

Public Diplomacy

Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion

A Report of the
Public Diplomacy and World Public Opinion Forum
April 9–11, 2006
Washington, D.C.

*A project of the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands
in partnership with the USC Annenberg School for Communication,
USC Center on Public Diplomacy and the Pew Research Center.*

Joshua S. Fouts
Editor



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USC CENTER FOR
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The Pew Global
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Please note that the opinions and ideas expressed in this document are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the organizers or of any organization or entity. Unless expressly attributed to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas expressed in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the conference.

Forward

Those interested in public diplomacy often describe public opinion polls as an index of how well people throughout the world regard a country. But people in the public diplomacy community rarely meet with those who conduct such polls in an effort to determine how people are developing their views, in what countries, and why. Nor do they use polls as a way of understanding how public diplomacy or national decision making might be differently framed and/or conducted in light of what pollsters can or do know.

One of the most studied and cited polls conducted in the post- 9/11 era is the Pew Global Attitudes 2002 survey of 44 countries led by Andy Kohut of the Pew Research Center. For policy makers and the public alike, this and subsequent Global Attitudes Project surveys have helped Americans to understand how and why the rest of the world feels the way it does about the U.S. Or, in the words of Ambassador Edward Djerejian, why they hate us.

It occurred to the leadership of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, that it could be enormously useful to bring polling experts from around the world together with foreign policy professionals, and academics engaged in the study of public opinion and public diplomacy. The Center asked Andy Kohut to partner with us and thankfully he agreed. We presented the concept to the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, who agreed to make this one of their signature projects for 2006.

The result was a conference in Washington D.C. on April 9-11, 2006 attended by leading pollsters, politicians and academics working in the field of public diplomacy. Joining us from the policy making world were lead thinkers such as: Christine Kojac of the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee; Mark Helmke, Senior Professional Staff Member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and Jeremy Curtin, Principal Deputy Coordinator for the Bureau of International Information Programs at the U.S. Department of State; among many others. Pollsters in attendance included: Angus Reid, President of Angus Reid Consultants; Mary McIntosh of Princeton Survey Research; Gerry Power, Director of the Research and Learning Group of the BBC World Service Trust; and Fares Braizat, Researcher and Coordinator for the Opinion Polling Unit of the Center for Strategic Studies in Amman, Jordan. Among those representing the academic community were Ernest Wilson, Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland and former senior staffer in the Clinton administration; Philip Seib, journalism professor and author of the upcoming book *Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead*

America to War (Potomac Books 2006); and Peter Mandaville, Director of the Center for Global Studies at George Mason University.

For most of the attendees, the Forum marked the first time they had gotten together, let alone met each other and they found it to be enormously productive. Many important ideas and possible points of collaboration emerged out of the three days of discussion. Conclusions and suggestions for future research and policy reforms are included in this volume.

We asked three Forum attendees—representing the world of public opinion polling, academia, and public diplomacy—to write essays on the relationship between public opinion and public diplomacy and their reflections on participating in this gathering. Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of the esteemed Harris Poll considers the struggle to define and adapt public diplomacy practices to the realities of polling and public opinion. Marc Lynch, Associate Professor of Political Science at Williams College and author of the widely acclaimed new book *Voices of the New Arab Public* (Columbia University Press, 2006) provides a critical inventory of the public opinion tools and resources open to academics and practitioners, and reflects on possible directions forward. And finally, Daryl Copeland, a career public diplomat in the Canadian Foreign Ministry, who is Director of Strategic Communications Services for Foreign Affairs Canada and International Trade Canada, offers observations on the subject of public diplomacy and public opinion from a diplomat's perspective.

We believe that the Forum discussion and the resulting three papers are an exciting first step in creating a much-needed synergy between practitioners, academics, and the polling community. We hope this event marks the first of many opportunities for interaction and collaboration between all the disparate yet highly complementary parties interested in public diplomacy.

Geoffrey Cowan

Joshua S. Fouts

Andrew Kohut

Co-chairs

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First and foremost, sincere thanks to Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and the Board of the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands for seeing the importance of this concept and engaging us to help bring it to fruition under their auspices. We are proud to have had the opportunity to be your partners in this endeavor.

Furthermore, we are delighted to have had the endorsement and support of Andy Kohut and his team at the Pew Global Attitudes Survey as our co-hosts. Andy, along with Elizabeth Gross, Director of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, and Richard Wike, Senior Project Director at the Pew Research Trust, offered wisdom, counsel and the invaluable legwork necessary to ensure that this gathering reflected a truly international array of researchers and practitioners worthy of the event's title and mandate.

Successful events such as these are more often than not a reflection of the blood, sweat and tears of countless individuals who toil behind the scenes. Our gathering was no exception. This event and its proceedings would be nowhere, repeat nowhere, without the efforts of USC Center on Public Diplomacy research associates Shawn Powers, Amelia Arsenault, and assistant director Tori Horton. To say that they did yeoman's work in researching, writing, and project managing this effort would be an understatement. We are all incredibly grateful to them for the personal investment they made in ensuring this gathering was a success. Leisa Vandervelde, our event coordinator, who has done numerous events for the Sunnylands Trust, proved again why she has been entrusted with this responsibility again and again.

Most of all, thanks goes out to our participants who while juggling frenetic schedules with calendars and demands around the world, chose to take the time to be a part of this event. We found it incredibly important and hope you feel the same.

Finally, this project would not have happened had it not been for the inspiration of a true visionary, Geoff Cowan, the founder of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy and Dean of the USC Annenberg School, who in a conversation in Barcelona in 2004 saw the need for this and shared with us his vision. Thanks as always for your leadership.

*Joshua Fouts
Editor*

Executive Summary: Public Diplomacy and World Public Opinion Forum

On the cusp of the twenty-first century, never has the world seemed closer together and never has it seemed farther apart. Terrorist-attacks, military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, and alarming increases in anti-American attitudes highlight the fractured nature of contemporary international relations. At the same time, the rapid dissemination of media and communications technologies, multilateral economic institutions and markets, and the global nature of the war on terror are just a few realities that underscore the fact that sociopolitical realities on one side of the globe have important consequences for those living on the other side. In the light of these fractures and interconnections, there is a growing consensus that negative public opinion abroad has important consequences both in the domestic and the international sphere and that public diplomatic communication must improve. But no such consensus exists about the best way in which to achieve this goal.

Particularly following 9/11, pundits, pollsters, academics and politicians alike have debated the reasons and remedies for America's negative image abroad. Indeed this renewed attention to public diplomacy has not been limited to the United States. The Bali bombings, the Danish cartoon controversy, and the Israeli-Lebanon conflict are just a few events that have caused nations around the world to stop and ponder the question: "why do they hate us?"

Many scholars and practitioners have called for a greater integration of public diplomacy into both the planning and execution stages of foreign policy. With varying degrees of success, countries around the globe have launched public diplomacy campaigns and adopted new communication strategies in an effort to create better impressions on global publics. These programs range from increased publicity surrounding developmental aid projects, to the placement of advertisements in major international publications, to conducting "listening tours" across the Middle East.

In recent years, public diplomacy has featured prominently in discussions about United States foreign policy, both because of the American-led war on terror and due to a growing body of opinion polls and empirical research that document America's declining image abroad. No less than thirty government reports have been released since 2001 on the subject of public diplomacy. Public opinion professionals have been equally busy identifying trends in foreign public opinion and perceptions of national brands, policies, and cultures. In academia, individuals and think tanks around the world have launched projects and produced publications addressing the subject of public diplomacy. Yet, despite the complementary nature of these endeavors, there has been relatively little interaction both between and among these three groups.

The Public Diplomacy and World Public Opinion Forum evolved out of a desire to provide a platform for cross-fertilization between academics, practitioners and public opinion pollsters. The Forum took place between April 9-11, 2006 in Washington D.C. and was co-chaired by Geoffrey Cowan, Dean of the Annenberg School; Joshua Fouts, Executive Director of the Center on Public Diplomacy; and Andrew Kohut, President of the Pew Research Center. Over these three days, pollsters, academics, and practitioners from around the world met in a series of seven sessions.

This executive summary provides an overview of the key themes and recommendations that evolved out of these discussions. The following summation does not in anyway reflect a consensus on the part of the participants, but rather provides a description of the principal issues addressed during Forum discussions.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLLING AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

How Pollsters View Public Diplomacy

To a large extent, pollsters understand their role in the public diplomacy process as a strategic one. Simply put, polling cannot provide the tools required to sway mass opinion. Rather, it can help identify trends in public opinion, specify public concerns, and perhaps most importantly, provide information about how changes in policy affect the attitudes and behaviors of particular audiences. This information is especially helpful in the policy formation process where practitioners are able to alter policy details and tailor specific communications strategies to address public concerns identified through polling.

Pollsters have learned much from contemporary corporate marketing research. Marketing and business professionals learned long ago that changing behaviors is difficult if not impossible and that field research is most useful in anticipating

responses with respect to small changes in behavior. Accordingly, public diplomacy practitioners must realize that presentation can only move public opinion at the margins. Sometimes you have to change the product, which in the case of public diplomacy is public and foreign policy. Similarly, many participants cautioned against an over emphasis on the concept of media effects. Causal correlations between media usage and public opinion change are almost impossible to establish. Thus it remains unclear whether simply modifying messages carried via the media can ever be, in and of itself, an effective public diplomacy strategy. Yet, while the relationship between media, message, and public opinion is far from clear, there was a strong consensus among Forum participants that polling is integral to developing a better understanding of the barriers to and the opportunities for effective public diplomacy campaigns.

How Practitioners View Public Opinion and Polling

Experience has shown that effective public diplomacy strategies often take the form of “niche diplomacy.” In pursuing international cooperation, it is crucial for diplomats to identify points at which political and public interests intersect and to utilize shared interests and attitudes. Polling is therefore an essential tool because it can reveal common interests and concerns across regions and borders.

Alternatively, from the perspective of international organizations such as the United Nations, public opinion may be interpreted as a form of reverse public diplomacy. Because the United Nations is comprised of member states it depends on public opinion as a measure of its “smart power.” If public opinion in a particular country favors a specific United Nations program or policy, it is more likely that the respective national government will lend its support and/or participation. However, when public opinion turns against the United Nations the reverse trend happens. A 2003 Pew poll—which identified a declining belief in the importance of the United Nations in light of its inability to stop the Iraq War—demonstrates this dynamic.¹

For many Forum participants the practice of polling is essential to today’s renewed emphasis on public diplomacy. As polling techniques grow more sophisticated, the divisions between public opinion research and public diplomacy grow fainter. A critical challenge for practitioners is the integration of these advanced polling techniques into actual public diplomacy strategies, a challenge compounded by the escalating costs associated with polling. Therefore, it is critical to first clarify specific policy goals and identify what segments of the public are the most important to influence before beginning government-sponsored polling research.

Contrastingly, there is concern that governments oftentimes overly rely on

polling data, information that does not always get to the heart of public opinion. Public diplomacy strategies require insight into cultural and ideological attitudes that are not always successfully unmasked through the traditional methods deployed by pollsters. As such, polling is best utilized in conjunction with alternate techniques such as focus groups, interviews, and the hands-on knowledge learned in the day-to-day process of diplomacy, information that requires diplomats to directly engage with local populations and opinion leaders.

HOW TO IMPROVE PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

The need to disaggregate different types of opinion and to identify what sort of public and what sort of opinion provided a critical source of discussion through out the course of the Forum . Opinion changes about specific issues as measured via opinion surveys and poll data do not necessarily reflect a transformation of attitudes towards the United States and other governments. As one moves farther away from concrete and identifiable behaviors (i.e., voting, purchases, violent actions) into cognitive processes such as attitudes and values, quantification becomes increasingly difficult.

Attendees stressed the need to identify the nuances in polling and survey data. More specifically, pollsters need to focus more on building in questions that help identify differences within the sample population. For example, in Nigeria Northern Muslims tend to respond quite differently to those in the Christian South. Pollsters should continue to work towards identifying and clarifying the diversity of opinions within as well as between nation states.

Identifying the Target Audience

Several participants focused on the importance of identifying elite opinion when conducting polling research. Not only can elite opinion serve as a barometer of a broader public opinion, but it can also provide policymakers with a better understanding of the role that the opinion-leader constituency can play in any public diplomacy initiative. Similarly, identifying opinion “changers” and “drivers” is as a critical task of pollsters. Business leaders may be an under-utilized group of opinion leaders, which could potentially play an important role in public diplomacy initiatives. Comparing elite and mass opinion is also an important task for pollsters. Policy makers can better construct policies if they have access to data that documents the differences, similarities, and interplay between these two groups. Along similar lines, polls that identify cross-sections of opinion across dissimilar ethnic, socio-economic, political, and religious groups are also needed.

Degree Versus Direction

Several attendees pointed out the need to evaluate opinions by degree as well as direction and to identify what characteristics if any might predict these differences. For instance, one participant pointed out that in some situations in the Middle East mass opinions might be stronger than elite opinion and vice versa. Pollsters could improve the utility of their polls for practitioners by being more specific about what audience is being surveyed and providing more nuanced measures of the degree to which particular opinions are held. For example, a 2004 Pew survey of seven countries illustrated high-levels of anti-Americanism; but on closer examination a division appeared between those with moderately anti-American views and those who were solidly Anti-American. Those who were moderately anti-American focused mainly on the Iraq War as a reflection of the trustworthiness of American government and the American people who supported the War. Those who were solidly anti-American said that their views were driven by their opinion of President Bush and a general sense of opposition to the war on terror. If polls pinpoint these distinctions, practitioners can better identify what actions might move opinion among specific groups, allowing discussions to advance to more pragmatic and strategic questions, such as: how do these groups differ demographically, and what media do they use?

Disaggregate Objects of Opinion

A critical task consistently echoed throughout the Forum was the need to disaggregate opinion about foreign governments and from opinion about foreign populations. Opinions are often nuanced and even contradictory. For example, many citizens in the Middle East may have negative opinions about the United States government while they simultaneously embrace American cultural products. Moreover, it is easy to attribute opinions to a single factor, which is never the case. Polls need to reflect the diversity of attitudes underlying opinions about specific actions or policies, a demand that requires more dynamic and thorough polling methods.

The wording of poll questions is thus critical. Opinions typically change when investigators ask respondents to rank or choose between different issues. For instance, in the case of the Middle East surveys, respondents rank issues differently in terms of importance depending on whether the question is framed in terms of foreign or domestic concerns.

Moving Beyond Polling

While polling and public opinion are often used interchangeably, polling is only one form of public opinion measurement. Several participants pointed out the

need to tailor public opinion research methods to the specific political environment in which communications are taking place. In some cases, public opinion polls are overly simplistic because they provide a “snap-shot” of attitudes at a particular point in time and do little to identify embedded cultural processes and mores. Moreover, information sources vary both within and between countries. In many countries like Tibet and Iraq, citizens draw upon community opinion leaders as their key sources of information. While in countries like Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, citizens rely on local and regional media for the majority of their information. Thus, public opinion is formulated in different ways in different countries, a condition that calls for specific communicative strategies for engaging each set of publics. Moreover, the fragmentation of the media environment may make word-of-mouth communications even more powerful in the construction of public opinions, increasing the need for more diplomatic activity on foreign streets to cover the “last three feet” to the people.

In the case of the Middle East, participants stressed that in order to fully understand what the “Arab street” thinks, practitioners must first understand how the Arab street works. One participant suggested paying closer attention to the numerous televised call-in talk shows that serve as a sort of “virtual focus group.” Other suggested focus areas included: cyber demonstrations on websites like myspace.com, viral text messaging campaigns, and the numerous religious and political Blogs, which are increasingly popular throughout the region. Tracking discussions about specific issues in the Blogosphere via Technorati² may be another innovative way to opinion trends in and outside of the United States.

Monitoring global, regional, and local media platforms can also provide critical information. Media tracking polls are critical to follow because they reflect how public opinion is covered in the media. This is particularly important because previous research has illustrated that individual opinions are often influenced by the belief that the majority of public opinion is on one or another side of an issue. Similarly, content analysis which compares how public opinion is reported in local, national, regional and global media outlets can also serve a valuable purpose. While establishing causality between media messages and public opinion is exceptionally difficult if not impossible, further research into this intersection will help practitioners to better separate the rhetoric of public opinion as it is depicted within the media from the reality of attitudes on the ground. Is it one and the same?

HOW PRACTITIONERS CAN BETTER UTILIZE PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

"The Say-Do Gap"

As one participant noted, the “say-do-gap” is seriously hampering American efforts at public diplomacy, pointing to the common perception that the Bush administration’s rhetoric often fails to accurately represent its policies. For instance, the Bush administration’s largely critical reaction to Hamas’ recent electoral victory in the Palestinian elections, juxtaposed to its public support for democratic elections and self-determination is a prime example of the say-do gap in American foreign policy.

It was noted that criticisms of a say-do gap have been a recurring theme throughout history. For instance, in the 19th century, Britain’s attempts to promote democracy abroad were hampered by a widespread perception that the campaign was motivated by colonial self-interest rather than a genuine concern for the well being of the international community.

In the specific case of American democracy promotion, one participant pointed to polling data that showed deeply held suspicions with regard to the motivations driving the Bush administration’s promotion of democratic governance in the Arab world. Perceptions of American hypocrisy with regard to democracy promotion, specifically its continued support of several anti-democratic and authoritarian regimes, are seriously hampering American public diplomacy initiatives in the region.³ One solution offered to address the say-do-gap came in the form of a call for a reorientation of the American political culture that most policymakers are trained in. Rather than emphasizing the *realpolitik* lessons from the previous decades of realist geopolitics, Americans should draw on the successful lessons provided by the British and the French in reconditioning politicians to take into account foreign public opinion in the decision-making process.

Successfully Engage the Media

New media and information technologies play an important role in both measuring and practicing public diplomacy. Internet and broadcast media mean that diplomats can no longer remain inside talking to other insiders. Successful diplomacy now means engaging with publics either through media appearances or via interactive Internet websites. Public opinion measures are thus critical for ambassadors and foreign service officers to identify points of common interest and engagement with the host country’s public. Moreover, public diplomacy strategies need to adapt to today’s information age. The Internet has brought forth a transnational and supra-national form of communication via Blogs and

specialty websites. Public diplomacy practitioners need to adapt to this new reality and develop strategies for effectively engaging and utilizing new media technologies and platforms.

Additionally, practitioners need to appreciate the continued importance of local media outlets in reaching foreign audiences. An increasingly diverse and multi-faceted media environment has resulted in increasingly segregated and disparate audiences. Even in information-deprived communities, when asked about their major media sources individuals often cite numerous sources of information. This fragmentation of media markets, particularly in the developing world, provides new challenges for public diplomacy practitioners. Mapping the availability of different types and forms of media in targeted areas may be needed to provide practitioners with an idea of what conduits are actually available. Both the rise of expanded sources for information, as well as the rapid expansion of forms of new media mean that efforts at getting one's message across in foreign countries must focus on utilizing the most trusted local media outlets and take into account the effects that increased competition has on the ability to fully articulate messages abroad.

Drawing on Past Examples of Successful Practices

Over the course of the Forum, participants cited several examples of successful public diplomacy campaigns that should be either replicated or expanded further. The Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program is an initiative that provides scholarships for young Muslims to study in secondary schools in the United States. Alumni of the YES Program have exhibited markedly high opinions about the United States. Moreover, exchange programs often work in unpredictable conditions, a point exemplified by experience of the positive impression that interactions with American Mormon communities have had on Muslims groups from Saudi Arabia. Given the widespread success and versatility of exchange programs, they should be expanded beyond the Fulbright initiative to include more academic exchanges, particularly among younger populations.

Public information campaigns accompanying humanitarian and disaster relief programs such as those conducted in the wake of the 2005 Tsunami in South East Asia were also cited as examples of successful public diplomacy initiatives. In addition to their principal goal of providing survivors with food, clean water, and basic medical services, the Navy also embedded public affairs officers (PAOs) with the chiefs of mission and spokesmen at regional U.S. embassies to coordinate public information about the process. These officers worked with local and regional media organizations to provide accurate and timely images and information about the campaign. The Tsunami relief effort was a rare example of

successful and rapid improvements in America's image. Even among countries that typically exhibit widespread anti-Americanism, the U.S. efforts "moved the needle" of foreign opinion from 15 to 40 percent favorability.

Finally, lessons must be learned from the successful public diplomacy initiatives that China and India have established in Africa and Latin America. Focusing principally on providing and publicizing extensive developmental aid, public opinion data has shown that China in particular has improved its image throughout both regions.⁴

Develop a More Nuanced Understanding of Polling Data

Not only do polls need to become more nuanced, but practitioners also need to better utilize polling data. Canada's strategic use of polling to formulate public diplomacy campaigns in the United States was cited as a key example. Because polls conducted by the Canadian government found that issues such as softwood lumber, NAFTA and water issues were not salient issues for most Americans, Canada chose to communicate directly with opinion leaders and decision makers rather than launch a widespread public diplomacy campaigns.

Moreover, rather than focusing on the weaknesses of certain data, policymakers need to develop a deeper understanding of what the data means in order to use it well. Similarly, journalists need to be trained in the intricacies of polling so they can report survey information more accurately. Oftentimes journalists utilize polling data in simplistic and sensationalized ways, reporting that can create misperceptions and even counter otherwise effective public diplomacy endeavors.

Knowing whom you need to persuade is critical to the success of public diplomacy. Rather than polling on every topic and issue, organizations should increase the extent and depth of their polling on issues related to governmental policies that are flexible and can be changed or altered in response to public opinions. Along those lines, polling should target key audiences on particular issues of strategic importance. While there are certain groups of moderates that are able to be persuaded to be in favor of particular policies of the United States and other nations, these audiences need to be disaggregated from the more polarized audiences that are less likely to alter their views because of public diplomacy initiatives. Using polling data to locate the convergence of opinion and ideals among moderate groups would help practitioners in formulating more effective messages for critical audiences. Or, put more succinctly, polls can be used to locate exactly where a country's leverage lies.

Increase Polling Resources and Coordination

While discussion mainly centered on best practices for both pollsters and practitioners, much attention was paid to the challenges practitioners face in effectively utilizing polling due to a lack of resources and the failure to share and coordinate between departments and offices the polling resources that are available. One of the most effective things that policy-makers can do to improve polling and public diplomacy is to allocate more money to agencies most skilled at measuring the attitudes of foreign publics, as opposed to forcing them to make choices and oftentimes forego polling in many countries critical to U.S. foreign policy. For instance, if the State Department were to double its current polling budget to \$6 million, they could offer more effective data and analysis to help guide practitioners in the construction and communication of policy. Moreover, very little collaboration exists between government agencies in the aggregation of polling data. Polls collected by different departments of government are rarely shared. For example, the Pentagon spends millions on polling, but does not share either its results or its methodologies with the Department of State or most public diplomacy practitioners.

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Please be reminded that the following list does not reflect a consensus on the part of the participants, but rather provides an overview of recommendations made during the course of the Forum.

- More longitudinal polling data is critical. Individual polls only capture a moment in time. Public opinion is often fickle and contradictory. Only by viewing long-term trends can public diplomacy experts identify points for collaboration and leverage.
- It is critical to identify the degree as well as the direction of opinion. Pollsters need to present data in ways that identify nuances in their sample population. Similarly, practitioners need to examine the intricacies of public opinion and not latch onto raw percentage points when making policy decisions.
- When using polling data, practitioners and pollsters need to disaggregate the objects of opinion. Brand America is too complex to reduce to a simple campaign. Foreign publics often feel differently about a nation's government and its people.

- Government departments need to share their polling data and coordinate their polling goals.
- The role of the diplomat must change. Diplomats can no longer feel comfortable focusing on high-up political figures, but rather they must engage in dialogue with foreign publics in order to better represent policy and motives as well as monitor public opinion abroad.
- Polling information needs to be utilized both in the launching of policies as well as in developing communication strategies. Polling data is too often used to point to the problems with existing policy rather than to improve future initiatives.
- Practitioners must learn to better understand and engage the media. The proliferation and increasing predominance of new media technologies necessitates that diplomats and policymakers engage with multiple media and communications platforms. While appearing on popular regional programming is important, attention must also be paid to the uses of alternative types media technologies such as the Internet and cell phones and their influence on public opinion.
- Policy-makers should draw from past public diplomacy successes. Valuable information from American and other national public diplomacy initiatives is too often overlooked in the construction of current foreign policy. Previous successes may provide the most empirical and useful information for policy-makers today.
- Practitioners and pollsters should develop a more nuanced understanding of the purposes and uses of polling data. Polling data is best utilized when it provides information about target audiences and issues of particular concern. Accessing polls that provide information regarding target audiences, particularly before policies are finalized is of critical importance for policymakers.

¹ Pew “Views of a Changing World: War in Iraq Further Divides Global Publics,” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2003); available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=185>

² Technorati is an internet tool that tracks the topics, links, and perceived relevance of Blogs. It is available from www.technorati.com

³ Fares al-Braizat., “Muslims and Democracy: An Empirical Critique of Fukuyama’s Culturalist Approach,” (World Values Survey, 2002); available from: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/library/index.html>

⁴ See for example the BBC World Service Poll of 22 Countries conducted in January 2005 by GlobeScan and the Program for International Policy Attitudes. For a summary of the results see, World Public Opinion.org, “22 Nation Poll Shows China Viewed Positively By Most Countries,” March 25, 2005; available from http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/116.php?nid=&id=&pnt=116&lb=btvoc

Three Ps in Search of a Pod: A Personal Perspective on Public Diplomacy, Public Opinion Research and the Public Environment

Daryl Copeland

Practitioners of public diplomacy (PD) routinely put their shoulders to the great wheel of public opinion in hopes of nudging it—forward, backwards, and sometime even sideways. Lately in government there has been a renewed commitment to the idea of measuring that performance and to assessing the results. Curiously, though, officials have made relatively little practical use of the one gauge specifically designed to register and monitor changes in widely held views and attitudes. That instrument—public opinion research (POR)—offers the promise of providing public diplomats and their political masters with insights into the changing public environment. Yet input from polling, or even less so from other more supple forms of research such as focus groups or interviews, rarely is used to illuminate the way forward or to guide the development of international policy. While it could provide greater levels of transparency and accountability, it is not routinely used to track the success or failure of efforts intended to “move the needle.”

USC Professor Nicholas Cull recently referred to this preoccupation with public opinion metrics as the equivalent of “rushing out into the forest every

morning to see if the trees have grown.” That is a lively and evocative metaphor and it may well be so, but clearly there are many critical issues at play here, many revolving around a single point of intersection—the *public*.

But do our three Ps in fact inhabit the same pod? Or should they? Diplomacy, and the issues with which it deals, remains for most people somewhat of a remote, even ethereal concept with limited relevance to daily life. Polling makes for great headlines and often provides an accurate snapshot of opinion on particular issues at a given moment in time, but it is of less utility in mapping the broad landscape of attitudes and pre-occupations as they evolve. And at that level, that of the changing public environment, the task of analysis becomes is so hugely complex and multifaceted that assessments tend to owe much to the perspective of the beholder.

With those caveats in mind, what might nonetheless be said?

FRAMING PD

Doing diplomacy, and especially the public variety in the Twenty-first Century is not for the faint of heart. The erstwhile global village has come to resemble more of an island patchwork of gated communities surrounded by a vast sea of sprawling shantytowns. To be sure, this is a cross-cutting and transformative era, one characterized by global economic scope (markets, sourcing and value chains); concerns about climate change, pandemic disease and weapons of mass destruction; the unfettered exercise of American unilateralism, and; the open-ended war on terror. That said the ends of diplomacy have not changed. The search for the non-violent resolution of differences through negotiation and compromise, and the promotion of cooperation for mutual gain are constant. Yet if the ends are immutable, both the art and the science of diplomacy have morphed dramatically in tandem with the changing context. New actors, drawn from civil society, supra-national bodies and the private sector—terrorists, zealots and criminals among them—now play major roles entirely distinct from those of government representatives. A different constellation of challenges and threats have emerged in tandem with multiplying media and unexplored possibilities.

Old-style, state-to-state relations, with all of the associated conventions and rigidities, remains in the diplomatic mix, but its relevance has diminished as the centre of gravity has shifted—what for long was fixed and predictable has become diffuse and dynamic. The diplomatic front lines are now often far from quiet clubs or closed meeting rooms, grand hotels or formal chancelleries. Today’s diplomatic encounters are just as likely to take place in a barrio or a souk, in an internet chat room or on a blog, on Main Street or in a Quonset hut set astride the wire. The transformed international security environment requires no less.

Much of this, in my view, may be attributed to globalization, which has become the defining historical process of our times, conditioning, and in some cases determining outcomes across a wide spectrum. Like a two-edged sword cutting all ways, it is producing a very mixed picture internationally, featuring winners and losers, and beneficiaries and victims. Globalization is nothing if not complex and paradoxical. By imposing the ethic of economic competitiveness and polarizing the creation and distribution of wealth, resources and opportunity both within and between states, it fragments at some levels as it integrates at others. Even where levels of absolute poverty and deprivation are diminishing, the relative gaps, and media-fuelled perceptions thereof, are at all levels increasing, while the spaces left for shared goals and common identity are shrinking. Sensations of difference, rather than similarity, are ascendant everywhere. All of this breeds insecurity and drives state failure.

How is the practice of diplomacy, in my view a significantly undervalued asset, adapting to these challenges? In this volatile and dangerous world—a world in which suicide bombing has become commonplace, fundamentalist Islam has been branded as the religion of the oppressed, and terror has been embraced as the weapon of choice by the weak and the disenfranchised—innovative diplomacy is desperately required.

I am convinced that diplomacy has an essential role to play in mobilizing the support necessary to achieve peaceful change and hence to avoid costly military interventions. Among the most promising recent developments has been the move away from an exclusive, discreet, boutique-type of diplomatic practice catering mainly to the style and tastes of the pin stripe set, towards a public diplomatic practice in much closer proximity to Main Street (or thereabouts).

The territory? Cerebral. The currency? Ideas. The marketplace? Global. The diplomat? Part activist, part lobbyist, and part street-smart policy entrepreneur.

In other words, public diplomats use public relations (PR) tactics—characterized by a commitment to continuing conversation, the identification of shared objectives, relationship building, image projection and reputation management—to connect with populations at both the mass and elite levels. Practitioners count on these tools—as opposed, for instance, to a démarche at the foreign ministry followed up by a diplomatic note—to move host governments towards desired ends.

Public diplomacy is most effective when meaningful exchange finds demonstrable expression in policy development and state action. It goes well beyond public affairs, which seeks more to inform than to persuade. Moreover, PD has more in common with dialogue than propaganda, which is a one-way flow of information often characterized by inaccuracy and bias. But public diplomacy will

not work in a vacuum. For starters, domestic constituencies must be maintained and nurtured if international policy objectives are to resonate with citizens. And performing that kind of outreach is no easy task, especially for those practitioners whose primary orientation is international: backs to their capitals and countrymen, faces to the world.

POR *should* play an essential role in providing public diplomats with a sense of whether or not their efforts are succeeding—both in the world and on the home front. In Canada’s case, to some extent it does. But much, much more could be done to reinforce this fundamental linkage.

PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT IN FLUX

In Canada much has been made in recent years of the irony that even as daily we become more cosmopolitan and charge ahead ever more completely into the culture and ethos of globalization, the coverage of international affairs in the mainstream media—television, radio, newspapers—continues to diminish. Whether the issue is the side-swiping of the national economy or a run on the dollar as a result of a financial decisions taken elsewhere; the migration of jobs due to free trade or the impact of the closure of the frontier with the USA on export performance; shifting patterns of land use and settlement across the north due to climate change; or the impact of SARS, BSE or Avian Flu on incoming tourism and investment decisions, there is no doubt that Canada is exquisitely vulnerable and exposed to events initiated beyond our borders.

Yet this reality is rarely reflected in the overall news mix, and even less so in the content below the headlines. Why? Media multiplication and segmentation; budget and personnel cuts; a loss of institutional memory; the closing or consolidation of foreign bureaux; infrequent and shorter stories; an absence of analysis; a fixation on the sensational...earthquakes, tidal waves, or train wrecks. Fewer journalists, with increasingly stretched resources, are covering the IR “beat,” and there appears to be a widespread conviction among media managers that Canadians just aren’t interested in world affairs. Those who are have little choice but to rely upon specialized sources and the web for anything but the most basic information.

These changes in the structure of media coverage have both prefigured and reflected major shifts in the public environment, which has itself been subject to the same powerful historical currents of globalization. This is producing a new division of labor at all levels, fracturing some communities while creating others, splintering populations, generating wealth, and immiserating simultaneously.

If Canadians are not sufficiently aware of the significance of this country’s global linkages, they are nonetheless buffeted by the consequences, which

have produced tectonic shifts in all dimensions of Canadian life and extend well beyond the visible impact of immigration. Economic and social aspects of the underdeveloped world, for example, have arrived in Canadian cities. Notwithstanding indications of renewed confidence in our collective identity and direction, hot air gratings and food banks and shelters have become more crowded as public spending on health, education and social programs has receded. In the attendant swirl of ambiguity and uncertainty which these developments have unleashed, international affairs has become a hard sell. This, in combination with the ascendance and popularity of single and special interest lobbies, plus the fact that the economy has performed exceptionally well for the past five years, has taken a toll on any nuanced appreciation of the bigger picture.

PERCEPTION AND REALITY

The evolution of the domestic environment goes well beyond the blurring of the lines between the national and the global, and the rising prominence government departments outside the purview of the foreign ministry, or the activism of other levels of government, including cities. The activities of non-state actors now deeply influence trends in the domestic polity. These non-state actors range from Al Qaeda to philanthropic NGOs, from transnational businesses to prominent individuals such as Bono, Bill Gates and George Soros. The rise of issue-driven advocacy, job insecurity, generational change and growing disquiet over matters closer to home have served to increase levels of discomfort, but also have induced fatigue, apathy, and, in some quarters, cynicism. Not that long ago a broad, comfortable, middle class consensus existed about the idea of Canada as middle power; but that entente has been riven, a development hastened by the growing popularity of highly particularistic, single interest lobbies—rainforest or reefs, Timor or Tibet, gender or human rights, small arms or child soldiers. It is difficult to reach, let alone attempt to draw together such a fragmented constituency. While this presents challenges for governments, it also affords considerable choice and a wide margin for maneuver.

Most Canadians may not know it, but Canada's interests have come to be defined increasingly in economic terms at the level of the political leadership. This may help to explain why few seem to have noticed the absence of many of the standards and norms, which in the past informed Canadian policy development. For instance, there was barely a squeak when international environmental activism, a foreign policy showpiece just over a decade ago at the time of the Rio Conference, quietly dropped from the diplomatic agenda. Even more tellingly, few protested when in the second half of the 1990s real aid spending was cut by almost 50%, defense by 40%, and foreign affairs by 35%.

Perhaps feeling adrift in this turbulent and confusing world, many Canadians have redrawn the lines of their individual moral engagement in closer proximity to their front door. Beset by lingering doubts about governance at home and facing a range of vexing, if not intractable challenges abroad, many Canadians seem to be looking inwards—just when they should be looking out. This has certainly been my personal and professional observation over the past decade, and is backed up by the survey research. Canadians now see their government's priorities as overwhelmingly domestic—health care, education, the environment and managing the economy dominate, with all aspects of international affairs (defense, aid and foreign policy) barely registering in comparison.

In Canada, most people appear to be paying less attention to the world and to their place in it. There have been occasional spikes in interest in international affairs—9/11, the decision to abstain from the invasion of Iraq, echoes from events in Iran or North Korea—but these are at best minor peaks in a valley of indifference. Global issues, in so far as they appear on the Canadian public's radar screen at all, include the hardy perennials of peace, development, and human rights. Below that level, however, if we drill into the views held by the internationally attentive public, there may be some new trends developing. These trends include: an appetite for independent global action; support for cranking up relations with the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries and moderate Islamic democracies (Malaysia, Jordan, Indonesia, Algeria); enthusiasm for a more active role for the UN; forgiving Third World debt; protecting Arctic sovereignty; and refraining from providing additional political or military support to the war on terror. None of these, however, are anywhere close to top of mind for most citizens.

For Canada, these shifts in the public environment have been mirrored in the selection of foreign policy goals and in the kinds of policy results achieved. Today in Canada one rarely hears talk about poverty alleviation, conflict resolution, or the pursuit of other grand, global order priorities that were once our hallmark. Instead, with the exception of the action in Afghanistan, which is a special case too complex to be treated in any detail here, Canadian foreign policy has become more about the identification of niches and the delivery of special projects. This approach has a defined beginning and end, limited resource requirements, and high levels of media and NGO marketability—all well suited to keeping public opinion on side.

The successful negotiation of the Montreal Protocol on ozone layer depletion in 1987 was a signal development in this respect, and the formula of forging temporary partnerships with civil society, the media and “like-minded” countries to achieve agreed objectives was refined further throughout the 1990s. The agenda

included engineering a PR victory (and in so doing avoiding international legal jeopardy) during the dispute with Spain on over-fishing in the North Atlantic; the “Ottawa Process” which resulted in the creation of the International Treaty to Ban Land Mines; creation of the International Criminal Court; highlighting the plight of children in war zones and the sale of “conflict diamonds”; and, most recently, securing acceptance at the UN, at least in broad outline, of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

The crucial importance of having both international and domestic public opinion on side could not be clearer. Still, and to return to the larger issue of the public environment, the question remains—for most Canadians, does any of this much matter?

This situation has immensely complicated the task of those trying to measure public opinion in the context of international policy survey research. For Canadians, foreign policy has become somewhat of an exotic, far removed from their more pressing preoccupations and concerns. It exists in a kind of floating world; a disconnected bubble somehow severed from the everyday and animated more by a sense of visceral values than by an appreciation of concrete interests. Compare that to the perceptions of a Palestinian or an Israeli, an Iraqi or an Afghan—or, for that matter, an American or a Brit. For these populations, whether they are on the receiving or the initiating end of foreign policy, the policy content has a palpable reality quotient, with tangible and wide-ranging implications for how one feels about the issues both on a daily basis and over time.

Canadians, for their part, continue to believe that their country is a force for “good” in the world—a generous aid donor, earnestly seeking and keeping the peace, and committed to progressive internationalism. However dated, and even undeserved, this package fits in well with multicultural cities, tolerant social norms, the absence of colonial baggage and the generally unthreatening posture. It is very much in line with Canada’s reputation on Main Street—if not in boardrooms—and constitutes a strength that we could more effectively leverage. Yet it remains a struggle to get Canadians to focus on global issues. Given my experience as National Program Director at the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) in the late 1990s, I speak from first hand experience. This is curious, but it does underline the fact that perceptions—as expressed by what people say they think and want when asked—are not always mirrored in what either they, or their government actually do.

WORKING IT

In this complex public environment, what use does Canada make of POR on international issues? Much less than we should, in my view, and that may be, at least in part, the result of a lack of political appetite engendered by the changes described above. While used episodically and in the context of risk management as a tool to capture attitudes on controversial issues, coverage of all but the most generic trends has been spotty. We do a very good job of media monitoring and analysis, with surveys of coverage in the domestic and international press prepared daily and thematic roll-ups produced every two weeks. Focus group testing is used, but it is occasional and demand driven rather than strategic and systematic. So too with polling; the results of major subscription-based research and data mining projects are distributed throughout government regularly, but custom polling, apart from an annual exercise undertaken to track major international policy trends and Departmental performance, is undertaken much less often and usually on a stand-alone basis. POR conducted abroad is even less rigorous or coordinated, and usually is driven by immediate priorities such as Canada's image and reputation in the Asia Pacific in the face of a declared interest in intensifying relations with China and India, or promoting commercial and investment ties with emerging economic centers in Southern and Western USA. On balance, Canada maintains its best tracking research on issues of international trade, Canada—USA relations, defense and security. We are weakest on foreign policy, development assistance, diplomacy, and the attitudes of Canadians towards global issues (e.g. climate change; pandemic disease; genomics; and nanotechnology).

These gaps, however, may be remedied at least in part through recourse to the possibilities afforded by the new media. In that regard I would like to highlight a recent development, which I consider highly consequential. In 2003 Canada's then Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham launched a protracted round of online consultations between the government and the polity on a variety of international issues. The government posted a comprehensive background/discussion paper on a custom built site; comments were invited, incoming views posted (mediated by an editor) and biweekly reports were prepared for the Minister. This enterprise, christened the Foreign Policy Dialogue, was complimented by a series of town hall meetings and expert round tables organized by at locations across the country. At the conclusion of the online dialogue, a summary of all input received was prepared for the Minister, and an official response—effectively a policy statement—was tabled in Parliament. Both documents were also posted.

As an approach to the democratization and ventilation of the policy development process, and as a supple, nuanced way to sound out public opinion, Foreign Policy Dialogue venture is to my knowledge unprecedented and

constitutes a best practice. For governments, it sits on the POR frontier. The Department has been built upon it subsequently through the creation of an international policy site, which features a similar facility for online exchange. The most recent discussions were based on papers authored by policy planning staff and dealing with the reform of multilateral institutions and possible policy responses to failing and failed states.

As the web becomes the world's Agora, it is likely that this will become a permanent feature of the Department's Internet presence.

I would add that there might also be instances, though rare, when international policy questions become hot button national political issues, around which all kinds of survey research might well be initiated. This may be becoming the case in regards to Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, where last February a 2400 strong Canadian military contingent departed the multilateral International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) enterprise in Kabul to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kanadhar and in so doing undertake a primarily counterinsurgency mission. This non-traditional deployment, recently extended to 2009 and established under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom (aka the global war on terror), has resulted in a spike in the number of casualties. The dead have included Canada's first-ever female combat fatality, and the senior Canadian diplomat in Kandahar who was killed by a suicide car bomber. If this remains a high profile story, it may well figure centrally in the next federal election, where international policy issues have surfaced significantly since the free trade agreement with the USA was contested in 1988.

On best practices, for partly reasons outlined above, I remain somewhat skeptical about using the fruits of conventional survey research as a basis for policy formulation and decision-making. What people say, think, expect that they'll do, and actually do are often quite different, especially in the case of Canadians for whom international policy issues may seem somewhat ephemeral. It is also relatively easy to load or manipulate questions in order to enhance the likelihood of receiving certain types of responses pleasing to the sponsors. Here I believe that working with focus groups, especially of the more in-depth, deliberative type, and structured interviews can provide more useful information.

To give a few examples, in 2001 the Department's Communications Bureau contracted a series of focus groups across the USA that explored issues related to Canada's brand in the USA. The result, a report entitled *Fuzzy but Warm*, in my estimation produced more policy-relevant insights than much of the conventional polling we had undertaken previously. Better yet was a study authored by Robert Greenhill and based on comprehensive interviews with 40 global opinion leaders and undertaken in 2003-04. This report, entitled *Making a Difference* and

published by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, provides a detailed and in every respect sobering account of the diminished esteem in which this country is held internationally by many of those whose views really count.

THE WRAP

Where, then, does this leave us? In a somewhat uncomfortable place, I think. POR can help public diplomats determine whether or not they are connecting with populations; there are few alternatives when it comes to establishing performance metrics. With few exceptions, however, POR is not tightly integrated into international policy development.

If feedback loops were working properly, policy planners and PD practitioners would be using POR systematically, especially to get to know much more about emerging currents in the thinking of the internationally attentive public—but resource constraints, coupled perhaps with a certain culturally-rooted reticence to consult, ensure that they don't.

Polling, moreover, though the dominant expression of POR, is expensive, easily manipulated, and does not always produce actionable results. Other forms of POR such as focus groups and interviews are more likely to yield useful insights; but governments are not generally enthusiastic about commissioning such studies, as the outcomes are less predictable. And at the political level there will always be the conundrum about whether to try to lead, or to follow public opinion.

To return to the theme suggested in the title, the three Ps of public diplomacy, public opinion research and the public environment probably should be growing together in the same pod. But whether or not that is in fact the case remains open to...shall we say, interpretation?

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Among his positions in Ottawa he has worked as Deputy Director for International Communications; Director for Southeast Asia; Senior Advisor, Public Diplomacy, and; Director of Strategic Communications Services, where he was responsible for public opinion research. From 1996—99 he was National Program Director of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs in Toronto and Editor of *Behind the Headlines*, Canada's international affairs magazine. He has written and spoken widely on-foreign policy, global issues, diplomacy and

public management. During the 1980s and 1990s he was elected five times to the Executive Committee of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers.

In 2000, he received the Canadian Foreign Service Officer Award for his “tireless dedication and unyielding commitment to advancing the interests of the diplomatic profession.” He is at present on special assignment to prepare a book dealing with diplomacy, security and international policy in the globalization era.

Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy

Marc Lynch

How can the new phenomenon of widespread scientific surveys of Arab and Muslim public opinion affect the practice of public diplomacy? As with mainstream political scientists who long avoided the Middle East because of the paucity of survey research, the new surfeit of survey research dramatically changes the opportunities for public diplomacy practitioners to engage with public opinion in targeted countries. Traditionally, the absence of regular, high quality public opinion polls allowed anyone to project his/her own biases and hopes on to an imagined “Arab street.” Academics, journalists, and governments tracked local public opinion through anecdotal evidence or through often overriding analytical assumptions. Arab governments, with their widespread surveillance and well-developed instruments of ideological control over their own societies had their own methods of determining public opinion which had little to do with scientific random sampling. The absence of independent evidence made it possible for a variety of political actors to claim the right to speak on behalf of this street: whether governments or political party leaders or outspoken pundits. Crude measures such as the ability of Nasser to incite protestors into the streets, or the musings of the ubiquitous English-speaking taxi driver, took the place of systematic analysis.

This situation has changed dramatically.¹ By the second half of the 1990s, surveys took place in select Arab countries with increasing regularity. The US Government conducted its own survey research where possible, though this information was not generally released to the public. After 9/11, international research agencies such as Pew and Gallup began carrying out major cross-national survey research on a wide range of questions of concern to American foreign policy. Individual academics and a wide range of US government agencies also began to carry out survey research, including an upgraded Arab component of the World Values Survey and a number of National Science Foundation supported single country and multi-country studies. Since the invasion of Iraq an enormous

amount of survey research has been carried out in an attempt to understand Iraqi public opinion. As a result, we now have a far more rigorous and useful set of data on Arab and Muslim public opinion than ever before.

This avalanche of survey research creates unique opportunities for public diplomacy practitioners, but also some real dangers. Successful public diplomacy must have accurate information about the attitudes, ideas, and preferences of target audiences, which survey research can offer...up to a point. As Mark Tessler puts it, “public diplomacy...will succeed only if guided by a proper understanding of the attitudes and orientations of Arab and Muslim publics. Such an understanding requires attention not only to *what* people think but also to *why* they hold particular views.”² On the positive side, survey research means that instead of having to depend on local interlocutors or on impressionistic readings of trends in local public opinion, public diplomacy practitioners can now draw on a growing body of scientific, methodologically rigorous research. Regular survey research allows trend-lines to be discerned, rather than capturing only an isolated snapshot. It can assist the crafting of new public diplomacy campaigns and provide feedback on the success of earlier campaigns.

But there is a real risk that the ready availability of survey research will distract policy makers from placing those findings into their appropriate political context. Public opinion survey research must be embedded in appropriate theories of why and how this public opinion matters, so that policy makers know which results matter and which can safely be ignored. The deluge of survey information can overwhelm the policymaker. The scientific allure of survey research might also lead policymakers to unjustifiably discount other sources of information about public opinion, such as media analysis or the interpretations of informed analysts. It might lead to misreadings of the real concerns of Arab and Muslim publics, since the questions tend to ask about things that matter to us rather than asking what really matters to them. And perhaps most crucially, the availability of survey research may lead public diplomacy professionals to place less importance on direct dialogue with Arab interlocutors. The real methodological problems facing any public opinion survey in the Arab world—as well as the particular shortcomings of specific surveys—merit more than the token nod that they usually receive.

Fouad Ajami famously dismissed the Pew Global Attitudes Survey findings by observing that, “there is no need to go so far away from home only to count the cats in Zanzibar.”³ But this withering, and politically useful, cynicism misses the real value of such surveys. From April 9-11, 2006, the USC Center on Public Diplomacy and the Pew Research Center organized a forum to discuss the issues raised by this new public opinion survey research for public diplomacy scholars and practitioners. This working paper draws on the discussions at that workshop,

which included both scholars and practitioners, to lay out the current state of the field of survey research in the Middle East, examine some of these shortcomings and possibilities, and offer some recommendations for the future.

THE EXPLOSION OF SURVEY RESEARCH

The explosion of survey research in the Arab world is nothing short of astonishing. As recently as the late 1980s, the idea of conducting scientific surveys of public opinion about controversial political issues would have been virtually unthinkable. In some Arab countries opinion surveys have now become routine occurrences. Some researchers are beginning to carry out survey research in even the most controlled settings, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. The proliferation of surveys has a number of implications in and of itself. It means that in many countries there exists now an infrastructure to support additional surveys (either on their own behalf or as contractors for the US government or independent organizations): reliable frames of the appropriate population, trained investigators, and developed methodologies. It also means that respondents, having seen the results of such surveys published in local newspapers and widely discussed in the media, are more likely to be forthcoming in responding to sensitive questions. Finally, it means that local policy makers and opinion leaders are better informed about the attitudes of domestic publics—as are those publics themselves.

In the 1990s, a number of pioneering Arab researchers began carrying out scientific research on local public opinion—some of which was released to the public and some of which was used by governments for their internal policy formation. The cats, one might say, have long since begun counting themselves. The Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan broke ground with its polling unit in the early 1990s.⁴ With regular surveys (e.g. the annual “Democracy in Jordan survey” and polls measuring expectations for, and 100-day evaluations of each new government) as well as controversial studies such as 1995 survey on Jordanian-Palestinian relations, the CSS established public opinion survey research as a regular part of the political landscape. Jordanian governments, for their part, have relied heavily on opinion surveys in crafting domestic policy. In 2004, the new liberal daily newspaper *al-Ghad* began commissioning its own public opinion surveys (using Ipsos-Stat). The Jordan Center for Social Research (headed by Musa al-Shtawi) has recently begun regular public opinion surveys, in part as a contractor for the International Republican Institute.⁵

Other Arab countries also developed a tradition of survey research. In the Palestinian areas, Khalil Shikaki's Nablus-based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research has carried out more than 100 opinion surveys since 1993. These surveys, at least potentially, helped Israel and the United States formulate

their peacemaking policies, and had some impact on world public opinion about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; at least once, Shikaki's findings caused him serious trouble with Palestinian radicals upset with the political implications of his findings.⁶ The Al-Ahram Center in Egypt carried out some survey research beginning in the 1990s but largely focused on "safe" issues such as economics and Arab integration.⁷ In 2004, Nawaf Obeid published the results of the first officially sanctioned political public opinion poll in Saudi Arabia, revealing widespread support for reform (85% in favor) but little support for liberals (only 11.8% expressed positive views), along with continuing support for Osama bin Laden's ideas (49%, down from 96% support reported in a study by Saudi intelligence shortly after 9/11).⁸ Finally, Iraq under American occupation and afterwards has become perhaps the most heavily surveyed Arab country in history, with a vast array of opinion surveys carried out by US government and private organizations alike.⁹

The US government administers its own survey research in the Arab world as well. This polling of international opinion preceded 9/11, contrary to popular belief. Participants in the Public Diplomacy and World Opinion Forum described the sophisticated polling conducted by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), including research on segmentation analysis and opinion changers. After the Hamas electoral victory in January, for instance, it was widely reported that INR's pre-election surveys had quite accurately forecast the outcome.¹⁰ This research is generally not made available to the public, which INR representatives at the Forum defended as the best way to ensure its non-partisan nature and to prevent its manipulation or exploitation for political ends. The Pentagon also carries out considerable survey research, particularly on "force protection" issues (though we really do not know its extent or subjects). USAID surveys tend to focus on issues of concern to development, such as health, democracy, effectiveness of aid programs; recent surveys have reportedly begun to ask about public perceptions and awareness of American aid programs. American NGOs also sponsor opinion surveys. The International Republican Institute, for instance, sponsored surveys (usually in collaboration with local partners) in Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Iraq, the Palestinian areas, and Lebanon.¹¹

The Arab world has also been included in a number of large-scale cross-national opinion research projects, beyond the Pew and Gallup studies discussed below. The massive multi-country World Values Survey only included its first Arab countries in the fourth wave (1999-2002).¹² Jordan's CSS oversaw a 2005 cross-national study of five Arab countries, in collaboration with local partners.¹³

While it is still more common for academics to concentrate on systematically analyzing the data generated by others, some academics have either carried out

their own original survey research. Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland, in collaboration with Zogby International, has conducted half a dozen surveys in six Arab countries since the summer of 2001.¹⁴ Mark Tessler of the University of Michigan has administered NSF supported surveys in Algeria, Jordan, Palestine (2003-2004), and in Iraq (December 2004). In 2002, Mansor Moaddel followed up on the 2000 World Values Survey with a second round of surveys in Egypt, Iran, Jordan and a first round of surveys in Morocco.¹⁵ Finally, and perhaps most excitingly, the new “Arab Barometer Project” organized by Tessler and Amaney Jamal (with start-up money from the Middle East Partnership Initiative) brings together local scholars in Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, Jordan, and Kuwait to carry out regular survey research comparable to existing Democracy Barometer projects in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.¹⁶

By far the greatest change in the field of opinion surveys, however, has been the large-scale entry into the Arab world after 9/11 by Gallup and Pew. Gallup's 2002 survey, the first out of the gate, continues to be widely used by academics doing secondary analysis of the data.¹⁷ In 2005, Craig Charney used focus groups rather than opinion surveys to get a more textured sense of Muslim attitudes towards America.¹⁸ Finally, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey has had the most impact of all.¹⁹ Its findings of a collapse in support for America framed the influential 2003 report of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, and its regular surveys of Arab and Muslim public opinion have become the ‘gold standard’ in public debate about anti-Americanism.

FINDINGS OF PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

Evidence of widespread anti-American attitudes has been the most consistently scrutinized and widely influential finding of this research. The Pew Global Attitudes Project's widely publicized 2003 report that “the bottom has fallen out” of America's support in the Arab and Muslim worlds galvanized public and policy attention. Findings that fewer than 5% of Jordanians and Egyptians approved of America were indeed eye-catching.²⁰ Zogby and Telhami similarly found in February 2003 that 4% of Saudis approved of America, along with 6% of Moroccans and Jordanians, 13% of Egyptians, and 32% of Lebanese (divided sharply along confessional lines).²¹ That these findings had such impact is worth reflecting upon. The Pew Global Attitudes Survey did not reveal anything that regional experts had not already written. But the scientific sheen of the numbers captured the public imagination and the policy agenda in ways that such writings could not—even if the quality of information produced by the regional experts, including its political context and local social meaning, might well have been better for most policy purposes.

While this information about attitudes towards America is often taken as the most important information for public diplomacy, I would argue that other information is actually more useful. Measures of anti-Americanism do not tell policy-makers the causes of these attitudes; even self-reported findings, such as a Zogby question in which overwhelming majorities said that their hostility was driven by policy rather than by culture, should be taken with a grain of salt. Policy practitioners should be concerned about the headline numbers, but must look deeper to find what is most useful for policy formation. For instance, opinion survey research has demonstrated deep and broad support for democracy, widespread opposition to American foreign policy, deeply ingrained doubts about American credibility, conflicted feelings about radical Islam and terrorism, and deep divisions over the appropriate role of religion in political life. Surveys have revealed both striking continuities across the Arab world on certain issues and vast differences on others—which should help the public diplomacy practitioner to identify which issues can be addressed effectively at the regional level and which are better dealt with on a country-by-country basis.

Instead of rehearsing the well-trod terrain of anti-Americanism, in this section I instead review the contributions of public opinion survey research to questions of public diplomacy in two key issue domains: democracy and terrorism.

Democracy:

The findings about Arab support for the idea of *democracy* are both unequivocal and non-obvious. As Mark Tessler concluded from a review of 15 different data sets, using a wide range of questions and samples, “in not a single case was there a statistically significant relationship between attitudes toward democracy and the personal involvement of Muslim respondents with their religion.”²² This is the sort of finding—overwhelmingly one-sided, replicated in a wide range of surveys using different methods, and decisively supporting one side of a contentious theoretical and policy-relevant debate—which should influence not only public diplomacy but also policy more generally. It demolishes long-held prejudices about the incompatibility of Arab culture or Islam with democratic values.²³

But if those findings demonstrate an opening for public diplomacy, they also illustrate some of the risks of leaping to conclusions on their basis. The surveys show clearly that promoting democracy was one area where American ideals and Arab aspirations overlapped: something not true of virtually any other American foreign policy interest. But at the same time, the evidence of America’s profound lack of credibility on the issue should have been given equal weight. Credibility should be seen as a “master variable” which influences the reception of a very wide range of policy areas. For instance, after the United States began talking

extensively about the need for Arab democracy (and also after it made the creation of a democratic Iraq part of its justification for the war) a number of surveys asked about the reality of America's commitment to Arab democracy. In a May 2004 Telhami/Zogby survey, 25% of Jordanians thought that democracy was an important motive for the invasion of Iraq, along with 6% of Moroccans, 44% of Lebanese, 7% of Saudis, 5% of the UAE, and 8% of Egyptians.²⁴ In an October 2005 Telhami/Zogby survey, only 6% thought that American democracy promotion was a real objective which would make a difference, while 16% said it was the right goal pursued the wrong way, and 69% said that democracy was not really an American objective.²⁵

Such survey research could have helped American public diplomacy realize that it did not need to "sell" democracy to the Arab public, but rather to convince a skeptical audience of American bona fides on the issue.

Looking more closely at surveys about democracy in Jordan can illustrate some of the possibilities and pitfalls for public diplomacy professionals. Jordanians expressed consistent enthusiasm for the principle of democracy (98% in one of the Tessler surveys) and the belief that democracy could work well in the country (74% in the 2006 Pew survey).²⁶ Surveys also show limited satisfaction with the current state of affairs, suggesting that Jordan is a country ripe for American democracy promotion efforts. The annual CSS "Democracy in Jordan" survey has shown a steady decline in public perception of Jordanian democracy. In the 2005 CSS survey, 51% of Jordanians said that Jordan was a democratic country, while overwhelming numbers say that they want Jordan to be a democratic country.²⁷ But beyond this general admiration for democracy, how pressing were such concerns for the average Jordanian? Repeated surveys show citizens to be far more concerned with economic issues than with political democracy.²⁸ CSS also found that very few Jordanians were members of political parties, and few valued any of the institutions upon which democracy promotion would presumably focus (political parties, Parliament, civil society, the professional associations). One aspect of "democracy" registered more strongly in these surveys: 77% in a 2005 survey said that they were not able to criticize the government or differ with its opinions publicly without fear of reprisals by the security services against themselves or their families. "Freedom of the press" ranked first among the freedoms which need to be protected, at 62%, while "freedom of opinion" was second at 61%.²⁹ So survey research might tell policymakers that Jordanians *value* democracy but don't rank it *highly*, and they care quite a lot about public freedoms and economic issues. Knowing the permutations of priorities in different countries may be more useful to policy makers than are the headline numbers.

Terrorism

Since 9/11, building a global norm against terrorism has been a major American foreign policy objective. Pew surveys and others have very usefully tracked shifting ideas about the legitimacy of terrorism employed against different targets (e.g. Americans, Israelis, and other Muslims), and the popularity of bin Laden and other Islamist figures. These findings should be extremely useful to the public diplomacy practitioner, again within important limits. These numbers tell us little about the actual likelihood of terrorism, since such acts are typically carried out by very small, highly motivated groups who are not likely to be captured even by the best survey methodology. But they do tell us some things of real importance.

Survey research can measure the extent of passive or active support for groups using terrorism, which gets to the environment within which terrorists must operate. It also can help determine progress towards establishing moral norms against terrorism. For instance, the 2005 and 2006 Pew surveys asked a series of questions about when violence against civilians would be considered legitimate. Asked whether such violence would be legitimate to “defend Islam,” 43% of Jordanians said “often/sometimes” in 2002, 47% in 2005, but only 29% in 2006 (28% said “often/sometimes” in Egypt in 2006). Those who responded never” went from 26% in 2002 to 11% in 2005 to 43% in 2006.³⁰

Opinion surveys have been instrumental in shaping our understanding of how different kinds of terrorism affect Arab attitudes. In summer 2005, when much of the world seemed to be losing interest in al-Qaeda, Jordanians expressed even greater confidence in bin Laden than in the past (60%, up from 55% in the previous survey), while only 10% saw “Islamic extremism” as a threat to their country.³¹ After Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s organization bombed several tourist hotels in Amman in November 2005, surveys found dramatic shifts in opinion against Zarqawi and (to a lesser extent) bin Laden. An *al-Ghad* survey carried out less than a week after the attacks found that 64% of Jordanians said that their view of al-Qaeda has changed for the worse because of the Amman terror attacks: 78% said that their view of al-Qaeda was “very bad,” and only 1.5% “very good;” 87% now considered al-Qaeda a “terrorist organization;” and 86.5% said that terrorism should be condemned absolutely. A few weeks later, a CSS survey on attitudes towards terrorism found that the percentage of respondents who consider Al Qaeda a legitimate resistance group had dropped from 66.8% in 2004 to 20% in 2005.³²

The CSS surveys distinguish between the mass public and “opinion leaders,” offering an interesting dynamic. The opinion leaders (perhaps more politically aware, perhaps more susceptible to regime persuasion or likely to see things the King’s way), in 2005 overwhelmingly saw bin Laden’s Al Qaeda (73.4 %) as a

terrorist organization, while only half (48.9%) of the national sample respondents agreed. And spillover to other domains was limited: 63.6% in 2005 considered armed military operations carried out against US troops in Iraq as “not terrorist,” a drop of less than 5 percentage points. A series of surveys in 2006 then found something of a reversion to the status quo, as the shock of the hotel bombing faded, and Jordan’s government led a public campaign against the far more popular Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. A 2006 CSS survey found that 72% of Jordanians now considered Zarqawi’s organization a terrorist one – high, but a 13% drop over five months. In June 2006, an Ipsos-Stat opinion survey found that 59% of Jordanians described Zarqawi as a “terrorist” and 67% refused to describe him as a martyr.³³ But there were sharp class and ethnic divides: 76.6% of those over the age of 60 described Zarqawi as a terrorist, compared to 54.5% of youth; and 77.6% of residents of the upscale West Amman describe Zarqawi as a terrorist, compared to 51.7% of the poorer residents of East Amman.

These shifts in mass attitudes may help us to understand and even forecast the strategy of terrorist groups. If al-Qaeda believes that attacks targeting Shia or civilians undermine their appeal then they may change those practices. The hard core of anti-American jihadis—the ones likely to resort to violence against American interests—hated America before those attitudes went mainstream, and would continue to do so even if the US dramatically increased its favorability ratings among mass publics. But reducing support for those tactics among the wider public might well cause them to alter their strategies to avoid losing their own public support. For an example of how survey research can be used for assessing terrorist strategies, Mia Bloom drew on a range of surveys of Palestinian public opinion to show how suicide terror attacks tracked domestic political trends and attitudes towards Israel and the peace process.³⁴

Similar studies in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and elsewhere confirm the general trend that local terror attacks tend to undermine—at least temporarily—the universalistic appeal of radical Islamist ideas. All of this information is therefore of obvious use for anyone attempting to formulate a public diplomacy campaign likely to contribute to delegitimizing terrorism. This offers little direct policy guidance for American public diplomacy, however, since encouraging such attacks is obviously not on the agenda. Perhaps the lesson would be that American public diplomacy should stay out of the way in the aftermath of such terror attacks, allowing the local reaction to develop on its own terms.

USES AND MISUSES OF SURVEY RESEARCH FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

One danger in the proliferation of public opinion survey research is that it can too easily become a substitute for real understanding of the patterns of public opinion in the region. There is a risk of turning it into a horse race, or playing to the numbers because it is a metric we can use. It would be a mistake for American public diplomacy to be oriented primarily towards improving its favorable ratings in the Pew Global Attitudes Survey. Instead, it should focus upon using the survey data to construct policies—not only rhetoric—which can address real Arab concerns.

For opinion surveys to be useful, analysts need a theory of the role of public opinion in the political process.³⁵ This will matter differently at different times: certain foreign policy goals—such as the promotion of democracy, or the construction of a norm against terror—could not plausibly be achieved in isolation from foreign public opinion. Elite opinion may matter more than mass attitudes, for instance, for many policy domains.³⁶ Public opinion surveys privilege the uninformed, unmobilized masses over activists—which can be problematic if activists (or elites) in fact have a greater role in shaping political outcomes. For instance, during the summer of 2005 the Jordanian press and political salons were consumed by a heated political standoff over the confirmation of new Prime Minister Adnan Badran. An opinion poll found that 72.1% of Jordanians had not heard about the crisis—suggesting that for all its heat and intensity within the political elite (65.8% of those who had heard of the crisis said they were interested in the story), it hadn't really penetrated into the wider public consciousness.³⁷ What would American public diplomacy gain from knowing this?; Perhaps that a crisis generating great press attention was not all that important to Jordanians at large. But it would be a mistake to think that it therefore was not important—since the political class and opinion leaders matter more than do the mass public in this widely depoliticized country.

The results of opinion surveys need to be placed into the context of other sources of information, with triangulation among multiple streams of information. The artificial certainty offered by numbers can seduce even knowledgeable observers; for the novice, they can be overwhelming. But survey research does not put numbers into storylines, narratives, which make sense of the mass of data. Practitioners still need interpretation for that. The distribution of opinions expressed on Arab satellite television may be a more useful indicator of politically relevant attitudes than the opinions collected in opinion surveys.³⁸ In the case of Iraq before the war, survey research may have been actively misleading. Surveys showed overwhelming opposition to American invasion of Iraq, which led most analysts to stop asking questions about an Arab opinion presumed to be

unchangeable (if not irrational). But following Arab talk shows and op-eds and internet forums might have revealed that beyond the binary “yes/no” format of most opinion surveys, lots of Arabs would have been happy to see Saddam go, just not through an American invasion. The real story was skepticism about the US and its motives, not about support for Saddam. But the surveys didn’t necessarily ask the right questions, or allow Arabs to explain their own positions, only to choose among pre-determined responses.

Another concern is that public opinion surveys can actually create an artificial “opinion” among respondents who in fact have never thought about matters in those ways. Often we ask questions which matter to us, but which might not be what matters to them. Asking the same question across multiple countries can be essential for cross-national comparisons, and should not be eliminated. But to really get useful information for public diplomacy in a specific country, survey questions should be carefully designed in response to the local political discourse and tested to ensure that the questions are effectively measuring actual opinions rather than imposing or inventing them.

Other issues are more prosaic, but important. One is the opportunity cost created by increased survey research. High quality survey research is expensive, although economies of scale and sunk costs have helped. The State Department has a very limited budget for survey research (i.e. INR), while the DOD has unlimited resources but a different agenda. This means that polling must be selective, and focused on producing the most useful kinds of information. A number of participants in the USC Forum emphasized that surveys could be most useful for defining the field itself—who and what you need to win, who is persuadable, who to communicate with—offering a broad overview of what publics think and how audiences are segmented.

Even for the most credible, nonpartisan research there are continuing methodology fears. The Gallup and Pew surveys are without question the two most highly regarded in the field: highly professional, face to face interviews, no expense spared. But even those two organizations have found widely discrepant results when asking very similar questions in the same countries. Others are less scrupulous, or operate under tight budget constraints: telephone rather than face to face interviews, short interview protocols that do not allow time to build trust, interviews in public places, convenience sampling, an unacknowledged urban bias. Certain countries tend to be over-represented in survey research, due to their importance for American policy or the availability of local partners (such as Jordan), while others are consistently absent. Bad data can drive out good, especially when its public release is itself an attempt to influence public opinion.

Finally, despite the explosion of survey research noted above, the realities of life

in a *mukhabarat* (secret police) state should never be discounted. On the one hand, interviewers for these surveys have anecdotally reported that participants are often thrilled to have the chance to express their opinion and be heard. But respondents in such societies will have real doubts about the confidentiality of their answers, and will very likely attempt to anticipate the correct (or safe) answers. How many Jordanians, whatever their true feelings, were likely to tell an unknown telephone interviewer of their admiration for Zarqawi immediately after the Amman hotel bombings, or immediately after four members of Parliament had been very publicly arrested and charged with incitement for praising the deceased al-Qaeda leader? In other words, the surveys may be measuring what people think others want to hear rather than real opinions—which is useful information to have, but which should not be confused with the other. In the words of one liberal Jordanian columnist, “the truth is that these surveys continue to give results that it is difficult to do anything with...The numbers rise and fall without any comprehensible justification, especially in the political realm. This is not the fault of the surveyors, who follow professional standards and methods, but *because of the absence of a real political life.*”³⁹

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

While the Pew data on anti-Americanism caught the eye, the prior question of the significance of those mass attitudes has remained under-explored. Did growing hostility among foreign publics matter in concrete ways? Was resentment of America simply the natural product of American supremacy? Even if the surveys identified the reasons for anti-American sentiment, did it make sense to adjust those policies in response to foreign opinion? The fashionable fixation with “moving the needle” with public diplomacy is badly misplaced: so many different factors go into the formation of public opinion that it will be rare that the effects of a public diplomacy campaign would register in public opinion surveys.⁴⁰ If the Pew Global Attitudes survey shows that 15% of Jordanians have favorable opinions of America compared to 21% the previous year, and 5% the year before that, what can or should a policymaker do with such information?

Just because a problem has been identified (i.e. mass anti-Americanism) does not mean that policy makers should try to solve it. Now matter how well foreign public opinion might be measured, the national interest, domestic public opinion, and the attitudes of the leaders of key foreign states will most likely still matter more in the formation of policy. If responding to hostile public opinion would require policy changes that would be detrimental in some other way, then unpopularity might be a price worth paying. If the US could win practical support for its foreign policies from other governments (even if unpopular with publics),

would it matter if its unfavorable ratings remained high? A recent study by Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, for instance, found that anti-Americanism in Europe made virtually no impact on the consumption of prominent American brands.⁴¹

Another problem is that opinion surveys might point towards things, which in practice would be impossible to execute. Findings of Arab perceptions of American non-religiosity suggest that a greater emphasis on America as a religious, conservative place might help. Hollywood, MTV, and the deluge of American popular culture would overwhelm any public diplomacy conducted along these lines. Or from another direction, it is clear that changing American policies towards Israel would have a major positive impact on Arab and Muslim public opinion, but such changes would not be likely given the prevailing conception of the American national interest and domestic public opinion. The Broadcasting Board of Governors spent heavily on survey research, but al-Hurra TV does not seem to have benefited from the information it received.

Knowledge of the preferences and attitudes of those publics would give policy makers information necessary for making effective decisions about the costs of prospective policies and their likely reception. But the explosion of public opinion survey research can actually give policy makers more information than they can act on, or else information which is of little use to the practical formation of policy.⁴² Officials say that the primary daily challenge is to integrate polling into policy channels, especially given the vast amount of other information and considerations that go into policy. INR's quite accurate forecast of the Hamas electoral victory did not seem to prepare the United States government for that outcome. At the USC Forum, most of the practitioners doubted the usefulness of survey research for designing major policy initiatives: they paint with too broad a brush and tell policy makers little about how publics will respond to changes in the status quo. Survey research is better at identifying constants—enduring themes, recurrent patterns—than at anticipating the response to dramatic new initiatives. Survey research practitioners at the Forum also warned about confusing a campaign model and a marketing model of survey research.

A better way to think of the policy use of survey research is as a diagnostic—checking the effects of policies, and providing warning signs of policy failure. The Pew numbers on exploding anti-Americanism helped to set a political and research agenda in ways which journalistic reporting and academic analysis had failed to do. Sharp discrepancies between survey research and other sources of information should set off warning bells—if opinion surveys showed widespread support for Hezbollah, say, at a time when much of the Arab media was filled with anti-Hezbollah rhetoric. Similarly, strong and repeatedly confirmed findings

which resolve an active debate should be taken seriously: for instance, the strong support for democracy among Arab and Muslim publics in a wide range of surveys decisively resolves an important policy debate about the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Similarly, the repeated finding that policy issues rather than culture drives anti-Americanism should have (but has not always) been used to formulate public diplomacy accordingly. Another potential use for survey research is to identify red zones of contention within public opinion. Rather than discovering the obvious (counting cats in Zanzibar)—that Arabs don't like Israel, or generally favor a role for Islam in politics—surveys could help to highlight areas of unexpected consensus (widespread support for democracy) and those on which no consensus exists and which people might be open to persuasion.

In the end, survey research should be seen as useful, but should not take an exaggerated role in public diplomacy. Don't play to the Pew numbers—but do look for areas of broad consensus and areas of contention (“red zone”) where interventions can make a difference. Don't overreact and dramatically change policy in response to survey numbers, but do take seriously major shifts of opinion in either direction and try to figure out their causes. Do look for zones of overlap which public diplomacy can exploit—shared values, democracy promotion—but don't take those out of political context, at risk of formulating a campaign that fundamentally misses the point. If kept in its appropriate context, survey research should be an indispensable tool for effective policy-making, and help scholars and policymakers alike better understand Arab and Muslim attitudes.

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The Practice of Public Diplomacy

Humphrey Taylor

The Bush administration shows an unmatched ability to put its case in ways that make its friends squirm and its enemies fume with rage.¹

—*The Economist*

I have attempted here to summarize my views as to how and why public diplomacy may or may not be effective, and to consider how American public diplomacy might influence attitudes toward the United States and its policies.

This paper was stimulated by my participation at the Public Diplomacy and World Public Opinion Forum in Washington, D.C. in April 2006, which raised questions to which I had never given much thought. These questions ranged from what public diplomacy is, or might be, to what techniques could be used effectively. It triggered many thoughts about the practice of public diplomacy and the often-substantial barriers that must be overcome if it is to influence opinion in other countries.

WHAT IS PUBLIC DIPLOMACY?

Joshua Fouts, Director of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School for Communication, defines public diplomacy as, “a government reaching out to a public or polity to explain its cultures, values, policies, beliefs and, by association, to improve its relationship, image and reputation with that country.”

The phrase “public diplomacy” is relatively new, as is the State Department’s appointment of an Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy. However, governments and leaders have engaged in public diplomacy in the past, even if they did not use the phrase. The Voice of America, Radio Sawa, Radio Marti, and the activities of the U.S. Information Service, and some CIA activities are all part of American public diplomacy.

Before Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill sought desperately to influence American opinion and win American support. Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, and Isaiah Berlin, who was working in the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., were charged with the task of competing with

Charles Lindbergh and Father Coughlin for the hearts and minds of Americans. More recently Israel and its friends in the United States have done all they can to promote positive attitudes to, and support, for Israel in this country.

But, if public diplomacy, whether or not it was called that, is not new, the focus on it and the discussion about it have increased greatly. What is newer (but also not new) is the belief that the same public relations techniques that politicians, corporations, and advocacy groups use to influence the attitudes and perceptions of the domestic public can also be used by governments to influence public opinion in other countries. Many countries hire public relations firms in the United States to try to improve their standing among Americans. As a result, attempts at public diplomacy sometimes look like “spin.”

Underlying some of the support for American public diplomacy is the belief that public relations techniques can make world opinion more supportive of, or at least less hostile to, United States policies *without changing these policies*. Some advocates of public diplomacy seem to believe that since American policies are inherently honorable and ethical all we have to do is to explain them more effectively and people will think better of us, or that what is good for America is good for the world and should be seen that way. Corporate executives often hold similar views about the ways in which they can improve their companies’ reputations, and politicians adopt similar attitudes about improving their popularity—that it’s only about communications. Occasionally, but not very often, they are right.

Even where press coverage of a country improves, it is difficult to determine how much, if any, of the improvement was caused by public diplomacy. For example, an interesting column in *Izvestiya* reported that the Kremlin has hired Ketchum, an American Public Relations firm to combat Russia’s “almost entirely negative” press in the period leading to the Group of Eight Conference in St. Petersburg. However, Russia expert Marshall Goldman of Harvard speculates that the decline in negative press following Ketchum’s hiring was more likely due to increased media attention to the conflict in Lebanon and not the result of any public relation’s strategies.²

Sometimes it may not be possible to separate public diplomacy from traditional diplomacy and to say where one ends and the other begins. One of the great successes of President George H.W. Bush’s diplomacy in the first Gulf War was the forming and maintaining of a United States-led coalition that included Muslim and Arab forces. Almost all the world’s governments supported, explicitly or implicitly, the liberation of Kuwait and the invasion of Iraq. One of the reasons for not “pushing on to Baghdad” was the fear that the coalition would get bogged down there. However, in the context of this paper, another important

consideration was the belief that the coalition would fall apart and alienate both governments and publics in the Muslim world. This was an example of successful public diplomacy, where an understanding of foreign public opinion influenced policy.

IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN COMMUNICATIONS OR SPIN

Effective public diplomacy should, I believe, work hand-in-glove with traditional diplomacy. Public diplomacy involves more than public relations and communications. It is commonly understood that traditional diplomacy involves give and take, that compromises are often necessary, and that two-thirds of a loaf (or even half) is better than no loaf. Likewise, public diplomacy should involve both give and take. It should help improve communications but it should also influence what the government does and what leaders say, or don't say.

In the corporate world, wise CEOs require that their senior communications managers—who are the guardians of their companies' reputations—report directly to them. An effective approach to corporate public relations is not “this is what we are doing; put the best spin on it;” it is “what should we do as a company and what should I do as the CEO —actions, policies, programs and communications—to ensure that this company and its products and services, are liked and respected by the public, our customers, employees, suppliers, legislators, regulators, and shareholders?” Successful public relations directors do much more than just manage communications. They influence corporate actions and policies. In the 1980s, one of America's most respected public relations men, Willis Player of Pam Am, told me that, “if I can't influence the CEO, I can't do my job.”

If traditional diplomacy often relies on “hard power,” the use or possible use of military or economic strength, to achieve its ends, public diplomacy often uses “soft power,” cultural, political, educational (and also economic) forces. Successful diplomacy based on hard power may cause people to respect, but also to fear, dislike, and distrust its users. Successful public diplomacy can help to make a country not just more respected but more admired and liked. Examples of the use of soft power include the education of future foreign leaders and opinion leaders at American universities and the prestige of American science and technology, such as the space program, medical advances, and other cutting-edge technologies.

The summer of 2006 may not be the easiest or the best time to write about public diplomacy and soft power or about what can be done to present American policies and leaders in ways that will make foreigners feel more positively about the United States. At the time of writing the insurgency and sectarian killings in Iraq continue unabated. Legal proceedings are moving forward against four different groups of American soldiers and Marines accused of murdering civilians,

including a charge of raping a 14 year-old Iraqi girl and murdering her and her family. Israeli troops, with American support, have invaded Lebanon and Israeli airplanes have killed many hundreds of Lebanese civilians unconnected to Hezbollah. The world's media are full of these stories, which are fueling the already dismal views many foreigners (Muslims and non-Muslims) already have of the United States. World events and American policy make it very hard to persuade Arabs and Muslims (and others) that the United States is not anti-Arab or anti-Muslim.

The idea that public diplomacy can substantially influence foreign opinions about the United States while the media are full of these reports may be an illusion. It is difficult to believe that public diplomacy—if defined narrowly as attempting to influence world opinion through better communications—could have any impact without changing the administration's policies and/or positions.

However, over the long term, public diplomacy may well make a difference, particularly if it influences American policies and how they are presented by the President, the Secretary of State, the American Ambassador to the United Nations, and other United States government leaders.

Public diplomacy, as defined by Joshua Fouts, is about much more than just public relations, as these words are generally understood. It is not just about communications or about putting the best spin on the government, its positions, policies and leaders. It includes everything the United States can do to improve its relationships, image and reputation.

Over the years my colleagues in the market research industry have worked for the public relations managers of thousands of companies, seeking to improve their images and reputations. These public relations activities often “work.” Better “positioning,” more media coverage, more favorable publicity (for the “good” things the company does) and effective “crisis management” can all help to make people feel more positively about a company and its products or services. But a good public relations expert will always stress that substance matters more than communications or spin. It’s hard to get the public to love a company that is known to be a serial polluter, makes unsafe products, or treats its employees badly. Indeed, when the truth is disagreeable, public relations efforts alone may be counter-productive.

“HOW OTHERS SEE US”

The poet Robert Burns, in his *Ode to a Louse*, wrote:

Oh would some power the giftie gie us
to see ourselves as others see us.
It would from many a blunder free us, and foolish notion.

Unfortunately, it is probably true that most people in most countries do not see themselves as others see them. History books almost everywhere tend to teach children that their country and their people are better than others, and the media and politicians pander to these beliefs and prejudices. This is true not just of strong and powerful countries, but also of small countries and even of tribes. Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians and Croats all have very different history books and are shocked that the rest of the world does not share their views of their histories. While objective histories see most Balkan peoples as both the perpetrators and victims of atrocities, they usually see themselves only as victims.

My mother was born in 1894 at the apex of British imperial self -confidence and pride. When still young she was stunned to meet a young French boy who told her he was proud to be French. How she wondered, could anyone be proud to be French, or any nationality other than British? It was incomprehensible to her. Everyone, she assumed, knew that Britain was the best country in the world.

Similarly, some Americans may see themselves as latter-day Athenians, the defenders of a great democracy pitted against ruthless and undemocratic Sparta. Sometimes this may be a useful analogy. However, others may see Americans, not as the Athenian democrats, but as the ruthless Athenians who crushed the island of Melos because it would not support Athens, killing the men and enslaving their women and children. In Thucydides' famous account, the Athenians demanded that the Melians surrender because Athens was much stronger than Melos and that:

you know as well as we do that, when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the quality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.³

Sometimes this has appeared to be the position of the American government; shades of, “you are either with us or against us.”

The impact of the Iraq War on world opinion has been overwhelming. As early as 2003, under the headline “Foreign Views of United States Darken After

September 11,” Richard Bernstein wrote in *The New York Times* that:

the war in Iraq has had a major impact on public opinion, which has moved generally from post-9/11 sympathy to post-Iraq antipathy, or at least to disappointment over what is seen as the sole superpower’s inclination to act pre-emptively, without either persuasive reasons or United Nations approval. To some degree, the resentment is centered on the person of President Bush, who is seen by many of those interviewed, at best, as an ineffective spokesman for American interests and, at worst, as a gun slinging cowboy knocking over international treaties and bent on controlling the world’s oil, if not the entire world.⁴

Also in 2003, William Pfaff, in the *International Herald Tribune*, wrote that Europe’s perception of Washington has in the last two years changed dramatically. The United States is now seen in Europe as a threat to Europe’s independence. The American side does not understand this...The truth, as a leading (conservative) figure from ex-Communist ‘New Europe’ said ... that the Bush administration has turned America’s friends into anti-Americans.⁵

Moreover, when Americans re-elected President Bush in 2004, the popular British tabloid, *The Daily Mirror*, filled its front page with the words “ARE THEY MAD?”

A column in the *Financial Times* (Aug 3 2006) by a distinguished former British diplomat highlights the current negativity toward the United States. Rodric Braithwaite, calls for the resignation of Tony Blair, President Bush’s staunchest ally, whose poll ratings are the lowest in his three-term premiership. “Blair’s total identification with the White House has destroyed his influence in Washington, Europe and the Middle East,” Braithwaite wrote, “who bothers with the monkey if he can go straight to the organ-grinder.”⁶

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES ARE COMPLEX AND MULTI-FACETED

Attitudes towards the United States (and other countries) and its policies are complex and multi-faceted. People can feel very positively about one element of United States policy (e.g. relief for Tsunami victims in Indonesia and Sri Lanka) and very negatively about others (e.g. the United States’ rejection of the Kyoto Treaty, the Iraq War, or support for Israel). Polls have shown that an individual can hold very different attitudes toward the American president, American policies, Americans (as people) and other facets of this country and its culture. The same person may hold different opinions about the American

economy (and the United States as a land of economic opportunity), American culture, its constitution, political system, judicial systems, and moral and ethical standards. American television programs and movies seen around the world, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Microsoft ,and Exxon all contribute to perceptions of this country. Attitudes toward the United States as whole are an amalgam of all of these and other things.

However, history suggests that these different attitudes are linked. After a foreign government implements a new policy, people may dislike the policy, the government, and its leaders but still hold positive views about the country and its people. But that probably can't go on indefinitely. During World War II there weren't many Americans who believed that Hitler or Tojo and their policies were awful but that the Germans and Japanese were good people. How many Arabs differentiate between Israelis (or Jews) and Israeli policies? How many Israelis have positive opinions of Arabs and Muslims as people? The longer the Iraq War goes on, the more it is probably contributing to negative attitudes, not just towards the United States government and its policies, but also towards the United States as a country and Americans as people. Public diplomats and their pollsters need to understand this complexity of foreign attitudes towards the United States.

THE FEAR AND SUSPICION OF POWER

American public diplomacy has another handicap in addition to the quantity of (often hostile) media coverage in other countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain, there was much talk about a “new world order” and of the United States as the world’s only superpower. Before the invasion of Iraq some American commentators celebrated the fact that they were living in a “uni-polar world” and argued that this country was in a position to control, or even dictate, the shape of the new world order, and to bring freedom, democracy, and good government to countries in the Middle East and elsewhere.

This talk fuelled fear and suspicion of the United States. Power is seldom associated with popularity. I doubt that the great empires of antiquity and history—the Roman, Chinese, Mongol, Ottoman, Moghul, Spanish or French empires—were popular with their neighbors. As a British schoolboy I was taught that the British Empire brought prosperity, new freedom, and civilization to its colonies and Pax Britannica. But I’m not sure that this is how other countries saw Britain or how Britain’s former colonies see it now.

One problem is the need for scapegoats. When things are not going well at home, it is convenient to blame others; and the most powerful countries make the easiest scapegoats. In the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, I was surprised by the strength of hostility towards the United States in Greece and Spain. It was caused, I believe,

by the tendency of the Greek and Spanish media and politicians to blame the United States for both their economic and foreign policy problems. Rightly or wrongly, Spaniards blamed the United States for Franco, not just when he was in power but long afterwards. Greeks blamed the United States for the junta, “the colonels” who ran Greece from 1967 to 1974. The Greeks also blamed the United States for Turkish control of Northern Cyprus. NATO and the presence of the United States bases were easy targets for populist politicians in both countries.

As William Grimes wrote in his *New York Times* review of Josef Joffe’s *Uberpower*:

it’s lonely at the top … don’t look for love even when you do the right thing and don’t expect gratitude even from your friends…Power makes the less powerful nervous [and] to Europeans the New United States looks like Gulliver did to the Lilliputians: a giant whose intentions are uncertain and whom they would prefer to see bound by a thousand little ropes.⁷

In *Cousins and Strangers*, Chris Patten noted that, “for a great power, diplomacy is not easy, and America has had to cope regularly with the assumption that it is throwing its weight around even when it has been doing no such thing.”⁸

While some hostility to the world’s only superpower is surely inevitable, it can always be made worse. One of the rules of public diplomacy should probably be not to humiliate people and their governments if you want their support and care about what they think. Fareed Zakaria noted in *Newsweek* shortly after the beginning of the Iraq War that, “having traveled around the world and met with senior government officials in dozens of countries over the past year, I can report that with the exception of Britain and Israel, every country the administration has dealt with feels humiliated by us.”⁹

In the late eighteenth century Edmund Burke commented of Britain:

I dread our own power and our own ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded…We may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard of power. But every other nation will think we shall abuse it. It is impossible but that sooner or later this state of things must produce a combination against us which may end in our ruin.¹⁰

Henry Kissinger wrote that the challenge facing the United States is “to transform power into consensus so that the international order is based on agreement rather than reluctant acquiescence.”¹¹

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Americans tend to view the United States as different and special. So do many other countries; but they often view *American exceptionalism* very differently and some of these different perceptions were in place long before 9/11 or the invasion of Iraq.

In their book *America Against the World*, Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes address the “problem of American exceptionalism” and make several very important points. “Nothing is more vexing to foreigners than Americans’ belief that America is a shining city on a hill—a place apart where a better way of life exists, one to which all other peoples should aspire.” They argue that “United States citizens are alone in thinking it is a good thing that American customs are spreading around the world.”¹² Many foreigners look at United States economic and military power, at what the United States says and does and see not a shining city, not a role model, but hubris and arrogance.

At the risk of making sweeping generalizations, many Americans see this country as the best—the most free, most just, most moral, most democratic, most generous country with the best Constitution. That is what American history books tend to teach. Fewer foreigners see America that way. They often see this country as having the biggest and strongest economy and the most powerful military, and as a land of opportunity. But many people also see America as money-driven and materialistic, with high levels of crime and drugs. American politicians often applaud (American) “family values.” Many foreigners see their own family values as being stronger. Many Americans see this country as caring, compassionate and idealistic. Many foreigners see exactly the opposite—a rich country that doesn’t care much about the poor and disadvantaged, that is unwilling to pay more taxes to provide a reasonable safety net. Like Kenneth Galbraith, they see “private affluence and public squalor.”¹³ They are shocked that we still have the death penalty, the only Western democracy to have it. They are puzzled that we do not have universal health insurance, which they see as further evidence of American callousness. While believing in some of the benefits of American democracy, they also see a country where political campaigning requires far more money than in other countries, where powerful lobbyists have too much power and where about half the population, or more, does not bother to vote. Those who know about it are also perplexed by the gerrymandering of electoral districts, something that is difficult or impossible in many of their own countries.

To many Europeans, America also looks rather weird. Of all the Western democracies, this country is unique in its religiosity, its opposition to (and lack of) gun control, its questioning of human evolution (fewer than half of Americans, compared to 70% or 80% in other developed countries believe humans evolved

from other species), and its inability to put the abortion debate behind it.¹⁴

As for generosity, polls have found that most Americans believe the United States has a very generous foreign aid program. Few Americans seem to know that on comparative measures, (e.g. percentage of GDP per capita) of foreign aid the United States ranks behind most western European countries and Japan.

THE “SAY-DO PROBLEM”

One of the most powerful speakers at the Annenberg School’s Conference on World Public Opinion and Public Diplomacy earlier this year referred to the “say-do problem,” that the United States Government often seems to say one thing and do another.

For example, we say we are strong supporters of human rights but the world hears about Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, “extraordinary rendition,” and our reluctance to condemn or prohibit what sounds like torture or to accept that the Geneva Conventions apply to “enemy combatants.” We say we believe in, and want to promote, democracy but we support dictatorial governments if we need their support and oppose democratically elected governments—from Venezuela to the Palestinian authority—if we don’t like their policies. Sometimes we have tried to topple them, and sometimes we have succeeded.

We say we invaded Iraq to remove a brutish, dictatorial, and human-rights abusing government; but foreigners notice that there are worse governments we do nothing about. In much of the world there is the widespread belief, accurate or inaccurate, that we targeted Iraq at the urging of the “neo-cons,” because of its oil, because it threatened Israel, and perhaps because President Bush wanted to finish the job his father had left uncompleted. We justified the invasion of Iraq, in part, on the grounds that Saddam Hussein failed to comply with U.N. resolutions, but we did not condemn Israel for its failure to comply with other U.N. resolutions. We say we believe in the rule of law, but the administration appears to ignore or break laws here and abroad if it believes it is in our national interest. The United States preaches free trade but it provides massive subsidies for United States agricultural products, imposes legally questionable tariffs to protect American steel companies, and gives substantial price support for United States sugar and cotton—freezing out cheaper foreign imports. The United States put a tariff on Canadian timber imports in apparent defiance of NAFTA and imposed quotas on foreign textiles. Protectionist policies subsidize American agriculture and businesses and make it difficult for poor Third World countries to sell their products here or to compete against subsidized United States products in world markets. We preach human rights, but we have often propped up nasty dictators who were among the worst violators of human rights in Africa, Central Asia,

Central and South America. We continue to prop up some of them to this day.

In *Rogue Nation*, Clyde Prestowitz examines the reasons why attitudes towards the United States, or more specifically towards the U.S. government, have become more hostile. Prestowitz, a former corporate executive who was one of Ronald Reagan's trade negotiators wrote that:

in recent years, America has rejected or weakened several landmark treaties, including the ban on use of landmines, the ban on trade in small arms, the comprehensive test ban treaty, the ARM treaty, the chemical warfare treaty, the biological war treaty, the nonproliferation treaty, the International Criminal Court, and others.¹⁵

In the final U.N. vote on the International Criminal Court, only seven nations voted against it: the United States, China, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Qatar and Israel. One hundred and twenty nations including virtually all our allies, except Israel, voted in favor.

Prestowitz noted that:

the United States has rejected a protocol to strengthen the 1987 Convention Against Torture (many believe out of reluctance to allow inspections of the condition of Taliban prisoners at Guantanamo Bay); the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (out of conservative fears that it would interfere with “family values”).¹⁶

He also quoted an unnamed British ambassador as saying “America always preaches rule of law, but in the end always places itself above the law.”¹⁷

During the zenith of British imperial power, the French called Britain “perfidious Albion” because of what they saw as British hypocrisy. British foreign policy was often advocated in moralistic words (“the white man’s burden”) when the reality was often national self-interest. Much of the world today sees a similar gap between American rhetoric and American actions.

Clearly public diplomacy should be about more than communication. If we want to influence public opinion abroad and address the “say-do problem,” public diplomacy should focus on what the president and administration do—not just what they say.

Successful public relations are based on an understanding of the difference between perceptions and misperceptions. If a company is a serial polluter, it is a substantive issue that must be addressed by the company, not a communications

issue. Only when the company has addressed the core problem can public relations help, by letting the public and opinion leaders know what it has done.

Likewise, successful public diplomacy needs to understand the difference between perceptions that are “real” and can only be addressed by dealing with the substantive issue and those that are misperceptions and can be corrected by better communications. In my experience, public relations people in the corporate world often fail to understand the difference. Public diplomats must not make this mistake.

IT'S THE MEDIA STUPID

Successful public diplomacy, like successful corporate public relations or political campaigning, must start with a good understanding of what actually influences public opinion. Influence starts and ends with *the media*. I sometimes tell my corporate and non-profit clients, half seriously, “if it ain’t in the media, it didn’t happen.” Of course, *events* influence attitudes, but only so far as they are reported in the media. So do *policies or programs*, again as they are reported in the media. Perceptions of *leaders*, as they are portrayed in the media, are also important. It is much harder for unpopular leaders to “sell” their policies than it is for popular ones, whether inside their country or abroad. If you don’t trust the messenger, you probably distrust the message.

Public diplomats are stuck with the leaders that they have, those leader’s policies and the events that happen. Public opinion is also influenced by personal experiences and word of mouth; but there is usually little a government can do to influence personal experiences or word of mouth in other countries. This leaves the media, (and not just the news media but, potentially, almost all types of media including comedies, soaps, and more) as a potential area of influence. Newspapers, television and radio are much more than mirrors that reflect reality. They are magnifying glasses that can greatly increase (or decrease) public concerns and shape the agenda of public discourse. They are filters that can give very different views of the same people and events. And they are prisms that can bend opinions.

One reason why Americans’ views of the world often diverge from opinions in many other countries is that the media here and abroad report the news very differently. News reports about (say) Iraq or the Middle East on American, British, and French, and Arab television give widely varying pictures of the same events. Most of them are probably accurate in that they report actual events and show real footage of these events. But the events they choose to report and the video they choose to show are very different. These differences may reflect deliberate biases, but they also reflect the world-views and beliefs of editors and reporters as to what is important and what “the real story” is. Is it Hezbollah rockets killing

innocent Israelis or Israeli attacks killing innocent Lebanese? Is it the United States soldiers being killed by Iraqi insurgents or American soldiers killing Iraqis?

If I were unlucky enough to be in charge of public diplomacy, I would start with the belief that my goal would be to get more positive, or at least less negative, coverage of the United States and its policies in foreign media. This presumably was the goal of the CIA when it subsidized the British journal *Commentary* and other foreign media in the past. But I would ask myself if this was realistic, or even possible, without changing policies. It is certainly extraordinarily difficult. Of course, public diplomats can help plant some positive stories about the United States in a few places, but influencing the coverage of the big stories about the events that dominate the news is a huge challenge.

WORLDWIDE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE U.S.

It may be much easier for other countries to engage in public diplomacy that influences opinion in this country than it is for the United States Government to influence opinions abroad. Communications and public relations activities are more likely to have an effect when people do not have much knowledge, do not already hold strong opinions, and do not see or read much about a country in the media. A few positive reports about Latvia in the United States media may make a difference because there is little in the media about Latvia and few people hold strong opinions about it.

However, events and news trump public relations activities. The polls have shown that after the beginning of the Iraq war American attitudes towards Britain improved while attitudes towards France declined sharply—reflecting these countries' policies and the statements of their leaders about the war on terror and Iraq.

Probably no country on earth is as widely covered by the world's media as the United States. Events in America, especially perhaps more negative events, are reported frequently all over the world. The world's television screens are filled with reports and pictures of American leaders, American actions, and American policies. Many people around the world therefore have strong opinions—accurate, less accurate, or inaccurate —about the United States and its policies. These opinions have been shown to change sharply in response to events such as 9/11, the Iraq war and, more recently, United States support for Israeli attacks in Lebanon which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Lebanese civilians, women and children.

One difficulty faced by public diplomats is the phenomenon psychologists call “cognitive dissonance,” which is the tendency not to accept or believe information that is not consistent with what you believe. Conversely, there is a human

tendency to believe information, even false information, if it supports what you believe. It is also probably true that the stronger your beliefs the more powerful the cognitive dissonance. This surely explains why, five years after 9/11, large numbers of Americans believe that Iraq did possess weapons of mass destruction, that Saddam Hussein had close links with Al Qaeda, and helped to plan the 9/11 attacks.¹⁸ It also explains why (as has been widely reported) many Arabs believe that the CIA or Israeli intelligence executed the 9/11 attacks to provide an excuse for America to attack Afghanistan and Iraq. Even if told frequently that this was untrue, many of them would continue to believe it unless told otherwise by people or media they really trusted.

THERE ARE MANY “TRUTHS”

Long ago, I believed, naively, that the job of the news media (apart from its opinion pages) was to report the news honestly and accurately—to just tell the truth.

In the late 1970s, I was startled when Charles Douglas-Home, then editor of *The Times* (of London), told me that there are many different truths and that different journalists, while honestly trying to report the same event, will write reports giving slightly or very different impressions of what occurred even though all of them are writing honestly and truthfully. It’s like the classic Japanese movie “Roshomon.” Different editors disagree as to which events are more or less important and different reporters report the same event accurately but differently.

Ideally, public diplomacy should influence the foreign media, not to present untruths, but to encourage the presentation of truths that are less damaging to our image and reputation. Influencing the American media is obviously possible, but influencing the big picture presented by foreign media to their citizens is much more difficult.

WHAT MAKES FOR SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC DIPLOMACY?

It is not easy to think of many truly successful examples of public diplomacy. The most striking may be Israeli public diplomacy and its success in building support for Israel in the United States. *The Economist* recently focused on “why America gives Israel its unconditional support.” It quotes poll data to show how different American attitudes towards Israel and the Middle East are from European attitudes, and how much more likely Americans are to “give Israel the benefit of the doubt.”¹⁹

The Economist believes that the most obvious reason why America is so much more pro-Israel than Europe [lies], in the power of two very visible political forces: the Israeli lobby (AIPAC) and the religious right. AIPAC, which has an

annual budget of almost \$50M, a staff of 200, 100,000 grassroots members and a decade's long history of wielding influence, is arguably the most powerful lobby in Washington, mightier even than the National Rifle Association.²⁰

It quotes Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, saying, “thank God we have AIPAC, the greatest supporter and friend we have in the whole world.”²¹

In addition, AIPAC, *The Economist* wrote, runs a “coordinated body” of pro-Israeli activities that “includes pressure groups, think tanks and fund-raising operations” and the organization of regular trips to Israel of influential Americans.²²

This success story for public diplomacy is instructive. It shows that one country can influence public opinion in another. But it also shows how difficult (and expensive) it is. The idea that the United States could successfully use similar techniques to influence opinion in other countries is questionable. Among other things, Israeli public diplomacy’s success in the United States depends on the well-organized support of millions of highly motivated Americans. The relative failure of Israeli public diplomacy in Europe and other countries probably reflects the absence there of large and influential Jewish or evangelical “Christians Right” populations.

THE ROLE OF POLLS AND POLLSTERS

Thanks to polls in many countries and the multi-national polls, conducted by The Pew Center, Gallup, IPSOS, Harris Interactive, the BBC with ICM, the Eurobarometer surveys, TNS, and others, we can get a pretty good idea of how people in other countries see the United States. Whether this will save us from “blunders and foolish notions” is unclear. During its first four years, the Bush administration often appeared to believe that world opinion was not important for the only superpower.

If there are now more and better international polls in the media, do public diplomats need anything other than the published polls? What proprietary polling, if any, should be conducted for public diplomats? When I did proprietary polling for British political leaders (a long time ago) I advised them not to try to duplicate the very useful and important polls that were available free, in the media. For example, I cautioned them not to waste their money measuring “the horse race.” Proprietary polling should seek to address questions that are not really covered in the media polls, such as:

- Why are we ahead or behind?
- What issues or policies should I talk about or not talk about?
- What does the public really know, understand, and believe about this issue?

- When should we introduce new topics, policies, or programs (or call an election)?
- How do we best explain our positions and policies?
- Who are our most effective and credible spokespeople?
- What words and phrases should we use, which will be understood and resonate with voters?
- What messages are more or less effective?
- When and how (if at all) should we react to events or attacks from our political opponents or criticisms by the media?
- When should we try to change the subject?

Public diplomats should use most of their polling budgets to answer the same kinds of questions smart politicians and corporate leaders ask, and address the same types of “why, what, when, who, and how” questions listed above.

There are other important questions I would address in my polling as a public diplomat:

- What is the importance of elite opinion and “influencers” on both governments and publics? Who are they? What are their opinions and attitudes? What would influence them?
- Are there important differences between different segments of the population based on religion, geography, language, or other demographics?
- What potential allies and supporters are there whom we might encourage or help, and what’s the best way to do that?

Most of all, I would want to give senior government officials the best possible understanding of what influences and motivates opinions in other countries.

One of the clichés often mouthed by politicians is that polls have no influence on their policies and positions. Polls are only used, they and their pollsters often say, to help improve their communications and fine-tune their messages. Conversely, critics often accuse politicians of being influenced too much by polls. In my experience, polls sometimes influence policy and sometimes don’t. They usually don’t influence major policies and positions; but they often influence minor ones, or the details of major ones, in order to broaden their appeal or make them more acceptable to key constituencies.

Presidents have always understood that compromises are often necessary in order to win congressional support for the passing of their bills. They know that they have to be flexible and to agree to bills that are not exactly as they wanted. Public diplomats and the governments that they serve should do likewise. They

should be willing to modify their policies in order to achieve their major objectives. Polls can help them to do this.

CONSIDERATION OF DIFFERENT POLLING METHODS

American pollsters and the public diplomats that they serve need to be flexible in considering different methodologies and to be careful not to impose American methods in countries where other methods work well and are more cost-effective. It is always good practice to get local advice about which methods work well in each country, as they differ.

For many years, before telephone and Internet polling, the overwhelming majority of public opinion polls in Europe and many other countries were conducted in-person using quota sampling, not probability sampling. Quota sampling for in-person surveys was widely accepted and used because “it worked.” Empirically the results (in predicting elections for example) were as reliable as, and much less expensive than, in-person surveys using probability sampling. Most American companies regularly relied on quota sampling for much of their marketing research outside the United States. But some (particularly American) statisticians were appalled. Quota sampling does not have the same strong statistical underpinning as probability sampling. Quota sampling does not enable the calculation of sampling error. The fact that the use of quota sampling produced results which were as reliable as most probability sampling was an inconvenient irrelevance. Quota sampling seemed more like an art than a science. For some people, theory trumped empiricism.

Where probability sampling is used, the best methods vary by country and are often based on different sampling frames because different sources are available, such as lists of virtually all adults with their addresses on voters’ rolls or household listings. Nothing comparable (or as good) exists in the United States.

Writing questionnaires for multi-national polling has many special requirements and a number of potential pitfalls. To avoid possible mistranslations, all draft questionnaires should be re-translated into English by someone who has not seen the original English version. Verbal scales can be very problematic. Qualifiers such as “very,” “somewhat,” and “extremely” may, when translated, have subtly different meanings in different languages. Some words may not have an exact translation. When our Japanese clients wanted us to ask Americans about “diligence,” this was a translation of a very clear and common Japanese concept meaning more than just hard work. This was often unclear to Americans. Language is not the only problem—the cultural context may affect the replies given in ways that the people analyzing the data do not understand.

There are also important differences in the appropriate data collection and

weighting methodologies in different countries. For many years some of our Japanese clients wanted us to leave questionnaires in American homes and collect them later. They were reluctant to believe that many Americans would not complete the questionnaires if they were not paid. On the other hand, the Japanese were late in using telephone polling because they did not believe it was reliable.

Policymakers, speechwriters, and communicators using polls should review their options and possible actions or statements with the people specifically charged with responsibility for public diplomacy. In turn, public diplomats should brainstorm ideas, issues, strategies, and tactics with the pollsters who are working for them. I have witnessed many occasions when the people who commissioned surveys failed to explain to those conducting them all the possible actions they might take. Pollsters cannot ask about possible actions if they don't know what these are.

Public diplomats and their pollsters should use both quantitative and qualitative research —surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. They should be more careful than some politicians not to rely on the “findings” of focus groups which have not been validated by quantitative research (i.e. surveys). However, they should not spend any money on proprietary research if they are not confident that the results will be communicated effectively to the Secretary of State or senior policymakers.

IN CONCLUSION

I have criticized the belief that public diplomacy is mostly about communications and the use of public relations tools to improve the world's understanding of, and increase support for, the United States and American policies. These activities will have little or no effect when the world's television screens are full of pictures of the apparent victims of attacks by the United States or its allies.

If the government is serious about wanting to influence public opinion abroad, public diplomacy should focus mainly on what the president and administration *do* and how they *present themselves and their policies* to the world. They should also remember that what plays well in Peoria may play badly abroad. Published and proprietary polling can help them do these things.

In my experience, corporate public relations people often fail to understand the difference between substantive issues and communications issues. Pollsters sometimes do not make this distinction clear to their clients. Public diplomats must not make this mistake. As *The Economist* wrote: “manners and tone of voice matter in international relations... [but] actions speak louder than words.”²³

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- ² Ekaterina Grigoryeva, “Can Better PR Improve Our Bad Reputation,” *Izvestiya*, August 2006, reprinted in *The Week*; available from http://www.theweekmagazine.com/best_view.aspx?g_date=8/11/2006
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- ⁴ Richard Bernstein, “Foreign Views of United States Darken After September 11,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2003, A1.
- ⁵ William Pfaff, “Bush Policy Risks Terminal Strain in NATO,” *International Herald Tribune*, July 21, 2003
- ⁶ Rodric Braithwaite, “Mr. Blair Should Recognise His Errors and Go,” *Financial Times*, Aug 3, 2006; available from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/3a7a368c-224d-11db-bc00-0000779e2340.html>
- ⁷ William Grimes, “Being King of the Hill Has Its Political Downsides,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2006; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/28/books/28grim.html?ex=1157256000&en=9308eed5a64f25f2&ei=5070>
- ⁸ Chris Patten, *Cousins and Strangers: America, Europe, and Britain in a New Century*, (New York: Times Books), 3.
- ⁹ Fareed Zakaria, “The Arrogant Empire,” *Newsweek*, March 24, 2003; available from <http://www.fareedzakaria.com/articles/newsweek/032403.html>
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- ¹¹ Henry Kissinger, “Opinion: Uneasy Allies, Uneasy Alliance,” *The San Diego Union Tribune*, March 3, 2002, G6.
- ¹² Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes, “Backgrounder: The Problem of American Exceptionalism,” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, May 9, 2006); available from <http://pewresearch.org/obdeck/?ObDeckID=23>
- ¹³ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 191.
- ¹⁴ The Harris Poll, “Nearly Two-thirds of U.S. Adults Believe Human Beings Were Created by God,” Harris Interactive, July 6, 2005; available from: http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=581
- ¹⁵ Clyde Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 144.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 156.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 143.
- ¹⁸ Harris Poll “Belief that Iraq Had Weapons of Mass Destruction Has Increased Substantially.” Harris Interactive, July 21, 2006; available from http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=684
- ¹⁹ “To Israel With Love: Why America Gives Israel its Unconditional Support,” *The Economist*, Aug 3, 2006; available from http://economist.com/world/na/displaystory.cfm?story_id=7255198
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ *The Economist*, “America’s War for Hearts and Minds: Mind Your Language,” June 17, 2006; available from http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=7064466

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Appendix

ABOUT THE ANNENBERG TRUST AT SUNNYLANDS

The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands was established in 2001 by the Annenberg Foundation to advance public understanding of and appreciation for democracy and to address serious issues facing the country and the world.

THE TRUST CONVENES:

- leaders of the United States to focus on ways to improve the functioning of the three branches of government, the press, and public schools;
- educators to determine how to better teach about the Constitution and the fundamental principles of democracy;
- leaders of major social institutions including learned societies to determine how
- these institutions can better serve the public and the public good; and scholars addressing ways to improve the well being of the nation in such areas as
- media, education, and philanthropy.

ABOUT THE USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy is an academic research, teaching, and training center created and run jointly by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and the USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences School of International Relations.

The Center conducts research and offers courses that specifically emphasize the examination of public diplomacy and soft power as both a theoretical and applied subject area. Our studies and courses build upon previous work in a number of fields, utilizing a variety of research methods, with a specific effort to integrate past scholarship in mass communication, international relations and other fields into contemporary perspectives.

Our research agenda embraces cross-disciplinary opportunities in such fields as communication, international relations, journalism, public relations, law, psychology, public policy, business, religion, and the arts.

The USC Annenberg School for Communication and College of Letters, Arts and Sciences jointly offer the world's first degree-program in public diplomacy. Launched in Fall 2005, the Master of Public Diplomacy brings together the resources and expertise of two of USC's premier academic programs, making us uniquely suited to provide the highest quality of graduate training in this interdisciplinary field.

The Center also hosts the USC Public Diplomacy Summer Institute for professionals. Geared toward officials posted in ministries such as foreign affairs, defense, and homeland security; agencies such as intelligence and economics; and international and non-governmental organizations, Institute courses approach public diplomacy in a multi-disciplinary manner.

Additional information about these programs as well as other Center initiatives can be located on our website. USCPublicDiplomacy.org is fast becoming the "go-to" site for practitioners and academics interested in the field of public diplomacy. Our Newsroom features breaking news about issues in public diplomacy as well as regular columns aggregated and/or written by public diplomacy practitioners and academics. In addition to the Newsroom, the website also features academic and professional research resources on issues pertinent to public diplomacy as well as updates and white papers about current Center research projects and initiatives.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Pew Global Attitudes Project is a series of worldwide public opinion surveys encompassing a broad array of subjects ranging from people's assessments of their own lives to their views about the current state of the world and important issues of the day. More than 100,000 interviews in 50 countries have been conducted as part of the project's work.

The Pew Global Attitudes Project is co-chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, currently principal, the Albright Group LLC, and by former Senator John C. Danforth, currently partner, Bryan Cave LLP. The project is directed by Andrew Kohut, president of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" in Washington, DC, that provides information on the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. The Pew Global Attitudes Project is principally funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Since its inception in 2001, the Pew Global Attitudes Project has released 15 major reports, as well as numerous commentaries and other releases, on topics including attitudes towards the U.S. and American foreign policy, globalization, terrorism, and democracy. The project is a unique, comprehensive, internationally comparable series of surveys available to journalists, academics, policymakers, and the public.

Following each survey, the project produces a series of reports and in-depth analyses, all of which can be found at www.pewglobal.org. The data from each survey are also made available on our website within two years of publication.

Findings from the project are also analyzed in *America Against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked*, a recent book by Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes, a Pew Global Attitudes Project team member and international economics columnist at the National Journal.

ABOUT THE USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the USC Annenberg School for Communication is among the nation's leading institutions devoted to the study of journalism and communication, and their impact on politics, culture and society. With an enrollment of more than 1,900 graduate and undergraduate students, USC Annenberg offers Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degrees in journalism, communication, public diplomacy and public relations. For more information, visit www.annenberg.usc.edu.

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