

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY,
POLITICAL INFLUENCE,
AND INTEGRATED STRATEGY

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Cultural Diplomacy, Political Influence, and Integrated Strategy

Cultural diplomacy is one of the most strategic and cost-effective means of political influence available to makers of U.S. foreign and national security policy. Because of neglect and misunderstanding, however, this powerful tool of statecraft has been vastly underutilized, its absence the source of numerous lost opportunities in our dealings with other countries.

Definition

What is cultural diplomacy? The definitions in the literature on the subject are remarkably consistent. Representative is that of Milton Cummings, Jr., the Johns Hopkins University political scientist: “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding.”¹ Culture and ideology critic Frank Ninkovich speaks of cultural diplomacy as “promoting an understanding of American culture abroad.”²

A related definition says that, “cultural diplomacy has long served to foster understanding of America and our culture around the world.... Cultural diplomacy, in particular, can help to bring people together and develop a greater appreciation of fundamental American values and the

¹ Milton C. Cummings, Jr., *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey* (Washington: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003), p.1.

² Frank Ninkovich, *Arts and Minds: Cultural Diplomacy Amid Global Tensions*, a paper based on a conference by the National Arts Journalism Program, Arts International, and the Center for Arts and Culture, 2003, p.26. Also see Ninkovich, *U.S. Information Policy and Cultural Diplomacy* (Washington: Foreign Policy Association Headline Series No. 308, 1996).

freedom and variety of their expression.”³ Harvard’s Joseph Nye recognizes culture as an important component of public diplomacy and what he calls “soft power.”⁴ A definition from an earlier era describes cultural diplomacy as:

the act of successfully communicating to others complete comprehension of the life and culture of a people. The objective of American cultural diplomacy is to create in the peoples of the world a perfect understanding of the life and culture of America . . . it is the requirement of mutual understanding which is the basis of successful cultural diplomacy, and it is this requirement which helps make cultural diplomacy so vitally important today.⁵

Helena Finn, a longtime senior State Department cultural affairs practitioner, states that cultural diplomacy consists of, “Efforts to improve cultural understanding” and, “winning foreigners’ voluntary allegiance to the American project....”⁶

Most of these definitions stress the role of cultural diplomacy in producing greater foreign understanding or appreciation of the United States and American culture, or greater mutual understanding. While all these definitions are accurate, most of them do not reflect either the other functions of cultural diplomacy or the alternative interpretations of those who do not share the consensus cited above.

Finn, for one, does introduce one of the missing dimensions linked to mutual understanding – its link to national security, a goal rarely and only implicitly acknowledged as a purpose of cultural diplomacy:

History is a useful reminder of how seriously [the United States] once took the promotion of mutual understanding through cultural exchange. Policymakers understood the link between engagement with foreign audiences and the victory over ideological enemies and considered

³ *Cultural Diplomacy: Recommendations and Research*, Center for the Arts and Culture, July 2004, p.7.

⁴ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), *passim*.

⁵ Robert H. Thayer., “Cultural Diplomacy: Seeing is Believing,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* (October 1, 1959), Vol. 25 Issue 24, p.740-744.

⁶ Helena K. Finn, “The Case for Cultural Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec 2003, Vol. 82 Issue 6, p.15-20.

cultural diplomacy vital to U.S. national security.⁷

In his history of cultural diplomacy, Richard T. Arndt introduces greater complexity to the definition than is found in most other places:

Most thoughtful cultural diplomats use ‘culture’ as the anthropologists do, to denote the complex of factors of mind and values which define a country or group, especially those factors transmitted by the process of intellect, i.e., by ideas. ‘Cultural *relations*’ then (and its synonym – at least in the U.S. – ‘cultural *affairs*’) means literally the relations between national cultures, those aspects of intellect and education lodged in any society that tend to cross borders and connect with foreign institutions.

Cultural relations grow naturally and organically, without government intervention – the transactions of trade and tourism, student flows, communications, book circulation, migration, media access, inter-marriage – millions of daily cross-cultural encounters.

If that is correct, cultural *diplomacy* can only be said to take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests.⁸

Arndt, a veteran public diplomacy professional at the former U.S. Information Agency, also defines cultural diplomacy from another perspective – that of the cultural diplomats themselves:

Quietly, invisibly, indirectly, my cultural colleagues and I spent our lives representing American education and intellect, art and thought, setting foreign ideas about America into deeper contexts, helping others understand the workings of the peculiar U.S. version of democracy, combating anti-Americanism at its taproots, linking Americans and foreign counterparts, helping the best Americans and foreign students study somewhere else – in short, projecting America, warts and all.⁹

British scholar David Caute, while not endeavoring to produce a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005) p. xviii.

⁹ Ibid. p. x.

definition of cultural diplomacy per se, describes the uses of cultural instruments as implements of war. The Cold War was not a traditional political-military conflict, but an “ideological and cultural contest on a global scale and without historical precedent.”¹⁰ Caute argues that for all of the Soviet Union’s failures to be economically competitive or to sustain its vast military establishment, “the mortal ‘stroke’ which finally buried Soviet Communism was arguably moral, intellectual, and cultural as well as economic and technological.”¹¹ For all their books, ballets, scientific advances, chess champions, Olympic athletes and so forth, the Soviets “were losing the wider *Kulturkampf* from the outset because they were afraid of freedom and were seen to be afraid.”¹²

In this war, then, cultural diplomacy took the form of “cultural promotion” and “cultural offensive” designed to compete with similar campaigns by the USSR to “prove their virtue, to demonstrate their spiritual superiority, to claim the high ground of ‘progress,’ to win public support and admiration by gaining ascendancy in each and every event of what might be styled the Cultural Olympics.”¹³ What distinguished this conflict and its use of cultural instruments as weapons of war from religious and cultural conflicts of earlier centuries, according to Caute, was the presence of “the general public” as a theater of conflict, due to the emergence of mass media. Here, war was disguised as cultural “exchange” or “diplomacy.”¹⁴

The use of cultural instruments as implements of war is not the preferred understanding of what cultural diplomacy is or ought to be among most cultural diplomats or students of the subject. Nevertheless, given the history of their use in this way, there is no escaping this dimension of the definition.

Under the circumstances, cultural diplomacy may be defined as the use of various elements of culture to influence foreign publics, opinion makers, and even foreign leaders. These elements comprehend the entire range of characteristics within a culture: including the arts, education, ideas, history, science, medicine, technology, religion,

¹⁰ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 6.

customs, manners, commerce, philanthropy, sports, language, professional vocations, hobbies, etc., and the various media by which these elements may be communicated.

Cultural diplomacy seeks to harness these elements to influence foreigners in several ways: to have a positive view of the United States, its people, its culture, and its policies; to induce greater cooperation with the United States; to change the policies of foreign governments; to bring about political or cultural change in foreign lands; and to prevent, manage, mitigate, and prevail in conflicts with foreign adversaries. It is designed to encourage Americans to improve their understanding of foreign cultures so as to lubricate international relations (including such activities as commercial relations), enhance cross-cultural communication, improve one's intelligence capabilities, and understand foreign friends and adversaries, their intentions and their capabilities. Cultural diplomacy may also involve efforts to counter hostile foreign cultural diplomacy at home and abroad.

In short, cultural diplomacy, being designed not only for mutual understanding but for these other purposes as well, has as its proper end the enhancement of national security and the protection and advancement of other vital national interests.

Note that the this definition, in addition to those cited earlier, contains enough references to foreign publics, foreign opinion makers, foreign cultures, and "Americans" in general, that cultural diplomacy fits principally within the sphere of public diplomacy, which involves principally relations with, and influence over, foreign publics, with a result being greater understanding by Americans of foreign cultures and policies as well. While it does comprehend influence and relations with governments, the primacy of its public diplomatic effects is worth stressing because some cultural diplomats, as discussed below, have been known to subordinate cultural diplomacy to the exigencies of traditional government-to-government diplomacy.

Integration with other arts of statecraft

Properly speaking, cultural diplomacy is an element of national security policy in general and public diplomacy in particular. Cultural diplomacy can be integrated with other elements of these activities whether they are in the realm of information policy, ideological

competition, countering hostile propaganda, foreign aid policy, religious diplomacy, or establishing relationships of trust. In these capacities, cultural diplomacy can have positive effects on foreign cooperation with U.S. policy.

Foreigners who trust the United States, Americans in general, or even merely certain individual Americans, and who feel that Americans respect them and are willing to listen to their point of view, are more likely to help those whom they trust with sustenance, safe haven, information, and communications in wartime. They are more likely to help establish relations with others, build coalitions, collaborate with U.S.-sponsored political arrangements, and so forth during times of peace making and peace keeping. They are also more likely to do business with Americans.

Cultural diplomacy is an important ingredient in the collection of secret intelligence and open-source information of a political, diplomatic, or other national security-oriented nature. This is not to say that participants in cultural diplomatic activities are, or should be, intelligence collectors. In fact, as in the case with Peace Corps volunteers, it is more effective that such participants should stay clear of intelligence activities precisely in order to maximize the beneficial effects of their activity. Nevertheless, cultural diplomats and participants in cultural diplomatic activities often have insights into foreign political conditions and foreign public attitudes that embassy political officers do not. Yet, rare is the occasion when they are debriefed by our traditional diplomats or policymakers for these insights.

Cultural diplomatic participants also establish and develop relationships with individuals who are not likely to be sources of intelligence or other information, but whose networks of personal relationships can lead to such sources. The best human intelligence collection and operations were accomplished through the broadening of personal relationships. Collection is also successful when there are significant numbers of foreigners who sympathize with American ideas and ideals. Insofar as cultural diplomacy involves the effective promulgation of those ideas and ideals, it increases the pool of potential sources.

Cultural diplomacy can also be integrated with political action, political warfare, and subversion. It can be an integral part of strategic psychological operations.

It can be integrated with these other arts and dimensions of statecraft by being overtly political or, in most cases – and most effectively – by avoiding association with politics altogether. Its effectiveness in the latter case results from the fact that many forms of cultural activities do not have political or strategic strings attached and authentically aboveboard.

And yet, paradoxically, they have tremendous positive political effect. Thus, cultural diplomacy, like other forms of public diplomatic outreach such as Peace Corps volunteerism, foreign medical assistance, disaster relief, and the like, can be undertaken effectively by various governmental and non-governmental participants in many cases without their being aware of strategic integration or the political/psychological methods and effects associated with it.

Why Cultural Diplomacy Is Neglected

With all these possibilities, why is cultural diplomacy ignored or relegated to tertiary status in U.S. foreign and national security policy? Part of the explanation derives from the nature of the two principal perspectives in policy making: that of the defense community and that of the traditional diplomatic community – the communities representing “hard” and “soft” power respectively.

The defense community is that which conceives of its role in “national security” terms more so than the diplomatic community (notwithstanding the latter’s oft-articulated role as the “first line of defense”). Similarly the defense community tends to think in “strategic” terms more than the diplomatic community does. However, it sees strategy as a matter involving armed forces, physical battlespace, geo-strategic opportunities and constraints, intelligence concerning these matters, and sometimes even a limited view of the psychological element of strategy, insofar as it involves such things as deterrence and depriving the enemy of his will to resist.

This community, which can be said to be concerned with “hard power,” historically has tended not to think of the other psychological elements of strategy, such as public diplomacy, which, after all, is not its principal professional focus. Occasionally, this community does consider such activities as aid programs and their role in winning hearts and minds in the context of counterinsurgency warfare. The U.S.

military has a substantial soft power dimension of its own, and since 9/11 arguably has taken a lead in public diplomacy innovations which, out of deference to the State Department, it calls “public diplomacy support.” However, the potential fruits of cultural diplomacy almost never enter into the military community’s strategic calculus.

The traditional diplomatic community, exemplified by the Department of State, has traditionally treated cultural diplomacy as an afterthought. This has been aggravated by the fact that it does not conceive of diplomacy in grand strategic terms that incorporate a variety of instruments of statecraft. During the early years of the Cold War, this was less the case, as the Department included its own Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Subsequently, however, this bureau was shifted to the U.S. Information Agency which became the main public diplomacy agency of the government.

Meanwhile, primacy in the Department was placed on traditional, government-to-government diplomacy, including consultations, dialogue, demarches, negotiations, peace processes, agreements, and reporting on political conditions affecting the foreign governments in question. This diplomatic culture has traditionally placed its emphasis on negotiations and reporting and rarely on influence in the largest sense of the term. These emphases derive principally from a longstanding bureaucratic culture that has placed no career incentives on influencing non-governmental figures and larger publics. One can even say that it is a culture that discourages such influence insofar as it has become risky and certainly profitless to one’s career, for an American diplomat to speak, for example, to the foreign media or to endeavor in other ways to shift foreign public attitudes.

When American career diplomats speak publicly, they use a language of caution and rarely a language of persuasion and advocacy – the art of rhetoric that can be used to sway large numbers of people. The diplomatic culture in this sense cannot be called an influence culture, and thus it does not think of all the ways influence can be exercised.

After years of separation of public (and cultural) diplomacy from the Department’s direct purview, these functions became not simply subjects of neglect, but even irritants to the smooth running of the diplomatic process. Some public diplomacy initiatives – particularly targeted toward publics living under tyrannical regimes – would irritate those regimes and thus produce mild disruptions to traditional (i.e.,

government-to-government) relations. Telling the truth to truth-starved populations denied a free press cannot easily be reconciled with withholding such truth in the interest of harmonious relations with censorious regimes. The genetic impulse among State Department policymakers was to attempt to suppress those initiatives that risked “rocking the boat.”

Because of the primacy of the State Department in policy making (whereby country desk officers exercised a trump over public diplomacy policy that might be attempted at USIA or other public diplomacy agencies,) more than a few public diplomats acceded to smooth relations with tyrannies than improved relations with oppressed publics.¹⁵

One of the most breathtaking examples was the opposition by the leading staff members of the Board for International Broadcasting to a major modernization plan and budget increase (totaling \$2.5 billion) proposed in 1982 for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (as well as the Voice of America). This program, part of President Reagan’s strategy to dismantle the Soviet Union, had been initiated in response to the deterioration and obsolescence of the radios’ equipment, to the extreme scarcity of programming funds, and to the KGB’s proxy operation to bomb RFE/RL’s Munich headquarters. That it should have been opposed by the very agency responsible for funding and overseeing these radios’ work is contrary to every law of nature and bureaucratic behavior.

Similarly, a coalition of USIA cultural affairs officials and State Department officials who fashioned the first draft of an exchanges agreement (including cultural exchanges) with the USSR in 1985 was so bent on avoiding any disagreement with the Kremlin that this initial bargaining position contained 21 violations of a Presidential directive (NSDD 75) requiring full reciprocity in exchanges.¹⁶ The spirit of this draft agreement was to make preemptive concessions to Moscow on every matter of sensitivity to the Kremlin, the net effect of which would

¹⁵ This author personally witnessed examples of this phenomenon while in and out of government. He served in the Department of State and the National Security Council from 1982 to 1987, working on U.S.- Soviet relations and public diplomacy.

¹⁶ This is the judgment of this author, whose 1985 memorandum on this issue to the National Security Advisor to the President documents each violation.

have been to minimize the extent of cultural outreach to the Soviet public.

It should not be surprising, then, that the nation's message-making will suffer when public diplomacy and cultural affairs officials are co-opted by the government-to-government diplomatic priorities of a State Department that has long since shed any inclination toward adopting a culture of influence towards foreign publics.

Another reason why cultural diplomacy is neglected is because it is a long-term endeavor requiring a long-term strategic vision. As Winston Churchill noted in *The Gathering Storm*, democracies have congenital difficulty in pursuing a consistent policy for more than five years at a time. Changes in administrations, and in cabinet and sub-cabinet positions, all make for short-term thinking in foreign policy.

Finally, cultural diplomacy is neglected because it, along with other arts of statecraft, is not studied by aspiring or current diplomats and strategists in their academic preparation or mid-career training. Where there is little understanding gained through on-the-job training of the integration of cultural diplomacy with other arts of statecraft, there has been little or no education on this integration in existing professional schools in or out of government. This includes, not remarkably, the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, whose training in public and cultural diplomacy is superficial and management-oriented. While the defense and intelligence communities depend and ought to depend on the success of cultural diplomacy undertaken by other agencies, there is sufficiently little comprehension of this dimension of statecraft in those communities that they fail to demand its inclusion in national strategy.

The Tools of Cultural Diplomacy

While every element of what can be considered part of the culture of a nation is and has been used in cultural diplomacy, some have been used more regularly and intensively than others. The literature in this field is replete with examples of these instruments. It may be useful to summarize them as briefly as possible here, before showing how they work.

The Arts

Both the United States and other powers have made significant use of the various arts to great effect in cultural diplomacy. These include the performing arts such as theater, film, ballet, and music; the fine arts such as painting and sculpture; and an art that can be considered *sui generis*: architecture.

Exhibitions

While exhibitions can be considered an art unto themselves, they harness a variety of other elements of culture, such as science, technology, folk and ethnic culture, commercial products, and the activities of various professions, including charitable work, as well as hobbies. They can convey American customs, manners, and the enthusiasms of popular culture. They can be used to teach and convey interpretations of American, regional, and world history as well as ideas.

Exhibitions can be huge, World's Fair-type displays. They can be as small as a poster outside the U.S. embassy in Moscow, portraying Rev. Martin Luther King's struggle for civil rights. In this one example, our cultural diplomats conveyed: the history of King's struggle and the success of that struggle; the fact that there was sufficient freedom in America for him to conduct that struggle in the first place (implicitly in contrast with political conditions in the USSR); that America celebrates that struggle as a reflection for its concern about the dignity of the human person and human rights both at home and abroad (including implicitly the USSR); and American honesty about the adverse conditions of American blacks ceaselessly highlighted by Soviet propaganda (this honesty being implicitly in contrast with Soviet official mendacity about political and human rights conditions both in the U.S. and the USSR). None of these points was conveyed in a way that directly attacked the Soviet government or its policies.

Exchanges

Exchanges with foreign countries have included every imaginable

field. The most common have been educational, scientific, and artistic. However, there are many other fields that have also been covered including professional, labor, sports, youth, and religious exchanges.

Educational Programs

Educational programs abroad can incorporate: the establishment of American universities abroad (e.g., the American University in Beirut, the American University in Cairo, Robert College in Turkey, etc.); sponsorship of American studies programs at universities around the world; the dispatching of American authorities (professors, teachers, experts in private industry and government) abroad to teach or conduct lecture tours; sponsoring conferences; scholarships, both for Americans studying abroad and foreigners studying in America; etc.

Literature

While the distribution of some kinds of literature can properly be considered to be in the realm of information policy, the distribution of books and other periodicals that do not relate specifically to official information policy is a form of cultural diplomacy. The establishment of libraries abroad for use by foreign populations is one of the most effective means of conveying ideas, history, and other elements of culture, whether to generate understanding or to persuade.

Language teaching

Teaching foreigners English is the key to giving them access to American literature, film, broadcasts, and other media and the information, ideas, and other messages they carry. Similarly, the American study of foreign languages is the key to opening up understanding of foreign cultures.

Broadcasting

American broadcasts abroad by radio and television, and related multimedia, are among the most important media of cultural diplomacy. These are the only means by which unfiltered information and ideas can be conveyed to foreign audiences that live in countries

where media access is restricted either by market realities or official censorship. The Voice of America has traditionally served not only as an instrument of U.S. information policy (as the voice of the U.S. government), but also as the voice of the American people and their culture. Other radios, such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty have broadcast respectively to the countries of East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union acting as “surrogate domestic free presses” for those countries, especially when they were under communist rule and had no free press. Other U.S.-sponsored radio and television media have undertaken similar roles in recent years, including Radio Marti, Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Afghanistan, Radio Sawa, Radio Farda, and Alhurra satellite television.

These various media have, among other things, broadcast news, music, literature, and poetry, whether American or native to the audience’s country, programs on alternative ideas, historical programs, and religious programs -- all concerning subjects that may be unknown or forbidden in the target countries.

Gifts

The giving of gifts has been a perennial staple of cultural diplomacy. It is a sign of thoughtfulness, of respect, of care about others. Its psychological and political effects can be long lasting.

Listening and according respect

The simple tools of dialogue, listening to others, expressing interest in and solicitude toward others, and according them respect are such obvious instruments of any kind of diplomacy that it would seem unnecessary to mention them. Yet it is clear that, given the lack of integrated strategic thinking within the larger foreign policy and national security communities, these most elementary tools are often neglected, and their power misunderstood or not appreciated. According foreigners respect merely by listening and endeavoring to understand their perspectives breeds such good will that it is amazing that these instruments are not emphasized in every dimension of security policy.

Promotion of Ideas

While most of the previous instruments can be described as vehicles or media for the transmission of cultural categories, the role of certain elements of culture should be included in this list for purposes of emphasis, despite the risk of violating a consistency of categories. The promotion of ideas is arguably the most important of these cultural elements. In the American case, this has meant the explanation of such American ideas as: the inalienable rights of the individual and the source of those rights; the rule of law; political and economic liberty; our Founders' view that since men are not angels there is a need for government and also for limits on government, including checks and balances; the dignity of the human person, no matter what his or her background or condition; democracy and representative government; the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion; and other ideas central to our political culture.

The use of ideas as an instrument of cultural diplomacy may involve the gentle explanation of unknown or misunderstood ideas or the attempt to undermine hostile ideological currents abroad.

The question arises as to who in the U.S. government should be involved in the promotion and articulation of ideas. Given that developing and maintaining literacy in the realm of ideas is virtually a full-time occupation, it is questionable whether the vast majority of those whose profession is traditional diplomacy, strategy, or information policy will ever have the time to cultivate the necessary intellectual skills to double as competent professionals in this field. The only practical answer as to who should undertake the job of promoting and articulating ideas or arranging that this task be done by non-governmental organizations or individuals with maximum competence to do so, is: cultural diplomats.

Promotion of Social Policy

Among the ideas American cultural diplomacy has promoted in recent years are those whose cultural effects are so notable that they merit individual attention. The United States has promoted contraception and abortion as part of both a policy of population control and "reproductive rights," sexual abstinence and marital fidelity (as part of a campaign against HIV/AIDS), and women's rights. Some

of these policy positions are controversial not only in the United States but also in many of the countries to which they are targeted.

The controversial – even offensive – character of these positions raises questions central to cultural diplomacy: to what degree should such diplomacy respect the customs and mores of often fragile foreign cultures, and to what extent should it attempt to disrupt these cultural patterns? The answers to these questions must be informed by prudential judgments that balance the need to build good will toward America and support for U.S. interests on the one hand, and a desire to promote social agendas worldwide in spite of the effects such promotion may have on other U.S. foreign policy interests. Such judgments cannot be made by those whose sole interest is in an ideological or social agenda. It must be made with the perspective of the entire array of U.S. interests.

History

The writing and interpretation of history has long been the object of political controversy and struggle, not only domestically but internationally. The distortion of history (marked principally by the deliberate neglect or suppression of significant facts and evidence) has been a staple of the proponents of political ideologies whose extreme political ends justify the use of any means, including dishonesty in historical interpretation. Typical examples were communist movements and regimes which used historical revisionism to re-shape national memory and national identity in an effort to create a “new communist (or “Soviet”) man.”

It is the province of cultural diplomacy to enter into historical controversy in ways that advance U.S. national interests. This may mean disseminating historical facts that have been flushed down what George Orwell called the “memory hole.” Or it may mean correcting historical distortions that have captured the minds of foreign populations or leaders, and which serve to inspire hatred, resentment, and desires for justice that are not merited by the true historical evidence.

In the case of communist historical revisionism during the Cold War, U.S. cultural diplomacy consistently and faithfully endeavored to supply accurate history to populations subjected to intellectual oppression and denied access to a free press, not to mention historical

archives. The good will toward the United States engendered among millions of people behind the Iron Curtain from this cultural diplomatic effort alone was of strategic proportions. When Vaclav Havel, as the first president of post-communist Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic) visited the United States, he made a special visit to the Voice of America to thank its personnel for keeping his national flame alive for half a century.

Religious Diplomacy

Religion has long been, and continues ever more visibly to be, a central element of international relations and foreign policy. Yet, in the U.S. foreign policy culture over the past few decades, policy makers and governmental structures continue to pretend it does not exist. This is partly the result of cultural illiteracy due not only to secularization but to a precipitous decline in the study of history, philosophy, and religion in American colleges. It is also the result, in more recent times, of an ill-informed attitude that any use of religion by U.S. officialdom represents a violation of the First Amendment.

Religion, however, has for years been both the medium and the subject of cultural diplomacy not only by foreign powers but also by the United States as well, albeit in less visible corners of the U.S. foreign policy community. For example, U.S. international broadcasting has regularly included religious programming, including actual religious services, for populations where freedom of religion has been suppressed. For years such programming was conducted with no hesitation, and completely in conformity with Constitutional law, since it had nothing to do with the First Amendment proscriptions against Congress establishing an official religion in the United States. Such programs involved different religions, depending on the target audience.

A key element of religious diplomacy has involved inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue has been used in recent years to overcome hostility and mistrust between Moslems on the one hand, and Christians and Jews on the other, by stressing their common Abrahamic tradition, monotheism, and subscription to the idea of a transcendent, universal, objective moral order, in contrast to modern relativism and materialism and their contemporary cultural fruits.

Knowledge of religion and its attendant philosophical categories of

thought is a key professional skill for cultural diplomats. In the contemporary period, we have been witnessing a struggle between traditional Islam and “Islamism” -- which is arguably less a pure religion than a political ideology that attempts to harness religion to serve its worldly ends. Is it the business of traditional government-to-government diplomacy to affect this struggle? Are traditional diplomats equipped to do so? Is this the province of information diplomacy and “public affairs officers”? We hear constantly about how the United States is in a “battle of ideas” with extremist, terrorism-prone Islamism. So, once again, who within the U.S. government is to affect or conduct this battle of ideas? The main answer is cultural diplomats. It is they who must either be actively involved or who must have at least the adequate intellectual preparation to identify private sector individuals or non-governmental organizations who are equipped intellectually to conduct these affairs with some level of competence. They must be accompanied by people with the same skills in our intelligence community who are capable of conducting political action and political warfare.

**How cultural diplomacy works:
Political and psychological effects**

The ways by which cultural diplomacy achieves its desired objectives are little studied and little known in the larger foreign policy community. They include the palpable political and psychological dynamics and effects as well as less obvious ones.

Enhancement of international relations

The most widely acknowledged way by which the larger number of cultural diplomatic tools work is by promoting cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding. Cultural diplomatic tools are methods of having relations with influential groups in foreign countries outside the purview of normal diplomatic or commercial channels (although commerce can be considered a “cultural” activity in the broader understanding of the term). They can significantly ameliorate relations with foreign publics, opinion makers, influential groups, and even governments by bringing to light and strengthening cultural affinities and thereby inspiring relationships of trust. This

happens, for example, when, through artistic performances or exhibitions, our cultural representatives speak to foreigners in a “universal language” of art or music. This language serves as a vehicle of cross-cultural communication that highlights commonalities of aesthetic sensibility – particularly a common appreciation of beauty, which contains an element spiritually related to truth. The discovery of such aesthetic commonality can, in turn, inspire respect and trust.

Cultural diplomacy, when conducted with respect for foreign cultures and in ways that minimize disruption of foreign cultures, can inspire first the obvious mutual understanding but also ever greater relations of trust. It is a way of conducting international relations without a *quid pro quo*, without a direct political agenda, without specific diplomatic, commercial, or military goals. This breeds such good will that it can, over time, translate into better relations on a political level. The establishment of this good will and trust, however, is a long-term endeavor the beneficial effects of which cannot be realized overnight. The oft-entertained idea of public diplomacy as the equivalent of “crisis public relations” whereby a poor corporate public image can be reversed through a skillful short-term public relations campaign could not be more inapplicable here.

It is difficult to overemphasize the strategic value of respect for foreign cultures. In recent years, much of the world has perceived the United States as having a unilateralist foreign policy that is disdainful of the views of the international community and even culturally imperialist. Attendant to this is the feeling that American policies are based on an underlying lack of respect for other cultures and a lack of willingness to listen to other points of view. As cultural diplomacy can initiate and broaden cross-cultural communication, two worthwhile results can emerge: 1) it can mitigate the existence of any extant American lack of respect for foreign cultures and sensibilities; and 2) insofar as Americans do respect foreign cultures yet are perceived by foreigners as not doing so, cultural diplomacy can disabuse such perceptions or at least lessen their intensity.

Finally, cultural diplomacy produces those levels of mutual understanding, trust, and comfort by contact with foreign cultures that promotes better international relations in other fields, such as commercial, diplomatic and military.

*Immunization against, and cure for,
the effects of hostile propaganda*

Cultural diplomatic tools, particularly those in the realm of the arts, exhibitions, and sports, can have the effect of immunizing foreign audiences from hostile propaganda, and even reversing the effects of that propaganda. Exposure to inspiring cultural products, displays, and performances have the effect of creating curiosity about, and appreciation for, the United States that may not have been there before. Indeed, the witnessing of even a single artistic performance can have instantaneously positive effects on foreign attitudes.

For example, during the Cold War, the Indian subcontinent was the target of the greatest investment of Soviet anti-American propaganda. In spite of the affinities that India and the United States might be thought to have had as the world's largest and oldest democracies respectively, relations between the two countries were considerably strained for various reasons, not least of which was the adverse effect of Soviet propaganda, which portrayed America as materialistic, imperialistic, rapacious, militaristic, aggressive, and unjust in its policies. When audiences in New Delhi witnessed performances of an American college choir, many of these images were erased. As with G.K. Chesterton's description of art as a reflection of the soul,¹⁷ the Americans' performing art revealed the existence of a spiritual component to the American character that many in the audience had never seen. This spiritual element had the effect of melting hearts hardened by the distortions of hostile propaganda.

The very establishment of personal relations of trust, developed as a result of any number of different types of cultural relations, can have an immunizing effect. Foreigners who know, like, and trust individual Americans are less likely to believe hostile portrayals of America simply because they could not imagine their American friend being guilty of the opprobrious behavior or attitudes alleged of Americans in general.

¹⁷G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Fort Collins: Ignatius Press, 1993).

Conditioning for subsequent political messages

Baruch Hazan has dissected a related dimension of the dynamics of cultural diplomacy. He describes it as a form of conditioning propaganda: whereby cultural diplomatic tools induce sufficient curiosity or appreciation for their users that they have the effect of breaking down the barriers that foreigners erect to prevent themselves from receiving messages from sources they do not trust. The cultural influences “impregnate” those barriers, poking holes in them, increasing the likelihood that the audience will listen to political messages that follow.¹⁸ Thus, cultural diplomacy can set the stage for political communications and even serve as a cover for them.

Psychological disarmament

A related effect of cultural diplomacy is psychological disarmament. This is a tool used principally by powers posing a political or strategic threat to others and which use cultural diplomacy as a means of disguising the threat.

Again, recent history provides us with insights. The USSR was a master at this form of psychological disarmament. During the latter stages of the Cold War, Moscow launched a multi-faceted campaign directed toward the psychological disarmament of the United States so as to remove the competitive military pressure that had contributed to the crisis in the Soviet military economy and the larger crisis of the legitimacy of the regime.¹⁹ The key objective of this campaign was revealed publicly by Kremlin representatives as an endeavor to “deprive you [the United States] of an enemy image.”²⁰ A key part of this effort was the launching of a huge cultural offensive targeted

¹⁸ Baruch Hazan, *Soviet Impregnational Propaganda* (Woodstock, NY: Ardis Publishers, 1982) p.17.

¹⁹ John Lenczowski, *The Sources of Soviet Perestroika* (Ashland University: John M. Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs, 1990).

²⁰ _____, “Military Glasnost and Soviet Strategic Deception,” *International Freedom Review* Winter 1990, Volume 3 Number 2, , p. 6-7; as quoted in “Increasing Realism in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” *Nepszabadsztag*, June 4, 1988, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report-Eastern Europe*, June 8, 1988.

against the United States and the West in general.²¹

This campaign was accompanied by propaganda efforts to demonstrate that the Soviet Union had changed its political genetic code, that it had in effect ceased to be Marxist-Leninist in character, and therefore, ceased to have, by definition, unlimited global political-strategic goals. The larger propaganda campaign also included a campaign of military *glasnost* (a term designed to be understood as “openness” but really meaning “publicity,” or perhaps “controlled openness with manipulated truth”) – a campaign of partially opening up formerly secret military facilities to show that military secrecy was no longer a strategic priority.²²

The cultural component of the campaign involved dispatching every imaginable cultural product, from ballet companies and jolly balalaika-playing sailors on naval port visits to films and Olympic gymnasts. They were specifically designed to have a psychologically disarming effect. When the Red Army Chorus gave a concert at Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and included a stirring rendition of the American National Anthem, it received an enthusiastic standing ovation.²³ Only a few years before, the Chorus’ parent institution had been involved in creating and disseminating butterfly toy bombs, designed to be picked up by small children in Afghan villages so that their hands and arms would be blown off, thus inducing their parents and neighbors to flee the villages, depriving the anti-Soviet *mujahideen* warriors of safe haven in the countryside. Contemporaneous with that concert, Soviet armed units invaded Azerbaijan ostensibly to create inter-ethnic peace after the KGB had inspired Azeri communist pogroms against Armenian citizens in Baku, but in reality, as the Soviet defense minister publicly admitted, to prevent political power from slipping from the hands of Moscow’s local communist authorities.

When regaled with the inspiring choral strains thundered by the Soviet army’s *bassos*, who could be reminded of such events? Well into Moscow’s cultural and psychological disarmament offensive, it became clear that Mikhail Gorbachev’s military buildup considerably

²¹ _____, *Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: A Multi-faceted Strategic Instrument of Soviet Power* (Washington, D.C.: IWP Press, forthcoming).

²² Lenczowski, “Military Glasnost and Soviet Strategic Deception.”

²³ Lenczowski, *Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*.

exceeded that of President Reagan in eighteen of twenty categories of armament.²⁴

Political Power Projection

Cultural diplomacy is a form of demonstrating national power – by exposing foreign audiences to every aspect of culture that reflects such power, including the advancement of science and technology, a nation's quality of life, a nation's wealth (as reflected in the development of those elements of a civilization that can only come from wealth), its competitiveness in everything from sports and industry to military power, and its self-image of cultural and civilizational confidence. Some tools, for example a scientific and technological exhibition, accomplish this purpose directly, others, such as architecture, do so symbolically. The skillful use of these cultural tools can thus project a nation's power politically and thus have strategic effects from inspiring confidence among allies to enhancing the deterrence of adversaries.

Inspiration for Political Change

Cultural diplomacy is a method of inspiring political change in foreign countries. When targeted toward states representing a political, strategic, or cultural threat, it can serve as a form of warfare. In this connection, the use of cultural vehicles and the seizure of cultural institutions by one's political allies is a well-known form of subversion.²⁵

By creating a climate where certain thoughts and ideas become reinforced by cultural tools, whether through artistic or intellectual fashion or even in the realm of etiquette, cultural instruments can shape political attitudes and conditions. Typical targets of such cultural influence are film, literature, theater, popular music, educational

²⁴ Lenczowski, *Sources of Soviet Perestroika*, p.27, based on a chart compiled by Jim Guirard, *West Watch*, January-February 1990 (data based on U.S. Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, 1989).

²⁵ See, notably, the works of Antonio Gramsci, as compiled in David Forgacs, ed., *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

institutions, the mass media, religious organizations, and even charitable organizations.

Counteracting Atomization

One noteworthy effect of cultural diplomacy when utilized by the United States against the Soviet Union during the Cold War was the undermining of the Soviet regime's atomization of society. Atomization was the attempt to separate people from one another, to make each individual isolated from others so as to prevent people from organizing in groups beyond the control of the regime. The principal technique was to prevent people from trusting each other. This was done mainly by recruiting and co-opting even unwilling individuals into the internal security apparatus. People were thus pressed against their will into this service by being required to inform on their neighbors, co-workers, and even family members. Failures to report and denounce infractions of Soviet laws resulted in punishment of the coerced "informer." The climate of mistrust thus engendered became pervasive.

Contributing to Political and Ideological Warfare

When cultural categories, notably ideas, are used as instruments in political and ideological warfare, they can be critical to achieving several of the classic goals of these forms of war. They can be used to persuade or co-opt publics, opinion makers or leaders in allied, neutral, or adversary countries. They can be used to isolate extremist and adversary forces by exposing and discrediting them or their ideas, polarizing and splitting contending factions within an adversary's camp, or even demoralizing such adversaries.

Cultural diplomacy includes political and ideological argument. It uses the language of persuasion and advocacy. This is not the kind of language that is associated with traditional diplomacy, which, as mentioned earlier, stresses diplomatic caution and endeavors to smooth rough edges rather than accentuate them in political debate.

Traditional diplomats rarely learn the language of persuasion and advocacy and almost never use it in public fora, as there is no career incentive to do so. In fact, it is a career-threatening move to use such language when speaking to foreign media. Who, then, should use such

tools in service of U.S. strategic interests? The answer, again, is: cultural diplomats.

Cultural Instruments as Double-Edged Swords

Cultural products and instruments are not uniformly effective in achieving the many beneficent political, psychological, and strategic effects our foreign policy seeks. Some of these products can be offensive to foreigners. U.S. popular culture, for example, contains numerous attractive products that have captured the imaginations of people around the world, whether it be music, film, technology, or many other examples. However, there are dimensions of this popular culture, such as the pornographization of American cinema, dress, and music and the treatment of women (and men) as objects rather than persons, that many traditional foreign cultures find offensive and subversive of national cultural mores. Ordinary American television programs broadcast on American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) to American armed forces stationed abroad have been seen as sufficiently offensive by allies as close to the United States as South Korea that the governments of such countries have endeavored to prevent these shows from being viewed by their own populations.

Similarly, American and other Western attempts to export various social policies have been viewed in other countries as culturally imperialist and lacking in respect for the moral and cultural arrangements painstakingly worked out over centuries in their lands. The perception of the lack of respect has alienating effects among foreigners as great as the beneficent effects that derive from their feeling that Americans treat them with respect.

The question thus arises as to how U.S. cultural diplomacy should be involved in tempering the adverse effects of those elements of American popular culture that are widely perceived in foreign lands as toxic and subversive. There may not be consistency, of course, in how American cultural products are perceived in a given country. Religious and political leaders in a given Moslem country, for example, may view such products (or policies, such as women's rights) one way, while the youth of their country may view them otherwise.

Even in such cases, cultural diplomacy can find ways of mitigating the adverse effects of American culture among the members of one group while enjoying their benefits among the members of another. In

the case of foreigners being offended by the pornographic character and sexually libertine values portrayed in American films, cultural diplomacy can educate the concerned foreign audience about the existence of American constituencies that find such fare equally offensive and explain the existence of cultural conflict in America and how it is a feature of a free society.

Cultural diplomacy with adversary states can have a multiplicity of effects. The usual desired effects are to appeal to the people of such states over the heads of their (usually tyrannical) governments, or to neutralize or persuade adversary governments to change their attitudes and policies. Cultural interactions and exchanges arranged with adversary governments pose certain risks, however. Insofar as they principally involve U.S. exchanges with representatives of that government, they can have various adverse effects.

For example, they can legitimize illegitimate institutions thus serving the adversary government's efforts to achieve political-strategic deception. For example, during the Cold War, exchanges were arranged between the American Bar Association (ABA) and the Association of Soviet Lawyers (ASL). An exchange of this type gives Americans the impression that an organization like the ASL is the functional and moral equivalent of the ABA: in other words, a professional association representing the interests of a membership of independent lawyers who work in an analogous legal system.

Such an exchange would have been more accurately portrayed if it were described as being between American lawyers and official prosecuting agents of the Communist Party's system of arbitrary legal repression who double as official propagandists.

Similarly, "inter-parliamentary" exchanges between members of the U.S. Congress and members of the USSR Supreme Soviet gave similar legitimacy to the latter, by portraying them as having been legitimately democratically elected by citizen constituents whom they represent. Again, truth in advertising would describe such an exchange as being between U.S. elected representatives and Communist propagandists disguised as elected representatives.

By portraying the Supreme Soviet as a putatively legitimate parliament, an exchange of this type serves to send the message that the Soviet state is a state like any other (particularly like other democracies) with a parliament like any other. By portraying a system of government that is familiar and non-threatening, such an exchange

reinforces illusions about the systemic requirements and, therefore, strategic intentions of a state with a radically different genetic code.²⁶

Exchanges with foreign adversary governments can present the (usually oppressed) population of their country with an image of cozy relations between their oppressive government and the United States. Little can be more demoralizing to a suffering people, yet it is the objective of tyrannical government precisely to produce such demoralization so as to prevent internal political resistance to its rule.

Yet another risk of exchanges with adversary states is that such exchanges can be used by them to serve strategic purposes such as psychological disarmament, intelligence collection and technology acquisition. Under such circumstances, it should occur to U.S. policymakers to erect defenses against such purposes. Insofar as the threat may be intelligence collection or technology theft, the relevant counterintelligence and defense agencies must be involved. But in cases where psychological disarmament is the purpose, who exercises responsibility for defense against this? In one sense, this is a function of strategic counterintelligence. However, since most counterintelligence in the United States is conceived of principally as an exercise in tactical counterespionage and almost never a task of countering foreign political influence operations, cultural diplomats must be involved.

Here such involvement must include, at minimum, briefing participants in cultural exchanges about the potential threats and strategic purposes of their exchange counterparts and their official sponsors. The construction of such exchanges must also avoid political symbolism that reinforces the strategic purposes of those governments. The days of exchanges between uninformed, naive Americans and well-briefed official propagandists from adversary countries must end.

A final consideration relating to the double-edged nature of cultural diplomacy is in order: the role of American participants who do not share a given administration's policy positions, especially when the country is at war. Americans who dissent from administration policy can most assuredly undermine national policy objectives when

²⁶ For an elaboration of how Soviet institutions served purposes of strategic deception, see my "Themes of Soviet Strategic Deception and Disinformation," in Brian Dailey and Patrick Parker, *Soviet Strategic Deception* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1987), p.55-75.

speaking abroad in the context of whatever cultural activity they may be pursuing. However, it is also true that dissident voices can nonetheless serve longer-term American interests especially if their foreign audience also disagrees with the current administration policy in question. Under such circumstances, the portrayal of an America where there is free debate and where dissident voices are not suppressed can mitigate hostile attitudes of foreign audiences who oppose U.S. policy by giving those audiences hope that U.S. policy can change or at least be informed by views that seem more respectful of their own.

Conclusion

Given the vast array of activities included in cultural diplomacy, it is obvious that the U.S. government has ignored the many possibilities they offer to influence the world in ways that promote U.S. national interests and higher moral purposes. There is no genuine career track in the Department of State for experts in these matters. Nor are there career incentives for foreign affairs personnel to apply their talents to this field. There is no serious professional education for cultural diplomats within the government. Nor are cultural diplomats sent to outside educational institutions to develop the knowledge and intellectual skills necessary to succeed in this most sophisticated of political influence activities.

Meanwhile, despite the utterly strategic nature of this form of influence, no resources – neither human nor financial – commensurate with this strategic character are devoted to cultural diplomacy.

For all the specific policy recommendations one might make in concluding this analysis, and for all the recommendations that have been made in a slew of worthy reports on the subject, as a realistic matter none will be seriously considered by either the executive or legislative branches until two prerequisites are realized:

First, there must be a conceptual revolution in the character of American statecraft. This must involve the adoption within the broader diplomatic and national security communities of an influence culture, to complement the culture of government-to-government dialogue, consultations, and negotiations on the one hand, and the culture of material power, be it military or economic, on the other. A culture of influence can only come about with the merging of both these cultures

so that the ministers of “hard power” recognize the value of “soft power” and that the diplomatic culture recognizes the existence of one of its critical dimensions that make “soft” instruments powerful. What this means is that there must emerge a new culture of *integrated strategy* that refuses to abandon instruments critical to a successful foreign policy and grand strategy.

Second, determined leadership is necessary if existing patterns of bureaucratic practice and budgeting are to be overcome and cultural diplomacy is to secure its place at the strategic table. The existing advocacy by proponents of cultural diplomacy is weak. This is so because it is almost always divorced from integrated strategy. Its strategic value and its indispensable character have remained unsatisfactorily explained.

Ironically, those whose business ought to be the arts of capturing attention and of persuasion have failed both to capture national strategic attention and to persuade. Existing national leadership in both political parties remains oblivious to the enormous gap that must be filled. And given how difficult it is for existing leaders to acquire intellectual capital while in office, it seems quixotic to hope that they will undergo the necessary conceptual revolution, become enthusiasts and advocates for a necessary structural and bureaucratic revolution within the government, and then go about implementing such change with strategic and tactical determination.

The realistic conclusion to be drawn from this is that the fruits of this extraordinary instrument of national influence will have to be picked up by a new generation. But time flies and a new generation is in formation.