

Edited Remarks by

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Keynote speech, “How Cultural Diplomacy is Relevant to Contemporary Security Challenges”

At the conference

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In 1943, while in Naples, Italy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower commented, “Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth and civilization which is ours. It is a responsibility of higher commanders to determine the locations of historical monuments. We are bound to respect those monuments as far as war allows.” This policy serves as the gold standard. This policy would have been very suited to Iraq. Unfortunately, our policies in Iraq were exemplified by former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s statement: “Here is a country that's being liberated. Stuff happens and it's untidy and freedom's untidy and free people are free to make mistakes. The images you are seeing on television you are seeing over and over and over and it's the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase. And you see it twenty times. And you think, my goodness, were there that many vases?” I think one of the very fruitful things to come out of this conference will be: What can we do instead? What is a real alternative? What is a very real way to put in place policies to make sure that something like this is never said again and this kind of approach is never taken again into any intervention in any country, much less, the country that holds the beginning of civilization, in many cases represented in these much-maligned vases?

What is the impact over the long term of an attitude like that of former Secretary Rumsfeld? How does that impact the long-term goals of the United States and of the country of Iraq? What are the implications for security? Many accounts of the war by Iraqis perceive this lack of protection of cultural artifacts as an insult to their identity and culture. They know the figures of how much the US has spent on the war. I find that when I travel in the Middle East, people correct me, asserting that it is not a “war,” it is an “invasion.” Immediately we see a fundamental misunderstanding. These same Iraqis who observed the invasion, observe very little actually being done by the United States to protect and now to preserve and restore these important sites and cultural artifacts. The

image of a tanker in front of the oil ministry and not in front of the museum reflects overall policies and the lack of preparation and prioritization of cultural heritage artifacts.

Why are these cultural artifacts so important in an overall approach? It is fruitful to look to the Gallup poll, published in *Who Speaks for Islam?* by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed that was done recently of Muslim-majority populations all around the world. I am going to focus on these populations, because they pose the greatest challenges for US foreign policy today. Interestingly, when these populations were asked “what is the most significant factor in the divide between the US and Muslim majority countries around the world?” their answer was “lack of respect for and understanding of Islam and Islamic cultures.” When US audiences were asked what they admired or respected about Islam, more than 50% said “nothing” or “I don’t know.” This is a huge problem, with implications for the US education system, which, in the age of globalization, fails to provide students with knowledge about the world beyond the US. Muslim-majority populations perceive this fundamental lack of understanding as a lack of respect for their culture, their religion, and their lives. Within this context, we have seen the looting, plundering of their most treasured historical sites.

In addition, we are engaged in two wars that, in the words of the Secretary of Defense and other military and civilian leaders, cannot be won by military victory alone. Establishing trust in conflict zones is essential to stability and ultimately the transition to peaceful societies in these areas. One important way to achieve that is through cultural engagement, which necessitates demonstration of respect for their culture. In addition, arts, culture, and heritage, are very important elements in creating identity. These are often subjective, but intrinsic to all of us. Our sense of what our culture is grounded in cultural artifacts and practices.

The broader message is: what does this mean in terms of the approach? Is cultural diplomacy a tool for implementing US policy, as it was recently described at a House hearing by a high-ranking official at the Department of State? Or is it, as I would argue, an overall approach that involves much more than just sending our culture out there, but that involves equally importantly listening to and understanding cultures in other places and then using that understanding as a way to engage, build relationships, and ultimately achieve mutual goals? Today, cultural diplomacy is in a state of untapped potential.

Cultural diplomacy played a very important role during the Cold War period, when we used music, art, and writing as forms of engagement. During the heyday of cultural diplomacy, all the funding came from the intelligence community. Ultimately, when that was revealed, it kind of tainted the whole enterprise. I certainly cannot advocate covert funding. Ironically, the only time that culture was taken seriously by the US government was when it was done through public funding.

During the Cold War period, it was recognized that in the battle for hearts and minds, which is not what we are engaged in with the Muslim world, the most effective tools were jazz music and American writers. Audiences said that the people and writings, which made the strongest impact, were those who exercised free speech that included

criticizing the US government. For example, when we sent African American musicians around the world, and they were fed and treated like kings, they told local populations, “I can’t even go in the front door of the theatre in my town” or “I couldn’t even eat at a restaurant with you at home.” There is the famous story of Dizzy Gillespie being briefed before a trip by the State Department. In his autobiography he writes that he told them “I don’t need any briefing from you, I’ve lived here. You’re not going to tell me what I can say.” This was the most powerful force; you can’t pontificate about what free speech is, you can demonstrate what free speech is. In the Soviet Union then, and in many countries today, when artists criticized our government, audiences were stunned; they couldn’t believe it.

One of the many other things we did during the Cold War was our publication of books to exchange ideas between the US and the Soviet Union. We spent \$1 million per year on these publications. It was not only about getting our books in, we also got their books out. We published many authors in Russian and in English; we gave dissenting voices exposure. We have a very similar situation today in many countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran where dissent comes out in literature, movies, and music. We have failed to take these sorts of measures. We do send musicians out today and they are effective, but it is such a miniscule drop compared to what we did before. The funding for Rhythm Road, a very effective program run by the State Department, is \$1.5 million for the whole world.

This is just a brief differentiation between public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. Public diplomacy is much more focused on promoting acceptance and understanding of policies. Cultural diplomacy is much harder to pin down when it is used efficaciously. It is almost always done effectively in the context of a long-term relationship. It involves engagement and not necessarily acceptance of policies. The ultimate result may be acceptance of these policies, but it happens in a much more circuitous way. The term “soft power,” coined by Joseph Nye, embraces all of these things.

Secretary Gates has emphasized these civilian aspects of power. However, in the wake of his Kansas, when he advocated the importance of diplomacy and these civilian instruments and advocated beefing up the State Department, the funding has not come to make these changes. These ideas have been present for a very long time, since the time of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson already talks about the importance of the arts [Jefferson quote]. These are the same things we seek to do today, particularly reconciling the respect of the world.

There are several current examples of current artists involved in cultural diplomacy. This is a current US musician who is traveling. After a show in Oman, US diplomats told him, “you have accomplished more in a week than we have in years,” just by bringing people together and by performing music in Oman. Another example was in Cyprus where a Turkish diplomat met with an American ambassador for the first time; he crossed the line for the first time in 30 years to go to a jazz concert. Once he got there, he talked to the American ambassador, and now they have a relationship that would not have started otherwise.

The post-9/11 era is the first time that there has not been any sort of cultural surge in response to a crisis. We look back to the 1930s when Walt Disney and many others were sent to South America to gather materials to make animated movies specifically for that audience, with the goal of stopping the spread of Nazism there.

A new model of cultural diplomacy through music involves collaborative music making and teaching. A non-State Department group, that is sometimes sponsored by the State Department, American Voices, travels all over the world on a shoestring budget. They do not just perform, they spend 4 or 5 days with local musicians and then they collaborate to do a joint concert, facilitating respect for local cultures. This has been so successful in Afghanistan that they have toured Europe. For the last four years, in Iraq, they have been doing a 2-week music academy when they bring together over 200 people from all over Iraq, from all regions and sects, to perform classical, jazz, Broadway, and kids do hip-hop. This is something that brings together all different people in the midst of the conflict; and of course it is very American.

Cultural diplomacy can work effectively in very surprising ways. I think American Idol may be the most surprising. What is American Idol? It is all about a meritocracy; it is something thing where everyone starts in the same place and the most talented person wins. There are cultural connections; is anyone noticing? On one side you have American Idol, on the other you have a variant called “Poet of the Millions,” which is broadcast across the Middle East out of Abu Dhabi, as well as Afghan Idol. This may not look like someone breaking barriers to us, but one finalist, a woman in *niqab* from Saudi Arabia, was initially discouraged by her tribe and her family from competing. Her poetry, in an Iraqi style, was about the role of women in society. As she started winning, her family and tribe began to support her in the competition. Young Arab women all over the region view her performances.

Afghan Idol has had an even more profound impact in Afghanistan. They performed Afghan songs, which had been banned by the Taliban. They are part of a new independent media. Unfortunately, Afghan Idol has fallen victim to some censorship and persecution and the US government has done little to support them. Despite these challenges, they continue to broadcast.

The recent exhibition of Afghan treasures in Washington, DC, serves as another testament to the importance of cultural heritage. We know that people trying to destroy culture, look to destroy cultural artifacts. To often, the victors, seeking to win completely, destroy culture. We also know that cultural artifacts can hold disproportionate amounts of hope for people. This was true of the Sarajevo Haggadah; that object gives people hope that there is a future.

We have a distinguished history of considering culture in our military campaigns. In WWII, we took culture into account. At that time, cross-agency collaboration was easier. Arguably it wasn’t perfect, but we saved Florence, and we went into regions thinking ahead about preservation and acting on restoration after the world. We now know the

consequences of not integrating culture and policy. We saw our failures in Iraq and we know what went wrong, who did not talk to whom. We know that experts did go to the Pentagon to meet with officials, and were received well, but the orders did not go up the chain of command. As a result, Iraqis perceive that we do not take their culture seriously. Then there was a fundamental misunderstanding of what is the common ground that we are going to use to build this new society. We have this idea “they’re going to vote, it will be great.” Meanwhile, while we are destroying their history, what is going to hold this society together? What is going to give them meaning? It is a misunderstanding; it is *their* culture that will do this, not ours.

Cultural diplomacy needs to be taken seriously and integrated into policy at all levels. For the purposes of today’s discussion, this means the protections of local property need to be understood and supported at the highest levels. It needs to be part of the combat phase, not just stabilization. There should be integration between multiple agencies, particularly the Department of State, which was not at all involved in the invasion of Iraq. There should be accountability and funding for renovation and restoration—which we still don’t have. Italy and England have led efforts to restore and preserve Iraq’s cultural artifacts in recent years. Preservation of cultural artifacts needs to be taken seriously because the consequences are serious. A country cannot be built and become unified without a sense of its identity.