U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Public Diplomacy 2.0: A New Approach to Global Engagement

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As Prepared

Thank you, Steve Clemons and the New American Foundation, for giving me this opportunity to tell you about Public Diplomacy 2.0.

I'll begin in a surprising place: Colombia. For more than 40 years, Colombia had been in a state of siege from violent extremists of both the left and right, but now it is winning.

Since 2002, Colombia has reduced terrorist attacks by more than three-fourths. There are several reasons. Military and intelligence operations are working. So is an ambitious program to demobilize extremists and then reintegrate them into society.[1]

But just as important, the environment that forms the backdrop for terrorism has changed. Once frozen in fear and apathy, Colombians today are fed up with the wanton violence that and are standing up.

A powerful counter-movement has emerged that has demoralized the remaining terrorist group, the FARC. The origins of the new force were not in government or civil society. Instead, a young unemployed computer technician named Oscar Morales spontaneously started a Facebook group that grew quickly to more than 400,000 members. The group, called One Million Voices Against the FARC, put 12 million people in the streets in a single day in 190 cities around the world -- just two months after it was set up.

I'll get back to Colombia, but first some background.

Shortly after I was sworn in, I came here to New America to lay out our strategy for public diplomacy. It included a shift in focus and emphasis – toward the war of ideas.

Much of our public diplomacy effort had been devoted to building a positive image of the United States, mainly through long-term programs like educational and cultural exchanges and efforts to tell America's story. But there is more to public diplomacy.

In April 2006, the President designated the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy as the government-wide lead in strategic communications, or war of the ideas. I provide leadership and coordination for my colleagues at the Defense Department, the intelligence community, and beyond.

In the war of ideas, our core task in 2008 is to create an environment hostile to violent extremism. We do that in two ways: by undermining extremist ideologies and by encouraging young people to follow productive paths that lead away from terrorism.

The Colombian experience is relevant to both these tracks. It also reminds us that there is nihilistic violence in the world that is built on ideologies that have nothing at all to do with Islam. The intellectual historian Paul Berman puts the case very well in his important book *Terror and Liberalism*:

"Camus…noticed a modern impulse to rebel, which had come out of the French Revolution and the nineteenth century and had very quickly, in the name of an ideal, mutated into a cult of death. And the ideal was always the same, though each movement gave it a different name. It was not skepticism and doubt. It was the ideal of submission. It was submission to the kind of authority that liberal civilization had slowly undermined, and which the new movements wished to reestablish on a novel basis. It was the ideal of the one, instead of the many. The ideal of something godlike. The total state, the total doctrine, the total movement."[2]

That describes the FARC, which emerged from the Colombian Community Party. It describes Al Qaeda and the Taliban. It describes the Iran of ayatollahs and the other threats we face in the 21st century.

Beyond ideology, what most violent extremists around the world have in common is that their leaders hijack impressionable young people to carry out their crimes of terrorism. These young people are exceptionally vulnerable. A terrorist leader fills the hole in the heart of a young person searching for identity with what is sometimes seen as the most alluring game in town, linking adventure with a doctrine of hatred, fantasy, greed, and hysteria.

The reality – as young people who join Al Qaeda and the FARC soon learn – is quite different.

In Saudi Arabia two weeks ago, I met a young man severely disfigured with burns when the fuel truck he was driving for Al Qaeda in Iraq was blown up by his supposed comrades by remote control. He was driving a guided missile and did not know it. Now, after prison and rehabilitation in the Saudis' remarkable deradicalization program, he serves enthusiastically as a living warning to others of the nature of the Al Qaeda death cult.

In Colombia, I met a young woman named Flor who had joined the FARC at age 12 because she was bored. She soon found she had made a terrible mistake, living in an organization where babies were literally ripped from the wombs of pregnant women fighters. But she was trapped in the jungle for seven years.

The question that my colleague Jared Cohen and I asked after meeting the leaders of Million Voices movement in Bogota was this: Are there other anti-violence, anti-extremist, anti-oppression organizations out there that were using new online techniques to build movements? Could these young people both undermine pernicious ideologies and find a productive outlet, a way to create positive identities through a global network that promotes peace and freedom rather than death and totalitarianism?

We found 17 for starters – organizing against violence and extremism in South Africa, the UK, India, Cuba, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Darfur, and Egypt. And, in partnership with such private-sector institutions as Google, MTV, AT&T, Howcast.com, Access 360 Media, Columbia University, and Facebook itself, we are bringing them to New York for a summit starting on Wednesday. These groups will be joined by about a dozen others that do not have an online presence but want one – from places like Indonesia, Iraq, and Venezuela.

The purpose of the summit is to share best practices, produce a manual and an online hub, and create a giant global conversation about how young people can oppose

violence and extremism.

To return to Paul Berman, these young people subscribe to the "ideal of the many," not "the ideal of the one."

This project is an example of how we see public diplomacy changing. We have arrived at the view that the best way to achieve our goals in public diplomacy is through a new approach to communicating, an approach that is made far easier because of the emergence of Web 2.0, or social networking, technologies. We call our new approach Public Diplomacy 2.0.

PD 2.0 is an approach, not a technology. But new technology is absolutely necessary to its success. More than that, new technology gives the United States a significant comparative advantage over the terrorists.

That may sound counter-intuitive. After all, during my Senate confirmation hearings back in January, I said, turning an inelegant phrase, that Al Qaeda was "eating our lunch" on the Internet. That is no longer true.

Yes, Al Qaeda and other violent extremist organizations have exploited the Internet to their advantage, but that advantage has rapidly diminished – and not just because the jihadist message has worn thin with Al Qaeda's penchant for slaughtering fellow Muslims.

The Internet remains a venue for Al Qaeda to exhort and instruct and even plan attacks. But, as Marc Lynch points out on his Abu Aardvark blog,[3], new technology has at the same time diminished Al Qaeda's "ability to spread its ideology, frame public discourse in the Islamic world, [and] assert claims to leadership of Islamic movements."

Why? Because, as analyst Daniel Kimmage wrote in the New York Times, "the Qaeda media nexus...is old hat. If Web 1.0 was about creating the snazziest official Web resources and Web 2.0 is about letting users run wild with self-created content and interactivity, Al Qaeda and its affiliates are stuck in 1.0."[4]

The Internet world of Al Qaeda is one of direction: believe this, do that.

The Internet world of today is one of interactivity and conversation: I think this, your ideas are unconvincing, I need more information to make up my mind, let's meet at 3 p.m. Thursday for a peaceful protest. In fact, the Internet itself is becoming the locus of Civil Society 2.0.

This new virtual world is democratic. It is an agora. It is not a place for a death cult that counts on keeping its ideology sealed off from criticism. The new world is a marketplace of ideas, and it is no coincidence that Al Qaeda blows up marketplaces.

Almost pathetically, the violent extremists are trying to keep up with the new media. Kimmage notes that Al Qaeda statements are sometimes posted to social networking sites, but the reactions, "which range from praise to blanket condemnation, are a far cry from the invariably positive feedback Al Qaeda gets on moderated jihadist forums."

Meanwhile, Al Qaeda's attempts at interactivity fall flat. After powerful criticism from Sheikh Awdah and other religious leaders who have turned on the organization, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number-two, decided to open himself up to online questions in December 2007. The answers, which were labored, dogmatic, and unconvincing, did not appear until April 2008.

Extremists can't adapt to social networking because it shakes the foundations of their whacked-out, rigid ideology. But what about governments? Aren't we rigid too? Don't we want to maintain control of our message?

Perhaps. But in this new world of communications, any government that resists new Internet techniques faces a greater risk: being ignored. Our major target audiences – especially the young – don't want to listen to us lecture them or tell them what to think or how wonderful we are.

Certainly, there is a continuing need for clearly explained policies and for copious facts on, for example, the brutal nature of the Taliban. But our broad mandate in public diplomacy is to understand, inform, engage, and influence foreign publics. All of these activities work best by conversation rather than dictation.

Public Diplomacy 2.0 is more than interactivity. It is a holistic approach, an attitude. Monroe E. Price, director of the Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research in London, recently wrote [5] about a short book by the French deconstructivist philosoper Jacques Derrida called "Of Hospitality." [6] This is a tome that has nothing at all to do with strategic communications but that vigorously analyzes the term beginning with the idea of the foreigner in Plato, showing that hospitality has two senses. First, to host implies to control or to own. But at the same time, to host means to welcome unconditionally, to open up one's property.

In Price's reading, Derrida would argue that public diplomacy should move from being "primarily a means of projecting perceptions of the U.S…to one which would be a platform for cooperation, mediation, and reception – a mode of being informed as well as informing."

I like this paradigm: from the host as owner to the host as welcomer. The concept goes to the heart of what our research shows is a major reason for animosity toward the United States: the view by others that we don't respect their opinions, that we do not actively listen and understand.

Derrida's notion, as filtered through Price, is a good description of Public Diplomacy 2.0. We in government act as a facilitator or convener. The risks inherent here are absolutely necessary if we want to: 1) have our ideas heard and respected, and 2) be seen as what we are – a society that itself hears and respects the views of others.

Let me give you an example.

A few months ago, we formed a partnership – with such private-sector organizations as NBC Universal, the Directors Guild of America, and the Tisch School at NYU -- to launch what's called the Democracy Video Contest.[7] Entrants make their own three-minute videos, posted to a site on YouTube, with the topic, "Democracy Is…" Winners will be determined by a vote of the public over the Internet. While we did set a few rules – no pro-terrorist or pornographic videos – it is certainly possible that the winner of the contest will espouse views not completely shared by the U.S. Government.

And today, our Education and Cultural Affairs Bureau launches a similar video contest, in partnership with the Adobe Foundation, with the theme, "My Culture Plus Your Culture Equals…"[8]

These contests promote two big ideas that are at the heart of public diplomacy – democracy and cultural exchange – and they do so in a manner that is more effective than simply issuing white papers. We are encouraging others to tell us what's valuable about democracy and exchanges, to think about these subjects, and to share their conclusions. Millions can benefit from the interaction.

We have also urged our main assets in public diplomacy – the people who staff the State Department's overseas posts – to find ways to serve as PD 2.0 facilitators. Our public affairs officers have helped in the formation of groups, for example, of European Muslim entrepreneurs and of victims of terrorism. A partnership that we catalyzed will be starting the modern analogue to "Problems of Communism," a Cold War publication of the USIA from 1952 to 1992. The difference is that the new *Problems of Extremism* won't be run by a U.S. Government organization but by a foundation supported with both public and private funds and directed by European think tank

scholars.

Our embassy in Kuwait is sponsoring a moot court at a local university that will examine Guantanamo – seriously and dispassionately. Rather than sling slogans or ignore a difficult topic altogether, the post is saying, let's have a conversation – bringing together legal experts (not USG representatives) from all sides of the question of how a nation should detain enemy combatants in an unconventional war.

For those who ask how PD 2.0 relates to image burnishing, our answer is that we **want** to portray the image of a society that grapples with tough issues, lets millions of voices be heard, and believes that, in the end, the best ideas win. And, by the way, this image comports with American reality, as our recent election reminded the world.

What else are we doing in PD 2.0?

Our Digital Outreach Team goes onto blogs and websites. In Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and we hope soon in Russian – its members identify themselves as State Department representatives. They engage in the conversation, gently inform, correct distortions about U.S. policies.[9] Recently, one of our Farsi bloggers engaged in an extended series of interactive posts with the media advisor to Ahmadinejad in Iran. The series ran on the advisor's site and then was reprinted in full in an Iranian newspaper.

America.gov, our website that tells America's story in seven languages, has blogs on multiple topics, and our International Information Programs Bureau, which traditionally sends speakers abroad, now conducts more than 300 on-line webchats a year.

Our Education and Cultural Affairs Bureau has two social networking presences, on Facebook and on the platform, Ning.com. This latter site, called ExchangesConnect, [10] is, quite frankly, pushing the envelope -- a social networking dot-gov site.

We are developing an English language-teaching game that will use cell phones for distribution. Targeted toward Mideast audiences, like our other highly successful English-teaching ventures, it also teaches about American society and culture.

IIP has conducted five public diplomacy initiatives in Second Life, the virtual online world. In January, I will participate in a Second Life Virtual Newsroom project that will feature a meeting eight Egyptian bloggers, who have been covering the U.S. election and transition over the past three months in a program run by the American University of Cairo and funded by USAID, featuring internships with the Washington Post and the Huffington Post.

During the election, we made extensive use of social networking, including mobile updates through Facebook and Twitter/SMS. And since I was confirmed, we have held several bloggers-only press conferences, in the belief that bloggers who follow public diplomacy are the real experts and their posts radiate throughout the traditional media.

Finally, my domain as Under Secretary extends to public affairs, which is led by Assistant Secretary Sean McCormack. No public affairs leader in government has been more on the cutting edge of new technology than Sean, who **has made DipNote into an exciting interactive venue.**[11]

But let me be clear again: Public Diplomacy 2.0 is a new approach, not a new technology. The technology is an enabler, not an end in itself. Here are the guiding precepts of this approach:

1. **Indirection usually works best**. Matt Armstrong, in his MountainRunner blog,[12] recently defined public diplomacy as "the direct or **indirect** engagement of foreign publics to support national security objectives." I like that. Our embassy in Rabat, which I recently visited, supported a TV production team from a Moroccan network to tour the United States and talk with Moroccan-born Americans about their lives, including their practice of religion. Our greatest obstacle is the belief in many Muslim nations that the U.S. is out to destroy Islam. The Moroccan TV network, working on its own with our support but not our direction, produced a long-running series that showed the U.S. to be a tolerant nation where Moroccan-Americans are thriving. The series didn't say we were perfect, but by letting Moroccans themselves speak, we achieved aims through indirection that we never could directly. By the way, like many of our posts, Embassy Rabat has its own YouTube site.[13]

2. **We convene and facilitate**. We encourage and nudge. We put people together. We find people who are doing good things and support them.

3. **Expertise resides in the private sector**. Our job is to find it and use it and serve as a partner. Earlier this year, we brought in a dozen private sector experts for a Marketing College, to teach the latest techniques, including social networking, to three dozen students from State, DoD, and the intelligence community.

4. **Some of the best public diplomacy programs have long been based on PD 2.0 approaches**. Take educational exchanges. Our job there is mainly to bring foreigners in direct contact with Americans. Not to tell either what to think.

5. **Speed is essential.** A world of interactivity requires rapid engagement, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a willingness to take risks. We can't take four months to respond to questions, the way Zawahiri did. We need to give our diplomats and our surrogates the ability to move quickly and back them up if they make earnest mistakes.

And here are some cautions:

First, everything we do in public diplomacy must be strategic. We have to keep our eyes on the prize, which is the clearly defined national interest –the reduction of threats and the promotion of freedom, goals that are linked.

Second, tried-and-true traditional methods of public diplomacy – such as exchanges, where we spend most of our money – must be maintained and augmented, while always searching for new ways to do the job better.

In the tried-and-true category, I would also put U.S. international broadcasting, which hews to professional standards of journalism, such as balance and objectivity. The audience for the Broadcasting Board of Governors' 60 language services has risen from 100 million a week to 175 million during this administration, with most of the gains in Muslim nations.

Third, public diplomacy – whether 1.0 or 2.0 – is only one tool for achieving foreign policy and national security goals. One blogger wrote last week that "starting a Facebook group called 'Terrorism Sucks!' and getting a bunch of people to join it isn't exactly winning the War on Islamic Fundamental Militancy. Google bombing Osama Bin Laden doesn't have the same effectiveness as actually bombing him."[14] In fact, we never said soft power was a substitute for hard power. It is an essential complement.

But we need proportionality. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in July: "In the campaign against terrorist networks and other extremists, we know that direct military force will continue to have a role. But over the long term, we cannot kill or capture our way to victory."[15]

These sentiments, while surely correct, are not reflected in the distribution of resources. This is not a criticism of the current administration. Frankly, public diplomacy was unprepared for vast increases in resources until recently. Now, we are.

Finally, while I have talked today about the need to give up control, bear in mind that we in government are stewards. Public diplomacy is ultimately our responsibility. At the State Department, there is an important nexus that binds policy formation and analysis, critical input from seasoned professionals at our network of posts, and the tools to engage with foreign publics. We need private-sector partners, but we cannot outsource our basic responsibility.

Five years ago, I served on a commission, the Djerejian Group, that examined our government's conduct of public diplomacy.[16] We had just spent more than a decade dismantling our arsenal of persuasion, and the commission worried that there was a lack of will to rebuild it. The will now exists.

Across both parties, throughout government, and in the private sector, there is a fierce and conscientious desire to restore our strength in soft power. But to restore is not enough. What I have laid out today is a new approach to soft power, one both in keeping with our age and, I believe, with the strengths of the incoming administration of Barack Obama.

A month ago, I had the privilege of briefing President Bush on the state of the war of ideas – or NSE. I said that when he came to office in January 2001, because of the bipartisan and unilateral disarmament that the Djerejian Group talked about, there was no war-of-ideas infrastructure, no strategy, and few programs.

He will leave with a platform, a strategy, and **many** programs – all augmented by the Public Diplomacy 2.0 approach.

Thank you.

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[1] See my op-ed piece, "A Leader on Fighting Terrorism," in the Miami Herald, at www.miamiherald.com/opinion/other-views/story/786311.html
[2] Paul Berman, "Terror and Liberalism" (W.W. Norton paperback edition, 2004), p. 46.
[3] http://abuaardvark.typepad.com
[4] www.nytimes.com/2008/06/26/opinion/26kimmage.html
[5] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/monroe-price/changing-international-br_b_143099.html
[6] Stanford University Press, 2000
[7] www.videochallenge.america.gov
[8] http://exchanges.state.gov/news/ovc.html
[9] For a news story on the Digital Outreach Team, see www.nytimes.com/2007/09/22/washington/22bloggers.html
[10] http://connect.state.gov
[11] http://blogs.state.gov/
[12] http://mountainrunner.us/
[13] http://fr.youtube.com/usembrabat
[14] http://troydoney.blogspot.com/
[15] http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1262
[16] See the Group's report, "Changing Minds, Winning Peace" by following the link at www.publicdiplomacy.org/23.htm

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