

THE WHITE OAK RECOMMENDATIONS ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy is not just a “war of ideas” but a multi-pronged effort to understand, inform, engage and influence the attitudes and behavior of foreign opinion leaders and publics, in ways that both promote better foreign understanding of American values, policies and goals, and better inform the US policy-making process.

Over the weekend of January 30-February 1, 2009, some seventy men and women, representing principal stakeholders in the successful restoration of public diplomacy as a vital tool of US foreign policy and national security, gathered at The Howard Gilman Foundation's White Oak conference center in northern Florida to discuss *The Elements of Smart Power: Re-Inventing Public Diplomacy*.

Participants included former and current public diplomacy practitioners; former and current foreign policy thought leaders from the State and Defense departments, the National Security Council, the White House, the intelligence community, foreign assistance, the arts, academe, business, Capitol Hill, state government, the traditional and new media (including print, broadcast and Internet), think tanks and institutes, NGOs and national private sector citizen diplomacy groups.

The participants achieved their goal: to arrive at a cross-disciplinary consensus on fundamental recommendations to guide the new Administration and Congress, as they seek to revitalize and adapt public diplomacy in the context of new geopolitical realities and new communications tools.

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- **Stakeholders: Holistic Approach:** Public diplomacy is relevant to a broad array of strategic interests and has multiple stakeholders: military and non-military, Executive and Congressional, public and private sector. We need to identify the needs and strengths of each stakeholder and determine together how to best play to (support, staff and fund) the strengths of each.
- **Outreach: Holistic Approach:** Effective public diplomacy is strategic. It engages publics globally and is not limited to specific geographic regions, religions or ethnic groups.
- **Structure.** Re-fighting old battles over the consolidation of public diplomacy is neither feasible nor productive at this time. However, internal organizational structure must support the external credibility public diplomacy practitioners need with those with whom they engage. At minimum, within the current State Department structure, the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs should have operational control of public diplomacy field operations, budgets and personnel.
- **Personnel:** Public diplomacy is not an “anyone-can-do-it” profession. New geopolitical realities and communications tools reinforce rather than diminish the continuing need for a professional public diplomacy corps. Fixing now-chronic professional and structural personnel problems must be a top priority in restoring and revitalizing public diplomacy. We need to recruit and retain a new generation of skilled and qualified public diplomacy practitioners, who are willing either to commit to a long-term career or to a short-term reserve corps for given periods of time. Most potential candidates now think working for the government is a waste of time, offering little or no meaningful input, career potential or satisfaction. Small changes can make a big difference. They must be made and soon.
- **Technology/Communication:** We must better integrate the new tools of communication with the current “human contact” programs and relationship-development efforts that have long been the backbone of public diplomacy. In doing so, we cannot assume that “one-Internet-size-fits-all”. Within the new “Global Electronic Village” in which we now operate, we need to understand the Internet in itself is not a panacea. We must focus on which new communications tools work best where, based on geography and target

audience. That includes broadcasting, which remains an essential tool to communicate to both broad publics and opinion leaders. Broadcasting decisions need to be made within the parameters of the new communications environment, and need to be based on credibility, trust and authenticity – the standards by which foreign audiences judge what they hear.

- **International Exchanges.** Civilian and military exchanges – cultural, academic, media, professional, community, artistic, leadership development and training -- are the quiet but effective foundations of building long-term relationships based on trust, credibility and mutual understanding. Increasing resources to expand such exchange programs as Fulbright, International Visitor and IMET is a direct contribution to America’s long-term national security interests. So is simplifying and facilitating DHS border entry procedures and addressing current visa scope and allotment problems.
- **Citizen Diplomacy:** The number of private sector/NGO actors and stakeholders involved in citizen diplomacy has increased significantly over the past decade, primarily but not entirely due to the “democratization of communications” with the advent of the Internet. Government must recognize the role and increased importance of private sector actors in public diplomacy activities. Citizen diplomacy offers channels and opportunities to add international components for citizens eager to engage in national service. We support the proposed President’s Call to Action for Global Citizen Diplomacy launched by the U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy, to highlight these opportunities and encourage Americans to become more involved in ongoing community-based citizen-to-citizen international engagement activities, including such areas as education, environmental protection and climate change, health care, business and economic development, gender discrimination, poverty alleviation and the arts.
- **Funding:** Increasing financial resources for public diplomacy programs – whether diplomatic or military – in the current environment is a zero-sum game. Before we talk about new money, we need to talk about allocating current money more effectively. Funding coordination, particularly between State and Defense and with the active participation of Congress, is essential to reach consensus on *how* to allot funds.
- **Congress:** Congress must play a pro-active role, working with – and not just reacting to – Administration entities in designing and funding the structural, staffing and resource allocation changes recommended above.
- **Leadership and Coordination:** Public diplomacy needs a “quarterback” with the knowledge and authority to reach across government and into the private sector to quickly address mission, structure, staffing and resource issues. Effective leadership will require that we identify the needs and strengths of each public diplomacy stakeholder and determine how best to play the strengths of each. If a new Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs is unable to take on this task in addition to his or her daily responsibilities, we should consider a new Senior Director position at the National Security Council – either short-term or permanent – to coordinate these discussions and facilitate these changes.