

Citizen Diplomacy

By Michael Shuman, Gale Warner, and Lila Forest

What it is, how it began, and where it's going

In this section, we shift our focus (a little bit) to the process of developing better relations between our two peoples. We begin with an overview of citizen diplomacy, the bulk of which is excerpted, with permission, from the introduction to Citizen Diplomacy by Gale Warner and Michael Shuman (see the "Resources" section). I have added material on Soviet and American programs, past, present, and future.

— Lila Forest

In recent years, more and more Americans have begun taking responsibility, as private citizens, to promote healthier relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. They believe the dangers of nuclear war are simply too high for citizens to wait passively on the sidelines and merely hope for the best. They have been unsure of what they could accomplish, but absolutely certain that doing something is better than doing nothing.

They have traveled to the Soviet Union and met with members of every stratum of Soviet society, from Politburo members to peasants. They believe that expanding the dialogue between the countries at every level is valuable and stabilizing. Some simply seek to learn as much as possible through direct observation and personal experience and then communicate to other Americans what they have learned. Others try to develop cultural exchanges, joint scientific projects, and trade agreements. Still others work to open new forums of political dialogue that might directly affect the opinions of policy makers in both countries.

Until recently, Americans who were able to contact Soviets in direct and meaningful ways were almost exclusively those with power and influence. Armand Hammer, millionaire industrialist and entrepreneur, visited the Soviet Union in its very early years and participated in numerous trade schemes. In the 1960s, Norman Cousins, longtime editor of the *Saturday Review*, initiated the Dartmouth Conferences, involving influential Americans and Soviets in unofficial dialogues that sometimes affected official decision-making. He also carried out private diplomatic missions between President

Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev. But now hundreds, perhaps thousands, of ordinary American citizens are traveling to the Soviet Union as more than just tourists. They focus on such questions as: What is the Soviet Union really like? Its people? Its government? How can the United States transform its relations with the Soviet Union? What can American citizens do?

TRACK ONE AND TRACK TWO DIPLOMACY

Hans Morgenthau, one of America's foremost international relations scholars, has defined diplomacy as the method governments use for "establishing the preconditions for permanent peace". Citizen diplomats serve analogous functions. While they cannot undertake the quest for a "permanent peace" on behalf of the United States government, they often represent smaller chunks of America — churches, businesses, civic groups, local governments, or other Americans of like mind. On behalf of their constituencies, the new diplomats often negotiate and enter into agreements with Soviets. They also demonstrate their respect and goodwill for Soviets by singing, dancing, playing, feasting, and toasting with them. And they maintain their own two-way traffic of information and impressions by reporting at home on their view of events in the Soviet Union and conveying to Soviets the views of their constituents.

Some of the new diplomats attempt to influence both American and Soviet leaders directly. In a seminal article on this type of citizen diplomacy in *Foreign Policy* quarterly (Winter 81-82), Joseph V. Montville, a Foreign Service officer in the State Department, defined the official channel of government-to-government relations as "track one diplomacy" and the unofficial channel of people-to-people relations as "track two diplomacy". Montville argued that the second track is "a supplement to the understandable shortcomings of official relations". In track one diplomacy, national leaders "must assure their followers they will defend them against enemies — other tribes or nations — who want to conquer or destroy them". Unfortunately, this "necessary and predictable leadership function

often gets tribes – and countries – into conflict”.

To defend their nation’s interests, track one diplomats must make worst case assumptions about an adversary’s intentions. In track two, new types of relationships are possible that can prevent a chain reaction of escalating hostilities. “Track two diplomacy is . . . open-minded, often altruistic, and . . . strategically optimistic, based on the best case analysis. Its underlying assumption is that actual or potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness.”

Track two diplomacy has had concrete results. The off-the-record Dartmouth Conferences initiated by Norman Cousins have enabled influential Soviets and Americans to set the stage for track one agreements banning above-ground nuclear tests, installing the original “hot line”, expanding trade, and allowing direct flights between the United States and the Soviet Union. And thanks in part to the creative lobbying of members of the Harvard Negotiation Project, the superpowers have upgraded the “hot line” from a crude teletype machine to a modern two-way data transmission link capable of rapidly sending messages, charts, and maps.

Citizen diplomats work to help both Americans and Soviets learn more about the viewpoints, politics, culture, and lifestyle of “the other side”. They aim to close the enormous information gap between the United States and the Soviet Union – a gap that fosters mutual fear, suspicion, and mistrust.

AN EARLY CITIZEN DIPLOMAT

American citizen diplomats go back to 1798, when a Philadelphia Quaker named George Logan traveled to Europe in a last-ditch effort to prevent the United States and France from going to war. France, which was then battling Britain, had begun attacking American ships because of growing U.S. political cooperation with Britain. To the amazement of everyone, Logan returned to the United States with a decree from France indicating its willingness to end its trade embargo and to free all captured U.S. seamen. Instead of receiving a hero’s welcome, Logan was castigated for his “usurpation of executive authority” by a decidedly pro-British American Congress and President John Adams, who were gearing up for a fight with France and hastily passed a law criminalizing any direct interventions of citizens in foreign affairs.

The Logan Act is still on the books, but it represents only one American political philosophy toward citizen diplomacy. Another philosophy, expressed in the U.S. Constitution and two centuries of court opinions, is that Americans have full

rights to travel abroad and speak with foreigners about anything they choose, including relations between nations. The strength of this second philosophy is underscored by the fact that the Logan Act has never been enforced. The government’s misgivings about letting its citizens “meddle” in foreign affairs has been generally outweighed by a laissez-faire attitude toward the travel and activities of its citizens abroad.

PRESIDENT REAGAN AND CITIZEN DIPLOMACY

The Reagan presidency has reflected these contradictions. The Administration came to office, shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan, bent on discouraging citizen involvement with what it called “the evil empire”. It refused to renew the official cultural exchange agreement, cut the budgets of other exchange programs, denied visas to many would-be Soviet visitors, and increased restrictions on the movement and activities of the Soviets it did allow to visit.

Only in late 1985 did the Administration begin supporting citizen diplomacy in both word and deed. Just prior to the Geneva summit, President Reagan delivered a dramatic speech that echoed the points many citizen diplomats had been making for years: “Imagine how much good we could accomplish, how much the cause of peace would be served, if more individuals and families from our respective countries could come to know each other in a personal way.”

At the summit, President Reagan and Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to renew a number of exchanges and to resume direct commercial flights between the countries. The President soon appointed a high-level diplomat at the U.S. Information Agency specifically to oversee and promote private citizen initiatives for exchange with the Soviet Union. Yet a few weeks after the summit accords on health cooperation had been signed, the State Department cancelled the American downlinks of a “space bridge” between medical scientists in the U.S. and the Soviet Union at the last moment.

And the Reagan administration’s ambivalence toward citizen diplomacy continues to this day. President Reagan appears to believe that citizen diplomats embody what is best about America: pluralistic thinking, independent initiative, and global responsibility. But he also appears willing to co-opt or limit citizen activities when they begin to encroach upon his policy-making objectives. Whether or not the President will now act consistently to support people-to-people exchanges remains to be seen.

SOVIET CITIZEN DIPLOMATS

Peace delegations of Soviet citizens sponsored by the official Soviet Peace Committee have been coming to the United States for more than 15 years. They have seen these delegations as an important avenue by which to establish better connections with people in the U.S. and other western countries. Participants have been people from a wide range of geographical and professional backgrounds. They pay their own way and are given special language training in preparation for travel.

There are indications that some Soviet restrictions on travel to the U.S. by ordinary Soviet citizens (other than that initiated by official organizations) are being eased. Two performing groups of Soviet youth have come to the U.S. (a children's choir that performed in Seattle and the Soviet-American Peace Child company that toured both countries). In addition to the Earthsteward-sponsored trip of 20 Soviet youth to Washington, D.C., the San Francisco area, and Seattle in November of 1986, a Young Astronaut/Cosmonaut exchange has taken place, with Americans going to the U.S.S.R. in October of 1986 and Soviet Young Cosmonauts coming to the U.S. on a return visit in December. In June of 1987, 30 citizens from Minsk will visit Detroit, the first time that a group of ordinary Soviet citizens, as opposed to city officials, has visited the U.S. as a part of the official Sister City program. And an academic exchange will take place between students of Andover Academy in Massachusetts and the Math and Science Institute in Novosibirsk in September of 1987, with each group spending one to two months studying in the other institution.

A VARIETY OF APPROACHES

In this section, you will read about several kinds of citizen diplomacy: grass roots exchange visits, sister cities, cultural exchanges, and space bridges. Almost any activity involving Americans and Soviets can be considered track two diplomacy, as long as the intention is to promote peace and better relations between the two countries.

Are all these people-to-people exchanges having any effect on official attitudes and policies in the two countries? While it is difficult to determine whether the work of citizen diplomats has been responsible for the warming trends in both governments toward personal and cultural exchanges, it seems clear that it has made a significant contribu-

tion to the opening of doors between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The courage and determination of the early pioneers in this endeavor and the commitment of increasing numbers of individuals and organizations to promoting peace and understanding between our two countries may be laying the groundwork for a massive change in public opinion, with resulting shifts in official policy. □

