to focus on building the platforms being developed through which people will communicate in the future. Currently 5.5 billion people have access to television, 5.2 billion have mobile phones, 1.6 billion have smartphones and 2 billion have personal computers. The United States needs to be in the forefront of connecting people, especially as new and better technology is coming on line.

  - The systems to bring 5 billion people online are being built now. If U.S. open networks and design principles are used in those systems, then U.S. values will be shared around the world. If closed technology and design principles are used, then U.S. communications can be blocked and censored. At the same time, the United States must protect the confidentiality of users who live in countries where freedom of expression is not tolerated.

  - Support for open platforms, not controlled by governments, gives people the means to link up and reinforces the view of America as open and transforming. U.S. government platforms should be democratizing technologies and should encourage dialogue among people with differing viewpoints.

- It is important to encourage creating these platforms through public-private partnerships (PPP).

  - Create the structure at State and BBG to foster and to encourage the adoption of new technologies and streamline the internal bureaucracy.
\* Consider the creation of a bureau for public-private partnerships to bring private money into public diplomacy projects.

\* Supply the means for people to provide content. In today’s environment, everyone with a phone can become a journalist, but they need to share their information. New technologies such as AnchorFree and ImageShack can provide the means for people to engage while remaining anonymous.

\* Focus American policy on giving people in denied areas a voice. It also must encourage penetration in target audiences by using innovative and creative programming. Radio Sawa is one successful example of this.

**Modifying State to Communicate More Effectively**

- Create a central Research and Evaluation Bureau in the R Bureau with the capability to do sophisticated digital media analysis to determine what people think, to understand their concerns and to determine their reactions to American policy in order to craft a more effective message.

Currently less than a handful of people are assigned to do media analysis. State does not have the capability to do sophisticated data analytics in real time. It should have that capability in the field. State and the BBG have developed elaborate and sophisticated evaluation and monitoring systems, but what the Dialogue is suggesting is a melding of the longer-term program effectiveness evaluations with an on-the-ground, real-time capability.

- Create a feedback loop for information to improve American foreign policy impact. To communicate effectively the U.S. government needs to know how its message is being heard and what motivates the people hearing America’s message. It has to be an interactive system, and it has to be diffuse. Sitting in Washington, D.C., trying to understand the world is not going to work.
Create a hub at Department of State with regional and country spokes in missions that can develop the local knowledge and relationships, including with potential third party validators, to advise and inform the Ambassador and his/her team on how to act.16

The hub could take the form of a 24-hour operations center that can receive, formulate and disseminate information both within the U.S. government and to foreign audiences.

Increase at-post capabilities to monitor, evaluate and develop responses to competitors’ and enemies’ messages. Rapid response counter-messaging should be a critical function of an expanded R Bureau.

Improving Personnel

- Nothing can happen without the people to make it happen.
  
  - Change the PAO’s job to one of aggregating, curating and orchestrating networks of individuals, groups and institutions who engage each other better on American platforms or under the aegis of the United States.
  
  - Enhance the professional opportunities for PAOs by seconding them to the private sector’s new media and technological companies.
  
  - Foster public-private partnerships (PPP) at State to enhance the development and use of next-generation technologies to better connect people.
  
  - Provide apprenticeships for PAOs to learn and adopt best practices at the cutting edge of new communication technologies.
  
  - Empower PAOs to take risks and build networks.17
Train everyone at a State, especially incoming ambassadors, on the public diplomacy missions. One participant noted the mantra should be that “everyone’s mission at State is to be a customer service representative for America.” Ambassadors and other diplomatic personnel need to be trained on the importance of the new media in the countries where they will be posted.

Increase the budget for public diplomacy programs and personnel needs. You get what you pay for.18

Conclusion
There is a war going on for the hearts and minds of a new generation of young people. America is not telling its story effectively. Long the fifth wheel in the Foreign Service, public diplomacy is in need of revitalization. The current world situation daily demonstrates the critical importance of public diplomacy in a world of new communications technologies and to the role of the United States as it relates to other countries. Action is needed. As one participant mentioned, “It is time to commit sins of commission rather than omission.”

To be daring requires dynamic leadership: to irritate rather than to placate, to be willing to risk failure to achieve success, and to learn to listen.

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The administration and Congress must be willing to allow new initiatives with no guarantee of success and, most importantly, to dedicate more financial resources with less certainty of a return. It is clear that reforming public diplomacy will require a lot more money for a lot more people and programs than is currently allotted to the State Department or the BBG. This means patience to play the long game.

But is also clear that the failure to engage in the global battlefield of new ideas will endanger American lives both abroad and at home.
Endnotes


3. Implementation of the legislation, which separates out the various broadcasting outlets of the BBG, will require adequate oversight to prevent adding more redundancy and miscommunication in these media outlets.


5. A McKinsey & Company report found that 4.4 billion people are not connected to the Internet, the majority of which (3.4b) live in only 20 countries. Some of the countries with the largest percentage of people not connected include Pakistan (89%), Iran (68.4%), Vietnam (55.7%), Egypt (50%), and Russia (38.3%). See Roberto A. Ferdman, “4.4 Billion People Around the World Still Don’t Have Internet. Here’s Where They Live,” Wonkblog (blog), Washington Post, October 2, 2014. Available online: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2014/10/02/4-4-billion-people-around-the-world-still-dont-have-internet-heres-where-they-live/.


8. The Department of Defense spent hundreds of millions of dollars hiring private contractors to gain the support of the Iraqi people with dubious results.

10. However, they must be used carefully as the diaspora can represent fringe elements that lack credibility back “home.”

11. Modern marketing methods have to be used carefully, as they can backfire. An example, according to an interview with one former senior State official, was the “Muslims in America” campaign that centered on short video biographies of practicing Muslims who had also achieved the American Dream of success. This advertising campaign was based on expensive, privately contracted research given the task of finding common ground between youth throughout the Muslim world and Americans. The reaction when sent out for review in the field by one diplomat was, “It was great. I’d like to be a Muslim in America too. But I’m not!” The point being that policymakers have to be careful about creating a message that makes them feel good to be Americans but may not have the same reaction by foreign nationals.


13. The closest analogy would be the way modern presidential campaigns have used new media techniques to interact with voters. There have been numerous studies of the impact of this approach since the 2008 election. For a start, see David Carr, “How Obama Tapped into Social Networks Power,” New York Times, November 9, 2008. Available online: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/business/media/10carr.html.


16. A 2008 report by the Public Diplomacy Council advocated creating a new Bureau for Public Diplomacy Field Operations. The recommendation in this report is similar but more technologically based and more interactive in approach.

17. PD officers need to be empowered to think about what makes public diplomacy successful. This is easier to say than do as it is complicated how the cone is now treated within the department. First, money for overseas public diplomacy operations is passed through the R Bureau but not managerially controlled by R—it is controlled by State’s regional bureaus. Second, these regional bureaus also control the assignment and therefore the promotion opportunities for PD cone Foreign Service officers. Prior to the incorporation of USIA into State, PAO officers, as Head of Agency at Post, had some independence. They created, for example, an annual Country Plan that provided context and budget justification for programming that, together with USIA’s research office data, provided a long-view for American strategy. Where is the incentive for PD officers to take risks professionally if they remain on the periphery within the larger State structure?
18. The recommended industry standard for expenditures on evaluation is 5 percent of the total budget. BBG is projected to spend 0.7 percent on research and evaluation in 2015, and State’s Educational and Cultural Bureau was allocated less than .25 percent in the 2013 fiscal budget. See pp. 19-20, ACPD’s report “Data-Driven Public Diplomacy.”
APPENDIX
Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology

Aspen, Colorado · August 3-6, 2014

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Richard J. Kessler, in 25 years of congressional service, has served as Staff Director of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate; Staff Director of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives; Subcommittee Staff Director of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate; Professional Staff Member, Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee, International Relations Committee, U.S. House of Representatives; and Professional Staff Member of the Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Senate. He holds a TS/SCI/HCS/Q clearance.

Prior to joining the Congressional Staff, he taught at American University, consulted for a variety of government agencies, was a Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was Deputy Director for the Project on Energy and National Security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and worked in the Philippines and Senegal. He has published widely, including Rebellion and Repression in the Philippines (Yale Press).

He served with the United States Army in Vietnam and was an instructor at the U.S. Army Intelligence School. He was awarded the Bronze Star, the Army Commendation Medal, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, the Vietnam Honor Medal (Second Class), the Good Conduct Medal, and two Battle Stars.

He graduated from Colgate University with a B.A. (1970), and received a M.A. (1974), M.A.L.D. (1976), and Ph.D. (1986) from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.
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The Communications and Society Program is an active venue for framing policies and developing recommendations in the information and communications fields. We provide a multi-disciplinary space where veteran and emerging decision-makers can develop new approaches and suggestions for communications policy. The Program enables global leaders and experts to explore new concepts, exchange insights, develop meaningful networks, and find personal growth, all for the betterment of society.

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The Program’s Executive Director is Charles M. Firestone. He has served in this capacity since 1989 and also as Executive Vice President of the Aspen Institute. Prior to joining the Aspen Institute, Mr. Firestone was a communications attorney and law professor who has argued cases before the United States Supreme Court. He is a former director of the UCLA Communications Law Program, first president of the Los Angeles Board of Telecommunications Commissioners, and an appellate attorney for the U.S. Federal Communications Commission.
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