

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

PD 101 ^[1]

Fellow-blogger [Ted Lipien](#) makes some valid points about seemingly basic mistakes that the State Department has made in public diplomacy in the new Administration. In particular, he notes, a chance was missed earlier this month to express solidarity with the victims of terrorist attacks in Ingushetia. Eventually the Department did comment, but it took longer to get the statement out, in Russian and in other regional languages, than is necessary given the worldwide news cycle. In order for news-related public diplomacy to be effective, it has to be rapid, delivered in relevant languages and via relevant media.

The State Department's public diplomacy performance is worth monitoring in particular because the Department has, under Hillary Clinton, once again set out goals for itself to become more involved in interacting with foreign publics, not just governments. Clinton has also initiated a kind of strategic review of the Department's policies and priorities, called a Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. If public diplomacy emerges as a high priority, then practitioners at the Department may stand a better chance of getting the resources they need to do their jobs.

There's more. At least one fairly breathless account claims that Secretary Clinton has begun to carry out a "revolution" in the way that the State Department does business. Clinton's head of Policy Planning, Anne-Marie Slaughter, is quoted as saying that "our diplomats are going to need to have skills that are closer to community organizing than traditional reporting and analysis. New connecting technologies will be vital..."

I'm not sure that the Department needs community organizing skills so much as it needs to improve its communication skills. This means above all knowing your audience, so that government, media and publics all get messages that are consistent in terms of their content but at the same time tailored to suit their needs and understandings.

Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen has been telling the Pentagon something similar, but also emphasizing the very key point that "To put it simply, we need to worry a lot less about how to communicate our actions and much more about what our actions communicate." He adds:

Our messages lack credibility because we haven't invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven't always delivered on promises. The most common questions that I get in Pakistan and Afghanistan are: "Will you really stay with us this time?" "Can we really count on you?" I tell them that we will and that they can, but when it comes to real trust in places such as these, I don't believe we are even in Year Zero yet. There's a very long way to go.

Consistent effort is required, not a revolution. Public Diplomacy 101.

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