

U.S. ADVISORY COMMISSION ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Minutes and transcript from the quarterly public meeting focused on **field perspectives on the practice of public diplomacy and highlighting the release of the 2021 Comprehensive Annual Report on Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting.**

U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy Quarterly Meeting
Thursday, February 24, 2022, 12:00 PM - 1:20 PM EST
Virtual Public Meeting via Videoconference

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

TH Sim Farar, Chair
TH William Hybl, Vice-Chair
TH Anne Terman Wedner

COMMISSION STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Vivian S. Walker, Executive Director
Ms. Deneysel Kirkpatrick, Senior Advisor
Ms. Kristy Zamary, Program Assistant

MINUTES:

The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD) met in an open virtual session from 12:00 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. on Thursday, February 24, 2022, to discuss field perspectives on the practice of public diplomacy, challenges and opportunities.

A distinguished group of Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) from three key regions provided firsthand insights into the programmatic challenges and opportunities faced by PD practitioners today and the panelists highlighted the release of the Commission's [*2021 Comprehensive Annual Report on Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting*](#). Panelists included Virginia (Ginny) Elliott, PAO, U.S. Embassy in Ghana, Shayna Cram, PAO, U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic, and Arthur (Tuck) Evans, PAO, U.S. Embassy in Guatemala.

ACPD Executive Director Vivian Walker opened the session, and Chairman Sim Farar provided introductory remarks. Deneysel Kirkpatrick moderated the Q&A, Commissioner Anne Wedner provided a discussion wrap-up, and Vice-Chairman Bill Hybl closed the meeting. The speakers took questions from the Commissioners and the online audience, as detailed in the transcript below.

AUDIENCE:

Approximately 300 participants registered and 140 attended the ACPD's virtual public meeting, including:

- PD practitioners and PD leadership from the Department of State, USAGM, and other agencies;
- Members of the foreign affairs and PD think tank communities,

- Academics in communications, foreign affairs, and other fields,
- Congressional staff members,
- Retired USIA and State PD officers,
- Members of the international diplomatic corps, and
- Members of the general public.

Vivian Walker: Hello, everyone. My name is Vivian Walker and I have the distinct honor of being the Executive Director and Designated Federal Officer for the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. Along with Commission Chair Sim Farar; Vice Chairman Bill Hybl, and Commissioner Anne Wedner, it is my pleasure to welcome you to today's quarterly public meeting, which is held in partial fulfillment of the Commission's mandate to keep the American people informed about U.S. government public diplomacy policies and practices.

But before we go any further with today's program, I'd like to say something on behalf of the Commission. Today, we are all following Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. In these tumultuous times, public diplomacy—to include sharing knowledge, promoting democratic principles, and upholding freedom of speech and individual expression—has never been more important. We at the Commission join the U.S. administration in condemning the attack on Ukraine and its citizens, and we pledge to continue our longstanding commitment to the practice of public diplomacy in the service of the values that we all share.

In support of that commitment, we are very proud to present the ACPD's 2021 Annual Comprehensive Report on Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting. In addition to a wealth of exclusive information on public diplomacy practices and policies in the field, this report offers the largest and most comprehensive source of publicly available data on public diplomacy resources and expenditures.

The other big story in the past two years, of course, has been the impact of the pandemic on the practice of public diplomacy. This report takes a data-driven look at the consequences of the pandemic, but it also tells an amazing story about the creativity and resilience of public diplomacy practitioners around the world.

And that brings me to today's panel and the topic of our meeting. We are delighted to present public diplomacy officers from three geographic regions who are going to give us some firsthand insights into the programmatic challenges and opportunities they face every day. We have with Ginny Elliott, the PAO at the U.S. Embassy in Ghana; Shayna Cram, the PAO at the U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic; and Tuck Evans, the PAO at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala.

Before I turn this meeting over to Commissioner Farar, just a quite note on process. Following Chairman Farar's remarks, today's speakers will all speak consecutively. Their remarks will be followed by a general Q&A session moderated by ACPD Senior Advisor, Deneysel Kirkpatrick. We invite you to submit your questions via the Q&A option located on the bottom right of your screen and we will endeavor to get to as many of them as possible.

And with that, it is my pleasure to turn this meeting over to Chairman Farar.

Sim Farar: Thank you, Vivian, and all of you who've joined us today. With my distinguished colleagues from the Commission, Vice Chairman Bill Hybl from Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Anne Wedner from Miami Beach, Florida, I am pleased to welcome you to this quarterly meeting. Thank you all for joining us.

Let me begin by saying that we sincerely appreciate your continued interest in, and commitment to, the practice of public diplomacy. Thanks, too, to our panelists who are operating on the front lines of public diplomacy and have agreed to share their insights and experiences with us today.

Our bipartisan Commission was created by Congress in 1948 to appraise U.S. government activities intended to understand, inform and influence foreign publics and to increase the understanding of, and support of, these activities.

For nearly three-quarters of a century, the Commission has represented the public interest through regular reviews of U.S. government's global information, media, cultural, and educational exchange programs.

The Commission also assess the effectiveness of these public diplomacy activities, recommends changes when needed, and reports to its findings and recommendations to the President of the United States, Congress, the Secretary of State, and, of course, the American people.

On behalf of my fellow commissioners, it is my great pleasure to present the 2021 Annual Comprehensive Report. This carefully researched and thoroughly vetted document of record provides you, the public, with an exclusive view of the many information, outreach, education, and cultural activities the U.S. government supports worldwide.

Moreover, this year's targeted, future oriented recommendations strengthen Public Diplomacy's essential role in achieving U.S. foreign policy goals while reinforcing American's national security and prosperity.

Finally, as Vivian noted, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an undeniably negative impact on public diplomacy programming. But our report also details the extraordinary resilience, agility, and creativity of dedicated public diplomacy professionals at home and abroad who have found new and innovative ways to keep us connected, informed, and, inspired. This report honors their contribution. I want to thank you all very much.

Vivian Walker: Thank you, Sim. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce today's panelists, who are remarkable for not only the breadth of their geographic and policy expertise but, also, for their exemplary dedication to the service both inside and outside the Department of State. Their full bios are available on our website, but I wanted to run through some highlights from their careers that I think will be germane to today's discussion.

So, let's begin with our first speaker, Ginny Elliott, who serves as PAO in Accra. Highlights of her career include service in Algiers as a Regional Counterterrorism Policy Coordinator for the Sahel and Maghreb regions; Media Unit Chief for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, where she

oversaw press and public messaging on visa and immigration policy; and desk officer for Zimbabwe in the Bureau of African Affairs.

Ginny will be followed by Shayna Cram, the PAO in Bishkek. Shayna has served in public diplomacy assignments in the Congo, Pakistan, Ecuador, and Washington, D.C. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, she worked on democracy promotion for a social justice NGO in Brazil. And she also served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Togo, working, among other things, on HIV-AIDS prevention.

And finally, we have Tuck Evans, the PAO in Guatemala City. Tuck has served in public diplomacy assignments in Mexico City, Asuncion, Kyiv, and Tbilisi. Indeed, Tuck was a press officer in the leadup to another unprovoked Russian invasion - this one of Georgia - in 2008. Tuck has also served as a Peace Corps volunteer and a UN volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic.

So, as I said, we have an enormous wealth of experience and service represented in our panel today.

And now, I am pleased to turn the floor over to Ginny Elliott.

Ginny Elliott: Thank you so much, Vivian, for the invitation to address this group. When I think about Africa and public diplomacy, I think about the chance that PD practitioners have to make a difference. We often say - and it's very true - that we're on the front lines in Africa, and the results of public diplomacy programs are seen and felt in many tangible ways. And frankly, it's quite exhilarating and exciting.

As Secretary Blinken recently remarked, Africa will shape the future, and not just the future of the African people but of the world. With a population of 1.1 billion, and a projected half of overall global population growth in the next thirty years occurring in Africa, the region is increasingly connected, young, and aspirational. Public diplomacy in Africa is how we show that the United States is committed to being a partner that helps African youth realize aspirations for themselves, their communities, and their countries, while advancing U.S. policy goals.

But it's not without challenges, which have been exacerbated, of course, by the pandemic environment, as is the case globally. Messaging from violent extremist groups, high unemployment, civil conflict, health and humanitarian crises, and increased attention from the People's Republic of China and Russia all demand deeper dialogues with the African public. This can only be done with sufficiently resourced and funded public diplomacy and by helping policymakers realize the importance of U.S.-Africa policy is shaping responses to many of our shared global challenges.

The United States has a positive story to tell young African audiences who wants to listen. For Sub-Saharan youth, the United States remains the desired model for individual and national development. English is their preferred second language. Students want to attend U.S. universities, and U.S. entrepreneurial expertise remains the envy of the world. That means we have many opportunities for public engagement and the advancement of U.S. policy.

So, I thought I'd offer a brief snapshot of my team's recent activities as examples from the field, beginning with public health. Like my colleagues around the world, we have been championing U.S. leadership in the global COVID response. Thanks to my press and digital team, successive vaccine donations to Ghana have made front-page news or full-page spreads highlighting the U.S. partnership with Ghana, including a Christmas Eve delivery. We're continuing to build momentum for global public health diplomacy by highlighting vaccination clinics.

Now, this takes close coordination with our interagency and international colleagues. It takes time and manpower to corral the press, take photos, post on social media, and to report back to Washington about public reactions. And, of course, it takes flexibility to respond to events as they happen, such as the Christmas Eve delivery of vaccines.

We also promote economic growth, and some of our most exciting programs focus on exchanges for women business owners and leaders that enable women to take full part in the economy and contribute meaningfully to job creation and inclusive economic growth and trade. As Secretary Blinken noted, women entrepreneurs, are "powerful engines of growth."

We're preparing to launch the Fourth Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, which has grown from thirty small business owners to over a hundred in the most recent cohort. Within our leadership programs, we also herald women entrepreneurs who are doing well and doing good by providing opportunities to other women through jobs and training.

It's gratifying to see our program support and develop these entrepreneurs. But they need further nurturing, opportunity, and funding to maximize their potential and have an even wider effect on Ghana's economy and bilateral trade. Democracy, accountable governance, and human rights remain important priorities, and we've been steadily contributing to these goals through a wide range of exchange programs that strengthen mutual understanding and whose participants are poised to contribute to Ghana's development.

Our team recently crisscrossed the country by road and by plane to interview for three of our largest exchange programs: the YES Kennedy-Lugar High School Exchange, the Mandela Washington Fellowship, and the Community College Initiative. Our team conducted more than three hundred in-person interviews in the course of about four weeks. We find the in-person interviews critical to our selection process, largely because internet connectivity is unreliable or limited in remote areas but also because it provides an opportunity to assess applicants in groups settings and cross-promote and recruit for other PD programs.

We also learn and gather information that we can pass back to embassy colleagues. For example, our YES interviews took us to the northernmost region of Ghana where we were delighted to see a COVID vaccination clinic taking place for youths with U.S.-donated Pfizer vaccines. That was of great interest, of course, to our country team. These trips can be dusty, long, bumpy, and, of course, take time both on the road and in the air. But there's really no substitute for the in-person interviews and activities.

Finally, security is an enduring objective. And Ghana is fortunate to be among the continent's stable, democratic and peaceful countries, and a leader in this regard. So, we're able to devote

time to a proactive approach to the U.S.-Ghana security cooperation to sustain the positive reputation of our military cooperation and to ensure transparency of U.S. support to Ghana's armed forces. Key to our efforts is helping the Ghana armed forces amplify their public outreach and communication efforts. But, of course, many of my colleagues in Africa are frequently reacting to crises that can disrupt planning or facing other emergencies that result in setting staffing drawdowns, hindering their operations.

So, I've briefly touched on a couple priorities and activities. These are on top of our day-to-day outreach activities, which include support for thirteen other agencies at post to communicate our collective U.S. interests and bilateral partnership successes.

We're one of the better resourced public diplomacy sections in the African bureau, with three foreign service officers and seventeen locally employed staff. Still, it's a challenge to provide due diligence to all these time-intensive endeavors and cultivate our alumni while also managing expectations in Washington, meeting data calls, providing feedback and analysis, and preparing for high-level visits. Now, picture that more than 40% of the public diplomacy sections in African bureau missions are staffed by just one American officer.

Most of our one-officer posts are also first-time section heads and on their first or second public diplomacy tours. Absorptive capacity is an issue. Money and programs need people to manage them. So, no matter how eager the audience is, we simply don't have the manpower or time in the day to handle all of them. This applies whether it is a new exchange program, a target of opportunity speaker, or an arts envoy--there really is no resource-neutral opportunity.

Even for our sections that have more human resources, African bureau posts often lack the financial resources of our regional counterparts. As you might have noticed in the ACPD's annual report, the AF public diplomacy budget is just 11% of the total department public diplomacy budget yet, the AF region has the second-highest number of posts.

Resourcing also remains a concern given the increasing focus of our rivals in Africa. The People's Republic of China and other actors like Russia continue to aggressively influence governments and publics and promote corruption that undermines African democracies and U.S. interests.

I hope I've captured some of the ways public diplomacy and Africa advances U.S. policy and what a busy and rich portfolio it is. In closing, I would note that we invest significantly in programs and exchanges and have a wealth of human capital in our U.S. government alumni. We need more resources to continue to effectively cultivate this audience, which is poised to significantly advance U.S. interests.

The United States is a valuable brand in Africa, but we often lack coordination and a singular U.S. government voice or brand to encompass the range of projects, investment development, and programs that contribute to bilateral relationships, build goodwill, respect, and make our case as Africa's preferred partner.

The United States is seen as a role model and has an opportunity to frame the future for Africa in terms of its democratic, economic and security aspirations, but we need the appropriate resources in Africa to meet these 21st century challenges. Thank you.

Vivian Walker: Great, Ginny. Thank you so much for that presentation. I particularly appreciate, and certainly second, your effort to call attention to the significant under-resourcing that persists for African posts. I think it would be useful to discuss how we might change that.

Before we move on to our second panelist, Shayna Cram, let me remind audience members to put your questions in the Q&A function on the bottom right of your screen. As I said, we'll get to as many as we can following the presentations.

Shayna, we look forward to hearing from you.

Shayna Cram: Thank you. As Vivian flagged, the current situation in Ukraine definitely is something that's on all our minds. And my discussion is primarily focused on great power competition in the Soviet sphere. I'm currently posted in Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic and definitely, in Russia's backyard.

My discussion primarily focuses on the strategies we're using to address great powers competition here in the Kyrgyz Republic. But before I do that, I'd just like to give you a little bit of background on our public affairs section and on the Kyrgyz Republic.

Just to give you an idea of the scope of our section, we have six American officers and sixteen locally employed staff. We have a base budget of over \$2,000,000 and about \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000 in funding for regional programs.

We also are the first post in Central Asia to undergo the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative (PDSI), and I'm glad to answer any questions that anyone may have about that as we just recently concluded that successfully.

A little bit about the Kyrgyz Republic. It is a small, mountainous country in Central Asia with a population of about 6.5 million--one million located in the capital, Bishkek. The Kyrgyz Republic is well-known as an island of democracy in Central Asia and differentiates itself from its neighbors by maintaining a relatively free operating environment for media and civil society. However, in recent years, a trend of democratic backsliding has emerged, reinforced by the recent adoption of a new constitution.

The Kyrgyz Republic is also well-known for having revolutions. In October 2020, they had their third revolution, in which the President was ousted, and a new President took over. Suffice it to say that the politics of Kyrgyz Republic are always changing, often rapidly.

With respect to great powers competition, while China is particularly influential in the economic realm as an important trading partner of the Kyrgyz Republic, Russian influence continues to dominate economically and politically. However, Russian language influence is in decline. With the new presidential administration, there has been a rise in nationalism and national pride. Part

of that is wrapped up in language. The Russian language is actually losing popularity. You see more and more people who cannot speak Russian. And the further you travel outside of the capital, the more you see the prevalence of Kyrgyz and other local languages, to include Uzbek in the south.

The Kyrgyz Republic has a much higher internet penetration rate than neighboring countries, at about 50%. And phone data is very, very cheap. We can reach a large percentage of the population through digital means, and we have wide swaths of online audiences, particularly youth.

In terms of responding to Russian influence efforts, Russian propaganda outlets definitely operate here. They are well-known, they have connections to Russia, and they have small but targeted and influential audiences that they cater to. But the narratives they put out are sometimes outrageous. We found that as a strategy, generally, it doesn't do us any good to respond directly to these outlets to ask for retractions or to even to address them. In fact, such efforts usually backfire, ultimately bringing more attention to the negative issue than it would to either ignore it or, more effectively, to develop an indirect response.

For example, instead of directly responding to an allegation that the United States doesn't operate any food support programs, we would put out more information about the Mercy Corps school nutrition program. Or, in response to allegations that the United States isn't doing as much as other countries, including Russia, to support COVID and economic recovery efforts, we then would highlight the programs that address these problems. We have found it to be much more effective to take the positive approach. A recent Global Engagement Center report on Russian disinformation networks, also supports the use of positive narratives.

Other approaches to check Russian language influence include programs that promote the Kyrgyz language. We have designated some of our positions for Kyrgyz speakers within our Public Affairs section. And through the PDSI mechanism, we identified and filled a gap by hiring someone to work on social media in the Kyrgyz language to tap into a growing sphere of influence that is popular with both the public and with the government. So, it's a win-win for us.

As an example of our Kyrgyz language outreach, I will show a video developed in house that we put out on Instagram and Facebook. It features American officers, including the Charge d'Affaires, gathering in a yurt along with some very well-known Kyrgyz influencers. One of them is an Olympian who had recently won a silver medal at the Olympics.

[VIDEO - in Kyrgyz]

This video highlights the celebration of thirty years of U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relations. Participants are passing around fermented mare's milk [a traditional beverage] and toasting the future of the bilateral relationship. The video, which was extremely popular, helped us to double our Instagram audience in the past year. Such videos help us to grow new audiences.

To flag some other projects with similar themes; we have an Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation Project to restore the Burana Tower, an ancient nomadic structure dating from the

Silk Road era that has been damaged by earthquakes. This project is very popular with the governments as well as the public. And we have finally achieved an Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation Project for the restoration. It is incredibly popular with the government and it is incredibly popular with the public. We do a lot of promotion surrounding the project and it has, again, drawn kudos from both the government and the public.

We also have, for example, programs tied to the 30th anniversary. We have an incoming group of American cowboys that are going to participate in sports diplomacy by playing Kok-Boru, also known as Buzkashi. It has different names in different countries but it's essentially polo played with a headless goat. Those cowboys will team up with Kyrgyz Buzkashi athletes to play Kok-Boru together.

We also work with the Central Asia Design Hub to acquire and get licensing for American television content that is subtitled or dubbed in local languages and then distributed throughout Central Asia. The hub also enables local content creation. Right now, for example, the hub working on a campaign with Instagram influencers to increase Covid vaccine intake by addressing local vaccine hesitancy and misinformation.

The focus on Kyrgyz language programming, which decreases the influence of the Russian language, is a tactic that really sets us apart from the other great powers. Neither China nor Russia is focused on this. Russia is devoted to the promotion of the Russian language and does little to nothing to promote the Kyrgyz language. Similarly, China has Confucius Centers around the country, which teach Chinese language and culture, but they are not promoting the Kyrgyz language. This is something that really is unique to the United States. This approach has brought us a lot of good will from the public and the government.

Additionally, we have a whole host of English language programs, to include Access and other exchange-oriented initiatives. One that I would like to highlight that's unique to us and that we're looking to expand on a regional level is English for Professionals. This program targets the civil service. We work with dozens of ministries and government organizations to offer free English language classes for their mid-level civil servants. It works to their advantage, and to ours.

We have seen incredible dividends, including kudos from all of the ministries. This program not only earns us good will but broadens the horizons of those civil servants. They're able to participate in international events and have better conversations with their external partners. It opens up new doors for them, including economic opportunities and trade, and in building their English language skills, significantly decreases their dependence on Russia.

I'll leave it there. I'm glad to answer any questions that you may have about our programs here in Bishkek. Thanks.

Vivian Walker: Thank you so much, Shayna. That was extremely informative and helpful. I particularly appreciated your comments with respect to the geostrategic competition for influence, including a focus on positive stories rather than simply responding to the series of negative narratives coming out of Russia. I think that is extremely effective.

But even more importantly, I appreciate your focus on the longer-term investment in influence competition through language and culture. Your examples of programs that prioritize the Kyrgyz language are particularly instructive. Ultimately, the battle for influence is not won in the short-term exchange of talking points or disinformation narratives but the longer-term investment in exchange programs to get people the resources and opportunities they need to make decisions in their own time and in their own way. And I think the work that you're doing at post is an excellent illustration of that, so, thank you.

With that - and please do keep the questions coming in - I'd like to turn to Tuck Evans to give us his view of what's happening in Guatemala.

Tuck Evans: Thanks, Vivian. Thanks, everybody. It's great to hear from Shayna and Ginny. I'll try to add to that. For everybody to know, Vivian was actually my mentor when I first came into the Foreign Service so, this is a unique and special experience for me. Glad to be here.

So, a little bit about Guatemala to set the stage. Guatemala, just beneath Mexico, is one of the main feeders for irregular migration. It is a very complicated place with a complicated history with the United States. The long civil war that was resolved in the mid-90s, which still simmers, has divided Guatemalan society. Guatemala is also an incredibly diverse place with over twenty different Mayan languages spoken. These communities are still very vibrant and active politically, but not entirely included in the vertical power structure.

This creates a lot of internal stresses. The historical disenfranchisement of these different groups feeds into the regular migration cycle, which is actually, in Guatemala's case, largely a quest for prosperity. It is about families making decisions to seek a better life rather than fleeing violence or other drivers.

I wanted to tell two stories about PD work in Guatemala. The first one is about COVID and our vaccine donations because I think it illustrates aspects of the great power struggle in the region. It includes elements of U.S. credibility and messaging. It also indicates where additional resources should be directed.

The second story I want to tell is about disinformation. I was in Ukraine from 2011 to 2014. I was actually out doing - I wouldn't say "patrols"- but let's just say I was out bearing witness to the protests and watching a lot of the disinformation come in during that revolutionary time. That space has gotten more complicated, better resourced, and more dangerous to us in terms of our foreign policy. I think there are places that we would have said are safe and off limits that are no longer so. I want to tell a little bit of a story about that and what that means in terms of who our allies are and where we need to go, or at least maybe as a flag for resources.

I'm going to launch a slideshow here and share my screen.

[SLIDE SHOW FOLLOWS]

Let's look first at pandemic impacts. With a valued partner, the United States provided, all told, 8.5 million Moderna vaccines to the population of Guatemala (about 17,000,000 people) from June through September, making good on a promise made by our Vice President during her first visit to Guatemala in June that we would show up and be a partner in fighting the pandemic.

Here are a couple of images of the vaccines rolling off the plane. We did a lot of media coverage on this, as did most posts. This is really bread-and-butter for all of us. The second image here is, "Thank you for the vaccines, Mr. President. Muchas gracias, Sr. Presidente," a picture of our President, Joe Biden. And that's being held by a woman waiting for her vaccine in Chiquimula in the Highlands. So, that's the initial reaction.

And to be honest, the vaccines came at a time when Guatemala was really on its back in terms of the pandemic. They did not have a lot of vaccines. And in fact, the government had decided to purchase Sputnik vaccines but they never arrived. And then, of course, Sputnik vaccines were not certified by the World Health Organization. A dueling narrative emerged about purchased vaccines that didn't show up and that were not of the same quality. For your average Guatemalan, the question was: "Can I get on a plane with that vaccine certificate?" And the answer was yes for Moderna and no for Sputnik.

The second image you see here is "Gracias." You see the Moderna vaccine. That is the fourth and final shipment that came in. All the vaccines were shipped via U.S. carriers, American Airlines and United Airlines. We interviewed the pilots. It was classic public diplomacy, with the pilots saying, "This is the best thing I've ever done in my flying career."

And then, we moved into the second phase, which is that, suddenly, we went from not having enough vaccines to having too many vaccines--beyond capacity. We moved into obtaining and distributing over five million syringes. The ambassador was going out every week to a different front line responder clinic and doing fist pumps with the exhausted first responders.

This gets to the alternate voices part. The communities that really were hesitant to get vaccines tended to be more on the Mayan side, more on the rural side, and in some cases, more on the religious side. That pushed us into new areas in terms of influencers and voices.

Although we had been doing plenty of pushing of the science on the vaccine, we didn't necessarily have the credibility in terms of local voices. Somebody could say, "Oh, yeah, well, that makes me feel comfortable about going to get a vaccine that my tribal leader or my family matriarch told me has a microchip or will make me sterile." We needed something credible that was going to overcome that.

So, we reached out to various communities. At the top our ambassador communicated with the "Cuarenta y Ocho," an indigenous elected leadership. The local leaders decided on a message and post amplified it by recording their statements in the local language. One leader from Sololá, for example, spoke Tzutujil, which is one of the Mayan languages.

We began to put out more communications encouraging folks to get the vaccine. Those messages suggested that the vaccine was necessary, not just because the science says you're

going to be healthier and more likely to survive hospitalization, but because it is going to get Guatemala back on its feet.

It is important to note that we posted messages from the influencers on all our handles to create a shared voice. Getting those local leaders aligned with us on these issues was also important. Ultimately it served as an icebreaker for the development of broader cooperative relationships.

As Shayna noted with the Kyrgyz example, we want to show up, to validate and engage in local languages. It's not realistic to expect that all Foreign Service officers or programs will be functional in all local languages, but every effort helps. We are actually looking to put additional resources into Mayan languages so that we can do more programming and communications.

I also want to talk about innovative program responses to the pandemic. Here is an image of the U.S. ambassador at one of our binational centers. This particular binational center shut down two years ago. Like all binational centers in Latin America, it used to be almost entirely funded by the U.S. government, but the Cold War dividend came and the center now mostly sells books to keep itself afloat. It's still quite solvent, it's still relevant, it's still a great partner, but it's not the same kind of relationship as it used to be. The U.S. government no longer invests in such legacy institutions. Given the attention on China and Russia, we should do more with our binational centers.

The second image features the U.S. ambassador engaging a group of students who are part of our English Access language program. We have seven different programs throughout Guatemala for kids aged 14 to 16.

These seven boots-on-the-ground, classroom-type programs all pivoted to virtual during the pandemic. And in fact, some of the teacher trainers in the photo actually got grants from us to create completely virtual programs for kids living beyond the reach of the seven program centers. Looking ahead, it is important to be able put our resources toward connecting with these remote audiences to stay relevant.

The second story is about disinformation. This is an image from *El Periodico*, one of the papers that actually came out of the Peace Accords in the 90s. Its job was to create and maintain a public eye on government and provide transparency. It has increasingly come under siege, as have many other reporters and journalists in Guatemala. (Although the environment is different from Mexico where, unfortunately, there is an extremely high rate of mortality for journalists.)

In Guatemala, it's much more a case of using lawsuits and threats and, increasingly (and this'll get to my next slide) the use of social media to dox. Doxing is leaking private information to the public, whether it's a Social Security card or a court case that has a lot of delicate information. Doxing people, especially journalists and independent justices and prosecutors, targets the foundation of democracy and the rule of law.

Here are examples of how we have put public diplomacy resources toward engaging journalists, using social media to analyze what's happening to them, and standing up for them. Let's call it cyber forensics. Here are two tweets from about two weeks ago. These are independent justices

leaving the U.S. ambassador's residence, including one who was the International Woman of Courage Award winner from two years ago. Somebody staked them out and created a video alleging that, "Oh, well, you know, they're going there to get orders from the U.S. Ambassador." So, that's how this starts.

Now, the first two handles we see at the bottom here are from "Blanca Ochenta y Ocho." That's actually a nod to the white vans used to kidnap people in Guatemala during the civil wars so, it's a sinister handle designed to create fear. It's also "nameless"; it's not very credible but it's starting to launch the conversation.

Tweet number two picks that up and runs with it. It's also nameless, a kind of troll handle. And it says, "A judicial rights advocate who is very famous is going to cry when he sees this." So, now, the threat has been launched.

And then, we get to the next two handles. Here we transition from nameless handles to known handles, from an individual who is very well-known and leads a well-funded and influential NGO. "Yes, Master Vader GT" (named after Darth Vader) is saying, "What a list of names leaving this residence." And here's where we get into the actual threats: "If they did this in China, they would be shot for treason."

A day later, a legitimate individual picks this up and starts to talk about Ukraine and Putin, as well. (Ukraine and Putin are starting to filter in the U.S. Embassy twitter space.) This is a little bit alarming because these judges don't have anything to do with Ukraine or Russia. It is something that's being inserted into the conversation and that is rather insidious.

Then, this tweet moves into a far-right newspaper and becomes part of a seemingly legitimate story that the U.S. ambassador is meeting with five or six judges who are not independent. They're taking orders from ambassador and they should be shot.

And so, that's what we're up against.

So, let me just move into resources because I know I'm almost out of time here. I think the Global Engagement Center is fairly new to the U.S. Department of State, but it is something that needs to be resourced. When Karen Hughes brought in the media hubs, it was a new idea at the time. Now they are essential. The GEC is similarly important. The Global Engagement Center actually does focus on Western Hemisphere Affairs and has officers in the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau (WHA) who are watching Russian and Chinese disinformation in the region. The GEC needs more resources for research, forensics, and tools for posts like Guatemala to zero in on countering disinformation effects.

Pivoting to the COVID example, the second thing I would say in terms of resources is that we do have some great programs out there that help us engage, whether it's Mayan voices or Kyrgyz voices. I'm going to throw out one of my favorites - the SUSI Program for Indigenous Women and Afro-Descendant Leaders. This fantastic program allows us to send Spanish-speaking people to the United States without an English-language requirement. I think increasing programs that allow us to reach out and provide an American experience to people who don't necessarily speak

English is absolutely key, and a great way to create new allies, especially with a younger generation.

The last thing I'll mention is the need to move beyond stove piping to embrace an interagency approach. The COVID vaccine project I mentioned earlier included the Center for Disease Control, USAID, and public diplomacy and political-economic section participation. The disinformation project involved judges, USAID, the political-economic and public diplomacy sections, and the office for International Narcotics and Law enforcement affairs. Exploring new mechanisms for public diplomacy to be engaged with our interagency colleagues is how we're going to be more successful and more impactful.

Vivian Walker: Thank you so much, Tuck. My initial confidence in you as a rising public diplomacy officer has been more than justified!

Really quickly, I just want to highlight a few things that stood out to me from your excellent presentation, beginning with your emphasis on reaching out to alternate voices and finding different ways to influence and leverage your virtual resources to do so. That was certainly a feature of the global pandemic response that we addressed in the annual report. So, thank you for giving us a good example of that.

Thank you, too, for your mention of the important role of the GEC - the Global Engagement Center. For our audience members who might not be aware of it, the GEC, in short, has been instrumental in coordinating the U.S. government's effort to counter disinformation and malign influence strategies, across the Department of State and, to some degree, across the interagency. For more details on the GEC and its contributions, please see the [ACPD's annual report](#).

I also take to heart, Tuck, your comment about the challenge of stove-piping and the need for greater collaboration across the interagency. To refer to [a report that the Commission has just published on the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative](#) or PDSI (also available on the ACPD website), one of the PDSI's primary goals is, indeed, to break down those stovepipes and maximize collaboration so that we get the most out of our mission initiatives in the field.

I will stop there because we've got some great questions lined up. I will open the first question to Commissioner Wedner. And then, from there, ACPD Senior Advisor, Deneysel Kirkpatrick, will continue with the Q&A. So, Anne, did you have a question for our panelists today?

Anne Wedner: Thanks, everyone, for such a nice job and so comprehensive a look about what's happening on the ground. In terms of disinformation sources, are you guys looking at the effect of diaspora communities in the United States as a source of some of the disinformation that's coming through? It's a little bit trickier to handle a response to disinformation if it's homegrown in America versus if we can assert that it's Russian or Chinese or Iranian in origin. So, I just wonder if you're seeing that and what your thoughts are on it.

Tuck Evans: For us, it's really much more an issue of migration, which accounts for 50% of the information flow. But I'll pause there because I think we're talking China and Russia and cede the floor to Shayna and Vivian who may be following that closely.

Shayna Cram: Sure. Thanks, Tuck, I can follow up on that. We've done some diagnostics on some of the narratives to see where they travel. You often see the same narratives, the same articles even, repeated. They have a life of their own, so to speak. They travel from news outlet to news outlet. And you can track them in terms of where they come from and who's working on them.

So, we haven't seen connections to the diaspora but we have, for sure, seen connections to other countries. Of course, Russia is the primary generator of this information. But other countries, some in Europe, also have actors in this process. That have come into play with actors that are in Europe. Some articles from Turkey, for example have bounced back and forth. And these articles may well emerge from diaspora communities operating in Turkey who are being paid by Russian outlets.

Deneysel Kirkpatrick: Good afternoon, colleagues, and thank you, panelists, for joining us. We have a list of great questions lined up.

Let's start with a question from Wren Elhai. It is broken down into two parts; one focused on priorities, and another focused on content. And this is for all of you to address.

Given limited staff time and funding, how do you make decisions about which Washington priority topics and campaigns to devote resources to at post?

The second part of that question, again focused on content: to what extent are content production resources concentrated in DC (whether for videos, digital content, or online articles) matching the needs you see in the field? Where and how are they falling short?

Would you like to take the first one, Ginny? And then, we'll move to Shayna and then, Tuck.

Ginny Elliott: Sure. I'll try to address a little bit of both. Everything is a priority and it's a challenge.

There are times when information comes down but we are not sure whether or not to put it out given the local context. I would welcome more nuance in demarche cables or other public communications. At post we all know the context well. We are obviously most focused on Ghana and the region, which is West Africa. Then, maybe the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa or the African Union and then, everything else. So, there's not a lot of focus on some of these more far-flung foreign conflicts or policies. So, some of the messages are not going to necessarily resonate.

We've seen Washington put in a lot of effort to create playbooks and to help fill in those gaps on messaging. I'm obviously representing an English-speaking country and so, for us, it's quite easy. Certainly, content in a local language is very important. And frankly, I think I might rather see more research at the post level or even maybe a sub-regional level to push out tailored messaging. I think we could have greater impact or greater reach and engagement if it were somewhat more tailored rather than strictly generic.

We are fortunate to have good resources at our post to create a lot of great engaging content, but I know a lot of posts would struggle to tailor it to their situation. I'll stop there, thanks.

Shayna Cram: I can jump in with some input, too. In terms of whether or not we take on Washington programs, I think Ginny covered some of those issues. You know, it's a question, also, of capacity--how much can we really take on? We can't say yes to every single program. And having gone through PDSI, too, and having the audience focus really take priority, we have learned to take a hard look at whether there is an audience for the program and how it would resonate here in-country.

We have to look at other factors, too. Does this tie in well to our ICS (Integrated Country Strategy) goal or not? Some of those Washington programs are competitive. So, we must decide whether we have the staff resources, capacities, and time to put together a proposal that may or may not come through.

And then, on the second question of content from Washington, I feel like we all have our opinions on Share America and its value and how we use it overseas. I feel like we've seen it all. There are useful resources that come from Washington. Certainly, the licensing of AP photos is really useful for us. We use VideoBlocks too. It provides B-roll for content creation at post. But it's really limited, and there are better, more expensive, platforms out there with better footage, to incorporate in videos. Just recently, our information officer coordinated with other information officers in the region to put in a request for more substantive licensing for video platforms. This would benefit the region and create more opportunities for content creation at post.

Over to you, Tuck.

Tuck Evans: On the theme of disinformation, I did want to say that while Russia Today is not diaspora, it is quite effective in terms of what we see in media here, with people not differentiating between real news and what Russia Today puts out.

For the content question, we've actually moved a lot of our staffing resources over to the press and digital teams. We doubled our digital team just because of the demand for content and the velocity of tweeting and translating tweets. And now we're up to three handles--Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter—in addition to video statements, which take time.

With respect to content, the Department of State (especially the Bureaus of Western Hemisphere Affairs and Global Public Affairs) has upped its game in terms of contacts and content for migration, which is our big focus. The challenge is the pursuit of micro audiences--finding the right way to message in different languages and in different contexts. Migration messaging for El Salvador is different than it is for Guatemala and it's different than it is for Mexico.

We're starting to explore going back to local procurement of images and messages and language so that it really does ring true for Guatemala or Honduras.

This speaks to the challenges of trying to message effectively on issues like migration in very specific sociological contexts.

And then, in terms of prioritization, there are established mission goals and that's what either falls into the basket or falls out of the basket. And it's pretty clear between our Desk Officer and our Chief of Mission which are the programs we prioritize.

Deneysel Kirkpatrick: Thank you all for addressing those questions and particularly for homing in on the communication piece, given that IIP and PA merged in 2019, now forming GPA. I think there's a lot of support coming out of Washington to streamline these efforts and how post communicates with different audiences.

Let's move on to Brian Carlson's question. And this, again, for each of the panelists. Do each of you (or any of you) have any examples of programs or activities that particularly reflect "whole of government" engagement by the other agencies and sections in the embassy? That is, are public diplomacy objectives and activities complemented by substantial resource, or monetary, or time contributions from other parts of the USG?

Ginny Elliott: The example that comes to mind, if I'm understanding the question, has been the global pandemic response. In Ghana, we do have a number of different agencies: CDC, USAID, and DOD. So, we are working across all those agencies, and the public affairs serves as the clearinghouse to set the message, tone and communications.

All of those agencies bring resources to the issue, and then those of us in public affairs look at how to package it, how to talk about the fact that our COVID response is building on decades of health partnership with Ghana. We're not just Johnny-on-the-spot--we've been here for a long time and we'll continue to be here. And we're working using the systems that have been built over time through our enduring partnership.

Shayna Cram: I have a few examples from Bishkek. Outside of our daily press and outreach activities, we see the most interest in and overlap with other agencies and sections in our English language programs and exchanges. They're all asking about English language programs and exchange programs because that's what's interesting to them from our shop. And that's where that program I mentioned - English for Professionals - has really paid a lot of dividends. So, I'll leave it at that. Thanks.

Tuck Evans: Guatemala is a special place in that it really makes you, as a PD officer, question what your role is versus a lot of what the other agencies are doing, especially with regard to program overlap. Almost everything we do has to be with at least two other agencies in the room for planning because there are so many overlapping programs.

I think where we meet up and make sense together is that our programs are really about developing long-term relationships with people who eventually go on to become leaders or stay in touch as contacts. With USAID, we're really working to make sure that we're not in the same space and that we're collaborative. USAID is extremely well-resourced and has a lot of great programs. We do English, they do English. We do AWE (Academy for Women Entrepreneurs).

They do a lot of entrepreneurship programs. During Pride Month, we work very closely with USAID because they have a very strong public health sector program that includes gender-based violence and other areas of focus. And so, we need to work with them and plan everything out.

And then, with consular, I think we really provide a platform for them to communicate with American citizens and Guatemalans on visa issues.

Deneysel Kirkpatrick: Great. I'm sure that our audience is really pleased to hear that there's synergy and collaboration, particularly, in the areas of English language and exchange programs.

Thank you all for submitting questions. I think we are coming to the end so, I would like to pose one last question to each of our panelists from Asier Vallejo Itsaso .

In your opinion, what is the role of citizen diplomacy? What role should citizen diplomacy play within the wider scope of Public Diplomacy strategy designed by the Department of State? And how should Public Diplomacy practitioners work together to implement citizen diplomacy? Should it be with U.S diplomats, local staff, internationally, or other stakeholders? What's your take on that?

Shayna, I turn the floor over to you. We appreciate your brief responses.

Shayna Cram: Sure. So, if I'm interpreting this right, in terms of citizen diplomacy we're talking about other Americans who are weighing in and we're basically incorporating them into our outreach.

We do this regularly. In fact, I think because of the pandemic, we shifted over to virtual platforms out of necessity. But there was also a huge audience there already and it grew because of the pandemic. And as a result, we really expanded our virtual programming, which allowed us also to tap into former Peace Corps volunteers who had been evacuated to the United States. We also unearthed former speakers and other program participants for outreach and diplomacy through virtual platforms. We have the advantage of being able to do that in the Kyrgyz Republic because we have great internet penetration, so people can watch programs on their phone and, if they're dynamic, they will.

Deneysel Kirkpatrick: Tuck, what are you guys doing on citizen diplomacy?

Tuck Evans: For us, it's been complicated because of COVID. The three programs that come to mind are legacy programs. One is the 100,000 Strong Program, which started under President Obama and was launched by then Vice President Biden. It provides private sector funding for a competition in which Guatemalan regional universities partner with U.S. universities. The universities come together and launch their own program with State Department funding. The year-long project incorporates student exchanges and research in various areas. One such partnership is between the Universidad del Valle with the University of Lubbock, the University of Texas, and Texas Tech.

Then there is GLOBE, which started out as a Peace Corps program before the State Department took over. It's a classroom-to-classroom project in which schools receive a grant or other resources from the public diplomacy section. For example, we give them test tubes and meters and they go out and take air temperatures and then, they compare that with data collected by classrooms all over the world, including U.S. classrooms. The diplomacy is the engagement with other students in the United States, which is even more credible and interesting for younger students.

The Arts Envoy program, of course, is always a blessing.

Ginny Elliott: In Ghana, we have a robust citizen diplomacy program. For example, we have a strong EducationUSA advising program. In fact, Ghana sends the second highest number of students from sub-Saharan Africa to the United States. These students are great surrogates of our message. They help promote study in the United States. They participate in information sessions for other students and are a great resource.

We also have a very robust two-way Fulbright Scholar program. Participants and alumni are very active, and they continue those relationships and those linkages long after they return from Ghana or to the United States.

We also have a three thousand-plus-strong alumni association, and we tap into our rolodex of contacts to find Ghanaians who are featured as speakers for our programs, whether it is entrepreneurship, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, women's rights, or something else. We use Americans, as well, to do some of our virtual programming in American spaces.

They are all a great resource and one that we need to continually cultivate and share with other embassy sections and interagency colleagues.

Lastly, I'll make a plug for something that's taking off, which is our University Partnership Initiative. This was started under the last administration to build tertiary education ties, university to university. We've seen some exciting projects. We have a consortium at Texas Tech working with a local university here in Ghana on an online learning platform. This Ghanaian university is going to become a center of excellence for online learning delivery.

And then, we have another partnership with Engineers Without Borders. Students are working with engineers in Ghana who usually lack the practical experience that the U.S. education system offers. They've been able to work together on a project in a remote area of Ghana and really provide some good hands-on experience.

We are looking to enlarge those kinds of partnerships and develop dynamic citizen diplomacy between Ghana and the U.S.

Deneise Kirkpatrick: Thank you for summarizing the ways in which each one of your posts are engaging on citizen diplomacy. I'd like to thank all the panelists once again. I think that concludes our question-and-answer portion of the program.

Vivian Walker: Great. Thank you so much, Deneysel, and our panelists for their helpful responses to the extremely thoughtful questions we received from our audience members.

We started this program on a somber note, thinking about the events in Ukraine and reflecting on the sustained importance of public diplomacy in enabling people to claim their rights as citizens, their rights as individuals, and their rights as members of the global information space.

Today, our panelists did an excellent job in outlining what makes public diplomacy so important in turbulent times as well as peaceful times. I want to highlight in particular what our panelists have to say about countering disinformation by providing alternative and positive narratives. And by using that very useful long-term influence tool called investment in culture, in education, and exchange and languages. That's where change happens. And it was wonderful to hear from all of you about the work that you're doing in that regard.

It was also great to learn about your efforts to reach new audiences and generate new voices at a time - the period of the pandemic, in particular - when the ability to talk to people was at risk. And you demonstrated how ably you were able to create new platforms for discussion, leveraging your virtual tools, so that if you could not actually inhabit the proverbial last three feet between people, you were able to sustain that space around it. Very, very well done.

And finally, I think your comments on the relationship between Washington and field priorities were extremely well taken and served as an important reminder to those of us back in DC. Your focus on the need, now more than ever, for effective interagency collaboration, was also helpful.

So, on behalf of our audience members, on behalf of the Commission, a profound thank you to all of you for the great work that you're doing in the field--to you and all of your fellow public diplomacy officers and locally employed colleagues across the globe.

And with that, I'd like to turn to the Vice Chairman of the Commission, Bill Hybl, to close us out. Bill, over to you.

Bill Hybl: Thank you, Vivian. Let me just say that as stated before, the Commission appreciates our distinguished panelists and those of you that have joined us today, remembering we do this quarterly. And for those of you that have an interest in USG public diplomacy, we hope you'll be with us next time and all those times where Vivian and her staff put together great programs with great panelists. Hope to see you then.

This concludes today's event and we wish you all well. Thank you.