

The Art of Connection through Public and Cultural Diplomacy

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What a pleasure it is to be addressing such a great group. It is not often that I have the opportunity to speak about public diplomacy, let alone cultural diplomacy, to actual professional practitioners. Though in this bewilderingly over-connected world everyone is in some sense a public diplomat, hardly anyone is a *professional* at it. Unfortunately, this includes most of the people whose job description claims otherwise. And not because they aren't smart enough, but because training in this highly complex art is so dismally scarce where it exists at all. And yes, it is indeed an art.

All right, I suspect not too many of you would respond to the entry for "occupation" on your doctor's medical form with "public diplomat." And yet that is indeed what you all are - cultural public diplomats. Even if you have not yet gone through the full training process, and even if have not religiously committed to memory the new and improved **U.S. ARMY BANDS - Field Manual** released just last July, you cannot fail to know that. Every musician cannot help feeling that his (or her) mission is to reach another heart. It is why you become musicians in the first place.

Connecting through music is perhaps the highest and most durable sort of communication. The English poet Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1841: "Who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and let us for moments gaze into that!" The edge of the Infinite to which music leads us, however, is not frightening but awe-inspiring; music makes it possible for human beings to communicate

on a far deeper and more meaningful level than words could ever attempt. Music may not be a universal language - after all, different harmonies affect people differently, depending on their ethnic and cultural, as well as personal experiences. But it can reach to a place in the soul that reminds us of our common humanity. It is one of the most powerful instruments (if you will pardon the pun) that we can use in our quest for peace and security. It is a great asset to convey our values and aspirations.

Which makes it all the more frustrating when this critical function is poorly understood by those whose job it is to manage this nation's foreign policy outreach. We spend money on costly development projects in countries where much of the population doesn't even know they are taking place (often because we don't tell them about it), projects that often go unappreciated because they do not reflect the real needs of the people but a preconceived notion of what should be provided. At the same time, we fail to take full advantage of opportunities that stare us in the face; and military bands offer a most glaring example. What is wrong with this picture? A great deal indeed. The reasons for what seems paradoxical, if not outright incomprehensible, are complex, but no mystery.

Let's start with the very idea of "public diplomacy": what does it mean, and what role is it supposed to play in U.S. foreign policy? Evidently, it is "public" in the sense that it is meant to reach a wider audience than the red-carpet crowd; and it is "diplomacy" because it is supposed to enhance the national interest. This distinguishes it from run-of-the-mill non-diplomatic public communication - which is just what happens in our globalized world. We communicate whenever we interact with one another. By contrast, *diplomacy* is generally conducted by governments and - this is important - for a deliberate *purpose*. *Cultural* diplomacy is just a subcategory of *public* diplomacy.

Parenthetically speaking, I realize that the proliferation of hyphenated diplomacies is exceeded only by the applications on phones that are smarter than we are. There is sports diplomacy; medical diplomacy; citizen diplomacy; even - wouldn't you know it? - food diplomacy! Professor Craig Hayden, while deploring this promiscuous use of a perfectly good term, is right to observe that "Hyphenated diplomacy implies recognition that more people share some responsibility for diplomacy. The rise of hyphenated diplomacy is language catching up with the pervasive reality of globalization." Indeed.

But cultural diplomacy, as it happens, is not only not among these newcomers: it was here long before any other. As Richard Arndt wrote in his wonderful book on the subject, "recorded since the Bronze Age, cultural diplomacy has been a norm for humans intent upon civilization." In fact, for at least three millennia before the first Europeans landed on the American continent, writes Arndt, "cultural diplomacy has been the first resort of kings."

Perhaps the best definition of this ancient form of strategic communication is that of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, in a 2005 report : "Cultural diplomacy is the linchpin of public diplomacy; for it is in cultural activities that a nation's idea of itself is best represented. And diplomacy can enhance our national security in subtle, wide-ranging, and sustainable ways. Indeed history may record that America's cultural riches played no less a role than military action in shaping our international leadership, including the war on terror. For the values embedded in our artistic and intellectual traditions form a bulwark against the forces of darkness."

One might expect the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy to be a bit partial to cultural diplomacy; Frankly, I rather suspect that military action is not quite on a par with cultural diplomacy when it comes to shaping our international leadership. Not

wishing to minimize the impact of a perfectly pitched high note on a trumpet, it doesn't quite match the effect of a perfectly executed drone attack. Still there is no doubt that world leadership, which America must demonstrate whether we like it or not, is inexorably linked to who we are, our values and ability to connect. We are not and do not wish to be an imperial superpower; but we are and wish to continue to be a beacon of individual initiative, a generous society devoted to the principles of liberty and self-reliance. Well, at least that's the idea; we sometimes forget.

Which brings me to the broader meaning of "public diplomacy": in fact, it includes outreach to our own citizens, the public that is America itself. As it happens, the US Army Bands Field Manual reflects this fact in recognizing the broad purpose of military bands both at home and abroad. In full spectrum operations, for example,

Bands provide music for ceremonial and morale support within full spectrum operations to sustain warriors and to inspire leaders. Deployed bands are capable of reinforcing positive relations with host-nation, multinational, and joint forces. Army bands communicate through the broadcast and print media to foster support of American citizens, both while deployed and at home. Live performances in parades, concerts, and other public appearances represent the Army and our Nation while promoting national interests. Bands support the recruiting mission, provide comfort to recovering Soldiers, and contribute to a positive climate for Army families. Army bands of the 21st century are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct concurrent operations in supporting multiple objectives with targeted musical styles.

You will notice of course the way this is worded: "deployed bands **are capable of**" doing these things. It doesn't mean that they are **actually** taken full advantage of. Examples abound of opportunities missed, when bands had accompanied soldiers to

boost their morale yet they were not permitted to perform in live situations to the local audiences, for no obvious reason. While at times there are undoubtedly safety considerations, the under-utilization of military bands reflects an insufficient appreciation for the tremendous value of this invaluable tool of foreign policy.

But even at home we fail to make good enough use of our military bands, especially the National Guard bands that could do so much more since their members live right in the community. In this connection, the Army Manual notes that bands carry what it terms “nationalistic traditions and values that carry through to succeeding generations.” This is especially relevant since “nationalistic” is itself not a politically correct word in these times of cultural oversensitivity, which have almost succeeded in giving “multiculturalism” a bad name. We do indeed need to recapture and preserve the songs that unify us as Americans, who came together on these shores to establish a new world. National traditions cannot be manufactured - at least, not if they are going to be genuine - but they do have to be nurtured. There should be no hesitancy to do that; on the contrary, it should be a priority. How else can a nation project its traditions and culture abroad unless they are cultivated at home?

Yet a priority it is not. For example, the Band Training Manual notes that “Army bands support the senior commander’s strategic outreach through public relations and recruiting,” which implies first of all that this outreach is left to the discretion of the senior commander, and is considered merely “public relations.” (Admittedly, in the next paragraph, the Manual states that “army bands provide musical support of military operations to include Soldiers and their families, recruiting, *public diplomacy*, community relations and education.” Public relations-public diplomacy, whatever. I’ll say more about that in a minute.)

The Manual also specifies that “in addition to organic requests from the host installation or organization, band commanders respond to requests for bands from surrounding communities, recruiting events, and other various entities.” Requests? This means that band commanders are reactive rather than pro-active. Hardly the way to treat a vital national priority.

But the Army Band training manual is only one symptom of a far greater and more serious problem. Indeed, the State Department itself seems incapable of figuring out where “public relations” ends and “public diplomacy” begins. It is no accident that the title of the person supposed to be in charge of this apparently hybrid function is the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. And it is no accident that the agency whose function it had been to engage in public diplomacy abroad, the U.S. Information Agency, was essentially abolished in 1999, with bi-partisan acquiescence. After all, we had just won the Cold War, we could finally get out of this awkward business of tooting our own horn which Americans seem embarrassed to do.

Speaking of tooting horns, however (I bet there are not a few in this audience who do a very fine job of it too): why do we have a problem with it, I ask you? Why is it that Americans, who are the most generous people in the entire world, would rather let their actions speak for themselves when we know perfectly well - or anyway, *should* know - that actions have a way of not speaking by themselves and that ill-wishers have a way of distorting even our greatest sacrifices by turning it on their heads. Surely one of the most galling examples is the - thank heavens, LATE - Osama BL’s accusation that Americans sent troops to beleaguered Bosnia - after the Europeans showed themselves incapable of solving the problem in their own backyard - in order to *occupy* it! Bin Laden may be dead, but his lies have a life of their own.

Whether we like it or not, cultural communication happens - and on an increasingly large scale. Musical communication happens every day, as any of you who have traveled as tourists anywhere in the world will testify. Everywhere American noise masquerading as music is being played by people with questionable vocal ability in various stages of undress is sending a message all right, but it sure isn't the whole truth about who we are, even if it is, admittedly, an unfortunately sizeable part of it. Full disclosure: I happen to love jazz. (Yes, the fact that in communist Romania where I grew up we never heard it except on the banned short-wave broadcasts of Radio Free Europe undoubtedly contributed to its appeal.) It is a quintessentially American genre. I like the way my friend Dr. Rick Barnes, whom many of you know as a former colleague, uses jazz to demonstrate the meaning of "democracy." So are the many tunes you all play so well, that bring tears to soldiers as much as to their families and indeed to the larger family that is the United States of America.

When you entertain people of other nations, the feelings evoked by the music you play is harder to surmise. To me, brought up in a totalitarian country, military bands only reinforced the oppression to which we were subjected seemingly forever; it took a little while to listen to the Star Spangled Banner with a wholly different attitude. I must say, it wasn't long before American military music filled my heart with gratitude and joy - but I already lived in this country. For that reason, I would suggest being careful about playing American patriotic music to audiences that may fail to understand the context, and may erroneously interpret this as a sign of neo-imperial insensitivity. But even with this caveat, all things equal, the very fact that we would wish to share with them our music is itself a sign of friendship and in itself constitutes a form of public diplomacy. That said, still better is learning their own songs and playing them; inviting them to perform along

with you, reading the music together as you go; listening to them play their music; the permutations are innumerable, and all carry with them the message that we wish to engage, to understand one another, and to collaborate if at all possible on a human level. In addition to being musicians, members of the U.S. national security forces, and patriots, you are all remarkable and, if my own experience is any indication, particularly friendly human beings.

The report by the Advisory Committee for Cultural Diplomacy that I cited earlier fully recognized the need “to make greater use of available assets... such as military bands.” And the famous Colonel Thomas Palmatier, whose writings you have all read and undoubtedly committed to memory, has outlined with rare eloquence what specifically can and should be done to address some ongoing problems. If I may cite here just a few highlights:

- * Band leaders are not trained to view and employ their bands as strategic assets.
- * Army bands are usually aligned with staff elements that have little interest in public diplomacy.
- * Army bands are not properly structured to deliver the right kind of music support to be most effective in public diplomacy.
- * Most strategic leaders in the Department of Defense do not see military bands as strategic assets.
- * Bureaucratic limitations have been erected that effectively prohibit the Department of State from using military bands in support of public diplomacy.

Col. Palmatier wrote this in 2005, but I am afraid despite some advances many problems persist. If I were to focus on the single most important problem, however, it is a pervasive inability, throughout the U.S. government, including both Congress and the

executive, to appreciate the enormous importance of strategic communication in general, public diplomacy in particular, and cultural diplomacy above all.

But I will not end on a negative note. It is inspiring to note, for example, that the U.S. Air Force Band has journeyed to Europe, South America, Asia and the Middle East, performing in over 50 countries and 42 world capitals. And I don't have to tell you all about the great success of the 82nd Airborne Band's successes in Haiti. The Army Military Bands website offers additional examples, as do blog discussions such as www.tromboneforum.org - to say nothing of Facebook's "Show Support for American Military Music Programs."

Not to be overly self-critical - a typically American trait usually, though not exclusively, exhibited by the Left - we are not alone: the inability to appreciate the importance of cultural diplomacy is shared by our European allies. Wrote Robin Davis in March 2010, while participating in a conference organized by the British Council:

I suddenly realized yesterday – in a blinding flash of the obvious – was that the missing component in NATO strategy is...culture. ... 'What has Culture got to do with winning tactical battles against insurgents?' was the question posed by an eminent academic and leader of a respected Brussels think tank ... Four hours later – after a live debate between British Council CEO Martin Davidson and the NATO Head of Operations, with a wide exposition of cultural activities ... – there was no doubt in the audience's mind that the **only way to build lasting, sustained peace is through deep understanding of 'the other'**. And this understanding can only – I mean 'only' – be borne out of willingness to recognize 'the other's' culture.

It should not be so difficult to realize that there are opportunities out there for the taking – but, again, that is predicated on a willingness to do so. I am grateful to your

colleague Durrinda Garrison for pointing out to me an excellent thesis by Lt. Col. Brarry Cox of the National Guard about the Guard's State Partnership Program. Written in 1999, this study is as relevant today as then, if not more. The Partnership Program, begun in 1992, was originally designed to improve relations with newly independent nations but has since been expanded to include nations from Central and South America. Its principal purpose, in Lt. Col. Cox's words, is "preventive diplomacy," designed to support the U.S. national security by applying all the instruments of statecraft, including diplomatic and informational elements, in a coordinated way. 29 countries currently have partnerships with just so many American states. To mention but a few: Arizona is linked with Kazakhstan; Louisiana with Uzbekistan; Nevada with Turkmenistan; Montana with Kyrgyzstan; Utah with Belarus; Florida with Venezuela; and last but not least, Alabama with my own native Romania.

I will stop here, and ask for your questions. But first, I want to thank you with all my heart, as an American who emigrated to this wonderful country with my family as a teenager, for helping us preserve and nurture the tradition of the freest society in the world. It is a privilege to be here, with you. Thank you.