

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

The Philadelphia Story ^[1]

The news out of Philadelphia is that there is no news — no newspapers, that is. The Philadelphia Inquirer and the Philadelphia Daily News have joined the swelling ranks of American print media that have gone bankrupt. Last month, it was the Star Tribune of Minneapolis. Late last year, the Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune, owned by the same parent, declared their insolvency. The two newspapers in Detroit, the News and the Free Press, now have home delivery only three days a week. The print version of the Washington Post is stagnant. Even the colossus of American journalism, the New York Times, no longer stands so tall, as several accounts have noted. In its own peculiarly self-conscious way, the NYT recently reported on its own economic plight, although its senior management refused to comment (!) to its own reporter on the company's travails.

Internationally, the situation is not that much different. The wired world is reading fewer newspapers and, as publishers compensate by raising newstand prices, more readers are driven away. We are left with cable and satellite television, Internet media, and other evolving approaches.

There are some implications for public diplomacy here. As with PR and advertising, the lesson is for practitioners to be nimble and hone skills in all media. Hillary Clinton's State Department inherits significant experience and mixed results from the last turbulent decade. Some of State's efforts seem stiff and incomplete, such as the Web site www.america.gov. On the other hand, Clinton's trip to Asia seems to have been well planned to include the right amount and the right kind of public diplomacy. Fluent use of regional broadcasting — as Obama's interview with Al-Arabiya showed — is probably worth emphasizing for now. As Anne Applebaum observes on Slate:

Obama could, over the next few months, appoint people with the talent to act as real spokesmen for U.S. policy—on local television, speaking the local language, writing in the local press. For that matter, Obama himself could directly address the Chinese or the North Koreans, if not on local television then on CNN and the BBC...In China, a country where religious believers are harassed, all prominent visiting Americans should make a point of going to church—which Clinton did. In Russia, a country that feels ambivalent about its repressive past, all prominent visiting Americans should make a point of visiting a memorial to the victims of Stalin. Without even using the phrase human rights, many people will get the point.

Old media may die, in other words, but good public diplomacy skills and tactics remain.

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