

U.S. ADVISORY COMMISSION ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Minutes and transcript from the April 13, 2023 quarterly public meeting to examine the **Role of Public Diplomacy in Democracy Promotion**.

U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy Quarterly Meeting
Thursday, April 13, 2023 | 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM PT
Philippines Conference Room Encina Hall, Third Floor, Central, C330, 616 Jane Stanford Way,
Stanford, CA 94305 with on-line (Zoom) access

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

TH Sim Farar, Chair
TH Bill Hybl, Vice-Chair (on-line)
TH Anne Terman Wedner

COMMISSION STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Vivian S. Walker, Executive Director
Ms. Deneysel A. Kirkpatrick, Senior Advisor
Ms. Kristy Zamary, Program Assistant (on-line)

MINUTES:

The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy met in an open virtual session from 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. PST on Thursday, April 13, 2023, to consider the **Role of Public Diplomacy in Democracy Promotion**.

A distinguished group of leaders in the field of public diplomacy discussed how USG public diplomacy programs can most effectively promote and defend democratic values in an increasingly authoritarian and illiberal global context. Panelists included **Larry Diamond**, William L. Clayton Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Mosbacher Senior Fellow in Global Democracy at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies; **Michael McFaul**, Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution; and **Kathryn Stoner**, Mosbacher Director of the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies.

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

AUDIENCE:

Approximately 514 participants registered and 40 attended this in-person public meeting. Two hundred thirty-four logged on to the Zoom platform to view the event virtually 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 public.

TRANSCRIPT:

Note: The following transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

Vivian Walker: Hello everyone. I'm Vivian Walker, the Executive Director and Designated Federal Officer for the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy.

Together with ACPD Commission Chair Sim Farar, Vice-Chair Bill Hybl (on-line), and Commissioner Anne Wedner, I am pleased to welcome you to this quarterly public meeting in fulfillment of the ACPD's mandate to keep the American people informed about USG public diplomacy activities.

In recent years U.S. government public diplomacy programs have worked hard to counter disinformation persuasively and truthfully, all the while promoting democratic values, ideals, and movements in the face of mounting authoritarian influence.

We are in what many experts describe as an existential battle for soft power legitimacy in an increasingly fractured and hostile information space.

Today we are pleased to present a distinguished panel of experts who are, through their academic and policy expertise, extraordinarily well qualified to help us address this challenge.

Today's panelists include **Professor Larry Diamond**, Mosbacher Senior Fellow in Global Democracy at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, William L. Clayton Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution; **Professor Michael McFaul**, Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution; and **Kathryn Stoner**, Mosbacher Director of the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies.

The panelists will present consecutively, followed by a general question and answer session. On-line audiences will be able to submit their questions through the chat function. A full written transcript of this event will be available on the ACPD website in about 4-6 weeks.

Now, it is my pleasure to turn to Chairman Farar to open this quarterly meeting.

Sim Farar: Good morning. Thank you, Vivian.

With my distinguished colleagues from the Commission, Vice Chairman Bill Hybl joining on-line from Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Anne Wedner from Miami, Florida, I am pleased to welcome you to this quarterly meeting.

A warm thank you to our co-hosts and partners for today's discussion, the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at Stanford University.

We are also extremely grateful to our distinguished panelists for agreeing to share their expertise with us.

Finally, thanks to all of you who have joined us in person and online for today's panel discussion.

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 for, these same activities.

Our mandate was then--and is today--to serve public interest through detailed reviews of the U.S. government's global information, media, cultural, and educational exchange programs.

I am proud to say that the Commission's meticulously researched reports and recommendations have laid the foundation for every major shift in public diplomacy programs and practices since 1948.

This year we are celebrating 75 years of Commission service to the White House, Congress, the Department of State, and, above all, to the American people.

Today's conversation comes at a challenging moment in our history. We live in an era marked by disinformation, censorship, and distrust, all of which have put global democratic values at risk.

We think that public diplomacy has a critical role to play in the effort to promote democratic institutions and push back against the rising tide of authoritarian influence, and we are grateful to our panelists for leading the way.

Once again, thank you for joining us. As always, we sincerely appreciate your continued interest in and commitment to the practice of public diplomacy.

Vivian Walker: Thank you Sim.

Just a reminder that there will be no break between presentations, but there will be an opportunity to ask questions after the panelists have made their remarks.

It is now my pleasure to open the floor to Kathryn Stoner.

Kathryn Stoner: All right. Well, thank you very, very much for having us speak and also for having this event here at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law which is part of a broader institution known as the Freeman Spogli Institute. It is great to have you here and to welcome our State Department colleagues online.

We were asked to address three questions. (I am a Russia specialist and some of what I have to say will necessarily involve some comments about Russia today as well.)

The first question is whether the United States is still a credible force for promoting democracy around the world. The second question is whether U.S. public diplomacy programs can effectively promote and defend democratic values in an increasingly authoritarian and illiberal global context. The third question is how U.S. public diplomacy programs can better shape the way foreign publics perceive and act on their citizen rights and responsibilities.

I am going to be just a bit longer and perhaps stronger on the first two questions than the third, which is obviously the hardest one of the three.

So, again, my first question is whether the United States is still a credible force for championing democracy around the world.

Probably 20-30 years ago we may have been shocked by this question about the U.S. as “a still credible force.” But it is not so shocking these days when we look at the state of our own democracy.

I think the answer to this question about the credibility of the United States is not really so much about U.S. democracy. (I should say I am a dual citizen. I am Canadian and American. That’s only important because Canada keeps reminding us that they’re up there and we are a democracy too.)

As we champion democracy, we should point out that there are lots of successful democracies—not just the United States and its ups and downs. Although I understand we’re talking about the United States State Department.

We have allies, and we have allies who are also big opponents of democracy. I think the perception about credibility is not only about the United States but also about democracy and whether it is delivering.

Unfortunately, as Larry has noted in a number of recent cases, including one that he wrote about in *Foreign Affairs* last fall, there has been a notable rollback in the last 15 years or so in democracy and declines among all democracies.

I should point out that there is some debate about this. Happily, since Larry wrote his piece in the fall, Jair Bolsonaro lost elections in Brazil and accepted that loss so far. So far, the United States electoral and judicial systems have functioned as they should regardless of what some may think about the outcomes of the elections and about the judging.

Still, there have been very significant and disappointing rollbacks in Tunisia and India in particular, among other countries. Of course, here in the United States, it is important to remember the Freedom House measurement of U.S. democracy.

By the way though, I'll just point out we're as good as what the alternative is, right? The country with the biggest decline in democracy according to the *Economist's* Intelligence Unit in 2022 was? Anyone? Anyone? Russia! We're always relevant.

It declined by 22 points to 146th place out of the 167 countries that are ranked by the *Economist's* Intelligence Unit. That's in one year, right?

We have to tend to our own house. But, for me, our message about the value of open societies is still credible--no matter how messy our processes are, open societies are still superior to ones that are closed.

I'd like to look a moment to the developmental outcomes that we achieve with democracy. It is not just values alone--which obviously in themselves require tremendous work.

In the United States, we must remain vigilant to make sure that our courts function to challenge things such as bipartisan gerrymandering, mismanagement of elections on the state and local levels, and aspirations to do so. Also rolling back women's reproductive rights and all kinds of minority rights.

Democracy, open values, small "I" liberalism, these are not "woke" concepts. These are concepts on which this country was founded in the United States. If being tolerant is woke, then count me in.

We need to work hard to remind people and promote an understanding of the values of the founders of this country through our educational systems, at the primary and higher education levels.

All right. I think we are still a credible force, although we have to tend to our own village and make sure that we are teaching the values of democracy as opposed to the alternative.

So, second question quickly. How can U.S. public diplomacy programs effectively promote and defend democratic values in an increasingly authoritarian and illiberal context?

Well, I think it's fair to say that we can't assume that all societies everywhere appreciate the benefits of democracy. In surveys, people will say they prefer freedom to oppression. Pretty much everywhere you'll get human beings to say that.

But they also prefer food security to famine, peace to war, stability to unpredictability. Fortunately, this is what democracies almost always provide better than autocracies.

Political science does have a few truths to share. We can show that democracies don't have famines. We don't starve our people. That is just a fact.

They tend to go to war less, and they never go to war with each other. In the post-World War era, that's a statistical fact, not an opinion. While the outcomes of free and fair elections are unpredictable, the process of holding elections in a rule-of-law based state is not unpredictable.

There are lots of also positive economic and human developmental outcomes that flow from these facts. Democracies may grow more slowly than some autocracies perhaps. But they grow steadily and more reliably.

Singapore is, can we say, a teetering autocracy, tipping perhaps more towards democracy, but its growth and development are an exception. Sudan, an autocracy is the rule on all of these respects.

If it is true that, for people who are exhausted with poor governance, any order is better than disorder, then democracy is still the better bet than autocracy. Perhaps we might want to point this out in our public diplomacy programs. Even if you don't want to push values, you could point to outcomes, but we could do both of course.

Whether it's Russia, or China, or Iran, or North Korea, or Sudan, or India (one could question whether there is democracy there anymore), their students are still coming here for higher education in world class universities.

So, as messy as the U.S. democratic system is, and as troubled as it has been, and is at the moment, and despite the influence on the global south that Russia and China have developed in the last 10 to 15 years--I've written a book partly about what Russia has done there--the United States is still a more desirable destination for young people in the developing world than either China, Iran or Russia.

Autocracies are not actually performing all that well at the moment. Russia is not a shining light of authoritarian success. Its economy is currently in deep recession. They've shed 1.3 million young workers in the last 12 months alone due to its interminable war in Ukraine, and up to a million people are leaving the country. Russia has—as I mentioned earlier—become increasingly closed, and its autocratic form of rule is unpopular among 18-34 year olds in particular, who are even now bravely indicating by about 20 to 25 percent that they are far less supportive of Putin and the war than are those 35 and older.

Getting to the question about what to do, we need to point these things out in the global south and continue to engage publics there on a one-on-one basis. We need new initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular in places where Russia and China have made various and serious inroads.

The way Russia and China operate in sub-Saharan Africa and the global south is mainly extractive as opposed to providing public goods.

We can do that and, at the same time, demonstrate, rather than merely preach, our values. We have done that in the past with the HIV initiative and push. We can increase exchanges and people to people programs, especially now that COVID is over.

The best way to demonstrate to people that democracy can work is by talking about how messy it is. Despite what you read in the newspaper, you have to actually experience it.

I'm an immigrant to this country and one of the programs that I believe we've had some success with the last couple of years is the Stanford University Russian Forum, which cannot function right now because, well, a couple of us are banned from Russia. We'll have to come up with a new name.

This forum has been a wonderful one-on-one opportunity for students in North America and Russia to meet and introduce each other to one another's countries.

We can no longer do that, but we are planning to meet in the Czech Republic in the coming years to understand one another better--not to teach values so much as to live them and to work constructively on areas of mutual interest.

I'll end by saying that democracy needs defenders, to answer the third question, and constant tending. We can admit that our country's democracy is imperfect. I think we do sometimes come across as arrogant advisors and providers of aid. But we can be humble, and more effective, in pointing out that we have both a legal right and an obligation to disagree in democracies.

We have to go out and have more conversations and support exchange programs, especially since we are at one of the country's premiere universities. We need to have our young people do this while we also continue to educate them about their own rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Young Americans—and some of them are here at Stanford—have lots to say--and yell, at times. They're great at protesting, but they don't vote. It's more fun to go to a protest than to go to a ballot box. But they need to do that, and that is something we need to fix at home.

We should also invest more in opportunities like Peace Corps or global health and education initiatives.

Vivian Walker: Thank you very much. Professor Diamond?

Larry Diamond: Thank you. Wonderful to have you here. Thanks to the Commission for honoring us with the opportunity to host this meeting.

I think we have to begin by acknowledging that we are not as credible a force as we once were and that the damage has been cumulative over a long period of time, with the massive squandering of the political and moral capital we had after 9/11 in the extremely ill-considered American intervention in Iraq.

I don't think American standing in the world has recovered from that. One of the reasons why I think that it was so damaging is that when we didn't find weapons of mass destruction—which I believe the senior officials in the Bush administration really believed that Saddam Hussein had—the mission had to be justified, and I think was in part always meant to be justified, as an exercise in democracy promotion.

But then when the promotion of democracy is intertwined in both the American and global public mind with the use of force, that severely discredits the project. We need to bear that in mind.

There are two major elements of damage to the credibility of the U.S. in this regard. One has been the cumulative deterioration of American democracy, particularly as noted by Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit of Democracy Index.

This damage has happened in the last decade or so. It didn't begin with the previous presidential term. But it certainly dramatically accelerated then, and the whole world watched what happened in Washington, D.C. on January sixth with (in most cases) horror.

Let's also bear in mind how and where the global financial crisis of 2008 began. People are keenly aware of that as well. There was some resurrection of U.S. credibility and prestige and global hopefulness about the U.S. under Barack Obama, but there were also the inevitable disappointments such as when the Arab Spring, in most cases, didn't work out the way people wanted. Even as idealistic and inspiring a president as Barack Obama wasn't able to produce an instant transformation of the world. We are where we are.

We have just had a second global summit for democracy hosted in Washington, D.C. Personally, I am glad that President Biden has put such a strong emphasis on this. But I think it's frankly hard to escape the conclusion that the results from these two exercises have been underwhelming.

I will just say that Freedom House, in its most recent report, has been looking desperately for glimmers of hope after so many years of properly, appropriately, accurately depressing accounts of the global decline of freedom in the world. However, even though it said, "Oh! This is a much better year. Only one more country declined in freedom than the number that gained in freedom," and even though it noted that we are almost back at equilibrium now after 16 years of a balance sheet very much tilted toward decline, if you disaggregate what's happening with freedom in the world and look at the really big, significant, and influential countries, it is still a pretty alarming picture.

Some of the most important emerging market democracies in the world such as India, Indonesia, Mexico—and I agree Brazil dodged a bullet—are creeping toward being non-democracies. We'll see what happens with President Lopez Obrador's efforts to gut the independence of the electoral institute in Mexico.

But it's clear in India and Mexico, and in the less globally significant case of El Salvador, and many other countries you could point to--that you have elected presidents who do not value democracy and are, like Orban, Erdogan, and Chavez previously, agents of its destruction.

Given that Modi, India's opposition leader, brought up an extremely specious defamation charge, was disqualified from Parliament and then from competition in the next election, I do not think that we can any longer call India (the most populous country in the world), an electoral democracy. I think there are big questions about Indonesia. Mexico is hanging by a thread.

How do you look at this picture--the backward movement of these countries, not to mention South Africa and others--and conclude anything but that the democratic recession is continuing? We need a more vigorous, collaborative, imaginative, resolute, and sustained response, which should be diplomacy and public diplomacy.

Now just because U.S. credibility has been in a long state of diminution doesn't mean that it's non-existent. I agree with everything Kathryn said about people still looking to the United States for global leadership, in some cases hopefully and in some cases with very mixed emotions. There are still a lot of resources--morally, organizationally, ideologically, financially, and diplomatically--that we can draw on.

But I do think we need to reboot our approach and our strategy. I would phrase it this way. First of all, if you want to influence you have to listen. I'm not sure we've done that enough. All of our public diplomacy programs, I think, need to be configured around a sensitive appreciation that people are tired of being lectured to.

We in CDDRL, with our now renamed Fisher Family Summer Fellows Program—now in its 18th year—bring about 30 mid-career professionals to the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law to Stanford for three weeks. I can't tell you how many times the word “neo-colonial” creeps in. We just heard it again when our global digital policy incubator brought a similar number of people for a shorter technology training camp last month.

People have mixed feelings. On the one hand, they're grateful to be here, and to be engaged by the United States, and to have a powerful democracy supporting their quest for pluralism, freedom, and human rights.

On the other hand, they don't want to be lectured to. They want a two-way dialogue. That's the first thing.

The second thing is a bit hard to do perhaps. The way our public diplomacy programs are structured, it's easier to be nongovernmental. NDI does this all the time, and so does NED. But I think that it needs to be much more multilateral. That offers a way around ambivalent feelings about the U.S.—the mix of some admiration, but also a lot of resentment, skepticism, and questioning.

I think we should be paying it forward. Swedish democrats, African democrats can do some of this work by traveling around, lecturing, and engaging other countries around the values, ideas,

and information that the U.S. is trying to promote, even if the message isn't quite as perfectly pro-American as we would in principle like it to be.

Frankly, when they send me to lecture abroad it's not perfectly pro-American either because I will acknowledge all our faults. If you want to restore American credibility, a great way to begin is by acknowledging all our faults and showing that even the U.S. government is willing to expend resources to organize and entertain conversations that will involve honest and fair criticisms and invite reflection.

Thank you for your excellent remarks, Mr. Farar. I would humbly like to suggest to the Commission and to its Chair that we move away from the term "U.S. democratic values." I think it is a mistake to frame it this way. These are universal values, and we should be talking about them as such. Amartya Sen made an extremely compelling case for universal values in his book, *Development is Freedom* and in his article in *The Journal of Democracy*.

These are values that are shared around the world. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was written by a multilateral team that included people from the global south. We need to frame it in that way.

I would like to see U.S. public diplomacy focused much more on democratic values and ideas, around the dissemination of knowledge and the appreciation of the diverse regional and cultural origins and traditions of democracy, freedom of participation, and dialogue around the world.

This is exactly the lecture that I am preparing to give on Monday in our freshman class on Stanford's program on civic and liberal education. I was rooting around for the literature. I know it's out there on the African origins of many of these democratic traditions. I found a great working paper at the University of Chicago by Jutta Bolt, James Robinson, and others on the democratic features of African political traditions. Amartya Sen also talks about it in terms of Indian traditions.

I'm not going to be so naïve as to say that you can point to any culture and find these things, or that you can find them in equal measure. But the fact is that you can identify diverse, creative, original, and authentic indigenous traditions of democracy, consultation—and I will even use the words constitutionalism and restraint of power--in so many different cultures. That is the best antidote to the cultural imperialism criticism.

What I'd like to see—what I've been saying for 10 years now but lack the resources or platform to do anything more than repeat this statement once every 18 months—is some kind of multilateral initiative. It would cost maybe \$10-15 million if you were serious about it. But come on--we're spending a couple of billion dollars at least to promote democracy in the world.

So, in relative terms it's not a lot of money to gather together a multinational curriculum of democratic ideas, values, and traditions that's accessible to people around the world, and then have it vetted by a multinational group of scholars, civil society thinkers and leaders and translated into about at least 12 different languages for broad dissemination. Get it out there--not just on websites but on flash drives and in multiple media formats.

There's so much we could do in the current era. I'll just say a couple of more things. Technology is very important here. We do need to meet people where they are, as they're absorbing and using information.

We need to think about how we can help countries scale their firewalls and provide access to digital media in "non-permissive circumstances." Finally, the more we can get people to actively participate, the better. We have a deliberative democracy lab here.

I see my colleague, Alice Siu, in the back. She has been trying to promote these techniques to get societies to deliberate and to put public opinion into the policymaking process. I think that can be a way of promoting our values too. Thank you.

Vivian Walker: Thank you. Now over to you, Professor McFaul.

Michael McFaul: I'm going to be very bullet point like, Twitter light as opposed to Stanford light, and then if you want to dig into any of these points, we can do it in the discussion. I'd love to go into them all.

I agree almost with everything my colleagues said. So, this should be additive. We agree that the first thing we need to do is to get our own democracy in order to advance democracy abroad.

Second, I also think we need to tell the story rather than to be so defensive about the story. Tell the story about renewal. Larry, you used the word "resurrection." That's a good word today.

The war in Iraq was a mistake, a tragedy. My former boss, Barack Obama, if he were here, would say that one of the reasons he got elected as president is because he was against the war in Iraq. That's how he won the democratic primary and that's how he became president. People forget that.

The same is true of another pretty bad period in our history, punctuated by January sixth. But remember that was followed by an election in which more people voted than ever before, and more people voted than ever before for an alternative candidate. That's part of the resurrection story too.

I believe that the contest between China and the United States will be one of the biggest things that we have to deal with over the next century. In my view, our ideals are one of our biggest advantages. There is demand for democracy and democratic ideas in the world. There is demand for America to be involved in that.

But we've got to bring the positive message to this story, not just the negative message. We hear so much about disinformation—fighting disinformation, stopping TikTok, sanctions. I'm not against those things. But what's missing is a positive message about what we have vis-à-vis our Chinese competitors.

Right now, it's all about the negative. We do not have a positive mission. It's about a race in which all of our energy is focused on trying to cripple the Chinese rather than helping us to run faster and better. I think conceptually we've got to focus on that. We are not winning the arguments about ideas.

I look at the way people—both governments and societies—are talking about the war in Ukraine. This is for me a war about a dictatorship invading a democracy. An imperial country recolonizing a former colony, to use the language Larry was just talking about. This is a war about annexation. We set up the United Nations and we wrote language that states “Thou shalt not annex the territory of thy neighbor.” Yet most of the world doesn't see it that way, including many democracies and many citizens of democracies.

It's great that we get the votes in the UN General Assembly, but I'm really interested in the 40 or so countries that are sitting on the sidelines—the Indias, South Africas, and Brazils of the world—three big democracies that are sitting on the sidelines. That to me says we have a conceptual problem in how we're using public diplomacy to bring about democracy.

The first thing we must do is figure out why that's true. I don't think we have a good explanation in academia. Maybe others do, but I think it's a complex question. And it's not just South Africa. We've got to have a better explanation for why countries like Korea aren't providing military assistance to Ukraine. How is that? How can that be, right?

First, we've got to understand the problem better why these large and fragile democracies like India are not lining up with democratic norms.

On what is to be done, let me just go through a few specifics. Some are hard to do, and some are easier to do. Things that, irrespective of how you answer that big question, I think we should be doing today.

Number one, we must blow up USAGM. Did I say that on the record? Is that good for me to say? The model was established in a particular time for a particular reason. But I do not think that the structure works today.

I want to privatize Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, and the Open Technology Fund. “Privatize” is a weird word. What I mean instead is to set them up as a foundation like the National Endowment for Democracy.

They are fully enacted and part of the executive branch. They do not have credibility as media groups. A greater firewall between them and the U.S. government would better serve their independent media interests. In the long run, I think that would also serve the interests of small “d” or universal democracy. Independent media is a key component of that.

Second, if it were up to me, I would just get all of the democracies of the world together to fund independent media. Nothing better than putting billions of dollars into the independent fund for public interest.

I can think of bigger ideas. But more money for independent media around the world universally. We have to do that.

Third, VOA has three different mission statements. To paraphrase, VOA must serve as a consistently authoritative source of news. So, they're supposed to be independent. At the same time VOA must provide a comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions. That feels like that's not news, right? Finally, VOA is to represent U.S. policies clearly and effectively. That's impossible. You cannot do all those things together.

What I would like to do is to set up VOA Africa and VOA Latin America as independent media entities and pull other resources closer to the US government. Right now, I don't think the U.S. government, Secretary Blinken, or President Biden is effective in explaining our policies.

I do it every single day on independent media. When I'm on these programs I'm thinking, "Why isn't the U.S. government doing this?" They need more resources to do that.

I've gone on longer than I intended, so this will be short and sweet. The State Department has to value public diplomacy more than it does today.

I'm a former U.S. ambassador. I was struck by how my officers were focused on the cables written to the home institutions. In a place like Moscow, by the way, we had two dozen agencies. So, it wasn't just the State Department.

Man, they cared a lot about the desk officer back home working on nonproliferation. They were valued—tell me if I'm wrong about this—for good cable writing – that was part of their promotion cycle. They got no credit for going to a high school in Moscow and explaining American public diplomacy.

We carve off public diplomacy. The PAO is off to the side. What is that about? I deputized every single member of my embassy to do outreach, with one exception. Allegedly, we had an operation from the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States government in Russia. I can't confirm or deny that. So, those people were not involved in public diplomacy.

But everybody else should be, and they're not incentivized to do that.

We need armies of people explaining to Russians, and Ukrainians, and Chinese all over the world what we're doing. You just can't do it from the podium in Washington. We need massive funding for all educational exchanges.

We're behind the curve with our competitors. There are more African students studying in China today than there are in the United States. How did that happen? We have got to reinvest in exchanges both ways. You want more Americans going to these countries. Thank goodness we're finally opening up Fulbright back in China because we need Americans to get to that part of the world.

The budget numbers are shameful. There are so many things we could do that we're not doing. As Larry noted, we need to do more education about democracy in creative ways. For example, we should be translating issues of the *Journal of Democracy* into all languages and putting them online for free. Larry, I think you thought about doing that a bit ago.

Larry Diamond: We did do it. But we ran out of money.

Michael McFaul: Two last things. First, we should be giving that lecture on universal democratic values. I remember when I met Larry 30 or 40 years ago during a USIA lecture program in West Africa, and I thought, "Wow! What? This is so cool. I'd love to do it."

Taking a scholar like Larry Diamond and subsidizing this transfer of knowledge is not happening anywhere to the degree that it should be. By the way, I know a little bit about democracy, and yet I've never been asked by the State Department to go abroad to talk about it. Just making a point.

Last point. We need to democratize democracy promotion. Larry mentioned multilateral in one sense. But I think it should be across the board.

I have an idea about that. It's called The International Platform for Freedom, an online resource for democracy promotion. It will disrupt the democracy promotion world today just like Uber disrupted other markets. It will be a marketplace where people looking for ideas can find them.

And those that want to provide them can be there. Those that want to fund them but don't know who to fund can also go there. I think something radical like that would be a fundamental way to democratize the promotion of democracy.

So, everybody in this room, if you wanted to give money to a Pakistani woman's group, but don't know how to make that happen, this website can provide you a way to do that.

This website could also break up the foundations, including U.S. government organizations that are involved that have a lock on such programs.

They do good work. I'm on the board of NDI. I'm not saying this is a criticism of what's there right now. I just want to expand our efforts in this space exponentially. We are not going to achieve that with the status quo. Thanks.

Vivian Walker: Thank you to our outstanding panelists.

From telling stories of democratic renewal to the multilateral approach to democracy promotion, to seeking out creative ideas, and examples of democratic practices from around the world, to deconflicting that old information vs advocacy debate in international public broadcasting, to a return to credibility via humility and candor—these are just some of the great ideas we heard today.

But enough from me. This is the moment to ask your questions. As you do so, please provide your name and affiliation.

Q: My name is **Tara**. I'm an undergraduate student here doing my RS thesis with CDDRL. I'm from Costa Rica. Costa Rica is one of the strongest democracies in Latin America, and there too, there are these slow symptoms of decline—low voter turnout and edging in of populist candidates. And then there is El Salvador.

I think in Latin America, when you talk to people, there is a sense that people are afraid to leave their homes because of tremendous violence. Who cares about values when you're afraid for your life?

I'm interested in hearing your perspective about how you balance, on the one hand, these values that we have reason to share and to promote, and on the other hand, these very real existential threats that people are facing.

Sure, in the long term we know famines don't happen in autocracies, but in the short term, in this transitional moment, when you're looking for results, the U.S. right now is having these internal struggles and doesn't have results to promote abroad and deliver. How do you reconcile those two facts when you're actually trying to convince people that these values are worth it?

A: Larry Diamond: Well, I think the toughest example is El Salvador given the gang violence and what Bukele has done to substantially reign it in. But I think we can offer examples of how democracies did things like that. I think we can ask the question, "Was the sacrifice or treatment necessary?"

I think we can also point to other experiences in which people gave up their freedom, and what happened over time in terms of the economy, corruption, human rights, and so on. An effective response really requires widening the aperture—Number One—and Number Two, returning to first principles.

The first principles that you have grasped in your work in the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law--are that democracy not only has to respect its institutional principles and values, but it has to deliver. It has to deliver education. It has to deliver poverty reduction, and it has to deliver investment in human resources. It has to deliver jobs, so that young men aren't only left with the alternative to join a gang. There is a model of democratic policing that we can point to.

Vivian Walker: All right, over here. You had your hand up first.

Q: Hi, I'm **David Murphy**. I work in Silicon Valley these days, but I worked briefly for USAID. I might add that I provided commercial law advice to Brian Murphy, my late father. He had also worked in Iraq, and he was a Fulbright lecturer in Bulgaria. I worked for the State Department in Haiti and in Africa and all around the world promoting democracy.

I've often joked that "Some of his former students may someday be advising us here on the state of democracy." We may need all the help we can get with our own democracy someday.

You mentioned the need to invest in media. I think so much of this is a long-term fight to educate people. We are seeing efforts to limit education in the U.S. I'm wondering whether there are lessons from what we—in our democracy promotion efforts—say to other countries as to how we can make sure that our own population has the knowledge in the long-term to be educated citizens.

What would you tell other countries in which citizens aren't getting proper comprehensive education about their history, aren't getting news, or are getting news that is sometimes more propaganda? How would you advise these countries to overcome structural problems that we can apply to the U.S. in the long-term?

A: Michael McFaul: Well, I can say a couple of things. One is it's a lot harder to talk about these things even in the last couple of years in the United States than it was before, right?

We have a lot of contestation of what is truth, what are facts. Even here at Stanford if you Google "Stanford Internet Observatory" and "Congressman Jordan."

It's in the interest of transparency, right? We have to talk about these sorts of values. But I mean this very sincerely. These are highly contested things.

Even me! How many in this room have ever had a tweet or post on Facebook blocked as being offensive? I have. I have and I'm going to send it to you. I'm going to let you judge. It was a factual statement and yet, one of these companies blocked me.

Now I have a theory about what's going on there. It is that there are Russians—probably paid by the Russian government—who monitor everything I post and complain to the platforms about everything I post. I won't go into the details right now because it'll burn up our time. But when I posted it in Russian, that caused trouble. When I posted it in English, there was no trouble. But it came up on multiple platforms as language that should not be on their platforms.

So, this is just to illustrate a point that's really important. For me, it's two things. One, more independent sources of funding for independent media. I like the BBC. That's a great model. Every country in the world should have a BBC-like model.

In Ukraine, for instance, they're arguing over this right now. Because of the war, they've all come together. But eventually, they have to have that space because I think it's better rather than trying to restrict who is to decide what's a fact and what's not.

More independent voices are better, and the model where public funds are allocated for the production of independent media is one of many solutions.

A: Larry Diamond: Let me just add on since I think part of what you're driving at is civic education. This needs to be a mission that everybody embraces in the advanced democracies and in emerging market democracies.

We used to make big investments through our democracy promotion funding of civic education activities and NGOs. I think this has waned. We also used to do civic education in the United States.

I had a lot of it when I was in elementary school, and all the way through high school, they did that. This has very significantly declined.

So, I think we need to recommit to it. Richard Haas's new book, called *The Bill of Obligations*, has some interesting thoughts on this. I think that those would be worth considering.

Vivian Walker: Thank you. We're running short on time. I do want to take a question from our on-line audience.

Q: CDDRL: We have a question from one of our summer fellows, Hinda, online: "To what extent has the United States been successful in using public diplomacy to promote democracy worldwide?"

A: Michael McFaul: That's a huge question and I just would make a plea that we need to study that question more systematically, right? So, there's an assumption that we've had in this conversation that more students in America would need to transfer ideas about democracy.

That's an empirical question. We should study that. I wrote a book about democracy promotion published about a decade ago called *Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why We Should and How We Can*. Back then I tried to look for data to support that hypothesis. We don't have that data. Maybe it's in your book there.

A: Vivian Walker: The U.S. Advisory Committee on Public Diplomacy provides, in its annual report, the best and only publicly available data resource on public diplomacy--what we're doing in all these countries around the world, how much we're spending, and why.

So, while the report cannot fully answer the question about the extent of democracy promotion, you'll get great detail and a lot of good examples of what is being done.

A: Michael McFaul: So, that's what we're doing. The next thing is that we need to measure the effects of what we're doing. In my view, this is an academic question. We need to study the effects of America next to the effects of China, next to the effects of Russia, next to the effects of the European Union. We just can't conflate Europe and the United States.

I think to do this better, we've got to have a better sense of how this works. Just because it's showing that there's 100 million tweets from Russians in Mali, that's not showing whether it's having an effect or not, right?

The Chinese are doing a lot of work, and Larry is looking at that. Larry has 5,000 projects. But one of his projects over at Hoover is looking at Chinese sharp power around the world. In that data set, you see a lot of effort towards Taiwan. Well, is it having the effect that they think it is? We need to ask that question much more systematically about what we do.

I understand the problem. Some of the NGOs involved with this don't want to study it too closely because they're worried about the results, and they're worried about undermining public support for their funding. I get it. Maybe that's a place where institutions like Stanford should peel that back.

A: Larry Diamond: Yeah, I actually agree. I think part of State is working a lot harder on the monitoring and evaluation question, but what is missing is that private sector and academic component. You're absolutely right.

Vivian Walker: We have one more question over here before we finish up.

Q: My name is **Amrit Singh**. I'm a professor at the Law School here at Stanford. I am the Executive Director of a new project on the Rule of Law. My question is actually prompted by what Mike said about feeling perplexed about why India and South Africa are not voicing their opposition to the war in Ukraine.

I'm curious to know what you think of the argument that the answer to that is simple. For the same reason that the United States government places its national interest above its diplomatic messages. Similarly for these countries—whatever their conception of the national interest is—their public positions will be determined by their national interests. I don't understand why it's perplexing.

As a follow-up to that, I would query whether government-to-government diplomatic efforts are doomed precisely because they are subordinate to the national interest of those countries?

A: Michael McFaul: That's a great question. Here's my quick answer. What is the national interest? That to me is a variable, not a constant.

So, I actually think—and I've had this argument from people from India—that it is in the long-term national interest of Indian citizens to be against colonization. I think, if you look over 70 years of history, that decolonization was a fantastic achievement that made the citizens of India, and South Africa, Angola, Nigeria, Algeria, etc., better off.

To go back to a world where it's okay to colonize countries at random, to go back to a world where annexation was okay is not in India's national interest. That's a contested argument, right?

You may disagree with me personally. I know that many of my Indian colleagues disagree with my argument. But I want us to make that argument.

You know, I worked in government. I showed up at the White House. I said, "Give me the book that has our special interest." Where's that secret book? I've been waiting to get it. I had all my clearances, but nobody handed it to me, right?

What the national interest is a contested issue. What I've seen with us right now is we're not making that argument the way I would.

Q: Amrit Singh. But you can't make that argument when President Biden fist bumps MDS. That is a national interest network. So the United States can't make that argument.

A: Michael McFaul: But I'm talking about a citizen of the world, a small 'd' democrat. I personally believe that the fist bump wasn't in the American national interest, and I've written about it. So, just because Joe Biden thought that doesn't mean I agree. I wrote a whole book about it. I said, "We've got to get rid of our autocratic allies." That's not in America's national interest.

We're not going to solve that big debate now. Great question by the way—fantastic that you're here at Stanford. I want to contest those things. But that's not happening right now. We as diplomats—my friends in these countries—we are basically ceding the territory, saying "well that would be interfering. We're not going to interfere in what South Africans are saying is in their interest." I think we need to get into the debate of ideas in a more substantive way that doesn't take these things as givens.

Q: Thank you.

A: Larry Diamond: So, I have two final responses, one to this question and one to the previous one. On this question, I would say two things. There is a respect in which there is an interest that is constant and not variable. I would say we have a constant national interest in trying to advance democracy and human rights around the world and stand up for these values where we can to the extent we can. It's going to vary in places and over time. That's the variable.

What we might achieve in Saudi Arabia now is not what we could have achieved to defend democracy in Tunisia if we had lifted a finger to stand up against President Kais Saied. It's one of the most pathetic abandonments of democratic global responsibility that I've seen in the last decade.

So, we always have to balance a hard interest and idealistic interest. It can never be one or the other. This is precisely why I think Mike made a very powerful point.

There would be tremendous value in more separation between some of the information work of U.S. public diplomacy and our other work of diplomacy because everybody knows--we know, and the rest of the world knows--we've got other interests too. We can't abandon them.

But the fist bump shouldn't be the only element of it, and there's lots of fist bumps going on between the United States and India now, as you are well aware, while Prime Minister Modi is in the active process of destroying Indian democracy.

Part of the problem is—part of my complaint and I think Mike's if I've read him correctly—is that we too often underestimate our own leverage. The Saudis need us too. The Modi government needs us too. We have leverage that sometimes we don't recognize and utilize.

In response to the Zoom question from Hinda—our former summer fellow from Morocco—about success stories, I'll just give you one. In the late 1980s General Pinochet said, "I'm going

to renew my mandate as military dictator—” he didn’t put it that way “—of Chile, and I’ll show you I have public support. I’ll call a referendum on whether I should have another eight-year term as president.”

The U.S. swung behind the campaign for the “no” on that plebiscite. I don’t know if you were in the State Department then. But in any case, our ambassador there—Harry Barnes—was extremely active in signaling American support for democracy and for constitutionalism in Chile.

The National Endowment for Democracy poured money into the campaign for the “no.” The “no” campaign won, and Chile then transitioned to democracy as a result. This story has been repeated time and again: in the Philippines when an American emissary sent signals that Marcos had to go after he rigged the election in February 1986. In South Africa and so on.

In conclusion I would return people’s attention to the *Diplomat’s Handbook for Democracy Development Support* produced by the Council for the Community of Democracies—which includes some of your former colleagues at the USUN. This diplomat’s handbook has a lot of great ideas on what diplomats can do to advance our democratic values and interests.

Vivian Walker: Thank you very much. Anne, would you like to close the meeting?

Anne Wedner: I am so grateful for my great professors here at Stanford being willing to participate in this regularly scheduled Commission meeting.

I have to say I think this has been one of our best meetings. We’ve gotten some great ideas from you. If you don’t mind, we’re going to be stealing these ideas and including them in our report, highlighting them, and hopefully bringing about some change.

On behalf of the Commission, let me express my sincere thanks to our distinguished panelists for their insights and to the members of the audience for their thoughtful questions. Special thanks to Kathryn Stoner for her support from the start. And thank you, Larry. Thank you, Mike.

We look forward to seeing you at our next quarterly meeting, which is currently scheduled for June 2023. And we look forward to celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the ACPD in December 2023.

With that we conclude today’s event. Thank you, again.

END OF TRANSCRIPT