

Nov 04, 2016 by [Jill A. Schuker](#)

Another Chance to Get It Right ... ^[1]


Public diplomacy is no substitute for smart foreign policy, nor can it fix a myopic one. But miscalculations of both its power and place have left it a hobbled tool in our diplomatic arsenal.


Hopefully the newest designated chief of public diplomacy, Jim Glassman, understands this. His bona fides for the job are solid; but the challenges, unhappily, remain as distinct today as they did seven years ago under Charlotte Beers, the first Public Diplomacy chief of the Bush administration.

Simply put, we have been floundering in our attempts to run an effective public diplomacy for too long, with disastrous results judging from every reliable overseas opinion poll about perceptions of the United States.

The United States Information Agency (USIA), the nation's long-time, independent home for public diplomacy professionals and programs fostering dialogue about our policies, values, and ideas, was traded away in the 1990s in a shortsighted deal. It was replaced instead by a structure embedded in the Department of State that never has worked successfully in fulfilling its mandate. Can State's responsibility for articulating and promoting official U.S. policy (especially with officials and targeted elites), successfully cohabitate with fostering open dialogue among hostile and skeptical publics about the merits of those very policies? Moreover, can any one department coordinate the rest of the government successfully in this effort? After all, the Pentagon, both overtly and covertly, consistently has had considerably more resources and on-the-ground expertise in its "public diplomacy" operations than the State Department.

The end of the Cold War also encouraged "end of history" buffs to mark public diplomacy for the graveyard, with the added irony that newly-freed up resources eventually funded such anti-public diplomacy initiatives as those contained in The Patriot Act. Moreover, the last six years since 9/11 have turned public diplomacy into policy cheerleading rather than integrating it into the creation of better-crafted foreign policy.

Some hopeful glimmers for change and next steps are on the horizon, however, and from some interesting sources, hopefully prompting Mr. Glassman to take both notice and action. These include a new [study on Smart Power by the Center for Strategic and International Studies](#)  led by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye, the author of *Soft Power*, and Richard Armitage, the former Deputy Secretary of State under Colin Powell. In a recent [Op-Ed about the Study](#), both call for reinvestment in government public diplomacy efforts and doubling spending on essential academic exchange and language programs.

Other important recent contributions include [a White Paper by the private sector Business for Diplomatic Action](#),  focusing on the role that responsible corporations must play in their dealings abroad for effective public diplomacy. Perhaps most interestingly, [commentary from Defense Secretary Robert Gates at the Landon Lecture in November](#) and [former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in commentary in The Washington Post](#)

both call for vigorous and independent public diplomacy going forward. Gates cites the loss of an independent USIA as "shortsighted," as does Rumsfeld, himself a symbol of discredited public diplomacy during his tenure.

These observations and contributions are in addition to the stack of serious reports from the Council on Foreign Relations, the Derijian Commission and others that have called for a serious overhaul of U.S. public diplomacy. Both the present and past Chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Democrat Joseph Biden and Republican Richard Lugar have also strongly supported a serious restructuring of public diplomacy and the necessity of putting our money where our mouth is to do this.

Taking off the blinders at home is essential. It means recognizing what those abroad are hearing and seeing so we can be more effective at both understanding and outreach. It is one of the reasons why the English language Al Jazeera with veteran commentators such as David Frost and Dave Marash shouldn't be shut out of the airwaves in the U.S., especially when so much of our own news media has been reduced to only heat and tragically little light—embarrassing sound bites, biased invective, and only cursory analysis.

The U.S. presidential election is less than a year away. Our foreign policy is in shambles. We need to reshape the public diplomacy component of our foreign policy and help encourage and create next generation talent at home and abroad as an integral agenda item in a comprehensive foreign policy platform. If not, this article, echoing the same concerns, will need to be written in another five years. We don't have that luxury.
