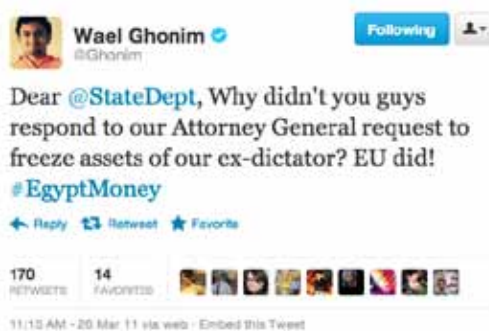


# Baked In and Wired: eDiplomacy@State

Fergus Hanson

“... [e-diplomacy](#) is the talk of foreign ministries the world over...”

—Nick Bryant, BBC, July 2012



Many foreign policy mandarins might not like or understand it, but the foreign policy operating environment is changing quickly.

When in 2011, the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt was unable to get in touch with his Bahraini counterpart during the heat of the protest movement there, he opted to publically shame him via [Twitter](#).



When General Electric was selecting topics for a summit of its most senior government relations executives, it chose Google....and the U.S. State Department's ediplomacy.

When on July 12, 2010, Terry Jones, a radical reverend from Florida, wrote a series of Tweets attacking Islam, one of which [read](#): "9/11/2010 Int Burn a Koran Day" news of his proposal spread virally resulting in a wave of global protests, some of them deadly.

The adaptation to this new environment and integration of new technologies into diplomacy is one of the biggest challenges foreign ministries—and corporations—have faced in many years. And it has

led to a string of attempts to describe the change afoot. The State Department calls it [21<sup>st</sup> Century Statecraft](#); the UK Foreign Office, [Digital Diplomacy](#); while the Canadians refer to it as [Open Policy](#).

This paper refers to it as ediplomacy and uses a slightly amended [definition](#) previously proposed by the author. It defines ediplomacy as: *the use of the internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives.*

At the vanguard of this adaptation is the U.S. State Department. The first paper in this series, [Revolution@State](#), found over 150 people employed at State in 25 separate ediplomacy nodes covering eight different work areas. At U.S. missions abroad another 900 staff used ediplomacy tools to some extent.

This paper is focused on just three of those eight areas where State is currently allocating the bulk of its ediplomacy resources: public diplomacy, internet freedom and knowledge management.

Its starting point comes from this video extract: as the Godmother of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Statecraft, Hillary Clinton, steps down as Secretary of State, is ediplomacy now baked into the Department? <http://www.brookings.edu/up-front/posts/2012/04/10-ediplomacy-ross-hanson>

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### eDiplomacy Staffing at State

Ediplomacy staff at State, by work programs  
(numbers indicate staffing levels)



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The above chart takes some liberty as several ediplomacy units cut across multiple thematic areas, but serves to illustrate the broad allocation of ediplomacy resources. It also helps explain why this paper focuses in on just three of the eight areas that are to the greatest extent 'baked in'.

### THE HISTORY OF EDIPLMACY AT STATE

Despite the United States' long history of innovation in the field of communications technologies, the State Department's emergence as the world's leading user of ediplomacy was not a natural consequence of this. A 2001 book by Wilson Dizard Jr., *Digital Diplomacy: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Information Age*, tracks a long history of reluctant adaptation to technological innovations at State. In a discussion about the UK and other countries' adoption of the telegraph he [notes](#):

Incredibly, the U.S. State Department was a latecomer to this process. Its officials did not hire a communications clerk for a dozen years after the first Morse telegraph network began

operations....It was another decade before telegraph connections with the State Department's overseas missions were established.

At the end of the book, in a discussion on "The Future of Digital Diplomacy," Dizard [writes](#):

In November 1998, the State Department issued an "international affairs strategic plan," outlining its policy priorities for the next decade and beyond. It included the standard list of issues (national security, trade, environment, human rights) without referring, except for a cliché nod towards the information age, to the role of electronic technologies in determining the form and content of these issues.

This reluctance to acknowledge new digital realities reflects an organizational culture that still resists change.

The origins of ediplomacy at State can be [traced](#) to this same year—1998—and the East Africa bombings, when a Blue Ribbon Panel investigating the attacks concluded State was poorly placed to internally communicate. But it was not until after the September 11 attacks that the first Taskforce of eDiplomacy was established in 2002 under Secretary Colin Powell.

This was renamed the Office of eDiplomacy, which grew into the Department's knowledge management lead. But this office kept a relatively low profile, maintaining a staffing level of [around six](#) (p. 6) until 2009.

There are now literally dozens of dynamic innovators driving ediplomacy efforts at State, which makes singling out anyone inherently unfair. But given the state of affairs described by Dizard above and the rapid and dramatic transformation from laggard to leader since, understanding the role of leadership is central.

As noted, Secretary Powell, with his high-tech military experience, was a clear visionary with his creation of the Taskforce on eDiplomacy. This team has been led by several officials over the years, but much of the growth has come under the entrepreneurial leadership of [Richard Boly](#), described by one official as having "a black belt in bureaucratic jiu-jitsu" for his ability to attract staffing resources.

Secretary Condoleezza Rice's transformational diplomacy agenda laid some of the foundational work for ediplomacy. Her road map for getting there in her [address](#) to Georgetown University in February 2008 could have been uttered by Secretary Clinton:

All of this requires further modernization of the State Department. We need to trust our people to manage greater amounts of risk. We need to get our people the best technology to liberate them from embassies and offices so they can work anytime, anywhere. We will need to be better at fostering and rewarding creativity and initiative, innovation and independent thinking, especially among our youngest professionals.

Secretary Rice also took an unusual chance in [appointing](#) a young 24-year-old [Jared Cohen](#) to her policy planning staff to drive some early ediplomacy initiatives. He continued on for a time under Secretary

Clinton's tenure and together with [Alec Ross](#) (Secretary Clinton's Senior Advisor for Innovation) and [Anne-Marie Slaughter](#) (Director of Policy Planning from 2009 to 2011) did much of the thinking that would drive State's embrace of ediplomacy. Another central, but under-acknowledged figure, is [Ben Scott](#) (Secretary Clinton's Innovation Adviser). He joined the innovation team in 2010.

While ediplomacy's emergence at State has been a bipartisan project, there is perhaps no more central figure than Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In some respects, she is an unlikely champion of new technologies. As she jokingly noted in her 2010 Newseum [address](#) on internet freedom: "even in established democracies like the United States, we've seen the power of these [social networking] tools to change history. Some of you may still remember the 2008 presidential election here."

"I don't think the Secretary goes home and downloads the latest app," one of her advisers said. But as her tongue-in-cheek remarks make clear, she understands that the internet and connection technologies matter.

Ironically, it was her loss to Obama that appears to have driven her enthusiasm for connection technologies. As one official put it, "Her starting point coming into the job was that the internet changed the world and by extension the election. And so it will affect diplomacy. That's why she brought in Alec [Ross]."

Her understanding of the power of these technologies has manifested itself in her hiring of young, entrepreneurial staff, her preparedness to accept risk (what Ross [terms](#) "mistakes of commission rather than omission") and her willingness to back them up when minor controversies occur.

When Jared Cohen infamously tweeted about the best frappacino in Syria during a tense visit in 2010, the U.S. media reacted [hostilely](#).

An old-world foreign ministry would have bought into the media narrative of young, inexperienced upstarts in need of a firing, demotion or severe dressing down. Her staff report that Clinton's reaction to the kerfuffle was nonplussed, and officials from policy planning backgrounded the incident as mere "[stray voltage](#)."

With every minor success she would tell them, "I want more. I want more," and with every minor scandal, "The only person who should hold you back from pushing the limits is me. And you haven't got there yet."

What started as a thoughtful experiment in diplomatic innovation soon began to expand in scope. After the first dozen or so innovations had been rolled out, the Secretary commissioned a review of what worked and what hadn't. Of those that worked, an assessment was done of which initiatives had succeeded because of the personalities behind them and which would have worked regardless of personalities/leadership. It was these latter initiatives that were used as the template for ediplomacy's broader roll-out across State.

The next stage of the process was the cultivation of champions within bureaus and embassies. A second aspect of this was the cultivation of international champions. This effort was spearheaded by Ross who has been on an endless international roadshow evangelizing ediplomacy.

State counts this evangelizing mission as one of its most successful, with most serious foreign ministries around the world beginning the technological transition. In anticipation of this being further entrenched, State has already begun conceptual work on the idea of “networked diplomacy”—that is, moving beyond the traditional siloed approach to information gathering in capitals, where every embassy closely guards all its information, to a networked approach where information is easily shared between like-minded governments.

Within the State Department itself, acceptance of new technologies has not been universal. Ediplomacy has been most widely accepted for public diplomacy purposes. Its application to internet freedom and knowledge management are also reasonably well entrenched. In other areas where it could be extremely helpful—such as policy planning, consular affairs and diaspora engagement—dynamic organizational champions are yet to emerge.

The remainder of this paper is focused on the three areas where ediplomacy is most baked in at State—public diplomacy, internet freedom and knowledge management—and how it is being used, how its effectiveness is being evaluated and how it could be further embedded at State.

## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

“Our basic assumption is that we’ve all lost control of the information environment—the only option is to embrace the change and work to shape it.”

—Ben Scott, Innovation Adviser to Hillary Clinton

### What’s the Issue?

One of Australia’s foremost foreign policy thinkers, [Allan Gyngell](#) (Director-General of the Office of National Assessments), recently [set out](#) why public diplomacy increasingly matters. He argued, “We are now entering a period in which diplomacy will matter again more than it has since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the Cold War. And...it will be a more complex and challenging form of diplomacy, with more than the usual scope for success and failure.” Gyngell goes on to list four reasons why, the fourth of which he describes as follows:

The final reason diplomacy will matter more is that its objects—the entities it is trying to influence—are increasing in number as the deeper effects of the information revolution, especially new forms of social media, spread through societies.

Just as the circumscribed court politics of the eighteenth century gave rise to the more complex diplomacy of the nation state in the nineteenth century, and the new dimensions of multilateral diplomacy were added in the twentieth century, in the twenty first century an additional dimension of public diplomacy is needed to address the publics which increasingly shape state behaviour.

As Joseph Nye says, “in the information age it’s not just whose army wins but whose story wins”. And diplomats are storytellers. The first of them in the Greek city states were actors. They’ve never looked back.

The technology-driven changes affecting public diplomacy have produced both risks and opportunities for foreign ministries. These include:

- The opportunity to influence and speak directly and more frequently to large audiences, that will in turn feed into political influence. In the case of State, this involves its emergence as a de facto media empire.
- The opportunity to segment audiences and target messages to key groups.
- Broadening awareness among diplomats of political and social movements that are driven from the bottom up by providing an early warning capability.
- The chance to listen to voices and receive information previously unavailable to diplomats. With the new opportunity to access the views of so many people on so many topics all the time it should help good listeners to better understand the complexity of politics, society, and culture beyond the elite views represented in traditional diplomatic sources.
- The risk of economically costly damage to a country’s reputation or key exports in incredibly short time-frames.
- The challenge of competing for a voice when everyone can communicate and, in some cases, with individuals or organizations that are more successful at controlling a foreign policy message than governments.

At the core of this change has been the democratization of access to communications tools as well as the nature of that communication. Most people on earth now have access to a cell phone. The International Telecommunications Union [estimates](#) there are six billion of them, with a global penetration rate of 87 percent, including 79 percent in the developing world. Even in countries like Haiti—one of the world’s poorest with per capita GDP of just [\\$1,300 in 2011](#)—there are [41 mobile phone subscriptions](#) per 100 people.

Giving nearly the entire human populace access to voice and SMS communication is a radical development—the first time everyone on earth has at least theoretically been one phone call away from anyone else. This is, of course, hypothetical; it is reasonably hard to obtain another person’s cell phone number unless they give it to you. But increasingly phones are not limited to voice and SMS capability (as powerful as these can be). [Estimates](#) are that there are now around one billion smart phones that have the capacity to access the internet to some extent, with the take-up of these phones spreading rapidly as costs plummet. That is facilitating access to an even greater reservoir of information. It is also providing access to networked social media platforms that, for some individuals, can dramatically multiply their reach. The largest of these networks, Facebook, had [955 million](#) monthly active users at the end of June 2012 and in 2012 became the largest tech IPO in history with a valuation in excess of [\\$100 billion](#).

For foreign ministries, connection technologies have ushered in three big changes: changing hierarchies and new actors; real time diplomacy; and rapid brand damage.

### **Hierarchies and New Actors**

This new, networked communication facilitated by the cell phone is changing the way people communicate and old power hierarchies in the process. Secretary Clinton's Senior Advisor for Innovation, Alec Ross [characterized](#) this shift in the following way:

So I think that part of what connection technologies do, is they take power away from the nation state and large institutions and give it to individuals and small institutions. And so very big companies and very big governments are often times those which are most roiled, which are most disrupted, by connection technologies. Because what it does is it puts power in the hands of individuals that was previously unimaginable. And this can be for both good or ill. Technology itself is value neutral. It takes on the values and intentions of the users.

These remarks came just a few months into the Arab Spring. But other events have also led governments and business to reassess the potential of connection technologies.

Another illustration of the power of these tools to disrupt the foreign policy establishment came with the launch of the Kony2012 [video](#) by Invisible Children. This previously obscure NGO [reported](#) its support and revenue as less than \$14 million in financial year 2010-11. Despite this relatively modest footprint, its half-hour video on Joseph Kony, leader of the rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, was launched in March 2012 and quickly amassed over 100 million views.



used under a  
creative commons  
license, [PipPipHooray!](#)

Unsurprisingly, the group's success irked just about everyone. The Ugandan government was [aghast](#) that a global LRA narrative was being shaped by an upstart NGO. Others were quick to point out factual [errors](#) in the film or the way Invisible Children [spent](#) its funds.

From the perspective of global perceptions about Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, these criticisms were beside the point. Invisible Children's narrative had spread so pervasively no level of retrospective scrutiny was going to change the now preponderant narrative it had shaped.

In the Kony 2012 video, Invisible Children claim credit for getting around 100 U.S. military advisers deployed to Africa to help in the hunt for Kony but expressed concern that without political pressure they risked being withdrawn. It was a reasonable worry given Obama administration officials had told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in October that the deployment would be "[short-term](#)." After Invisible Children's viral campaign it didn't take long for President Obama to address the group's concern directly. Just days after its "[Cover the Night](#)" action, President Obama announced during a [speech at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) that "our advisers will continue their efforts to bring this madman [Joseph Kony] to justice and to save lives."



This is not to suggest that every individual and NGO around the world is suddenly going to be sending governments off on a string of populist sprees addressing their pet priorities. Invisible Children had a strong [global network](#) established well in advance of the release of the Kony2012 video which no doubt helped its roll-out. It will also likely be harder for would-be imitators to replicate its success easily. But connection technologies have discernably empowered some individuals and groups and they are now going to be playing themselves into foreign policy decisions whether foreign ministries like it or not.

### Real Time Diplomacy

“I kid my good friend, Henry Kissinger. Can you imagine, in a world of Twitter, being able to sneak out of Pakistan and fly to China and do secret negotiations? It’s just an entirely different 24/7 public environment that you are living in.”

—[Hillary Clinton](#), March 2012

The diffusion of cell phones across the globe and the shift towards networking these has produced another radical challenge for diplomacy. It has been dubbed by Professor of Journalism and Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California, Philip Seib, “[real-time diplomacy](#).”

Every communications revolution has challenged governments and foreign ministries by constricting their decision time-frames. Seib tracks a few examples that put the current reality in perspective.

On the morning of April 19, 1775, there was a faceoff between American militiamen and the British army at Lexington and Concord that marked the beginning of the American Revolution. However, it wasn’t until April 23 that news reached New York and April 28 that it reached Virginia (Seib p 73). Today, these events could be live Tweeted globally.

Or more recently, when CBS filmed the East German closure of the border between East and West Berlin on Sunday August 13, 1961, it wasn’t until Tuesday evening in the United States that the story was finally ready for televised broadcast (Seib, p 68).



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Every advance that has reduced the time required for information to travel between two points has put pressure on decision time-frames for diplomats, whether it be the steam ship, train, telegraph, telephone, radio, television, or the internet.

The point has now been reached where information not only travels instantly from almost anywhere on earth, it is also democratized. Information is unfiltered by traditional gatekeepers like newspaper, radio



or television editors. Gone are the gentleman's agreements between editors and officials to hold back or restrain sensitive reporting. These sorts of traditional approaches are now largely redundant when it's possible for people like IT consultant Sohaib Athar to [live tweet](#) the raid that killed Osama bin Laden (see tweet). Even when major news organizations abide by these old standards of professionalism they can be instantly rendered moot.

When it decided to report on the State Department's WikiLeaks cables, the *New York Times* issued a note to [readers](#) that said in part:

After its own redactions, The Times sent Obama administration officials the cables it planned to post and invited them to challenge publication of any information that, in the official view, would harm the national interest. After reviewing the cables, the officials—while making clear they condemn the publication of secret material—suggested additional redactions. The Times agreed to some, but not all. ... In all, The Times plans to post on its Web site the text of about 100 cables—some edited, some in full—that illuminate aspects of American foreign policy.

However, less than a year later the entire unredacted stock of a quarter of a million cables was [released](#) online when *Guardian* journalist David Leigh [published](#) the passphrase to the master file in a book, while various [websites](#) further enhanced the cables' accessibility by making them easily searchable.

Notwithstanding, these technological developments, some of this change seems much more dramatic than it really is. The fact it used to take days or months for information to reach policymakers did not mean policymakers had all this time available to formulate policy and make a decision. Unless policymakers were actually conveying the information themselves to headquarters, this travel time was dead time, and upon receiving the information, policymakers would still be under pressure to respond in a timely way. Improvements in internal communications also allowed policymakers to effectively buy time by making processing and transmission more efficient (for example, by replacing written with typed letters and typed letters with emails).

It also remains true that for many (probably most) foreign policy issues, policymakers are still under no real public pressure to act expeditiously. The public has an extremely high tolerance for the negotiation of tax treaties, free-trade agreements, reciprocal healthcare arrangements and the like. Policymakers have even been able to drag out global negotiations for years on issues as pressing and potentially catastrophic as climate change.

It is only in a limited number of high-profile issues that decision making time frames have been dramatically curtailed. When your secret raid inside the territory of a foreign country is being live tweeted there is not much time for your public position to be explained. But even in the instance of the Osama bin Laden raid, its pre-planned nature meant public lines could have been thought through in advance.

That said, unpredictable developments in high profile areas can force policy making into uncomfortably tight time frames. The revolution in Egypt was a case in point.

The uprising began on January 25, 2011 and by February 11, Mubarak had stepped down. U.S. policy needed to scramble in a highly fluid and uncertain environment that was taking place against the backdrop of a successful overthrow of the regime in Tunisia and a torrent of social and other media reporting and commentary on the unfolding events.

Not surprisingly, and reasonably, U.S. policy was initially unable to keep pace with developments. As social media and the traditional media erupted in a frenzy of support for the Egyptian protestors, the President and State Department were unable to instantly jettison a long-term partner and policy approach from day one.

On January 27, Vice President Joe Biden said the following in an [interview](#) with Jim Lehrer:

**JIM LEHRER:** Has the time come for President Mubarak of Egypt to go, to stand aside?

**JOE BIDEN:** No, I think the time has come for President Mubarak to begin to move in the direction that—to be more responsive to some of the needs of the people out there.

...

**JIM LEHRER:** Some people are suggesting that we may be seeing the beginning of a kind of domino effect, similar to what happened after the Cold War in Eastern Europe. Poland came first, then Hungary, East Germany.

We have got Tunisia, as you say, maybe Egypt, who knows. Do you smell the same thing coming?

**JOE BIDEN:** No, I don't.

By January 30, the Administration line had evolved and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went on the Sunday talk-show circuit, [calling](#) for “an orderly transition” and stating the United States was “ready to help with the kind of transition that will lead to greater political and economic freedom.”

And on February 1, just a week after the protests erupted, President Obama [announced](#) that he had phoned President Mubarak and made clear “orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful and it must begin now (video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aok9uqV08dg>).”

In comparison to some previous leadership transitions the United States has had to deal with—[such as](#) Reagan with Ferdinand Marcos and Bill Clinton with Suharto—this was policymaking at warp speed.

This might have been an extraordinary policy pivot in an incredibly short time frame that landed the United States on the right side of history, but it was still nowhere near fast enough to appease public expectations of a virtually instantaneous reaction. In the lead-up to this policy evolution, social media was overflowing with demands for the United States to make its policy position clear (and tell Mubarak to go). While it is hard to imagine the United States being able to responsibly shift any faster than it did, given the fluidity of events and the stakes, even this slight delay probably dented the United States' wider reputation in the region as a champion of democracy.

In this super-saturated information environment there are going to be some circumstances where it is simply impossible for foreign ministries to keep pace with events. It would be reckless for states to jettison deliberation and time to see how events unfold in favor of snap decisions that play to the crowd. At the same time, this environment now demands they communicate their positions (even holding positions) and technology provides them with the ability to defend their stance and mitigate negative fallout.

### **Rapid Brand Damage**

A related challenge connection technologies have created for foreign policy practitioners is the potential for rapid, nation-brand-damaging incidents. A factor feeding this trend seems to be the fact journalists in many countries now use social media as a source for breaking news and as a means of gauging public reaction to events.

Events that in the past might have gone unnoticed beyond a small community now have the potential to explode internationally, causing massive economic losses and even death.

In 2009, Australia experienced this new reality. A series of attacks on Indian students studying in Australia created a perception they were racially motivated. Australian police did not collect data along racial lines, so it was at first [difficult](#) to determine if the attacks were racially motivated or just an unfortunate coincidence. The attacks received some attention on social media in India and various Australian-oriented Facebook [pages](#) appeared promoting hateful messages about Indians.

Even with this social media element, the mainstream media quickly became the major actor in this crisis, fuelling a string of protests over the attacks in both India and Australia. Various factors inflamed the crisis. The notoriously vociferous Indian media on several occasions omitted critical facts, [such as](#) when Jaspreet Singh claimed he was set alight by unknown assailants but police alleged he accidentally burned himself while setting his car alight to make an insurance claim. The Victorian government also handled the crisis poorly.

The overall impact was nation brand-damaging. Australia's [third-largest export](#) is education and its [second-largest source](#) country of international students at the time was India. Within months, student numbers had fallen dramatically, with government [figures](#) released in early 2010 revealing the number of Indians applying for student visas to Australia had fallen nearly 50 percent. Private government-purchased polling seen by the author also revealed Indian public opinion towards Australia had plummeted dramatically in key areas.

The Australian federal government responded in the same way many governments might. In June 2009, it [ordered](#) the National Security Adviser to lead a taskforce examining the attacks. But it was not until early 2010 that it had mobilized a comprehensive national response and by then the damage had been done.

This is the sort of crisis that fits Philip Seib's concept of real-time diplomacy. It was generating outrage in one of Australia's largest and fastest-growing export markets and causing serious economic and political damage. It required urgent action for which governments and foreign ministries at present are, mostly, wholly unprepared.

When a similar event happened in April 2012 and a Chinese student was assaulted on a train, Australia responded differently. The student had [posted](#) a message about the attack on the Chinese social media platform Weibo immediately following the incident, which was quickly reposted more than 10,000 times. This time former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (who is fluent in Mandarin) reacted quickly, posting a [response](#) on Weibo himself letting the student know he was going to 'approach the police and department of education' on his behalf.

In other instances, the inflammatory use of connection technologies has resulted in deaths. On July 12, 2010, Terry Jones a radical reverend from Florida, wrote a series of tweets attacking Islam, one of which [read](#): "9/11/2010 Int Burn a Koran Day." He followed that up with a Facebook group soliciting people to join his burn a Koran day. By September, Al Jazeera [reported](#): "A Facebook page in support of the burning had more than 16,000 fans by Friday and was on the increase, while fans of opponents' pages numbered in the hundreds of thousands."

The *Washington Post* [tracked](#) the spread of the story from Twitter to mainstream media including State's monitoring of the issue:

On July 23, Jones was tweeting about having more than 700 Facebook friends for his International Burn a Koran group. Next, he did a short interview on CNN, and after that, on July 30, the National Association of Evangelicals, one of the largest collections of such churches, denounced the event and urged Jones to call it off.

Still, the stunt caused little commotion domestically, even as senior officials within the FBI, the State Department and military intelligence watched warily for the news to inflame sentiment in the Middle East and Asia.

"This is not the first time something like this has happened," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Friday. Other pastors had burned Korans before and posted video on YouTube. "But what is different is the potential that the world will be watching and reacting," because of the contentious debate over the proposed Islamic center at Ground Zero.

Another lens this controversy was being analysed through was the response to the publication of cartoons depicting the [Prophet Muhammad](#) in a Danish newspaper in 2005.

Indeed the story spread and the consequences on the ground were very real. As the *New York Times* [reported](#), the fallout from one of the protests the reverend's actions sparked:

Stirred up by three angry mullahs who urged them to avenge the burning of a Koran at a Florida church, thousands of protesters on Friday overran the compound of the United Nations in this northern Afghan city, killing at least 12 people, Afghan and United Nations officials said.

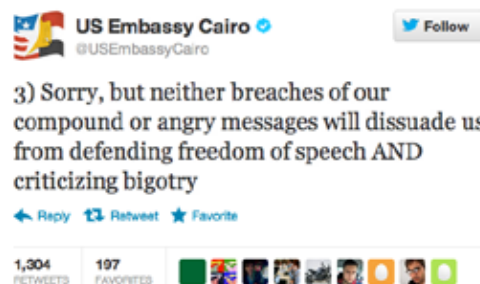
The dead included at least seven United Nations workers—four Nepalese guards and three Europeans from Romania, Sweden and Norway—according to United Nations officials in New York.

In other cases, these events can seem fleeting, doing limited brand damage. However, when there is the perception of a pattern (as with the attacks on Indian students or, say, U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan), there is cumulative damage that can have a major impact.

For democracies like the United States, responding to some of these crises can be challenging, especially when they involve fundamental freedoms. When an amateur video attacking Islam was posted online and began to attract attention in September 2012, the U.S. Embassy in Cairo issued the following [statement](#) on its website in an apparent effort to defuse escalating tensions:

The United States Embassy in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims—as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions.

Parts of the statement were also [tweeted](#). When protestors subsequently breached the Embassy compound in Cairo (later, in Libya, four U.S. officials were killed in clashes, including the Ambassador), the embassy in Egypt modified its message [tweeting](#):



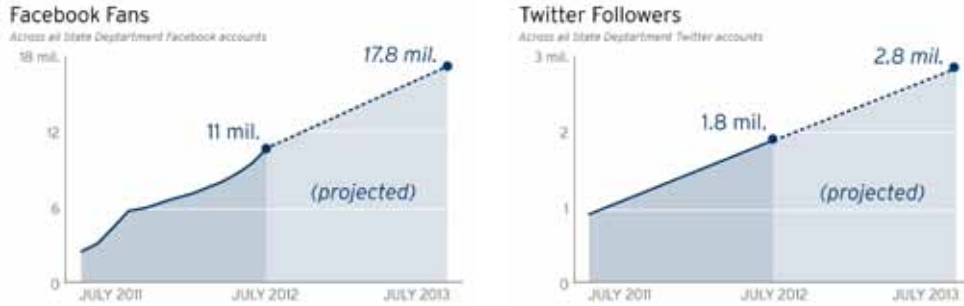
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Reflecting just how difficult it can be to manage communications in such a time-pressed and tense security situation, Politico later [reported](#) an administration official disowning the initial Embassy Cairo statement: “The statement by Embassy Cairo was not cleared by Washington and does not reflect the views of the United States government.”

Because information now has the potential to spread so rapidly, the facts are often ambiguous and can be out of direct government control, the response needed by governments is not fact-finding (although that is important in the medium term) but crisis public relations. And it is government-led public relations campaigns that need to account for the changes in the way people are communicating and the power of networks.

### **eDiplomacy Applied to Public Diplomacy**

At State, ediplomacy’s use in public diplomacy is baked in. At the end of January 2012, State’s social media reach via Facebook and Twitter was over eight million people. That was already a larger direct reach than the daily subscriber base of the ten largest newspapers in the United States combined (although that is not to suggest influence levels or readership equated). By early August, it had nearly doubled, approaching 15 million.



There is quite a bit of nuance to these big-picture numbers. Foremost is the fact that, like any mass medium, not everyone is receiving your message, and in the case of social media probably only a very small proportion. Facebook is currently the dominant mass reach tool (see chart) with around 13 million fans across nearly 300 pages. Even though State’s YouTube channels have had more than 16 million views overall, these are one-off views, whereas Facebook and Twitter offer the potential for reaching people on a daily basis.

### Facebook, Twitter and YouTube Accounts Operated by the State Department

Platform	Number	Total direct reach (9 August 2012)
Facebook	288 pages	12,862,585 fans
Twitter	196 accounts	1,883,344 followers
YouTube	125 channels	16,337,350 video views with 26,900 channel subscribers

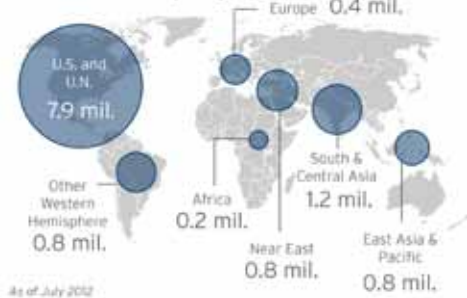
State’s 13 million Facebook fans are also concentrated in four accounts run by the Bureau of [International Information Programs](#) (IIP). These are [Global Conversations: Our Planet](#) (now also in Spanish and the first foreign ministry site to pass two million fans), [eJournal USA](#), [Democracy Challenge](#) and [Innovation Generation](#) (formerly known as [Co.Nx](#)). Global Conversations focuses on environmental issues, eJournal USA all things America, Democracy Challenge on democratic-related matters and Innovation Generation on entrepreneurship.

Together these four sites account for a little under eight million of these 13 million Facebook fans—with 49 percent of the audience under 24 years of age. The top ten countries where fans come from are generally non-English speaking (meaning content is pitched at a basic level of English literacy).

It is noteworthy, however, that the rapid growth in State’s social media audience has not been limited to these four well-resourced platforms. While from January 31, 2012 to June 12, 2012, IIP’s four Facebook sites grew their audience by 37 percent, all other State Department Facebook and Twitter platforms grew by 39 percent over the same period. Part of this growth in other sites is explained by a campaign IIP ran, which aimed to help 20 U.S. missions increase their social media audience by 100 percent in nine months (February-September), with most posts hitting this target.

There are also several other large Facebook and Twitter feeds (see tables below), although eight of the 15 largest Facebook pages and four of the 15 largest Twitter feeds are operated out of Washington (see charts showing all sites by region and top 15 tables).

Facebook Fans by Region



Twitter Followers by Region



YouTube Subscribers by Region



**Top 15 State Department Facebook Pages by Fans (as of August 9, 2012)**

Administrative Location	Name	Fans
Washington DC	<a href="#">Global conversations: our planet</a>	2,004,503
Washington DC	<a href="#">Democracy Challenge</a>	1,934,249
Washington DC	<a href="#">Innovation Generation</a>	1,895,951
Washington DC	<a href="#">eJournal USA</a>	1,889,189
Jakarta, Indonesia	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Jakarta</a>	507,057
Islamabad, Pakistan	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Pakistan</a>	455,513
Cairo, Egypt	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Cairo</a>	328,511
Washington DC	<a href="#">Vision of America</a>	252,448
Dhaka, Bangladesh	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Dhaka</a>	226,417
Washington DC	<a href="#">Iniciativa Emprende</a>	217,613
Washington DC	<a href="#">U.S. Department of State</a>	147,576
Lahore, Pakistan	<a href="#">U.S. Consulate General Lahore</a>	129,431
Washington DC	<a href="#">America.gov (Russian)</a>	124,243
Buenos Aires, Argentina	<a href="#">Embajada de Estados Unidos en Argentina</a>	101,417
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic	<a href="#">Embajada USA, Santo Domingo</a>	100,934



Top 15 State Department Twitter Accounts by Followers (as of August 9, 2012)		
Administrative location	Twitter account	Followers
Washington DC, United States	<a href="#">Alec Ross</a>	376,365
Washington DC, United States	<a href="#">State Department</a>	312,317
Washington DC, United States	<a href="#">Travel - State Dept</a>	240,013
New York City, United States	<a href="#">Ambassador Rice</a>	172,291
Tokyo, Japan	<a href="#">Ambassador Roos</a>	54,349
Jakarta, Indonesia	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Jakarta</a>	53,022
Beijing, China	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Beijing</a>	48,202
Bangkok, Thailand	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Bangkok</a>	42,544
Bogota, Colombia	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Bogota</a>	36,175
Jakarta, Indonesia	<a href="#">@america</a>	34,175
Bangkok, Thailand	<a href="#">Ambassador Kristie Kenney</a>	32,727
Washington DC, United States	<a href="#">USA bilAraby</a>	31,289
Moscow, Russia	<a href="#">Michael McFaul</a>	31,049
Caracas, Venezuela	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Caracas</a>	24,410
Manila, Philippines	<a href="#">U.S. Embassy Manila</a>	27,689



It is also worth noting that these figures exclude other social and digital means of engagement that U.S. embassies are using. Pictured (left) is the bottom of the email signature block used by the U.S. Embassy in New Zealand, which offers a host of ways to engage. The Department maintains a [list](#) containing many of these official accounts on its official Facebook site. And missions like the [U.S. Embassy in China](#) have had considerable success using Chinese social media platforms (with over 500,000 [Weibo](#) followers and 600,000 [QQ](#) followers).

Although the scope of this study does not include an exhaustive analysis of State's social media platforms, it is clear that social media is being used for a range of different purposes across the Department. Several broad categories are sketched out below.

### 1. Official messaging

The Bureau of Public Affairs manages eleven official Twitter language feeds as well as the official State Department [Facebook](#) page, [YouTube](#) channel, [blog](#), [Flickr](#) account, [Google+](#) page and [Tumblr](#).

The messages from Public Affairs aim to be the official line and to deal with breaking news. Enormous care is put into ensuring messages accord with official U.S. government policy. As well as informing the American public, it also serves to inform and service foreign journalists and operates 10 non-English Twitter feeds (in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and Urdu).

This internationally-facing aspect of its work has a public diplomacy component. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs for Digital Strategy Victoria Esser [put it](#) in January 2012, after the launch of State's official Turkish twitter feed:

Our Ambassador to Turkey Francis J. Ricciardone, Jr. explained the rationale—the U.S. relationship with Turkey is a high priority and we are always seeking to expand the ways in which we can inform and engage with the people of Turkey. Social media offered us a way to do that in real time with much broader reach than we could ever hope for with traditional shoe leather public diplomacy.

As a vehicle for providing the world with quick, official lines from the State Department, social media is excellently suited. It allows State to clarify or push out official lines without the need to organize and host a press conference, as well as to broadcast a wide range of relatively minor events and messages. It can also prevent escalation of false stories, such as when it was [claimed](#) Madagascar's ousted president had sought refuge inside the U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo. The range of platforms managed by Public Affairs also provides considerable flexibility in the way State can respond; for example, in a sentence or two on Twitter, by a video statement on YouTube, or more informally on the blog.

Although Public Affairs' social media sites do not reach an enormous audience, its reach, to date, is not insubstantial (its official English Twitter feed has over 300,000 follows, its Facebook page about 150,000). While this report did not include an analysis of the followers, it is likely they include a host of important influencers from around the world, who provide State (through their social media connections) with far ranging reach. In this way, it is not always possible to assess the impact of social media platforms by the quantity of followers alone.

## **2. Official messaging-public diplomacy hybrid**

Social media accounts run by U.S. embassies and consulates vary in style (as one official running an embassy site put it “we are all still learning”), but they tend to sit somewhere on a spectrum between communicating and engaging with influencers (such as journalists and officials) and the interested general public (often in the relevant local language).

Although they are meant to focus on promoting the Mission Strategic Resource Plan (MSRP), a February 2011 Office of Inspector General [Review of the use of social media by the Department of State](#) found (p. 5):

With regard to site content, public diplomacy staff members are engaging in a balancing act. They know they are supposed to focus on the MSRP, but they fear that too great an emphasis on serious issues will make the site heavy, boring, and unable to attract an audience. Some have developed lighter, more creative content, reasoning that if their MSRP goal is to reach a younger audience, anything they do to achieve this automatically falls under the MSRP.

Collectively, these platforms reach a large audience, with the single largest embassy account, the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta's [Facebook page](#), which has over half a million fans and is written in Bahasa squarely aimed at the Indonesian public.

### 3. Consular affairs

Social media is also playing an increasingly important role in consular affairs. It is being used to provide foreign publics with U.S. visa information, to provide travel information to U.S. citizens travelling abroad and to coordinate in disaster response situations. Examples include the [Consular Affairs Facebook page](#) and [@TravelGov](#) Twitter feed.

This is among the most important topics for many embassies on social media. It draws in big audiences and has a cost saving objective by getting people prepared before they visit a visa officer. In general, however, consular issues are yet to generate the same level of innovative flair State has exhibited elsewhere.

### 4. Diplo-media

State's rapidly growing social media audience is at least in part the result of a move into "diplo-media." This new category of media appears to have three core qualities:

- Content that seeks to advance broad national interests.
- An editorial approach that downplays associations with the State Department or U.S. government.
- Content that is participatory and towards the entertainment end of the content spectrum.



So what type of content do these sites promote and how does it seek to engage in an entertaining way? Below are two examples from a single day in June. First, is the 50 States in 50 days campaign that ran across several of the Facebook pages. It was created to support President Obama's [national travel and tourism initiative](#) and developed in partnership with the economic bureau and [BrandUSA](#). The feature on Alabama (pictured) seems designed with two messages: highlighting U.S. diversity and tourism (entertainment

options—NASCAR and beaches—and historical linkages—the Civil Rights Trail). The post then linked to the Alabama page of the [DiscoverAmerica.com](#) website.



Second, Innovation Generation had a post of three women (two wearing the hijab) that asked: "Entrepreneur Spotlight: How did three women from Egypt turn pregnancy advice into a thriving online business?" with a link to a BBC article, the question to followers being a characteristic trait of the postings across the four IIP Facebook pages. The [BBC article](#) describes how an Egyptian woman came up with the idea for SuperMama: a website described as "offering tips and expert advice for mothers and mothers-to-be, the first of its kind in the Arab world." Besides promoting the underlying message of positive U.S. engagement with the Arab world, the BBC article also offers a plug for U.S. innovation:

Setting up the site was a big risk for Yasmine....Help came in the form of the MIT Arab Enterprise Forum Business Plan Competition, where entrepreneurs from across the Arab world pitch their

business ideas. Out of 3,800 applicants, SuperMama was one of the 30 semi-finalists. Yasmine picked up invaluable contacts in the IT industry who helped develop the business model and pointed out its weaknesses.

The distancing from the U.S. government or the State Department is best displayed by two of the Department's largest Facebook pages: Democracy Challenge and Innovation Generation. Until recently, neither site mentioned it was run by the State Department on its opening page. State officials noted this was an omission (and it has since been changed). While the vast bulk of State's sites do point to their official status (for example the many embassy Facebook pages and Twitter feeds) there is a tendency on even these sites to avoid traditional diplomatic bureaucratese and adopt a less obviously governmental style.

A hybrid version of diplo-media involves the repackaging of State Department materials (such as speeches) into shorter, more entertaining formats. A good example is the below music video mashup of Clinton's LGBT speech. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpG\\_3E-NJKU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpG_3E-NJKU)

## **5. Network extension and retention**

An emerging use for social media at State is in the area of network extension. Part of a diplomatic mission's role is to organize an endless round of visits. Visitors are frequently trotted out to all the usual suspects and there is very limited incentive on the part of time-pressed diplomats to broaden these networks and be expeditious.

Social media is being used to change this. Some senior diplomats at State make a point of highlighting their Twitter handle or Facebook page every time they speak at an event. Diplomats like Alec Ross get between 10 and 20 percent of the entire audience signing up after each event. The theory is that these ever expanding networks can be harnessed for ideas when you need to find a new contact or expert, and allow for sampling of a wider audience than just the elite VIP networks embassies traditionally maintain. They allow diplomats to maintain a very loose association with contacts via their updates over an extended period and make it more likely they will show up at a future repeat engagement.

## **6. Resiliency capability**

At a big picture level, State's widespread adoption of social media has given it a new resiliency capability. As discussed above, the rapid spread of social media around the world has increased all countries' exposure to nation brand-damaging events. A single event that might previously have been reported in only limited circles can now explode into a media firestorm that can have real costs in lives, standing and money.

To some extent it is impossible (and contrary to Western principles) to try to prevent this communication taking place. But it is still the job of the foreign ministry to do its best to protect the national interest of the country and people they represent. In a world where these messages are travelling via social media and these tools are readily accessible to foreign ministries, that means development of a sound public relations strategy that includes a social media response that can mitigate the worst impacts.

State has the makings of this sort of resiliency capability, although it is not yet necessarily conceived of in this way. This capability has three components:

- a. Real-time monitoring:** The Bureau of Public Affairs' Rapid Response Unit has a small team monitoring social media responses to developments that have the potential to impact U.S. national interests. They produce short daily briefing reports with an anecdotal look at the online response to specific events/issues (for example, on the closure of the U.S. embassy in Syria) across the Arabic, Chinese, English and Spanish social media spheres.
- b. Identification and cultivation of key online influencers:** It is now possible to create maps of online influencers by subject area, which would allow diplomats on the ground to have a better sense of who is driving discussion on specific issues and who they should be reaching out to (in the same way diplomats currently use intuition to identify and build relations with politicians, officials and journalists they think influential). The Office of Audience Research in IIP is exploring analytics and social media management tools as a way of helping to better understand online conversations and the impact State is having, but could usefully focus on identifying influencers.
- c. Capability to speak (and engage) directly with a mass audience:** State now has a global reach approaching 15 million people on Facebook and Twitter alone and that reach remains on a very strong growth trajectory.

Combined, these three facets amount to a nascent resiliency capability that would allow State to quickly identify social media conversations that have the potential to affect national interests, to put their own case directly to a large online audience, and to reach out and explain their perspective to key online influencers.

Foreign ministries new to social media often struggle to look beyond its broadcasting function. Asked in July 2012, whether he shared Secretary Clinton's view that technology needed to be integrated into diplomacy, Australia's Foreign Minister Bob Carr gave a telling [reply](#): "I'd like to see that done, but—I might be old fashioned—I think that the substance is more important than the means of delivery."

The above discussion suggests that substance has to factor in social media. When an obscure reverend's tweets can lead to global protests and the best means of reaching people in a consular crisis is via social media, the substantive work of a foreign ministry needs to adapt. Social media is being used at State for broadcasting, but also for listening, engaging, organizing and for crisis public relations.

### **Options for Social Media**

Social media is changing diplomacy in several ways. It is bringing new actors into the foreign policy-making mix (both prominent individuals and organizations such as Invisible Children). It is allowing foreign ministries to listen to the concerns and interests of local populations in a far more cost-effective way than opinion polling. It is also allowing foreign ministries to communicate directly with mass audiences, including those increasingly hard to reach via traditional media (13 million directly via Facebook alone and about half of these under 24 years of age) in a more personal, immediate and ongoing way than traditional media allowed.

The State Department has been at the vanguard of the shift to social media and as such is the first foreign ministry to come up against some hard decisions these technologies throw up. Unfortunately, none of these issues were dealt with in the Office of Inspector General February 2011 [Review of the use of social media by the Department of State](#).

One of the biggest questions State is now facing is its status as a de facto media empire. State now communicates directly with a massive global audience that is growing at an extraordinary rate. Officials at State have two theories about where this could lead. First, audience reach could start to plateau out because of a technology change or as State saturates the finite audience interested in anything produced by the U.S. government. Or second, it could continue to expand its audience and content variety and as one official put it become a large niche media actor “like Sky” the British satellite broadcaster.

At this point, however, audience growth rates show no indication of slowing down.

Through its “diplo-media” social media presence in particular, State engages in a range of activity that directly resembles a major news organization. It advertises its platforms to build audience, it generates its own videos, pictures, graphics and written content, and it has staff pushing out and updating content 24 hours a day.

This opens up a web of complex issues:

- Should State continue the trend towards the creation of content with broader audience appeal, particularly more entertainment style content? Programs like the Broadcasting Board of Governors’ (BBG) hugely popular OMGMeyu, for example, which teaches Chinese people everyday American English (including uses for the words booger and snot (see below)) and is produced from the star—Jessica Beinecke’s—kitchen table would be an easy fit for some of State’s social media platforms. Or Parazit, another popular BBG show. This sort of programming would sit well in the diplo-media category that suits younger audiences and could even be merged into existing embassy websites, where some, such as the U.S. Embassy in Syria, already have “Join our weekly ‘American Idiom’” free SMS alert programs (pictured).
- Video of OMGMeyu: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhUQMrOLyVU>
- Interview with Jessica Beinecke: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1Q1oy1cApA&feature=relmfu>
- Parazit episode: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ6fRMAIcCQ>



- What level of oversight should this media empire have and who should decide its editorial line: bureaucrats? (At present there are several layers of bureaucratic hierarchy and the Smith-Mundt Act which act as checks on political manipulation).
- What level of advertising expenditure is appropriate for a government-backed media empire (current State Department thinking is that this should be very minimal)?
- An emerging policy issue is the potential overlap between BBG and State-produced media as both shift towards online oriented content. Where should both organizations' respective efforts be limited to?

These technologies have also brought to the forefront the old divide between public affairs and public diplomacy and the anachronistic Smith-Mundt Act. Historically, the Office of Public Affairs dealt with the press and reporters, while Public Diplomacy dealt with the general public overseas.

The Smith Mundt-Act (formally the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948) as amended [prohibits](#) domestic access to information produced by Public Diplomacy that is intended for foreign audiences, perpetuating this division at State and creating a general firewall between Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy.

The nature of online communications and State's development of a new media empire make this old distinction irrelevant. As one departmental official put it, "We have long thought that aspects of Smith-Mundt need to be modernized. However, the legislation still exists and we continue to abide by the letter and spirit of the law—we cannot use Public Diplomacy resources to create material for domestic distribution in the United States." This produces absurd consequences like the fact that while the State.gov website and embassy sites are hosted on the same platform, because of Smith-Mundt they are managed and paid for separately, and public diplomacy materials are at least two clicks away from the State.gov website. There is now little doubt this Act needs major modernization (with [proposals](#) already made along these lines) or repeal.

Any U.S. citizen can access content produced by Public Diplomacy officials, and at least a proportion of State's followers on social media intended for foreign audiences are in fact American citizens. As the OIG report on State's use of social media [found](#) (p. 10):

There is nothing to prevent Americans from posting comments and questions on embassy social media sites, and 5 FAM 794 a. (6) (b) notes that, "[d]ue to the open and global nature of social media sites, Department-generated Public Diplomacy content must be carefully reviewed to avoid violations of the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, as amended (Smith-Mundt)." About 10 percent of the embassy Facebook pages examined had a significant number of postings by Americans, and many more had some postings.

Communications from both Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy also often overlap. And the nature of the digital space means American citizens are themselves often involved in the dissemination of State's messages abroad. For example, the content State creates for the Iranian public in Farsi is consumed on



Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, sites that have been hard to access in Iran (and which are getting even harder to access thanks to Iran's attempt to develop a "["halal" domestic intranet](#)"). It is widely assumed this Farsi content is accessed by Iranian Americans who then repackage and deliver it into Iran via email, for example.

The merger of Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy would have the added benefit of creating a leadership with an overview of State's sprawling media empire.

One risk of this centralization is that it will kill off innovation. While support for social media's rapid and unstructured rise at State has come from the very top, there is an inevitable tendency among all bureaucracies to try and control. A traditional foreign ministry approach to social media based on rigid rules, hierarchies and constraints will kill off the success State has enjoyed so far. A look at other foreign ministries' mostly dismal efforts in this space testifies to this. So the emphasis of any consolidation should be on maintaining flexibility and innovation. It would also have to consider how to forestall political manipulation of this media empire by Administration appointees.

That concludes an overview of ediplomacy's integration into public diplomacy. The next section looks at its application to the new foreign policy issue of internet freedom.

## INTERNET FREEDOM

### What's the Issue?

Internet freedom was until recently not a foreign policy issue. Newton-Small traces the origins of the policy to a conversation four years ago:

[In 2008](#), Michael Horowitz, a longtime religious-liberty advocate, went to his friend Representative Frank Wolf, a Virginia Republican, and suggested setting aside funds to help Falun Gong, a religious group that Beijing has labeled a dangerous cult. The money was supposed to help the dissidents distribute software to jump China's massive firewall and organize online as well as communicate freely with the outside world. Wolf succeeded in appropriating \$15 million. But U.S. diplomats feared the move would derail relations with Beijing, and little money was spent.

The reality of how the issue actually percolated to the U.S. Congress is more complex, however; it was not until September 2009 that Secretary Clinton first used the term [internet freedom](#) in a speech, and then only in passing. It was in her January 2010, [Newseum speech](#) that Clinton sketched out what would become a mainstream U.S. foreign policy (the policy was later refined in a [February 2011](#) speech).

- Full video of the two Clinton speeches:
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccGzOJHE1rw&feature=plcp>
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pa-8z2pOSfA&feature=plcp>

Promoting and facilitating internet freedom is among the most radical uses ediplomacy is being put to at State. Its starting point is that America's traditionally strong advocacy for civil liberties should apply fully and without exception to the online world. Thus, if a government seeks to restrict these freedoms

online, the U.S. government will oppose it both rhetorically and in practice including by directly funding the development and rollout of tools that will subvert restrictive internet policies. The use of technology to overcome censorship and empower individuals in exercising their human rights online is a forward-leaning aspect of U.S. policy that views human rights online the same as it does in the physical world. The United States does not condone or seek to support illegal online activity (such as transnational crime) but leaves it to itself to be the arbiter of when and what type of monitoring and filtering is acceptable. It is a policy that has been framed in epic proportions. In October 2011, Secretary Clinton's Senior Adviser for Innovation, Alec Ross, was [reported](#) by the *Washington Post* as saying:

If the great struggles of the 20th century were between left and right, he said, the conflict of the 21st century will be between open and closed. "The president and the secretary of state have made it clear where they stand on this," he said. "For openness, with an open Internet at its core."

Unsurprisingly, this is a hugely controversial foreign policy. It [positions](#) (p. 24) the United States in direct opposition to important emerging powers like China as well as other authoritarian states the United States more commonly treats as partners (such as Vietnam and Bahrain). The policy also implies a call on all democratic societies to join it in countering censorship and monitoring. However, even some very close allies such as Australia and the United Kingdom have, at times, pursued inimical policies—and even the United States has found it hard to live up to its own policy (see challenges below).

In many respects Congress and State were ahead of their time on this issue. The Arab uprisings, which began at the end of 2010, [revealed](#) the extent of monitoring in places like Libya (and the complicity of Western companies in providing surveillance equipment). It also raised awareness among many authoritarian governments about the power of connection technologies to facilitate revolt, fuelling further demand for monitoring and filtering technologies. As the *Washington Post* [reported](#) in a December 2011 article on a trade show for makers of surveillance equipment run by entrepreneur Jerry Lucas:

The most popular conference, with about 1,300 attendees, was in Dubai this year. Middle Eastern governments, for whom the Arab Spring was "a wake-up call," are the most avid buyers of surveillance software and equipment, Lucas said.

The rapid and sustained spread of the protests across the Arab world and beyond also appears to have fed into State's thinking on internet freedom.

Clinton's Newseum speech—delivered nearly a year to the day before President Ben Ali of Tunisia was ousted - was a shot across the bow, laying out the broad parameters U.S. policy would take. It framed the issue in terms of universal human rights, in particular freedom of expression and freedom of worship.

While some [dismissed](#) the speech as being overly optimistic, it was not without its caveats, noting the internet is a neutral technology that does 'not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress' and acknowledging it could just as easily be used for good as ill.

By couching internet freedom in the language of rights, Clinton provided one rationale for direct U.S. government intervention to promote internet freedom in other countries. But the [speech](#) also offered another reason that equated restrictions on the internet with an attack on what Clinton called “the global networked commons.”

States, terrorists, and those who would act as their proxies must know that the United States will protect our networks. Those who disrupt the free flow of information in our society or any other pose a threat to our economy, our government, and our civil society. Countries or individuals that engage in cyber attacks should face consequences and international condemnation. In an internet-connected world, an attack on one nation’s networks can be an attack on all. And by reinforcing that message, we can create norms of behavior among states and encourage respect for the global networked commons.

The speech also laid out the approach the United States would take to implement this agenda: at a big-picture level, global political action; and at a technical level, support for the development of technologies “that enable citizens to exercise their rights of free expression by circumventing politically motivated censorship” and training.

It was envisaged activists would use these technologies across a very broad range of issues, with Clinton [stating](#):

We want to put these tools in the hands of people who will use them to advance democracy and human rights, to fight climate change and epidemics, to build global support for President Obama’s goal of a world without nuclear weapons, to encourage sustainable economic development that lifts the people at the bottom up.

The follow-up [speech](#) shied away from this more optimistic vision and focused on what Clinton called “the challenges we must confront as we seek to protect and defend a free and open internet.” These were described as “achieving both liberty and security,” “protecting both transparency and confidentiality” and “protecting free expression while fostering tolerance and civility.”

The speech focused on the tensions and complexities of internet freedom and the fact they defy easy resolution and tidy divisions of the world into black and white, while also addressing the criticisms the policy had received since the Newseum speech. For example, how to square a free and open internet with U.S. policy that regards the theft of intellectual property, State Department cables or child pornography as crimes? (Clinton argued freedom on the internet is an extension of human freedom in the real world. Just as walking out the doors of the State Department with a briefcase full of printed diplomatic cables would be regarded as theft, so too was obtaining them electronically. In essence, what is illegal in the offline world, should be illegal online too.)

The speech also included a defense of the approach the Department has taken with the development of circumvention technologies arguing in favor of “a venture capital-style approach, supporting a portfolio of technologies, tools, and training, and adapting as more users shift to mobile devices” rather than a focus on a single technology.

The U.S. government's establishment of internet freedom as a foreign policy priority has presented State with a hugely complex policy issue. It complicates important bilateral relations, it is a never-ending innovation battle pitting U.S.-funded circumvention technologies against the massive resources of countries like China dedicated to stifling freedom of speech and communication, and it is a policy very hard to live up to. Poorly executed, it also risks endangering activists. So how is State responding?

### **Internet Freedom at State**

From 2008 to 2012, the State Department will have spent close to \$100 million on internet freedom related activities. The grants are used to fund a range of activities. As the Department put it in its May 2012 grant [solicitations](#) (a detailed official version is available [here](#)):

Since 2008, State and USAID have invested \$76 million in efforts to advance human rights online. Through this call we intend to support at least \$23 million in additional programs in the following areas: 1) anti-censorship technology; 2) secure communications technology; 3) digital safety training; 4) emergency response support for netizens and civil society organizations under threat; 5) policy and advocacy; 6) research and evaluation on the technology and political context for Internet repression; and 7) research on technology options for expanding the free flow of information in extremely constrained environments.

The bulk of this funding has been spent on the first three areas. The funding categories also suggest that notwithstanding Secretary Clinton's [claim](#) the policy included efforts "to fight climate change and epidemics, to build global support for President Obama's goal of a world without nuclear weapons" the focus of State's internet freedom funding is on helping activists in extremely repressive societies and presumably those focussed on human rights and democracy promotion.

State uses the funding rounds to outsource the development of these tools to third parties—usually NGOs. The bulk of funding is channelled through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). However, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Iran desk and the Iran Program are also involved in Iran focussed campaigns (that draw on DRL expertise).

Many of the projects State funds have not been made public due to the sensitive nature of this work, but some have. The first [paper](#) in this series provides some details (pp. 23-25). Three of these include:

1. The [Commotion Project](#) (sometimes referred to as the "[Internet in a suitcase](#)"). This is an initiative from the New America Foundation's Open Technology Initiative to build a mobile mesh network that can literally be carried around in a suitcase, to allow activists to continue to communicate even when a government tries to shut down the Internet, as happened in several Arab Spring countries during the recent uprisings.
2. The Panic Button, "[InTheClear](#)." This is being developed by Mobile Active and is currently in Beta release. The application allows activists to instantly erase all the contacts and messages on their phone if they are arrested. It also lets them send a message to their contacts warning them that they have been arrested.

3. A circumvention campaign. This was run by [InterNews](#), a global NGO working on the promotion of local media. One recent circumvention campaign it developed and rolled out operated in 12 authoritarian countries: Bahrain, Burma, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen. The campaign lasted for between six to twelve months in each country and ran advertisements on Google, Facebook and local social media platforms as well as local banner campaigns on popular websites (see examples below). So, for example, if a user were searching for a blocked site on Google, instead of just getting a government message that the site was blocked or unavailable, they would also get a Google ad offering them the opportunity to get around the government firewall.



The fact much of its internet freedom activities remain unreported makes assessing their impact almost impossible. RAND has been awarded a State Department grant to conduct a comprehensive review, but this has yet to be finalized.

Even without a detailed picture of State’s successes or failings in this new policy space, it is possible to identify several challenges it must confront.

### Challenges

Despite the various attempts to explain and promote a coherent internet freedom policy, several tensions and contradictions trouble it.

In her Newseum speech, Secretary Clinton said, “Countries or individuals that engage in cyber attacks should face consequences and international condemnation.” Yet earlier this year it was revealed that the United States had itself been involved in directing cyber attacks against Iran since 2006. As David Sanger [reported](#) it in the *New York Times*:

Mr. Obama, according to participants in the many Situation Room meetings on Olympic Games, was acutely aware that with every attack he was pushing the United States into new territory, much as his predecessors had with the first use of atomic weapons in the 1940s, of intercontinental missiles in the 1950s and of drones in the past decade. He repeatedly expressed concerns that any American acknowledgment that it was using cyberweapons—even under the most careful and limited circumstances—could enable other countries, terrorists or hackers to justify their own attacks.

Although these sorts of cyber attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities are distinguishable from attacks on free speech there is a difficult tension in U.S. policy here. Cyber attack-like methods are often used to stifle free speech. And use of even limited cyber attacks clearly undermines the United States' broader effort to create an international norm against the use of such attacks. This approach is doubly problematic given the barriers to entry for cyber attacks are significantly lower than those required to develop atomic and other weapons.

To an extent, the U.S. is, for the most part, going to be able to ride this controversy out. U.S. cyber attacks were not directed at Iranians trying to access the internet, but rather computers used in Iran's nuclear facilities. And because U.S. policy towards Iran is openly hostile and focused on regime change it will come as a surprise to no one that the United State is doing whatever it can to undermine the Iranian regime and stop its acquisition of nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding this, when China, Russia or other countries carry out similar attacks, U.S. rhetoric on internet freedom will carry less weight.

Another challenge is dealing with close partners and allies who undermine internet freedom. In August 2011, in the midst of the Arab uprisings, the UK experienced a different connection technology infused movement, the London Riots. On August 11, in the heat of the crisis, Prime Minister Cameron [told](#) the House of Commons:

Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill. So we are working with the Police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality.

This policy had far-reaching implications. As recently as January, then President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, [ordered](#) the shut-down of Egypt's largest ISPs and the cell phone network, a move the United States had heavily [criticized](#). Now the UK was contemplating the same move and threatening to create a rationale for authoritarian governments everywhere to shut down communications networks when they threatened 'violence, disorder and criminality'.

Other allies like Australia are also pursuing restrictive internet policies. As OpenNet [reported](#) it: "Australia maintains some of the most restrictive Internet policies of any Western country..."

When these allies pursue policies so clearly at odds with the U.S. internet freedom agenda, several difficulties arise. It undermines the U.S. position that an open and free internet is something free societies naturally want. It also gives repressive authoritarian governments an excuse for their own monitoring and filtering activities. To an extent, U.S. internet freedom policy responds even-handedly to this challenge because the vast bulk of its grants are for open source circumvention tools that can be just as readily used by someone in London as Beijing, but so far, the United States has been much more discreet about criticising the restrictive policies of allies than authoritarian states.

A further contradiction with the policy is that U.S. companies are contributing towards the restrictive internet environment that its internet freedom policy is trying to overcome. The *Washington Post* carried a detailed [report](#) in December 2011 detailing what has become known as the "Wiretappers' Ball."

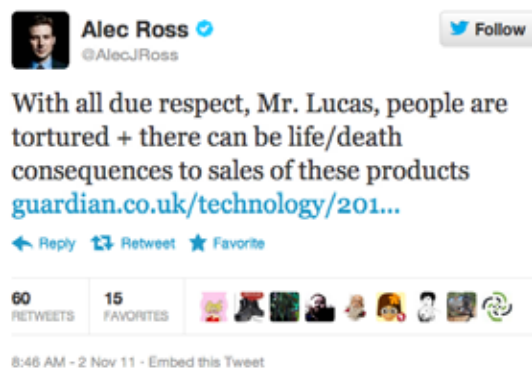
The event the *Post* reported on in Maryland brought together representatives from 43 countries to buy serious surveillance packages including from 15 U.S.-based corporations (as well as many foreign ones). As the *Post* described it:

On offer were products that allow users to track hundreds of cellphones at once, read e-mails by the tens of thousands, even get a computer to snap a picture of its owner and send the image to police—or anyone else who buys the software. One product uses phony updates for iTunes and other popular programs to infiltrate personal computers.

The article went on to report the entrepreneur behind the event:

‘When you’re selling to a government, you lose control of what the government is going to do with it,’ Lucas said. ‘It’s like selling guns to people. Some are going to defend themselves. Some are going to commit crimes.’

Lucas’ blasé attitude did not escape criticism with Alec Ross [calling him out](#) on Twitter.



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In April 2012, the Obama Administration also responded with an [Executive Order](#) that among other things “[blocks](#) the property and interests of any individual or entity designated by the Secretary of Treasury to have.....sold, leased, or otherwise provided any good, service, or technology to Iran or Syria, whether directly or indirectly, to facilitate network surveillance for human rights abuses by or on behalf of the Iranian or Syrian government.” As one law firm [noted](#), “Given the priority assigned to the issue by the Administration and Congress, affected companies should anticipate additional laws in the United States that may further restrict their business.”

Critics of State’s internet freedom policy, such as Morozov in [The Net Delusion](#), correctly point out that by entering into the fray, State risks inadvertently doing harm by, for example, developing circumvention tools that provide activists with a false sense of security. But that criticism is also too simplistic in a world where activists will continue organizing online whether or not State sponsors tools to help protect them—cell phones and the internet simply offer too great an advantage in terms of convenience, reach and speed.

Internet freedom is a long haul policy and the resources Congress is allocating towards it are no match for those China, Russia and others are allocating to counter its advances. Still there is a lot of valuable



work State can do in this space. Working to stop Western exports of surveillance equipment to human rights abusing regimes is one area in the traditional diplomatic space. It also makes sense to continue to fund the development of circumvention tools that will mitigate potential risks to activists. Certainly, there needs to be serious restraints on overoptimistic claims being made about these technologies and great care being taken when training activists. However, as the Arab uprisings continue to demonstrate, even when activists know their governments have highly sophisticated monitoring tools, they nevertheless continue to use them.

## KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

### What's the Issue?

The third area at State attracting serious ediplomacy resources is knowledge management. This was the first use ediplomacy was put to at State. It is also emerging as one of the most far-reaching applications of ediplomacy, and has garnered the attention of big business as well as other foreign ministries. It is attempting to solve some of the toughest organizational challenges foreign ministries face including:

- helping managers realize when expensive knowledge resources are being wasted or duplicated to deliver cost savings;
- delivering immediate and easy access to the organization's total knowledge stock on an issue or subject in order to improve decision and policymaking;
- promoting knowledge transfer and reducing knowledge loss, e.g., during personnel transitions;
- identifying centers of expertise and valued knowledge sources;
- allowing managers to know what knowledge resources the organization has and where to find them.

Knowledge management is an issue with which the private sector is also wrestling. MIT's Andrew McAfee undertook a detailed [assessment](#) of what he calls *Enterprise 2.0*—"the use of emergent social software platforms by organizations in pursuit of their goals" (p. 73) tools that mirror those managed by the Office of eDiplomacy. Towards the end of [Enterprise 2.0](#), he writes (pp. 186-7):

Discussions about ROI [return on investment] from *Enterprise 2.0* always remind me of an experience I had during a seminar in 2006.

In this seminar, I was presenting the concepts and structure of my MBA course to a diverse group of Harvard Business School colleagues. Pretty early on, one of the professors in the finance area asked me the question I was most dreading and least prepared for: 'Andy, what do you teach students about conducting a financial analysis of a proposed IT investment? How do you build a business case for IT?' I was about to launch into a long-winded and poorly argued answer, but Bob Kaplan spoke up first. 'You can't,' he said.

Like all good academics, Kaplan provided McAfee with one of his books, which McAfee goes on to cite (p. 187):

None of these intangible assets has value that can be measured separately or independently. The value of these intangible assets derives from their ability to help the organization implement its strategy.... Intangible assets such as knowledge and technology seldom have a direct impact on financial outcomes such as increased revenues, lowered costs, and higher profits. Improvements in intangible assets affect financial outcomes through chains of cause-and-effect relationships.

That is unfortunate for foreign ministries, whose principal asset is the knowledge stored in their workers' brains and the millions of documents they have written and stored in a myriad of locations (cables, emails, Word documents, blogs, intranets, etc).

In addition, while it is perhaps true that "knowledge and technology seldom have a direct impact on financial outcomes," there are obvious examples at foreign ministries where a failure to price knowledge has a direct financial bearing on the organization, even if at the moment foreign ministries do not realize it. For example, in the intake in which I joined the Australian Foreign Service, there was a colleague who spoke Korean and Japanese fluently but who was posted to the Middle East, even though that required him spending two years learning Arabic at the foreign ministry (and taxpayer) expense. Two other colleagues, neither of whom spoke Korean or Japanese, were sent to Seoul and Tokyo, requiring them to undertake language training as well. Of course, other considerations are taken into account in the decision to post a diplomat overseas, but without putting even an indicative price on that knowledge, very little consideration need be given to decisions that result in significant financial waste. In this particular case, sending my Japanese and Korean speaking colleague to either Tokyo or Seoul instead of the Middle East could have saved hundreds of thousands of dollars, a consideration that should form an element of the posting decision. This case and those like it are arguably just bad management decisions, but having readily available knowledge of staff members' skills should improve decision making and is something State's new digital tools should contribute towards.

Related examples occur when diplomats finish their postings overseas and are reassigned. Even though the foreign ministry has spent millions of dollars on the area knowledge that diplomat has acquired while abroad (via their salary, language training, housing costs, the expenses of running the Embassy, travel and other costs), because that knowledge is not priced, the organization does not realize any loss if it reassigns that individual to a completely unrelated work area. From the perspective of the organization's bottom line it makes no difference if the person is reassigned from Tokyo (for example) to Bagdad or sent to work on the Ethiopia Desk at headquarters. In practice, when the foreign ministry makes just such a very common decision, it effectively incurs a large loss of that person's area knowledge. Unless that person is sent back to the counterpart desk at Headquarters, there is no mechanism or incentive for them to pass on any of their expertise. They will inevitably be consumed by work in their new area, and their former embassy (and the counterpart desk) will in only rare instances have anything to do with them. Foreign ministries might argue they need generalists who can adapt to a range of country and functional needs even if this comes at the cost of losing specialist expertise. But even if foreign ministries want to maintain this generalist approach, harnessing technologies and adapting management practices to facilitate better knowledge transfer, retention and retrieval makes sense.

Another major knowledge management problem faced by foreign ministries is simply knowing what expertise they actually have. This can extend to the most basic level of knowing how many speakers it

has in X language and where they are physically located. Let alone more niche questions like how many Eritrean economic experts it has or how many arms control specialists.

A similar issue is identifying what the foreign ministry as a collective already knows on a subject. Foreign ministries have paper files, electronic cables, word documents, intranets, websites, emails and for some, now blogs and wikis. None of these link to each other and there is no foreign ministry equivalent of Google that lets a diplomat quickly search and scan all existing organizational written knowledge.

It all adds up to a diabolical mess. It leaves foreign ministries making irrational economic decisions, expertise that was hugely expensive to acquire being completely wasted, an organization unable to marshal its collective talent and doubling up of effort. Perhaps worst of all, because all of this waste and inefficiency is unpriced and therefore not realized, there is no value assigned to the tools that could help alleviate the problem. While the specifics might be different, all large organizations face very similar problems. The next section looks at how State is addressing this challenge.

### **Knowledge Management at State**

Work on knowledge management began a decade ago at State with the creation of the Task Force on eDiplomacy in 2002, making it the world's first ediplomacy unit. Since then the Task Force has been renamed the Office of eDiplomacy. Three other units at State also work predominantly in the area of Knowledge Management including: the Sounding Board, the Social Media Hub and CO.NX. Other important and related knowledge management areas include the SharePoint Users Group (that uses Microsoft SharePoint which allows for sharing across multiple work areas at State) and the Foreign Service Institute.

**The Office of eDiplomacy** began with six staff and remained near this staffing level [until 2009](#) (p. 10). Since then it has grown sharply in size to 80 personnel, half of whom work on ediplomacy (the other half being staff from the Customer Liaison Division).



The Office's core knowledge management work centers around several platforms it has created and operates. These include:

- Corridor: an internal professional networking site that is a hybrid of LinkedIn and Facebook, but with a stronger resemblance to the Facebook interface.
- Diplopedia: an internal Wiki, with the same look and feel as Wikipedia.



- Communities@State: an internal multi-author blogging platform.
- Enterprise Search: a search tool covering State's unclassified intranet and some State internet websites.
- The Innovation Fund: a \$2 million fund that aims to crowd source innovations from staff.



- The Virtual Student Foreign Service: a microtasking platform that taps into specialized external knowledge among university students.

In addition to these principal platforms, it also offers consultative knowledge management services via Idea Exchanges. These are [described](#) on the State Department website as follows:

eDiplomacy provides advice and support to Department organizations (domestic and abroad) to create Idea Exchanges. These online forums enable domestic and overseas employees to share and evaluate ideas for innovation and reform. The Idea Exchange program builds on the experience of The Sounding Board, an initiative launched by Secretary Clinton that encourages employees to contribute their ideas and suggestions for how to make the Department work in new, smarter, and more effective ways to advance our nation's foreign policy goals.

The Office of eDiplomacy is also working on a range of other ways to address the knowledge management challenge at State. It is actively looking to include digital tags on all written documents that would allow officers to immediately draw together all related documents on their desktop. It is also looking at ways to identify knowledge nodes or centers of expertise. Presented visually, this would allow officers to quickly identify key internal authorities on a subject.

- **The Sounding Board** is an attempt to source ideas and innovation directly from State Department employees. It started as a blog, but now uses ideation software (Bright Idea). It is the first thing all staff see upon logging on to State's intranet.
- **The Social Media Hub**, one of the Communities@State multi-author blogs, provides a range of knowledge management services, primarily to overseas posts. It runs and operates the Social Media Hub web portal, which contains detailed information for posts on best-practice use of social media, advice on the most suitable social media platforms for each market, and examples of successful applications and innovative uses by posts.

The Hub also fields specific social media queries such as on relevant State Department policies, troubleshoots social media problems such as hacked accounts, assists with compliance with legal obligations, running educational webinars and app development.

- **CO.NX, running on Adobe Connect**, has a strong knowledge management component. It is used for training purposes, resulting in considerable savings (by eliminating airline costs or video

teleconferencing fees) and internal discussions. This year the CO.NX team ran approximately 1,500 programs (up from 1,000 the year before), with the virtual speaker program now matching the in-country speaker program.



U.S. Department of State's CO.NX studio

CO.NX started with an average audience size of 30-50 people for public events. Now, for some larger ones like the Rio+20 conference it can hit close to 70,000 in a week. It has also moved from broadcasting solely from its DC studio to content produced by U.S. missions abroad. Around 30 missions now have their own CO.NX channels (see [conx.state.gov](http://conx.state.gov)) with most coming from Latin America.

### **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Knowledge Management at State**

Even though the Office of eDiplomacy has been working on knowledge management issues for a decade, the concept remains a relatively new one, even for private corporations, so much so that the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and several major U.S. corporations have approached the Office about its work.

The newness of its work means there are few established measures of its effectiveness. A mostly gushy [review](#) of the Office of eDiplomacy by the Office of Inspector General that made it sound something akin to a Silicon Valley start-up found its Knowledge Leadership team (responsible for many of the above mentioned Office of eDiplomacy platforms):

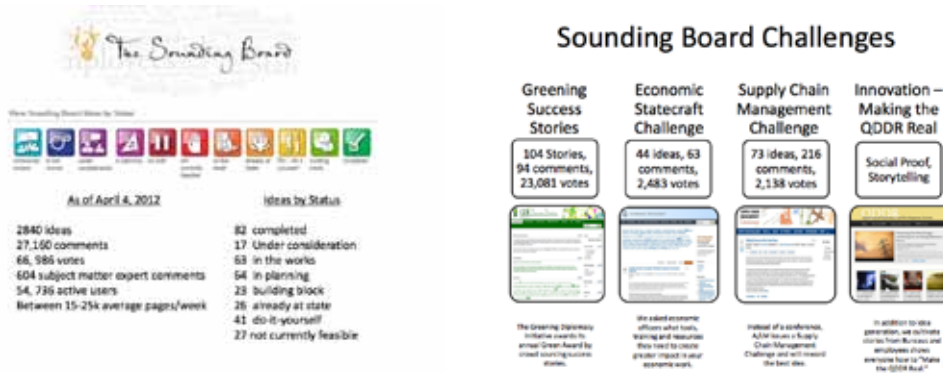
... has identified and is tracking a wide variety of metrics for its products. Output measures have been identified and, for the most part, are being tracked and reported. These measures, along with informal surveys conducted by the OIG team, indicate wide usage of and appreciation for the KL team's knowledge management tools within the Department. However, current measures focus more on outputs than on longer term outcomes and results. eDiplomacy notes that knowledge management programs are fairly easy to measure in terms of activity; however, every peer organization, both in the government and the private sector, that eDiplomacy has benchmarked against has had difficulty determining outcomes, because so much of what knowledge management

must accomplish occurs at the local level. There are currently no clear, systematically collected measures of the impact of these products on Department operations. The KL team could improve these measurements by formalizing the collection of anecdotal evidence to support outcomes.

The OIG suggestion is reasonable, but clearly not a solution to the broader problem of measuring results across the Department.

The Sounding Board also attempts to measure its impact, detailed (in part) below in two slides covering results to April 2012. These include a range of macro metrics. For example, it averages between 15,000-25,000 page views a week from internal users. Its managers count 54,736 active users, who have made 27,160 comments on 2,840 ideas submitted since February 2009. It has registered 66,986 votes and 604 subject matter expert comments.

The team has also begun tracking the status of individual ideas, providing direct feedback to State's employees on their proposals. In April, for example, 82 ideas were completed, 17 were under consideration, 63 in the works, 64 in planning, 23 at the building block stage, 26 already at State, 41 classified as do-it-yourself and 27 judged to be not currently feasible.



The CO.NX team has not done a detailed cost-benefit analysis (which would be a good way to justify its funding) but estimates it has saved around half a million dollars in security travel. Security technology experts now host a monthly virtual CO.NX session instead of flying to posts.

These tools are a serious effort to try to begin addressing the knowledge management challenges outlined above and each has significant potential. Diplopedia offers a platform to record and share knowledge on everything from internal processes to country facts. Communities@State provides area experts with the opportunity to share and exchange views on the latest developments. Corridor allows officers to record their expertise and for anyone to then search this. It also has the potential in future to geocode the person's location, providing even greater utility to a globally dispersed organization. The Sounding Board aims to allow good ideas and better business processes to bypass bureaucratic bottlenecks and be dispersed quickly. CO.NX provides a means of enhancing knowledge diffusion and skills transfer by making face-to-face (virtual) training cheaper and thereby more viable. The Social Media Hub attempts to provide an easy mechanism for sharing knowledge on best practice in an area that remains unfamiliar to many and where expertise can exponentially improve impact.

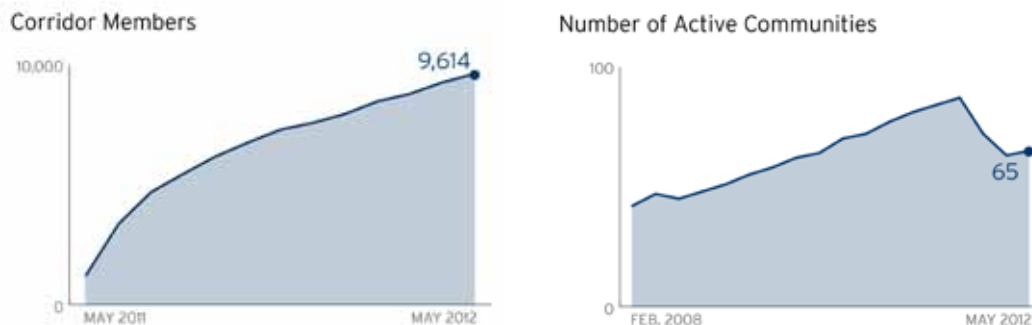
These efforts to address some of the most complex institutional challenges faced by State are at the vanguard of all other foreign ministries. At the core of knowledge management there are a few key assumptions:

- Ordinary staff (not just managers) have ideas for doing things better that are worth listening to.
- Giving managers and staff a fuller picture is worth the investment in the tools to allow this.
- Being more aware of the financial investment being made in workers' knowledge will feed into decision making processes and reduce unnecessarily costly management decisions.
- Pooling knowledge across an organization and facilitating easy access to it improves outcomes.

In principle, State Department management has already accepted these assumptions by funding the rollout of knowledge management platforms. However, knowledge management is not yet fully baked in at State. There is a significant risk that a less visionary Secretary of State or Department Chief Information Officer could wind back gains. Even more critically than this, though, the initiatives will not survive without being able to deliver results that prove the abovementioned assumptions correct.

Formalizing the collection of anecdotal evidence as the OIG suggested is one way to supplement existing metrics. However, broader management buy-in across State also seems essential for driving cultural change. In *Enterprise 2.0*, McAfee [writes](#) these tools “are what Gourville calls ‘long hauls’—products that represent significant technological leaps forward and are therefore potentially quite valuable, but require major behavioral changes from their target audience” (p. 171).

One serious risk for State (and any organization following suit) is that the platforms do not reach a critical mass of usage. Without that, the knowledge they connect employees to will be out of date or incomplete and of less use. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office has already experienced this issue with its internal wiki which is currently undergoing an overhaul. The uptake of State's knowledge applications has been strong in some areas, such as Corridor, which has grown to almost 10,000 members in under a year, and weaker in others, such as the uptake in the use of Communities@State (65 active communities, with many more social in orientation), and active contributors to Diplopedia (437 new articles in the February to May quarter).



As noted, phasing in these sorts of reforms is a long haul, but it could be accelerated and given a better chance of success through wider integration with management structures. Below are some possible ways to achieve this.



## **Options for Embedding Knowledge Management**

One way to embed knowledge management initiatives across State would be an organizational tweak. The Office of eDiplomacy currently sits under the Chief Information Officer, Information Resource Management (IRM). The primary advantage of this placement is that it has allowed the Office of eDiplomacy to skim off what is essentially a rounding error from the Department's IT budget to spend on innovation. However, IRM lacks clout among State's Economic and Political reporting officers—the ones who write most policy-related cables—and is separated from the human resources function. For this reason, the Office of eDiplomacy could be shifted to sit under the Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources. This makes sense in terms of providing the Office with the platform for integrating its initiatives more rapidly, building wider organizational buy-in and because so many of its tools have direct human resources applications.

A second, related, issue is incentivizing knowledge exchange. At present, employees newly rotated out of a position have no motive to pass on their expertise, contacts and know-how to their successors. The performance structure does not reward them for making themselves easily available to their new replacement, nor incentivize other departmental experts to help them get up to speed in the shortest possible time-frame. The two-year rotation system for Foreign Service Officers adds a further complication. A reform to the performance appraisal process that gave credit to an officer (and, in particular, officers who have just left a post) for actively engaging their successor, reviewing their reports, holding regular debriefing sessions on Microsoft Communicator (allowing users to share their desktop) or CO.NX or providing guidance via Communities@State would help change this. Their bosses would also likely need to be incentivized to let their staff allocate a small part of their time to transferring their knowledge. This would have the added benefit of building a community of subject area experts.

An additional reform worth considering would be encouraging Human Resources to adopt Corridor as its central staffing platform. It could be adopted as the principal platform for recording each officer's skills and experience, as well as the vehicle for managing all aspects of the staffing process, from posting applications to marshaling crisis response teams. It is already a far more useable tool than human resource forms, and if it were adopted as an essential platform for human resource purposes could be relied upon to be more regularly updated (and therefore accurate) than the current centralized approach. By making this general information freely available, searchable and geo-coding it, it would also greatly assist staff in quickly identifying specific (and nearby expertise).

Speeding the integration of the platforms is another option. It is cumbersome for users to have so many different things to check: cables, emails, Corridor, Communities' posts, Sounding Board posts, let alone external news sites. Information on these sites also needs to link together. A more seamless integration of the various platforms, which is already under discussion, could help improve usability.

Another possibility is to begin exploring basic ways to measure the knowledge held by staff. The efforts underway at the moment to try to measure knowledge nodes are steps in this direction and should help in identifying specific areas of expertise. Human resources could also begin to price some of the core foreign policy skill sets such as language skills and country knowledge. For example, it is well known how long it takes to train an individual in a given language to various levels of proficiency and so a

precise cost can easily be assigned to each language at each level of competency. A register of all staff with language skills and the equivalent value of those skills would help foreign ministries better inform staffing movements and recruitment decisions. A similar register could be developed for officers with other skills sets. For example, the cost of posting an officer to Japan for X years to cover economic issues could be used to assign a value to their Japan economic skills. This is a less precise measure of knowledge than language skills but offers a start in the right direction. As this process becomes more sophisticated and more routine, it would not only allow more rational financial decision making, but could also help make the case for investments in knowledge management tools.

Knowledge management is the least high profile of the three topics covered in this paper, but from an organizational and business perspective the most interesting and potentially beneficial. If State is able to truly network and integrate its staffing and information systems it will create major financial and informational awareness advantages. Of the three areas, it is also the one where ediplomacy is least baked in, making ongoing efforts to drive cultural change critical.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ten years since the creation of the first office of ediplomacy, ediplomacy is no longer an experiment. In key areas at State it is a way of doing business.

The point has now been reached where it is negligent for foreign ministries to ignore social media. When crises break online, there is now the real threat of serious economic and brand damage being done. Foreign ministries unprepared and unable to mitigate the fallout from these events are not performing their job. Those that ignore communication and engagement opportunities that connection technologies enable are also falling short in their communications function.

Internet freedom is a more challenging policy. Given the ongoing security challenges faced by activists, it makes sense for State to continue to fund the development of circumvention technologies, even though they are going to require constant upgrading as authoritarian states continue to work around them. Smaller countries are likely to calculate that it is easier to let the United States lead the charge on this issue and are probably not going to be persuaded to fund these tools themselves. In other areas though—like export controls on surveillance technologies—the cooperation of like-minded states will be critical.

In the area of knowledge management foreign ministries have a lot to learn from State. As technology continues to increase information flows and foreign ministry budgets continue to be squeezed, the ability to mobilize human and informational resources efficiently will only increase in importance. The interest State has received from the private sector indicates it is already ahead of the game in this space. The greatest potential benefits are in knowledge transfer, information retrieval and awareness, organizational efficiency gains and in progress towards knowledge pricing.

While State is at the vanguard of ediplomacy and well ahead of even its closest peers, beyond the three work areas covered in this paper it still lacks bureaucratic champions able to adapt State to the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. Consular affairs, disaster response, diaspora engagement, engagement with external actors, coordination with partner governments and, from a whole of government perspective, policy planning, would all derive major benefits from an equivalent level of innovation.

Foreign ministries that are just beginning to adapt to changes in technology or yet to begin naturally want to know what the advantages of ediplomacy are. Given the leading foreign ministry working on this has only been doing so for ten years (and only more recently scaled up these efforts) it is not surprising that it is still struggling to find sound metrics. While this is not a problem unique to State (corporations face the same challenge), this paper has hopefully been able to draw out the advantages ediplomacy offers foreign ministries as well as making the case that more could be done to quantify its value and success.

Not all of the State Department's innovations have been successful and not all of them can be easily copied by other foreign ministries, but there is now little doubt that ediplomacy is a core tool of diplomacy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to sincerely thank the nearly one hundred State Department officials at headquarters and embassies abroad who met or spoke with him during his research for this paper. Without the generous gift of their time and knowledge, this research would not have been possible.

He would also like to thank the Broadcasting Board of Governors, USAID, the MIT Saxelab, and the many other experts who so kindly gave their time to inform this paper.

I would especially like to thank Martin Indyk for inviting me to conduct this research at the Brookings Institution and for his enthusiasm and guidance during this research. Gail Chalef provided invaluable editing and Christopher Ingraham the wonderful charts.

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