

FTS STATE DEPT

Moderator: Glen Roberts

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James Glassman: Well welcome everybody. This is James Glassman. I want to talk to you today about two things; one quite briefly. Maybe I should do that first.

Two weeks ago I had the privilege of giving the President and the Vice President and several others in the White House a briefing here at the State Department about the state of public diplomacy and more specifically of our efforts of ideological engagement or the war of ideas.

And I'm not going to - I'm not going to give you the whole presentation but I will give you the basic conclusion which is I think in 2001 when George Bush became President, there really was no war of idea strategy to speak of and not much in the way of infrastructure.

And today as the administration prepares to leave office, there's a strategy, there's a platform, there's a new way of doing business in place that are ready for the next administration.

And I think an important question is what are the vulnerabilities of that strategy, platform and structure. I'm sorry, strategy, platform and program. And I think there are really two. One is that there is a need for a scaling up of resources in public diplomacy and certainly in the war of ideas part of public diplomacy.

You know, I think that prior to this revamping of the structure and the strategy, I'm not sure whether shoveling a lot of money at this would have been all that worthwhile. But I really do think that the next administration should scale up from where we are now.

And the second vulnerability is this. That there is a lot of talk and a lot of it quite constructive about the organization of public diplomacy in general and can it be improved. And my view is yes it can be improved. But that we have a structure today that is imminently workable and that I think is doing quite well.

And my worry is that if there is a major reorganization that the public diplomacy effort and the effort specifically in the war of ideas will be set back perhaps for years. So I think that the next administration is going to - should absolutely keep that in mind. I think we have a workable structure.

Okay. So that's what I wanted to say about that. And maybe I'll just - I think I'll move onto the second topic and then you can ask me questions about either subject or any subject you want.

The second topic is Columbia. I just came back from Columbia. Well, I guess I was there three weeks ago now. And the reason that I went was I felt that Columbia had a good deal to teach us in our war of ideas efforts in other parts of the world. And it turned out that I think I was right in two areas specifically.

One is that Columbia has been running a very successful program of demobilization and reintegration, what they call it, that has focused on violent extremist groups both of the right and of the left.

The right wing paramilitaries have essentially been demobilized on (mass). The FARC, which began life in 1964 as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party, is still around, still doing business now for 44 years. And the FARC is the major target of Columbia's efforts. And they've been quite successful.

Last year 3000 FARC members demobilized. They are leaving the FARC now at a rate of about 10 a day. We just saw just yesterday it was announced that a Colombian Congressman who had been help for eight years in the jungle was - got

out. Was rescued with the help of a FARC combatant. And this is the kind of program that the Government has been running.

And one of the things that we saw was that it's not just pulling people out of the FARC; and by the way, the effort to pull people out of the FARC is highly sophisticated from a strategic communications point of view.

They use music videos. They use community radio. They use text messaging to cell phones. But it's not just the demobilization part that's important. It's also what happens after they're demobilized.

And the country really from the top down is very impressive. From President Uribe with whom I spoke, you know, all the way down; civil society, individuals, businesses really - they are dedicated to this effort succeeding which by the way I think is an important lesson for countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan in their own struggles against violent extremism. You better have a society wide commitment.

At any rate, the people who are pulled out of the FARC or who desert or who demobilize, many of them really lived in - have lived in the jungle for years. I met a young woman who was recruited into the FARC at the age of 12. She's now 19. She'd been in for seven years. She's from a remote part of Columbia.

She had - she herself had seen a car before but she was with people who'd never seen automobiles and are now kind of plunked down in the middle of Bogota and it would be difficult enough for anyone coming in from the country to kind of learn, to be educated and to be trained for jobs. But after spending seven years in the jungle, it makes it more difficult.

Anyway, so that was very impressive and we think there are applications here for other violent extremist groups. And I think this is the important message at least to me that, you know, throughout the world we're seeing violent organizations, some

of them tied to specific ideologies like the FARC is or to a twisted interpretation of a religion like Al-Qaeda is.

And sometimes they're simply criminal enterprises. But what they all have in common is that they exploit young people. They hijack young people and indoctrinate them. And the effort to either get them out of those organizations or to prevent them from ever getting in there through policy we call diversion, I think is one of the most important things we can do in public diplomacy today. And that was reaffirmed by my visit.

The second thing that I learned in Columbia was - involved a movement that was started by a group of young people; really started by one 33 year old who unemployed a computer scientist, computer engineer who spontaneously started a group on Facebook against the FARC, No Mas FARC movement, that just exploded so that now you go on Facebook and you can see he's got over 400,000 members.

And that organization itself spawned as a million voices movement that put 12 million people into the streets against the FARC on February 4 -- A million in Bogota alone, and 11 million in 190 cities around the world.

So we were very interested in that. I say we. I traveled to Columbia with Jared Cohen and Adnan Kifiyat from - here from State. And one of the things we came away with was the idea of putting the young people who started the No Mas FARC movement in touch with other young people who had built much smaller organizations against violence in - around the world; in many different countries around the world.

So we are - we're helping them make connections. It's really not - it's not our work. It's really their work. And I think this is another lesson. You know, we think a lot of the most productive public diplomacy programs are ones where we are a facilitator or convener.

We give a little nudge. Occasionally we'll put the money into it or maybe more than occasionally but usually not very much money. But it's really - often it's motivated individuals and it's private sector that do the work. And I think that's absolutely true in this case.

So I think I'll just stop there and hear your questions either about what I said at the start or about Colombia or about anything you'd like. Thank you.

Glen Roberts: Perfect. Thank you. Of course I just want to remind you that there will be a transcript of this so you should have that about 24 hours after the close of the call today. I'll make sure it gets sent out to all the participants and we'll also posted to the Website as well.

First let's get started with Amy Zalman from about.com.

Amy Zalman: Hi. Thank you for having me on the call. I was going to ask a more general question that I prepared earlier. But actually your discussion of Colombia was interesting to me because I've been having a dialogue on my site with a reader who is an American businessman who - about recent protests and telling that CNN has reported as protests against the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. by indigenous folks in the regional country areas.

And the police in that instance said that the FARC was behind it and I questioned that in my site. This reader wrote in and said - and said he thinks that the FARC was absolutely there. And then we began this dialog in which he said ultimately that he doubted that the people who were protesting had enough understanding of the Free Trade Agreement itself to be protesting it.

And we discussed what kinds of - why these protests might have occurred now. We're they for local reasons? Was the stated reason sort of funneling other issues? And he agreed with you as a matter of fact that the FARC is in big trouble there.

So my question is whether you happen to have a read on what this protest was about and why it occurred now? And more generally, was it when anti-Americanism is expressed but it's not necessarily really anti-Americanism as it is a vehicle for funneling local issues? How sort of public diplomacy thought afoot now might address this?

James Glassman: Okay. Well thanks for the question. I really - I've read about these protests but I really don't know that much about them. I can tell you this. That the FARC's relationship with indigenous people in Colombia, and obviously there are many indigenous people and so this is a general comment.

The FARC's relationship with them is not a very good one. The FARC has been quite brutal throughout its history to indigenous people. So, you know, I don't have an idea whether they're behind this or not.

I do know that they have been - that they have been - the FARC has been demoralized both by this program, which now has reduced the estimated size of the FARC from 18,000 to 9000. I mean they're still dangerous. There's no doubt about that. They still hold an estimated 700 hostages. Some of them may be dead by now. But that's the general estimate. So they've still got a lot of hostages.

And lets see, your other question about anti - could you just repeat that question? Maybe I...

((Crosstalk))

Amy Zalman: Sure. It actually strikes me that this is - this is only one instance of many and I think of many in the middle east where express statements of - that sound like anti-Americanism are really funneling local issues.

((Crosstalk))

James Glassman: Oh. Oh yeah.

Amy Zalman: They of course take up America as a symbol in free trade or perhaps another issue. But in fact there are a number of narratives running through and (balanced) by whether it's in print or it's in a protest or it is another expression of anti-Americanism. And so that's my kind of getting at the bottom of anti-Americanism instead of just saying well, we're not this or we're that or what happened sort of in 2001 and 2002 when the State Department used to respond.

James Glassman: Right. Okay. Well, I think - I think I would agree with the general proposition that often - that often protest movements that may have other objectives kind of seize on anti-Americanism. You know, anti-Americanism is in some parts of the world a kind of a religion.

And so it does make it kind of difficult to combat in that sense. I mean, but part of this is inevitable. I mean we are - we're the big guy on the block at a time when there aren't too many other big guys at all. And so I think we become the focus of anger that may be - that may be - whose sources may be completely different.

But let me just say one other thing. I have to get in a little pitch for the Free Trade Agreement. I did talk to President Uribe and that was his major concern was about the Free Trade Agreement.

And, you know, I think - I think it's a real shame that this country - that Congress has not passed the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia which is - has been such a great partner; has made so much progress over the past few years.

It's not - it's not a particularly good signal to be sending to other allies of ours which I realize it doesn't have very much to do with public diplomacy. But I couldn't pass that up.

Glen Roberts: Okay. Thank you very much Amy. May have time for a second round. But lets move onto Alex Belida. Alex, are you with us?

Alex Belida: I sure am. A couple of questions if I might because the first one might be real brief in answering. You mentioned your position vis a vie what you think the next administration can do, should do.

Have you had a chance to either brief the two campaigns or is there some vehicle for you to communicate the structure to them?

James Glassman: Yes. We are - we have prepared a transition paper and - which I just finished actually on Monday. Rather brief. I think it's about six - it was supposed to be four pages but it's actually six pages.

And then they're separate briefs that were prepared by - under our guidance by ECA, Education Cultural Affairs and International Information Program. And we expect that we will be having actually face to face conversations and be preparing other papers over the next few weeks with the newly elected administration.

But beyond that, I personally have not had conversations with potential members of the new administration although we don't know who they are.

Alex Belida: And my second one is a kind of follow up to the first blogger's roundtable. There was a discussion of a social networking project with Iran that State had been involved in setting up called Parsloop.

James Glassman: Oh, right.

Alex Belida: What's happened to it because it seems to have stopped functioning?

James Glassman: Yeah. It has stopped functioning. Oh, I'm being told by Glen that it's a funding question.

James Glassman: So - we could probably follow up with you on that. Glen could...

Glen Roberts: Alex, I'm happy to follow up with you on that. It was a funding issue and, you know, our research that looked at it - I'll definitely get to you offline on it. But bottom line is it was not funded for FY09 so it went black on the 1st of October.

Alex Belida: Got it.

Glen Roberts: And so we're - we'll see how that progresses in the future but right now it looks like Parsloop probably is not going to come back to us.

James Glassman: And I just want to say really quickly that that is not a reflection of our general attitude towards social networking. We were doing more and more in social networking. But, you know, I think - I think it's as with anything - some things work and some things don't. We're not exactly sure why Parsloop did not work as well as we thought that it would. I think that's...

((Crosstalk))

Glen Roberts: It's kind of a tribute to our folks at INR department doing our research. They really quantify - they're very, very good at quantifying, you know, the impact of a lot of these projects that we do in public diplomacy.

That's kind of a new thing that's just come about fairly recently but we really do spend a lot of money and a lot of effort on quantifying and measuring the impact of these efforts. And certainly that was one that was looked at. So while Parsloop probably did not, you know, was not something that we're looking to continue, it is kind of a tribute to our INR folks and our research folks that have done a pretty good job on measuring that.

So, did you have anything else Alex?

Alex Belida: No. Thank you very much.

Glen Roberts: Great. Lets move on to Bud Goodall from ASU.

Bud Goodall: Good morning. Well it's morning here, afternoon for you. We've got a group here that's working on a project about FARC and about the self-organizing systems that were used to draw people into the movement against it.

But one of the questions that we've had here is what is the U.S. position on Uribe's recent response to FARC. And we're talking here about his military campaign into Ecuador. I mean does this change things in terms of how people use organizing to effect change in that system?

James Glassman: Well the only thing I would say is that the battle against the FARC is a very good example of the use of war of ideas or strategic communications techniques as well as military. You know, three, including the fellow in Ecuador, three of the FARC's seven top leaders have died in the past year. One by natural causes.

Bud Goodall: Yeah.

James Glassman: And so, you know, the military effort is definitely continuing. During my trip to Colombia I went to a town called Vista Hermosa, which is south of Bogota and was really kind of the front line of the - of the battle in military terms against the FARC and this is territory that has been reclaimed. And there certainly are still parts of Colombia that are under the control of the FARC.

And the problem of - I'm absolutely not going to comment on the, you know, the particular action that you're talking about. But there's no doubt that the FARC has used Ecuador and Venezuela as safe havens whether, you know, it was wittingly - whether those Governments were witting or not. And so it does present - I think it presents a problem for the - for the Colombian military.

Bud Goodall: Okay. Great. Well thanks.

James Glassman: Okay.

Glen Roberts: Perfect. We'll move on to Matt Armstrong from MountainRunner. Matt. Good afternoon.

Matt Armstrong: Good afternoon. Thanks for - thanks for having the call. My question goes to the definition of public diplomacy. I know that you generally look at public diplomacy and strategic communication as interchangeable and synonyms of each other.

But of course other areas don't look at it that way. Some hold PD under SC and some the other way around. So I'm looking at how would you - how do you look at public diplomacy as you're handing over the system, if you will, over to the new administration?

In your discussion, you're mentioning FARC, which was clearly not Government to people, which would contradict some views of what public diplomacy is, the No Mas FARC being people to people.

Also if you might have a thought on, you know, how public diplomacy extends beyond the war of ideas and countering ideological support to terrorism and toward economic warfare and the old Chinese concept of unrestricted warfare. I wonder if you'd given thought to that on the definition of public diplomacy.

James Glassman: Well, lets see Matt. Sorry you asked me that question because I don't - I think it's hard to distinguish in these - I know what my definition is, lets put it that way, of public diplomacy.

You know, what I say, maybe this is sort of a tautology. The public diplomacy is diplomacy that's aimed at publics and sometimes gets officials engaging with those

publics. Sometimes it's our publics engaging with those publics, foreign publics. Sometimes it's actually other foreign publics engaging with those foreign publics. And they may be foreign publics that we have encouraged to engage.

So I think that it really is defined - I define it by the target audience and also try to distinguish it from official diplomacy which in general is our officials talking or interacting with their officials.

You know, I use the term - I realize the military has a specific definition of strategic communications. I tend to use that term in - as a subset of public diplomacy and more interchangeably with war of ideas activities.

And I'm not sure whether these things are right or wrong but I sort of have laid down my own definitions or our own definitions so the people that we work with here understand what they are.

I also and maybe this is a hyper simplistic way, but one of the things we've been thinking about now is also how the three broad categories in which we work under public diplomacy - how to distinguish those. So there is telling America's story, which is essentially what IIP does explaining our policies and our principles to the world, talking about America. And that's really about us. That's mainly about us. It's about America.

Then there is what ECA does, Education and Cultural exchanges and that's about us and them. Almost an equal measure. And then the third which is the war of ideas which is mainly about them.

Now in all of these functions clearly there is a dialog or even something that's even broader than a dialog, a conversation that's going on, but the main focus is - I think is differentiated in one of those three ways. Is that - does that answer your question? Was there something else you had?

Matt Armstrong: No, that answered the question. I was looking really to something that preps the use of public diplomacy and the conceptualization of public diplomacy that's general practice for the next administration as you're getting ready to hand off. What will they use (R) for and what will they use (SPD) for should it continue to exist?

One of the problems I see is that people don't really understand the value of public diplomacy. They don't exactly know what it's doing that is changing and changing rapidly. But we don't necessarily have a firm doctrine. I know you haven't had time to rewrite the national strategy on strategic communications and public diplomacy.

James Glassman: No, but I think - I think certainly my - in my transition paper and some of the other things that I've written or talked about I think I've clarified it fairly well. I mean, you know, that the definition I just gave is the definition of public diplomacy and then I used pretty much the standard definition of understanding, informing, engaging and influencing foreign publics.

So I would think that the next administration may disagree, but I think they will get a pretty clear picture at least of where we're coming from on public diplomacy.

Glen Roberts: Perfect. With that, Brian McGuigan with the British Embassy, did you have anything? Any question?

Brian McGuigan: Yeah. Undersecretary Glassman, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your Digital Outreach Team and specifically what success you found there, what lessons you've learned and maybe specifically how you quantify success.

James Glassman: Right. Yes. The Digital Outreach Team currently comprises nine - it's nine, is that correct?

Man: Yeah.

James Glassman: There are nine people and they go onto Websites, blogs, popular meeting places, chat rooms. They identify themselves as working for the State Department and they engage in conversations where a good deal of what they do is trying to sort of correct misimpressions about U.S. policies.

And they frequently do that by referring back to documents some of which are on america.gov. And we think that they're effective. Now I'm not - I don't think it's easy to quantify how effective they are. I know that we do have - we do have metrics on the number of - I think the number of people that they're reaching. That they're individually reaching.

But, you know, we're not just in the reaching business. We're in the persuading business and that's very hard to do. I mean that's - it's very hard to quantify exactly how well we've done there.

And let me just speak in general about that. I think we've done a very good job in recent years of evaluating ECA programs, Education and Cultural Affairs programs. We are just now making a major effort and putting a fair amount of money into evaluations of other programs that we do.

We've evaluated before but not in the same kind of consistent way. So with...

Man: It's called PD impact.

James Glassman: ...yeah, it's called PD impact. One of the things I can - now I think I may have discussed this on the last call. But, you know, to give you an idea, this is just anecdotal evidence, but as far as the success of the Digital Outreach Team.

We had - we had a Farsi blogger, a Farsi-speaking member of the team who went onto the blog of the Chief Media Advisor to Ahmadinejad and engaged - we were amazed that this fellow engaged with him. And they ended up doing five - he ended up doing five posts. They did a back and forth debate really about major policy

issues that went on for, you know, we have the printout - I think actually may have provided a...

((Crosstalk))

James Glassman: I'm sorry I'm going over ground that you already know about. But anyway, then the Iranian official put it in the newspaper and then after that the whole thing went dark. So we kind of figured that he - somebody may have said to him, "You shouldn't have done this."

But at any rate, I mean, that's the kind of anecdotal evidence that we have that things are working. I should also point out that we are considering adding Russian to our Digital Outreach Team languages.

Glen Roberts: Perfect guys. Are there any other questions? Anybody that I missed or anybody that would like to re-attack? Okay. Folks, what we'll do is then we'll close. Thank you very much for your participation. Look forward to doing this again probably at the end of November and like I said, my goal is to get a full transcript of this call out to you within the next 24 hours.

If you have any follow up questions, feel free to hit me back at the email address that I sent you the invite to and look forward to hearing from you guys. Thanks a lot. Have a great day.

END