PART TWO

ADVANCING THE DEBATE
CHAPTER FOUR

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: TOWARD A COMMON IDENTITY

Public diplomacy is not providing information. It is building relationships.¹

How is it, at a time when nations and peoples have become more interconnected and interdependent than at any time in the nation’s history and America’s image throughout the world has reached an all-time low, the U.S. government has not made public diplomacy a priority in the national strategy? Is it because U.S. leaders simply don’t believe international relations—particularly relations with foreign publics—are important? Is it because U.S. leaders don’t see the potential for public diplomacy to have any real effect on America’s relations with people abroad—perhaps because of poorly conceptualized post-9/11 public diplomacy initiatives?

Or is it because public diplomacy advocates—practitioners, scholars, and others—have not made a persuasive case for public diplomacy’s place in twenty-first century diplomacy? In other words, is it because those most interested in seeing public diplomacy succeed have been unable to convince government leaders and others that public diplomacy is important—even crucial—to determining a nation’s fate in this new world?

The truth (as earlier chapters indicate) is that the state of U.S. public diplomacy today may be attributed to many factors—including the seeming inability of those who study and practice public diplomacy to adequately explain what public diplomacy is, how it works, and why it is important. But, if this emerging profession is to reach its full potential—both as a discipline and a diplomatic resource—it’s time to start thinking more about such matters.

Of course, many aspects of public diplomacy have been examined. In fact, in discussing the many recommendations offered since 9/11 on