

US Public Diplomacy Efforts During Obama's Administration to Combat Islamic Extremist

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Public diplomacy (PD) is a term that “describes a government’s efforts to conduct foreign policy and promote national interests through direct outreach and communication with the population of a foreign country”. Public diplomacy is an important tool for “promoting security and economic stability throughout the world”. Public diplomacy is multifaceted; it includes listening, collecting information, advocacy, Radio/TV broadcasting, international exchange, branding diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, psychological warfare, and digital diplomacy. Public diplomacy is an integral component in the planning and execution of the United States’ foreign policy. The United States government has 14 “cabinet-level departments and over 48 independent agencies and commissions” that participate in at least one form of official public diplomacy. US public diplomacy programs have most effectively promoted US security and economic stability. The US employs public diplomacy as tool for strengthening the US’s global political and economic ties to serve US national interests. With the United States frequently being considered among the “most dangerous and distrusted countries in the world”, the US policy makers have focused on developing effective and well-resourced public diplomacy strategy. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the struggle against “extremist ideologies became vital to US foreign policy”. The US has utilized public diplomacy in its struggle against extremist ideologies and overall war against terrorism. The US has employed its soft power to mitigate threats to US security and counter the spread of Islamic extremist influence.

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Public Diplomacy and Media

Diplomacy is a crucial element of national security strategy. It has many facets, some conducted behind closed doors and other conducted openly (Wallin, 2012). Public diplomacy “complements traditional diplomacy in achieving foreign policy goals” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009, p. 20).

Traditional government-to-government diplomacy is dominated by official interactions that are conducted between professional diplomats. Traditional diplomacy involves “strong demonstration of one’s policies to foreign governments, analysis and reporting of a foreign government’s activities, attitudes, and trends that may have impact on own country security and national interests” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009, p. 21).

Public diplomacy is reaching out directly to global publics, without the influence of their governments. Uncooperative regimes will be forced to moderate their positions under popular pressure. To the extent, a country succeed in its public diplomacy efforts, “threats it faces will diminish and new partnerships will be

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possible" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009, p. 2).

Public diplomacy is the "public, transparent, interactive aspect of diplomacy", which is global in nature and involves many tools and a whole host of actors and networks. Through public diplomacy states and non-states actors engage with the general public, influential leaders, journalists, civic leaders, Non-governmental and governmental organizations (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, 2002), to inform and influence audiences in foreign countries for the purpose of promoting their own national interest and advancing own foreign policy objectives (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2017).

Public diplomacy relies mainly on a nation's "soft power" in cultivating relationships, respect, support, and admiration from others (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2017). Joseph Nye has argued that the power of attraction can be an important complement to more traditional forms of hard economic or military power. Soft power depends on the "appeal of one's ideas" and the ability to "shape the preferences of others". Nye stressed that soft power works through "convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to norms and institutions", thus influencing and altering their long-term perceptions, attitudes, and preferences toward a specific cause or political agenda (Leonard et al., 2002).

Public diplomacy provides a powerful political force in international relations (The Conflict Resolution Program, 2014). Public diplomacy aims at increasing people's familiarity and appreciation with one's country by "making them think about it, creating positive images and perceptions, turning around unfavorable views and getting others to see issues of importance from the same perspective" (Leonard et al., 2002, p. 2).

Building long-term relationships with the populations and organizations in the foreign countries is "an essential requirement for public diplomacy". Building relationships "depends on earning high levels of trust and creating a neutral and safe environment to exchange ideas, to win recognition and earn support for the cause". Organizing visits by influential people, education and training exchange programs, seminars, and conferences can help in building lasting relationships with foreign audiences (Leonard et al., 2002).

Public diplomacy focuses on developing common understanding with the targeted groups rather than "delivering one sided messages". Public diplomacy is not about winning arguments; it is more about engagement. It requires moving beyond "intellectual forms of communication", and utilizing experience, emotions, and images to influence people's response to the intended messages (Leonard et al., 2002).

In many communication campaigns, branding is an important element. In public diplomacy, branding is not only about developing "logos, catch phrases, and other multimedia". Branding is about "attaching value to the message", emotions attracts people and drive people to act. If emotional value can be attached to a message, the response to that "particular message will go beyond its rationale" (Wallin, 2012, p. 21). Branding diplomacy has become one of the "most important channels for transmitting national identities to other people". It is important to design brands carefully, since the relationship between brands and national perceptions is "powerful and complex" (Leonard et al., 2002).

Public diplomacy narratives are ultimately strengthened through demonstrable action. It is one thing to say something and it is another to actually do it. When developing a public diplomacy message, considerations must be made towards actually committing to that message by genuine foreign policies. Engaging in PD that cannot be "backed up by actions on the ground, will inevitably reduce one's credibility and erode trust. Trust is much harder to earn once a country lose it" (Wallin, 2012, p. 22).

Public diplomacy includes "reacting to news events, proactive communication and perception changing activities and relationships building efforts". Public diplomacy relies on "proactively creating news worthy

activities and events” which are designed “to reinforce core messages and influence the targeted audience’s perceptions”. It requires daily reaction to news events while they occur in ways that coincide with the country’s strategic goals. News management needs to be reactive, flexible and widely spread (Leonard et al., 2002).

Traditional and new media play a vital role in public diplomacy, as an “essential channel of communication and conveying information” (The Conflict Resolution Program, 2014, p. 13). The media play an essential role in informing the public about world issues. It plays a constructive role in shaping public beliefs and attitudes (The Conflict Resolution Program, 2014). News events and the continuous stream of satellite news influence the basis by which people compose their choices.¹

Technology has brought a variety of tools for communicating across numerous mediums, including, printed media, television, radio, social media, and the Internet (Wallin, 2012). Public diplomacy actors are increasingly relying on social media to reach audiences around the world. Social media has changed the way people communicate (Toivo, 2012). The power of social media effect on society is based on its “social aspects which mean interaction and participation” (Toivo, 2012, p. 12). Social media has become an “essential, influential and equitable political tool” that can be effectively utilized to conduct public diplomacy and propaganda campaigns (Durra, 2015).

Social media provides a forum where a broad range of political actors can express alternative views and provide political choices for people.² Social media and information and communication technologies provide an “enabling environment for relationship building”. It works “through building real and virtual networks and developing lasting relationships with key individuals, peers, politicians, cultural and academics organizations, Think Tanks, and business people in foreign countries” (Leonard et al., 2002, p. 28).

The information revolution, satellites television, 24-hour news networks, the Internet, and social media have created an environment, in which “governments are not the most trusted or relied upon source of information”. Many of the government information dissemination and outreach efforts are “usually interpreted with doubt and suspicion” (Wallin, 2012, p. 23).

The importance of traditional information media sources and actors has been challenged by individual communicators, who have the ability “to influence large numbers of people on a global scale through social networking”. Social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and weblogs, provide individuals with the ability to connect with one-another on a global scale, allowing opportunities for “many-to-many interactions of information” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009, p. 26).

Attention is today’s rare resource on a daily basis; people are flooded with information from a variety of sources. In this media and information saturated environment, it is often difficult to ensure that the message you send is heard by the intended target. Credibility of both the message and the messenger make a difference (Wallin, 2012).

History of United States Public Diplomacy

The aim of United States public diplomacy efforts is “to support the achievement of US foreign policy goals and advance US national interests” (Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, 2017). The US employs public diplomacy as tool for promoting democracy, increasing regional and global economic

¹ Katrin Voltmer, “The media, government accountability, and citizen engagement,” Harvard University, Chapter 6, available at <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/WorldBankReport/Chapter%206%20Voltmer.pdf>.

² *Idem*.

and political stability and strengthening its global economic and political ties. Through public diplomacy, the US government seeks to “understand, inform, engage and influence global audiences, reaching beyond foreign governments to promote greater appreciation and understanding of US society, culture, institutions, values and policies” (Johnson, 2010, p. 24).

The United States has always “sought to influence peoples in other countries through public diplomacy”. US efforts to communicate with foreign publics have usually increased in proportion with growth in perceived threats to US national security (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

During First World War, President Woodrow Wilson established the “Committee on Public Information (The Creel Committee) which was responsible for the United States’ first large scale information dissemination campaigns” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). The Creel Committee was established to counter German propaganda. The Committee have disseminated “its own distortions of the truth and propaganda” to both American and foreign audiences. The Creel Committee was disbanded at the end of the War in 1919 (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The US military conducted most of the propaganda and public diplomacy campaigns during the Second World War. President Franklin Roosevelt established the Office of War Information (OWI). OWI provided American and foreign audiences with news of the war, US foreign policy objectives, and activities. Voice of America (VOA), the oldest US government radio broadcasting services, was an integral part of OWI. It has become the official overseas broadcasting arm of the United States. After the end of the war, US President Harry Truman terminated OWI in 1948 and “transferred the responsibilities for US public diplomacy efforts to civilian authority, the State Department” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

At the beginning of the Cold War, the United States started creating public diplomacy programs “to counter Soviet influence and compete in a war of hearts and minds”. After George Kennan described the Soviet Union as having “declared psychological war on the United States, a war of ideology that require a fight to the death”, the US Congress in 1948 passed the “Smith-Mundt Act. The Act served as the “charter for peacetime US public diplomacy information programs”. It has provided authority for the US government to engage vigorously in a non-military “soft” war with the Soviet Union (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

In 1953, President “Dwight Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) to oversee and implement US public diplomacy programs in support of US foreign policy” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). USIA was supported by the “US international broadcasting agencies such as Voice of America, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). Throughout the Cold War all public diplomacy entities were well funded and resourced (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

USIA primary mission was combating the spread of communism and the Soviet Union’s propaganda campaigns. USIA’s stated goals were “explaining and advocating for US policies in a credible and meaningful forms to foreign audience”. It has provided information about the United States official policies and about its people, values, and institutions. USIA has worked on “increasing international engagement with American citizens to build strong long-term relationships” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

During the Cold War, the United States operated a large number of “America Centers”. The centers provided several outreach programs to foreign audiences, including “libraries and reading rooms, English language instruction, US speaker programs, and exhibitions of American films” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

USIA officers were posted at “embassies, consulates, and US Information Services’ (USIS) centers around the world”. USIS planned and implemented country specific activities and programs, “targeting audiences

identified by the post". In 1999, USIA operated "190 USIS posts in 142 countries". USIA staffed these posts with 520 "Foreign Service Officers" with the support of 2,521 locally hired "Foreign Service Nationals (FSN)" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The end of the Cold War meant that the central justification for a strong public diplomacy for the "ideological fight against the Soviet Union, no longer existed". After more than four decades of US engaging the "Soviet Union and their allies in ideological warfare", the Cold War came to an end. The United States was the sole superpower. "The free world had won the war of ideas" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Since 1991, USIA's public diplomacy role was reduced. During the 1990s, the United States public diplomacy budget was "decreased and its resources were reduced". In 1999, USIA was "eliminated as a result of the post-Cold War restructuring". The US Department of State (DOS) has taken most of US public diplomacy responsibilities (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the struggle against extremist ideologies became vital to US foreign policy. This resulted in increasing US interest in utilizing public diplomacy in the "overall struggle against Islamic extremists" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). On the other hand, the considerable decline in the worldwide perception of the United States, during the Bush Administration, has renewed interest in public diplomacy as a foreign policy and national security tool (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Obama's Administration Policy Toward the Islamic World

The election of Barack Obama resulted in "an increase in favorability towards the United States in several regions of the world". The narrative presented by President Obama initially succeeded in repairing relationships with key allies in several regions of the world (Wallin, 2012).

Obama speech in Cairo in June 2009 was seen as an attempt to redefine the relationship between the US and the Muslim world. In his speech, Obama said "This cycle of suspicion and discord must end. I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect" (Khatib, Dutton, & Thelwall, 2012). The speech was delivered to appeal directly to its targeted audience. It was seasoned with verses from the holy Quran and messages about issues of cultural and political sensitivities to Muslims (Wallin, 2012).

The rise of ISIS power in Iraq and Syria in 2014, made the Obama administration to consider the "utmost threats to US security come from radical Islamic groups". Obama said "Our objective is clear: We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy" (David Hudson, 2014, p. 65).

The US strategy to combat Islamic extremists is to "conduct systematic airstrikes campaign against ISIS, cut off ISIS funding, improve intelligence gathering and increase military support to local forces fighting ISIS on the ground" (David Hudson, 2014, p. 67). In addition the US strategy include providing "humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians, countering ISIS ideology and stopping the flow of foreign fighters to fight with ISIS" (Hudson, 2014, p. 67).

US public diplomacy aspires to inform and influence a foreign country population in order for its citizens to influence their government to support US foreign policies and national interests (Johnson, 2010). It aims at

increasing understanding and comprehension of the US policies, its culture and values; reducing anti-Americanism and increasing favorability and approval of US policies and culture; nurturing US soft power capacity to influence directly or indirectly a change in opinions and behavior of foreign audiences (Johnson, 2010, p. 21).

The US "National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication outlined the US public diplomacy objectives." They include "offering a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in American most basic values, seeking to isolate and marginalize violent extremists, nurturing common interests and values between Americans and peoples of different countries". The US PD strategy called for targeting key influencers, those who can "effectively guide foreign societies in line with US interests", and vulnerable populations, including youth, women, and minority groups (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Obama's administration public diplomacy objectives in relation with the Muslim world are, to "support democracy and human rights everywhere, expand exchange programs, which is the single most effective public diplomacy tool" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009); increase internships and scholarships to Muslims; create a new corps of American business volunteers to partner with their counterparts in the Muslim world; expand partnerships with Muslim communities (Wallin, 2012). The US utilize the "diplomacy of deeds", through widely publicizing US humanitarian assistance, health, education, and economic development programs; increase US officials' presence in Arab media (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

In May 2009, the Obama Administration established the "Global Engagement Directorate (GED) within the National Security Council". The GED aims "to drive comprehensive engagement policies that leverage diplomacy, communications, international development and assistance, and domestic engagement and outreach to achieve US national security objectives" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The United States' public diplomacy efforts are led by the Department of State (DOS) with total annual budget for public diplomacy programs during Obama administration have reached \$1.2 Billion in 2009. In addition, there are "13 other US government agencies that engage in communications with foreign publics, by virtue of their missions". The International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Agency for International Development (USAID) are organizations with clear foreign policy aspects to their strategy (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The academic, professional, and cultural exchange program goals are "to foster mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). Through these exchange programs, the US provides funds to US and other countries' organizations and citizens for (Nakamura & Weed, 2009):

- Establishment and operation of educational institutions abroad.
- Establishing and operating centers for cultural and technical interchanges.
- Reproduction and translations of books, periodicals, and US government publications.
- Encouraging American to study in foreign countries.
- Promoting foreign languages and regional studies at US schools.
- Participating in international fairs and expositions.

The "Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), oversee the implementation of the International exchanges programs". The ECA mission is "to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations" (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [ECA], 2017a). ECA support academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges programs, and public private partnerships with foreign countries (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [ECA], 2017a). ECA Programs include:

- *The Fulbright Program*, with total annual budget of more than \$262 million, is considered the flagship of exchange programs. Each academic year, approximately 7,000 (2008-2009) new Fulbright awards were made.

This includes 2,700 for foreign students, 1,500 awards for US students to study abroad, and 900 for visiting scholars. In addition, the Fulbright Program sponsor teachers and scholars to conduct research and teach abroad, where more than 3,000 awards were provided to US scholars (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [ECA], 2017a).

- *Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program* “facilitates academic study and internships in the United States for career professionals from developing nations” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).
- *International Visitors Program*, organize visits to the United States by “current and promising leaders of other countries”. During the visits, they travel around the US, meet their counterparts, and learn about US society and culture (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).
- *Cultural Envoy Program*, seeks “to promote cross-cultural understanding and collaboration” with foreign audiences. The program sponsor “dancer/choreographers, Blues musicians, American artistic, sports figures, and writers to share American culture with people in other countries” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).
- *English Language Education Program*, engage foreign audiences and to encourage long-lasting connections to improve collaboration between the United States and people foreign from countries (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

International Information Programs

The “Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) oversee the implementation of several information dissemination programs to present United States’ policy, society, and values” to foreign audiences (Johnson, 2010).

IIP is responsible for the “operation of America.gov, the US Speaker Program, American Corners, and Information Resource Centers (IRCs)”. In addition, IIP provides policy and technical support for US embassies in more than 140 countries (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). IIP trains “Information Resource Officers to deliver research, training, and cross-cultural programs to international audiences” (Johnson, 2010).

IIP utilizes print and electronic resources in several languages to improve international receptivity to the United States and its values. IIP produces annually 40 to 50 publications in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Persian, Russian, Spanish, and other languages (Nakamura and Weed, 2009). IIP publish books about various issues, such as “Free at Last, The US Civil Rights Movement, Being Muslim in America, and the US Economy” (Johnson, 2010).

After “American Centers” were closed in major foreign city centers due to terrorism and security concerns, the US established America Corners and “Information Resource Centers (IRC)”. Some America Corners were placed at participating host country institutions, such as universities and libraries. These institutions are used by US embassies to house material and host events and meetings with visiting US officials and guest speakers for the local population. Unlike American Centers, which were staffed by US personnel, American Corners are often staffed by the partnered institution’s personnel (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). Since 2000, the US has opened nearly 400 American Corners in approximately 60 countries (Johnson, 2010).

The Internet is enabling new approaches to public diplomacy. The United States have utilized innovative public diplomacy methods towards the Middle East. The US is moving from one-way communication through broadcasting and the print media to a more interactive model in which the government joins the conversation (Khatib et al., 2012).

US IIP has increased its information presence on the Internet. “America.gov provides in major languages,

videos, blogs, timelines, web chats, articles and news stories on world events, American society, and US policies" (Share America, 2017, p. 27). America government posts video about diversity of religions in America, US Muslims gathering with other Americans at an interfaith rally "to reject violence and terrorism committed in the name of religion" and a video showing US Muslims solidarity with victims of the Orlando terrorist attack (Share America, 2017).

IIP utilize a "ten-person Digital Outreach Team (DOT) that engage directly with citizens in the Muslim world" through posting messages on popular Arabic, Urdu, and Persian language Internet forums blogs, news sites, and discussion groups "to explain US foreign policy, challenge perceptions of US foreign policy towards the Islamic world and to counter misinformation" (Khatib et al., 2012, p. 57).

DOT posts short comments and translated videos previously produced by IIP. Their messages include that the USA is supportive of establishing a Palestinian state, the US is not at war with the Muslim world, Islam is a religion of compassion, and Islamic extremists are foreign to Islam (Khatib et al., 2012).

Although US Missions public diplomacy efforts contend with "suspicion, high security threat environments and weak partner institutions", US embassies public diplomacy team frequently seek out new opportunities to "engage foreign audiences in support of US foreign policy goals" (Brown & Hensman, 2016, p. 17).

United States' Embassies around the world "retain public affairs section to manage informational and cultural programs in the host countries". The sections are tasked with "explaining US foreign policy and actions to that country's officials, media, and people". The section's overall duties are done by a Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO), and an Information Officer (IO), or a Public Affairs Officer (PAO) (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

PAO is responsible for cultural, professional, and educational exchanges, "American cultural ambassadors and American speakers program". PAO often conduct informal outreach activities, by attending "receptions and concerts in the host country, and by hosting receptions for foreign influencers" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). US public diplomacy officers reach out to people who may be "vulnerable to radicalization, providing an alternative message of hope and opportunity" (Brown & Hensman, 2016).

US Embassies' press officers work vigorously with the press across the region in Arabic, Hebrew, French and English to advocate for US policy goals. The PAO issues press releases responds to inquiries in press conferences and provide interviews with local media. In addition, the PAO provide information and analysis to the US government about the impact of US PD activities (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

USIAD and NGO—Diplomacy of Needs

USAID play an important role in US public diplomacy. Through its assistance and development programs, USAID establishes "long-term relationships with influential and normal people in foreign countries". The type of relationships established through USAID efforts "are capable of influencing foreign publics to view US policies and actions as beneficial to them, which will make them more likely to cooperate with US government initiatives in their countries" (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, USAID has increased its outreach activities with foreign audiences. USAID has its own public diplomacy officers to inform the people in the host country about US economic assistance and development efforts in their country. In addition, USAID provides its "Communications Officers with specialized PD training". It has developed a field manual for effective communications with foreign publics (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

USAID and its partner organizations make sure that assistance provided through USAID, whether it is in the provision of commodities or services or funding large development projects, is clearly marked “from the American people”, with the logo of USAID (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). USAID puts considerable resources to make sure that the general public and influencers are aware of assistance provided by the United States and the accomplishments made by its development programs (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The Office of Private Sector Outreach (PSO) engages in partnerships with US companies, universities, NGOs, and private sector leaders, “to promote mutual understanding with foreign audience, counter violent extremism, empower women business leaders, provide humanitarian relief, and promote social and economic development throughout the world” (Johnson, 2010).

NGOs are vital to effective communication with civil societies in other countries. NGOs have “credibility, expertise, and appropriate networks”. NGOs can exert influence on people and their governments and they can help in shaping public opinion (Leonard et al., 2002).

US non-governmental organizations that are already on the ground usually complement the US public diplomacy efforts (Wallin, 2012). Many US government approved organization have received appropriated funds to perform work “in support of US foreign policy objectives”. These NGOs “seek to develop long-term relationships and to improve foreign populations’ understanding of and attitudes toward the United States” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009)

The US utilize, to the maximum extent possible, “the services and facilities of private agencies, including the American press, publishing, radio, motion picture, and other agencies to implement their public diplomacy programs” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Since 9/11 terror attacks on the US, counterterrorism have gained importance in the overall US military strategy. Communicating with and “winning the hearts and minds” of foreign populations that may produce extremists have become increasingly important to the success of the US mission” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The US “Department of Defense (DOD) is increasingly improving its public diplomacy and communications efforts with foreign publics”. US DOD has shifted its focus from traditional military operations to “information and influence based activities”, which it called “strategic communication” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Strategic communication as defined by US DOD is

a focused efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives, through the use of coordinated programs, themes, messages, and products harmonized with other actions and instruments of US national power. (Nakamura and Weed, 2009)

US DOD “strategic communication” budget has increased greatly with raising threat from Islamic extremists. Spending on “Information Operations (IO) has increased” from \$9 million in 2005 to nearly one billion Dollars in 2010. The United States Military became engaged in non-military propaganda, public relations, and “behavioral modification messaging” campaigns (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

US DOD implemented several programs that were designed to counter terrorist and Islamic extremist groups. US DOD supports organizations, such as Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Public Affairs (PA), and Visual Information (VI) has increased their public diplomacy and communication efforts on the Internet and on the ground in areas where military operations are ongoing, including Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan (Nakamura

&Weed, 2009).

US military has created regionally focused websites and posted tailored communications. The DOD measured and assessed effectiveness and impact of these posts on the targeted audience to feed in the design of its psychological warfare strategy. US DOD has created the Expanded Trans-Regional Psychological Operations Program (ETRP). ETRP utilize audio-visual, telephonic, and web-based applications to influence foreign audiences in the targeted countries by posting and distributing information and communication designed by the US military (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The US DOD is using “newly developed software systems to track and analyze attitudes and opinion of key foreign leaders”, and Internet activities to identify “sentiment, trends and developing issues”. In addition, DOD has established the “Human Terrain Teams (HTT)” from social scientists and anthropologists. HTT were embedded within the army in Iraq and Afghanistan to provide insights into the customs and values of local populations (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Regional Centers for security studies were established by US DOD. The centers provide “educational opportunities for key foreign influencers on regional security issues”. These centers produce “networks of influential” from foreign countries who “serve in the frontline” of US “DOD strategic communications” efforts (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Public diplomacy outreach and engagement programs play a critical role in supporting US diplomatic efforts in the Islamic world, where US most significant “national security challenges are located”. Public diplomacy “articulates, defends and advocates for US interests and values in the Middle East region” (Brown & Hensman, 2016).

During the 20th Century, American public diplomacy towards the Middle East was centered on the use of “one-way transmission of information and opinions through the mass media” (Khatib et al., 2012). The current period of instability in the “Middle East is perhaps the most disruptive in nearly 100 years”. Long “festering issues of political legitimacy, the lack of effective democratic institutions, economic stagnation and sectarian differences” have erupted into violent insurgency, conflict and instability (Brown & Hensman, 2016).

Recently, in the Middle East, public diplomacy and DOD strategic communications are at the core of US foreign policy efforts to “support stability, democracy and US security”. US public diplomacy programs aim to “counter extremist messaging by building on areas of shared values to strengthen people-to-people ties between the region and the United States” (Brown & Hensman, 2016).

US direct engagement programs take many forms, from English language teaching to cultural and sports programs. They are targeted toward “populations vulnerable to radicalization” (Brown & Hensman, 2016) These programs include:

- *Raise Your Voice* multimedia campaign: To establish an alternative to the ISIS narrative targeting critical audiences across the Arabic world. The new venues provide a platform for discussion of issues at the root cause of extremism and a forum for stimulating discussions around related solutions. The social media initiatives, call-in radio, and television shows provide forums for activists, youth and others to share their ideas on topics such as sectarian relationships, religious freedom and freedom of expression (Brown & Hensman, 2016).
- *Exchange Programs*: Communications and engagement are critical aspects of the broader fight against ISIS. The US has implemented exchange programs with visiting leaders from anti-ISIS coalition countries, spokesperson trainings to sharpen anti-extremist messaging, and social media workshops to coordinate anti-ISIS messaging and amplify a counter narrative of tolerance and coexistence online. Some students

exchange programs were utilized by the US to explore strategies for “designing more effective and culturally significant solutions to extremist messaging and recruitment (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [ECA], 2017b).

- *The “Sawab Center”-UAE*: A key element to counter ISIS’s appeal to young people across the region is a joint messaging center that was established in 2015, by the US and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Sawab Center’s efforts are solely focused on ISIS “to create a measurable decrease in online support for ISIS network; empower the silent majority, and support larger coalition to counter terrorism efforts”. The center focuses on combating hyperactive users who inflate the level of support for ISIS. The center access encrypted discussion platforms and create multimedia publications (Brown & Hensman, 2016).
- *Jordan-TechCamp*: A hands-on training workshop to “counter extremist messaging and recruiting”. The workshop brought together more than “75 senior Jordanian government leaders, entrepreneurs, media officials and civil society leaders” (Brown & Hensman, 2016).
- *“Heroes Build” Campaign (Tunisia)*: The Heroes Build campaign is an “innovative approach to fostering resilience and building civic pride among young people”. This collaborative effort encourages young Tunisians youth to volunteer in their communities to improve their country and push back against extremism in Tunisia. The graffiti campaign redefining a hero as a positive contributor to society rather than one who participates in destructive activities (Brown & Hensman, 2016).
- *Iraq Joint Messaging Initiative*: The Department of State and the Department of Defense worked together to establish the position of “Combined Joint Task Force” to provide information to media outlets and the people on “counter-ISIS military operations”. In addition, the US has utilized new technologies, such as video teleconference, and Skype to chat online with youth on a variety of issues (Brown & Hensman, 2016)0
- *25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Kuwait*: The US Embassy in Kuwait organized five months of events commemorating the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait. The US implemented a series of events in Kuwaiti public schools, including those in areas known to be “hotbeds for Islamic extremist recruiting”. The theme for these events was 25 Years of U.S.-Kuwait Friendship (Brown & Hensman, 2016).
- *Leveraging Arab Media Outlets*: The United States government has facilitated the formation of a partnership between MBC and Hollywood to produce TV programs to counter ISIS propaganda. MBC executive Ali Jaber said “for us at MBC, we look at ISIS as an idea, a dangerous narrative. We believe that the only way to beat that idea is to create another one that is better, more appealing, and progressive” (Schneider, 2017).

Analysis of US Public Diplomacy Efforts

Evaluating the effect and impact of US public diplomacy efforts toward the Islamic World is very difficult. Public diplomacy efforts “do not occur in a vacuum, their outcome is greatly influenced by other components of US foreign policy strategy” and actions. It is not always clear whether the progress made was a result of US public diplomacy efforts or was a result of other factors (Johnson, 2010).

Although US public diplomacy is equipped with numerous advanced communication tools, it seems it is unable to cope with the changing political, technological, and strategic realities of the world (Wallin, 2012).

Doubts have been poised on the United States ability to counter the Islamic extremists influence. According to the UN High-level Panel on threats, challenges, and change, the overreliance on military responses to terror threats has fueled a great deal of resentment in the Arabic and Islamic countries (United

Nations, 2004).

There is widespread consensus that the educational and cultural exchange programs supported by the US government are highly effective public diplomacy tool. Exchange programs target influential foreign people to provide them with experiences of American culture and way of life. Exchanges build an environment of “mutual understanding and develop long-term relationships” that can be drawn upon to enhance cooperation between the United States and other countries (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The State Department estimates that more than 55,000 individuals annually participate in the US international exchange programs. There were more than 1 million alumni of US exchange programs around the world. These alumni include more than, “105 Pulitzer winners, 82 Nobel Prize winners and 565 heads of governments, and 58 ambassadors to the United States” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Young people are especially eager participants in exchange opportunities and study in the United States and are regularly attracted to programs that “foster educational opportunity, economic growth, English language learning and entrepreneurial skills” (Brown & Hensman, 2016). More than 100,000 students from the MENA region are in the United States, an 11.5 percent increase over the previous year. In addition, there is a 5 percent increase in the number of Americans studying in Middle Eastern countries (Brown & Hensman, 2016).

The US government promotion of American values, such as “human rights, rule of law, democracy or free trade” have backfired due to the perception of “foreign publics that US policies do not follow those values” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Obama Cairo Speech

Speech is a powerful tool, especially when made by the President. It is more effective when coupled with action on the ground. Obama Cairo Speech was intended to improve the image of the United States in the Arab world (Wallin, 2012).

President Obama has failed to “accomplish several key foreign policy promises he made in his Cairo speech, leading to general skepticism by the Muslim populations”. These failures include pursuing an end to the “Palestinian Israeli conflict, supporting democracy and human rights and closing the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility”. These unfulfilled promises continued to produce disappointment of many Muslims toward the United States (Wallin, 2012).

It is vital to keep promises that are made when attempting to establish a trust relationship. The failure of the US to deliver on several of the most vital issues to Muslims led to “a perception of dishonesty and hypocrisy toward the US” (Wallin, 2012). Perception matters and words without action are merely words and actually increase “sentiments of frustration and disappointment”. Broken promises reduce credibility and the effectiveness of future US public diplomacy efforts (Wallin, 2012).

Department of Defense Strategic Communication

The US military engages in public diplomacy communication campaigns designed specifically to achieve US military objectives. US government has funded “several military deception operations, including “news and entertainment websites, planting of fake news stories in foreign media and production of propaganda materials” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). The US military’s dual messaging role has led to confusion, broken trust, and rejection of other US government’s public diplomacy and communication efforts (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Communications with foreign audiences should be open and truthful. Any covert communications activities that must be undertaken by the US government should be “effectively separated from the

communications undertaken by public diplomacy actors” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Given the unsettled history of the Arab world during the past hundred years, it is no surprise that Muslims distrust the Western world. As long as western countries are perceived as being hostile toward Arabs and Muslims, US public diplomacy will have little chance to gain influence (Seib, 2013). Muslim hostility to the US is based on a fairly accurate notion, of United States’ policies in the Middle East and its blind support for Israel (Wallin, 2012).

US PD efforts in the Muslim world are being undermined by the “trajectory of US foreign policy towards the Middle East”. While the US advocate for freedom and democracy, it supports Israel and repressive Arab regimes. This has fostered suspicion about US intentions and has affected negatively its public diplomacy efforts (Seib, 2013).

Polls have shown that attitudes towards American foreign policy and the image of the United States is getting worse in nearly all Muslim countries. The PEW Global Indicators Database shows the favorable views of the United States in the region in 2015 ranged from 10% percent in Egypt, to 14% percent in Jordan to 39% in Lebanon (Brown & Hensman, 2016). US public diplomacy efforts have not been successful at “winning converts from among those who are strongly anti-American”. It only has been able to “reinforce opinions that are already sympathetic to United States” (Seib, 2013, p. 170).

People attitudes affect the United States abilities “to form and maintain alliances, impact the cost and effectiveness of military operations, influence local populations to either cooperate, support or be hostile to the United States” (Seib, 2013, p. 36). In addition, it influences foreign publics’ enthusiasm to buy US products and services (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

Resentments felt by Muslims toward US policies, prevent collaboration. The US usually relies on “foreign elements and groups to achieve its security objectives”. In places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, effective public diplomacy can mean the difference between a resident reporting the location of a bomb or planting the bomb by himself (Wallin, 2012).

Dissemination of information through regional broadcast and social media outlets, contribute positively or negatively to the impressions about the United States and its society. The attitudes and perceptions of foreign publics created in this new information environment impact US interests and national security greatly (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The rise of “global communications, the spread of democratic and international institutions, and the growth and development of multilateral, influential nongovernmental organizations”, have changed the nature of power within societies and influenced public diplomacy’s abilities to facilitate political change across national borders (Zanotti, Weiss, & Ruane, 2015).

Many cross-border flow of information take place outside the control of governments and without their knowledge (The Conflict Resolution Program, 2014). Globalization has increased the volume, velocity, and importance of cross-border flow of information. Globalization has weakened the influence of States and strengthens the capacities of non-state actors (Haass, 2008). Globalization has “created a new dynamic for US public diplomacy initiatives” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

The world of international communications and information dissemination is “undergoing revolutionary changes at a remarkable speed” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). The democratization of information through new media and communication technology has greatly empowered non-state actors and elevated their role and legitimacy in international politics (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2017).

The rise and rapid evolution of Internet, social media, and broadcast communications system have affected the US government public diplomacy abilities. In an increasingly “complex and democratized global communications environment it became much more challenging for United States to effectively communicate and influence foreign audience” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009). US public diplomacy has to compete for “attention and credibility in a time when rumors can spark riots, and information, whether it is true or false, quickly spreads across the world” (Nakamura & Weed, 2009).

In the new era of proliferating satellite television channels, state-controlled and Western broadcasters have found that they are at a significant competitive disadvantage in the Arab world, because they are not as credible as regional Arabic TV news stations, such as Al-Jazeera (Wallin, 2012).

The Arab media market is incredibly saturated, as demonstrated by the sheer number of satellite channels available (Wallin, 2012). Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabia, and other Arab television channels have allowed people in the region to watch the news that affects them through Arab's eyes (Seib, 2013). The presentation of news on Al-Jazeera reflects a passion that is well suited for an audience that feels passionately about many of the issues and events that Al-Jazeera covers (Wallin, 2012).

For a news organization to be “journalistically credible, it must be a neutral provider of information”. Al-Hurrah has faced several credibility issues with Arab populations. It is perceived as an “American propaganda channel”. Credible media must provide multiple perspectives (Wallin, 2012).

Being truthful means reporting information that may not be favorable to one's goals. Talking about unfavorable “events and people accurately and honestly, establishes an environment that ultimately improves the credibility of American messaging”. If dishonesty or hiding information is necessary for the success of a public diplomacy initiative, it may be best to “reconsider the policy goal being served” (Wallin, 2012).

For states wishing to conduct public diplomacy in the Arab world, prospects are discouraging. The region's media environment is healthy and growing, and with so many voices trying to be heard, the US has found it very challenging to deliver messages that gain the attention of a sizable audience (Seib, 2013).

Public diplomacy needs to take advantage of already trusted news media institutions. Duplicating or competing with existing mediums is often a waste of resources and, less effective, and more difficult than utilizing existing ones. The Obama Administration has made deliberate effort to repair relations with Al-Jazeera. Many US officials have appeared on Al-Jazeera frequently (Wallin, 2012).

Conclusion

A country's public diplomacy is only as effective as the foreign policies behind it (Seib, 2013). When President Barack Obama visited Cairo in 2009, he delivered a beautifully written speech that promised, among other things, assistance to the Palestinian. Obama said, “America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own”. That won applause in the Arab world, but it lasted only briefly (Seib, 2013).

The core problem with the 2009 Cairo Speech was that the major policy promises made were not fulfilled. Following through on actual policy commitments establishes “credibility as a communicator and create trust with the target audience while avoiding accusations of hypocrisy”. Given the credibility issues the US already faces, “dishonesty would prove counterproductive to US interests in the long-term” (Wallin, 2012).

Public diplomacy scholars, such as Nye, Kraidy, Seib, and Khatib have argued that no matter how sophisticated the public diplomacy messages, if the US foreign policy towards the Middle East does not

produce more than “rhetorical change, public diplomacy on its own will not be able to alter perceptions of the US in the region” (Wallin, 2012).

Public diplomacy does not “offer solutions for all problems and it cannot be expected to make up for inadequacies in US foreign policy” (Wallin, 2012). PD cannot resolve issues by its own. It must be part of a “greater multifaceted foreign strategy”. No amount of good communication will “conciliate an angry people who feel that they have been negatively affected by US policies and actions” (Wallin, 2012)

Public diplomacy and strategic communication should be a two-way process. Listening allows a country to “better craft messages and identify issues” of importance to the target audience (Wallin, 2012). PD should be utilized as an assessment tool to “understand grievances felt by the targeted people and to inform the US foreign policy making process”. PD can be a vital source of information in developing effective foreign policy that “accomplishes the United States long-term objectives” (Wallin, 2012).

Regardless of how much resources the United States invest in developing public diplomacy methods, the most effective way to change attitudes and gain trust in the Middle East is through “a positive change in US foreign policy” (Khatib et al., 2012). Public diplomacy is unable to mitigate the negative impact that US policies and actions generate. PD cannot be expected to be a “band-aid over ineffective foreign policies toward the Islamic world” (Wallin, 2012).

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