

Nov 04, 2016 by *APDS Bloggers*

India Blog Series: Outward Bound-A Proposal for Indian Public Diplomacy ^[1]

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India has been described as a land of contradictions, a place that assaults the senses with all the colorful vehemence of a Bollywood dance. The world's largest democracy is a collage of brilliant hues and stark contrast, which makes it all the more ironic that India's image as a world player is somewhat hazy and its public diplomacy is still a bit unformed. Professor Philip Seib of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, in a blog published in December of 2010, wrote, "In many respects, this exotic, chaotic country remains geopolitically undefined. ... More and more, India is a significant player in world affairs, and yet it lacks a consistent profile that it can present to the rest of the world."

Perhaps the problem is that while India has made great strides in defining its character and image, it has yet to define its role as a player in the world. That's a subtle but important distinction. **The central question is not what India is but what it can become.**

Take Norway. Its national character and image are defined, to a large extent, by its adjacency to the sea; but its public diplomacy is centered on peacemaking. Its capital is the namesake of the Oslo peace process, and it is the home of the annual Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. While it is true that, as Alan K. Henrikson notes, some of Norway's peace activities originated with missionary work by the Lutheran Church years ago, there is nothing that geographically singles out Norway for peacemaking. "Now, more than ever," wrote New York Times correspondent Frank Bruni, "Norway seems to be the international capital of peace." As Mark Leonard and Andrew Small note in their commissioned study "Norwegian Public Diplomacy," "Norway might be only 115th in the world in terms of its size, but it is leading the world as a humanitarian power." In other words, Norway has added a global role that draws from its culture and is designed to enhance its soft power, rather than simply drawing attention to its heritage. India can do the same.

Consider China's efforts at public diplomacy. While it is true that its Confucius Institutes are designed to draw attention to Chinese language and culture and are somewhat inward looking, the growing ubiquity of the Xinhua News Agency is not. It aspires to become a world class news service rather than just a vehicle for China's positions on issues of national and global importance. It has covered the mining accident in Chile, the shootings in Seal Beach, California, the Global Green Growth Forum in Copenhagen, the Conrad Murray trial and the wedding of Paul McCartney as well as developments in China. The implicit message is that China's perspective on the world matters, but it's a soft sell that does not attempt to put everything in the context of Chinese culture or politics. India, which is at least as media-rich

and media-savvy as China, should be a major player in the same realm.

As a burgeoning, boisterous democracy and a growing economic power with a tradition of nonalignment, India has tremendous assets that can be put to work in its public diplomacy; but it should re-orient its strategy to reach out to the world in a way that leverages its strengths and national values rather than simply inviting other nations to sample its rich culture and diversity. As Professor Seib notes, it has been doing some work in that direction by, for example, helping Senegal and Ghana with projects including rice production and information technology development; but it needs to do more. Some suggestions:

- India should establish a Gandhi Academy of Peacemaking that would function as a global think tank for **conflict resolution** and that would convene an annual general assembly at which delegations from nations and non-state actors around the world could brainstorm new modalities for peace. **India's leadership in technology would position it well to come up with innovative solutions involving new media as well as traditional paradigms of peace**.
- India should start a Peace Corps – type program that would enlist recent university and technical institute graduates in service projects around the world. Tuition waivers and forgiveness could be used to create a burgeoning corps of highly skilled volunteers.
- India should establish a global news service that not only provides an Indian perspective on world affairs, but also establishes the nation as a player in an increasingly competitive field.

India's public diplomacy has already established the nation's image as incredible. The challenge in the next phase is to make its imprint on the world indelible.

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