
5 RECONFIGURING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: FROM COMPETITION TO COLLABORATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Diplomacy has continually adapted to change in the international system, in states and in societies. A growing concern with public diplomacy has to be seen in this context. For decades, foreign ministries and other government agencies have focused on projecting national images for a variety of purposes. The growing integration of economies and societies has enhanced the perceived need to project national brands in a competitive global environment. But alongside this, another perspective on public diplomacy is emerging, which views it in terms of a different way of conducting international policy. This recognises both the need to operate within more complex domestic and international networks and, at the same time, the challenges this environment poses. Working with a more diverse set of stakeholders raises questions about the structures and processes of national diplomatic systems and their policy capacity. More fundamentally, it touches on the principles and norms underpinning a world order in flux.

Current preoccupations with public diplomacy are not hard to understand. Events following the wave of terrorist attacks that began in September 2001 have focused attention on the centrality of identities and values in world politics and, consequently, on the significance of images and ideas. Add to this the impact of globalisation and regionalisation, the proliferation of actors seeking a voice on the world stage, and the dramatic changes in communications and information technology underpinning these developments, and it is clear that the business of diplomacy is far more complex than it was even a quarter of a century ago.

As is the case with so much in a rapidly transforming environment, the implications of observable change are not always easy to interpret. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify two interlinked but distinct images of diplomacy emerging within the discourse of public diplomacy. One of these flows from a traditional conception of diplomacy as a predominantly hierarchical and intergovernmental process. The other sees public diplomacy

as one facet of an environment in which international policy is increasingly conducted through complex policy networks. In the latter image, publics are partners in and ‘producers’ of diplomatic processes. Although the two images coexist, the second is gaining more and more attention. What implications flow from this situation for those who have to operate within the labyrinth of relationships spanning domestic and international policy arenas?

Public diplomacy scenarios: hierarchies and networks

The hierarchical image of public diplomacy presents it predominantly in terms of top-down information flows, using techniques founded on theories of strategic political communication.¹ Much of the public diplomacy debate – particularly in the United States – rests on state-centred models in which people are seen as targets and instruments of foreign policy. The dominant question is how to target them more effectively. The answer usually involves allocating more resources to public diplomacy programmes, adopting a better-coordinated or ‘holistic’ approach, and responding more rapidly and more flexibly to crisis situations.²

The network model of public diplomacy rests on a fundamentally different picture of how diplomacy works in the twenty-first century. It recognises the importance of policy networks in managing increasingly complex policy environments through the promotion of communication, dialogue and trust. Globalisation – despite some views to the contrary – has not rendered national governments irrelevant, but it has highlighted their deficiencies in terms of knowledge, flexibility and speed in responding to global problems, and often the limits of their legitimacy in the eyes of those for whom they claim to act. The more diverse membership and non-hierarchical quality of public policy networks promote collaboration and learning, and speed up the acquisition and processing of knowledge.³ In contrast to the assumption (inherent in the hierarchical model) that government controls international policy, the emphasis here is on bringing together government agencies and non-governmental stakeholders. In short, public diplomacy becomes more

than a component in the power inventory and suggests a different way of conceptualising the framing and implementation of international policy – and thus of conducting diplomacy in general.

Competition and collaboration

A first step in this process of reconceptualisation is to understand the fundamental characteristics of public diplomacy as a modality of power. As other chapters in this book demonstrate, public diplomacy is widely equated with the concept of ‘soft’ power. However, the picture is more complex, since ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power are often difficult to differentiate and, in practice, need to be integrated. Hence the growing emphasis in the US on ‘smart’ power, which seeks to combine the two.⁴

Alongside these conceptual debates runs the need to differentiate forms of public diplomacy and the objectives they are intended to achieve. Governments have at their disposal two fundamental diplomatic strategies: bilateral and multilateral modes of action and influence. The latter have become increasingly important and complex, but the former remain significant, and in many contexts the two are intertwined. Consequently, some dimensions of public diplomacy will be competitive, in the sense that they are primarily intended to serve national interests and are pursued in predominantly bilateral contexts. The obvious examples are the quest for foreign investment, and the promotion of trade and international tourism, associated with public diplomacy and defined as ‘branding and reputation management’.

The network image offers a different slant on public diplomacy, one in which competition is complemented by collaborative strategies. These are exemplified in **multiparty** or **multistakeholder** forms of interaction, which are familiar features of multilateral institutions, not least the United Nations.⁵ At the national level, the Canadian and Norwegian experiences with the Ottawa Process relating to landmines offer a frequently cited

example of collaborative public diplomacy spanning the domestic and international policy arenas and the public and private spheres. The Kimberley Process provides another example. In this case a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Global Witness, acted as a catalyst in a process involving national diplomats, the European Commission, journalists and the global diamond firm De Beers, all of which contributed to the establishment of a regime to control the sale of 'conflict' diamonds. In the very different context of internet governance, negotiators at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), meeting in Geneva in 2003, found it necessary, given the complexity of the issues, to establish the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) under the aegis of the UN. According to one participant this was the most significant event in the WSIS process, as it moved the centre of gravity away from government negotiators and into a multistakeholder environment: 'It meant that representatives from government were sitting around the same table as industry and civil society to discuss the issues that had caused so much controversy in the run-up to the Geneva negotiations.'⁶

The key differences between these examples and narrower forms of traditional intergovernmental diplomacy lie in patterns of participation and communication. In the network image, the focus is on the identification of policy objectives in specific areas and of 'stakeholders' who possess interests and expertise related to them. These stakeholders are viewed less as targets or **consumers** of government-generated messages than as possible partners and **producers** of diplomatic outcomes. Hierarchical communication flows are replaced by multidirectional flows that are not directly aimed at policy elites, although the ultimate goal will often be to influence elite attitudes and policy choices. This model is more in tune with the demands of the global governance agenda, in which national governments remain key but not the sole players. It poses challenges for governments and their diplomatic systems at several levels – from bureaucratic structures and working practices down to the most fundamental assumptions regarding the operation of a diplomatic system driven by the principles of national sovereignty.

Structures

At the level of bureaucratic structures, we enter familiar territory. How best can governments organise themselves to operate in rapidly changing policy environments, where distinctions between international and domestic agendas have become weaker? Viewing 'public diplomacy' as a different style of diplomacy, rather than as a set of activities intended to reinforce traditional models, sharpens these debates. This perspective highlights a point that has long been obvious: the conduct of international policy is not the preserve of foreign ministries. Global policy networks are shadowed by increasingly complex national policy networks made up of a growing range of departments with international interests and links to civil society groups and the business community.

At the bureaucratic level, then, the conduct of international policy is now commonly seen as a 'whole of government' activity. But this raises the problem of coherence and coordination. Who, if anyone, takes the lead?⁷ Not surprisingly, foreign ministries may claim this role; but they are confronting simultaneously growing demands and shrinking resources. Moreover, by the nature of their work they are not naturally linked to domestic constituencies. A common strategy is to strengthen central coordinating agencies, such as prime ministerial and other executive offices. Moving in this direction can lead (as did one analysis of the Norwegian foreign ministry) to the conclusion that the functions of the foreign ministry are best relocated to a central agency, which draws together all the international responsibilities of government departments. But there is no obvious reason why this model should provide a better structure for meeting the demands of operating in a diplomatic environment comprising a complex mix of public and private actors.

Furthermore, overcentralisation brings its own problems. Where coordination demands that public diplomacy strategies be 'on message', it may stifle adequate exploration of policy options and strategies in the

domestic environment and create a perception in foreign audiences that this commitment to policy dialogue is lacking. In both environments, the notion of ‘partnership’ conveys the aims of a mode of public diplomacy that is not top-down, is not hierarchical, and is more consistent with the objectives set out above. In one sense, this requires the deployment of traditional diplomatic advocacy skills within the domestic as much as the international arena, with the aim of developing and maintaining stakeholder relationships. Fundamentally, this is a reformulation of an old problem: how to integrate the demand for specialist skills with the generalist skills associated with the profession of diplomacy. The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has identified one answer in the establishment within the foreign ministry of ‘docking points’ – that is, staff who combine generalist skills with sufficient specialist knowledge to engage with other government departments and non-governmental actors and networks.⁸

Policy capacity

Underpinning these structural issues are more profound problems concerning the capacity of governments to respond to the demands posed by the increasing integration of economies and societies. As the recent ‘capability reviews’ of UK government departments illustrate, there is a strong sense that governments are not sufficiently flexible, adaptable or equipped with the necessary expertise to meet the challenges posed by rapidly changing policy environments.⁹

This is a huge issue, but there are several obvious points that can be made. Probably the most important is the need to integrate multistakeholder strategies into the policy cycle at an early stage. This was one of the key themes of the 2005 Carter Review of UK public diplomacy, and the Public Diplomacy Board established after the review has stressed the importance of associating public diplomacy with the delivery of governmental goals.¹⁰ Similarly, in the United States this has been a consistent theme of numerous reports, and significant changes have occurred. The Under Secretary for

Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs now sits in the Secretary of State's policy decision meetings and meets weekly with senior members of operating bureaux.

Another way of enhancing policy capacity is to reinforce the research strengths of national diplomatic systems. This cuts across all departments with significant international responsibilities, but impinges particularly on foreign ministries, which, though often seen as the logical repositories of the skills needed in integrating domestic and international perspectives on policy, frequently fail to perform this critical function. In part this reflects the dominance of day-to-day operational demands. Some foreign ministries have strong centralised research units (these include the US State Department and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which has recently re-established its policy planning staff), while some (for example those of Norway and Germany) outsource much of their policy research to external think-tanks. Others, such as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, have no policy planning unit, relying instead on desk officers meeting the demand for research as and when it is needed. Arguments can be advanced in support of each model; but, however research is commissioned and undertaken, the demands of multistakeholder diplomacy place added importance on the capacity to identify policy objectives and the strategies through which they can be achieved.

Other resources outside national settings can be tapped. Collaborative public diplomacy involves working with others, and experience in operating in multistakeholder environments is much more developed in international organisations. The UN, the World Trade Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are well aware that dialogue-based diplomacy is demanding and requires not only clarity of objectives but also an awareness of which interlocutors are relevant and how relations with them can be developed and managed. One way that national diplomatic systems can strengthen their capacity in this area is to draw on this experience through exchanging ideas for best practice with practitioners in multilateral institutions.

Working with stakeholders

Diplomats have long been accustomed to interacting with a range of constituencies. However, the logic of the stakeholder model requires not only that this engagement intensifies, but also that fundamental elements of diplomatic structures and processes are rethought. Developing dialogues with other stakeholders is challenging, particularly where this involves the meeting of very different cultures – at home as well as overseas. Identifying stakeholders, and their interests and needs in international policy, is an obvious first step. In the UK, two ‘stakeholder surveys’ have been conducted by the FCO, and these reveal interesting perspectives on what different groups expect from a foreign ministry. Two of the key themes that emerge from the surveys are the need to form better networks with stakeholders both at home and abroad; and – more fundamentally – the need to recognise that they can be partners in diplomatic processes.¹¹ In 2006 the FCO appointed a former senior Oxfam official as ‘strategic stakeholder manager’, charged with developing a set of structures and strategies for engagement with NGOs and other stakeholders.

There are many opportunities for building bridges through institutionalising consultative processes, as exemplified in trade policy consultations. Many countries have developed advisory groups that embrace business and NGO membership, and the EU has for several years operated a Trade–Civil Society Dialogue attended by officials from the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Trade and representatives of civil society groups and business. In the past, Sweden has had an ambassador tasked with the role of communicating with NGOs, and former NGO officials are commonly appointed to specific functional areas in foreign ministries. Although the practice is not as widespread as many NGOs would like, there has also been a trend towards including relevant stakeholders in delegations to international organisations where their expertise is recognised. Thus at least two delegations to the WSIS/WGIG negotiations (the Canadian and Swiss) included NGO representatives. A further feature of the stakeholder

diplomatic environment lies in the transnationalisation of patterns of communication. It is now far harder to insulate ‘publics’ in separate international and domestic environments, with the result that communications with organisations overseas leak back into the domestic environment. This suggests that the distinction maintained in some countries – such as the United States – between ‘public affairs’ directed to domestic constituencies and ‘public diplomacy’ directed to foreign audiences is no longer helpful or sustainable.

Tasking the diplomatic network

The developments we have been examining have obvious implications in redefining the role and responsibilities of the diplomatic network. A ‘whole of government’ perspective on international policy emphasises the fact that these networks are the representatives not of foreign ministries but of an increasing number of ‘domestic’ departments. In many diplomatic missions there may be very few professional diplomats. The restructuring of networks is a common preoccupation of governments as they respond to global and regional changes – hence the arguments advanced for US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s ‘transformational diplomacy’ initiative. Today’s posts are more flexible and adaptable than anything associated with the traditional image of the embassy.¹²

Alongside governmental and resource-driven change, the logic of a stakeholder image of public diplomacy has an impact on the role of posts – in both multilateral and bilateral contexts. This reaches beyond enhancing the public diplomacy capacity of posts, by designating responsibility for programmes to a person or unit. Not only is tasking the network a more diffuse process than it once was in purely governmental terms (and some governments have found it necessary to stress to government departments the overall coordinating role of the head of mission), but also the demands of working with stakeholders in the field add another dimension. This works in several ways. At one level, domestic stakeholders now hold increasing

expectations of what the network can deliver – particularly in crisis situations such as in the wake of the South-East Asian tsunami of December 2004 or the Lebanon crisis of 2006. Beyond this, the 2006 FCO stakeholder survey indicates that UK stakeholders have definite views about the network and the functions it performs, and in particular expect to be consulted about significant resourcing decisions.

If domestic stakeholders have expectations regarding the role of the diplomatic network, this is equally true of foreign stakeholders. Obviously, a multistakeholder perspective on public diplomacy places a premium on developing working relationships with, for example, overseas NGOs. But this poses questions about the status of those who want to develop a relationship with a post and, in particular, about their relationship with the host government. One response, suggested by a seasoned Canadian observer of interactions between diplomats and NGOs in the field, is for diplomats to develop a ‘checklist’ of questions intended to establish the legitimacy and capacity of an NGO and the capacity of the post to respond to overtures from it. This recognises the complexity of civil society and its relations with foreign governments, and also the need to relate stakeholder strategies to policy objectives set by the home government. A traditional diplomatic function, to be sure; but the interlocutors are different, and determining their status and credentials demands much more research.¹³ To a degree, this can be facilitated by the trend towards greater use of locally engaged staff in overseas posts.

Rules and norms

A major issue confronting the multistakeholder model of diplomacy lies in the rules and norms of behaviour that underpin it. The diplomatic system remains one founded ultimately on principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, however much these have become modified in practice. Non-state actors, such as NGOs, work to different norms, often rooted in the rejection of these principles. Developing working relationships in

the context of multistakeholder relations therefore implies adaptation by governments and their agents, as well as by the range of stakeholders with whom they interact.

One example of how this works in practice can be seen in the WSIS/WGIG negotiations referred to on page 66. These produced the Geneva Declaration of Principles, which provided a road map for the emerging multistakeholder process. While the declaration affirmed the intergovernmental status of internet-related public policy issues, representatives of business and civil society – originally treated as peripheral observers – were acknowledged as having an important role in the negotiations. In short, this was a diplomatic learning process; moreover, it was regarded by many of those who took part as the most significant legacy of WSIS.

What this suggests is the need to develop ‘rules of engagement’ between the agents of government and non-governmental actors that reconcile the norms and patterns of behaviour associated with traditional diplomatic processes with the emerging principles associated with multistakeholder modes of interaction. One locus of tension between the two approaches lies where the traditional preoccupation of foreign ministries with secrecy meets the requirements of openness and transparency on which public diplomacy strategies rest. While diplomatic confidentiality remains important in some contexts, in others it (and the mindset that goes with it) is not only less relevant but it is also counterproductive. Frequently, the real challenge lies in managing ‘openness’ constructively. One significant and necessary change in this respect made by the US Foreign Service was the issuing in 2006 of new guidelines, enabling staff in overseas posts to operate, and speak, more freely without waiting for guidance from Washington.

Twenty-first-century diplomacy is being conducted in an environment where national and international knowledge networks are proliferating. A central challenge for national governments, international organisations and NGOs alike is knowing how to connect to them, build alliances and utilise these

networks to exercise effective advocacy in support of policy objectives. This requires recognition of the evolving nature of public diplomacy. Once an extension of the pursuit of national interests through a range of techniques intended to direct messages towards target audiences, it now increasingly emphasises the establishment of interactive dialogues and collaborative relationships with other institutions and groups in both private and public sectors. In one sense this is a reworking of traditional diplomacy, in that its ultimate objective may well be to influence the policy choices of other governments. But it poses questions concerning the principles on which the diplomatic system operates, the policy capacity of governments and the role of the professional diplomat. This has to be redefined as that of mediator, facilitator and important node in the complex networks constituting contemporary world politics. It is very different from the mindset, still not unfamiliar in foreign ministries, which sees the diplomat's role as that of gatekeeper, jealously guarding the interface between domestic and international policy arenas.

Notes

- 1 J. Manheim, *Strategic public diplomacy and American foreign policy: the evolution of influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Among the many evaluations of US public diplomacy, see Foreign Affairs Council, *Task force report. Managing Secretary Rice's State Department: an independent assessment* (June 2007).
 - 2 M. Leonard and V. Alakeson, *Going public: diplomacy for the information society* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000), pp. 86–98.
 - 3 W. Reinecke, *Global public policy: governing without government?* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1998); A.-M. Slaughter, *A new world order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
 - 4 Center for Strategic and International Studies, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: a smarter, more secure America* (Washington DC, 2007).
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- 5 These forms of interaction are discussed in two special issues of *International Negotiation*: 8: 1, 2003, on 'Multilateral negotiation and complexity' and 8: 2, 2003, on 'Multiparty negotiation and the management of complexity'.
 - 6 Observations made by a representative of the former UK Department of Trade and Industry. On the negotiations, see P. Dumitriu, 'The World Summit on the Information Society: from Geneva (2003) to Tunis (2005). A diplomatic perspective', in J. Kurbalija and V. Katrandjiev, eds, *Multistakeholder diplomacy: challenges and opportunities* (Geneva: DiploFoundation, 2006).
 - 7 B. Hocking, ed., *Foreign ministries: change and adaptation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); B. Hocking and D. Spence, eds, *Foreign ministries in the European Union: integrating diplomats*, rev. edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
 - 8 'Six imperatives for change', statement by Peter Harder, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, 18 March 2005.
 - 9 Cabinet Office Capability Reviews Team, *Capability review of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, March 2007.
 - 10 Lord Carter of Coles was asked by the Foreign Secretary and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to conduct 'an independent review of Public Diplomacy' and examine the effectiveness of current public diplomacy activities. His *Public diplomacy review* was completed in December 2005.
 - 11 *Stakeholder survey 2006: a report for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office* (London: Indepen and Accent, June 2006).
 - 12 Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The embassy of the future* (Washington DC, 2007).
 - 13 A. Van Rooy, 'A new diplomacy? How ambassadors (should) deal with civil society organisations', in R. Wolfe, ed., *Diplomatic missions: the ambassador on Canadian foreign policy* (Kingston, Ont.: School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, 1998), pp. 155–9.
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