The Long Road to Digitalized Diplomacy: A Short History of the Internet in U.S. Public Diplomacy[1]

Nicholas J. Cull
University of Southern California
cull@usc.edu

Abstract:
This article considers the tortuous path by which the agencies of US public diplomacy came to use digital and social media. It argues that despite progress the Department of State has yet to use digital platforms to their full potential as a mechanism for building and maintaining relationships.

Key Words:
Public diplomacy history, negative example, institutional history, State Department.

The United States of America often presents itself – justifiably – as the land of innovation. The digital revolution of recent years has underlined this image. The internet itself emerged from U.S. Federal Government funded projects such as the Pentagon's DARPA-net. Most of the world's giants of hardware and software have emerged from the country, and the U.S. is home to the key platforms of social media and user generated content which have become so central to the medium in recent years. Yet the story of the U.S. government's encounter with digitalized diplomacy tells a different story. Early experiments and innovation were replaced by a culture of suspicion and painfully slow progress. As will be seen, some of this was the result of an internal structural transition as the U.S. wound down its inherently innovative Cold War communication agency – the United States Information Agency – and trusted its digital work to the much more conservative Department of State. But some of the errors

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are more general and serve as a negative example for other international actors seeking to use digital tools as a functional element of their engagement with foreign publics.

In the beginning the leaders of the United States understood the value of technology in projecting their national image overseas. The young republic's first public diplomats – Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson – were also accomplished scientists. The U.S. showed off its technology and know-how at international exhibitions in the nineteenth century and was swift use such innovations as radio and television to carry messages abroad in the twentieth. The first use of computers in U.S. public diplomacy was purely as symbols of modernity. Early IBM machines featured at the World's Fairs of the later 1950s and were programmed to answer "frequently asked questions" about the United States.[2] But large-scale use of computers in the field required a technological leap. Remote connection was the key. In the 1970s the United States Information Agency post in Paris experimented with a computer terminal linked to a databank in Washington D.C. The experiment failed to provide anything of operational value but it showed what might be possible in the future.[3]

During the Reagan administration the United States Information Agency had both the budget and the energetic leadership to undertake a massive program of technological investment. The agency launched a satellite television channel called WORLDNET and installed a Wang computer system for word processing at its headquarters. By the end of the 1980s the agency had several databases which could be accessed from the field over what was called US-INFONET, but it was not until the early Clinton years that plans materialized to link digital information directly to the public.

At the beginning of the Clinton administration the Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA), Penn Kemble, proposed a single online public diplomacy network, initially connecting agency employees at home and abroad as an online community, and

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[2] For a survey of US expo diplomacy in this period see Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1997.

[3] Allen C. Hansen, *USIA: Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age,* New York: Praeger. 1989.

then bringing in the agency's foreign interlocutors.[4] The first step to this unrealized end was to centralize USIA's content creation within a single "Information Bureau" or "I Bureau" for short. The White House loved the initiative but only because it saved money. The first steps in actually reaching directly to a global public came in January 1994 when USIA's radio element Voice of America launched an online text service using the Gopher protocol. By the summer of 1994 audio files for fifteen VOA languages were available online. VOA soon reported 50,000 down loads across fifty countries each week including use in China. By 1996 VOA was streaming its audio services in real-time. But there were limits to the broadcasters' appetite for innovation. In 1997 the director of the US International Broadcasting Board, Kevin Klose blocked a proposal for an online video stream for just $250,000 a year on the grounds that the internet was not a "proper" broadcast medium and the US needed to maintain investment in shortwave radio.

USIA itself launched a Gopher service in 1994, including resources for English language teachers. The first World Wide Web based materials appeared on 12 April 1995 when USIA's website débuted.[5] It was well reviewed. In 1996 an independent survey of web sites ranked USIA in second place in terms of "total experience" in the "government, politics and law category" (the winner was not a U.S. government site but rather that belonging to the cable channel Court TV). USIA's early digital content included five "e" journals: *Economic Perspectives, Global Issues, Issues in Democracy, U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* and *U.S. Society and Values*, in multiple languages. Digital Public Diplomacy 1.0 had arrived.

From the outset the USIA officers understood the unique potential of the internet to sustain virtual communities and worked to use digital links to maintain links already made through face-to-face exchange. In 1995 the agency began providing participants in its Russian teacher exchange with training in email and internet use during their time in the U.S., equipping their institutions with computers on their return

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4 Penn Kemble, *USIA Discussion paper: American foreign policy in an Information Age*, Washington D.C.: USIA, 22 October 1993.

5 James, McGregor, "USIA on the Internet", *USIA World*, Vol. 14, No. 2, April 1995: 3, 23.

home. The program was not perfect. Many Russian teachers thought the computers were too precious to use. But it worked well enough to justify launching a full blown internet access and training project across the former Soviet Union the following year. USIA succeeded in setting up internet access points in fourteen Russian cities. Similar projects included "Technology for Peace" created for the divided island of Cyprus where Greek/Turkish Cypriot internet communication was impossible because of the absence of direct phone lines between the two halves of the island. USIA established a dedicated mail server at the University of Maryland so that Cypriots who met one another in the agency's program of bi-communal peer-to-peer groups could maintain contact by email. The networks survived and flourished. The agency also developed a new internet based system to connect the field and headquarters called PD-NET. With an emphasis on band width it provided a valuable mechanism for the agency's practitioners to share digitized materials in real time.

By the end of the 1990s U.S. defense analysts had begun to flag their country's vulnerability to cyberattack. In August 1997 the Chinese government began blocking access to VOA and other western news sites. By November 1997 VOA stopped logging any connections from inside China. The VOA's parent body, the International Broadcasting Bureau, began its search for countermeasures. The Department of Defense responded in 1998 by creating a Joint Task Force-Computer Network Defense (JTF-CND). The Kosovo War saw battles online as organized groups of Serb hackers bombarded the west with what became known as "Yugospam". USIA countered as best it could by assigning six officers to monitor chat rooms and chip in with corrective statements when appropriate. Of more practical value, USIA drew on private sector help to establish a chain of internet points across Kosovo and in Kosovar refugee camps, to help refugee families reunite and connect to the outside world. It also used the web to publicize Serb atrocities in multiple languages including Russian. The Kosovo crisis as a whole showed the value of digital diplomacy and USIA's contribution to US foreign policy, but the agency's fate was already sealed. On 1 October 1999 the non-radio elements of USIA were folded into the Department of State while inter-

national broadcasting elements became independent under a Broadcasting Board of Governors.[6]

Public diplomacy online or face to face did not initially flourish in the Department of State. The Department had its own traditions, hierarchies and priorities. It displayed little interest in digital innovation and then only as an alternative form of fast media/advocacy rather than as a mechanism for listening or exchange. The department seemed terminally risk averse and terrified of attracting negative attention on Capitol Hill. For ex-USIA personnel trying to advance a digital approach it was an intensely frustrating experience. One USIA new technology expert spoke the experience as "running into a buzz saw".[7] One point of friction was the need to consolidate USIA's PDNET with the State Department's more limited OpenNet Plus system. PDNET and OpenNet Plus operated in parallel until 2004, but the PD practitioners were loathed to downgrade and argued fiercely that their work required the ability to send large files including video, without these being held overnight for a security review. The State Department eventually accepted that their system would have to accommodate PD needs.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 provided a brutal wake-up call for U.S. public diplomacy. The new Secretary of State, Colin Powell, moved swiftly to bring the entire Department into the Twenty First century as rapidly as he could. He established an Office of E-Diplomacy staffed by a mix of technical specialists and Foreign Service personnel to digitize the inner working of State. All U.S. diplomats were issued with Blackberries and all embassies acquired websites; where the internet was used externally, the operating philosophy one of "pushing out" material to supplement press conferences. In the summer of 2003 the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy published a report focusing on E-Diplomacy and the online PD techniques including "Virtual Consulates" a system of web-pages designed to "use the power of the Internet to communicate with local publics and Americans in a locally branded product". The first

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6 Nicholas J. Cull, *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: U.S. Public Diplomacy, 1989-2001*. New York: Palgrave, 2012.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

Virtual Consulate launched in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Supportive, the commission offered helpful ground rules for their expansion.[8] The much criticized "Shared Values" campaign launched by Undersecretary Charlotte Beers to rebuild the US relationship with the Arab world included an interactive website called *www.opendialogue.org* operated in conjunction with the Council for American Muslim Understanding which invited Muslims around the world to share their experiences of the U.S.A. and its people. Soon over one thousand stories had been posted but it was insignificant when set against the enormity of the US' public opinion challenge in the Islamic world. It was a sideshow of a sideshow. The budget went elsewhere.

Unlike the Department of State, the Bush-era Pentagon had both the extra resources and the willingness to experiment and launched multiple projects to engage foreign publics. Its digital projects included an Office of Global Engagement which planned to confront Al Qaeda in cyberspace and work to promote internet connectivity around the world by distributing such things as solar powered laptop computers. The initiative was torpedoed by rivals within the Pentagon, but the process of online engagement continued at the Joint PSYOP Support Element (JPSY) attached to the U.S. Special Operations Command in Tampa.[9]

While other governments such as those of Israel and Britain embraced digital tools and the first generation of on-line diplomats at the Department of State were initially unwilling to open any conversation they did not control. The sporadic nature of Bush-era leadership made matters worse. In 2004 Under Secretary Margaret Tutwiler rolled out some special projects to connect U.S. college classrooms with classrooms overseas, but she was soon gone. An element of stability came in 2005 with appointment of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her energetic Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes.

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[8] U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. *The New Diplomacy: Utilizing innovative communication concepts that recognize resource constraints,* Washington D.C., 2003; Carl Weiser, "$1 billion international image campaign isn't enough to buy U.S. love", *USA Today,* 14 September 2003.

[9] Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception: the Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq,* Robinson: London, 2003.

As a friend and close adviser of President Bush, Hughes brought political clout to public diplomacy. She reestablished State as leader in the interagency effort in the area and rolled back the presence of the Pentagon. Her approach to digital media was dominated by approaches learned on the campaign trail. She was at heart a propagandist for the Bush White House and encouraged State Department officials to be more present online by feeding them with pre-approved talking points which they were free to discuss without further clearance.

As during the Powell period, the most significant advances in the use of electronic media in the Rice/Hughes-era were internal to the Department of State. They included the use of second generation platforms within State's firewall. The Office of E-Diplomacy launched a Diplopedia: a user-generated wiki resource of information on countries and issues which soon accumulated 10,000 entries. 2007 saw the debut of the State Department's blog "DipNotes" and the E-Diplomacy office also established a series of "Communities@State" online groups to link diplomats interested in particular issues (Boly 2010). There was also a unit within the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) able to innovate beyond the State Department's firewall. The PD officers who had managed PDNET until 2004 were reconstituted as a unit with the title PD IT (Public Diplomacy Information Technology). They had their own small Planning Budget and Applied Technology group (PBAT) which had just enough "bandwidth" to develop some small online diplomacy initiatives which came online in the course of 2008.

Hughes' successor as Under Secretary – James K. Glassman – had a more nuanced interest in the potential of digital work. Glassman was a journalist who understood his country's challenge as being at its core a war of ideas. Noting the application of the term "Web 2.0" in a variety of sectors – Library 2.0, Government 2.0 and even Porn 2.0 – he proclaimed the era of "Public Diplomacy 2.0". The coinage both recognized existing initiatives and stood as a call for more. The point, as Glassman knew, was that the Department could no longer expect to control its message, but merely offer the message to the world and be open to subsequent discussion. Glassman was only in office for the last six months of 2008 but those months brought innovation. He found the International Information Program bureau (IIP) and Education and Cultural Affairs bureau (ECA)

both willing and able to deliver. PDIT's shop worked in the virtual world of Second Life organizing a meeting the Muslim journalists and a Second Life Jazz Festival. PD IT also the launch of a social network for ECA's exchange participants – including a video competition to promote exchanges. The idea of a YouTube competition also surfaced in the bureau of International Information Programs which in 2008 launched the Democracy Video Challenge – a competition to create a three minute video about democracy in the hope that entries might circulate virally within their makers' peer communities.

The Glassman period also saw the revival of direct digital engagement work. A small group of public diplomacy officers was charged with the task of going online to seek out forums in which issues of U.S. foreign policy and the war on terror were being discussed and intervening with the U.S. official line. In keeping with the clear division of roles within U.S. strategic communication which allocated the Department of State overt communication, members of the unit were required to declare their official U.S. government status. Glassman's final innovation was to launch a program to share best practices of social media work among NGOs whose work was in line with the broad aims of U.S. public diplomacy: the so-called Alliance of Youth Movements. A conference took place in the fall of 2008. Participants included Oscar Morales, the founder of the Facebook group One Million Voices Against FARC.

Not all the second phase digitalization work was hailed as a success. The press mocked Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Diplomacy for Europe, Coleen Graffey for launching a personal Twitter account as a way to reveal a person behind the diplomacy. As the Middle East lurched into crisis her personal tweets included details of her difficulties finding a bathing suit in Iceland to visit a spa.[10] At much the same time the PBAT team was pushing to launch the first formal Twitter feed for the Department and running into all sorts of objections about the inability to say anything significant in 140 characters. The role of new media in the Obama election campaign of 2008 finally settled the argument their

[10] Al Kamen, "In the Loop: Live From Iceland, or Possibly Greenland, It's the DipNote Tweet Show!", *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2008, A23.

way. Thanks to a last minute scramble the U.S. State Department's official Twitter feed was live in time for election night.

Barak Obama's victory created a general buzz around social media in the world at large but at the State Department public diplomacy stalled. In place of Glassman the Obama administration appointed a former television executive named Judith McHale. Her confirmation hearing was a long time coming and in the meantime U.S. digital engagement lost momentum. In June 2009 PBAT's applied technology component became a dedicated new technology group with the unofficial title of the Office of Innovative Engagement (OIE). It has an able director, USIA veteran William May, and a sufficient budget to get projects up and running. Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was an enthusiast for new media. Her digital innovations included the launch of Virtual Presence Posts – an expansion of the virtual consulate idea of five years earlier – to establish websites to present U.S. materials in a particular regional language unaddressed by a physical post. Languages included Mayan. Clinton also announced "Virtual Student Internships" using U.S. college students as online auxiliaries for posts with new media projects. There were online projects to help particular constituencies, like digitizing of the Iraqi National Museum, and no shortage of initiatives to push U.S. materials out across new platforms. OIE worked to make the President's major speeches in Cairo and Ghana available on handheld devices in Africa and the Middle East.[11] The Cairo speech was simply sent out by SMS text; the Ghana speech had been built on an interactive campaign to whereby the Department invited input from West Africa via traditional media, collected feedback via TXT and then passed the material to the White House to steer the issues addressed by the President. It was a small step to using the new technology as a way to listen but the wider Department still did not take the relational aspects of the social media seriously.

The most successful online initiatives remained inside the State Department's firewall as the "Communities@State" continued to grow and the Department launched "Statebook" – its own equivalent of Face-

[11] Jeff Zelney, "The Lede: Multiple Channels Open for Obama's Cairo Speech", *The New York Times* blog, 3 June 2009. Available at *http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/03/multiple-channels-for-obamas-cairo-speech/.* (Accessed 12 February 2018).

book. The Secretary of State also commissioned "The Sounding Board": an online place for discussion of suggestions about life inside the department could be posted. The issues were often parochial but the platform built confidence in the user-generated content platforms of the second phase of digitalization and thereby showed the change-averse what new media could do.[12]

The Obama administration placed rhetorical emphasis on the importance of the web. Secretary Clinton spoke of advancing the digital rights of the world, by which she meant helping the citizens of Iran, China and elsewhere circumvent censorship. Some posts made extensive use of new media, most famously in Indonesia, where the U.S. embassy acquired over 200,000 additional friends on Facebook and established a digital post in a shopping mall. The embassy noted ample evidence of real dialogue online and not just pleasing numbers: posts sometimes received hundreds of comments within ten minutes of being posted online. There was also innovative mixing of digital media into conventional exchange projects as with OIE's "Virtual Exchange" program called "Kansas2Cairo", which introduced architecture students in Cairo to those based in Los Angeles. The students worked together in Second Life for three months before meeting in person for a week of direct contact.[13]

The higher levels of the Department of State were receptive to new media as never before. In 2009 Anne-Marie Slaughter joined the State Department hierarchy as Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning. Slaughter's work on network power had underlined the value of the digital age to the U.S.[14] The Secretary of State also retained the services of Condoleezza Rice's technology adviser, Jared Cohen, and hired her own: Alec Ross and Katie Jacobs Stanton. Ross avoided talk of "Public Diplomacy 2.0" preferring to speak of "Twenty First Century Statecraft". It may have been simply a quest for a catchy brand, but the term had none of

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12 Richard Boly, Presentation to Gov 2.0 conference, Los Angeles, April 2010.

13 On Kansas2Cairo see *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Al29TN8Dx10&feature=relmfu* (Accessed 12 February 2018).

14 Anne-Marie Slaughter, "America's Edge: Power in the Networked Century", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2009, 94-113.

the emphasis on relational work implicit in Glassman's phrase. This was reflected in some of the output. Ross, Cohen and Stanton all launched Twitter streams (@AlecJRoss, @JaredCohen, and @KateAtState). While all three had great credibility within the U.S. online community, their feeds were angled towards tweeting to the world insights from others in their U.S. tech circle and re-tweeting the views and doings of the Secretary. They did little to feed the views of the world back to the U.S. tech community. This was clear to anyone who scrolled down the list of people who the trio followed who were seldom "foreign". The neglect of the "following" aspect of Twitter was even more acute in the field where posts and ambassadors launched Twitter accounts. It was common to find that these accounts were following no one. They were judged within the Department solely by the number of followers. No one seemed to notice the collective missing of the potential of the medium.

The final weeks of 2010 underlined the power of the new media. Julian Assange published a massive quantity of State Department documents on WikiLeaks and social media played a prominent role in protests across the Middle East that became known as the Arab Spring. In the United States, the advocates for digital diplomacy within the Department of State seized on the Arab Spring as evidence of the need to advance internet freedom worldwide, a stance which ignored the role of the U.S. government in restricting freedom when it conflicted with the needs of corporate intellectual property. It was the digital incarnation of an old paradox in U.S. political thought. Yet the Department also displayed a belated understanding of the full potential of the new media, as evidenced by the publication of a public diplomacy strategy which looked beyond just the idea of "pushing out" material and acknowledge the possibility of an online dialogue to mutual benefit.

On the positive side of the ledger Hillary Clinton was able to reign in the Pentagon. The Secretary of Defense Robert Gates even lobbied for resources to be diverted into State Department programs and re-oriented the DoD's international engagement to an explicitly supporting function. The State Department consolidated its lead role in the interagency use of strategic communication in the on-going struggle against terrorism. Innovative digital work came out of a reconfigured counter-radicalization unit – the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) –

which sought to use new media to push back against Islamic extremism. CSCC did not try to sell the United States but rather focused on collecting and re-posting on other platforms local materials that showed adversaries in a poor light, even if those materials were not friendly to the United States.

By the end of 2011 the Department of State seemed at last to be at home with social media. In order to promote the usage of social media for outreach OIE – which had finally become an officially recognized unit – had created a Social Media Hub featuring "how-to" guides on the chief social media tools, best practices examples and answers to the frequently asked questions. The office also arranged for experts on mobile devices to speak at a special session at the Foreign Service Institute and ran an "Ask the Experts" program which made Silicon Valley gurus available to posts via a scheduled group Digital Video Conference. Also by the end of 2011 IIP had undergone a major restructuring to better suit it for meeting the digital needs of the field. Signature projects included the launch of four public diplomacy Facebook gateways for materials on democracy, climate, the e-journals and exchanges. Usage soon approached four million visitors a month, though this had to be sustained by a heavy advertising campaign. Positive examples of U.S. diplomats online included Ambassador Robert Ford who used Facebook to communicate with the people of pre-Civil War Syria[15] and Ambassador Michael McFaul who introduced himself to the Russian people via YouTube.[16] There was still push-back. Diplomatic Security attempted to stop the use of Facebook in some places as "too dangerous." Similarly, while a social media was introduced into the basic training for new Foreign Service Officers, as recently as 2011 security briefers warned the same incomers away from Facebook or Twitter.

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[15] Joshua Hersh, "U.S. Ambassador to Syria takes on his critics via Facebook", *The Huffington Post,* 8 September 2011. Available at *http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/08/ambassador-to-syria-robert-ford-critis_n_954658.html* . (Accessed 2 February 2018).

[16] John Brown, "U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul's YouTube Presentation from a Public Diplomacy Perspective", *The Huffington Post,* 16 January 2012. Available at *http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johnbrown/us-ambassador-to-russian-_b_1208580.html.* (Accessed 12 February 2018).

The Second Obama administration promised a new era. In the event it did not to turn out to be as open to experimentation at the first. Much of this change sprang from the tragic events in Benghazi of 11 September 2012. The attack on the U.S. compound in Benghazi coincided with unrest across the Muslim world protesting an anti-Islamic YouTube video entitled *The Innocence of Muslims.* At the U.S. embassy in Cairo a public affairs officer tweeted his own objections to the content of the video, reminding those who followed him that "we firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others". This clashed embarrassingly with the wish of Washington to present an undiluted rejection of the violent protests, leading to the tweets and other statements by the officer concerned being taken down.[17] From this point on Public Affairs priorities – which is to say domestic U.S. political concerns – superseded all other considerations in public diplomacy, and U.S. digital diplomats found themselves subject to tight message control and a complex message clearance process that made it impossible to use new media to develop a relationship with audiences.

There were a couple of digital bright spots in the second Obama administration. The Broadcasting Board of Governors demonstrated a mastery of digital platforms for delivering its news products and also took a lead in developing circulating of methods for overcoming internet censorship and firewalls of the kind deployed by the governments of Iran and China. Secretary of State John Kerry was able to work well with the tech sector around the world, launching an annual public private hackathon to assist in developing high tech solutions for ocean resource preservation – the initiative was dubbed the Fishackathon. Such small advances were of little interest in the 2016 election cycle, with its emphasis on grand slogans and scape-goats, crammed into 140 characters.

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[17] *https://www.buzzfeed.com/nycsouthpaw/us-embassy-in-cairo-deletes-controversial-tweets?utm_term=.sqpVKVoaG#.doP5M5KAG* and *https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/09/the-us-embassy-to-egypts-oddly-informal-twitter-feed/262331/* (both accessed 12 February 2018). See also Garance Franke-Ruta, "Here's a Timeline of the Confusing Statements on Libya and Egypt", *The Atlantic,* 12 September 2012. Available at *http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/09/heres-a-timeline-of-the-confusing-statements-on-libya-and-egypt/262264/.*

The result of that election – the presidency of Donald J. Trump – was in some way an endorsement of the crudest powers of new media to tweet, re-tweet, and reverberate within a segmented community. Trump's victory was seen by some as testament to the success of digital diplomacy. He was boosted by bots, trolls and biased news coverage all subsidized from an international propaganda budget. Ironically, that budget belonged to the Kremlin.

Conclusions

Surveying the evolution of U.S. online diplomacy to date, we find no knock-out blow which can be credited to digital engagement and many examples of digitization being held back. The level of risk aversion at the State Department has been mind boggling. The bureaucracy has prioritized advocacy and a broadcasting at the expense of listening and exchange even when the technology has particular potential in those areas. It is not wholly State's fault. Congress, the White House and the people of the U.S. have all looked to public diplomacy primarily to "push" messages out to the world rather than oversee a dialogue. Yet whether in Tunisia or in Topeka, individuals are inherently more powerful than they have been at any time in history, more especially as they connect across networks. This global and wired public cannot be ignored and communication aimed only at its leaders will necessarily fall short. The new technology has a chaotic aspect but it also offers the opportunity for a new kind of politics and a new kind of diplomacy. The first step for the communicator is to acknowledge their limitations. The task of public diplomacy should evolve from one of speaking to one of partnering around issues with those abroad and at home who share the same objectives, and empowering those who will be credible with their target audience or connect with the special peer-to-peer bond.

It is amazing how much energy had to be expended within the Department of State itself to get diplomats using digital platforms, but that process has taken place. The Department has developed internal digital literacy, but the digital future will include its share of challenges. The controversy over the Cairo Embassy Tweets of 2012 show how hostile

some sections of the U.S. media are to the notion of an embassy saying anything more complex than a pro-U.S. slogan. Finally, the experience of the first twenty years of digital diplomacy suggests that the Department of State needs to resist the habit of advocacy, relax rigid message control and remember the need to open two-way channels of discussion and to if it is to succeed in using social media to the fullest extent.