

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

PD Under Secretary-Designate's Advice: Watch China ^[1]

WASHINGTON --- [Tara Sonenshine](#), nominated to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, offered advice this morning to public diplomacy observers: Watch China.

“We are challenged every day by what the Chinese are doing in public diplomacy,” she said.

Speaking at the U.S. Institute of Peace, where she is Executive Vice President, Sonenshine pointed to China’s paid print supplements in the *Washington Post* and other newspapers, including the *New York Times*.

“You may not read it,” she said, but readers are “embraced” by the paid supplements, which Sonenshine called “brilliant.”

These supplements have not been without critics, focusing on blurring of editorial and paid propaganda content. And an article on the Nieman website described them as “content-as-advertisement strategy.” That may be good news for China’s public diplomacy -- and confusing to readers who miss the sometimes subtle cues that label these sections as paid advertising.

Second, said Sonenshine, are the Confucius Institutes, China-funded centers that have spread rapidly to U.S. universities from east to west and north to south. She said the buildup of the Institutes’ Chinese language instruction programs across the U.S., followed by Institute-produced programs, was a major long-term investment by Beijing to gain influence here.

Her third illustration was the Chinese government’s international broadcaster, CCTV. Sonenshine, formerly a producer at ABC News, recently visited CCTV’s new Washington studios, which she described as a major broadcast production center.

“This is three floors of a major building on New York Avenue,” she said. “There will be a nightly newscast produced [and anchored] in Washington. This will start just as Al Jazeera did.” Sonenshine said predicted CCTV news will be carried first in just a few markets in the U.S., but that distribution would grow, just as Al Jazeera has grown in the U.S.

Al Jazeera’s English-language programming is now carried over the air on broadcast channels in cities including Washington D.C. and Los Angeles.

So China has “checked the print ‘box’” and has moved into broadcasting and in-person programs at the Confucius Institutes, she said, all adding up to a powerful public diplomacy force – and a huge investment in public diplomacy.

Sonenshine also noted Russia has started to follow China’s PD model in the U.S., with its

Russia Now section in *The Washington Post* and its 24-hour English language Russia Today television channel and website.

“Do you want to lose the public diplomacy battle with China and Russia?” she asked.

Sonenshine made her remarks at a forum with the Public Diplomacy Alumni Association and the Public Diplomacy Council, of which she is a member.
