

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

New book released on Public Diplomacy, by Public Diplomacy Practitioners ^[1]

WASHINGTON - Dec. 15 "Engaging the Arab and Islamic Worlds through Public Diplomacy," a new book about U.S. public diplomacy, was released this morning at a news conference with [William Rugh](#), the book's editor, and several of its contributors.

"Our report is different," Rugh said. "Our report is based on the understanding of experts in the Arab world and the Islamic world, and most of the authors have longtime experience in the field of public diplomacy as public diplomacy practitioners."

There have been several recent books on the subject, noted Rugh, adding that some of them "may have new ideas and good ideas" but many are "off the mark." According to Rugh, many recent books are flawed, at least in part, because were not written by practitioners.

The book embraced "differing points of view," he said. "There is no total consensus, even among the professionals in public diplomacy."

There is not even an agreement on what constitutes public diplomacy.

"Definitions of public diplomacy vary," said Rugh, who offered his definition, "developed over the years by professionals working in the field of public diplomacy. It's not psy war, it's not public relations, and it's not propaganda. It's a long-term effort to reach foreign opinion leaders and foreign opinion with different instruments" including broadcasting, education, exchanges and other contacts.

The book rolled off the presses at 9 p.m. last night, according to [McKinney Russell](#), President of the [Public Diplomacy Council](#) which issued the report.

Each of the book's authors wrote separate findings and recommendations. [Shibley Telhami](#), an Arab scholar and a contributor to the book, said his measurements of Arab public opinion document a "collapse of trust" in the U.S., down from 60% "to single digits." So at the same time the U.S. is trying to empower publics and spread democracy, he concluded, those publics have turned decisively against America and American interests.


This is not entirely due to disagreements with U.S. policy, Telhami explained. Some of it is due to fundamental misunderstandings of what America and Americans are.

"Most Arabs feel religion and family are not important in American life," he said, which is a major misperception. This is feeding a troubling trend.

"Historically, Arabs differentiated their views of Americans and of American policy," he noted, citing especially exchange programs that left visitors impressed by individual Americans and

by democracy. But now that differentiation may have vanished.

“There may be an emerging trend of a deeper hostility toward America itself,” he said, not just of American policy in the Middle East.

Telhami was a member of the U.S. Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, which produced a widely praised 2003 report , which reported some of these problems.

International broadcasting was the area of public diplomacy that attracted most of the attention at this morning’s news conference.

Norman Pattiz, a member of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors and author of another section of the report, said it is “incredibly important” that there be “coordination but not control” of the Voice of America, Radio Sawa, Alhurra television and other U.S. international broadcasters need “accurate, credible, reliable” info.

“We have a journalistic mission,” said Pattiz, speaking via video link from Los Angeles, “and protecting the integrity of that journalistic mission is paramount.” If broadcasters are “under the control of the State Department or the Defense Department,” he said, “that will have an impact on our credibility ... Without credibility, we have nothing.”

The issue of branding international broadcasting was also discussed. Alan Heil, former Director of the Voice of America and another contributor, described the VOA as a critical brand for the U.S.

“That kind of branding, no less than classic Coke in international broadcasting terms, is absolutely essential in this day and age,” Heil said.

But branding was described as only a device. The U.S. should not depend on branding “as the only tool,” Rugh said. “A slogan or brand name is not enough.”

Rugh summarized the book’s conclusions and recommendations, first identifying three problems that he said now plague public diplomacy:

- “The cost cutting that took place over the past decade or more has really hurt public diplomacy.”
- “The security problem,” which has closed or curtailed U.S. missions, libraries and cultural institutions abroad.
- The merger of USIA and the State Department. “It was expected to lead to an improvement of efficiency, but in fact the reverse has happened.”

Rugh then offered the book’s four recommendations to improve U.S. public diplomacy:

1. “Education exchange programs should be expanded,” he said. “There is nothing more powerful than a personal experience... It’s a win-win program.”
2. Reopen the cultural and information offices that have been closed in recent years. “They have been, in the past, very important.”
3. Expand U.S. international broadcasting. “We should revive the Voice of America Arab service,” he said. “We should do more with electronic media.”
4. Recruit and train more specialists in public diplomacy, and assign them to posts

overseas. "We need more people with Arabic skills," he said. "Face to face contacts are especially important."

"For all of this we need more money," Rugh said, proposing the U.S. public diplomacy budget be increased fourfold. Even then, he said, total public diplomacy spending would be "still less than 1% of the Pentagon budget."

"Engaging the Arab and Islamic Worlds through Public Diplomacy" is the first of a series of books planned by the Public Diplomacy Council. The next report, scheduled for release early in 2005, will be devoted to the future of public diplomacy, according to William Kiehl, Executive Director of the Council.

[Disclosure: Adam Clayton Powell III is a member of the Public Diplomacy Council. He is not an author of this book.]
