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**From:** McHale, Judith A <McHaleJA@state.gov>  
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**To:** H  
**Subject:** FW: National Journal piece based on interview with U/S McHale

Hope your ear is better! Hurts just thinking about your getting on yet another plane !

Thought you might like to see this article from the National Journal. Tried to do my best to explain what we are doing. Hope you like it.

Safe travels.

jm

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/i-tweet-for-freedom-20110629>

## I Tweet for Freedom

By James Kitfield

June 29, 2011 | 6:00 a.m.

If there is a single lesson that can already be distilled from the Arab Spring democracy movements sweeping through the Middle East, it is this: social media is mightier than the sword. Despots who once ruled in blacked-out realms are now challenged by flash mobs organized over the internet and wielding thousands of cell phone portals to the outside world.

Under its "21st Century Diplomacy" initiative, the State Department has taken a proactive stance in arming those masses with advanced communications gear and training. With millions of dollars of grants, for instance, State has been financing "stealth wireless networks," mobile "internet in a suitcase" systems, and software that protects the anonymity of cell phone and internet users in places like Iran, Libya, Syria, and China. State Department officials consider the initiatives a natural extension of long-standing programs to advance freedom of speech through Voice of America broadcasts. In an interview with *National Journal*, Under Secretary of State Judith McHale, the former president of Discovery Communications, discussed those initiatives. Edited excerpts of the interview follow.

**NJ: Why is it in the United States' interests to challenge state censorship of free expression, even in nations with whom we have close or at least cordial relations?**

McHale: [Secretary of State Hillary] Clinton has been very clear, consistent and vocal in articulating U.S. support for freedom of expression. We think it's important that people be allowed to raise their voices in debate, and to have an independent media. Freedom to access information and express opinions is a core American value. We think it is a fundamental right, and thus it helps drive everything that we do. Not only have President Obama and Secretary Clinton given speeches on the subject, but we raise it in our private conversations with governments around the world. We believe it is in their self-interest to allow freedom of expression. Now obviously not all of them agree with us, but I think repressive regimes are losing that battle.

**NJ: Do you see events in the Middle East as proving the point?**

McHale: Well, look at Egypt, where the government tried to shut down the internet in reaction to protests. That didn't last very long. In today's communications environment, people will increasingly find a way to exercise their fundamental right of expression. Because we believe it is a fundamental human right, we have also given a number of grants to people who are looking for ways for activists and others to circumvent the technology that repressive regimes use to stifle communication, and to circumvent barriers that governments erect to the exercise of free speech. That's consistent with the Voice of America's mission to broadcast into Eastern Europe during the Cold War, to counter the lack of reliable information there.

**NJ: Has there been blowback from nations who see that as meddling in their internal affairs?**

McHale: Well, it has upset some governments, just as Voice of America angered some nations, but that's not a reason to stop doing it. We'll continue to raise the issue of freedom of expression in our private discussions with other governments, and we'll continue to publicly provide the tools and resources necessary for people to exercise their fundamental human right of free expression. In fact, we're not only seeding activists with new technology and circumvention tools, we're training them how to use those tools while protecting

themselves from government reprisals. This is the 21st century version of what we accomplished with all of those Voice of America broadcasts, and it goes to the heart of what we're trying to do.

**NJ: So the tweet really is mightier than the sword?**

McHale: I think that's probably true. Clearly the ability to communicate, share ideas, and share strategies has played a key role in the Arab Spring democracy movements. That's not to say Twitter caused the revolution. Absent the underlying problems of injustice I doubt we'd be where we are today. There's also a dark side to this technology, because repressive regimes will be just as sophisticated in using these tools and technologies to suppress communication and expression.

**NJ: In what other ways have these technologies impacted U.S. public diplomacy?**

McHale: With the proliferation of information technology across all societies, people around the world are participating in shaping the political lives of their countries to an unprecedented degree. That drove us to an understanding that the United States government had to take a different approach to public diplomacy. For centuries, traditional diplomacy was conducted on a government-to-government basis through negotiations. That continues to be a critical component of diplomacy. We need to complement it, however, with a new outreach to populations that are increasingly involved in their governments' decisions. If we don't strengthen those relationships then we can't meet our foreign policy objectives or, frankly, assure our own security. That meant we needed to find ways to engage 7 billion people around the world. It's hard to shake all of their hands, so we had to look for new ways to engage them.

**NJ: How do you shape a consistent narrative when addressing so many different audiences?**

McHale: Shaping a narrative in today's world means understanding that the media landscape has changed dramatically. People talk of a 'technological revolution,' but it's now 20 years old, so this new world is here to stay, and it requires us to react to events very quickly. We've had to move beyond just pushing out press releases, for instance, to engaging proactively and broadly across both traditional and social media. If we don't respond quickly to an inaccurate story, for instance, we will never get beyond it, because they live forever on the internet. I have a 16-person Center for Strategic Counter-Terrorism Communications, for example, that rapidly responds to any message from al-Qaida that we see online, and is willing to explain and debate the American position on violent extremism.

The larger point is that in the world of social media, if you don't provide a context for what you're doing, other people will interpret your actions for you. That's why this morning I met with 30 plus bloggers from around the world, who have an expectation that I will engage with them in dialogue. I have 200 folks at the State Department focused solely on social media, and around 1,000 employees worldwide who have social media as a large component of their jobs. We produce 100 foreign language Twitter feeds. That's the character of 21st century diplomacy.

**NJ: So is improving America's image and countering widespread anti-Americanism just a matter of better messaging and adept use of social media?**

McHale: No, it can't just be about messaging. If we're sitting here in Washington, D.C., and trying to figure out what foreign policy will or will not work in Tunisia, for instance, no amount of messaging is going to help. Messaging divorced from informed policymaking will fail.

**NJ: Despite all of your hard work, how do you explain polls that show the U.S. is still profoundly unpopular in many parts of the world?**

McHale: While I would push back against the idea that we are unpopular everywhere, certainly we operate in a very challenging environment. Some of the unpopularity goes with being such a large, powerful nation. Sometimes it results from policies that we pursue in our national interests that are disliked abroad. Other times it results from ignorance or misconceptions. Even in especially challenging areas like the Middle East, however, we find there are areas where people are eager to work with the United States, such as science, education, and entrepreneurship. So we can't be so focused on poll numbers that we lose sight of areas of potential cooperation.

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