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Diplomatic Security: Tweeting the Public Diplomacy Gospel [1]

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The issue of striking a balance between security and accessibility is one that has been a constant struggle for United States' diplomatic missions worldwide. How do diplomats meet the competing demands of interacting with foreign populations and keeping safe in a world filled with anti-American extremism? A diplomat's work is not complete when conducted solely from behind a desk within a veritable "Fortress America," so the need arises to ensure both safety and openness.

Following the 1985 U.S. Marine barracks bombing and April 1983 U.S. embassy bombing in Beirut, Lebanon, the U.S. State Department released the Inman Report, recommending a range of security improvements that have become hallmarks of security at diplomatic missions around the world. Measures such as "setback" (an increased distance between embassies and public streets), state of the art physical security concepts, and armored vehicles, are now the norm at diplomatic posts worldwide. As local non-Americans must have a certain degree of access to facilities to transact business encompassing the entire range of U.S. foreign policy interests (consular and travel matters, business and commercial affairs, cultural and informational exchange, and foreign assistance programs), closing off embassies and consulates has never been an option.

Nevertheless, U.S. embassies and consulates have been the constant target of protests, demonstrations, and even violence. The consequence, however, is that the "bubble" that many diplomats now operate under makes it more difficult for them to interact with people in other countries, limiting their ability to gather information and promote the American "brand." Essentially, it makes true public diplomacy altogether impossible!

This struggle has become especially salient in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Attackers gained entry to the complex and soon after the main building was engulfed in flames. Hours later, security forces had regained control of the complex, but the U.S. ambassador, Christopher Stephens, his state department colleague, Sean Smith, and former Navy Seals, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, had all been killed. The reason for the attack is not entirely clear at this point. The unrest immediately followed the release of an anti-Islam film produced in the U.S. but some U.S. lawmakers argue the attack was a pre-planned Al-Qaeda operation. Regardless of the immediate cause, the impact has been far-reaching. There has been intense regional fallout as protests, violent at times, have spread across the Muslim world.

Of course, a certain measure of security is necessary and to ignore the realities of the current international environment would be foolhardy at best and lethal at worst. We cannot expect our ambassadors to return to a time when they could move freely throughout the countries

where they are posted, making unexpected stops and allowing visitors to freely pass through embassies without necessary security inspections and processing. The time is ripe, however, for 21st Century Statecraft to take the stage.

21st Century Statecraft refers to the U.S. State Department's recent complementing of traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft. The goal is to fully leverage the networks, technologies, and demographics of our interconnected world. It recognizes that just as the Internet has changed economics, culture, and politics, it is also significantly impacting the practice of foreign policy. To ignore this digital component of international communication would be to do a great disservice to U.S. foreign policy efforts. The ultimate objective is to extend the reach of diplomacy beyond government-to-government communications; it is public diplomacy in the purest sense of the phrase.

21st Century Statecraft allows for communication beyond simple broadcasting with a whole host of participants. Of course, traditional forms of diplomacy still dominate, but 21st Century Statecraft represents a shift in form and strategy, a way to amplify traditional diplomatic efforts and encourage cyber-activism. It is not meant to replace traditional diplomacy, but merely serve as a supplement. In times like these, however, when the environment is much too hostile for traditional forms, digital forms may be all that are possible. Social media serves as a solid tool and has already been leveraged by U.S. diplomats in the Middle East. For example, after U.S. ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, was removed from the country due to security concerns, he continued to use social media to stay involved in the country, communication messages through Facebook to Syria's armed forces, warning them they would be prosecuted for crimes against humanity should they continue following President Bashar al-Assad's orders. While just one small example, it demonstrates the potential of 21st Century Statecraft.

Looking forward, the opportunity is perfect for 21st Century Statecraft to lead the U.S. towards its diplomatic goals. While not meant to oust traditional diplomacy, digital tools such as social media can serve as a suitable complement. 140 character messages beat radio silence from a barricaded embassy any day.

Marissa Cruz-Enriquez is a graduate of USC's Master in Public Diplomacy program. Her research interests include digital diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and international security. She is interested in pursuing a career with the federal government.