

You are in: [Home](#) >

default header

02 July 2008

State's Glassman Discusses Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century
Glassman outlines impact of war of ideas, including terrorism

(begin transcript)

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS MEETING
SUBJECT: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY
SPEAKER: JAMES GLASSMAN, UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
MODERATOR: MICHAEL MORAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR, CFR.ORG
LOCATION: COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK
TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT
DATE: MONDAY, JUNE 30, 2008

MR. MORAN: Well, good afternoon, everybody. I'd like to welcome you all to this Council on Foreign Relations meeting. This is an on- the-record meeting.

I'm Michael Moran. I'm the executive editor of CFR.org, the Council's Web site and, for the sake of full disclosure, once a junior newsperson at Radio Free Europe. So I have some knowledge of what we're talking about here today. Our guest today is James K. Glassman, who leads America's public diplomacy outreach. Mr. Glassman, of course, used to serve as the chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees all federal and surrogate broadcasting from the U.S. government. It's a complicated web, and I hope we can unravel some of it for you this afternoon as we talk.

Mr. Glassman has a very deep background in journalism, a former president of the Atlantic Monthly Company, a publisher of The New Republic, executive V.P. of U.S. News and World Report, and editor in chief and co-owner of Roll Call, which most of you know is the congressional newspaper.

He's also a former columnist for The Washington Post, a business columnist and has been published all over the place -- Wall Street Journal, New York Times, L.A. Times, et cetera.

We're going to begin the day with some remarks from James Glassman and then we'll have a period where he and I discuss issues that his office is grappling with, and we'll open it to questions after that.

With no further ado, Assistant Secretary James Glassman. (Applause.)

MR. GLASSMAN: Thanks, Mike. It's a great pleasure to be here today.

Two and a half weeks ago, on my first day of work at the State Department, I told my staff that at this moment in history there is no more important work in government than the work that they are doing -- public diplomacy.

Now, if this sounds like bureaucratic chauvinism, it is not. The threats that America faces today and the goals that we want to achieve are profoundly dependent on influencing foreign publics -- not with arms, not even with arm-twisting, but with the softer power of ideas.

I was sworn in on June 10th, six months almost to the day from the date I was nominated. And that's pretty quick in Senate time, I understand, although quite frustrating for the person involved.

Six months gave me a chance eventually to hit the ground running, and on June 24th I was able to launch a new approach to public diplomacy at an interagency meeting. That new approach, a public diplomacy for the 21st century, is what I want to talk to you about today. It is not grandiose. It is indeed a shift in

emphasis, but a shift with real strategic consequences.

This is my first speech as undersecretary. I wanted to give it here at the Council on Foreign Relations, not just because of your reputation and your history, but also because of your deep interest in public diplomacy.

I served on the congressionally mandated Djerejian Group in 2003, which examined U.S. public diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim world. And at the same time CFR was completing an excellent study, "Finding America's Voice," by a group headed by Pete Peterson. We drew freely, plagiarists that we were, on the Peterson Report.

The undersecretary for public diplomacy and public affairs, as the mouthful of a name puts it, has a big portfolio. One part of the portfolio is to be, in the words of Senator Joseph Lieberman, who introduced me at my confirmation hearing, the supreme allied commander in the war of ideas. (Chuckles.)

I will be concentrating on just that -- the war of ideas -- because I believe the war of ideas needs urgent attention, not because other parts of the undersecretary's portfolio are unimportant.

So let me start with some context. Public diplomacy is diplomacy that's aimed at publics, as opposed to officials. Public diplomacy, like official diplomacy and like war, when war becomes necessary, has as its mission the achievement of the national interest. Public diplomacy performs this mission by understanding, informing, engaging, and influencing foreign publics. Ultimately it is that last word, influencing, that counts the most.

We want to influence foreign publics in the achievement of our foreign policy goals, the most important of which today being to diminish the threat to Americans' safety from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and to help people around the world achieve freedom. And those goals are linked. According to our national security strategy, championing freedom advances our interests because the survival of liberty at home increasingly depends on the success of liberty abroad.

Governments that honor their citizens' dignity and desire for freedom tend to uphold responsible conduct toward other nations, while governments that brutalize their people also threaten the peace and stability of other nations. That's from the national security strategy of 2006.

During the Cold War, after a slow start, we became very good at public diplomacy, with such institutions as the Congress of Cultural Freedom, Radio Free Europe, and Voice of America, and a robust U.S. Information Agency. But starting in the early '90s the U.S., in bipartisan fashion, began to dismantle this arsenal of persuasion in an act of what the Djerejian Group called a process of unilateral disarmament in the weapons of advocacy.

Beginning shortly after 9/11, the tide began to turn again, but slowly. In 2003, at the time of the Peterson Report, it is safe to say that public diplomacy did not enjoy broad support as a priority. The Djerejian Group, almost in exasperation, called for a new strategic direction informed by a seriousness and commitment that matches the gravity of our approach to national defense and traditional state-to-state diplomacy.

Today the environment has changed. Budgets have risen, backing is bipartisan. One of the biggest enthusiasts for public diplomacy is our secretary of Defense. There's a lot of talk, as usual in Washington, about restructuring public diplomacy.

Structure is important, but will is more important. And I can report to you today that the will is there. Does the seriousness and commitment, as the Djerejian Group said, match that of our approach to national defense and state-to-state diplomacy? Not yet, but we are moving in the right direction.

While pursuing immediate goals over the next six months, our intention is to help build a strong foundation for a program of vigorous public diplomacy for the next administration, a public diplomacy endowed with both adequate resource and intellectual seriousness.

Before getting to the war of ideas, let me talk briefly about the more traditional tools of public diplomacy. Until a few weeks ago, I chaired, as Mike said, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which supervises taxpayer-funded U.S. international broadcasting.

The weekly TV and radio audiences in 60 languages reach now 175 million people, at least -- who tune in at least one a week. That's up from 100 million in 2002, and

about half of that increase occurred in the 22 Arab nations.

The BBG is also having impact in places like Tibet, Burma, Somalia, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran. In Iran, VOA broadcasts seven hours a day by satellite television, and with two radio networks reaches about one-third of adult Iranians every week.

In my view, this BBG effort, which began 66 years ago with the founding of Voice of America, is exceptionally effective, in part because its mandate is clear and limited.

Within the State Department itself, the crown jewels of public diplomacy are our educational and cultural exchange programs, where we spend a majority of State's public diplomacy funds. To the rest of the world, higher education is America's greatest brand.

While we do not have the final figures yet, it is clear that 2007-2008, that school year, will see a record high number of international students coming to the United States to study, about 600,000 of them, a dramatic recovery since 9/11.

Our research shows that the best public diplomacy is one that puts foreigners face-to-face with Americans. Exchange programs grew impressively under my predecessor -- or my predecessors, Karen Hughes and Dina Powell, from about 30,000 people a year to about 50,000.

Goli Ameri, the Teheran-born American who runs this part of the State Department now, is focusing on English language programs, teaching programs, especially reaching disadvantaged young people in Muslim nations.

Other exchanges bring 4,000 international visitors to America, including talented people on the way up. Graduates have included 150 heads of government and heads of state, recently including Tony Blair and Hamid Karzai.

The other traditional public diplomacy effort at State is the information department. We sent 800 American experts in science, public policy, and other key fields aboard last year and hold dozens of videoconferences to talk about America and its policies. We maintain multilingual Web sites like America.gov to spread the word, and more and more of these efforts are becoming interactive and technologically sophisticated.

We believe, as Daniel Kimmage of Radio Free Europe recently wrote in The New York Times that Web 2.0, with emphasis on social networking, holds the key to public diplomacy communications, at least for the start of the 21st century.

Now let me turn to the war of ideas. In April 2006 the president designated the undersecretary of State for public diplomacy as the interagency lead in this effort. I had what's called a policy coordinating committee with members from a wide variety of government agencies, the main ones being State, Defense, the intelligence community, Homeland Security, Treasury, USAID, and the BBG.

The undersecretary really has two hats. I run the part of public diplomacy, as I outlined to you earlier, that resides at State and I run the government-wide effort on the war of ideas, which includes coordination with the private sector as well.

The focus of today's war of ideas is counterterrorism. As the national strategy for combating terrorism of 2006 puts it, in the long run, winning the war on terror means winning the battle of ideas.

Our mission today in the war of ideas is highly focused. It is to use the tools of ideological engagement -- words, deeds, and images -- to create an environment hostile to violent extremism. We want to break the linkages between groups like al Qaeda and their target audiences.

The strategy paper that my predecessor, Karen Hughes, issued last year had three objectives. Number two was this: with our partners, we seek to isolate or marginalize violent extremists who threaten freedom and peace.

The war of ideas as we are leading it today gives this strategy focus and emphasis, but it is nothing new. Unlike traditional functions of public diplomacy, like cultural exchanges, the aim of the war of ideas is not to persuade foreign populations to adopt more favorable views of the United States and its policies.

Instead, the war of ideas tries to ensure that negative sentiments and day-to-day grievances toward the U.S. and its allies do not manifest themselves in the form of violent extremism. We need to recognize that there is a complex, multi-sided battle

going on in the Muslim world for power. It is, unfortunately, a battle that affects the United States directly and was responsible for the deaths of 3,000 people, most of them in this city, nearly seven years ago.

In this battle, we do not pick winners. Instead, we support constructive alternatives to violent extremism. In the war of ideas, our core task is not to promote our brand, but to destroy theirs.

Let me say something about brand. Since the late 1990s and especially since 2002, animosity toward the United States has been on the rise. That's not a shock to anyone here. This is a complex subject that has often been dealt with in the press and among politicians in caricature.

I'd be glad to address this issue of American image further in the Q and A, but for now, let me just make a few points.

One, our image is in fact very important. When foreigners respect and trust -- and I'm not sure about like or love, but certainly when they respect and trust us, it is easier to achieve our foreign policy goals.

Second, animosity is far from universal. Ten of the 23 countries recently surveyed by Pew have more favorable than unfavorable views of the United States. We're well liked in much of Latin America and much of sub-Saharan Africa, and nearly -- and in key nations such as India, Brazil and Japan, as well as in much of Asia. Problem spots, of course, are Europe and the Middle East.

Third, the animosity does not seem, in most cases, to run deep. The United States is still the place where people want to come to live, to visit, and to learn.

And four, things are looking up a bit. In the last Pew study and in others we see U.S. favorability rising -- in the Pew survey, in 80 percent of the countries that they surveyed.

But back to the war of ideas and to the importance of not being too U.S.-centric. Think of it this way: we're Coke; they're Pepsi. Our job is not to get people to drink Coke in this instance, but to get people not to drink Pepsi. They can drink anything else they want. They can drink milk, ginger ale, tomato juice. We think that ultimately they will come around to Coke; that is to say, come around to principles of freedom and democracy. But in the meantime, we want them to stay away from Pepsi -- that is to say, violent extremism. And my apologies to Pepsi for this metaphor. (Laughter.)

The effort is to help show populations that the ideology and actions of violent extremists are not in the best interests of those populations -- not that they're in our best interest. It is a fact that the battle is going on within Muslim society that makes our role so complicated, and that requires that we ourselves not do much of the fighting. The most credible voices in the war of ideas are Muslim.

Here is our desired end state: a world in which the use of violence to achieve political, religious, or social objectives is no longer considered acceptable. Efforts to radicalize and recruit new members are no longer successful, and the perpetrators of violent extremism are condemned and isolated.

How do we achieve such a world? In three ways. First, by confronting the ideology that justifies and enables the violence. We try to remove the fake veneer on the reputation of extremists and allow publics to see the shame and hostility of life in terrorism.

That is what worked in al-Anbar province in Iraq. It has worked in Jordan and Algeria. This is an effort that requires credible Muslim voices to work effectively, especially the voices of those like Dr. Fadl, whose story was recently told in *The New Yorker* by Lawrence Wright, who helped to build the al Qaeda ideology and now repudiates it for its wanton violence. But we ourselves should not shrink from confidently opposing poisonous ideas, even if they are rooted in a distorted interpretation of religious doctrine.

Second, and probably most important, we achieve such a world by offering, often in cooperation with the private sector and using the best technology, a full range of productive alternatives to violent extremism. The shorthand for this policy is diversion -- powerful and lasting diversion, channeling potential recruits from violence with the attractions of entertainment, technology, sports, education and culture, business, in addition to politics and economics.

While winning hearts and minds would be an admirable feat, the war of ideas adopts the more immediate and realistic goal of diverting impressionable segments of the population from the recruitment process. The war of ideas is really a battle of alternative visions, and our goal is divert recruits from the violent extremist division.

Going beyond diversion, we seek to build counter movements by empowering groups and individuals opposed to violent extremism -- movements using both electronic and physical means that bring people together with similar constructive interests, such as mothers opposed to violence, built on the Mothers Against Drunk Driving model; believers in democratic Islam; even electronic gaming.

Our role is as a facilitator of choice. Mainly behind the scenes, we help build networks and movements, put tools in the hands of young people to make their own choices, rather than dictating those choices.

The third means to achieve this safer, freer world is to create a broad awareness of the war of ideas throughout the U.S. government, business, academia, and elsewhere, so that those institutions can put in effect their own projects or help us with ours spontaneously, rather than through top-down direction.

We've already done some reorganization to help in this overall effort. You may be hearing these phrases at some point. We've created something we call the Global Strategic Engagement Center, which is an interagency group located at State whose job it is to be a clearinghouse for war of ideas programs, the first clearinghouse of its type, to provide day-to-day direction and make sure that the job is done.

We're in the process of building an advisory group on strategic engagement as the primary locus of private-sector engagement, and we're working closely with the National Counterterrorism Center. I want to stress that we are on the lookout for measures that marry the traditional means of public diplomacy with the war of ideas effort. One such idea a far more robust alumni network, encouraging social networking by Internet among the 1 million -- 1 million -- alumni participants in our educational and cultural exchange programs.

The emphasis on alumni programs is something that my predecessor, Karen Hughes, started and we want to expand it. These alumni, if networked, can be credible voices in their own societies.

Three more quick points. The war of ideas must extend beyond the Muslim world. The Russian and Chinese ideological models, which suppress individual freedom while allowing market economics a good deal of breathing space, are growing disturbingly popular in some circles.

Second, Latin America and Africa and much of East Asia must be an important focus of our attention, along with Europe, Central Asia, and other areas with high concentrations of Muslims who might be susceptible to the extremist message.

Third, as Senator Lieberman, in calling the undersecretary the supreme allied commander implied, we work with allies. Europeans especially are trying to use the tools of the war of ideas to combat an insidious ideology that is an internal as well as an external threat.

We work as well with partners in the Middle East. While they may disagree with some of our policies in the region, they agree that strategies like diversion can make their own nations safer.

In the current issue of Commentary, Max Boot, a military historian and senior fellow here at the Council on Foreign Relations, looks at this question: Are we winning the war on terror? He cites the comments of CIA Director Michael Hayden, quote, "Near strategic defeat of al Qaeda in Iraq. Near strategic defeat for al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. Significant setbacks for al Qaeda globally -- and here I'm going to use the word 'ideologically' -- as a lot of the Islamic world pushes back on their form of Islam," end quote.

Peter Bergen and Marc Sageman are among the analysts who have changed their views and now also believe that al Qaeda has suffered severe setbacks. All true. It is no accident that there has not been an attack on America in nearly seven years. Still, there is no one that I know who's been intimately involved in this battle who believes that the war is won, or close to it.

There is a wide spread belief in Muslim nations that the United States and other Western powers want to destroy Islam and replace it with Christianity. This is the

root belief of those who provide the ideology and the impetus behind the violent extremism of al Qaeda and similar groups. The flow of new recruits has not stopped. Our goal in the war of ideas is to create, as I said, an environment hostile to violent extremism, and that is an urgent task.

In the end, here is the mission of 21st Century public diplomacy: to tell the world of a good and compassionate nation and at the same time to engage in the most important ideological contest of our time -- a contest that we will win.

Thank you. (Applause.)



MR. MORAN: Thank you, Jim.

Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400

(end transcript)

[Tell us what you think about this article.](#)

Bookmark with:

 [Delicious](#)
 [Digg](#)
 [reddit](#)
 [Facebook](#)
 [StumbleUpon](#)
[What's this?](#)

This site delivers information about current U.S. foreign policy and about American life and culture. It is produced by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs. Links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.