

*The Last Three Feet: Case Studies in Public Diplomacy, 2012*¹, William P. Kiehl (Ed.)

This book was published in edition of William P. Kiehl, former executive director and the current treasurer of the Public Diplomacy Council, who captured several case studies in contemporary American public diplomacy. These studies were presented in November 2011 at the public forum jointly organised by the Public Diplomacy Council, Walter Roberts Foundation and George Washington University's Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communications. The title of the book is self-explanatory: although it derived from the forum's title ("The Last Three Feet: New Media, New Approaches, and New Challenges for American Public Diplomacy"), its basic idea is inspired by the famous declaration of Edward R. Murrow, the first director of the United States Information Agency, who – back in 1962 - stated that "the real art" in public diplomacy "is to move it the last three feet in face-to-face conversation". The book was published not only with a view to explain how American public diplomacy functions abroad, taking into consideration the input of social media to the global communication environment, but also to "fill the gap" in the ever-growing public diplomacy literature, which is – according to book's editor – "lacking on written contributions by active professionals in public diplomacy". The book encompasses ten chapters.

In the first chapter William P. Kiehl introduces the subject, indicating that within the ever-growing literature in the area of public diplomacy there is "a paltry representation" of case studies from abroad, which could provide information on public diplomacy actions written by very diplomats and public diplomacy professionals. He points out that the experiences on the ground (field operations), as not sufficient known and not well-understood aspect of public diplomacy, should be brought to public attention. According to editor, the book helps to raise "greater public awareness and interest" in this specific aspect of American foreign policy.

The second chapter, entitled "How I came to love the Shanghai Expo" represents the first case-study in the row. It explains why the Shanghai

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Expo 2010 was not only a major event but also “an expo of necessity” for the United States. Beatrice Camp, the author of this story, argues that the post-Cold War disinterest in cultural diplomacy and Congress’ refusal to provide appropriate funding created huge obstacles for USA to be present at world’s major fairs. Yet, as it was not possible to ignore the Chinese invitation and the pull of public diplomacy opportunities, the organisation of the Expo relied on private funds rather than depend on a government bureaucracy, which enabled exemplary presentation of American culture and values to the Chinese people. The Shanghai Expo proved successful as it attracted 7.3 million visitors on the ground, enabling them an insightful face-to-face encounter with the United States. Consequently, the valuable experience and lessons learned in Shanghai inspired USA administration to put forward initiatives for further major fairs in Yeosu, Korea (2012) and Milan, Italy (2015).

Within the third chapter Rachel Graaf Leslie presents the experience of the US Embassy in Bahrain, whose main activities in public relations were intensively focused on proactive engagement towards the press during the social unrest in 2011. The author points out how important was for the Embassy staff to timely recognize the change of media climate in Bahrain, in order to adapt its public diplomacy strategy on the ground. After the various traditional media editorials insinuated that the USA was behind the unrest, and the Embassy was blamed for providing “politicized reports” and accused of “interference” in Bahraini political affairs, the Embassy had no other choice but to turn to digital and social media, which proved to be adequate tools for dissemination of unedited versions of U.S. statements, and facilitating communication with domestic audience.

The following, fourth chapter, deals with the “recapturing the narrative in Turkey”. Elisabeth McKay explains that the US diplomacy, being aware of the negative perceptions of the United States within the Turkish public opinion, which emerged during the crisis in Iraq, launched in 2006 the program for young entrepreneurs, whose focus has been on teaching students on basics of entrepreneurship. It was also aimed at encouraging young people to design and implement their own projects. The U.S. Embassy in Ankara has carefully monitored the overall impact of programs through analyzing the feedback in the media and social networks. It turned out that the program has significantly helped to create a positive image of the United States as “a good partner and associate.”

The fifth chapter, entitled "The story of '@America'" (by Michael H. Anderson), deals with difficulties that public diplomacy officers had to overcome in performing their duties since the closure of American cultural centres for security reasons, due to budgetary cuts and changes in communication environment in late 1990s. In the post-9/11 environment the public diplomacy outreach efforts became even more difficult and the official U.S. premises were perceived as "isolated, unwelcoming" and "fortress-like". Following more than one decade of neglect, the issue of "public diplomacy space" was re-examined. As a consequence, the Embassy in Jakarta conceived a public diplomacy pilot project "@America", launched in 2010 as the first high-tech American cultural centre within the Jakarta's biggest commercial mall space.

The following case study presented within the sixth chapter by Jean Manes highlights the Youth Ambassador Program in Brazil as a State Department's best practice and example how to successfully put together the whole "package" of public diplomacy activities in a host country. Encompassing exchanges of students, media, partnerships with the private sector and local governments countrywide, educational advising services, language teaching centres etc., this Program proved to be indispensable for establishing longstanding partnerships and significantly improved U.S. – Brazil relations.

The seventh chapter deals with experiences of American diplomats in Baghdad, who intensively utilised social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in order to show a "human face" of the American presence in Iraq towards the very sceptical domestic public opinion. The information and stories about various social and other issues of importance to American and Iraqi citizens were firstly communicated in English and subsequently also in Arabic, which proved to be a crucial step forwards, as it spurred users of social networks on a daily, engaged interaction with American diplomats. These efforts gradually attracted ever more attention of public opinion, which became more responsive and co-operative, so the Facebook site of the American Embassy in Baghdad has been eventually considered as "the place for a truly democratic dialogue."

The specificities of the American public diplomacy in Pakistan have been presented by Walter Douglas within the book's eighth chapter. It looks at

improvements made by the American Embassy in Islamabad with the view to better understand what was important to Pakistani citizens. Realising that the English-language media in Pakistan has been misleading as its coverage reflected rather an outside-looking viewpoint and not necessarily the stance of Pakistani people, the Embassy staff invested much more efforts into analyzing the media in national Urdu language, especially the television broadcasts that reached huge Pakistani audiences. It proved to be instrumental for drafting more accurate reports for US government officials and insightful in terms of identifying wider political implications of media stories for the U.S.-Pakistani relationship.

The following chapter, whose author is Bruce Wharton, deals with necessary requirements and capabilities of successful public diplomacy officers in the future. According to Wharton, apart from key management, communications and interpersonal skills, diplomats engaged in public diplomacy activities need not only to have ability to attentively listen and learn from people in the host country, but also to apply the gathered information in shaping public diplomacy programs. Moreover, he refers to “new abilities” such as creating social partnerships, including through the effective use of technology and social media, persistence, “insatiable curiosity” and willingness to identify the expectations of targeted audiences.

Finally, within the chapter 10, William P. Kiehl draws conclusions on possible lessons learned from the foregoing case studies. He points out that successful public diplomacy programs should be based on common interests between the USA and the host country, and that rest on local resources, which often accompany those from Washington headquarters. Arguing that the Embassies and Consulates (in particular locally employed staff) are more knowledgeable to drive the process of public diplomacy than the “massive bureaucracy in Washington”, especially in terms of targeted allocation of available financial resources from headquarters, Kiehl concludes that the key for success in public diplomacy campaigns lies in very combination of “locally resourced, field-driven and commonality-focused programs, with a minimum of interference from headquarters”.

The rest of the book represents the review of interviews with Public Diplomacy officers and envoys worldwide, who elaborated on their

experiences, major challenges and impacts of their daily-based engagement in public diplomacy programs.

In sum, the book provides the reader with an insight into the basic features of U.S. public diplomacy. Although presented case studies significantly differ one from another, they all illustrate how indispensable the interaction and reliable personal contacts may be for the overall success of one country's public diplomacy. Recognizing the benefits and opportunities of new technologies and social media as a platform for the promotion of national interests, it reviews to what extent U.S. administration pragmatically approaches to shaping of its public diplomacy, carefully selecting communication tools, which diplomats utilise in performing their daily tasks. The book can be highly recommended as a valuable source of information and guidance to both governmental and nongovernmental communication experts. Likewise, it could prove instrumental for practitioners in public, economic and cultural diplomacy as an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

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