

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

Lugar Report Offers a Realistic Appraisal of Chinese Public Diplomacy ^[1]

On numerous levels, the United States continues to fall farther behind China in public diplomacy. This is yet another indication that for all its protestations about its commitment to reach out to foreign publics, the U.S. government is unwilling to commit the resources needed to do so effectively.

Within the U.S. Congress, the most thoughtful and persistent champion of public diplomacy is Senator Richard Lugar, ranking Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In a report released February 15, Senator Lugar noted that “in the same way that our trade with China is out of balance, it is clear to even the casual observer that when it comes to interacting directly with the other nation’s public we are in another lop-sided contest.”

This matters because inadequate public diplomacy is a fundamental flaw in the American effort to compete with China and, argues Lugar, “our nation is not doing all it can to prepare for the increasingly prominent role China will play in our economic and foreign policy.”

The Chinese are moving forward on several fronts, particularly with their Confucius Institutes, which teach Chinese language and culture and create a benign Chinese presence in countries around the world. There are about 320 of these institutes, with more than 70 in the United States. Politburo member Li Changchun is quoted in the Lugar report as saying that the Confucius Institutes are “an important channel to glorify Chinese culture, to help Chinese culture spread to the world,” which is “part of China’s foreign propaganda strategy.”

In addition to supporting the Confucius Institutes, the Chinese government is pouring money into its international broadcasting channels, trying to establish a media presence that complements its other efforts. Although the Chinese are not forthcoming about their grand strategy in these matters, it is clear that decisions have been made by the government to spend whatever is necessary to influence global publics, particularly in those countries that China needs as trade partners or suppliers of natural resources.

Most impressive (or frightening, depending on your outlook) is the apparent coherence of the Chinese public diplomacy strategy. The Chinese know what they want to accomplish and they have decided that they will do what it takes to reach their goals.

The United States is far behind in committing both the economic and intellectual resources needed to compete effectively in public diplomacy. Perhaps Senator Lugar’s sounding the alarm about this will grab the attention of Congress, the White House, and the State Department and help revitalize American efforts in this crucial field.
