

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

Public Diplomacy's 10,000 Pound Gorilla: It's Everywhere ^[1]

Some Worldcasting readers are said to take issue with our most recent piece contending that the Fox News Channel is a key player in U.S. public diplomacy. A great misperception is that FNC is solely a domestic U.S. cable news service, with minimal foreign distribution. But Fox News Channel is not only international in scope, it is in fact broadcast in 88 countries worldwide.

Like the meaning of life, there is endless philosophizing about what public diplomacy is. The USC Center on Public Diplomacy, for which I write, defines public diplomacy as "focusing on ways in which a country (or multi-lateral organization such as the United Nations) communicates with citizens in other countries," while the U.S. Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World calls public diplomacy outright "promotion of the national interest."

The U.S. Information Agency Alumni Association says the unfortunately-defunct Agency strove "to explain and advocate U.S. policies in terms that are credible and meaningful in foreign cultures," and the State Department has a 1,300-word definition for its new Transformational Public Diplomacy.

That said, most would agree that public diplomacy is directed at international audiences and the Fox News Channel is not a player because it is considered as solely a domestic outlet. But Fox News Channel is actually available throughout the world -- if not via satellite TV, via satellite radio, as evidenced on their Web site.

Fox News Channel spokesman, Paul Schur, informs Worldcasting that the FNC is seen in more than 88 countries. That means that Fox's so-called fair, balanced, and unafraid views, as they often say on Fox, reach a huge audience abroad, and could therefore be considered part of U.S. public diplomacy according to many definitions, including this one from the U.S. Information Agency Alumni Association, which foresaw the popular FNC talk shows, with their variety of spokespersons and views, bounding worldwide.

...[P]ublic diplomacy deals not only with governments but primarily with non-governmental individuals and organizations. Furthermore, public diplomacy activities often present many differing views as represented by private American individuals and organizations in addition to official U.S. Government views.

Those of us who managed at the USIA during the Cold War know well that some of the most effective points were made for us abroad by third parties, in interviews and discussion programs, in news reports and otherwise..

The Fox News Channel also fits the PD description of the Murrow Center, that: "Central to

public diplomacy is the transnational flow of information and ideas."

Mr. Schur of the Fox News Channel discloses that the "FNC also has one feed, so that all interviews on FNC, including Shepard Smith's exclusive first TV interviews with Naom Shalit, the father of kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and wife and father of kidnapped Israeli soldier Ehud Goldwasser from Israel, are seen around the world."

Therefore, when President Bush was interviewed exclusively on July 31 by Fox's Neil Cavuto, and discussed in some detail the U.S. government's position on the Israel-Hezbollah war, the president's comments were carried on the Fox News Channel to 88 countries abroad, as well as on international wire services, and broadcast stations globally, and in other media as well. And Senator John Kerry's views on the Middle East were thusly radiated worldwide in his interview with the FNC's Alan Colmes last week. Said Senator Kerry, in the discussion program: "...this administration did not engage with France, Great Britain and Germany in the effort to keep Iran from having nuclear weapons. And our absence from that had a profound impact on their attitude."

And when the FNC's Bill O'Reilly interviewed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice August 1, her comments also went all over the world, via the highest rated-cable talk show in America. Said Secretary Rice: "The Middle East is littered with ceasefires that didn't work...We need to have an end to the violence. But we also have to be certain that we're pointing in the right direction politically."

An additional huge audience abroad is reached by FNC's correspondents on Sky News in Europe, which is available to some 98 million viewers in 36 countries alone throughout the continent, as well as in many more countries internationally. The FNC and Sky News, both owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, have partnered on Middle East coverage, including the sharing of news correspondents, video footage, and technical facilities.. Additional international outlets using the FNC are the News Corporation's Star News seen in China and throughout the rest of Asia and the Middle East, and on News Broadcasting Japan, also a News Corporation company, which carries the Fox News Channel, including Bill O'Reilly and the rest of the FNC program lineup.

If one looks at the important building blocks of generally-accepted PD, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, with its some \$15 billion annual revenue, is a 10,000 pound gorilla, one of the great media giants of our day internationally. As a former USIA alum, we would have looked at the prospect of such a PD resource and said, "In your dreams."

What we have here is a Pinata filled with PD goodies. Let's look at some of the rest of them. The State Department mentions the importance of regional PD centers to "take America's strong story to... the regional TV media...." Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation owns more regional media than just about anyone, anywhere. In addition to its worldwide broadcast holdings that carry the Fox News Channel, the News Corp. is "the world's leading publisher of English-language newspapers," with 175 titles, including the London Times, The Sunday London Times, the London Sun, and the NY Post. The State Department feels that publications are important "instruments" of PD as they "inform or influence public opinion in other countries."

And books too, are high on the list of the State Department's PD tools. The News Corporation owns HarperCollins books, HarperBusiness, HarperInformation, Harper Children (in many languages) William Morrow and Co., Avon books, and 25 additional world-class imprints,

printing more than 40 million copies per week.

The State Department says motion pictures are an important instrument of public diplomacy. Twentieth Century Fox is owned by the News Corporation, whose internationally-popular films from *Titanic*, to *The Devil Wears Prada*, are now playing at your local theater in Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Bangkok, Sydney, Madrid, and many more neighborhoods.

And if you don't want to watch the Fox News Channel, here or abroad, or watch the News Corporation's movies, or read its newspapers, or read its books, how about the News Corporation's other international cable TV content. History Channel, National Geographic Channel, Fox Sports, Fox Kids Network, the Golf Channel, Family Channel, Sky Scottish, Grenada Sky, Sky Soap/Sports/Movies, Nickelodeon UK, Sky Latin America, are all available internationally.

Or when you are driving abroad, you may see News Corp. outdoor advertising billboards along the road, while listening to Sean Hannity on Fox radio, or Fred Barnes, a daily news contributor on Fox, who is executive editor of the *Weekly Standard* magazine -- also owned by Rupert Murdoch. And if you are abroad long enough to get your own telephone number, you might get a call from one the News Corporation's numerous telemarketing companies overseas, or be solicited for an opinion poll from the News Corporation's opinion polling company.

Etc, etc.

Fox is not overseas? In your dreams.
