

Domestic Diplomacy: Making US Foreign Policy Less Foreign

Michael A. Hammer

Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs

The mission of the Bureau of Public Affairs (PA) is to advance America's interests through effective, accurate, and timely communication of our foreign policy. As we explain our policies to audiences abroad, we must also inform our fellow citizens here at home.

Secretary Kerry has made it a key priority to connect with the American people and to make the case for the value of our diplomatic and development efforts. In his first major foreign policy address on February 20, 2013—noteworthy, among other things, for being delivered domestically at the University of Virginia (UVA)—Secretary Kerry conveyed a core message: “I came here purposefully to underscore that in today’s global world, there is no longer anything foreign about foreign policy. More than ever before, the decisions that we make from the safety of our shores don’t just ripple outward; they also create a current right here in America. How we conduct our foreign policy matters more than ever before to our everyday lives, to the opportunities of all those students I met standing outside.”

Spearheading the Department’s domestic outreach, I have been struck by just how much room there is to increase the American public’s understanding of the work we do, how it benefits them, and how much we are able to accomplish with roughly one percent of the federal budget. The Department of State is the only federal agency that holds a daily press briefing. Each day, our spokesperson takes to the podium to present and explain our policies on myriad foreign affairs topics and breaking news items to American and international press. While the messages we deliver from the podium are invaluable to our influence on world issues, there remains a gap in understanding how we conduct our diplomacy. Our work ranges from negotiating arms control agreements and providing consular support for US citizens abroad to advocating for American businesses and promoting travel and tourism to the United States. Yet, perhaps the message that resonates most is what Secretary Kerry said at UVA: “Deploying diplomats today is much cheaper than deploying troops tomorrow.” In my experience, audiences across the country are eager to hear from us, and there is a tremendous interest on the part of our youth in doing public service, and, once they learn about the State Department, in joining our ranks.

My fellow State Department colleagues and I regularly travel the country to connect with local officials, business leaders, academics, students, diaspora communities, nongovernmental organizations and the media. In Denver, we helped representatives of the Chamber of Commerce of the Americas and other small business leaders understand the tools we employ to promote their exports. In Miami, I conducted a round of press interviews in Spanish and addressed students at Miami Dade College about US priorities in Latin America. And, when I traveled to North and South Dakota, we forged collaborative

relationships with five universities, and participated in a recruiting event for Native American students. In addition, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Domestic Outreach Cheryl Benton has visited numerous World Affairs Councils and Historically Black Colleges and Universities in such places as Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Raleigh, and Seattle, areas and demographics with whom we are looking to increase our engagement.

In one of his first public appearances, Secretary Kerry dropped in on one of our Foreign Policy Classrooms, a new PA program connecting US college students with our subject matter experts to discuss the most pressing foreign policy issues—be they counterterrorism, the Arab transitions, the Eurozone crisis, or human rights. There, he relished being able to “have a good dialogue, and talk about what is happening in the world and why we make some of the choices that we make.” The ultimate aim, he said, is for students to “become ambassadors, if you will, in [their] own communities, in [their] schools, in [their] homes, and explain what we’re doing and why we’re doing it.” PA is ensuring more and more students engage with us by taking the Foreign Policy Classroom program digital. Our first digital Classroom this past fall brought 155 undergraduate and graduate students from the Universities of Texas and Wisconsin together via digital video conference to discuss Internet freedom and cyber issues with diplomats in the Department.

We supplement our Foreign Policy Classroom initiative and domestic travel by employing a variety of innovative strategies to inform the American public. We have a network of Foreign Affairs Campus Coordinators, who serve as our liaisons to their respective academic communities through their Facebook pages and through workshops with visiting officials. Our flagship program, Hometown Diplomats, helps Foreign Service Officers bring the world of diplomacy to communities and schools across the country, and, last year, to all 50 states for the first time. Looking forward, we are eagerly anticipating construction of the US Diplomacy Center, a 30,000-square-foot exhibition hall and education center in the making, which will become a living museum to US diplomacy. We were thrilled to have Secretary Hillary Clinton host an event in January officially launching the Diplomacy Center with former Secretary James A. Baker III, both of whom made clear how important it is to recognize and celebrate the contributions State and USAID make to the country. As Secretary Clinton said, “People need to understand how an economic officer in Cambodia is helping to create jobs not only there, but in the United States; how helping women farmers in Africa sell more of their crop at markets makes the region the more stable and prosperous and gives us the opportunity to really expand our bilateral and regional relationships.” The Diplomacy Center will help our work come alive to the public.

We face a dynamic, fast-paced, 24/7 media environment often driven by 140-character tweets, and to adapt, we created a team in our Bureau to enhance our digital efforts. Our Office of Digital Engagement keeps the Department on the cutting edge of social media and innovative communications technology, ensuring that we are part of the conversation no matter where it is taking place. We are conducting Q&A sessions on Facebook, hosting Google+ hangouts, and addressing tweeted questions from the podium. Also, Secretary Kerry has been using our main @StateDept feed to engage with the Twittersphere directly. For example, before the 2013 Academy Awards, Secretary Kerry

and actor Ben Affleck traded tweets about Oscar-winning Best Picture *Argo*. The Secretary's tweet was an instant hit; it was re-tweeted by Ben Affleck himself, who acknowledged the "outstanding service and sacrifice of US diplomats and their families," and was picked up and re-tweeted by other opinion leaders and journalists, such as *Foreign Policy* editor Blake Hounshell and CNN reporter Jake Tapper.

PA has also had the opportunity to lend its expertise to other federal agencies. In the wake of Superstorm Sandy, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) came to us with a request for support, specifically seeking individuals well versed in public affairs with immediate deployment capability. Because of PA's recent establishment of our Fly Away Communications Team (FACT), we were able to identify and deploy five officers who arrived in the impacted region within 24 hours. These five women arrived on site and, in coordination with FEMA, immediately went to work identifying community needs, connecting with local elected officials, and providing assurance that the Federal government was committed to helping the victims of Sandy. This type of "surge force" deployment to the field enhances our ability to respond to international crises and was particularly gratifying, as our team was able to assist Americans directly, here at home.

When it comes to domestic diplomacy, PA has a clear mandate: we need to use all available communications platforms to ensure we are informing American audiences. We need to make our accomplishments accessible and tangible, impressing upon Americans that the benefits of investing in effective diplomacy and development are not abstract or aspirational; they can be seen here and now. Diplomacy leads to job creation and a level playing field for American businesses. The work of American diplomats enhances national security by addressing the causes of conflict and obviating the need for military action. It is up to all of us to continue to reach out beyond Bujumbura, Brussels, Bridgetown, and Baku to Biloxi, Boise, Boston, and Baton Rouge.