

SPEAKING TO OUR SILENT ALLIES: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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“The updated National Security Strategy proceeds from an understanding that the power of the United States is immense and unprecedented, but it also wisely notes that we cannot achieve all of our goals by acting alone,” says U.S. Representative Henry J. Hyde, chairman of the House International Relations Committee. “We must have allies to help shoulder the tasks, especially if we are to render our accomplishments secure.”

The newly revised National Security Strategy issued by the Bush Administration eloquently lays out a comprehensive agenda to guide U.S. foreign policy through the next decade and beyond. By linking together our fundamental principles, our long-term goals, and the challenges we will confront in the new century, this document provides an excellent and concise guide to thinking strategically about how the United States can best employ its resources toward promoting its interests around the world.

Of necessity, a study of such sweeping scope can devote only a limited discussion to each of its many subjects, inevitably prompting calls for more attention to be given to one facet or another. Each reader will have his other favorite to champion. One that I believe deserves much greater emphasis in our foreign policy decision-making is the role of public diplomacy.

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There are many countries whose interests may intersect with ours over a sufficiently broad range of subjects and time to merit the term “ally,” but I believe that our most powerful and most enduring allies are to be found among the peoples of the world.

And public diplomacy is the most effective instrument we possess for engaging them.

Public diplomacy — the collective name given to efforts by the U.S. government to explain its foreign policy to the world and encourage greater familiarity with the United States by the populations of other countries — embraces international broadcasting, exchange programs, and a range of public information services, along with many other programs and functions by a surprisingly large number of agencies. But in addition to this essentially passive approach, there is an additional capacity and a larger purpose which have never been fully recognized, namely the use of public diplomacy to speak directly to the peoples of the world and enlist them in our long-term efforts to promote freedom, prosperity, and stability throughout the world.

If we are to achieve this ambitious goal, we must begin by reversing the long neglect that has consigned public diplomacy to the periphery of our foreign policy decision-making. Our initial focus must be on stripping away the encumbrance of misunderstanding and disinformation that has been allowed to distort the image of the United States abroad, distortions that now seriously threaten our influence and security. Only then can we begin to lay the foundation for a deep and lasting connection with the peoples of the world that is complementary to, but separate from, our relationships with their governments. The necessary elements for this historic task are already in hand.

Let me explain that task and the rewards that await us if we accomplish it.

As Americans, we are justly proud of our country. If any nation has been a greater force for good in the long and tormented history of this world, I am unaware of it. We have guarded whole continents from conquest, showered aid on distant lands, sent thousands of youthful idealists to remote and often inhospitable areas to help the world's forgotten.

Why, then, when we read or listen to descriptions of America in the foreign press, do we so often seem to be entering a fantasyland of hatred? Much of the popular press overseas, often including the government-owned media, daily depict the United States as a force for evil, accusing this country of an endless number of malevolent plots against the world. Even as we strike against the network of terrorists who masterminded the murder of thousands of Americans, our actions are widely depicted in the Muslim world as a war against Islam. Our efforts, however imperfect, to bring peace to the Middle East spark riots that threaten governments that dare to cooperate with us.

How has this state of affairs come about? How is it that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue has allowed such a destructive and parodied image of itself to become the intellectual coin of the realm overseas? Over the years, the images of mindless hatred directed at us have become familiar fixtures on our television screens.

All this time, we have heard calls that "something must be done." But, clearly, whatever has been done has not been enough.

I believe that the problem is too great and too entrenched to be solved by tweaking an agency here or reshuffling a program there. If a strategy is not working, we should not insist on more of the same. Instead, we must begin by rethinking our entire approach.

It is increasingly clear that much of the problem lies in our ineffective and often antiquated methods. For example, broadcasts on short-wave radio simply cannot compete with AM and FM channels in terms

of accessibility, to say nothing of television, the most powerful medium of all. Shifting our efforts into these and other broad-based media, including the Internet and others, will take time and money, but this reorientation is a prerequisite to reaching our intended audience.

But there is a deeper problem. According to many observers, we have largely refused to participate in the contest for public opinion and thereby allowed our enemies' slanders to go unchallenged. The effort to avoid controversy has come at the cost of potential persuasion and of much of the reason to listen to us at all.

The results are sobering. In testimony last year before the House International Relations Committee, the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees our international broadcasting efforts, stated that "we have virtually no youthful audience under the age of 25 in the Arab world."

We have several tasks, then. We must develop both the means of reaching a broader audience and also the compelling content that will persuade them to tune in. These objectives will not be easy to accomplish, especially in an increasingly competitive media environment, but they are prerequisite to our having an opportunity to present our case in clear and persuasive terms. Our work does not stop there, for we must make our case not once but over and over again and be prepared to do so for decades to come.

It is for that reason that I introduced legislation aimed at accomplishing these and other goals, legislation which I am proud to say has enjoyed broad bipartisan support and which the House passed unanimously last July. Unfortunately, we were not able to persuade the Senate of the merits of this legislation before both houses adjourned, but we shall take it up again in the 108th Congress.

This bill, H.R. 3969, is divided into three sections. The first reshapes and refocuses the State Department's public diplomacy programs, including specifying a series of objectives to be attained and requiring an annual plan be formulated to determine how these are to be implemented. Far greater prominence will be given to public diplomacy

throughout all of the Department's activities, and greater resources will be made available to ensure that these new responsibilities can be met.

The second section establishes a series of exchange programs focused on the Muslim world. Our purpose here is to lay the foundation for long-term change in a part of the world to which we have given far too little attention. As we respond to the immediate problems before us, we must remember that the task we face has no obvious endpoint.

The third section of the bill reorganizes our international broadcasting services in order to prepare them for far-reaching and innovative reforms. Given the importance of broadcasting to our larger purpose, we cannot afford to be constrained by how we have always done things. New approaches and enhanced resources will be central to any prospect of winning an expanded audience, and this bill is but the first step in that direction. To this end, the House has authorized \$135 million to launch an ambitious effort into television broadcasting.

Let me now turn to what I believe should be the larger purpose of our public diplomacy efforts. To some, that purpose is self-evident: to provide objective news and information, to convey an accurate and positive image of America, and to present and explain U.S. foreign policy.

Unquestionably, these are essential functions. If we do them well, they will comprise an indispensable voice of clarity regarding our foreign policy, one otherwise absent from the world's airways.

However, I believe that public diplomacy's potential is even greater. To understand that, we must first understand that half of our foreign policy is missing.

Let me explain.

As the most powerful actor in the international system, the United States conducts the world's only global foreign policy, one that dwarfs in extent and resources that of any other country. Its range extends across the entire spectrum, from the political and military to the economic and cultural, and centers on an elaborate array of relationships with virtually

every sovereign government, from Russia to Vatican City, with scores of international organizations rounding out the total.

Nevertheless, for some years now, scholars have talked about the emergence in world politics of what they call "non-state actors." While the nation-state remains the primary "actor" on the world stage, it is no longer the only one — and in certain instances, what nation-states do and don't do is heavily conditioned by what those non-state actors do and don't do.

Poland's Solidarity movement in the 1980's is a powerful example of a "non-state actor" which had a dramatic and positive impact on the course of events. I needn't remind you that al Qaeda has demonstrated a contrary ability to sow destruction.

Thus, it should be obvious to all that the dynamics of world politics are no longer determined by foreign policy professionals only. As important as they are, what they think and do is conditioned by what is happening in the hearts and minds of almost 7,000 million human beings on a shrinking globe in an age of almost instantaneous information. That is why public diplomacy — the effort to persuade those hearts and minds of the truth about our purposes in the world — must be a crucial part of our foreign policy effort.

My point is this: Our focus on our relations with foreign governments and international organizations has led us to overlook a set of powerful allies: the peoples of the world.

Uniquely among the world's powers, a dense network connects the United States with the populations of virtually every country on the planet, a network that is independent of any formal state-to-state interaction. On one level, this is not surprising: as the preeminent political, military, and economic power, the presence of the United States is a daily fact of life in most areas of the globe. America's cultural impact is even broader, penetrating to the most forbiddingly remote areas of the world, with a range continually expanded by the boundless reach of electronic media.

But there is an even deeper connection, a bond that derives from the universal values America represents. More than a simple wish list of desirable freedoms, at their core is the belief that these values have universal application, that they are inherent in individuals and peoples by right of their humanity and not by the grace of the powerful and the unelected. They provide hope even for those populations which have never experienced hope.

The advancement of freedom has been a prominent component of American foreign policy since this country's inception. Given the nature of the American people, it is certain to remain so. But in addition to genuine altruism, our promotion of freedom can have another purpose, namely as an element in the United States' geopolitical strategy.

Despite the laments and exasperations of the practitioners of Realpolitik regarding what they see as our simplistic and naive images of the world, we haven't done so badly. That virtually the entire continent of Europe is free and secure today is largely due to America's powerful and beneficent embrace, one that stretches from the landings in Normandy to the present day.

The history of the last century taught us many lessons, one of the most important being that the desire for freedom we share with others can be a remarkably powerful weapon for undermining geopolitical threats. The prime example is the Soviet Union.

Decades of enormous effort on the part of the United States and the West aimed at containing and undermining the threat posed by the Soviet empire enjoyed considerable success. But it was only with the advent of democracy in Russia and the other nations of the Soviet prison house that the communist regime was finally destroyed and with it the menace it posed to us and to the world as a whole. This should be a deep lesson for us, but it is one that curiously remains unlearned.

Candidates for the application of this lesson come readily to mind: the list of countries posing threats to the United States, such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, contains no democracies. All are repressive, all maintain their rule by coercion. Given the closed

nature of these regimes, the conventional tools available to the United States to affect the behavior of these and other regimes can seem frustratingly limited, often amounting to little more than a mix of sanctions, condemnation, and diplomatic isolation. Despite great effort on our part, each of these regimes continues its course toward the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, holding out the frightening prospect of a vast increase in their ability to do harm to the United States and its interests.

In our deliberations regarding our policy toward these and other challenges to U.S. interests, we should remember that the fate of the Soviet empire provides an instructive example of how peaceful change can be encouraged by those outside.

To secure its rule, the Soviet regime trained its vast powers on all who would dissent, dividing and isolating the population —and even sending in the tanks when necessary — in an effort to deny hope to any challengers. But the West was able to provide hope anyway, with the role of two individuals being especially important.

The first was the election of Pope John Paul II. His initial message to his countrymen in Poland told them: "Be not afraid." From that beginning, a mass movement took shape, Solidarity was born, and the Polish regime began its unstoppable slide to oblivion. Poland is now free.

Equally significant was the election of Ronald Reagan. Against the advice of many, Reagan refused to tame his remarks about the Soviet Union. When he called the Soviet Union "an evil empire," he was openly derided by many in the West as an ideologue or a warmonger and especially by those who asserted that our interests lay in an accommodation with the regime.

Many dismissed his declaration as "empty words." But veterans of the democracy movement in the former Soviet Union point to his statement as a turning point in their struggle. For it was the first time that a Western leader had called the Soviet Union by its real name, had openly stated that the regime was illegitimate and proclaimed it mortal. It was an unambiguous statement that, at long last,

America was casting its lot with the powerless and not with the all-powerful regime, a declaration that we would never abandon the oppressed merely to secure better relations with their oppressors.

That infusion of hope, the unambiguous declaration that America was openly aligning itself with those who were struggling against impossible odds, helped set in motion the events which dissolved the Soviet Union, almost without a shot being fired. We know the importance of the role played by the West because those who led that resistance have repeatedly told us. We must understand that although the long decades of pressure by the West on Moscow were essential to its demise, in the end it was the victory of our allies within — the unfree peoples of the Soviet Union — which actually vanquished the empire.

I have used the term “alliance” when speaking of our relationships with peoples around the world. I do not use the term lightly, nor is it merely a figure of speech. Although our global responsibilities require us to maintain a full complement of official interactions with regimes around the world, and even to cultivate good relations with them, we must remember that our true allies are the people they rule over. We are allies because we share a common aim, which is freedom. And we have a common opponent: oppressive regimes hostile to democracy.

Does this mean that we must cast our lot with the uncertain prospects of the oppressed around the world and forgo cooperation with their ruling regimes? Must we renounce traditional foreign policy goals, and even our own interests, in the name of revolution? Obviously, the answer is no. Adopting

such a course would be profoundly foolish and would quickly prove to be unsustainable. Our interests require that we cooperate with a range of governments whose hold on power does not always rest on the consent of the governed. The first and enduring priority of American foreign policy is and must remain the promotion of the interests of the American people; our desire to help others must not be confused with an obligation to do so. But neither should we ignore the necessity of maintaining our connections with the populations of those governments whose cooperation we need but whose tenure in power is not eternal.

This, then, is the purpose I would set for our public diplomacy and for our foreign policy as a whole: to engage our allies among the peoples of the world. This must include public pronouncements from the President and from the Congress that clearly state the long-term objectives of U.S. foreign policy. We must have good relations with the world’s governments, but this must be complemented by our speaking past the regimes and the elites and directly to the people themselves.

For all of America’s enormous power, transforming the world is too heavy a burden to attempt alone. But we are not alone. The peoples of the world represent an enormous reservoir of strategic resources waiting to be utilized. The formula is a simple one: we can best advance our own interests not by persuading others to adopt our agenda but by helping them achieve their own freedom. In so doing, we must always remember that although we have many vocal opponents, these are vastly outnumbered by the legions of our silent allies. ●