

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

Public Diplomacy in the Next U.S. Administration ^[1]

Who is the fairest of them all?

Worldcasting refers to White House presidential aspirants, and where public diplomacy could be headed in the next administration.

What emerges in our admittedly unscientific survey of several PD practitioners past and present, are some basic concerns: Will the next administration realize the availability of abundant PD resources in both the U.S. public and private sectors? Will they utilize these resources to further foreign policy and national security interests? And if so, will the next administration proceed wisely and responsibly?

Some feel that the practice of public diplomacy is considered sacred and ought not to be sullied by anyone passing through, be it a president or his charges. "Washington is riveted by Iraq and Iran. PD is on the sidelines now," said a veteran Foreign Service Officer.

Although *Worldcasting* was cautioned by one former Foreign Service Officer (FSO) that speculating about the next administration and PD could wind up as "Bar-side thumb sucking," we proceeded to see what we could find out anyway, and here is some of what we learned.

The issue of preserving the integrity of U.S. public diplomacy appeared in our informal survey to be paramount and concern regarding the potential for political abuse was mentioned often.

Foreign Service Officer Daniel F. Whitman believes "an interesting study for a grad student would be the use of the Wireless/Washington File by administrations in the past, who have used it for their domestic political agendas.

He would be alarmed if the White House ever "took over PD... which has been the fear and expectation of many, who would want PD to remain a non-partisan foreign policy instrument.... Too many consider PD a megaphone for getting out a given message. If it ever ceases being channel for genuine dialogue, we're sunk."

There seemed to be little interest in taking the time and energy required to reconstitute the USIA or starting a new agency. "It's easier to break crockery than to put it back together, as we all learned from Humpty Dumpty," said one Foreign Service Officer, who did not wish to be identified.

Several potential presidential candidates were mentioned as possessing an appreciation for the potential of public diplomacy.

It was pointed out that Evelyn Lieberman is Senator Hillary Clinton's Chief Operating Officer. "Evelyn was first PD Under Secretary at State and thus the Clinton campaign indeed has

resident expertise," a former FSO mentioned to *Worldcasting*.

Henry Catto, a former director of the United States Information Agency, felt that all presidential hopefuls may "be ignorant of the art (of public diplomacy) but maybe not. The original McCain, campaigning in New Hampshire, seemed to be good at charming the press," but may not be "an applicable skill for genuine PD."

Alan Kotok, editor of PublicDiplomacy.org, said that General Wesley Clark "advocates a wholesale change in the way our country approaches foreign affairs. He believes we need to make use of a wide array of national resources -- political, economic, and ideological (in the strict sense of the term), as well as military power -- in our dealings with nations and peoples outside this country. This position is not unlike Joseph Nye's "Soft Power" thesis. Public diplomacy, therefore, becomes one of the critical tools in our foreign affairs repertoire."

Worldcasting believes even given the array of U.S. public diplomacy tools available: the education and cultural exchanges, the broadcasts, the Internet, the wire services/e-magazines, the local in-country contacts and all the rest, that the next U.S. president must be personally enthusiastic about the effectiveness of public diplomacy. And a president who can communicate effectively with audiences abroad would be a definite asset for U.S. PD.

Worldcasting recommends that international town meetings be held as part of the presidential campaign process. In these forums, presidential candidates can interact with audiences at home and abroad via satellite TV and the Internet, allowing the public to witness first-hand how their next president might engage in public diplomacy.

Good reviews for a president abroad would be good for PD, and good for America.
