

The Public Diplomacy as a Global Phenomenon Conference took place at the Mershon Center on Friday, 28 April, 2006. The conference was organized by Alexander Stephan (Ohio State University) and John Brown (Georgetown University and the University of Southern California). The Conference included twelve presentations – organized into three sessions – and a luncheon lecture.

Each of the three sessions covered a different aspect of the study of public diplomacy. As a number of the speakers emphasized, there is no agreement on an exact definition of the term ‘public diplomacy,’ but there is a rough consensus. The term was coined by the now defunct US Information Agency (USIA) to describe what it did. It is sometimes said to be a euphemism for propaganda, but the latter term is pejorative in a way that public diplomacy is not.

The first session of the conference focused upon the origins and development of public diplomacy. Professor Frank Ninkovich (St. John’s University) spoke first, considering the broader topic of cultural relations from an historical perspective. He began by discussing the way that cultural relations were viewed by the US in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which he claimed was particularly visible in relation to developing countries. As he explained, the government at the time thought that culture was the embodiment of tradition, and saw tradition as being opposed to progress. Developing countries could only hope to match the success of the West if they gave up their own cultural practices and adopted those of modern Anglo-Saxon culture. Not only would this be of benefit to the developing countries, it was also seen as the only way to achieve global unity.

Ninkovich then talked briefly about cultural relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He claimed that it was during this period that cultural relations emerged as a government activity, hand-in-hand with the growth of political internationalism between the two world wars. The two world wars also led to a change of focus, from the developing world to Europe, and a change of approach, as the government came to realize that spreading liberalism and destroying cultural differences could not by themselves achieve all that it had hoped.

Ninkovich concluded by noting that in the aftermath of September 11 the emphasis is once again upon developing nations, and cultural differences are once again being seen as an obstacle to US foreign policy objectives. As he noted, this is a return to cultural relations at its most anti-cultural.

Richard Arndt (USIA and Fulbright Association, retired) spoke about the cultural dimension of public diplomacy. He explained that there are at least three ways to view the cultural dimension: as a cover for something more sinister, as an incentive to help satisfy other objectives, or as what is most central to public diplomacy. He claimed that the cultural dimension was actually best viewed in the third of these ways, and referred to it metaphorically as “the beating heart” of public diplomacy. Arndt also talked about the cultural victories that the US has won in the past, and continuing a theme suggested by Ninkovich’s talk, Arndt expressed concern about US cultural relations post September 9/11. He said that America’s past successes had filled “reservoirs of good-will,” but claimed that the last five years have shown us how quickly these reservoirs can be drained.

Professor Nicholas Cull (University of Southern California) spoke about lessons from the history of the USIA. As he explained, the US government has traditionally been skeptical of public diplomacy. The government has preferred to leave it to the private sector, and considers its own involvement necessary only during emergencies. The Cold War was anomalous in this respect, as it led the US government to form a strong and sustained interest in public diplomacy, and justified the foundation of the USIA in 1953. Professor Cull went on to explain that the history of the USIA has taught us much about what is necessary to ensure that the government supports public diplomacy, and also about what is necessary for it to be practiced successfully. He finished by applying some of the lessons learnt from history to the present crisis in the Middle East. He spoke about some of the dangers and the difficulties faced in the Middle East, and warned about a misapplication of history. Iraq in 2006 is not Japan in 1946, and the Middle East in 2006 is not Eastern Europe in 1988. It is important to appreciate the differences between these situations, and to formulate policy appropriately. The second session consisted of presentations by foreign diplomats working in the United States. The diplomats spoke about the public diplomacy programs of their embassies here, and the roles that they play in those programs.

Tahani Al-Terkate (Information Office, Embassy of the State of Kuwait) spoke first. She explained that the Information Office in her embassy aims to give Americans a chance to explore Kuwait, in whatever ways that is possible. She said that many Americans know little about the Middle East, and do not appreciate the many differences between Middle Eastern countries. Her office does what it can to educate Americans about Kuwait, and to make Americans aware of the many respects in which it differs from the countries around it. Through education and other means, her office aims to strengthen the ties between Kuwait and the United States, not just for economic and political reasons, but also for the cultural and personal benefits to individuals of both nations.

Terry Colli (Canadian Embassy / Ambassade du Canada) spoke about the problems facing the Canadian Embassy as it aims to strengthen the relationship between the United States and Canada. He said that Canadians tend to think about America a lot, but Americans seldom think about Canada. One goal of his agency's public diplomacy efforts is to address this asymmetry. One way to achieve this is to publicize the degree to which America and Canada are interdependent. As he explained, 85% of Canada's exports are sent to America, 25% of America's exports are sent to Canada, and two hundred million people cross the border between the two countries every year. These statistics may make the interdependence clear at a national level, but Colli said that it had been more effective to make the level of interdependence evident at the state and local levels, and he detailed the research that his embassy had done and the literature that they had produced to achieve this.

Colli also explained that part of the goal of his agency is to get Americans to realize how important it is to engage with others in the world, and to realize that globalization can only make America better off.

Christoph Moran (Austrian Press and Information Service, Austrian Embassy) spoke about the perception of Austria and the European Union in the US, and about his embassy's approach to public diplomacy in light of that perception. He began by explaining that as

Austria is a member of the European Union, the Austrian Embassy has to promote both Austria and the European Union.

He went on to explain that perceptions of the two are quite different in the US. The Embassy's research has shown that the image of Austria here has three elements. Firstly, Austria is seen as a cultural superpower. Secondly, Austria is seen in a negative light historically because of her involvement in the two World Wars, and thirdly, Austria is seen as being only a small economic power. In contrast, the European Union is seen as having no particular cultural identity of its own – because the cultures of its members are so diverse – but it is considered to be an economic superpower.

Moran finished by mentioning that even though diplomatic relations between the US and the EU are at an all time low, economic interactions are increasing. There are some well publicized trade disputes between the two powers, these disputes concern only about one percent of trans-Atlantic trade.

Finally, Hjayceelyn Quintana (Cultural Affairs, Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines) discussed the public diplomacy programs of her country. As she explained, an unusual fact about the Philippines is that over ten percent of all Phillipino nationals live overseas. Part of her embassy's role is to support initiatives that will promote the rights and benefits of these people. But these people also benefit the embassy and its goals, as they function as cultural agents – educating people in other countries about the Philippines. She mentioned that in the US there are around 3000 Phillipino-American organizations. The Embassy has a very close relationship with these groups, and makes use of some of them for its public diplomacy programs.

The last session of the conference focused upon the future of public diplomacy. Barry Fulton (George Washington University) spoke first, about the changes that must be made to public diplomacy methods to accommodate the ways in which the world is changing. As he explained, the world is changing in many respects that are relevant to public diplomacy: information scarcity has been replaced by an information surplus, the East/West divide has been replaced by a poor/rich divide, and the nature of the state and the relationship between states has changed. In response, public diplomacy methods must change to embrace the best communicative processes, conceive of the world in terms of what he called “a multi-dimensional map,” and employ public diplomats who are also scholars, artists, and scientists.

Joshua S. Fouts (University of Southern California) spoke next, about ways to develop new, online venues for public diplomacy. He spoke in particular about Second Life, which might be considered an online computer game, but better resembles a virtual world. The world has been created by its residents, who also own all of the property that they have created. There are currently over two hundred thousand residents, around twenty five percent of whom are non-US citizens. To involve these people in public diplomacy, the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy designed a competition. The competition invited people to produce games within Second Life that would stimulate public diplomacy. At the time Fouts presented his paper the winner had not been announced, but he described a number of interesting entries.

The last speaker was Michael Vlahos (Johns Hopkins University), who spoke about the relationship between public diplomacy and war. He argued that the object in war is the achievement of authority over the enemy. Authority over the enemy is achieved not just by having greater military forces, but also by public diplomacy. A society asserts authority in war in part by demonstrating its superiority, but also in part by making a promise of empathy and cooperation – indeed, for a society to be truly victorious it must promise to share the fruits of war.

Vlahos applied this analysis to the Napoleonic Wars, and also to the War in Iraq. He claimed that a large part of the problem with the war in Iraq is that the administration has used the wrong narrative to describe the war. They have tried to use the narrative of World War Two, but this requires a big enemy, which has resulted in the elevation of the authority of al Qaeda, and has moved us towards treating all Muslims as the enemy. Vlahos suggested an alternate narrative: the US as a friend of revolution, as was the case during the nineteenth century. He said that we have to let natural change take place in the Middle East, even if that does result in an Islamic revolution.