U.S. Public Diplomacy: Is It Working?

Opposition to the U.S. and its foreign policies has intensified since the start of the war in Iraq according to a survey by the Pew Research Center who polled 7,500 people in nine countries. American prestige is at an all time low. What can be done to improve America's image abroad? Is public diplomacy a noble futility? What role for the private sector?

Moderator:
Sarwar Kashmeri, Strategy and Communications Consultant and Fellow, Foreign Policy Association

Panelists:
Amb. Robert R. Gosende, Associate Vice Chancellor, Office of International Programs, State University of New York

Jerrold Keilson, Director, Business Development, Creative Associates International, Inc.

John Zogby, President and CEO, Zogby International

Introduction:
John Donvan, Nightline Correspondent and Guest Anchor, ABC News

Transcript:

John Donvan:

On our final panel discussion tonight, I might open by pointing out that one of the questions we’ve all been asking since September 11, 2001, in the media, elsewhere, in our own lives, is the question put most simply as ‘Why do they hate us? Why do they not
like us?’ There tend to be three answers that people like to pursue. One is that it’s because of who we are. That tends to be President Bush’s explanation. The other possibility -- it is because of what we do. And the third possibility, it is because of what we say. On the front of what we say, you may recall a rather catastrophic effort was made to address that in the wake of 2001, in which a Madison Avenue executive was brought into the White House and created a series of television ads to be broadcast to the Muslim world, in which it was said by us that we’re nice people, and it just didn’t go over. The other way to work with the issue of what we say and who we are is through diplomacy, which is far more complicated, far more nuanced, takes far more work and far more investment than actually turning out television ads. It requires professionals whom we have, and it also requires a commitment to diplomacy and a belief that diplomacy works and that it’s worth doing. That will be essentially the topic of our next discussion: U.S. Public Diplomacy: Is It Working?

Reading from the description of this particular conference: opposition to the United States and its foreign policies has intensified since the start of the war in Iraq. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center polling 7,500 people in nine countries, American prestige is at an all-time low. What can be done to improve America’s image abroad? Is public diplomacy part of the answer? To lead this discussion I’d like to introduce Sarwar Kashmeri, who is a strategy and communications consultant and Fellow of the Foreign Policy Association.

Sarwar Kashmeri:

Thank you, John. Thank you, that’s quite a crowd for the last session. I am aware, as a law school professor friend of mine used to say, that I’m all that stands between you and the bar, so thanks for coming. Allow me a personal moment. As you know we have a lot of fine men and women with us today from West Point. I just wanted to take a moment to say to all of you, thank you for your service. You and your comrades have around the world, Iraq, Afghanistan, showed exemplary bravery, initiative, leadership and too many times you’ve paid the ultimate price. I just want you to know that it is for me, and I’m sure I speak for all of us here, an honor to be with you ladies and gentleman, so thank you.

Now, we started this morning with a session called “The View from Wall Street,” and one of the nice things about financial sessions is that they have numbers which talk about the market and numbers clear up, the market clears up, and I thought that’s how we would start today to set the stage for public diplomacy. Depending on whose numbers you use, we spend roughly a billion dollars a year on everything that has to do with public diplomacy, and the results have been startling.

A recent report pointed out that in the predominately Muslim countries that were surveyed, anger towards the United States remains pervasive. After the expenditure of that money, Osama bin Laden is viewed favorably by large percentages in Pakistan, 65 percent, Jordan, 55 percent, Morocco, 45 percent. Even in Turkey, where bin Laden is highly unpopular, as many as 31 percent say that suicide attacks against Americans and
other Westerners in Iraq are justifiable. Majorities in all four Muslim nations surveyed doubt the sincerity of the war on terrorism; instead most say it is an effort to control Mideast oil and to dominate the world. In Great Britain support for the decision to go to war has plummeted, from 61 percent a year ago to 43 percent in the March Pew survey. Zogby, in a June poll, showed that 76 percent of Egyptians viewed the United States unfavorably, that was a year ago. After two billion dollars in aid, that number now is 98 percent. Now those are our friends. Clearly something is wrong.

Public diplomacy is a much used phrase. I would recommend for those of you who would like to, to visit a wonderful site. It’s [www.publicdiplomacy.org](http://www.publicdiplomacy.org) It was set up by a number of the alumni of the USIA [United States Information Agency]. The phrase public diplomacy, the site says, simply doesn’t do the concept justice. When a student or scholar in a developing country conducts research in a U.S. information center in his capital city he is utilizing one of the popular services provided by U.S. public diplomats in his country. When a newspaper correspondent in a country that has diplomatic relations with the U.S. asks for clarification of a statement allegedly made by a high ranking U.S. official, he contacts the U.S. embassy’s press attaché, a U.S. public diplomat. When a student or an educator in a foreign country wants to know more about U.S. education in general, or a specific college or university program, it may be a U.S. public diplomat or someone on his staff to whom such a query is directed. When a U.S. performing artist is on a foreign tour sponsored by the U.S. government, U.S. public diplomats in the cities the artists visit publicize the tour, and make arrangements for his or her performance. Those are all the different kinds of actions that public diplomacy encompasses, and then there is *Voice of America*, the recent Arabic TV channel and so on.

Now, to help us put all of this into perspective and answer questions, we have quite a panel, actually. Starting on the extreme left we have Mr. John Zogby, who is the President and CEO of Zogby International, the well-known polling firm which recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary. Since 1996 John Zogby has polled for Reuters News Agency, the largest news agency in the world, and in 2000 polled for NBC News. His firm’s polling drives news stories in the Wall Street Journal, MSNBC and leading newspapers around the country. This list includes virtually every daily in New York State as well as television stations throughout the United States.

Next to him we have Ambassador Robert Gosende, Associate Vice Chancellor for the International Programs at the State University of New York. Ambassador Robert Gosende has served with great distinction in Republican and Democrat administrations. He was President Clinton’s Special Envoy to Somalia in 1993. He’s also served as a diplomat in residence at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Affairs and with the U.S. State Department in Moscow. I am giving you a précis of their bios all of which the complete bio is available in the handouts to you.

And last but not least, Mr. Jerrold Keilson. He’s Director of Business Development, Creative Associates International, Inc., and member of the board of the National Council of International Visitors. He’s a historian by training; Jerrold has spent nearly 25 years
working in international affairs. Mr. Keilson is currently Director of Business Development for Creative Associates, a Washington D.C.-based professional services firm that implements primary education and civil society strengthening projects in 20 countries around the world. He began his career in international affairs as a Foreign Service officer with the State Department.

Now, this is how I thought we would run our panel. What I will do is walk and sit, and ask each one of these gentleman to say what’s on their mind for five minutes. I’ll start with John Zogby because his firm has conducted a special poll for the Foreign Policy Association and for this panel which talks about America and the world around it, which is so pertinent to what we are about to talk today. So we’ll let them all talk for a few minutes, then I have a few questions to ask them, after that we’ll open it up for questions from you, and then we’ll allow them to wrap up. So that’s what we’ll try and do. So without further ado, I’ll walk over, and John may I turn it over to you?

John Zogby:

That’s fine with me. The microphone is on I see. We prepared a power point and you should have a hard copy black and white of the power point. I’m sorry that you’re going to miss the taupe and lovely chartreuse that our wonderful graphics folks produced, but picture the colors in your mind as I go through them. I’m going to go through this page by page. We have some really fascinating results. We have a news release that’s gone out on the wire as of a couple of hours ago, and the phones are ringing so that’s good news for the Foreign Policy Association. We conducted this among 1,011 likely voters in mid-August, the 12 through the 14. Each result that you see here has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.1, and so let’s get right into it. These are some select results.

“Do you often agree or disagree that the U.S. is a nation with self interests that too often conflict with its espoused ideals of freedom and democracy?” Fifty-four percent agreed with that, 40 percent disagreed. That’s an interesting result because you’re going to see throughout much of this poll an almost even split on many of the questions we asked, just as the nation is almost evenly split. But that 54 to 40 is very telling.

Let me interpret this second one. I’m going to read you the same list of descriptions. We asked already this list of descriptions and we wanted to know if this is how the United States should behave. This now is the second reading of that list and we asked whether or not they felt this accurately displayed the way the Unites States behaves. There is an error at the bottom of the chart. Instead of July 2004, that’s actually August 2004 and the September is 2003, and I’ll come back to that because the error does recur. But let’s look at these statements very quickly. “The United States is a selfish power that’s willing to sell out those who want freedoms when those desires conflict with our own needs as a nation.” The top bar, 16 percent, was the response last year. 27 percent this year agree that that accurately describes the United States. “A nation with self interests that too often conflict with its espoused ideals of freedom and democracy.” Thirty-two percent agreed last year, just slightly more, 37 percent agreed this year. “A reluctant sheriff with
responsibility to police the world and regional trouble spots.” Thirty-one percent agreed last year, 37 percent this year. “An imperialist power that acts on its own regardless of what the rest of the world thinks.” One in three agreed last year, slightly more, 38 percent, agreed this year. “A genuine superpower, but one that actively seeks out allies in dealing with global issues.” A slight majority, 51 percent, agreed last year, there is a slight erosion, down to 46 this year. “A force to promote the values of freedom and democracy everywhere in the world.” Fifty-eight percent agreed last year, that’s eroded six points down to 52 percent this year and lastly, “a good friend and ally of people who desire freedom and individual rights.” It was 65 percent last year, about the same at 62 percent this year.

“Do you feel the United States is doing a good job of promoting American values, policies, and actions overseas?” We only asked that question this year. Forty-nine percent said yes, but 46 percent said no. That’s the recurring even split, part of the two warring nations within the United States that I talk about often this year.

The next chart shows how evenly split we are. We asked on each of these, “Which presidential candidate do you believe would be a more proactive leader on each of the following situations.” As you will see as I run through these very quickly, each candidate roughly has about the same level of support. The top bar is Kerry, and the bottom bar is Bush. Dealing with Cuba, handling the war on terrorism -- as you can see these are all fairly close. Handling the war on terrorism, more effectively containing nuclear proliferation -- Bush actually trumps Kerry by a few points. Resolving post-war issues in Iraq and lastly, settling the Israel-Palestine dispute. No real advantage for either candidate.

Now we asked, “What’s the most effective way to handle nuclear proliferation?” We offered three brief policy alternatives. Strategy B won with 60 percent. The U.S. would employ a multilateral approach with more reliance on allies like NATO and the UN. That trumped strategy A which called for asserting military strength and even going it alone, or strategy C would continue the current status of alliances in combination with the current level of military force. Interestingly, throughout this poll and in other polls that we’ve done, the most multilateral sector of any of the groups are those under 30-years-old. Eighteen to 30 are the most multilateral. I attribute that to the fact that while under 30 voters may not necessarily be more knowledgeable, they are more globally aware. MTV, I think, has had a major impact and obviously the internet has as well.

“Some argue the UN has been reduced in its influence and is less relevant today in global matters. Others say the UN is needed now more than ever to represent the global perspective in issues that arise.” As you can see the largest bars go to “the UN needed now more than ever,” just about the same as it was last year. About one in three still feel the UN is less relevant.

“How important is the transatlantic alliance to U.S. foreign policy in general?” Eighty-five percent say that it’s important. That’s a combination of very and somewhat important, only 10 percent say not important.
“Please tell me if you agree with each of the following statements.” Again, its August 2004 and September 2003. “The U.S. should sign the Kyoto global warming treaty.” About the same as last year -- not a majority, 44 percent, 42 last year. On the other hand, “the U.S. should sign on as a participant in the International Criminal Court.” The majority said yes. And then, generally speaking, “the U.S. should take a role in the world concerning the protection of the environment, 91 percent agree with that conceptually. Those are fascinating nuances that I’m sure we could talk about.

Two statements about the Kyoto treaty. “Statement A says that the U.S. should ratify the Kyoto Global Warming Treaty it has already signed to reduce the emission of industrial pollutants in the atmosphere. While the treaty reduces U.S. and European emissions at a faster rate than those for countries like China and India, it is only fair that these nations have the opportunity to catch up in industrial development.” Forty-four percent agreed with that this year, about the same as last year. On the other hand, 45 percent agreed with Statement B “that the U.S. should not sign the treaty because it unfairly punishes the U.S. and Europe, and makes them reduce emissions at a faster rate than developing nations and puts the U.S. economy at a severe disadvantage.” On one hand, you have an ardently pro-environmental group of voters, on the other hand nationalism trumps environmentalism.

“Please tell me again if you are more in agreement with A or B. Statement A says the U.S. should ratify the creation of the International Criminal Court that enforces a set of standards against war criminals. By signing on, the U.S. brings its moral voice to this court and takes a strong stand against serious violations of human rights, as in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda. Statement B argues that U.S. participation in the International Criminal Court ties the hands of the U.S. on matters that it should be free to decide upon unilaterally. In addition, the Court could be used against U.S. interests and allies, etc.” You have a majority, 51 percent, but one in three oppose.

NAFTA. Interesting results on NAFTA and free trade. “NAFTA has been in effect now for ten years. Do you believe that NAFTA has been a good thing or a bad thing for the U.S.?” Forty-eight percent now say it’s a bad thing, fifteen points greater than last year.

“Do you believe NAFTA’s created more jobs?” Sixty-three percent say less jobs -- that’s a growth or a decline I should say. Only 18 percent say more jobs. Free trade is like affirmative action. Americans endorse the concept, but the devil is in the details. Americans don’t like to think of things 10 years down the road, they like to think of what’s happening now, and right now they see NAFTA and free trade as a loser.

How about the issue of outsourcing or off shoring to developing countries like India? One point of view says it enhances the middle class in those countries which in turn allows them to purchase more U.S. goods and then improves our economy. The others say the outsourcing of jobs overseas poses a real threat to job creation. Seventy-one percent endorse the idea that it hurts our economy. That’s how they feel. Now, I call this issue of outsourcing the PCB economic issue. You know how it takes five parts per trillion of
PCBs to pollute an entire river? 225,000 service jobs being outsourced to India has polluted the entire job outlook in this country. One out of five voters now tell us, “I’m afraid of losing my job in the next twelve months,” but one out of four voters earning $75,000 a year or more, one out of four suburban voters as well tell us, “I’m afraid of losing my job in the next twelve months.” A lot of that is attributed to the fact that a relatively small number of good paying white collar jobs have been outsourced to India or abroad. “Do you personally feel that outsourcing to other countries has placed your family’s livelihood at risk?” Fifty percent say yes, 40 percent say no. Those 225,000 jobs are like the loaves and fishes in the New Testament. “Do you agree or disagree that free trade is good for America?” Seventy-nine percent agree. The concept is solid, they say, the devil is in the details.

Lastly, “which power poses the greatest threat to the United States?” This was a great question- it comes from Noel [Lateef]. Economically, 53 percent said China and 22 percent said China militarily. Militarily, North Korea is the greatest military threat to the U.S. in terms of perceptions at 37 percent. Which power is the greatest threat to the United States culturally? It’s only 14 percent China, 11 percent the European Union. No one really wins that battle. Lots to talk about here and our full report I believe is going to be on the FPA website. It will also be posted at zogby.com. Thanks for the opportunity of doing the poll. Thank you.

Sarwar Kashmeri:

Thank you John. Ambassador Gosende, may I ask you to tell us what’s on your mind regarding public diplomacy? You have a lot of experience here, in the trenches and outside.

Amb. Robert Gosende:

Kash, thanks very much. I will be very, very brief. I think that to discuss public diplomacy, which is I think much misunderstood in the broadest sense, it probably makes sense to begin with a bit of a definition of soft power. This comes from Joseph Nye, the man who is currently just stepping down as the Dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard. I’ll read right what Joe says about this. “Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. When you can get others to do what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of a country’s military and economic might. Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of the other, our soft power is enhanced.” By the way, the latest issue of the Political Science Quarterly has a piece by Joe Nye on soft power and American foreign policy. The latest issue of Great Decisions has a piece on public diplomacy as all of you who know this journal know, and the latest issue of Foreign Policy Magazine is full of articles that touch upon this whole issue of soft power or public diplomacy. I think that these journals including this indicate that this is somewhat of an issue.
Part of the reason I think that it’s become an issue -- and I’m surprised as a retired Foreign Service officer from the U.S. Information Agency that this has happened so quickly -- is the great crisis that we face right now with a major part of the world. You heard Ambassador Julia Chang Bloch this morning lead the panel on China. I’m sorry I didn’t make it. She [Julia] and I served in the U.S. Information Agency, not concurrently; I succeeded her at one point as the Deputy Area Director for Africa in that agency. The agency, which was America’s public diplomacy arm, went out of existence exactly six years ago in the fall of 1998 when it fell under the ax of the then-Vice President’s national performance review. Al Gore headed a panel to look at how we could downsize, make smaller, the United States government. I think those of us who’ve been semi-conscious for the last years know that a great mantra these days is that somehow the government is too big, it got too big in ways that nobody really wants to examine carefully, but whatever we could do to make it smaller would be good. So, very quickly the U.S. Information Agency was abolished, and with the passage of the budget for fiscal year 1999 it went out of existence. At the height of when Ambassador Bloch and I worked in that agency, at its apex, it had a billion dollars and change as its budget. That was for all of the activities of the United States Information Agency, the Voice of America, the Fulbright Program worldwide, the libraries we ran, the information centers we ran, WorldNet television service, Radio Martee, TV Martee- all of the activities of public diplomacy worldwide. Now, how much is a billion dollars? Well, let’s think about it for a minute. The last panel told us, Ambassador Ned Walker, that the current budget for the enterprise in Iraq is two hundred billion dollars, so one billion is a small percentage of 200 billion for one project in one country.

**Sarwar Kashmeri:**

That’s per year?

**Amb. Robert Gosende:**

Per year. At its height, the U.S. Information Agency’s budget was $1.087, if I remember correctly, but it didn’t make 1.1 billion dollars. In fiscal year 2002, the combined costs of the State Department’s public diplomacy programs and all of our international broadcasting that year was just over a billion dollars. So between 1998 and 2002 nothing’s gone up as far as public diplomacy is concerned. About the same amount, one billion dollars, spent by both Britain and France in this same activity is about a billion dollars a year. It is also equal to one quarter of one percent of the military budget. No one has suggested we spend as much to launch ideas as to launch bombs, but it does seem odd that we spend 400 times as much on hard power as we do on soft power. This is again Joe Nye talking about soft power. I just thought we ought to understand as we begin our discussion, or part of what ought to come out of this is how much we’re currently spending in this activity currently. How much of a threat it is to the fiscal integrity of the republic, if you would like to put it that way. If we spent, for example, just one percent of the military budget on public diplomacy it would mean quadrupling the amount of money we spend on public diplomacy.
So, I think it’s terribly important for us to understand how much money we’re talking about, because as you talk about a worldwide television service or a worldwide radio service you think, “Oh my God, we can’t afford these things.” Is that true? Can we not afford these things or are they within the realm of us being able to afford them? I want to wind up, but I don’t want to wind up without two things that Kash has asked me to relay. The Fulbright program, which I think many of us in this room have come to understand in our adult lives as one of the greatest things that our country has ever done. A friend of mine working on this program in Washington today said, “Bob, do you think anybody here currently worrying about our foreign policy really cares about a program started by a dead Democratic senator from Arkansas?”

Now, I think we’ve all heard -- those of us who’ve worked overseas -- that this program has more salience, understanding, appreciation outside the United States than it does within the United States. But I think we’re at an alarming point right now, when some of the people working on the program are getting the feeling that, hey, that’s just a program named after a dead Democrat from Arkansas. Not only that, the dead Democrat from Arkansas had Bill Clinton as a young student intern in his office. You know, a program that has gone into the Oxford English Dictionary -- that’s the way it’s seen throughout the rest of the world -- is little understood and even less appreciated within the boundaries of our own country.

The other thing that Kash asked me to repeat is just sort of my impressions as a public diplomat about where we are now. I’ll say this and then end on some positive things. I think we’re really at the edge of the apocalypse. Tom Pickering, the past Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, I think last year said anti-Americanism was as high as it’s been in 50 years. I think with where we are right now in our relations with the Muslim world, we’re at the edge of something really apocalyptic. How we are able to contain that, if we are able to contain it within Iraq is going to be a real challenge. My university, I just learned today, has been awarded a contract to begin work on democratic development in Morocco and we’re at the edge of one in Kuwait, and I’m worried about whether we’re going to be able to conduct those programs—whether we can send people safely into Morocco and Kuwait if the trend continues the way it is.

Now, to get off the negative business and relay to you one very positive thing: Last year we embarked on our first dual-deployment programs with Turkey. We’ve collaborated between six of our campuses and six Turkish universities opportunities to do about half of their undergraduate work on their home campus and half with us. We created 300 initial opportunities, 3,865 Turkish students signed up for one or another of those 300 positions. This year we increased the number to 550 and 550 students have signed up. That is enormously encouraging because despite the fact that in Turkey public opinion is overwhelmingly against what we’re doing in Iraq, it still says to us that the younger generation there would like to come and study in the United States. I think that’s the kind of thing we’ve got to lead with, it’s the kind of thing that Joe Nye is talking about here with soft power. It’s the kind of thing that our government should be supporting. It’s the kind of thing I’m very proud that my university is supporting. I think it’s where we’ve got to go. There are no short-term solutions to what’s happening in our relations with the
Muslim world, the Arab world. But how long is a long-term solution? A four-year undergraduate degree is not that long a period of time, and I think we do nothing better to convince young people about what we are as a people than to bring them here and let them study us as they study in their chosen field, and learn warts and all what we’re all about.

Sarwar Kashmeri:

I think, Bob that you make an excellent point, and I just wanted to cue Jerrold with that. I was having lunch with a board member of the FPA this week, who mentioned that the President of Georgia, [Mikheil] Saakashvili, came at an exchange program to Harvard, then served as an apprentice with a law firm in New York before going back to Georgia and becoming the President. Now that took a number of years, but how does one attach a cost-benefit? We now have a president of a country in a very sensitive area who is, probably, a friend for life. I know Jerrold, that you have dealt with budgets and policies and I wanted you to touch on how one does determine cost effectiveness.

Amb. Robert Gosende:

Let me just say one last thing about Saakashvili. Our Ambassador to Georgia, Dick Miles was at the Harvard Weatherhead Center for International Affairs last fall. They brought up the Saakashvili issue and a student said, “Mr. Ambassador, what were you doing in the embassy when that Rose Revolution was going on out there in the street?” The inference behind that was that somehow the embassy had microphones out, or was in connection with the crowd on the street. And Dick said, “What were we doing? We were watching out the window.” You can’t expect that an American embassy could do anything then. But what he said was, that 10 years earlier the embassy had been picking Saakashvili and others of his cabinet now to come to the United States on the Muskee program and study here for a year, and that that was what was important that day that the Rose Revolution was going on. Okay, just to give you some idea of what’s going on right now. The Muskee program was cut this year by 65 percent in Russia because people have said, Russia’s ready to graduate now. We don’t need to worry about Russia, okay? The Fulbright program was cut by 50 percent last year in Russia. That’s why these relatively small amounts of money are so terribly important. Jerrold.

Jerrold Keilson:

I was going to mention some other things, but I think maybe I’ll talk a little bit about this because I think the issue of long-term impact and measuring the long-term effectiveness of these kinds of public diplomacy programs is critical, and the U.S. government through some of its policies has really put us in a bind. In 1993 I think it was, the government passed the Government Performance Results Act of 1993 which mandated that any expenditure of a government agency had to result in some sort of measurable result or impact. And of course, that had to be done within a budget cycle, within a program cycle. In most cases, I think in the case of the former USIA, budgets were done on an annual basis. In terms of the USAID programs, generally programming was done on a four or
five-year basis, and so you had to design and implement a program that over a four or five-year basis would result in some measurable impact. In the case at hand, they were thinking about exchanges and public diplomacy efforts more generally. These are 20 and 30-year programs. These are programs where you have some initial impact on somebody, you touch somebody maybe by bringing them to the United States for a short study tour or give them a scholarship to the United States. The embassy remains in touch with them periodically over a period of time. Twenty years down the line they become the president of the country or a senior leader and they are a friend of the United States. The problem is that that is not measurable within a budget cycle, and that I think has been a significant factor in contributing to the cutbacks in expenditures.

I would also point out that there is a long history of current and former leaders who have come to the United States on these exchange or training programs: Margaret Thatcher, Anwar Sadat, DeClerk from South Africa, Karzai from Afghanistan, or other people who had been leaders of their country who had participated on exchange or public diplomacy programs and twenty or thirty years later were in positions of power to affect change. In fact, there is a story -- it might be apocryphal -- that DeClerk came to the United States in the early 1960s, which of course was a period of great civil rights unrest in this country, and as a young South African he went around and saw various things, and the program that he was on was designed to not only show him a propagandistic view of the United States, i.e. the government perspective, but because of the nature of the program took him into small towns and had him meet with all sorts of citizens. The story goes that he was so struck by the fact that even in the 1960s south in the United States that blacks and whites were able to live together and were in the process of figuring out how they could work out the huge civil rights issues, that subsequently when he became the prime minister of South Africa he came at the issues of apartheid with the understanding that it could be worked out because of what he had seen 30 years before in the United States. I don’t know if that’s a true story, but it’s been told to me by people who maybe should know. But it really speaks to the power of public diplomacy.

Kash gave one definition of what public diplomacy is. Edward Murrow, who was the head of USIA also about 40 years ago, said that public diplomacy is about bridging that three-foot-gap between me and you. What that means is the effort is getting people to know each other. As Ambassador Gosende mentioned, that includes looking at exchange programs, Muskee programs, other kinds of government-funded programs, but it also has another dimension to it which maybe is not so much focusing on the government. I want to ask everybody here: how many of you have been Peace Corps volunteers in your past lives? How many of you have traveled to other countries? How many of you have sent your children on high school exchange programs or college study abroad programs? How many of you have done business overseas? You’re all public diplomats. Congratulations. Each and every time that you go overseas or engage a person from another country and have the opportunity to talk to them about your life, American foreign policy, American values, their lives and their countries, whatever it might be, you are as a private citizen engaging in a public diplomacy activity. You are bridging that three-foot gap between you and somebody in another country.
I think that is the essence of what the public diplomacy challenge is all about. How do we bridge that gap? Related to that is the question of what we are talking about when we are trying to bridge that gap. What are we selling when we engage in public diplomacy activities? I think, John, your polls have suggested that trying to sell U.S. policy in the Middle East, policy vis a vis Israel, Iraq, and so forth is just a non-starter because they’re not buying it. You cannot sell, as the old joke goes, a refrigerator to Eskimos. You’re not going to be able to sell a policy that is so inathomate to people that they’re just not going to hear it. So maybe the question we should ask ourselves in thinking about public diplomacy is what is it that we’re selling? What are the messages that we’re giving? Maybe it shouldn’t be policy. Maybe it should be principles or core values or whatever term you may want to talk about.

I’ll just tell another story. A few years ago I had the opportunity to go to Mexico, and I interviewed 60 Mexicans who had been to the U.S. on these exchange programs. Mexico is a funny place because people there know a lot about America. They see American movies, they get American TV, and most of them go shopping in San Diego or in Texas. Many of them have family in the United States, and so they feel they’re very familiar with America. I remember one gentleman -- a journalist from Tijuana who one would think would know a lot about America -- had been on an exchange program, a public diplomacy program and he said his perception of America changed when he went to a farmhouse in a small community in Illinois and sat down with a family and he said it was a normal family just like in Mexico. ‘The kids didn’t have piercings, there wasn’t loud music, they prayed before they ate, and everybody was respectful and they cleared the table afterwards and we had a very nice conversation.’ He then went on to tell me that that incident changed his perception of the United States. Previously he had a very different point of view. So, if we try to sell policies and policies change -- we have one administration, the Bush administration, maybe there will be a new administration and policies will change. But arguably American core values and American principles, the things that we’re all so very proud of as Americans, well those are things that we should talk about, and maybe if we think about public diplomacy those are more saleable items - - those may have more resonance to these audiences.

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