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Canada and the New Public Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that successful public diplomacy is becoming an increasingly important asset in a globalised world. It analyses the various different concepts associated with public diplomacy and their relation to the changes that are taking place in the practice of foreign policy. Canada's approach to public diplomacy is utilised as a case study and it is argued that the relatively low priority which has been given to funding initiatives in this field may jeopardise the country's long-term interests. The increasing significance of what has been termed 'soft power' in relations between states and the success of previous Canadian initiatives in this field, such as the 'Think Canada' campaign in Japan, indicates that investment in public diplomacy can have long-term advantages. The paper concludes by suggesting that current technological and economic changes suggest that there is a pressing need for active and effective public diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy.

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CANADA AND THE NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

*Evan H. Potter, Ph.D. **

Introduction

We are witnessing a fundamental shift in how nations manage their international relations. National interests are being advanced abroad through events and actions that go well beyond the classic diplomacy of communiqués, demarches, and aide memoires. Foreign ministries must now devise programs and muster complex coalitions involving the wider public aimed directly at specific problems rather than simply urging governments or international organizations to act. It is a cliché to say that the terrorist attacks on September 11th and the subsequent public relations campaign by the United States and its allies to win understanding in the Arab and Islamic worlds have changed ‘everything.’ However, it is certainly true that this tragedy has made public diplomacy, ‘once the stepchild of diplomats,’ assume its rightful place at the centre of diplomatic relations.¹

We are entering a new world in which knowledge, culture, and communications are the key, not only to technological progress and economic prosperity, but also to social cohesion and sustainable development. A “digital divide” is opening within and among countries and generations. There is concern that the powerful engine of the global economy will roll over cultural diversity, fragile social and political systems, and state sovereignty itself. In this world of instant and ubiquitous communication, hypertext, and easy travel, the ideas, images and values that motivate citizens take on an importance and power never known before. As Akihiko Tanaka says, “word politics” is becoming more important in world politics.²

A decade ago, a former Canadian ambassador to the United States summed up his experience: “The new diplomacy, as I call it, is, to a large extent, public

* The views in this paper reflect those of the author and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Government of Canada. I would like to thank members of the Policy Planning Division and the International Cultural Relations bureau at DFAIT for their insights.

¹ David Hoffman, “Beyond Public Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs* 81/2 (March/April 2002): 84.

² Quoted in Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (New York, NY: Longman, 2001), 221.

diplomacy and requires different skills, techniques, and attitudes than those found in traditional diplomacy.”³ This paper examines the extent to which Canada as a middle power has embraced this new diplomacy by using new skills and techniques. I will describe how Canada is positioned to develop the ‘information edge’ in its diplomacy.⁴

Canadian diplomacy has many of the tools for capturing global mind space. Despite severe budget cuts in the 1990s leading to a significant reduction of the complement of Canadian diplomats assigned abroad, Canada still brings formidable assets to the table: a bricks and mortar network of 160 missions abroad linked by the most advanced information technology infrastructure of any foreign ministry in the world. With extensive experience dealing with civil society groups on sensitive international trade and security issues, Canada has developed protocols that allow it to be more nimble than many of its larger Group of Seven (G7) counterparts when dealing with the general public. The projection of Canada’s culture and values abroad, the quintessential and traditional expression of ‘public’ diplomacy, has been promoted as the ‘third pillar’ of Canada’s foreign policy since a parliamentary review in 1995. With respect to using international broadcasting and new media to establish an international communications presence, although Canada, through Ottawa’s leadership, is ahead of most other countries in being able to provide government services on-line, it has managed to make little headway in strengthening its global broadcasting presence through international television and short-wave radio.

The paper is guided by a number of questions. Given its leadership in exercising soft power in support of its foreign policy goals, particularly in the area of human security, and with its international reputation as a coalition-builder, to what degree did Canada redefine the conduct of its public diplomacy between 1998-2002? What challenges in articulating a national image were posed by the fact that the projection of Canada’s image abroad is shared between the federal government and the provinces? How did Canada use the new media such as the Internet and its international broadcasting assets to make its presence felt on the international stage? The first section defines public diplomacy and reviews the major trends affecting the public dimension of foreign policy making. The second

³ Allan Gotlieb, *“I’ll be with You in a Minute, Mr. Ambassador”*: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), vii.

⁴ The term ‘information edge’ was coined by Joseph S. Nye and William A. Owens in their article, “America’s Information Edge,” *Foreign Affairs* 75/2 (March/April 1996): 20-36.

section outlines the primary instruments of Canada's public diplomacy. The third section examines the image problem faced by Canada abroad and its possible causes. The fourth looks at efforts to re-brand Canada in Japan through a high-profile public diplomacy campaign.

What is Public Diplomacy?

Simply put, public diplomacy is the effort by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion of another nation for the purpose of turning the policy of the target nation to advantage. In the words of Hans Tuch it is: "... a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies."⁵ National goals and interests are communicated to foreign publics through a variety of means, including international broadcasting, cultivation of foreign journalists and academics, cultural activities, educational exchanges and scholarships, programmed visits and conferences, and publications. It is not just a one-way street, however. Gifford Malone expands the definition by pointing out that the requirement to understand others is indispensable to success: "If we strive to be successful in our efforts to create understanding for our society and for our policies, we must first understand the motives, culture, history, and psychology of the people with whom we wish to communicate, and certainly their language."⁶

Whether using the expanded or contracted definitions, the essential point is that public diplomacy, both in its short-term (e.g., media relations) and long-term varieties (cultural programs), is undertaken by official bodies of one state to target publics of another state for the purpose of persuading these foreign publics to regard favourably the national policies, ideals and ideas of the targeting state. What distinguishes public diplomacy from classic diplomacy is that although the former's programs may include government officials as direct targets, the programs are not exclusively state-to-state interactions.

⁵ Tuch offers an excellent survey of slightly different definitions of public diplomacy, although all agree that for public diplomacy to exist it must be projected outside a country's borders by an official body. Hans Tuch, *Communicating with the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, 1990), 3.

⁶ Gifford D. Malone, *Political Advocacy and Cultural Communications: Organising the Nation's Public Diplomacy* (Lanham, Md: University of America, 1988), 12.

Public diplomacy activities may be formulated in direct support of a particular foreign policy objective. For example, most countries have 'foreign visitors' programs, whether in their foreign or information ministries, which are designed to bring in foreign journalists and other foreign elites for official tours in advance of important conferences or policy announcements. The purpose is to bring about greater understanding of, and hopefully a more favourable disposition towards, the host country's specific policies or initiatives. Other types of public diplomacy, particularly cultural and international education programs, are not necessarily linked to specific near-term policy objectives; they help develop a three-dimensional image of a country, leading to a more complete and balanced perception of the country's economic, political and social development. As with any good public relations strategy, this is designed to build goodwill over time in targeted governments and publics alike so that there may be less friction on those occasions when interests diverge. In the words of a former senior Canadian official responsible for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's (DFAIT's) public diplomacy: "A relationship with a solid foundation ... will be more reliable when the chips are down. And one of the best ways to foster a relationship in a non-threatening way is to engage in public diplomacy."⁷

Public diplomacy is also distinct from (but related to) a foreign ministry's public affairs role, with the latter often using similar activities and techniques but directing them at its own citizens to help them interpret the outside world from a national perspective and to raise awareness of their country's international role and that of their diplomatic service. In Canada, a considerable number of the activities identified as 'public diplomacy' in official DFAIT documents are, in fact, communications and consultation programs directed at domestic audiences. They range from dedicated consultation divisions such as DFAIT's Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development to efforts, through DFAIT's Federal-Provincial-Territorial division, to strengthen partnerships with other federal government departments and other levels of government on international issues of mutual interest. Indeed, the levels of energy expended domestically to communicate Canada's international role reflects two key imperatives: the desire to use Canada's international activities as a means of highlighting and promoting Canada's success as a unified nation to Canadians and the need to show that DFAIT is linking its activities to broader national priorities.

⁷ Hugh Stephens, "Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century," *bout de papier* 16/2 (1999): 7.

As the following section will show, in a hypermedia environment it is difficult and, indeed, counter-productive for foreign ministries to run completely separate public diplomacy and public affairs tracks in their external communications activities. This is especially so for Canada, which, given its 'liberal internationalist' foreign policy heritage, uses its roles in the world, whether in peacekeeping or aid-giving, to forge a national identity domestically. Given Canada's close proximity to the United States and the spasms of national self-doubt this engenders, the reflection back to Canadians of foreigners' perceptions of them is an important element of Canadian nation-building.⁸

The Changing Context

A number of over-arching trends have increased the importance of both public affairs and public diplomacy in contemporary diplomacy. These include: the increased importance of public opinion; the rise of a more intrusive and global media; increased global transparency brought about by advances in communications and the related phenomenon of a more activist civil society; and the rise of a global culture leading to a reflexive desire to protect cultural diversity. In a globalized world public opinion matters more than ever. With publics more distrustful of government, demanding greater transparency and input into policy making, governments can no longer count on 'spin' to overcome communications challenges.⁹ With so many players and a 24/7 news cycle, foreign ministries like domestic departments are under pressure to provide substance on demand, be aware of and responsive to the public mood, and, in some cases, aggressively refute misinformation and untruths in the public domain.

We are not just witnessing a qualitative change in the relationship between the state and its citizens but also one that is spreading across the globe. However imperfect in design, the sweep of democracy through Eastern Europe, Russia and Latin America since the late 1980s has led to a greater need to understand and manage the opinions of at least another half billion people. From a time when contact with local civil societies was strictly circumscribed, we have moved to a point where the rise of pluralism in previously closed societies has led to an

⁸ I am indebted to Roman Waschuk of DFAIT's Policy Planning Division for this point.

⁹ I am indebted to Colin Robertson, Consul General of Canada (Los Angeles) for this observation.

abundance of interest groups that have to be taken into account when engaging in public diplomacy. In fact, more public diplomacy and greater advocacy skills are now required since there are more points of access in the policy making process.

Of globalization's many effects, one of the most profound for diplomatic practice is the ability of citizens to access, use and disseminate information. The explosion of information technology and communications infrastructures provides the public with the ability to research, engage and advocate positions on a wide range of issues. It creates new competencies for citizen activism on a global scale. Increasingly, domestic issues such as crime, health, and the environment have become essential elements of global security. It is noteworthy that these domestic policy areas already have advocacy networks in place.

As the concept of security has been broadened, the gap between what used to be domestic policy and foreign policy has rapidly closed, making citizens' everyday concerns the concerns of foreign policy makers. The reason that diplomats must take notice is that to resolve the non-traditional security issues that are high on the public's agenda often requires much closer links with non-governmental organizations and will require the mobilization of public opinion at home and abroad. With an expanding and, at times, intrusive global media, what governments do and say abroad is playing back rapidly into public debates at home. As a result, diplomats are being called upon increasingly to become good public communicators at home and not just when they are assigned to foreign postings. The closing of the gap between foreign and domestic policy in tandem with a more activist civil society is making public affairs with domestic audiences and public diplomacy with foreign audiences a central element of contemporary diplomacy.

The expansion of trade liberalization, emergence of global media giants (e.g., Time Warner/AOL, Disney, Bertelsmann), increasing mobility of people and changing demographic patterns (the North gets old as the South contends with exploding youth populations), is creating not only global markets but also global societies. This has raised concerns that cultural homogenization, often interpreted as Americanization, will limit the ability of countries to maintain their cultural distinctiveness. On the other hand, as noted, the rise of new communications technologies such as the Internet is creating virtual communities of interest where people from different backgrounds can learn from each other and understand each other's experiences. Ease of transportation and digitized communication is allowing closer and greater interaction. Through these encounters, people can build understanding to prevent conflicts based on ethnic, religious or linguistic differences. It is also recognized that cultural diversity, rather than being a barrier,

is a strategic resource that, in a global knowledge-based society, drives innovation, creativity and reconciliation. It could even be conjectured that in the same way that environment was held up in the 1970s and 1980s as essential to quality of life, by the 1990s cultural diversity was increasingly recognized as a focus of global strategies towards economic development.¹⁰

In this “infosphere” of ubiquitous communication, with the twin forces of global culture and cultural diversity vying for ascendancy, the diplomatic advantage goes to countries that are able to present distinct voices or ‘information edges’, attract support, project identifiable three-dimensional national images, and that can provide credible, timely information. Globalization and the communications and media revolution have, according to van Ham, “... made each state more aware of itself, its image, its reputation, and its attitude – in short, its brand.”¹¹

Lacking requisite hard power in the form of military capabilities or economic weight, most countries are the image or brand they project abroad. Their room to manoeuvre is affected by their image. A middle power such as Canada, dwarfed as it is in North America by the United States, and with only limited ability to dominate the global “mind space” through its military or economic might, must give its brand serious attention. It is an essential part of Canada’s “strategic equity”.¹² Reputation, goodwill and credibility are keys to competitiveness – to attracting foreign investment, recruiting the best immigrants, and wielding political influence. Canadian author John Ralston Saul, in a seminal position paper on culture and foreign policy written for the 1995 parliamentary review of Canada’s foreign policy, states that Canada’s profile abroad is largely its culture:

That is our image. That is what Canada becomes in people’s imaginations around the world when the time comes for non-Canadians to buy, to negotiate, to travel. Canada’s chance or the attitude toward Canada will already have been determined to a surprising extent by the projection of our culture abroad.¹³

¹⁰ The above paragraph draws from internal DFAIT documentation. I am indebted to colleagues from the International Cultural Relations Bureau for making this available to me.

¹¹ Peter van Ham, “The Rise of the Brand State,” *Foreign Affairs* 80/5 (September/October 2001): 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ John Ralston Saul, “Culture and Foreign Policy,” typescript version, August 30, 1994, 2-3.

Canada's Public Diplomacy Instruments

Since representation, advocacy, image-building, delivering messages and interpreting and explaining are activities that are part and parcel of daily routines of diplomacy, it can be said that public diplomacy has always existed. What has changed is the relative emphasis being placed on this facet of diplomacy. In the Canadian context, public diplomacy was recognized as a 'third pillar' of Canada's foreign policy as a result of the 1995 foreign policy review; in theory, equal to the first two 'pillars' of promoting economic growth and international peace and security. However, just when it seemed that public diplomacy would receive the emphasis that it deserved, the federal government was forced to engage in a major budget-cutting exercise to reduce the federal deficit. Rather than expanding public diplomacy programs, the issue became one of survival. Despite the pressure to cut government programs during the 1995-98 period, DFAIT actually managed to refurbish Canada House in London (it had been slated to be closed for budgetary reasons) and the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris and to protect the Department's cultural grants program.¹⁴

In addition to both reactive and proactive communications work with foreign media, perhaps the best-known public diplomacy tool is that of culture and international education. By 1999, DFAIT's \$4.7 million (all figures in CDN dollars unless otherwise indicated) cultural program had assisted both established and emerging artists and cultural groups to perform and display abroad, supported visits to Canada by film and book distributors and agents, and undertaken specific cultural projects to promote key foreign policy themes such as "Children and War". Having its own cultural grants money allowed DFAIT a seat at the table with the federal cultural department, Canadian Heritage, and agencies such as the National Film Board and Telefilm Canada. The purpose of the grants is not to subsidize Canadian culture *per se*; rather, it is to select specific cultural activities that will reinforce foreign policy objectives.¹⁵ This point is frequently misunderstood. At the same time, helping Canadian artists to market themselves is a legitimate exercise for a Department that houses the Canadian government's trade commissioner service. Culture is not only an essential means of projecting Canadian values and messages; it is also a multi-billion dollar business which

¹⁴ Stephens, op. cit., 7.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Curtis Barlow of DFAIT's International Cultural Relations Bureau for this point.

supports some 50,000 Canadian jobs from exports alone.¹⁶ In addition to symphony orchestras and ballets, acts such as *Cirque du Soleil* and jazz singer Diana Krall were once the beneficiaries of DFAIT cultural grants.

A major plank of DFAIT's public diplomacy approach has been its post-graduate scholarship and academic relations programs. By the late 1990's it was administering \$7 million in grants, covering primarily the Commonwealth Program and the Canada Awards program. The purpose was to support promising students who, it was hoped, would become leaders, contacts, business partners and scholars of Canada when they returned to their countries of origin. The jewel in the crown for many long-time observers, however, has been the Canadian Studies abroad program which supports Canadian studies associations and centres, research and study awards, travel grants and assistance to university libraries. By 1999, there were more than 7000 'Canadianists' in over 30 countries teaching at least 150,000 students per year. The Canadian Studies network, for a relatively small investment, ensures that knowledge and understanding of Canada reaches present and future decision makers. The approximately \$12 million annual expenditure on academic grants and scholarships represents less than one per cent of DFAIT's annual budget.¹⁷

Although Canadian universities have a long tradition of having sizable numbers of foreign students, it was only in the 1990's that the post-secondary education sector became a core trade sector. The high-quality education offered by Canadian colleges and universities was both a hidden 'national branding' and commercial resource. One reason education marketing had not been fully exploited as part of public diplomacy strategies was the decentralized education system in Canada. With education falling under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government had only a limited role to play. That said, the absence of a federal education department meant that DFAIT could take a far more prominent role working with provincial ministers of education to coordinate foreign policy in the area of education and to ensure Canada's active participation in a range of international educational activities abroad, including the Organization of American States, the G8 and UNESCO.¹⁸

After media relations and international cultural and education relations, the third major component of most countries' public diplomacy strategies is

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Interview with DFAIT official in International Academic Relations division (March 22, 2002).

international broadcasting. In the case of Canada there has not been an adequately funded or developed public diplomacy instrument.¹⁹ The most experienced player in Canada's international broadcasting is Radio Canada International (RCI). It also has had the most problematic internal history, lacking adequate domestic governmental support at crucial periods of its evolution, even during the Cold War. In the words of Keith Spicer, the former Chairman of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, "The history of RCI has been a series of intermittent terrors with reprieves at the last minute for a few years and then it starts all over again with a new breed of politicians who again do not know about it."²⁰ By the end of 1998 the weekly audience for the broadcaster was approximately six million (not including China, India, and Southeast Asia for which reliable figures are not available). There was a concerted attempt by RCI's managers to reposition the broadcaster as a programmer. It placed its programs through FM and CD distribution to 62 countries and developed real audio availability on the Internet in order to distance itself from its antiquated image as a short-wave broadcaster. A \$5 million investment in capital spending meant a 100 per cent change in RCI's infrastructure and by 2000 the broadcaster began distributing digital radio programming. The only area of operations that, for reasons of cost, could not be dealt with immediately was that of tailoring programming to local conditions. It was recognized, of course, that in an information universe exploding with new media sites every day, quality – measured in availability, attractiveness, ease of use, feedback and reliability – would be a key factor in allowing Canada's voice to be heard abroad.

Canada does not have a dedicated government-funded international television presence such as the BBC World Service or the U.S.'s WORLDNET Television and Film Services. It can channel a limited amount of Canadian-produced French-language programming through TV-5, the international French-language broadcaster, which reaches 66 million households on five continents and which was launched into the United States in January 1998. TV-5 is financed by leading members of La Francophonie (Canadian federal government, Quebec, France,

¹⁹ This section on Canada's international broadcasting is adapted from a more detailed description and analysis in Evan H. Potter, "Information Technology and Canada's Public Diplomacy," in Evan H. Potter, (ed.) *Cyber-Diplomacy: Managing Foreign Policy in the 21st Century* (Kingston, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming in 2002).

²⁰ Quoted in Arthur Siegel, *Radio Canada International: History and Development* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1996), 175.

Communauté Française de Belgique et Suisse). Although the bulk of this broadcaster's budget and programming is furnished by France, the Canadian federal government (through Canadian Heritage) and the government of Quebec, acting as partners, together make the second highest contribution. TV-5 has 15 per cent Canadian content in Europe, 13 per cent in Asia, 12 per cent in Africa, and 28 per cent in the United States and Latin America where it is positioned as a speciality channel for French speakers. Although it is an important international projection of Canada's Francophone character, and a valuable showcase for Canadian French-language programming, the fact remains that it does not broadcast in languages other than French. Its identity for viewers is influenced by the predominance of programming from France. And, as if to underscore the somewhat precarious nature of a Canadian influence in international television, as of 1 August 2001, TV-5 Monde (based in Paris) took over the management of programming for the U.S. and Latin America, a function that had been previously based in Montreal.

What is evident in reviewing these public diplomacy instruments is that for many years the Canadian federal government's spending in these areas has been very low in both absolute terms and certainly relative to what is being spent by its major competitors. Whereas the Canadian investment on its public diplomacy instruments can be counted in the tens of millions of dollars annually, the U.K. devotes several hundred million dollars and France, Germany and Japan each spend well above one billion dollars. In addition to low funding levels, it is reported that Canadian Studies is a 'greying' area with no guarantee that there is a next generation of Canadianists in the pipeline or that the distribution of programs across the world reflects the growing influence of emerging regional powers such as India, Brazil and Mexico.²¹ If Canada's soft power, that is, its influence and credibility internationally, is a direct function of public awareness and respect for its society's values, accomplishments and creativity, then it is worth examining how successful Canada has been in using its limited public diplomacy resources and how it is perceived abroad.

²¹ In person interview with DFAIT official in International Academic Relations division (March 22, 2002).

Does Canada have an Image (Branding) Problem?²²

How did the aforementioned global trends and the state of Canada's public diplomacy tools affect its ability to be heard in the world between 1998-2002? As stated, Canada's ability to influence other states depends increasingly on factors that transcend raw economic or military power and that appeal to public perceptions abroad. This is what scholarly observers in the early 1990s, such as Cooper et al., referred to as Canada's ability to demonstrate intellectual leadership and be a 'good dancer' on the international policy stage.²³ A manifestation of this intellectual leadership was the promotion of Canada's soft power by Lloyd Axworthy when he was Canadian foreign minister.²⁴

On a day-to-day basis and leaving out the need to project hard power during crises such as in Kosovo (or now in Afghanistan) the contemporary foreign policy agenda of a middle power such as Canada runs in large part on soft power, which, in turn, is exercised through the strategic use of the media and public diplomacy to develop constituencies, forge coalitions with like-minded countries, and build alliances with civil society. The Canadian victory over Spain during the 1995 dispute about allegations (subsequently proven) that a Spanish trawler, the *Estai*, was overfishing in Canadian waters was driven by public diplomacy, as were the negotiations, known as the Ottawa Process, leading to the landmine treaty (Ottawa Convention). The Ottawa Process on landmines provides a compelling case study of how governments have had to ally themselves with a diverse group of non-governmental actors to achieve a landmark treaty. Country-specific initiatives such the Canadian Consulate General's innovative "Upper West Side Campaign" in New York City, which aimed to create the convergence of persuasive advocacy activities with investment and trade objectives in one of the world's toughest

²² I am indebted to Colin Robertson and Daryl Copeland who have both contributed substantially to this section on branding. After so many discussions, e-mails, conversations, briefing notes, PowerPoint presentation, I cannot claim ownership to any of the ideas.

²³ See Andrew F. Cooper, Richard Higgott, and Kim R. Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993).

²⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Statements and Speeches, "Notes for an Address by the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy Minister of Foreign Affairs to the National Forum", January 22, 1999, 99/4; and Joseph S. Nye, Jr, "The Challenge of Soft Power," *Time*, February 22, 1999: 30.

markets, and the Canadian embassy's "Think Canada" campaign in Japan, both serve to illustrate the point about the growing importance of public diplomacy.

Canada's success in promoting a human security agenda during these years, that is, a focus on the safety of people that included protection of human rights, good governance, economic rights and environmental sustainability, was almost completely an exercise in soft power and thus in public diplomacy since it depended on how convincingly Ottawa advocated its positions to the citizens and leaders of other countries. On the trade side, having over 40 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product dependent on exports, meant that Canada's international reputation and image were fundamental to Canadians' well-being.

The strategic use of both traditional and new public diplomacy tools – international broadcasting, cultural and international education programs, and new media – together were a 'force multiplier' for Canadian foreign policy. The examples of these high profile Canadian foreign policy initiatives of the mid- to late-1990s showed that public diplomacy was destined to become more and more central to the success of Canadian diplomacy. Canada's strategic use of its public diplomacy assets did enable it to act as a knowledge broker, to influence others, and to ensure that its political and economic objectives would be taken seriously.

So, was there really a problem? Despite the success, it was nonetheless apparent that there was a large gap between how Canadians viewed themselves and how others perceived them. In the eyes of the world, Canada remained largely what it was a century ago, namely, a resource economy, and, according to a review of Canada's international brand undertaken in 2000, contemporary elements – dynamism, innovation, technology, tolerance, competitiveness and multiculturalism – were conspicuously absent.²⁵ As a result, there was a sense that Canada was being routinely passed over when foreign governments and businesses were contemplating direct investments or partnerships. The evidence was clear: Canada's share of world investment had dropped precipitously from 9 to 4 per cent over the course of the 1990s. An international poll conducted in 1997 by the Angus Reid research organization found that fewer than 1 per cent of Germans and Japanese associate Canada with telecommunications or other technologically-based products. More than 50 per cent associated Canada with lumber, pulp and

²⁵ In response to the outdated foreign images of Canada, Daryl Copeland, then in DFAIT's Communications Bureau, developed a proposal for an international communications framework that sought to begin the process of re-positioning Canada's 'brand' abroad. The proposal advocated an overarching message or mantra – 'Canada. Cool. Connected' – that could be adapted for all regions.

paper, and food.²⁶ More generally, according to Daryl Copeland, who in 2000 was almost single-handedly spearheading an internal drive in DFAIT to re-think the projection of Canada's image abroad, "there was a sense that Canada was coasting on an international reputation – liberal internationalism, honest brokerage, environmental activism, generous aid giving – that was increasingly difficult to sustain and that the growing gaps between reputation, rhetoric and reality would become an unbridgeable chasm."²⁷ In short, Canada had an image problem, with "image" being defined as one part presence and one part promotion.²⁸ A world characterized by 'connectivity' thus presented multiple avenues through which to gradually provide foreign audiences with a more balanced and accurate view of Canada through both increased presence and promotion.

Canada found itself with this image problem for a number of reasons. First, although Canada has one of the most advanced communications systems of any foreign ministry, much of the investment had been in software and hardware to serve the needs of government employees and the web-based content on the main DFAIT Internet site was designed primarily for a domestic Canadian audience. It is instructive, for example, that by 2000 DFAIT had spent in excess of (CDN)\$100 million on informatics, twice what it had 5 years before. This was 7.4% of the total budget in the fiscal year of 1999-2000 which was more than the 6.9% spent on personnel. It is true that in the mid-1990s DFAIT was a leader among foreign ministries in the introduction of web sites. However, this was largely a reflection of individuals who 'saw the light' within the department, taking it upon themselves to develop innovative sites. There was much creative energy, little coordination and, not surprisingly, very little consistency in the 'looks' of individual embassy sites. Canada's lead did not last. The lack of an authoritative presence on the Internet created a vacuum that other countries and even a Canadian province had no trouble filling. The consequences were rather startling: with the exception of Canadian embassy web sites in Latin America and Spain and Radio Canada International's Spanish-language broadcasts, in the late 1990s the major source of information produced by Canadian governments in Spanish was

²⁶ Angus Reid Group, *Canada and the World, 1997*. The Angus-Reid group is now known as Ipsos-Reid, a global public opinion research firm. The survey sample consisted of 5,700 adults in 20 countries.

²⁷ Daryl Copeland, personal communication.

²⁸ I am indebted to Gaston Barban, a DFAIT official, for this observation.

provided by the provincial government of Quebec. It was only with the push, starting in 1999, to provide all federal government services on-line, with a target date of 2004, that serious attention began to be paid to creating a 'common look and feel' among the many embassy sites and how Canada could project itself to non-Canadian audiences through a single Government of Canada site.

Second, despite the fact that Canada is the world's second largest producer of children's television programming, a leading producer of computer software, and has among the highest per capita producers and users of information on the Internet (especially in the French language), such activity remains largely invisible to the rest of the world. This is because Canadian television programming is often absorbed into local broadcasters, or, increasingly, into the program schedule of US-based specialty channels. With the partial exception of TV-5, which broadcasts only in French, most Canadian programs are, in fact, deliberately not branded as Canadian.

Indeed, it could be said that Canada is invisible for all intents and purposes in government-financed international broadcasting. The outlay on Canada's international broadcasting is modest to say the least. The \$15.52 million (1999-2000) annual federal appropriation for RCI and the contributions by the federal and Quebec governments of \$9.1 million and \$5.2 million respectively to TV-5 are but small fractions of what is being spent by the first tier of international broadcasters (mostly Canada's G-7 counterparts). For example, the U.S. spends in excess of \$400 million on its extensive network of international radio and television broadcasting organizations. It has been reported that Radio France International spends about \$200 million on radio only and *Deutsche Welle* has had a budget in excess of \$500 million. The federal government's investment is also small when compared to medium-sized players such as Radio Netherlands or even Vatican Radio.²⁹

The third factor is that globalization has driven other levels of government (provincial and municipal and regional) as well as other federal departments and agencies previously considered domestic to launch or develop further their international relationships. On the federal front, with instant electronic access to counterparts abroad and combined funding for foreign operations that equals 60% of DFAIT's operational budget, other federal government departments must now be managed as major components of Canada's overall capacity for international influence. For instance, the Canadian Tourism Commission (an agency of the

²⁹ See Potter, op. cit.

federal Industry Canada department) promotes Canada as a pristine and clean vacation destination, a promotion that is sometimes at odds with federal trade commissioners in the field who are trying to project an image of Canada as a sophisticated, high-technology market.

Generally, the relations between the federal and provincial governments abroad are cooperative. Given the growing levels of interdependence, both levels of government must increasingly work together in trade negotiations and on trade promotion. DFAIT has negotiated co-location agreements with a number of provinces to place provincial trade officers within specific Canadian embassies. The Team Canada trade missions around the world are a manifestation of this attempt to mine the synergies of federal and provincial activities abroad and to promote a single, unified image of Canada. By all accounts, such an approach is working.

Of course, some provincial governments, notably British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, have their own specific international activities and these include trade offices abroad (with Quebec being most active), immigration offices (only Quebec) and trade missions. Where some confusion can occur among foreign audiences is if the provinces engage in high-visibility events abroad that project only a partial image of Canada's identity.

In light of what can only be considered a chronic under-funding of its public diplomacy instruments, it is worthwhile looking more closely at a particular case study of Canadian public diplomacy in action. Such a case study brings in to stark relief both the untapped opportunities to re-position Canada in global mind spaces and also highlights some of the constraints.

'Think Canada' in Japan

Japan is Canada's principal ally in Asia, second-largest trade partner after the United States, and an important G8 partner. As it positions itself to play a larger role in regional and international affairs commensurate with its economic status, it has been in Canada's interests to look for more ways to engage Japan in Canada's foreign policy priorities. At the same time, there has been an acknowledgement in both Canada and Japan that for a number of reasons, including the domestic stagnation of the Japanese economy through the 1990s, the bilateral trade and investment relationship has not been reaching its potential and the export mix from Canada does not reflect the sophistication of the Canadian market.

In response to these conditions, starting in 1998 the Canadian embassy in Japan began an extensive program of research and consultation to explore the reasons for the state of bilateral economic relations. A number of striking findings emerged from an embassy-commissioned survey of several hundred Japanese opinion leaders.³⁰ According to the survey, the single most important determinant for Japanese interest in another country was its culture. Canadian officials were also surprised at the high-level of knowledge of some aspects of Canadian history and society, including Japanese awareness of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. When asked to identify a country that would fulfil the image of being progressive, innovative, modern and attractive, it was noted that the Japanese respondents invariably picked the United States and not Canada. The respondents generally viewed Canada in terms of natural resources and a lack of sophistication, which was at odds with the Japanese cultural norm of doing business with countries that they deemed to be culturally diverse in business and industry. Canadian officials applied the findings from the survey to the development of a more focussed strategy for an incoming Team Canada trade mission in 1999. The programs prepared by the embassy for this mission, whether cultural activities or banquets, all emphasized Canada as a high-technology exporter. The Japanese media picked up the message. With few extra resources to devote to a more comprehensive branding exercise, sponsorship from major Canadian and Japanese corporations became a key source of support and exceeded all expectations.

It was on the heels of the Team Canada mission that the Canadian embassy in Japan launched the 'Think Canada 2001' festival from March to July 2001. It was the largest ever Canadian festival to be held in Japan, featuring a program of approximately 200 events that took place throughout the country. The activities were diverse: arts and culture, business, science and technology, politics and society, education, and food and living. The thrust was to re-brand Canada as a diverse, sophisticated, technologically advanced society.

Canada's multifaceted approach did raise the awareness of Canada in Japan with a very significant increase in print and broadcast media coverage. An 'open house' at the Canadian embassy alone had thousands of people attending over the course of a weekend, something that was unprecedented. It was noted

³⁰ The details of the 'Think Canada' campaign were outlined to me in an interview with a mid-level Canadian official who worked at the Canadian embassy in Tokyo during the initial phases of what would eventually become a formal campaign. The in person interview was conducted in Ottawa at DFAIT on March 22, 2002.

by Canadian officials that by pursuing a more integrated public diplomacy strategy rather than the traditionally more an ad hoc approach, Japanese audiences received a more three-dimensional image of Canada. For all its success, the “Think Canada” approach was not inexpensive. It drew significantly on the Canadian Embassy’s resources and is a reminder that public diplomacy requires investment and commitment.

Conclusion

There is an old Cornish proverb that says, “the tongueless man gets his land took”. The absence of a vibrant, sustained and coordinated presence abroad through culture and education stating, “This is Canada,” could prompt a disturbing question, “What is Canada?”³¹

A small, open economy such as Canada’s is vulnerable by definition, meaning that it lives and dies by its reputation. Despite its acknowledged problem in updating its image, there is a tremendous amount of goodwill directed towards Canada in the hearts and minds of citizens around the world. For this reason, there is an urgent need to create a vibrant public diplomacy, using all the communications and technological tools at Ottawa’s disposal, to defend both Canada’s sovereignty and to promote its values and economic development. A coordinated public diplomacy strategy, one that emphasizes the importance of international broadcasting, can play a pivotal role in projecting an informed, sophisticated image of Canadian views and concerns in a knowledge-based environment.

A number of observations arise from this initial examination of Canada’s approach to public diplomacy. First, it is often said that public diplomacy is the soft side of diplomacy, a servant to the ‘real’ diplomacy of state-to-state negotiations. This is false. Prosperity in an increasingly competitive global knowledge-based world requires that people have the outlook and skills that can only be gained from exposure to and understanding of other values, cultures, experience, languages, and ways of life. Canada needs to adopt a more strategic and coherent approach to its public diplomacy. It must anticipate controversial issues, develop clear policies that are in line with its interests, and promote these to

³¹ The Cornish proverb is cited in Franklyn Griffiths, “Canada as a Sovereign State,” *Canadian Foreign Policy* (Spring 1994), Vol. 2.

the relevant segments of its foreign audiences. It needs strategies that are proactive, use a combination of traditional and new public affairs tools/techniques, which are implemented by staff with the appropriate training, and that are consistent with a federal government-wide strategy to promoting Canada's image abroad.

Second, we must ask what is so new about this idea? Most fundamentally, it is that issues of global concern require broad-based public consent. The processes pursued to achieve this consent are often as important as the final outcomes. If governments do not first prepare the publics of the states they wish to target, it will become that much more difficult to sway the governments of these states. And, if there is initial resistance from the targeted government, it will be through public diplomacy that new alliances will be shaped with local groups to attempt to change policy. Put simply, in an age of instantaneous information, power is becoming distributed more evenly.

Third, the electronic media are a primary means of conveying a national presence. There should be re-examination of Canada's under-developed and under-funded international broadcasting capacity. In addition, there should be greater coordination between what capacity exists at RCI, for example, and the particular policy objectives of country-specific public diplomacy strategies. The convergence of radio, television and the Internet may make this easier to achieve.

Fourth, content-driven 'connectivity' whether in traditional forms of public diplomacy or on new dedicated web sites is key for credibility. This will enable governments to build electronic communities around their national foreign policy interests. Finally, it is worth remembering that the key is to see public diplomacy in its whole:

A well informed, engaged civil society strengthens the will and ability to achieve foreign policy objectives; an active and vibrant projection of cultural expression can underpin and support an active foreign policy; and a network of academic and scholarly linkages can help build a network of comprehension and knowledge to build alliances of the like-minded in Canada and abroad. This is the essence of soft power ...³²

³² Stephens, op. cit., 8.