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May 08, 2017 by **Cari E. Guittard**

The Mother of All Influence ^[1]

In advance of Mother's Day later this week, it is a good time to reflect and recognize not only the contribution mothers make in our own lives and those of others around the world but their collective power globally. We should also call out and celebrate their unique strengths, skillsets, and experience sets. Skills and strengths that are not often championed or called out, but which could be powerful soft power assets in our broader public diplomacy strategies. I have detailed these strengths in prior posts that mothers develop and hone day in and day out, initially recommending that our law enforcement and intelligence services tap into. From exceptional situational awareness and heightened intuition, to building alliances and emotional intelligence, mothers also can assess, adapt and redirect on the fly and particularly in moments of crisis. Additionally, as Angela Cason, Co-founder of TEMPO Strategic recently shared, "we have a combination of patience and persistence that is unmatched. If our child has a problem we will not stop until we find answers."

In thinking further on these skill and experience sets, could there be a more powerful asset

than engaging mothers' strengths here and abroad for our broader public diplomacy strategies? Especially at a time when just last week Secretary of State Tillerson reiterated the massive planned cuts in both funding and personnel at State. Knowing and experiencing firsthand how public diplomacy has traditionally fallen at the end of the diplomatic priority list, those in charge of informing and influencing on behalf of the USG will need to find even more creative ways to expand our ability to inform and influence abroad.

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Engaging mothers in public diplomacy efforts is not new, though most of this work is ad hoc at best and rarely documented. There have been attempts to add this into our broader strategic PD efforts from the highest levels and I witnessed this work when Charlotte Beers championed it during her tenure at State. In the weeks following 9/11, Beers, then Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, convened a high-level group of global advertising, marketing and public relations executives for a two-day intensive strategy session on how the U.S. could respond to and counter the propaganda war that Bin Laden was unleashing. The sessions - which included legendary branding experts with decades of experience - was an intense back and forth, where creative minds clashed, then merged, then plotted out several proposed communications strategies that Charlotte would refine and build upon over the months that followed. One of the recommendations included expanded outreach to women and mothers in our broader public diplomacy efforts at the post level, as well as a targeted Rewards for Justice campaign, which at the time was ramping up the collection of any information leading to the capture or killing of Bin Laden and the terrorists responsible for 9/11. I remember well the immense pushback she received from the press, the diplomatic corps, public diplomacy experts, security and counter-terrorism experts and even the White House. It was also quite telling that most of the "experts" - from senior FSOs to political appointees - in each of these offices were 90% men.

It's ironic now that when you go to the Rewards for Justice website, the first image you see, rather than a WANTED sign is scrolling images of children and much softer, more emotionally intuitive language that I would argue is meant to garner the attention of women and mothers. No matter what you think of Charlotte Beers' tenure at State or her imprint on public diplomacy writ large, one would hope by now it is no longer considered crazy to add targeted outreach to and engagement of women and mothers as part of any sound public diplomacy strategy.

The current state of America's relationship with the world is tenuous as the new Administration gains its footing. It is a deeply challenging time for our public diplomacy efforts, which are critical to our broader diplomatic and national security efforts. We should engage every PD asset and every trusted influencer available to us in every community around the world that is sympathetic to Western values. Why not start with mothers?
