



LETTERS

New Media Innovations

Public Affairs Officer Scott Rauland is right to stress the importance of cutting-edge technology to the success of U.S. public diplomacy in the 21st century (September Speaking Out, “State’s Wrong Turn on the Information Highway”). The State Department’s International Information Programs Bureau, Public Affairs Bureau and Information Resource Management Bureau, among many others, work hard to ensure that posts have both the IT support and Web-ready content they need to maintain a competitive presence on the Web.

State 52197 (May 16) provides detailed guidance on post management of Dedicated Internet Networks, which can provide embassy Information Resource Centers with the open platforms needed to engage foreign publics on the Internet. That cable specifically authorizes external media, such as CDs, DVDs and flash drives, and offers guidelines for wireless DIN applications that meet department security requirements.

The Content Management System now mandated for all posts eases IT development and maintenance costs overseas and ensures that posts are in compliance with the elaborate complex of federal security and privacy regulations. CMS also provides automatic content feeds when desired, freeing posts to focus on country-specific information. In times of crisis, embassies can ask IIP to manage a site directly from Washington, relieving a

stressed post of technical site-management chores. During the recent Georgia-Russia crisis, we did this for Embassy Tbilisi.

DINs and CMS are two examples of the department’s commitment to innovation in new media. We are energetically adapting blogs, video, podcasts and widgets to advance the mission. The Digital Outreach Team engages directly on Arabic-, Persian- and Urdu-language sites to discuss critical policy issues. And through the Democracy Video Challenge, we are leveraging the power of YouTube and all its attending social networking capability.

Working together, the State Department and overseas posts will continue to explore and develop our capacity to use new technologies creatively and effectively.

*Jeremy Curtin
Coordinator, Bureau
of International
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Washington, D.C.*

The Challenges Ahead

President-elect Barack Obama faces a host of immediate and difficult global challenges. This is true in every sector: health, energy, climate change and poverty, which together make the world increasingly dangerous. Ignoring these problems as the U.S. has done for nearly a decade will have catastrophic consequences for us and the rest of the world.

Not least among our challenges is the continued threat of nuclear disaster, either from an irresponsible nuclear weapons state or from the so-called “loose nukes” still around in the former Soviet Union. Too little was done over the last eight years about this problem; in fact, recent U.S. policies weakened the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Solving these problems must be at the top of a new administration’s global agenda.

Too often America has tackled one problem, one solution at a time. In the 21st century, this piecemeal approach does not work. The challenges of food security, regional conflicts and refugees are complex and fast-changing. This is especially true in the realm of weapons of mass destruction, where the consequences of our policies of neglect can be catastrophic.

One priority is to make our international institutions more effective. To do this, reform and renewal must address the global landscape in a new and fundamental way. Unfortunately, recent American attempts to “reform” old structures, like the U.S. Agency for International Development and the United Nations, have often resulted in *weakening* their capacity for effective action. This makes restructuring to create an effective problem-solving framework more difficult, but it is still necessary.

What is required at the very start is not only reforming but rebuilding American and international organiza-

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tions with a key role to play in addressing these global issues. If necessary, we must create more effective multilateral mechanisms that are “purpose built” and more effective than traditional models.

A fresh look at the organization of our own national security and foreign affairs bureaucracy is required, as well. The tangle of ill-conceived executive orders, dysfunctional department reorganizations, and the shuffling and downgrading of key functions has left much of our foreign affairs structure bereft of direction, clear lines of authority and accountability.

The U.S. development assistance mess requires a unified development agency using the core USAID professional staff and bringing a host of mini-fiefdoms, such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation, under unified direction. Needless to say, the Rube Goldberg type of intelligence reorganization needs fine-tuning and simplification. The same is true of public diplomacy.

On the international level, institutions such as UNEP, IAEA, WHO, the World Food Program/FAO, NATO, IEA, etc., need strengthening and freedom from a bureaucratic and resource-poor straightjacket. Some measure of central coordination and responsibility is needed.

Many of these challenges have been with us for a long time and will take decades to resolve. Others have clear solutions but require adequate funding and effective leadership. There are few “silver bullets,” yet almost all have clear paths towards amelioration.

There is no more important action than to create a new, powerful entity to examine emerging trends and threats, as well as new opportunities on a global level. That office should apply strategic foresight to assess

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emerging threats and problems, but also propose long-term, specific solutions. Such a group within the White House can command the ear of the president and serve as a kind of "early warning system."

Finally, we also need a global capability along the same lines located in the United Nations that can draw on the best minds of all nations to give the entire world early warning and recommendations for action to mitigate or prevent the worst.

Harry C. Blaney III
FSO, retired
Senior Fellow, Center for
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Washington, D.C.

A Political Tool

I take issue with friend and former colleague Irv Rosenthal's September letter ("Ignoring USAID?") and support the editor's comments that followed. Even from within the agency, it has been difficult to differentiate the political from the true economic development and implementation themes. As I recall, USAID has long had an inverted salary pyramid for employees and a political appointee saturation second only to that of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

I voiced that concern to AFSA in a June 2004 *Foreign Service Journal* article, "USAID & Contracting Out," though the idea was politically unpalatable at the time. Under this administration, the agency has functioned exclusively as a "money hammer" to force all nations into unqualified support for our wars and wrong-headed, arrogant policy initiatives.

In that spirit, the State Department bureaucracy sees USAID as a mere political tool to expedite cash flow to nations and favored contractors, with little oversight capability. And unfortunately, many past USAID employee letters to the editor have

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focused only on the need for increases in personnel benefits, with little attention to the content of foreign assistance execution.

On a positive note, I was delighted to see the *FSJ* survey results highlighted in the September “Letter from the Editor,” which reflected my own feelings totally. I also loved the first-hand focus articles on Islam, Iraq and others so much that I have mailed issues of the *Journal* to a former DOD neighbor back in D.C. who refuses to go electronic. Thanks and keep up your great teamwork.

Kevin Burke
USAID FSO, retired
Cape Cod, Mass.

The White Males

Have we gone so far in being polit-

ically correct that “white” and “male” are now practically disqualifications for serving as Secretary of State? By the time the next Secretary is installed, it will have been 12 years and three presidential terms since the last white male held the position.

With each succeeding Secretary, the incumbent president has attempted to “prove” something — to deliver a political-social “message” about the United States, about U.S. foreign policy, about representative inclusiveness. Thus we have had the first woman in the position, the first African-American, and the first African-American woman.

This approach resembles central casting. What’s next? The first Hispanic Secretary of State? The first Asian-American? The first “differently abled”?

The State Department has done its part on “diversity.” Currently, 28 percent of State’s Civil Service/Foreign Service complement consists of minorities; almost 17 percent are African-American. In 2008, the *Black Collegian* listed State as a “preferred employer among diverse audiences” — the only government agency listed in the top 100 (and rated 11th). Are we moving to set-asides for each group and subcategory?

It was insulting for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to say in a September speech that there were too few blacks at State and that she “can go into a whole day of meetings and rarely see somebody who looks like me.” Is she arguing that by their nature those around her are unqualified? That they do not merit their positions? That sounds racist to this Asian-American, who does not “look like” Sec. Rice and prefers not to be judged by her race.

It’s time to free ourselves from labels and succeed on our own without it reflecting on our “category.” Let us recognize that the recent Secretaries

of State have not left us gasping with awe for their brilliance or horrified at their proven incompetence. Nor can we say that any of the recent harvest of department heads has made a defining difference in the management/resolution of any of the current batch of major problems: the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, Russia, China and India/Pakistan.

Furthermore, our two most effective Secretaries of State in the past generation have been “pale males,” George Shultz and James Baker. Secretary Shultz dealt with Soviet interlocutors to negotiate seminal bilateral arms control agreements during the closing years of the Cold War. Secretary Baker, through guile and inducements, assembled a huge military coalition under a United Nations mandate to reverse Iraqi aggression in Kuwait. Their success is their own and certainly no proof that only pale males deserve the position, but neither should it preclude them from consideration.

Can we start considering white males again for Secretary of State?

Teresa Chin Jones
FSO, retired
Arlington, Va. ■

CORRECTION

We regret several errors in the obituary for former FSO Andrew Hillman (In Memory, October). Mr. Hillman died on July 9 at his home in Edgemont, N.Y. He served in the U.S. mission to the United Nations in New York from 1997 until his death. Since 2001, Mr. Hillman had also taught at Seton Hall University and Fordham University. He is survived by his son, Alexander Hillman, of Chatham, Mass.

The complete, corrected obituary is available online at www.afsa.org/fsj/oct08/inMemory.pdf.

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