Backgrounder

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Public Diplomacy 2.0: Where the U.S. Government Meets "New Media"

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Abstract: *Can Facebook and Twitter change the world? Can all the nifty new social-networking sites promote democracy and a better understanding of American values around the world? The potential is certainly there—as was seen in the invaluable Twitter updates during the post-election protests in Iran. The U.S. government is embracing Web 2.0 for an ambitious strategy of reaching previously untapped populations around the world—call it Public Diplomacy 2.0. While the potential progress is undeniable, so is the potential danger. Public diplomacy expert Helle Dale explains the recent developments, strategies, benefits, and risks of cyber diplomacy.*

Public diplomacy and strategic communications experts within the U.S. government are exploring the potential of the new social media in the effort to win hearts and minds abroad, especially in the Muslim world where today's war of ideas is being fought. Enemies of the United States are already expert in using these low-cost outreach tools that can connect thousands, potentially even millions, at the touch of a computer key or cell phone button. As public affairs blogger Matt Armstrong writes,

> In this age of mass information and precision guided media, everyone from political candidates to terrorists must instantly and continuously interact with and influence audiences in order to be relevant and competitive. Ignoring the utility of social media is tantamount to surrendering the high ground in

Talking Points

- Public diplomacy and communications experts in the U.S. government are exploring the potential of the new "social media" in order to win hearts and minds abroad, especially in the Muslim world where today's war of ideas is being fought.
- Enemies of the United States are already expert in using these low-cost outreach tools that can connect thousands, potentially millions, at the touch of a computer key or cell phone button.
- The U.S. government is often far behind the private sector in employing technological innovation. The new social media is cutting edge, nimble, constantly changing, and interactive on a personal level—so strategic thinking, training, and critical analysis is critical before employing Web 2.0 in the service of public diplomacy.
- Congress should establish a National Communications Strategy and a Corporation for Foreign Opinion Analysis to monitor the effectiveness—and security risks—of launching Public Diplomacy 2.0.

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the enduring battle to influence minds around the world.[1]

There is, however, no doubt that a matchup between the federal government and the new media will require strategic thinking, training, and critical analysis in order to function optimally. Where the U.S. government is rather stodgy and often far behind the private sector in employing technological innovation, the new social media is cutting edge, nimble, constantly changing, and interactive on a personal level. "It doesn't make sense to be using Web 2.0 tools for the sake of using Web 2.0 tools," Sheila Campbell, co-chair of the Federal Web Managers Council, told the *National Journal* in February. In other words, many federal agencies have yet to demonstrate the ability to create videos or Web sites that attract and maintain the interest of the public.[2]

In the absence of a National Communications Strategy and in the absence of capacity to measure the impact of various communications platforms, the new media's effectiveness for public diplomacy and strategic communications purposes will remain limited. The potential for reaching large audiences is certainly there, but there are many gaps in the understanding of the nature of Public Diplomacy 2.0 that have to be addressed before the new social media can become a primary vehicle with which the U.S. government addresses world audiences (in addition to more traditional means, such as shortwave and FM radio, television, libraries, or student exchange programs).

The History of Internet Diplomacy

The trend toward new media outreach within the U.S. government began in the early 1990s, when the Internet quickly became an everyday tool in businesses and homes. In the past few years, online social media have also become accessible worldwide. Facebook, for instance, was until recently merely a social-networking site for high school and college students, launching its debut in 2004. It was a tool for teenagers to connect beyond the reach of parental supervision. Now, however, Facebook has become a means of easy mass communication around the globe, used by teens and adults, government, ordinary citizens, and businesses alike.

Today, new media outreach is the main thrust of the public diplomacy innovations of the State Department.

The Obama Administration came into office with a keen sense of the potential of the new media, having run the most tech-savvy campaign in American history. In fact, new media outreach is today the main thrust of the public diplomacy innovations of the State Department under Judith McHale, the new Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy. Yet, in part because of the newness of this policy thrust in public diplomacy (which essentially dates back to President Obama's Cairo speech to Arab audiences this past June accompanied by the U.S. government's electronic mass distribution of his speech, and coinciding with McHale's taking office), and in part because of the diffuseness of new media outreach within various government agencies, there is little data to quantify and analyze the U.S. government's new media effectiveness and impact.

Discussions of the State Department's need to embrace emerging technology, specifically harnessing the Internet's remarkable capacity for effective public engagement, go back little more than a decade. Early steps were taken by Joseph Duffey, director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) under President Bill Clinton: To save money, Duffey moved certain USIA activities to computer platforms, closing down some of the agency's costlier print publications. Change, however, began in earnest in the year 2000, following the absorption of USIA by the State Department, where USIA's cultural and exchange programs became the International Information Programs (IIP) and its public diplomacy officers became staff

1. Matt C. Armstrong, "Social Media as Public Diplomacy," *Perspectives*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 2009), at *http://www.layaline.tv/publications/Perspectives/MattArmstrong.html* (November 20, 2009).
2. David Herbert, "Agencies Struggling to Make Connections Online," *National Journal*, February 2, 2009, at *http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/no_20090126_4207.php* (November 23, 2009).

for the State Department area desks and worked in the field in U.S. embassies.

In 2000, Ira Magaziner, President Clinton's "Internet czar" briefed State Department officials on the need for the United States to become more engaged in public diplomacy. As the Internet was quickly becoming more deeply integrated into everyday life, he argued that the average person could now be linked to near-unlimited amounts of information, necessitating greater openness and engagement on the part of government.

Senator George Allen, chairman of the Republican High Tech Task Force, echoed similar ideas at the 2001 NetDiplomacy conference, referring to the Internet as "a modern day version of Gutenberg's printing press," advocating its use to "disperse our ideas," spreading democratic ideals within previously inaccessible societies worldwide, "[hopefully] leading to greater liberties."[3]

Though the need for U.S. diplomatic engagement on the Internet was widely understood, in 2000 and 2001, the questions of what should be posted online and how best to accomplish American diplomatic objectives remained a subject of debate. As Richard Solomon of the U.S. Institute of Peace stated in 2000, "the opportunity is there for State to put out American perspectives on almost any issue, for anybody to pick up, the question is: What should the government be putting out?"[4] It is fair to say that this question is still being debated.

The annual report of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy in 2004 recommended that State "actively look for ways to use emerging software developments to expand…broadcast reach over the internet," but budget requests as late as 2006, which sought to increase funding for public diplomacy, still did not include funding for newer technologies, preferring instead more traditional tools such as radio.[5]

It was not until 2006 that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared her intention to "set up 'virtual posts,' where people can visit a Web site and chat online with U.S. diplomats."[6] According to Colleen Graffy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy under President George W. Bush, the first State Department blog entry was posted by senior legal adviser John Bellinger III in a guest appearance on the Opinio Juris blog[7] in January 2007. This was followed nine months later when the State Department officially joined the blogosphere with its own blog, Dipnote, on public diplomacy.[8]

The arrival of America.gov, the U.S. government's chief public diplomacy portal, launched by the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs in January 2007, was much hailed by American diplomats. America.gov provides features on American life as well as the doings of the President and Secretary of State and serves as a platform for a whole host of interactive media—Webcasts, blogs, videos, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and even Second Life, a 3-D virtual world where users can socialize with free voice and text chat. One of the State Department's latest new media ventures is Co.Nx, a Web conferencing program that connects U.S. experts in a variety of fields with foreign audiences as well as U.S. embassies.[9]

3. Cara Garretson, "Senator Says Internet Essential for Diplomacy," CNN.com, September 6, 2001, at *http://archives.cnn.com/2001/TECH/internet/09/06/internet.diplomacy.idg/index.html* (November 23, 2009).
4. Bryant Jordan, "Net Diplomacy," *Federal Computer Week*, October 29, 2000, at *http://www.fcw.com/Articles/2000/10/29/Net-diplomacy.aspx* (November 23, 2009).
5. Hampton Stephens, "Uncle Sam's Blog," *The Boston Globe*, March 14, 2005, at *http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2005/03/14/uncle_sams_blog/* (November 23, 2009).
6. Farah Stockman, "U.S. to Shift Envoys to Developing Countries," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2006, at *http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/19/world/americas/19iht-diplo.html* (November 23, 2009).
7. Colleen Graffy, "The Rise of Public Diplomacy 2.0," *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, No. 17 (Fall 2009), at *http://www.securityaffairs.org/issues/2009/17/graffy.php* (November 23, 2009).
8. Ben Bain, "State Department Opens Up with Dipnote Blog," *Federal Computer Week*, September 27, 2007, at *http://fcw.com/articles/2007/09/27/state-department-opens-up-with-dipnote-blog.aspx* (November 23, 2009).

The Obama Approach

In its first months in office, the Obama Administration indicated its commitment to using 21st-century technology in various forms as an integral component of public diplomacy. Similar to strategies employed in last year's U.S. presidential campaign, a wide variety of social networking and communication mediums have been under consideration to maximize the exposure and resonance of U.S. outreach. On his first day in office, President Obama signed a memorandum of "Transparency and Open Government,"[10] which stated that the Web 2.0 technologies are necessary to "tap into the vast amounts of knowledge…in communities across the country."[11] It became clear very soon that the Administration aspired to tap into the knowledge from communities around the world as well.

As part of the effort to make the U.S. brand more marketable and accessible to foreign populations, President Obama appointed Judith McHale, former president and CEO of Discovery Communications, as Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The selection of McHale—who molded Discovery into a global giant with 1.4 billion subscribers in 170 countries and 35 different languages—speaks volumes about the shape that President Obama envisions for public diplomacy.[12]

When asked about what made Discovery so effective in the global market, McHale stressed the need for understanding target audiences and conveying information in user-friendly ways. During her May 13, 2009, confirmation hearing McHale stated:

> New technology, used effectively and creatively, can be a game changer. Communications advances provide unprecedented opportunities to engage people directly, to connect them to one another, and to dramatically scale up main traditional public diplomacy efforts. They provide the opportunity to move from an old paradigm, in which our government speaks as one to many, to a new model of engaging interactively and collaboratively across lines that might otherwise divide us from people around the world. We must create an institutional framework that can take full advantage of new media, with an understanding that these new tools must be carefully tailored to particular circumstances and always used in the service of a larger strategy.[13]

The most important example of President Obama's commitment to technology as a vital mechanism of public diplomacy and to McHale's initiative was the mass distribution of the President's speech in Cairo. In an effort to disseminate President Obama's call for improved U.S.–Arab relations to as large an audience as possible, U.S. government agencies used a variety of Internet applications, including social-networking sites, podcasts, and a live Webcast on the White House's Web site. Text-message and Twitter updates reached more than 20,000 users worldwide.[14]

The focus of this particular service, funded by the State Department, was on the citizens of nations abroad—the text messages were unavailable to U.S.

9. Jeremy Curtain, "U.S. Public Diplomacy 2.0," *Public Diplomacy*, June 27, 2009, at *http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/forum/us-public-diplomacy-20*.
10. "Transparency and Open Government: Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies," The White House, January 21, 2009, at *http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment* (November 23, 2009).
11. Tod Newcombe, "Vivek Kundra, Federal CIO, Addresses State CIOs," *Government Technology*, April 30, 2009, at *http://www.govtech.com/gt/653151* (November 23, 2009).
12. Merle David Kellerhals, Jr., "State's McHale to Spearhead U.S. Global Public Engagement," America.gov, June 2, 2009, at *http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2009/June/20090602083933dmslahrellek0.6198542.html* (November 24, 2009).
13. Judith McHale, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Confirmation Hearing, May 13, 2009, at *http://www.state.gov/r/remarks/124155.htm* (December 2, 2009).
14. "20K People Outside US Got Obama Speech Texts," Associated Press, June 6, 2009, at *http://www.federalnewsradio.com/index.php?nid=27&sid=1689247* (November 24, 2009).

citizens, as in principle are all the products of U.S. public diplomacy, because of the restrictions on disseminating propaganda to U.S. citizens embodied in the Smith–Mundt Act. The text messages were available in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and eight other languages, reaching people in more than 200 countries.[15] Translated versions of the speech in both text and video were available on YouTube, Facebook, and MySpace, as well as the popular South Asia networking site Orkut.[16]

The White House also started an international discussion on Facebook, which has over 20 million Arab users, and responses to the speech submitted via text messages were compiled and posted on America.gov.

New media is, in its own way, as vulnerable as traditional media is to government interference in highly controlled societies.

Similarly, President Obama's speech in Ghana last July was, according to McHale, "a model of creative public diplomacy for the 21st century. I believe that it is embodied in what Secretary Clinton calls 'smart power.' The centerpiece was a creative White House initiative that bridged new media and old."[17] The White House Office of New Media strategy included a texting service throughout Africa and invited people to ask questions of the President in English or French. Nearly 16,000 people from 87 countries did so. The U.S. embassy in South Africa collaborated with a mobile-based social network and received another 200,000 questions from throughout Africa.

New Media and Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Iran

All this flurry of activity has a vision behind it that could bear fruit in the 21st-century media environment. But new media is, in its own way, as vulnerable as traditional media is to government interference in highly controlled societies like Iran, Burma, China, or Russia. While new media has great potential to create and engage political forces, these are just forces that are being used from a U.S. point of view. Such forces may also be deployed by enemies of the United States. Georgetown University's Yahoo! fellow, Evgeny Morozov, noted at an October U.S. Helsinki Commission briefing that promoting new digital spaces "entails the same risk as promoting free elections: it's quite possible we may not like who wins them."[18] Furthermore, authoritarian governments are highly sophisticated in their efforts to control cyberspace, and—just like democratic governments—try to build alliances with likeminded online groups. Consequently, other new technologies like cell phones, and old technologies like shortwave radio, will continue to play an important role in resisting authoritarian regimes.

A case in point was the Iranian election in June, when the revolutionary potential of Web 2.0 really came into public focus. The elections and their dramatic aftermath provided the Obama Administration with a unique opportunity to put into action key elements of the U.S. government's public diplomacy strategy—though that potential was hardly fulfilled. What the example of Iran showed was that Web 2.0 technology has the potential to play a role similar to that played by fax machines in the Solidarity uprising in Poland in the 1980s and cell phones

15. Roy Furchgott, "State Department to Text Obama Speech," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2009, at *http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/03/voice-of-america-to-become-texts-of-america* (November 24, 2009).
16. Jake Tapper, "The Speech (the White House Hopes) Heard 'Round the World: A Preview of President Obama's Speech to the Muslim World," ABC News, June 3, 2009, at *http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2009/06/the-speech-the-white-house-hopes-heard-round-the-world-a-preview-of-president-obamas-speech-to-the-muslim-world.html* (November 24, 2009).
17. "An Invitation to Africans: Send a Message to President Obama," America.gov, July, 7 2009, at *http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2009/July/20090702103907ptellivremos0.7542078.html* (November 24, 2009).
18. Helsinki Commission briefing, "Twitter Against Tyrants: New Media in Authoritarian Regimes," October 22, 2009, at *http://csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContentRecords.ViewTranscript&ContentRecord_id=462&ContentType=H,B&ContentRecordType=B&CFID=23584766&CFTOKEN=37249586* (November 24, 2009).

in Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2005. However, this potential can only be realized if technology is married to an active U.S. official government policy in support of the forces of democracy and self-determination. In and of themselves, the new media may change the technological game, but the political impact will fall short if the message from the U.S. government is not in strong support of American values and democracy. In Iran, the Obama Administration chose an official arm's length approach to the spontaneous public demonstrations.

As Iranian citizens took to the streets, disputing the re-election victory of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a wave of public protests swept through Iran. In these protests, the role of social networking—both in organizing activities and sharing updates—was widespread. The cyber activism surrounding the Iranian protests was unprecedented, driving the global debate.

The use of social-networking tools in Iran illustrates both the opportunities and the downsides of Web 2.0. On the one hand, "citizen reporters" were able to share stories instantaneously with a worldwide audience. Foreign correspondents that were otherwise prevented by the Iranian government from doing their jobs were able to rely on "crowdsourcing" for their stories, which had to be filed from outside the borders of Iran or from hotel rooms to which the journalists themselves were often confined. Documentation of the brutal crackdown on the protestors appeared on YouTube, Facebook, and Flickr, and in blogs and e-mails. Mainstream media outlets, such as CNN and Fox News, relied on Iranian[19] citizen journalists both for content and the scheduling of events as they were unfolding. In turn, the Twitter revolution became a news story in its own right with the new media in a starring role.

On the downside, false reports were just as easily spread as accurate ones. And the Iranian government deployed a censorship strategy that was clearly well thought out and had been prepared in advance. After the initial surge of Internet activity, Tehran shut down Internet service nationwide, subsequently allowing a gradual but controlled increase in Web activity. This also included blocking access to mobile networks and satellite television. Since the Iranian government owns and operates radio and television outlets and supervises all newspapers and publications, it has a tight grip on information dissemination.[20]

The cyber activism surrounding the Iranian election protests was unprecedented, driving the global debate.

Despite its tech-savvy reputation, U.S. government outreach was limited to the State Department's revelation that it requested the social Web site Twitter to postpone its scheduled maintenance operation in the days after the Iranian election. Undoubtedly, this action was important, but given the resources of the U.S. government, it was hardly proactive. The Obama Administration had chosen to take a hands-off approach in Iran, refusing to offer public support for the protestors in order to influence the election outcome. All of which meant that the potential of its tech-savvy approach to public diplomacy was not realized.

The New Media and the U.S. Government: Risk Analysis

While U.S. agencies have begun to use social-networking technologies for a range of activities, and while usage is growing by leaps and bounds, it was not until September this year that the official "Guidelines for Secure Use of Social Media by Federal Departments and Agencies, v1.0" was published by the Federal Chief Information Officers Council.[21]

19. James Jay Carafano, "All a Twitter: How Social Networking Shaped Iran's Election Protests," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2300, July 20, 2009, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternetandTechnology/bg2300.cfm*.
20. Graffy, "The Rise of Public Diplomacy 2.0."
21. Federal Chief Information Officers Council, "Guidelines for Secure Use of Social Media by Federal Departments and Agencies, v1.0," September 2009, at *http://www.cio.gov/Documents/Guidelines_for_Secure_Use_Social_Media_v01-0.pdf* (November 24, 2009).

The document is intended for any federal agency that uses social media to collaborate and communicate among employees, partners, other federal agencies, or the public. It is therefore not specifically directed toward the U.S. government's use of social-networking media for public diplomacy purposes, but it is the closest thing the government has produced to a social media policy so far.

Most security risks involved in engaging in these activities are common to all departments that use them—from the State Department to Defense to Homeland Security, from the FBI to the Education and Justice Departments. The guidelines point out that the social media are vulnerable to a variety of cyber attacks including "spear phishing," which targets a group of users with the goal of persuading them to perform an action that launches a computer virus, such as opening a document or clicking on a link.[22] Another type of attack, social-engineering, usually focuses on an individual, exploiting the wealth of personal information posted on social media Web sites.[23] In yet another type of Web application attack, a user may inadvertently grant a malicious Web application access to his Facebook account, or download unauthorized software to his computer. New Web technologies are also opening up new techniques for attackers.

Security challenges are the focus of the first set of official guidelines—as opposed to any attempt at issuing guidelines for messaging or appropriate usage. The guidelines conclude that the decision to engage with social-media technology has to be made by each agency, and must identify mission requirements that justify the use of the technology. In other words, it is very much up to each agency to make this risk-based analysis and to accept the risks. The 19-page guidelines conclude that,

> Finally, while a hijacked personal media account may be annoying and personally costly or embarrassing, a hijacked account of a federal user or a federal account may have more serious implications. Unofficial posts, tweets or messages may be seen by the public as official messages, or may be used to spread malware by encouraging users to click links or download unwanted applications.[24]

Federal Social Networking: How Effective Is it?

The phenomenon of social networking includes sites such as "Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and other interactive media tools to communicate with ever-expanding networks of family, friends and colleagues."[25] There are several popular social-networking sites used by the U.S. government, which essentially operate in the same way. Facebook is a site on which members create a personal profile, adding contacts to a "friend" list as well as joining interest groups, say, with information about home gardening, or in support of a particular political candidate. Anyone can post a personal profile or create a group, which is precisely what government organizations from U.S. embassies to the FBI have done. In April, the U.S. General Services Administration came to an agreement with Facebook (as well as several other sites such as Flickr and YouTube) that cleared the way for federal agencies to use social-networking Web sites based on special terms-of-service agreements for federal agencies. The agreements cover standard terms and conditions governing liability limits, endorsements, freedom of information, and legal jurisdiction. Since then, government agencies have been free to use Facebook as they see fit. The top five government Facebook pages frequented by the public are (1) The White House, (2) the U.S. Marine Corps, (3) the U.S. Army, (4) the U. S. Centers for Disease Control, and (5) the State Department.

22. Microsoft.com, "How to Recognize Phishing E-Mails or Links," 2009, at *http://www.microsoft.com/protect/fraud/phishing/symptoms.aspx* (November 24, 2009).
23. Adrienne Felt and David Evans, "Privacy Protection for Social Networking APIs," University of Virginia, 2007, at *http://www.cs.virginia.edu/felt/privacy/* (November 24, 2009).
24. "Guidelines for Secure Use of Social Media by Federal Departments and Agencies, v1.0."
25. Heather Forsgren-Weaver, "Defense Department to Announce Balanced Social Media Policy," U.S. Air Force, September, 24, 2009, at *http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123169486* (November 24, 2009).

Twitter posts, Facebook pages, and other Web postings are a mix of more or less official sites loosely coordinated, often administered only at the discretion of the users within the agency. Occasionally, as in the case of the Department of Defense, lower-level agencies within the department have conflicting policies. Though soldiers on Army networks are allowed to use Twitter and Facebook to post updates and photos to friends and family back home, the Marine Corps has banned the same sites from its networks, citing the difficulty of properly vetting this type of media.

Government agencies run the risk of people creating fake Facebook and other Web pages that may distort their image or message.

The FBI provides an excellent example of the danger that sites such as Facebook represent for government agencies. Precisely because anyone can create a group, a search for "FBI" within Facebook's groups lists not only the FBI's career group, but several official-*looking* groups, with a seal similar or identical to the FBI's, which are completely unaffiliated. Agencies run the risk of people creating fake pages which may distort their image or message. To combat this from a liability standpoint, the government should publish an accessible, official list of social-networking pages in use by U.S. government agencies.[26]

U.S. embassies have seen the potential of social Web sites for facilitating public diplomacy. Embassies in Pakistan and Indonesia both have Facebook pages, offering information about the United States and American culture to an audience roughly 13 to 26 years of age. Degrees of success vary wildly, however. The U.S. embassy in Indonesia boasts 19,640 "fans" as of December 1. Its Web site bears an official U.S. government seal, and has a professional look that lives up to its diplomatic purpose. By contrast, the U.S. embassy in Pakistan has 539 Facebook "fans," and is more difficult to identify as an official group—the site has no official seal, no State Department e-mail address, and a casual homemade look. This highlights the very pertinent question of official policy guidelines regulating U.S. government use of online social networking.

The challenges the U.S. government faces in harnessing social media are numerous. While it is essential that government have a coordinated message, the "grassroots" nature of social media makes it both difficult and somewhat undesirable to control them. The appeal of social media is precisely its feeling of intimacy and informality, and the government runs the risk of diminishing, even destroying, this appeal of social media through regulation. The content on social-networking sites should be both interesting and pertinent to *individuals*—people, not formal information, are the essence of social interaction.

On the other hand, lack of regulation incurs serious risk for agencies involved in sensitive areas, such as defense and diplomacy. For regulation within the government to be effective, the government must establish policy guidelines (possibly similar to those applied by The Heritage Foundation to its blogs—all Heritage blogs must be approved by the foundation's department directors and blog editors) without destroying the intimate feel of social networking. This media's strength lies in its freshness and unregulated feel, allowing people to become personally involved.

Finally, Internet access is not widely available in many regions of the world where the United States needs to be engaged. Though 75 percent of the U.S. population has access to the Internet, only 17.4 percent of the population in Asia and 5.6 percent in Africa are connected.[27] In many regions of the world shortwave radio and television still far outperform the new media. As far as technology is concerned the world is advancing at an uneven pace. This means that a national strategy must be based on sophisticated analysis and assessment of the relative effectiveness of platforms in various parts of

26. Andrea DiMaio, "Faking Government Agencies on Facebook," Blogs.Gartner.com, July 9, 2009, at *http://blogs.gartner.com/andrea_dimaio/2009/07/09/faking-government-agencies-on-facebook* (November 24, 2009).
27. David Herbert, "Digital Divide Thwarts Online Diplomatic Efforts," *National Journal*, April 23, 2009, at *http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/no_20090415_4481.php* (November 24, 2009).

the world. Such considerations are critical to success in the context of today's public diplomacy.

Cell Phone Technology: A Promising Tool for the Government

Twitter. Twitter is one of the 50 most popular sites on the Web,[28] receiving an average 55 million users each month.[29] Users (whether individuals, government agencies, or private groups) can create an account to send messages of up to 140 characters to other Twitter subscribers. The State Department's Dipnote Twitter account lists 8,986 "followers," Twitter users who specifically signed up to receive Dipnote tweets. Tweets are usually received as text messages on cell phones, often directing followers to lengthier content viewable on the sender's Twitter Web page. Government agencies are able to quickly set up Twitter accounts, making information widely available to interested members of the public. The Food and Drug Administration, for instance, issues food recalls via Twitter, and the State Department (Dipnote) and White House (USAtwitt) "tweet" alerts on press releases linked to their respective Web sites. Since Twitter relies on cell phones, it is widely available to 78 million cell phone users in Pakistan (44.3 percent of the population), and 10.5 million users[30] in Afghanistan (23 percent of the population, projected to climb to 72 percent by 2011).[31]

Twitter is clearly effective in communicating critical information during a rapidly unfolding situation, and has important potential as a public diplomacy tool for that reason. Twitter is a grassroots tool, ideally suited to spreading information that would otherwise have little or no means of transmission. From a "top-down" perspective, Twitter appears most promising for monitoring and rapid alert, allowing officials to react to unfolding events. This was exemplified in Iran during the post-election protests and violent government crackdown. Other examples are travel advisories to trouble spots, food and product recalls, and infectious disease alerts. State Department Spokesman Ian Kelly has referred to Twitter as "a vital tool for citizens' empowerment" in the context of the Iranian election.[32] This tool was also used extensively by Barack Obama's staff to organize and mobilize his base during the 2008 presidential election campaign.

The use of Twitter by the government to inform the public of its policies, agendas, and activities seems, however, to turn the medium's ideal use on its head—possibly diminishing its impact through information overload of the medium and overexposure of government users.

Mobile SMS Text. An SMS (short message service) is a short text message sent by cell phone. The State Department has experimented with SMS text-diplomacy. Before President Obama's policy speech in Accra, Ghana, where he addressed the country's parliament, the State Department invited Africans to text their questions to the President and sent out SMS speech updates during his speech. Invitations to send text messages were posted on embassy Web pages and America.gov, the State Department's public diplomacy home page. Africans were encouraged to send their questions in French or English, and a select number received an SMS reply containing highlights of the President's speech. Regular service fees applied for texts sent to the President. The fact that texting is a fairly expensive medium for the users, who have to pay to receive messages, probably means that its scope is limited (a similar limitation applies to Twitter).

28. Alexa, The Web Information Company, at *http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/twitter.com* (November 24, 2009).
29. Andy Kazeniac, "Social Networks: Facebook Takes Over Top Spot, Twitter Climbs," Blog.Compete.com, February 9, 2009, at *http://blog.compete.com/2009/02/09/facebook-myspace-twitter-social-network* (November 24, 2009).
30. Jared A. Cohen, "Diverting the Radicalization Track," *Policy Review*, April and May 2009, at *http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/41784647.html* (November 24, 2009).
31. Scott Simon, "State Department Guru Talks Twitter Diplomacy," NPR.org, October 17, 2009, at *http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=113876776* (November 24, 2009).
32. Ian Kelly, "Daily Press Briefing," U.S. Department of State, June 16, 2009, at *http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2009/124991.htm* (November 24, 2009).

X-Life Games. One of the more unusual efforts launched as a part of the State Department's new media public diplomacy campaign are "X-Life" cell phone games. According to the games' creators, the first two games were launched in the Middle East to allow young people there to "experience the dynamism and vitality of American life" by "projecting the fundamental values that Americans cherish: tolerance, freedom, and respect for cultural and religious differences." The games wrap an American history lesson inside a video game for cell phones. Since their release in early 2009, the games have reached some 2,000 "registered gamers," the top five user nations being Egypt (438), Indonesia (323), USA (214), Lebanon (131), and Jordan (110).

Technological innovations such as X-Life capture headlines, but they pose a great risk of waste to taxpayers and to the State Department. Even a quick comparison and analysis of the cost-to-benefit measured in time, focus, and expense is telling. In order to launch this new medium, the State Department established a start-up tech company, MetroStar Systems, employing 75 people to create and maintain X-Life. This effort is currently reaching only an estimated 2,000 gamers, of which 20 percent are within the United States.[33] By contrast, the State Department's Facebook page setup is free, requires only two staff members to update its content, and reached 23,786 fans worldwide as of October 27.[34]

Conclusion

The U. S. government, traditional media, and the public often view "new media" as a magic tool, portending a revolution in the way the U.S. government conducts public diplomacy and addresses the world. In time, it may indeed be the "game changer" that Undersecretary McHale talked about in her confirmation hearing, and new media does make it possible to connect with previously unreached and under-engaged populations. However, to realize this advantage, the strengths, limitations, and risks of each media tool must be properly understood, and technologies must be wisely used to their respective comparative advantage. This is why the framework of a National Communications Strategy is desperately needed in order for U.S. public diplomacy to rise above mere strategy and tactics.

In her confirmation testimony before Congress, Judith McHale spoke of the need for just such a strategy. While Twitter, for instance, is excellent at providing small, timely bits of essential information, it is fatiguing and ineffective for routine updates. The U.S. government, in the person of the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, must provide agencies engaging in outbound communication with guidelines and metrics to establish that their use of new media is on message, recognizable as official, and wisely deployed in order to avoid destroying the intrinsic appeal of a given media to the target audience. Lastly, the government must realize that there are new media that are valuable tools, and others that are a distracting waste of time and taxpayer resources.

Congress and the Administration should:

- **Create a National Communications Strategy articulated by the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy.** The Administration has been tasked by Congress with producing such a strategy by December 31, 2009. If public diplomacy is to become an effective outreach tool for the U.S. government, it will be as part of a tool kit, a coordinated government-wide approach, and a deliberate effort to harmonize messaging. Such a strategy is critical for Public Diplomacy 2.0 to reach its potential and be more than decentralized, trial-and-error efforts by individual government departments.
- **Formulate government-wide guidelines to ensure that the new media is on message,** as well as standards for official use of social media, ensuring that government Web pages can be identified and differentiated from impersonators without destroying the appeal of the particular

33. Andrew Nusca, "With Video Games, Public Diplomacy by Mobile Phone," Smartplanet.com, August 25, 2009, at *http://www.smartplanet.com/business/blog/smart-takes/with-video-games-public-diplomacy-by-mobile-phone/387* (November 24, 2009).

34. U.S. Department of State group, available by signing on to *http://www.facebook.com* (November 24, 2009).

media to its audience. Proper analysis of the way government agencies use social media will be needed to make Internet presence more than simply a nifty way of issuing press releases. "Web 2.0" is not a cohesive whole, but a collection of different, complementary tools that must be evaluated individually as well as in concert.

- **Establish a new non-governmental or semi-governmental research organization** (a Corporation for Foreign Opinion Analysis) that can track the effectiveness and persuasiveness among foreign audiences of U.S. public diplomacy and strategic communications. A Corporation for Foreign Opinion Analysis would analyze the effectiveness of the new media in reaching targeted audience segments around the world, which vary widely according to the availability of technology, the control by autocratic governments of information flows, and local cultures.

When employed strategically, social-networking sites clearly offer potential for U.S. public diplomacy to reach younger, tech-savvy audiences around the world. Social-networking sites can also be cost-effective and run with relatively low overhead. Yet, nothing can replace the power of person-to-person contact and individual exposure to American culture. Furthermore, the unevenness of global technological progress means that a variety of media will remain critical to spreading the U.S. message. As part of a clear and calibrated U.S. government communications strategy, however, Public Diplomacy 2.0 can be a valuable tool.

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