


Nov 04, 2016 by [Philip Seib](#)

Judith McHale and the PAOs ^[1]

Undersecretary of State Judith McHale's [October 15 speech](#)  to the 2009 global Public Affairs Officers conference provides some useful insights into PAOs' concerns and Secretary McHale's thinking.

McHale remains optimistic, citing what she perceives as "a genuine wish to see a revival of American leadership...grounded in partnership and respect." That is probably true, at least among people around the world who recognize that a leadership vacuum will likely be filled by chaos, and with the United States taking the lead at least they will be able to deal with "the devil we know."

Based on McHale's comments, the PAOs had apparently informed her that if they are to be successful they must emerge from within the fortresses in which they work and engage more frequently and directly with foreign publics. McHale indicated that proposals for American Centers are gaining traction. Related to this was the PAOs' recommendation that offering English language instruction is a sure way to connect with people throughout the world. McHale also noted with approval the PAOs' endorsement of using American science and technology to reach even those people who dislike many aspect of U.S. foreign policy.

Whether this apparent meeting of the minds translates into substantive policy remains to be seen, but at least McHale seems to appreciate the value of listening to the women and men who are actually doing diplomacy.
