

# AN ENGAGED PUBLIC DIPLOMACY KEY IN FIGHTING WAR ON TERROR

The United States currently confronts one of the biggest foreign policy challenges in our history with a hand tied behind its back.

One of the most important, yet underappreciated, PR positions in the nation's capital is being vacated. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Margaret Tutweiler will be leaving her desk in Foggy Bottom this month for a senior position at the New York Stock Exchange. Election years being election years, it's likely that a replacement won't be named until sometime in 2005 – if at all.

We can't afford the delay. America right now is like a prominent company or institution whose credibility has been battered in the midst of a withering crisis. The next six to nine months will go a long way toward shaping the views of America's key "constituencies" in the world – our traditional allies, our now-disaffected friends, our many detractors, and tens of millions of people from Fallujah to Kabul. Given everything that's at stake in the war against terror, Ms. Tutweiler's position needs to be filled now—not after the next election.

The undersecretary for diplomacy position at State is America's de facto corporate communications department. During the Cold War, America's foreign policy leaders—both Republican and Democrat—pursued an engaged public diplomacy, ranging from programs for local journalists to maintaining cultural centers and running exchange programs. This concerted grassroots diplomacy played a key role in winning the hearts and minds of people in hot spots around the world. Our leaders' reasoning was sound: the more citizens of other countries understood about America and Americans, the more they liked our system.

Regrettably, we have lost track of that lesson. Between the end of the Cold War and the start of the War on Terrorism, America became complacent. We triumphed in the rightness of our system, but we forgot about the need to constantly persuade others that our system is right. As a result, our country's global communications tool box is nearly empty. Now more than ever, our leaders need to persuade an increasingly skeptical world of our fealty to America's promise. State's office of public diplomacy must communicate to people in the world's trouble spots that America remains deeply committed to the democratic values that have guided us for two centuries: freedom of thought, freedom of markets, and opportunity for everyone, regardless of race, color, or creed.

All of this may sound simple—but it's easier said than done. An October report issued by a State Department advisory group found that "the apparatus of public diplomacy has proven inadequate, especially in the Arab and Muslim world." Moreover, the General Accounting Office maintains that "[The State Department] does not have a strategy that integrates all of its diverse public diplomacy activities and directs them toward common objectives."

A dose of realism is in order here. As in any business-communications dynamic, there are problems—then there are pr problems. An engaged public diplomacy won't make America's challenges in the Islamic world disappear any more than an effective "rapid response" system will make a company's crisis go away. But



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**continued**

without that rapid response, a company's crisis is sure to escalate. And without an engaged public diplomacy, the prospects of winning the war against terror become considerably more difficult.

The U.S. needs to return to traditional public diplomacy campaigns that seek to influence attitudes individual-by-individual, ultimately changing views and behaviors. Our global grassroots diplomacy needs campaigns that recognize that every audience is unique. For each, we need to find the right channel, the right vehicle, and the right messenger. Our campaigns must employ powerful third-party champions whose views will be respected in cities and villages throughout the Middle East and Central Asia.

No public diplomacy campaign, regardless of its effectiveness, will turn the tide of global public opinion quickly. Nonetheless, we need a commitment from policymakers that public diplomacy is an absolute priority.

Money is important, but leadership is more so. Let's fill the undersecretary position now. And let's fill it with someone who reaches out to the best and brightest minds in the communications business—professionals expert in tapping the full arsenal of modern communications tools.

To win the war on terror, we've got to win the battle for public diplomacy. That means both hands actively engaged.

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