



Reshaping public diplomacy at the State Department

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Congratulations to Heather Nauert, the State Department's new acting under secretary for public diplomacy and affairs! You have just taken the best job in U.S. government, though not many people know it.

What people don't realize is that you can communicate with over 300 million people anytime, anywhere and in almost any language. Your predecessors are some of the most iconic communicators in the world: Edward R. Murrow, John Houseman, Robert Sherwood and William Benton. They helped defeat Nazism, push back Communism, liberate oppressed people around the world and shine a much-needed light into closed places.

Although underappreciated, your role is at the center of 21st-century statecraft. The knowledge and assets in your arsenal are the keys to ensuring U.S. influence in coming decades. So what do you have to do in order to succeed? From my former perch within the U.S. government, and now as an avid observer, let me offer a few suggestions:

- Your central goal should be to draw together the various tools of government. You inherit a number of internecine rivalries inside the State Department that are matched by an equally furious competition between State, USAID, and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). Work with the new secretary of State to bring them together. Each has individual interests and specialties, but they share overlapping audiences. Lay out core themes and goals, frame them within achievable objectives and require these agencies to work on those tasks together.
- Build a new posture for public diplomacy by insisting that you are a part of policy formation. From Russian political interference to Chinese empire-building, the lesson that U.S. policymakers need to learn is that proactive communications shape the ground on which policy decisions are made — not the other way around. Don't communicate the decisions; be a part of the decision-making.
- Your prior experience in commercial media can help you with your strongest role: leading media campaigns to achieve foreign policy objectives. As under secretary, build a permanent capability dedicated to executing media and content campaigns to accomplish U.S. foreign policy objectives. You can demonstrate by example how a modern media unit can be integral to modern statecraft.
- Your greatest assets are your forward deployed communicators, including the Regional Media Hubs and the dedicated public diplomacy staff in U.S. embassies around the world. These assets have been overlooked for far too long. Use them to augment key themes and campaigns, but also as key listeners on how U.S. policy is being received.
- The BBG is ripe for reform. Take the time to get to know the agency. It is a strategic asset that opens closed media markets and creates local relevance for U.S. ideas and ideals among hundreds of millions of people. But it has undeniable problems, too, including diffuse management, overlapping services, lackluster production values and a drift away from its purpose in public diplomacy. You and the Board need to work with Congress to rebuild its mission and structure for the next fifty years.
- Finally, you have to understand that today's media environment is vastly different from that of preceding decades. It is time to consider how innovation, ingenuity and technological advances can help us converse with the world. U.S. innovation and American entrepreneurial culture is central to our 21st century influence.

In the end, you will be judged by your ability to assist the U.S. to (re)build influence around the world. Public diplomacy creates trust, and credibility is essential in forming and implementing U.S. policy. This is an important mission, and you have an excellent team to assist you with it. Plus, you now occupy George Marshall's old office — the very best in the building. So enjoy every minute.

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