Re-Valuing Public Diplomacy in the Trump Era

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Public diplomacy has been an integral part of U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II. Public diplomacy seeks to advance U.S. goals, promote U.S. national interests, and expand U.S. values internationally by directly engaging with foreign publics and thus shape their views in support of the United States. Public diplomacy is particularly relevant at this time because of sophisticated campaigns seeking to undermine U.S. power and security, U.S. strategic alliances and friendships, and U.S. shared beliefs such as the legitimacy of democratic governance and the protection of human rights of groups and individuals around the world. This article argues that U.S. public diplomacy is in critical need of a new approach that re-values its importance in U.S. foreign policy. Several problems impinge on U.S. public diplomacy today. Some are the result of developments that originated decades ago; others point to emerging new challenges. We contend that these problems overlap and reinforce each other, creating a sense of paralysis. This situation is unlikely to change in the Trump administration. More likely, it will continue to deteriorate. U.S. public diplomacy is underfunded, understaffed, and undervalued, while U.S. adversaries have deep pockets and display long-term public diplomacy strategies.

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This article argues that U.S. public diplomacy is in critical need of a new approach that re-values its importance in U.S. foreign policy. Several problems impinge on U.S. public diplomacy today. Some of them are the result of developments which originated decades ago, but others point to emerging new challenges. We contend that these problems overlap and reinforce each other creating a sense of paralysis. This situation is unlikely to change in the Trump administration. More likely, it will continue to deteriorate. U.S. public diplomacy is underfunded, understaffed, and undervalued, while U.S. adversaries have deep pockets and display long-term public diplomacy strategies.

We identify four ongoing challenges to U.S. public diplomacy and suggest an additional one resulting from the Trump administration’s approach to foreign policy. First, public diplomacy is hamstrung by an unclear focus and direction since the end of the Cold War, resulting in budgetary reductions and continual reorganization. Public diplomacy has become reactive instead of proactive. Second, public diplomacy has followed the retrenchment of the state’s presence in economy and society. For lack of a better categorization, we call it the privatization of public diplomacy. The process, however, is more nuanced than the idea of privatization entails. Third, public diplomacy is increasingly defined in terms of national security, national defense, and counterterrorism strategy. This is problematic. To be clear, public diplomacy is a tool that helps to buttress the security of U.S. interests at home and overseas, but it is not a blunt tool of hard power. It is an exercise of soft power. Fourth, closely related to and a consequence of challenges listed above, public diplomacy is increasingly defined in terms of producing a message to counter disinformation and propaganda. Public diplomacy helps dispel foreign publics’ misperceptions about the United States.

For public diplomacy to operate successfully, it must operate as a two-way channel and not be perceived as overt government propaganda. Public diplomacy must engage the local population and allow foreign publics to engage with the U.S. people. The Trump administration has touted a new model or paradigm for public diplomacy. This new model is premised on the introduction of best practices followed by other governments and private actors, primarily business firms. Under the Trump administration, public diplomacy is steered by public relations professionals and journalists, largely from Fox News (U.S. Department of State 2019). Additionally, the administration has shown enthusiasm for new
forms of technology and social media to deliver public diplomacy safely and remotely (U.S. National Security Strategy 2017; U.S. Department of State and USAID 2018).

This article is organized in the following manner. The first section introduces the concept of public diplomacy and reviews the literature on public diplomacy. It identifies soft power and its connection with public diplomacy. We also include a discussion of key concepts useful to understand public diplomacy and review different practices of public diplomacy. Our analysis draws from the contributions of authors in international relations theory and considers public diplomacy as an expanding subset of studies in international relations. The second section is a discussion of the historical evolution of U.S. public diplomacy. We put particular emphasis on the post-Cold War period since we believe it is the most consequential moment in U.S. public diplomacy. The third section analyzes public diplomacy in the Trump administration. At first glance, it may appear premature to attempt such a task considering the limited time in office. However, there are substantial official documents and staffing decisions that allow us to discern the direction and content of U.S. public diplomacy under the Trump administration. The final section is the conclusion of the article. We argue that there is a basic failure to understand that the essence of public diplomacy has not changed and that it continues to be strategically relevant. This lack of understanding hinders the U.S. ability to use public diplomacy as an effective tool to buttress soft power and places the United States in an increasingly vulnerable position. The absence of a robust public diplomacy strategy is not immediately evident because we are still drawing down on deep reserves of soft power accumulated decades ago.

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is a government’s effort to communicate directly with foreign publics in order to bring to them an understanding of its country’s ideas, values, institutions, culture, and policies (Holmes and Rofe 2016; Kerr and Wiseman 2018; Melissen 2005). Public diplomacy is not a form of propaganda conducted by diplomats. It is an effort to build interconnectedness at the level of civil society with individuals and nongovernmental organizations. Yet, this interconnectedness is not a uniquely state activity. Private actors can engage in public diplomacy, too. It presents a variety of private points of view in addition to the official government position expressed by diplomats. Usual manifestations of public diplomacy are cultural and academic exchanges, student exchanges, foreign broadcasting services, cultural centers and libraries, language institutes, art exhibitions, and cultural performances. In recent years, the spread of social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) and electronic
Platforms (cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc.) have dramatically transformed the reach of public diplomacy.

It is hard to dismiss the impression that public diplomacy is just another theoretical or scholarly fad (Holmes and Rofe 2016). However, public diplomacy has deep roots in foreign policy. The term itself was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and retired Foreign Service officer, when he established the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy; but it took decades for the concept to become accepted around the world (Kerr and Wiseman 2018; Melissen 2005).

Public diplomacy points to the transnational nature of international affairs today. As Melissen (2011, 2) argues, public diplomacy can be seen as “a metaphor for the democratization of diplomacy, with multiple actors playing a role in what was once an area restricted to a few.” Thus, public diplomacy is ubiquitous. Many and varied actors engage in public diplomacy from the local to the global level: diplomats, military, artists, athletes, scientists, scholars, students, businesspeople, and people of faith. Their actions help define how others see us. This reflects, in the words of Melissen (2011), a belief that “private initiatives can assist in developing a kind of public diplomacy that is not only less government-driven, but ultimately more effective” (19). Governments that enable people-to-people exchanges, citizen diplomacy, and public-private partnerships recognize that their most valuable asset in public diplomacy is an active civil society (Melissen 2011). Yet, at the same time they are bringing down the traditional separation between the domestic and foreign outreach of diplomacy. This in turn requires a more holistic or integrative approach to diplomacy. As a result, public diplomacy re-contextualizes the conduct of diplomacy. Following Melissen (2011):

Domestic groups and citizens are seen as the government’s potential partners. In such a conception, the support of “at home” citizens for international policy choices is a precondition for effective public diplomacy abroad. International messages must resonate at home, and a society’s projected image must be embedded in its identity to be credible to foreign publics. (20)

Both students and practitioners of public diplomacy acknowledge that diplomacy is changing as a result of broader changes in international relations. This new public diplomacy is fundamentally different from traditional diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy is defined by a state-centered model and hierarchical relations; the new public diplomacy represents a network model. Brian Hocking explains its component parts or “threads” (2005, 28). First, there is the thread of democratic accountability which recognizes the role of public opinion,
transparency, openness, and direct public involvement in diplomacy. Second, the intensification of social flows across national borders point to the blurring of the line separating the local and global contexts. The third thread refers to the impact of innovations in communication and technology. These changes enable more and varied actors to directly participate in world politics. The fourth thread is the impact of global media. Known as the CNN effect, it points to the role of global media in generating pressure on governments and determining foreign policy. A final thread underscores the concern about a country’s image in the world. Borrowing from business lexicon, countries worry about their brand name. A bad image or reputation could negatively impact a country’s capacity to promote exports; attract students, tourists, or foreign investment; and build alliances (Hocking, 2005). As Hocking (2005) asserts, “public diplomacy is increasingly defined as diplomacy by rather than of publics” (32; emphasis in the original).

As discussed by Melissen, the democratization of diplomacy is a more recent phenomenon (2011). Private, nonstate actors contribute greatly to public diplomacy. We will discuss below several expressions of citizens directly engaging in public diplomacy and of public-private partnerships in public diplomacy. Given the broader trend toward privatization and the retrenchment of the state from society and the economy, it is important to consider both the positives and negatives of delegating public diplomacy activities to private actors. Privatization advocates point out that the private sector can perform government functions faster, better, and cheaper. But as Kathy Fitzpatrick (Seib 2009, 165) says, “a number of potential disadvantages should be addressed. Matters related to control, accountability, and mission could be particularly significant in evaluating the desirability and long term benefits of privatization.” There is increased reliance on private contractors to perform functions previously performed by the state. The emphasis in public diplomacy is on incorporating best practices from corporate public relations. Yet involving private actors such as nongovernmental organizations and foundations in administering and funding programs has been a hallmark of public diplomacy for a long time. This discussion is further complicated by governments engaging both for-profit and nonprofit organizations of the private sector and by multinational corporations pursuing their own global public diplomacy strategies. The challenge is to find a way in which private-sector efforts support government efforts without undermining each other. The integration of the private-sector efforts into state diplomacy, while integral to public diplomacy, challenges longtime assumptions in international relations.

Conceptualizations of power in international relations are often dominated by realist scholarship (Hayden 2012). As Hayden (2012) notes, to analyze power as a reflection of ideas, principles, and culture is not easily reconciled with
realist assumptions which explain power as a reflection of material factors (military, economy, and geostrategic position). Moreover, the practice of public diplomacy itself is questioned by realist scholars. For instance, Morgenthau (1948, 433) warns of the “evil wrought by the public conduct of diplomacy.” He contends that this type of diplomacy “has not led to negotiation, nor has it solved any problems which threaten peace in the world” (Morgenthau 1948, 433). However, Morgenthau’s notion of prestige in international politics fits into definitions of power as a reflection of intangible sources. As he notes, “in the struggle for existence and power, which is, as it were, the raw material of the social world, what others think about us is as important as what we actually are.” (Morgenthau 1948, 50–51). The purpose of the policy of prestige is “to impress upon the other nations the power one’s own nation actually possesses or which it believes, or wants the other nations to believe, it possesses” (Morgenthau 1948, 51). Prestige comprises the display of military force as well as ceremonial or symbolic diplomacy (Morgenthau 1948). For Morgenthau, the individual actions of diplomats constitute a projection of state power, or what Nye (2004) refers to as agenda setting or framing such as seating arrangements or order of public introductions. While Morgenthau viewed these interactions between diplomats as a symbol of state power, these exercises remain limited to the realm of professional elites (Hocking 2005; Kerr and Wiseman 2018; Melissen 2005). The concept of prestige and image as a source of influence is central to the idea of public diplomacy. Hart (2013) discusses the centrality of the construction of image in the foundation of U.S. public diplomacy. Hart (2013, 200; emphasis in original) contends that “public diplomacy must be understood first and foremost as the government’s attempt to participate in the process of defining the image of ‘America’ to the world.” The new public diplomacy places the crafting of this intangible source of power on a much broader coalition of participants both within and outside of the government (Hocking 2005; Kerr and Wiseman 2018; Melissen 2005).

Soft Power

Soft power has become a prominent idea in international affairs. Although soft power and public diplomacy are frequently referred to in tandem, they are different concepts and must be considered separately. The idea of soft power is inextricably associated with the work of Joseph Nye. It is a term that has enjoyed a dynamic intellectual evolution over more than two decades. Nye (2004, 2) defines power as “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants.” He argues that there are three different ways to influence the behavior of others: coercion, payments, or coopting them to want what you want. It is the last form which he defines as soft power; that is, “the ability to get what you want through attraction and persuasion” (Nye 2004, x). The soft power

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of a state arises from three resources: its culture when it is attractive to others, its political ideals and values when they are shared by others around the world, and its policies, both domestic and foreign, when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority (Nye 2004).

Nye referred to soft power as “indirect power” or “co-optive power behavior” that is “getting others to want what you want” (Nye 1990, 31). In contrast to direct or command power, countries relying on co-optive power are still able to achieve their desired outcomes because other countries want to achieve the same outcomes or because they have joined and agreed to a system of rules and ideas that produces such results. Command power can consist of the use of force (“sticks”) or threats (“carrots”) to get other countries to do what you want them to do. Command power rests on coercion or inducement; co-optive power rests on the attractiveness of a country’s ideas, culture, or policies. Nye saw co-optive power as a third dimension of power in addition to military and economic power (the two dimensions associated with command power).

Wishing to engage and rebut the contemporary literature of the late 1990s that argued that the power of the United States was in decline, Nye proposed that observers had mistakenly perceived how U.S. power was assessed. The world had changed (and was still changing at the time of his writing) in fundamental ways, rendering old metrics obsolete. “Raw materials and heavy industry are less critical indices of economic power today than are information and professional and technical services” (Nye 1990, 8). These changes were affecting countries differently. Countries lacking the flexibility and ability to adapt to the different world reality were at a disadvantage, such as the Soviet Union and China; the United States was not among them. The risk the United States faced was not power loss or absolute decline, but the pursuit of the wrong strategies in the context of a changing nature of power.

Nye (2002) later cautioned against misinterpreting the uses of soft power and falling into the trap of triumphalism. In the post–Cold War period, the United States as the only superpower created the impression among scholars and policy makers that U.S. commands would be followed not only because they had been proven right by history, but also because others had no other choice but to follow. Nye argued that this ignored not only the strengths but also the limits of U.S. power (Nye 2002). Soft power alone could not produce effective foreign policy. Instead, soft power is part of a strategy combining both hard and soft power that he called smart power (Armitage and Nye 2007; Nye 2009). This requires “developing a deeper understanding of the role of soft power and developing a better balance of hard and soft power in our foreign policy” (Nye 2004, 147). Soft power could help a state create a favorable context for foreign policy and, thus, save a state a lot on carrots and sticks, but soft power could not completely replace hard power.
Soft power is different from hard power, based not on category but on degree both on the nature of the behavior and the tangibility of the resources. Traditional sources of power generally emphasized tangible aspects (military force, economic factors). Even for smaller countries without traditional sources of power, such as Norway, Canada, Costa Rica, Singapore, or Jordan, public diplomacy efforts can leverage strategic geographic location to play an important role in world politics (Melissen 2005). Nye argued that intangible aspects also matter. This is what he called “the second face of power” (Nye 2004). A country may be able to obtain what it wants because it can set the agenda of political choices and structure the situations to get others to change their preferences. Other countries will choose to want the same outcomes that you want because they admire your values, want to emulate your example, or aspire to possess the same prosperity and openness. Soft power is neither influence nor persuasion. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. Soft power is attractive power, and soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction (Nye 2004).

Soft power is important because there is a historical discontinuity in the nature of power. In an era of transnational interdependence, power is becoming “less transferable, less tangible, and less coercive” (Nye 1990, 33). Soft power thus has emerged as a key concept in international affairs scholarship because world politics has been transformed in fundamental ways: the rise of the information age, the changing role and effectiveness of military force, and the inability to counter terrorism and extremism with hard power alone (Nye 2004).

States do not necessarily control the content and delivery of soft power. The creators of soft power in civil society include musicians, movie stars, professional athletes, business leaders, philanthropists, etc. (Arndt 2011; Hayden 2012; Kerr and Wiseman 2018; Melissen 2011). While working to create an enabling environment for its policies, government efforts may take years to produce the desired outcomes. Moreover, the efforts work indirectly by creating a favorable environment for foreign policy to advance. Not surprisingly, negatively perceived policy decisions tend to reduce a country’s soft power faster than positively perceived policy decisions tend to improve it. Soft power is associated with goodwill accumulated over long periods of time (Kerr and Wiseman, 2018; Melissen 2011).

The instruments of U.S. soft power are public diplomacy, international broadcasting, student exchange programs, faculty and scholar exchange programs, development assistance, disaster relief, and military-to-military contacts (Nye 2004). To this list we can add cultural centers and libraries, language institutes, art exhibitions, and cultural performances. In the United
States, these programs are not integrated into a single government agency or comprehensive national security strategy. Instead, they are scattered across many departments and agencies and lack overarching coordination. As a result, the challenges of the uses of soft power are many.

Citizen Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy

Citizen diplomacy is one of the most valuable tools of public diplomacy (Bhandari and Belyavina 2011; Eastwood 2007; Mueller 2009; Sharp 2001). It represents a unique public-private sector partnership. The idea of citizen diplomacy is deeply rooted in U.S. democracy. It is based on the belief that all individuals have the power to make a difference by contributing directly to international understanding. For decades, nongovernmental organizations and individuals have strived to build enduring relations with individuals of other countries. The goal of citizen diplomacy is to allow foreign publics to meet directly with ordinary U.S. citizens and acquire a more nuanced and unfiltered view of the population, its values, its ideas, and its culture. The goal is to expand the dialogue beyond the government-to-government channel. Student exchange programs hosted by volunteers such as the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study, the Young Leaders Program, the Future Leaders Exchange, the National Security Language Initiative for Youth, and the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange are important examples of public diplomacy initiatives involving citizen diplomacy (Eastwood 2007; Mueller 2009). These programs offer foreign students the opportunity to study in the United States or U.S. students the opportunity to study abroad. American Field Service (AFS) has been a leader in such international education programs. Established during World War I, it was reorganized in 1946 as a secondary school student exchange program to help maintain and strengthen the mutual understanding and goodwill that had been established during its wartime humanitarian efforts (AFS 2014; Bhandari and Belyavina 2011). During the Cold War, the U.S. Congress funded student exchange programs such as the Fulbright Program and the Humphrey Fellowships through the State Department (Congressional Research Service [CRS] 2004).

Cultural Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy involves the power of persuasion and attraction and is one of the most effective instruments of soft power (Hayden 2012; Melissen 2005). It is defined as the actions governments and nonstate actors take to promote their cultural values and ideals to the societies of other countries. The essential idea behind cultural diplomacy is to bring together different cultures, enabling dialogue and mutual understanding. Cultural diplomacy reinforces the attractiveness of a country’s culture by being open to talk about its negatives as well as its positive aspects. As Scott-Smith argues (2016, 187), it is a process of
negotiation and learning “whereby openness about the negative aspects of a nation-state’s general welfare or foreign policy outlook can ultimately generate more goodwill.” Cultural diplomacy is practiced both by governments and members of civil society. Thus, it may comprise international tours by a nation’s symphony orchestra, renowned soloists, or pop stars. Cultural diplomats work in the midst of international relationships, many of which occur outside the involvement of any government, involving tourism, study abroad, scientific exchanges, cultural artifacts, books, music, migration, and ideas (Arndt 2011; Holmes and Rofe 2016). A cultural diplomat, as a servant of government, attempts to make such relations flow more smoothly and productively so as to minimize damage to national interests and maximize the possibility that elements of the interaction may grow into sustainable positive contributions to both or all participating nations (Arndt 2011, 7). Cultural diplomacy as a form of soft power is at work when a government seeks to actively promote intercultural exchanges as a way to promote its national interests.

**International Education and Public Diplomacy**

International education is a valuable and rapidly expanding service export in the global economy. However, as Byrne and Hall (2014, 1) note, “it is the intangible soft power value that arises through exchange, interactions and collaboration opportunities offered by international education that positions international education within the realm of diplomacy, and specifically public diplomacy today.” Either as hosts of foreign students who come to study in the United States or as guests when U.S. students participate in study abroad, international education illustrates the basic essence of public diplomacy as a two-way dialogue and affinity (de Lima 2007). International students share values, ideas, and culture, and even after they return home, they maintain cross-national networks through alumni associations. The development of intellectual, business, and friendship bonds can play an important future role in helping advance a country’s goals and interests (Byrne and Hall 2014; de Lima 2007; Nye 2004; Scott-Smith 2014).

International education as a dimension of public diplomacy was negatively impacted by the U.S. government response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Melissen 2005; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2008). While U.S.-hosted exchange programs did not suffer the same drastic cuts of other public diplomacy programs since the end of the Cold War, security concerns severely curtailed the number of international students coming to the United States (Institute of International Education [IIE] 2018). This is especially troubling because empirical studies have confirmed that U.S.-hosted student exchange and military exchange programs do play a role in helping spread democratic
values overseas and thus serve as a key instrument of U.S. soft power (Atkinson 2010; Scott-Smith 2014).

Military and Public Diplomacy

Military public diplomacy has a long tradition exemplified by military-to-military exchange programs, military visits (port visits), concert tours of military bands, emergency and disaster relief operations, and the stationing of troops overseas. The presence of soldiers in a foreign country creates numerous opportunities for people-to-people contacts with the local population. These activities help build goodwill and trust in foreign publics. They also create mutual understanding between the military of the countries involved. Military training and military education programs involve the additional public diplomacy dimension of international education. They improve communication and lead to further instances of cooperation (Wallin 2015). However, military public diplomacy is not about an information campaign to counter misinformation. This is more akin to propaganda. Military public diplomacy is about building and maintaining relationships of trust between one country’s military and the public and military of another country. It is another element of soft power (Nye 2004; Wallin 2015).

Digital Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy

It is common to find references in the literature to the impact of new technologies and media on public diplomacy. This impact is augmented by unprecedented levels of interconnectedness, interdependence, and globalization. The literature sees a fundamental change in international affairs characterized by the growth of webs or networks of multiple interactions across national borders (Adler 2018; Holmes and Rofe 2016; Kerr and Wiseman 2018). This new reality indicates that not only states but nonstate actors play important roles in world politics and public diplomacy. State and nonstate actors can now reach larger audiences and shape how others perceive them across vast distances. Sometimes this helps to connect people and other times to divide them, as the example of ISIS illustrates. This new reality highlights the urgency to keep pace with proliferating new technologies in a fast-changing environment. As Charlie Winter and Jordan Bach-Lombardo (2016) argue in the face of today’s communication technologies and diverse audiences, social media strategies typified by rigidity or lack of flexibility, centralization, and reactive responses do not work. It requires a new approach to public diplomacy that acknowledges the potential impact of adopting new technologies for public diplomacy and the importance of the network pattern of engagement with foreign publics.
Historical Evolution of U.S. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy enjoys a long and varied history in U.S. foreign policy. On the one hand, we can identify the essential role of diplomats who directly communicate U.S. actions and interests to foreign individuals and groups as well as to other governments. Yet we also recognize the impact of people-to-people exchanges, cultural relations, and international education. From the diplomatic missions of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in Europe to win over support to the U.S. cause, to the tours of jazz ambassadors sponsored by USIA during the Cold War; from the expanding presence of Christian preachers in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific during the nineteenth century, to the sailing of the Great White Fleet around the world, early U.S. public diplomacy was conducted by a diverse group of actors commonly referred to as the three M’s: Merchants, Missionaries, and Military. Notably, U.S. missionaries and merchants stood out as practical and pragmatic compared to their European counterparts and found more receptive audiences among the mainly rural settings of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Arndt 2011).

International education also played a foundational role in the U.S. government’s early efforts in public diplomacy. When the Roosevelt administration established the Division of Cultural Relations in 1938, it had decided to reach out to foreign publics and cultivate cultural relations as part of U.S. foreign policy, and universities were expected to play a key role in it (Arndt 2011; Nye 2004). The decision was resisted by Congress, which was reticent to support expanding the role of government into an area that was essentially regarded as a private domain (Arndt 2011). This office was housed in the State Department and assisted universities in their expansion of educational opportunities overseas. Years later, the Fulbright Program (1946) accentuated the impact of academic exchange programs in public diplomacy. The first congressional act authorizing public diplomacy activities was the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, also known as the Smith-Mundt Act (CRS 2004).

During the Cold War, the lead agency for U.S. public diplomacy efforts became the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). Created in 1953, USIA had its roots in World War II efforts to counter enemy propaganda and present a favorable image of the United States overseas. The USIA housed three bureaus: the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), the Bureau of Information (I), and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (E). They were responsible for a wide variety of public diplomacy activities. The IBB included the Voice of America programming, Worldnet TV and film service, and broadcasting to Cuba. The I Bureau housed geographic liaison offices, foreign press centers, and thematic programming. The E Bureau covered all academic programs,
international visitors, and professional and cultural programs (CRS 2009). Foreign broadcasting services (for example, Voice of America, Radio Marti) made U.S. culture more accessible to foreign audiences by communicating in their own language. In addition, since its creation in 1961, the Peace Corps has sent thousands of volunteers as public diplomacy ambassadors of the United States. As private citizens, these volunteers have engaged in solving developmental challenges around the world one project at a time and favorably reflecting on U.S. culture and attractiveness. In fact, one of the most dramatic examples of citizen diplomacy during the Cold War involved the unlikely friendship between a farmer from Iowa, Roswell Garst, and the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev (Mueller 2009).

Public diplomacy was an integral part of a coherent, long-term strategy of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Before the Cold War was defined in terms of hard power, it was perceived first as a clash between two contrasting worldviews (Melissen 2005). In the end, the United States outcompeted the Soviet Union in the field of ideas (Seib 2009).

Public Diplomacy in the Wake of the Cold War

With the end of the Cold War, funding for public diplomacy programs declined notably. The most dramatic change, however, took place in 1999 when the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act went into effect (Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy [ACPD] 2015b; CRS 2009). The act abolished the ACDA and USIA and reallocated USAID under the State Department. All former USIA functions were transferred to the State Department (CRS 2009).

The reasons for the elimination of the USIA were many. The euphoria surrounding the “winning” of the Cold War resulted in a much-anticipated peace dividend. Public diplomacy programs operated by USIA were soon considered expendable in an international context of unipolarity and ideological end-of-history triumphalism. Critics contended that USIA operating independently from the State Department weakened diplomacy efforts due to a lack of coherent messaging (CRS 2009). Finally, members of Congress and the White House were seeking to streamline government in general and U.S. foreign policy agencies in particular (CRS 2009).

The consequences of these changes were deep. The first impact was that the newly created Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy at the State Department did not have a direct line of authority over geographical area offices. The new structure placed much of the public diplomacy staff in separate offices divided into regional and functional bureaus outside of the control of the lead public diplomacy officer (CRS 2009). The second impact was that funding for public diplomacy was now sequestered from other funds of the State Department. Yet, the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy did not have complete control of this
budget (CRS 2009). The use of these funds was dictated by the officers on the ground who did not directly report up a public diplomacy channel, but rather to the leadership at the embassy level (CRS 2009).

The result was a reduced importance of public diplomacy within the State Department. A CRS report (2009, 43–44) pointed out that public diplomacy officers (PDOs) did not “play an equal role with other decision makers when foreign policy is made, leading to public diplomacy that is largely reactive in nature, diminishing its effectiveness.” This diminished sense of importance also affected the recruitment, training, and utilization of PDOs. PDO numbers declined consistently during the decade immediately after the dissolution of the USIA. The training programs and recruitment programs to fill those staff losses were not met (CRS 2009). In addition, PDO positions were heavily burdened with administrative responsibilities, leaving PDOs unable to focus on strategic planning or outreach. The same report found that PDOs were promoted at the lowest rate of any track in the State Department (CRS 2009).

U.S. public diplomacy was further hindered in 1999 when Congress passed the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act, or SECCA (ACPD 2015b). This act required that new embassy facilities had to be set back at least 100 feet from the perimeter of the property (ACPD 2015b). This requirement pushed most embassy facilities out of urban centers and into rural locations due to the lack of space and ability to meet the 100-foot perimeter requirement. Second, SECCA required that in selecting a site for new U.S. diplomatic facilities abroad, the State Department must colocate all U.S. government personnel at the post (ACPD 2015b). The combined effect of these two requirements was to quickly shut the door to engaging local citizenry and to place U.S. facilities far out of the reach of local populations (ACPD 2015b).

The USIA had opened a large number of “American Centers” around the world. These centers were made accessible to foreign publics and provided a substantial physical presence at the heart of large cities (ACPD 2015b; CRS 2009). They were spaces in which foreign publics could engage U.S. speakers on a wide range of topics. U.S. films were showed, English classes were offered, and a variety of public outreach took place. With the absorption of USIA into the State Department and the SECCA Act, most of these centers were closed, moved into secure embassy compounds, and renamed Information Resource Centers (IRC). Visitors to IRCs were subject to the same security regulations as other visitors to the embassy. They were required to make a previous appointment and surrender cell phones, laptop computers, and electronic devices at the time of visit (GAO 2010). Moreover, the IRCs were generally smaller than the American Centers they replaced and competed with other offices for limited space within embassies (ACPD 2015b; GAO 2010). After 2017, all IRCs were rebranded as American Centers.
Table 1: Number of American Spaces by Type, Selected Years

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<th>Type</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Centers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Resource Centers (IRCs)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>(70)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binational Centers (BNCs)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Corners (ACs)</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total American Spaces</strong></td>
<td><strong>743</strong></td>
<td><strong>715</strong></td>
<td><strong>710</strong></td>
<td><strong>679</strong></td>
<td><strong>658</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Own elaboration with data from U.S. GAO and U.S. ACPD reports (2015a, 2016, 2017, 2018).*

Presently the State Department supports 659 facilities collectively referred to as “American Spaces” (Office of American Spaces 2018). They consist of 105 American Centers, 443 American Corners (ACs), and 111 Binational Centers (BNCs) in more than 150 countries (see Tables 1 and 2). Each of these public diplomacy efforts raises significant issues. For example, 84% of them (ACs and BNCs) are operated as public-private partnerships with foreign partners such as libraries, schools, universities, or foundations which means that “the success of these spaces hinges on the willingness of host institutions to work with the U.S. government” (ACPD 2015b, 4). Since the 1990s, BNCs operate as self-sustaining organizations commonly through fees charged for English-language training. BNCs have no permanent U.S. staff and operate essentially separately from the State Department. ACs are the largest interaction point for U.S. public diplomacy efforts. ACs contain books, magazines, DVDs, and other materials about the United States. ACs are managed by private entities and remain in the hands of foreign nationals who are not paid by or overseen by the State Department (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2009). According to the same U.S. Senate report (2009, 12), this practice amounts to “nothing less than outsourcing U.S. public diplomacy.”

Foreign publics are increasingly accessing the State Department through social media and website searches in foreign languages (ACPD 2018). The State Department maintains Twitter feeds in eight foreign languages (Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Urdu) in addition to English. In March 2018, it had more than 5 million followers on Twitter, 1.8 million fans on Facebook, 73,000 subscribers on YouTube, almost 130,000 followers on Tumblr, more than 400,000 on Google+, and more than 200,000 on Instagram (ACDP 2018). It reached 16.6 million views on YouTube and 68.4 million views on Flickr (ACDP 2018). Its digital presence is the largest in the U.S. government after the White House (ACPD 2017).
The critical need for an active public diplomacy presence was most acutely felt in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. As early as 2002 the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) published an article on public diplomacy and the War on Terrorism, calling for “a commitment to new foreign policy thinking and new structures” (Peterson 2002, 74). The article contended that “addressing the image problem [of the United States] should be viewed as no less than a vital component of national security” (Peterson 2002, 77). The work of the CFR was followed by a report from the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World (2003, 8; emphasis in the original) that was submitted to the Committee on Appropriations of the U.S. House of Representatives calling for a “new strategic direction informed by a seriousness and commitment that matches the gravity of our approach to national defense and traditional state-to-state diplomacy.” Similar calls for reform were made by the Congressional Research Service (CRS 2004, 2009) and the General Accounting Office (GAO 2006, 2010).

Further adding to the lack of a coherent U.S. public diplomacy strategy and message by the State Department after 9/11, the Department of Defense (DOD) also focused on increasing its communications with foreign publics (Seib 2009; Wallin 2015). It, however, did not share the view of State Department practitioners that saw public diplomacy as the give-and-take of ideas that was outlined at the start of this article. While the State Department focused on communication with foreign publics, the DOD emphasized influencing foreign publics, other U.S. government agencies, and the U.S. people. This approach was named “strategic communication” and appeared to be an outgrowth of other DOD-related functions such as Psychological Operations, Information Operations, Public Affairs, and Civil Affairs (GAO 2010; Seib 2009; Wallin 2015). The DOD’s actions in the area of public diplomacy have not been without controversy (Duggan 2012; Lord 2008; Seib 2009; Wallin 2015). In 2007,
reports began to circulate that the DOD public diplomacy offices were providing guidance to military commanders that did not meet DOD standards for accuracy and transparency (GAO 2010). After years of confusion, bureaucratic bloat, and little coordination between agencies, the DOD stopped using the term “strategic communication” in 2012 (Brooks 2012; Wallin 2015).

As part of the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) was created in 2011 within the State Department. Its goals were to influence foreign audiences, monitor the spread of information, identify emerging trends, and promulgate public communication strategies for countering propaganda by terrorist organizations. The CSCC was replaced by the Global Engagement Center (GEC) in 2016. The GEC was established to coordinate interagency efforts to counter disinformation and propaganda by terrorist organizations. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 expanded the mission of the GEC to include countering disinformation campaigns by both foreign state and nonstate actors and to support U.S. allies in their efforts against disinformation campaigns. While celebrated for its name rebranding, its new focus on campaigns by state actors, and its mandate to cooperate with allied and friendly foreign governments, the GEC has been the victim of funding fights between the State Department and the DOD and is awaiting confirmation of a permanent replacement to lead it (Gramer and Groll 2018; Winter and Bach-Lombardo 2016).

The confluence of the previously addressed reorganizations, restructuring, budget constraints, and increased security measures have resulted in a truncated, dysfunctional version of public diplomacy that not only does not engage foreign publics, but also further alienates them. U.S. public diplomacy through the State Department is forced to distance itself from the very populations that it seeks to influence. As we have shown, there has been a constant stream of evaluations and recommendations both from actors in the public and private sectors to fix U.S. public diplomacy since the late 1990s (i.e., reports by GAO, Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, House Committees, Senate Committees, Council on Foreign Relations, Heritage Foundation, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, Private Sector Summit on Public Diplomacy).

U.S. public diplomacy has been subject to close scrutiny and supervision of its operation, budget, and mission. New metrics to measure its effectiveness are introduced with constant regularity. Members of the diplomatic corps endure conditions that compromise their professionalism and training, and lack adequate resources and infrastructure to best serve U.S. goals and interests abroad. This suggests that the basic failure resides with policy makers failing to understand the value of public diplomacy in U.S. foreign policy and to provide enlightened leadership and vision. The situation is unlikely to change under the Trump administration.
Public Diplomacy under the Trump Administration

At first glance, it may appear premature to evaluate public diplomacy under the Trump administration given its short tenure in office. However, substantial documents and staffing decisions exist that provide sufficient information that we can analyze about the direction and content of U.S. public diplomacy under the Trump administration. Chief among them are a new National Security Strategy released in December 2017; the Joint Strategic Plan 2018–2022 for the State Department and USAID released in February 2018; and two funding requests for the State Department for Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019 submitted to Congress in May 2017 and February 2018, respectively.

The National Security Strategy (NSS), or “An America First National Security Strategy,” serves as the guiding document for the foreign policies of the U.S. government. It identifies four vital national interests or “pillars” (Trump 2017, 4):

1. Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life
2. Promote American Prosperity
3. Preserve Peace through Strength
4. Advance American Influence

These national interests are intertwined, but the role of U.S. diplomacy is specifically highlighted in the document in pillars three and four. The NSS urges the collaboration of the public and private sectors and the greater reliance on technology to keep pace with a competitive global environment. The NSS further urges the United States to engage in “competitive diplomacy” expressed in the following terms: “we must upgrade our diplomatic capabilities to compete in the current environment and to embrace a competitive mindset” (Trump 2017, 33).

This requires a set of priority actions: the United States must preserve a forward diplomatic presence, must advance U.S. interests, and must catalyze opportunities, including people-to-people exchanges (Trump 2017, 33). These are activities closely associated with public diplomacy. On the economic front, the NSS calls on U.S. diplomacy to reinforce economic ties with allies and partners, deploy economic pressure on security threats, and sever sources of funding to “terrorists, WMD proliferators and other illicit actors” (Trump 2017, 34). Finally, the NSS states that U.S. diplomacy must work to counter misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda by states and nonstate actors. Public diplomacy must “compete effectively in this arena,” drive effective communications, activate local networks, share responsibilities with foreign governments in
countering violent messaging, and upgrade, tailor, and innovate delivery platforms for communicating U.S. messages overseas (Trump 2017, 35).

To advance the foreign policy objectives of the Trump administration as set forth in the NSS, State Department and USAID produced the Joint Strategic Plan 2018–2022 (JSP). The JSP lists four goals (Department of State and USAID 2018, 3):

1. Protect America’s Security at Home and Abroad
2. Renew America’s Competitive Advantage for Sustained Economic Growth and Job Creation
3. Promote American Leadership through Balanced Engagement
4. Ensure Effectiveness and Accountability to the American Taxpayer

Each of these goals is linked to a specific set of objectives, strategies to accomplish them, and performance goals for evaluation. The document emphasizes overall guiding principles such as “effectiveness, accountability, learning, and transparency” (Department of State and Agency for International Development 2018, 23). A review of the goals, objectives, and strategies of the JSP reveal a path for PD under the Trump administration. For example, goal 2 includes international education as a valuable U.S. export which it commits to support. The only risk it notes associated with it is a strong dollar which will deter foreign students from studying in the United States (Department of State and USAID 2018, 37). For goal 3, strategic objective 3.2 calls on U.S. diplomacy to continue to seize on opportunities at international organizations “to build consensus around American values, advancing American national security, economic, and development goals; and rallying collective action with American leadership” (Department of State and USAID 2018, 45). The risk it identifies is that the rebalancing of burden sharing that the Trump administration is seeking will lead to a diminished U.S. influence in international organizations as other states increase their financial contributions and demand a greater activism in return. Thus, the United States can see a limitation in its ability to advance its interests in international settings (Department of State and USAID 2018, 47). Strategic objective 3.3 directs the State Department to “[i]ncrease partnerships with the private sector and civil-society organizations to mobilize support and resources and shape foreign public opinion” (Department of State and USAID 2018, 48). This calls for “strategic partnerships” with actors in the public (i.e., federal, state, and local government), private (i.e., business firms), faith-based, and nonprofit sectors (i.e., universities, schools, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations).

Developing sustainable and effective partnerships outside the public sector requires unique skills and tools distinct from those used in government-to-
government diplomacy. Successful communication with civil society and foreign publics requires mutual understanding and trust. The JSP notes that the United States must develop and educate strategic stakeholders in civil society and the workforce to effectively deploy people-to-people and communication programs to generate the strong support and robust local participation necessary to solidify partnerships that produce maximum impact (Department of State and USAID 2018, 48). The JSP warns that “significant drops in a [foreign] population’s trust of the United States may constrain willingness to work with [U.S. actors] as partners” (Department of State and USAID 2018, 48). Finally, goal 4 reiterates the pursuit of effectiveness, efficiency, security, transparency, and accountability at all levels of government, including the work of the State Department. This is to be understood as maximizing the taxpayers’ return on their money (Department of State and USAID 2018, 54).

Several issues impinge on public diplomacy under the Trump administration. Some of them result from developments originated decades ago in previous administrations, but others point to new challenges. First and foremost among them is the stated goal to reduce spending through consolidation and rationalization of public diplomacy programs while maintaining and expanding the public diplomacy mission. To analyze where the proposed budget cuts to public diplomacy fall under the Trump administration, we use the FY2018 and FY2019 Congressional Budget Justifications for the State Department. These documents state the operationalization of foreign policy goals and provide a supporting rationale for funding priorities. An adversely affected area is the Education and Cultural Exchange programs (ECE). ECE programs support the study of U.S. scholars and students overseas and the study of foreign nationals in U.S. schools and universities.

This is a very troubling development as it directly undermines a key source of U.S. soft power. The alumni of ECE programs include Nobel laureates, hundreds of foreign heads of state and government, and over a million people from around the world. Secretaries Tillerson and Pompeo proposed reductions of 55% (FY2018) and of 75% (FY2019), respectively, compared to the actual spending levels of FY2017. These reductions translate into almost US$600 million worth of spending cuts and would result from the streamlining of programs and the elimination of staff positions (see Table 3). The budget justification stated that these decisions would translate into savings to U.S. taxpayers, benefits to the U.S. economy, advancing U.S. national security, and avoiding duplication of programs with the private sector (U.S. State Department 2018). The U.S. Congress later modified FY2018 to restore funding for ECE programs, but still below the FY2017 baseline. Adjusted for inflation, the budget for public diplomacy programs is below FY2010 levels (see Figure 1 and Table 4).
Table 3: U.S. Public Diplomacy Personnel, Fiscal Years 2014–2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD Positions</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>1,159</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>1,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE Positions</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total PD Positions</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,640</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,621</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,642</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,646</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,447</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,320</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration with data from U.S. Department of State, *Congressional budget justification*, various years.

Figure 1: U.S. Actual Budget for Public Diplomacy, Fiscal Years 1980–2017 (in Millions $)

Source: Own elaboration with data contained in Table 4.
Table 4: U.S. Budget for Public Diplomacy, Current and Inflation-Adjusted Data, 1980–2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Budget (in millions $)</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>CPI-U-RS Index 1977 = 100</th>
<th>Inflation Adjusted Base year = 2017 (in millions $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>127.1</td>
<td>1,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>139.1</td>
<td>1,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>147.5</td>
<td>1,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>153.8</td>
<td>1,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>160.2</td>
<td>1,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>165.7</td>
<td>1,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>168.6</td>
<td>2,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>174.4</td>
<td>2,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>180.7</td>
<td>1,978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>188.6</td>
<td>2,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>197.9</td>
<td>2,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,226</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>205.1</td>
<td>2,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1,310</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>210.2</td>
<td>2,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>215.5</td>
<td>2,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>220.0</td>
<td>2,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>225.3</td>
<td>2,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,077</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>231.3</td>
<td>1,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>236.3</td>
<td>1,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1,125</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>239.5</td>
<td>1,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1,109</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>244.6</td>
<td>1,637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>252.9</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>260.1</td>
<td>1,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>264.2</td>
<td>1,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>270.2</td>
<td>1,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>277.5</td>
<td>1,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>286.9</td>
<td>1,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1,531</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>296.2</td>
<td>1,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1,578</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>304.6</td>
<td>1,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>316.3</td>
<td>1,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,797</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>315.2</td>
<td>2,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,060</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>320.4</td>
<td>2,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2,023</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>330.5</td>
<td>2,210</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,948</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>337.5</td>
<td>2,084</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>1,759</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>342.5</td>
<td>1,854</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>1,803</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>348.3</td>
<td>1,869</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>2,064</td>
<td>Obama</td>
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<td>2,136</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2,031</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>353.4</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>2,131</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>361.0</td>
<td>2,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2,098</td>
<td>Trump</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>1,550</td>
<td>Trump</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A related area is the staffing of critical public diplomacy posts. Several of these positions remained vacant in late 2018. They are the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the Coordinator for International Information Programs, and the Coordinator of the GEC positions. The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and the Coordinator for GEC are at the time of this writing being filled in an acting capacity by the State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert and Daniel Kimmage, respectively. The latter was appointed by former Secretary Kerry. The situation is further complicated by leadership transitions at the very top of the bureaucracy: the State Department has had three different secretaries in two years.

Analysts have warned about the impacts and risks of ongoing staffing and budgetary reductions to U.S. foreign policy, national security, and State Department morale (Alliance for International Exchange 2018; Associated Press 2017; Bloomberg 2018; The Economist 2017). As Abigail Tracy (2018) points out, at a time of critical importance to counter Russian disinformation campaigns, a key State Department agency, the GEC, is “understaffed, underfunded, and over-extended.” State Department personnel report suspicion, distrust, and open hostility from the White House to their recommendations and counsel (Tracy 2018). In addition, President Trump has exhibited a marked tendency to nominate people to foreign policy and diplomacy because of their military credentials instead of their academic or professional expertise (Gramer and Groll 2018). The consequences run deep. The systematic choice to bypass and ignore the advice of public diplomacy practitioners has led to frustration and low morale among members of the diplomatic corps (Alliance for International Exchange 2018; Associated Press 2017; Gramer and Groll 2018; Stephenson 2018).

However, as we have argued in this article, staffing and funding problems at the State Department are not new. They span different administrations beginning in the late 1990s. There continues to be a dysfunctional approach to public diplomacy based on the reluctance of the White House and the Congress to fund new agencies and programs that are unable to demonstrate results and prove their effectiveness. Intersecting this situation, there is the broad process of state retrenchment from public diplomacy, which began in the 1990s. Moreover, the Trump administration brought a renewed vigor to the idea of public-private partnerships and the reliance on private actors to fulfill public diplomacy functions previously performed by the State Department.

A third area of continuity is the increasing conceptualization of public diplomacy in terms of (or synonymous with) state security or national security. Putting security at the forefront of U.S. communications with the world undermines the effectiveness of other public diplomacy efforts. For example, decisions to impose higher restrictions to foreign students and scholars or to outright deny them entry to the United States on the basis of security concerns tied to a religion,
nationality, or world region do have a negative impact on worldwide perceptions of the United States and deter potential students from applying (IIE 2018; McClory 2018). At this point, it helps to reiterate that international education is a valuable U.S. export and is one of the key strategic goals of the Trump administration. U.S. institutions of higher learning are admired throughout the world. Large numbers of foreign students prefer to study in the United States rather than anywhere else, which indicates its growth potential (IIE 2018). However, as noted in the 2018 Open Doors Report, the number of new international students enrolling at U.S. universities dropped for a second consecutive year (IIE 2018). Visa restrictions and public expressions of hostility to Muslims, Mexicans, and people from the Middle East or Central America produce a negative effect on the U.S. economy and U.S. soft power (IIE 2018; McClory 2018).

As previously discussed in this article, the issue of balancing engagement with foreign publics while securing U.S. lives and installations is a dilemma that originated decades ago. Yet, moving American Centers and IRCs inside embassy compounds that resemble medieval fortresses does not help project a welcoming message to foreign publics (ACP 2015b). American Spaces serve as the first point of contact to learn about educational opportunities in the United States. A significant proportion of the actual spending for Diplomatic and Consular Programs (Tables 5 and 6) is currently going for Worldwide Security Production. While increasing security of diplomatic personnel and U.S. facilities overseas is of paramount importance, considering that this is happening in an environment of stagnant or shrinking budgets, it translates into declining spending on core public diplomacy areas. As shown in Table 5, almost US$500 million worth of spending cuts are concentrated in a single area, namely ECE. ECE includes programs such as the Fulbright Program, the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS), the International Visitor Leadership Program, the Citizen Exchanges Program, the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX), the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchanges (CBYX), and the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study (YES), among others. The rationale for such cuts focuses on avoiding duplication of exchanges with the private sector, improving cost efficiency, and more narrowly defined foreign policy priorities (U.S. State Department 2018).

Overlapping the securitization of the public diplomacy message is the narrowing of the public diplomacy focus to just countering disinformation. The problem with this approach is that it confuses public diplomacy with public relations at best and propaganda at worst. Despite previous setbacks and harsh criticisms of the Madison Avenue model, public diplomacy is still approached as a public relations or propaganda message (Melissen 2005; Seib 2009; Winter and Bach-Lombardo 2016). Peter van Ham (2005, 62) warned that “true dialogue,
rather than mere one-way communication, is the essential starting point to fix the U.S.’s serious image problem around the world.”

The Trump administration is bringing with it an exaggerated belief in business models combined with an enthusiasm for new forms of technology and social media to deliver public diplomacy safely and “virtually” from within the United States (U.S. State Department, 2018). It is important for U.S. public diplomacy to keep pace with new forms of technology and modernize its digital presence. However, they must not be used as substitutes for a continuing physical presence of U.S. public diplomacy overseas. There is broad agreement among scholars and public

Table 5: U.S. Public Diplomacy Budget, Fiscal Years 2016–2019, in millions $

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department of State Programs</th>
<th>FY2016 Actual</th>
<th>FY2017 Actual</th>
<th>FY2018 Estimate</th>
<th>FY2019 Request</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic and Consular Programs—Public Diplomacy</td>
<td>$369.6</td>
<td>$492.8</td>
<td>$534.2</td>
<td>$556.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic and Consular Programs—American Salaries</td>
<td>$134.6</td>
<td>$134.6</td>
<td>$165.2</td>
<td>$164.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational and Cultural Exchanges (ECE)</td>
<td>$590.9</td>
<td>$634.1</td>
<td>$629.8</td>
<td>$159.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Funding (OCO, ESF, etc.)</td>
<td>$183.1</td>
<td>$83.3</td>
<td>$83.3</td>
<td>$0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting Bureau Governors (BBG)</td>
<td>$752.9</td>
<td>$786.6</td>
<td>$685.2</td>
<td>$661.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total PD Spending</td>
<td>$2,031</td>
<td>$2,131</td>
<td>$2,098</td>
<td>$1,545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration with data from U.S. Department of State (2017, 2018).

Table 6: U.S. Diplomatic and Consular Programs, Fiscal Years 2016–2019, in millions $

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY2016 Actual</th>
<th>FY2017 Actual</th>
<th>FY2018 Estimate</th>
<th>FY2019 Request</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Projects</td>
<td>$4,890</td>
<td>$5,046</td>
<td>$4,939</td>
<td>$4,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldwide Security Protection (WSP)</td>
<td>$3,395</td>
<td>$4,642</td>
<td>$4,629</td>
<td>$3,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Diplomatic and Consular Spending</td>
<td>$8,285</td>
<td>$9,688</td>
<td>$9,658</td>
<td>$7,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSP/DCP Ratio</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration with data from U.S. Department of State (2017, 2018).
diplomacy practitioners that digital platforms are useful tools to influence and inform foreign publics, but they don’t replace people-to-people engagements (ACPD 2015).

Words and events have real consequences in public opinion. Even before Trump’s accession to power, analysts were warning about the impact of the Islamophobic rhetoric of the campaign on public diplomacy (Boduszynski 2017; Seib 2016). The Trump effect was reflected in sharp reductions of worldwide views of U.S. leadership. The Pew Research Center (2018) reported that global audiences regarded the United States as a greatest threat to world order than either Russia or China in a majority of countries (21 out of 30). Still, a gap remained between views, largely negative, about President Trump as a leader and views about the U.S. people and values. The same report (Pew Research Center 2018) showed that while global audiences continued to hold a favorable image of the U.S. people and U.S. values, they had no confidence that the U.S. president was doing the right things for world affairs (70% no confidence; 27% confidence).

More worryingly, all indicators fell pointing to negative long-term effects on U.S. soft power. As the CPD Advisory Board noted in its latest annual soft power report, these surveys were conducted before the policy of forced separations of migrant parents and their children at the border was enacted (CPD Advisory Board 2017). The accumulated impact of these actions point to continuing deterioration of U.S. soft power in the future (CPD Advisory Board 2017; McClory 2018). As Philip Seib (2016) puts it: “The reservoir of goodwill will never run dry, but now the dam has sprung a giant leak.”

Conclusion

Thus, we come to the painful realization that current soft power sources so critically important for foreign policy success and soft power interaction with U.S. public diplomacy efforts are in serious decline and point to an increasingly vulnerable position of the United States in the world. The current malaise within the State Department hinders the U.S. ability to use public diplomacy as an effective tool to buttress soft power throughout the world. There is a failure to separate short-term from long-term goals in foreign policy. The accumulated soft power potential is not easily harnessed or developed as public diplomacy. In the wake of 9/11, U.S. foreign policy shifted away from strategic to operational. U.S. public diplomacy was no exception, and in fact it may be one of the strongest examples of short-term goals overwhelming long-term strategic goals. While the United States has relied on its accumulated reserves of soft power that were supported by public diplomacy, there has been very little effort to develop public diplomacy as part of a long-term strategy. “Rather, a tendency
remains for public diplomacy benefits to emerge organically or serendipitously—a fact that has and continues to bedevil policy-makers” (Byrne and Hall 2014, 2).

The essence of public diplomacy—that is, intercultural dialogue and understanding—has not changed. It is embedded in exchanges and dialogues between cultures. However, the dedication of U.S. policy makers to public diplomacy efforts in both funding and staffing has changed. There is a basic failure to understand that public diplomacy continues to be strategically relevant and fundamental. The emphasis on cost cutting driven by short-term considerations is paralleled by overall policy decisions focusing on hard power concerns and devaluing U.S. public diplomacy initiatives. The idea that the Trump administration represents a shift toward a “hard power” approach to U.S. foreign policy and public diplomacy in particular and somehow represents a break with the past ignores the fact that U.S. public diplomacy has been in a state of malaise for a long time. The last high point for U.S. spending on public diplomacy program was 1994!

Public diplomacy cannot wait. Larger numbers of people around the world now have the means to access unprecedented levels of information. Vacating these spaces will deal a severe blow to U.S. interests, goals, and security; spaces that our rivals are readily occupying. Public diplomacy has value. We must address the direction of worldwide public opinion and stem the tide of anti-Americanism and disinformation about U.S. values, ideas, and culture. Furthermore, public diplomacy is not propaganda. The goal is not to make foreign audiences agree with us, but to engage in dialogue and communicate to them that respect for alternative perspectives is part of democracy. To achieve that, an active U.S. public diplomacy strategy is critical.

U.S. public diplomacy is in critical need of a new approach that re-values its importance in U.S. foreign policy. The United States is abdicating spaces and opportunities to build long-term relationships with foreign individuals and groups who would eventually rise to be leaders of civil society, business, and government throughout the world. This is blinding us to the consequences of how our actions today are hindering our ability to reap the long-term benefits of soft power in the future.

References


