



# *Worth Noting*

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***Worth Noting is the journal of research and conferences company L21. It is focused on issues of relevance and interest to senior executives.***

Brands have become a powerful concept. For most of the world's best companies, their 'brand' is one of the top three most valuable assets they have. A strong brand resonates with consumers and clients. A weak or failing brand almost always means impending disaster for that company.

Can we apply branding principles to international politics?

Within days of the 9/11 attack in New York, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell suddenly took up a longstanding invitation to appear on Arab satellite news channel *Al-Jazeera*. This was a significant step given that American administrations had always viewed the channel as a cynical, vitriolic service that fuelled extreme elements in Muslim societies.

Something even more remarkable happened less than a month later. On October 2, renowned advertising executive Charlotte Beers was sworn in as the new undersecretary of state for public affairs and public diplomacy (answerable directly to Secretary of State Powell). Then aged sixty-six years, Beers was a giant in the PR and advertising world. A Texan with the usual Texan reputation for blunt and tough talking – earning her the nickname of the 'Steel Magnolia' - she had run two of the world's largest advertising agencies: Oglivy & Mather and J. Walter Thompson. Over the course of her career, she initiated enormously successful campaigns that had persuaded Americans to buy everything from Uncle Ben's Rice and Sears tools to Head & Shoulders shampoo.

Commenting and defending Beers by saying “Guess what? She got me to buy Uncle Ben’s rice”, Secretary of State Powell had flagged a role for Beers to a skeptical House Budget Committee on March 15, 2001 prior to 9/11:

“I’m going to be bringing people into the public diplomacy function of the department who are going to change from just selling us in the old USIA way to really branding foreign policy, branding the department, marketing the department and marketing American values to the world.”

When 9/11 occurred, Beers’ appointment became a priority. Formally sworn in on October 2, 2001, Beers had the monumental task of ‘branding’ American foreign policy to the world, and in particular, to the Arab and Muslim world. In typical gargantuan U.S. fashion, a budget of US\$1 billion was allocated for this marketing exercise. Correctly labeling this challenge as “the most sophisticated branding assignment I have ever had” in her impressive marketing career, Beers also labeled the U.S., U.S. values and U.S. foreign policy “the most elegant” product she had attempted to promote. For a person without any experience in diplomacy, Beers’ appointment and mission was largely derided by the diplomatic and journalistic community.

*“One shouldn’t laugh, really, but I must confess to a short guffaw on reading that Washington’s new war propaganda chief is a woman head of an advertising agency whose personal triumphs included Uncle Ben’s rice and Head & Shoulders shampoo.”*

**Andrew Alexander, London Daily Mail**

*“The Bush appointee in charge of the propaganda effort is a C.E.O. (from Madison Avenue) chosen not for her expertise in policy or politics but for her sales expertise on behalf of domestic products like Head & Shoulders shampoo. If we can’t fight anthrax, I guess it’s reassuring to know we can always win the war on dandruff.”*

**Frank Rich, New York Times**

*“Who knows? Maybe they’re onto something. Just the other day I took a sip of Coke and began singing, ‘I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony.’ How could anyone hate a nation of peace loving simpletons for whom the best part of waking up is Folger’s in your cup?”*

**Steve Lopez, Los Angeles Times**

Many marketing professionals were excited and also apprehensive. This was recognition of their services at the highest levels yet many were concerned that failure in such a monumental task would unfairly reflect negatively on the marketing profession.

In this edition of *Worth Noting*, we will examine the notion of ‘branding’ diplomacy and foreign policy. We do not seek to pass comment – positive or negative – on the foreign policy of the Bush administration. Our concern here is solely with the slightly odd concept of ‘branding’ foreign policy.

## History of branding foreign policy

Many would say that branding foreign policy has been going on as long as foreign policy has been going on. That is what propaganda is all about: getting your views across to persuade a target audience by being selective about facts.

Marketing one's foreign policy has been a common occurrence especially in recent times. Harry Truman launched his *Campaign of Truth* at the beginning of the Cold War. Reagan took control of diplomacy promotion himself to promote American values to the world. During every major war, from WWII to Korea to Vietnam, the U.S. has devoted large budgets to fund propaganda campaigns. In fact, current arch enemy of the U.S., Bin Laden, is the master at 'branding' his policies if you like. He understands his target markets, vigorously tries to expand those target markets, has a 'product' that many in his target markets buy into, and is the head spokesperson that promotes the product. This is not to make light of what this means in reality – his product is terrorism, his markets are largely disenfranchised people whom he cynically exploits, expanding those markets means spreading more chaos and provoking civil strife to create the conditions for unrest and civil breakdown. It is more that the Americans realized that they were being 'out marketed' by Bin Laden. British PM Blair both scornfully and enviously has referred to Bin Laden as 'Spin Laden'.

### ***But we would argue that this move is unique in foreign policy for two reasons.***

First, never before has any administration used 'brand management' jargon in such a deliberate and meaningful way. Never before has the power of 'brands' been invoked as the primary weapon in a diplomatic high stakes game. A week before 9/11, Secretary of State Powell told an incredulous audience of mainly State Department types in D.C.:

“What are we doing? We're selling a product. The product we are selling is democracy. It's a free enterprise system, the American value system. It's a product very much in demand. It's a product that is very much needed.”

Moreover, the mandate given to Beers was expressed in the terms of “branding American foreign policy”, “branding America,” “getting people to buy into our product”, and “communicating U.S. policy brand values.”

Second, and this really is worth noting, never before in recent history has a state department with a significant role in international affairs – let alone the world's only Superpower – appointed a career advertising executive with absolutely no

diplomatic experience to head its communication of foreign policy. To make the point event bigger, the focus on the branding campaign is on the Middle East, the source of the most flagrant anti-U.S. sentiment in the world and the location where the current arch enemy of the U.S. – Bin Laden – has the most support. In other words, as far as foreign policy is concerned, the stakes could hardly be higher for the U.S.

## **The Branding Campaign**

### **The background**

The 9/11 attacks convinced President Bush and Secretary of State Powell that America was losing the hearts and minds of people overseas in particularly the Muslim world.

Their belief was that it was not U.S. policy per se but perceptions of U.S. policies that had gone awry. Hence, what was needed was not a change in policy but a change in policy promotion.

### **The product**

Put simply, the product is U.S. foreign policy which encapsulates American aims, objectives and values. The priority was to inform the world about U.S. policies and values behind those policies.

Before we immediately dismiss U.S. policy as ‘arrogant’, ‘bullying’ and self-defeating, we need to look at a few facts about the product.

U.S. foreign policy from Reagan to Bush Sr. to Clinton and George W. Bush is not easy to dismiss as simply those of a self-serving Superpower stumbling their way throughout the world. Remember also that U.S. action in Afghanistan and Iraq was not an issue when Beers was first appointed. 9/11 occurred before the Iraq invasion in particular – so re-branding U.S. foreign policy is not about covering up the perceived mistakes of President Bush as many glibly assume.

The U.S. has substantive military and diplomatic roles and commitments worldwide. Below is a summary of main U.S. involvements:

<b><u>Continent/Body</u></b>	<b><u>Country</u></b>	<b><u>Action</u></b>
South America	Columbia	200 U.S. troops and more than \$500 million sought in 2003 to help eradicate coca crop, interdict drug smuggling, fight guerrillas and protect cross-country oil pipeline that is target of guerrilla sabotage.

<b>Africa</b>	Various	Receives billions in humanitarian and development aid.
<b>Europe</b>	European Union Countries	Closest allies despite tensions over direction of war on terrorism, trade, environmental issues and anti-missile system embraced by Bush. Both sides liken disagreements to those of a close family.
	Balkan countries	U.S. peacekeeping troops were in Bosnia, Serbia (mostly in Kosovo) and Macedonia as part of multinational effort to keep ethnic tensions from boiling over. United States gave \$540 million in military and economic aid. Intensive joint diplomatic effort with Europe helped ease ethnic tensions in Macedonia.
<b>Asia</b>	Afghanistan	Multinational force includes 7,000 U.S. troops. Bush calling for a 'Marshall Plan' to rebuild country.
	Philippines	U.S. troop presence to help train locals to combat Muslim extremists
	Kashmir	U.S. continually involved in negotiations between India & Pakistan to ease tensions over the disputed territory.
	China	United States has opened door to trade, giving businesses access to huge market. China and America are fighting over pirating of U.S. software, music and movies. United States will continue to pressure China on human rights.
	Vietnam	America spending more than \$1.5 million a year to help find and destroy land mines left over from Vietnam War. One of 28 countries where United States is helping destroy

<p><b>Middle East</b></p>	<p>North Korea</p>	<p>mines to end threat to civilians.</p>
	<p>South Korea</p>	<p>Described by President Bush as part of "Axis of Evil" for supporting terrorists and seeking weapons of mass destruction. United States provides humanitarian aid aimed at easing suffering from persistent famine.</p>
	<p>Iraq</p>	<p>United States has 36,000 troops on border with North Korea. It is seen as stabilizing influence in region that is calm now but could erupt if United States left.</p>
	<p>Israel/Palestine/Egypt</p>	<p>Ongoing U.S. occupation of Iraq with over 150,000 troops. A U.S. backed Iraqi interim government has been formed with full elections planned for 2005.</p>
	<p>Iran</p>	<p>U.S. troops stationed on Sinai. Egypt and Israel receive U.S. aid. United States is trying to mediate peace deal between Israel and Palestinians.</p>
<p><b>United Nations</b></p>		<p>Also named an "Axis of Evil" country by Bush, but United States sent aid to help with recovery after June 23 earthquake. Money was 'quietly' accepted by Iran despite public repudiation. Iran is currently singled out by UN for an alleged nuclear weapons programme.</p>
<p><b>World Bank &amp; IMF</b></p>		<p>The U.S. underwrites the U.N. to the tune of almost 50% of the whole U.N. budget. The U.S. has withheld some monies though demanding bureaucratic reform of the U.N.</p> <p>The U.N. is the main underwriter for both these bodies that provide public goods in the form of loans to</p>

<p><b>NATO</b></p>		<p>developing countries (World Bank) and loans to stabilize currencies (IMF).</p> <p>The U.S. effectively underwrites the military capacity of NATO. The action in Kosovo was a NATO action.</p>
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Source: L21 Research, 2004

The point of the table above is to display examples of U.S. commitments worldwide. Like any country, policies are a mixture of selfish self-interest, longer term relationship building self-interest and genuine humanitarian aims. Although in line with the basic interests of the U.S., American support of bodies such as the U.N., IMF, World Bank and NATO provide genuine 'public goods' that cannot be dismissed as blatant self-serving policies. Note that in the last decade, U.S. troops have been sent to over seventy countries for various reasons. Of these, all but five have been at the request of governments of those countries. The reliance on the U.S. 'product', therefore, is not insignificant.

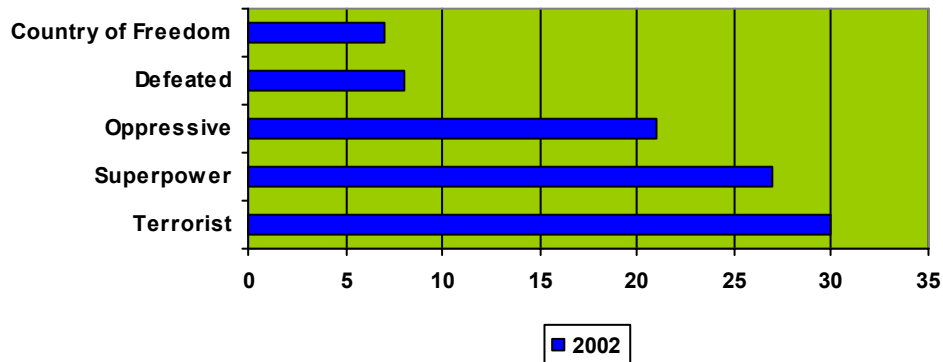
In terms of Muslim populations, U.S. policies create more controversy. Muslim grievances point to the perceived traditional U.S. support of Israel at the expense of Palestine and U.S. hostility toward Iran since the pro U.S. Shah was overthrown in 1979. Others would also point to changes in U.S. policy that are perceived as hypocritical and disingenuous (i.e., U.S. support of Iraq prior to 1991 against Iran, U.S. support of the Afghan resistance including Bin Laden and the Taliban against the Soviets.) This is despite successes such as ultimately protecting Kosovo Muslims from the Serbs in 1999 and displacing oppressive regimes in Afghanistan (2002) and Iraq (2004). With respect to U.S. actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, despite the continued violence in those countries and Western and Arab media reporting, U.S. actions there actually enjoy the support of the majority of the population in those countries. This is clearly evident in polling conducted by media and NGO organizations.

The point is that U.S. foreign policy is seen as a mixed product in the 'target markets' (Middle East especially). Reception to the 'product' is therefore mixed. The governments and elites in countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, UAE, Egypt, Kuwait and now Iraq support U.S. foreign policy. Governments in Syria and Iran, and substantial populations from all Middle Eastern Arab countries do not.

The concern for the U.S. though is not that the reception is mixed. It is that the reception is so heavily negative amongst non-elites. Not all Arabs are Muslim extremists who cannot tolerate modern societies; many 'modern' Arabs are critical of U.S. policy. The table below is typical of Arab reaction to U.S. foreign

policy. More worrying, Lebanon is a country that is relatively peaceful currently which means conflict has not spurred on extremism.

**The view from Lebanon**  
Q: Describe America in one word (%)



Source: Zogby International (1224 samples)

This, then, is the brand failure. Secretary of State Powell believes the U.S.'s brand is one of 'freedom' in substance and this should be reflected in perceptions of the U.S. brand. The mission for Beers was to get a significantly higher number of people in the main target market of the Middle East to 'buy into' the 'freedom' brand value of the U.S. product.

Some might say that the answer for Arab negativity is obvious: the recent 'War on Terrorism' which in practice targets many of the Arab countries. But this line misses several points.

First, negativity toward American policy in the Arab world was evident before 9/11 and the war on terrorism. Second, the whole purpose of building a brand is to have a brand that works and enjoys support not only during periods of peace but also periods of conflict. In the context of foreign policy, that is when you need the power of your brand.

### **The brand campaign**

Beers was the woman appointed to make the Arab world understand the American 'brand'. According to Beers, she wanted to go beyond normal bureaucratic methods used by state departments and employ "modern marketing techniques". The aim was to go beyond the governing elites (many of whom in Arab countries give at least lip service to U.S. policy anyway) to reach mass markets.

1. The basic methods of communication were lacking. According to Beers, Arab populations do not just reply on examination of the 'facts' produced by bureaucracies and departments;<sup>1</sup> there needed to be more appeals to 'emotions' and metaphors that give certain messages. Reference was in fact made to Bin Laden who had crushed the U.S. in the 'branding war'. It was pointed out that Bin Laden rarely used facts extensively but relied heavily on allegories, polemics and emotional appeals. America had to get away from the tendency to just 'release the facts' and assume opinions would follow the facts soon after.
2. Use Arab media and sources such as Al-Jazeera to disseminate information. Do not rely on mediums such as CNN or Voice of America which are distrusted by Arabs. State department officials and ambassadors made more than 2000 media appearances over the next two years mainly on Al-Jazeera television. 'Radio America' in the Middle East was rebranded 'Radio Sawa' (meaning Radio Together).
3. Arabs value person-to-person communication much more than mass media mediums. Ambassadors in Arab regions have to behave as 'brand managers' rather than just bureaucrats.
4. Expand the range of communication vehicles that may be used to reach grassroots populations: dialogues, CD Roms, videos, pamphlets, Arab run and branded radio & TV stations, TV ads ...
5. Use modern marketing techniques such as focus groups to gauge deep seated Arab beliefs and reactions.
6. Publicly tie U.S. aid monies into the Middle East with the brand message: political and economic liberalization, supporting schools that do not teach anti-Americanism, supporting bodies that overtly seek modernizing reform ...
7. Promote attractive aspects of the American way of life directly to Arab people to combat demonisation of Americans and American society: American Muslims that thrive in America, freedom to practice religion in America, that America is not a faithless society as many Muslims assume ...
8. Invite prominent Arabs and Muslims to visit America and see how Americans and American Muslims live.

***The basic strategy here is ultimately a positive branding strategy: get perceptions in line with reality. America is not an angel but nor is the country the 'Great Satan'.***

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<sup>1</sup> Despite 'facts' released to the public by both Western and Arab governments, over 61% of Arabs still believe Bin Laden was not responsible for the 9/11 attacks.

## **The results**

In what many see as representative of the lack of success of the campaign, Beers resigned two years later in 2003 citing 'health reasons' – generally political speak for either 'I was pushed' or 'I jumped before I was pushed'.

Studies and reports convincingly show that Arab opinions on U.S. foreign policy are worse now than before. Clearly, the Iraq war has much to do with it but the trend was there even before the invasion of Iraq occurred or was openly talked about.

In other words, using marketing principles to 'brand' U.S. foreign policy has been neutral at best. Arguably, the initiative has made things worse.

The next question to ask is why? We believe one can point to a number of marketing and non-marketing related principles and reasons.

### **Reasons for Failure – Marketing Principles**

**Poor Measurement:** Despite the \$1 billion budget, efforts to provide accurate measurements of the branding effort on hearts and minds were poor. Success or failure was largely gained through anecdotes or measured by the number of speeches given or broadcasts issued etc. Estimates of monies spent on proper measurement procedures show only about \$3.5 million was spent.

Moreover, when measurement of brand reaction was taken, basic methodological mistakes were made. For example, the brand campaign was designed to target Muslims in mainly Arab countries. Yet, focus groups on ads such as the 'Shared Values' campaign were conducted amongst Western educated Muslims from America and Europe. It was no wonder that the \$15 million ad failed and was pulled shortly after release. Furthermore, the sample used for this particular campaign was only 105 people.

**Failure to Understand the Target Market:** There was a failure to understand differences both between target markets and within target markets. Little relevance was given to different cultural characteristics of Egyptians compared to Saudis for example when these two cultures are quite different. Moreover, Arab Muslims were seen as either extremists or enlighten elites with Beers even stating that much of her strategy was to target those aged eleven and under. Presumably, this meant that those aged twelve and above were beyond reform from their extremist ways. Perceptions of U.S. policies are not homogenous and therefore neither are complaints about it. Consider the differences in emphases given to reasons why 'brand America' is failing sampled earlier this year:

Al-Safir: “Washington’s war in Iraq does not only aim to reshape the political map of the Middle East, but also to *undermine Arab cultural values*.”

Al-Mustaqbal: “The Iraqi government is *implementing democracy with U.S. military might*.”

Al-Hayat: “Forces are deployed at Iran’s doorstep in a manner that looks like a *U.S. siege of the Islamic Republic*.”

Al-Jazirah: “Israeli settlement fever rages in the Palestinian territories with the direct encouragement of the U.S. administration, whose position shows *increasing contradictions between its plans, ideas and reality*.”

We have italicized those sentiments that are behind brand failure. The lesson is that exporting a one-size-fits-all brand of “democracy and market reforms” as a desperately needed product is a fundamental ‘marketing’ error – it misses the different reasons given why the target markets are rejecting the product.

Moreover, the different demographics in target markets will mean different ‘consumer’ responses. It is probably not a good idea to market BMWs to the poorest parts of Sydney. For example, UAE and Kuwait are wealthy countries with relatively small populations and little poverty. Egypt has 70 million people and widespread poverty as is Iran with 66 million people. The policies of those countries might be largely to blame for this but as far as target markets are concerned, differences between them will mean differences in perceptions to the same campaign.

### **Reasons for Failure – Non-Marketing Principles**

These reasons, we believe, are the main reasons why the ‘brand campaign’ failed.

***Inconsistent Nature of Foreign Policy***: Branding experts say that successful branding is about delivering a carefully crafted message and image with consistency every time, everywhere. A brand may be tailored to suit different cultures and markets but its core must remain unchanged.

Herein lies the first problem. American foreign policy is NOT a consistent product – no foreign policy can be. As a hotchpotch of coldly calculated economic and political interests as well as genuinely humanitarian aims to promoting democracy and liberalism to supporting regimes for no other reason than ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’, there cannot be a consistent product. There is therefore a huge question whether we can truly ‘brand’ any product that is not consistent.

If a skeptic or cynic wants to poke holes in the 'brand', they only have to find an inconsistency and that is not difficult.

***Unpalatable Means of Foreign Policy:*** Nike was quick to try to put to rest the perception that Nike workers in Third World locations were made to work in intolerable conditions for slave labour rates. If that perception existed, imagine Nike's chances of success in building a brand in Third World countries!

Now consider trying to build a foreign policy brand – promoting a 'product' that promoted democracy, free markets and liberalism. To achieve these aims, the methods used by any country can be unpalatable. At one end is war where the nature of war is destruction and lives are lost. Even softer forms of foreign policy such as sanctions can create suffering. It is therefore difficult to successfully brand a product when the production of that product can cause suffering in those very markets we are trying to build our brand in. This is not to say that we are passing moral or ethical comment on U.S. foreign policy. We accept that these are the means frequently used by foreign policy to achieve their aims and at times those aims can be sound or even morally defensible ones. The point is made here that branding a foreign policy is different to branding a consumer product because a consumer product does not necessarily involve unpalatable means in the production of it.

***Stakes are too high for Winners and Losers of Foreign Policy:*** Regimes and markets are generally indifferent to consumer products building a brand in markets because building brands is not always a zero-sum game (if one wins, another loses). Moreover, if Pepsi enters the market, the worse that can happen is that Coke loses market share. The stakes are therefore not really that high as a whole for society.

Foreign policy, especially that of a Superpower is different. The stakes are very high and there are definite winners and losers. For example, the Taliban have lost a lot more than market share with recent U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan and the same can be said for Saddam's Baa'th Party in Iraq. It would be unrealistic to expect that those parties would have remained indifferent whilst the U.S. branded their foreign policy to those countries. Apart from Arab countries, note North Korea's paranoia about anything American or Western in Kim's recent warnings against U.S. efforts to replace communism with "rotten imperialist reactionary culture" spread by small radios and television sets. Western culture was said to "benumb the independent consciousness and revolutionary spirit of the popular masses." How would one 'brand' U.S. policy to Kim? Talk about a hard sell.

The significance of this: some regimes and interest groups have a vested interest in seeing American branding of their foreign policy fail. Anti-Americanism and many groups that fuel it thrive on failing states, failing regimes, failing systems and failing societies. For extremist groups in Arab countries that are attempting to

persuade moderate elements to join their cause, it serves their purpose to paint the West as decadent and faithless, as insatiable consumers and greedy for markets to make a profit. Using the term 'branding' vis-à-vis U.S. foreign policy allowed groups the opportunity to portray Beers' branding initiatives as symptomatic of Western market-based strategies to dominate. Even for U.S. friendly regimes like the Saudis and Jordanians, they are wary of openly supporting U.S. policies due to the number of powerful groups in their societies that fundamentally oppose any U.S. presence and Western-style reforms. In other words, the U.S. product does not enter into an indifferent open market and it is therefore difficult to 'brand' U.S. policy and values as one might brand Coke as an alternative to Pepsi. The branding exercise will either be opposed or else reinterpreted as more evidence of U.S. desire to dominate.

Beers along with President Bush and National Security Adviser Condeleza Rice have expressed a somewhat naïve belief that if only people knew the American foreign policy brand proposition (democracy, free markets etc.), the brand would be readily accepted. Therefore, it was just a matter of matching the brand with the product. To phrase it this way assumes that vested groups are willing to allow the American 'product' to compete with their own and accept the market's verdict: may the best product win. It might be true that most people would choose prosperity and liberalism over alternatives. But it is also true that it serves the purposes of individuals and groups that prosperity and Western style freedoms are not realized. If the political market place was so simple, open and free, America and the West wouldn't really have any political concerns about the country or region in the first place. Allowing the marketing of Coca Cola into Jordan is one thing. Allowing the U.S. to market their foreign policy of carrots and sticks freely is something else.

***Misperceptions of 'Branding' by Target Markets:*** When the 'market' is at worse antithetical to U.S. policies and values and at best suspicious of U.S. intentions, to openly 'brand' U.S. policy in hostile markets might be counter-productive. Like it or not, branding can bring up images of spin doctors, style over substance and making only surface changes to 'seduce' consumers. Many Arabs view 'brands' and brand building as a subtle and perhaps insidious Western capitalist marketing tactic. That is seen as probably harmless for consumer products but not so for a product where the stakes are enormous. Plenty of pro-American Western and Arab analysts saw the 'brand campaign' as counter-productive because the image created in Arab communities was that the U.S. was trying to sugar-coat or re-wrap unchanged policies that were viewed with suspicion in the first place. Furthermore, when a company brands their product, it is expected and part of the credibility building process. When a country, especially a Superpower, begins to explicitly brand their foreign policy, such action runs the risk of being seen as authoritarian, manipulative and threatening.

***Political Imperatives take Precedence over Brand Management:*** The senior executives of the world's best consumer brands work closely with brand

managers to ensure what top management does is consistent with the brand they are trying to build. Nothing a top consumer company does can compromise the brand message. This is often not the case with foreign policy out of necessity. While Beers was trying to de-demonise the American brand, the Bush Administration had to respond to 9/11 and was preparing a war against Muslim Afghanistan. True, statements like Bush's "You're either with us or you're with the terrorists" makes branding more difficult but it is questionable whether strict adherence to brand guidelines and promotion is possible in any foreign policy in word or action. Top brands depend on consistency, familiarity and predictability. It is arguable that no foreign policy of any major power has ever been, or can afford to be, consistent or predictable.

***Lack of Control over the 'Product':*** A top company ensures top management never loses control over the product. In the case of foreign policy, especially when it comes to military action, Beers has no control at all over what occurs on the ground. Witness the blows against the U.S. attempting to win the propaganda war following incidents such as the 1968 My Lai Massacre in Vietnam and the recent Abu Ghraib incidents in Iraq. Once again, not to make light of these incidents but if Beers were still Undersecretary it would have been a 'brand' disaster for her as it is now for the U.S.

## **Summary**

We do not intend to cast doubts on the value of branding or the competence of Beers in doing what she was hired to do.

Indeed, unlike some who have argued that brands serve anti-social purposes by focusing value on unreal assets and outsourcing actual production to cheap, Third World markets, we argue that brands do serve worthwhile ends. They are a storehouse for trust, hard earned reputation and reliability, and they simplify choices in a diverse marketplace. It is a mistake to think that the top brands can sit on their laurels and keep on selling their products no matter what they do. The top ten most valuable brands change from decade to decade. Witness what happens when a brand loses credibility – disaster for the company is not far behind. The building of brands and having brands to choose from is also fun for consumers. There is no doubt life would be far more dull in a brandless world.

The record also shows that Beers performed well as far as leading brand initiatives are concerned. She was hired to try out some consumer brand management ideas and that is what she knows and does best. One problem is that she did not have a team of brand managers and marketers under her but thousands of state department and foreign affairs bureaucrats more use to paper work and paying lip service than building and communicating brands. Moreover, the greater problem we have argued is that 'branding' is not entirely suitable for foreign policy for various reasons.

It is worth noting that following Beers resignation, Secretary of State Powell hired Margaret Tutwiler to take Beers' position. Tutwiler was a more typical choice: experience working with four Republican administrations as a State Department spokesperson and then as ambassador to Morocco. Tutwiler was expected to bring to the job knowledge of international affairs and diplomacy that Beers left.

Tutwiler suddenly resigned to accept a job in one of the New York Stock Exchange executive suites. Her resignation drew suspiciously as it occurred during the first week images of abused Iraqi prisoners were released to the media worldwide. The point is that Tutwiler, notwithstanding her international affairs credentials suffered the same problems Beers faced.