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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: US' marketing of its image overseas

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DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

We have a running feature on this program called Marketing Place, and it's time to take stock of how the US of A markets its image overseas. What is prompting this is the announcement that the Madison Avenue exec who was given a \$1 billion budget to improve America's image abroad is leaving. Charlotte Beers cited health problems. Martin Kaplan of the Annenberg School for Communication at USC appears here regularly to talk business of media.

Hello, Marty.

Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN (Annenberg School of Communication, USC): Hello, David.

BRANCACCIO: Where are we in this effort to market and improve America's image abroad?

Mr. KAPLAN: Well, if you look at the polls, we're in a terrible place. Over the last few years, public approval, public opinion, especially among young people and especially in countries that we want these days for our coalition, has plummeted. And the problem is that public diplomacy, soft power, as it's sometimes called, is only one element. You can't just go out there and do commercials about how America loves Muslims. At the same time, you've also got to realize that American foreign policy has an impact on the world. If you abrogate the ABM Treaty or you run away from the Kyoto Treaty or you seem disengaged or one-sided in the Middle East, people in other countries aren't only going to like you because they like "Baywatch."

BRANCACCIO: So there's nothing wrong with our public diplomacy? It's just that foreign policy itself trumps public diplomacy.

Mr. KAPLAN: No, there's plenty wrong with our public diplomacy. You start with the fact that we've had a decade of cutting back on the amount of budget that we spend in this sort of thing. And now you have situations where a guy named John Kiesling, a 20-year career foreign service officer, resigns in protest, saying that the problem is that the foreign servants who want to spread public diplomacy are being muzzled and that the policies they're being asked to peddle are not the kinds of things that they're proud of.

BRANCACCIO: Marty, I thought Americans were supposed to be really good at this. I mean, Madison Avenue--I mean, we can take any kind of product and sell it to people. Let's be reasonable here.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes. And when Charlotte Beers was appointed, Colin Powell was fond of saying that, 'Someone who could sell Uncle Ben could sell Uncle Sam.' The problem is that America isn't a product and Brand America isn't necessarily a good analogy for what public diplomacy is all about. For one thing, public diplomacy is a two-way street. It's not, 'We sell, you buy.' It's, rather, 'We have to listen to each other. We have to demonstrate some mutual respect.' Unfortunately, in our country, we are notorious for not being interested in other nations, and recent National Geographic polls show that most people would place New York on the west of the Mississippi, let

alone being able to identify nations in the Middle East that we want to be friends with. So our interest in other nations and what they feel on the street is relatively limited.

BRANCACCIO: All right. Marty Kaplan, thank you.

Mr. KAPLAN: Thank you.

BRANCACCIO: Martin Kaplan is also director of the Norman Lear Center at USC.