The Dual Nature of Public Diplomacy: Promoting State Visibility While Perpetuating Modern-Day Propaganda - U.S. Public Diplomacy Post-9/11

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Abstract. While public diplomacy is utilized to enhance the visibility of democratic societies and cultivate a positive national image abroad, the extent to which governments rely on one-sided messaging to effect foreign public opinion -in many cases- is more likely to cause resistance than attraction. With soft power as its driving engine, public diplomacy is far from being coercive in nature and is entirely devoid of coercive manners to bypass the foreign public for national interest purposes. In fact, the foreign public is not a controllable target in this equation with the freedom to accept or reject -partially or wholly- public diplomacy efforts. The one-sided public diplomacy strategies of the United States as it calls upon universal respect for human rights and democracy while simultaneously waging wars in the global south, diminished its soft power base, thus making it counterproductive. In this regard, the lack of mutuality having been perceived as forcefully pushing for its own agenda is performed in complete disregard of the foreign public it aims to engage. In such cases, public diplomacy rhetoric can be tainted by the negative impressions serving as beautified modern-day propaganda and manipulation. The application of effective state-crafted public diplomacy strategies to restore its reputation and paint a favorable image requires redressing the soft-power mechanism, which lies at the core of public diplomacy and using attraction more wisely in a non-coercive or one-sided manner.

1. INTRODUCTION: DIPLOMACY REDEFINED: FROM CLASSIC TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Consonant with the rise and fall of nation-states, the emergence of international organizations, and the codification of international law, the nature of diplomatic machinery has departed from its traditional government-to-government framework to encompass a government-foreign people interaction (Roberts 60). With this development, the diplomatic landscape was no longer confined to issues affiliated with war and peace. In fact, it was influenced by the evolving geopolitical dynamics to manage social, cultural, and economic matters between nations. Accordingly, the diplomatic discourse was further conceptualized transcending classic state-centric diplomacy to include non-state actors. As transnational relations between non-state actors developed, this marked the rise of public diplomacy (PD) and multi-track diplomatic practices. The evolving nature of the diplomatic discourse is premised on the exercise of soft power contingent upon 'cooperation over coercion,' contrary to hard power, which relies mainly on military and coercion. Soft power, which lies at the core of public diplomacy efforts, operates through "attraction and persuasion" employed to shape narratives and project a positive image to achieve foreign policy objectives (Roberts 60).

While the notion of public diplomacy first entered the political lexicon by the end of the Cold War, it was first conceptualized by Edmund Gullion in 1965 as means to, "shape public attitudes on the formation of foreign policies" (Cull, *Public Diplomacy before Gullion*). Accordingly, public diplomacy efforts are contingent upon influencing local and global public perceptions to enhance national interests without resorting to force or coercion, thus representing a mere ideological battle to win the hearts and minds of the foreign public. During the Cold War, key western players were convinced that image cultivation and information control through public diplomacy efforts had a new relevance in international relations. It became evident that information dissemination employing persuasive efforts was an effective tool to counter the domestic one-sided messaging propagated by governments towards each other (Gilboa, *Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy* 61). In this regard, the U.S. public diplomacy efforts conducted by The U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and international broadcasting entities including Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty throughout the Cold War, were instrumental in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Trajkov and Trajkov 73). However, as U.S. public diplomacy efforts grew to become more one-sided, exemplifying a beautified version of modern-day propaganda while bypassing the foreign public it sought to engage, it led to the dramatic decline of its policies in the post-Cold War era. As the U.S. called upon democratization and universal human rights, it simultaneously promoted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the institutionalized 'war on terror' foreign policy, which diminished its soft power base, thus making its public diplomacy efforts counterproductive. In this regard, the U.S. government utilized coercion and psychological warfare to enhance its foreign policy interests under the guise of public diplomacy efforts, therefore constituting a euphemism of modern-day propaganda.

This study provides a critical lens to the current developments within government-sponsored public diplomacy initiatives drawing a clear distinction between efforts to promote state visibility in international relations and efforts taking on the propaganda-coercive path. In this regard, the significance of this study lies in its thorough examination of the dual nature of public diplomacy, presenting its 'paradoxical r/evolutionary approaches' as means for promoting state visibility while simultaneously shaping international perceptions to serve national interests, thus abusing the soft power principle. Furthermore, this study traces the reinvigoration of U.S. public diplomacy initiatives post-9/11 by providing a frame of reference for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, presenting public diplomacy efforts as a euphemism for propaganda.

The first section of this study draws upon insights from history and scholarship referencing the reconfigurations of power structures within the dual nature of public diplomacy. The second section of this study provides a rigorous conceptual framework into the three fundamental concepts that lie at the core of public diplomacy rhetoric, the government, the media, and public opinion while tracing the impact of the three public diplomacy variants, the *Basic Cold War* variant, the *Non-State Transnational* variant,

and the *Domestic PR* variant. The third section of this study examines the reinvigoration of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the post-9/11 environment with reference to the U.S. war on terror. This section provides a case study into U.S. public diplomacy efforts designed to justify its violation of the just war criterion in its invasion of Iraq in 2003. This study then presents the landscape of new public diplomacy premised on the operationalization of actor-people diplomacy utilizing a media-centered approach.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this study incorporates analytical and descriptive approaches to dissect the dual nature of public diplomacy in promoting state visibility and modern-day propaganda. The analytical methodology establishes the contemporary manifestations of public diplomacy with one-sided messaging serving as a distinctive product of modern-day propaganda. By employing a descriptive methodology, this study presents an evidence-based case study on U.S. public diplomacy rhetoric framed to influence foreign audiences with propaganda at the core of its campaigns.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE DUAL DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Beyond the confines of traditional diplomacy, the public diplomacy landscape reflects the need to inform, influence, and engage domestic and foreign audiences in support of foreign policy objectives that feed into national interests. Conversely, such efforts might project propagandistic connotations particularly in the event of one-sided messaging. The related scholarly work examines the progression of public diplomacy as means to implement foreign policy objectives, and the impact of globalization on its practicalities.

In the pre-digital era, the emergence and use of the concept of public diplomacy is attributed to Edmund Guillion in 1965 addressing it as the "influence of public attitudes on foreign policies" (Cull). Similarly, in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Paul Sharp regards public diplomacy as 'establishing direct relations with the foreign public to advance the interests of those being represented' (Sharp 83). These definitions, particularly the latter, are derivative from the post-Cold War public diplomacy discourse characterized by government-led efforts. In *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,* Joseph Nye presents soft power as the core of every intercourse within the public diplomacy landscape. He argues that diplomatic initiatives shall embody attractiveness by enhancing "cultural, ideological, and communicative elements" that shape narratives, thus influencing behavior on the international stage (Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power* 94). He further states that the success of a nation in public diplomacy intercourse often depends on whose narrative is most persuasive (94).

In a broader contextualization of public diplomacy, Nicholas Cull in *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*, terms public diplomacy as 'the attempt of an international actor to manage the international environment' (Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past* 12). The referral to 'actor' in this definition cites the rise of the new public diplomacy paradigm as it extends beyond state centric frameworks to encompass non-state actors and a taxonomy of components represented in, 'listening as the foundation of public diplomacy, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, and international broadcasting' (12). Accordingly, as listening constitutes the foundation of every public diplomacy effort, then the cultural perspective shall occupy the center. In this regard, cultural exchange is a key feature utilized to enhance a country's soft power as it can entice and paint the best features of a state beyond its national boundaries. This notion is further explored by Simon Mark in *Rethinking Public Diplomacy: The cultural diplomacy of New Zealand, the Canadian Federation and Quebec,* as he states that, "enhancing the foreign policy objectives of a state can be supported through sharing the attractive elements of its culture" (Mark 62).

With the rise of digitization driven by information communication technologies, the diplomatic landscape witnessed new configurations of actors and dynamics, generating a need for a mix of communication channels for targeted public communication purposes. Additionally, Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault in *Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy,* revealed the multilayers of public diplomacy involving, "one-way monologue, two-way dialogue, and collaborative public diplomacy" (Cowan and Arsenault 23). The latter being less hierarchical with an increased soft power base calling for partnership over competition as evidenced by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, as Jian Wang points out in *Managing National Reputation and International Relations in the Global Era: Public Diplomacy Revisited*, the one-sided messaging employed by governments in an attempt to influence foreign attitudes tends to demonstrate propaganda-like features reflecting that, "the credibility of foreign governments is often suspected, as government-sponsored communication is now perceived as political propaganda" (Wang 94). In such circumstances, public diplomacy efforts can easily become a euphemism for propaganda, particularly in the event of the narrow use of soft power, thus generating a decrease in attraction. As defined by Vreg France in *Political Communication and Persuasion*, propaganda stands for 'using and abusing the model of persuasive communication to establish bilateral communication and satisfaction of the public interest" (Vreg 116). Furthermore, in his work on *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique*, Leonard Doob provides a definition of 'intentional' propaganda as the "systematic attempt by an actor(s) to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through suggestion and consequently control their actions" (Doob 88). In this regard, legitimization and social control make for propagandistic objectives (88).

Correspondingly, Jan Melissen in *Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy* draws the line of comparison between public diplomacy and modern-day propaganda by setting the pattern of communication used for persuasion as the indicator (Melissen 20). Unlike propaganda, public diplomacy is devoid of coercion, as the foreign audience is not a controllable target. Accordingly, public diplomacy efforts erode connotations of propaganda by communicating in a truthful manner while promoting freedom of opinion and the critical voices of the foreign public that it aims to engage (21). Once public diplomacy initiatives fail to function aligning with the soft-power principles, they affect the goodwill of foreign populations, causing resistance, and therefore inflicting propaganda-like results. In fact, Corneliu Bjola and James Pamment in *Countering Online Propaganda and Extremism: The Dark Side of Digital Diplomacy* view public diplomacy as the "shiny ornament" that conceals darker propaganda intents (Bjola and Pamment). On the contrary, while Joseph Nye in *The New Public Diplomacy* notes that public diplomacy and propaganda are two distinct concepts, he explains that public diplomacy may "degenerate into propaganda, thus losing its soft power base" (Nye, *The New Public Diplomacy* 31). Furthermore, Kathy Fitzpatrick in *The Future of US Public Diplomacy* acknowledges that public diplomacy may have negative connotations as it plays a prominent role during times of war. In fact, Fitzpatrick suggests that only in times of war has public diplomacy bolstered, demonstrating that public diplomacy efforts are born out of necessity (Fitzpatrick 3).

3.1. A Conceptual Framework: The Public Diplomacy Landscape

Historically, the public diplomacy apparatus referred to government-sponsored communication strategies with foreign audiences to shape their opinions, and ultimately their government's foreign policies (Malone 199). While this conceptualization might have been relevant during the Cold War, it has progressed as transnational relations between non-state actors developed leading to a broader definition signaling the efforts of governments and non-state actors to -directly or indirectly- influence public attitudes, which reflects on the target government's foreign policy decisions (Signitzer and Coombs 138).

Public diplomacy emerged during the Cold War as a means to counter the destructive power of nuclear weapons through information-based persuasive campaigns in what came to be a "global ideological and strategic struggle" (Gilboa 59). The public diplomacy model birthed during the Cold War resembles the utilization of antagonistic relationships between states to persuade the foreign public to accept a favorable image of the other state. This process would presumably exert pressure on governments to alter existing hostile attitudes and policies towards the other government. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union utilized their own means of communication represented in international broadcasting channels and radio stations such as the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Liberty, and Free Europe on the American side, and Radio Moscow on the Soviet side to conduct public diplomacy, therefore shaping favorable public attitudes towards their rival ideologies (Rawnsley). Subsequently, the Ronald Reagan administration established Radio and Television Marti to undermine the Castro regime in Cuba, while the Bill Clinton administration established Radio Free Asia to promote the so-called democratization and fortification of human rights in China, and Radio Free Iraq to overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq (Gilboa, *Diplomacy in the Media Age* 5).

The era of globalization and digitization required readdressing the *Basic Cold War* variant giving rise to new public diplomacy variants, the *Non-State Transnational* variant, and the *Domestic PR* variant with five elements to distinguish between them, "actors, initiators, goals, types of media, and techniques" (Gilboa, *Diplomacy in the Media Age* 5). As the diplomatic intercourse progressed to include non-state actors as new players in international affairs, it introduced a new variant in public diplomacy, the *Non-State Transnational* variant. This variant reflects the role of non-state actors operating across national borders to influence sectors of foreign opinions, thus presenting a favorable image to foreign audiences. Accordingly, the campaign pursued by non-state actors in 1989 to bring about democratic principles and human rights standards in China indeed succeeded in exerting pressure on the Chinese government to make the necessary reforms (Wright 157).

The third variant, *Domestic PR* in public diplomacy, refers to governments hiring local PR firms and lobbyists to the target state to serve its agenda in a concealed manner. This variant proved to be more efficient as local firms knew best how to influence public opinion in the target state, thus strengthening the authenticity of the campaigns. This variant was utilized during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991, when the George Bush administration declared the need for sufficient support from the public, the congress, and the media to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. In response, the Kuwaiti monarchs in exile hired the PR firm Hill and Knowlton to garner the support of the American public, Congress, and the media to spark an American-led war (Manheim 387). However, it was later revealed that this firm established a staged popular movement, Citizens for a Free Kuwait, and used unsubstantiated evidence and biased witnesses to shift public opinions and attitudes in the United States, therefore tampering with the decisions made within the United States government and the United Nations, which accounts for propaganda and manipulation conducted under the guise of public diplomacy efforts (Trento 384).

The three public diplomacy variants had a significant impact on governments, media outlets, and the domestic and foreign public opinions. To achieve this outcome, these variants are shaped by the exercise of soft power, arising from the 'attractiveness' of a state's values, culture, and policies, expressed through cooperation over coercion (Nye, *Soft Power*). While hard power uses carrots and sticks represented in coercion and payment, soft power refers to attraction to shape public preferences, thus obtaining the preferred outcomes. As coined by Nye, soft power is 'the ability to influence others in order to obtain the preferred outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment' (Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power* 94). As states and non-state actors perform public diplomacy efforts with moral authority devoid of coercion or manipulation, they are deemed legitimate by the foreign public, thus increasing their soft power.

3.2. The Reinvigoration of the U.S. Public Diplomacy: U.S. Rhetoric Post-9/11

Fundamental events shaking the traditional trajectory of international relations represented in the Cold War and the September 11 terrorist attacks, have shifted the overall power equation in the international system. Accordingly, governments became more inclined to practice public diplomacy, seizing opportunities to provide domestic and foreign audiences with information to form opinions and make decisions (Gonesh and Melissen 3). With power politics coming into play, the public diplomacy apparatus thus carried the risk of being viewed as political pressure or even propaganda (4).

During the Cold War, which gave rise to the 'war of ideas,' public diplomacy efforts gained more recognition. Accordingly, the U.S. President Harry S. Truman's "Campaign of Truth," was launched in 1950 to expose the threat that communism had on Western values. The Truman administration then established broadcasting entities including Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty with the "enslaved nations" of Eastern Europe as its target audience (Tiedeman 24). Following this, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953 recognizing that 'state-to-state diplomacy alone could not achieve U.S. interests in a world of sophisticated propaganda' (Djerejian 15). In this regard, the USIA had a dual purpose of countering anti-American propaganda while reproducing and redirecting propaganda to the Soviet Union.

During the early 1990s, U.S. public diplomacy initiatives witnessed a gradual decline. With such efforts instigated as a "reactive practice," many deemed it had already served its purpose as the Soviet threat had disappeared, and therefore such practices have expired. However, following the events of the September 11 attacks, and the subsequent U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, interest in public diplomacy as a foreign policy and a tool of national security resurged (Trajkov and Trajkov 73). As the September 11 attacks institutionalized the U.S.-led 'war on terror' as a foreign policy objective, public diplomacy efforts, an instrument of foreign policy, were reinvigorated to pursue this objective. U.S. public diplomacy efforts were fixated on promoting the 'war on terror' facilitated through mass media attention. Since September 11, the military objective against al Qaeda and states harboring them, expressed through the Bush doctrine of preemptive military operations, evolved into a U.S. obligation to "democratize" all corners of the world, placing propaganda at the very center of these campaigns.

3.3. Case Study: How Propaganda Fueled the U.S. Invasion of Iraq

In pursuit of the 'war on terror,' the George Bush administration embarked on a prolonged exchange of value-laden terms

and images about Osama Bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the 'Axis of Evil' as termed by the U.S. President George W. Bush, thus redirecting the attention from al Qaeda to North Korea, Iran and Iraq (Botes 96). The information flooding mass media campaigns labeled the war as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy, thus producing the 'rationale' for invading Iraq in March of 2003 (96). The U.S. invasion of Iraq was in violation of the just war criterion, not considered as a purported self-defense against an armed attack, nor was the war authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Hinnebusch 212). In fact, this war was waged based on falsifying, misleading, and manufacturing the mindsets of public audiences to expand U.S. influence in the Middle East. The U.S. attempted at establishing a just ground for the war in Iraq by assuming the following: Iraq was in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) threatening the U.S. on U.S. soil; and Saddam Hussein was aiding and abetting September 11 terrorists (212).

To extend the 'war on terror' to Iraq, U.S. public diplomacy efforts were utilized to generate widespread propaganda-persuasive campaigns based on the reproduction of misinformation to convince domestic and foreign audiences that Saddam Hussein was indeed in possession of WMDs and a direct link to 9/11 (Van Ham 428). Accordingly, during Bush's news conference on 13 March 2002 he repeatedly addressed the nation of Iraq as a nation with "weapons of mass destruction and apparently are not afraid to use them" (*US President Delivers State of the Union Address* 2002a). Furthermore, in another news conference on 6 April 2002, both George W. Bush and Tony Blair, UK prime minister, repeated the same rhetoric pushing the public to "recognize the danger of a man willing to kill his own people as he harbors weapons of mass destruction" (*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* 2002b) Moreover, propaganda dominated mass media and communication channels, in an interview with the President's national security advisor then, Condoleezza Rice, on the CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer, she stated that, "Saddam Hussein possessed and used weapons of mass destruction, he was actively pursuing weapons of mass destruction" (*16 Words Dispute 'Enormously Overblown'*). Rice even referred to the "mushroom cloud" imagery making statements like, "imagine a September 11th with weapons of mass destruction," which was broadcasted through mass media to domestic and foreign audiences (*16 Words Dispute 'Enormously Overblown'*). While this claim was never substantiated by evidence, the Bush administration blamed the failure to allocate the WMDs to intelligence errors, rather than adapting intelligence into a war strategy.

4. CONCLUSION: THE RISE OF NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The era of digitization and mass politics labeled public diplomacy as a powerful, yet controversial tool exposing its dual approach in enhancing state visibility and perpetuating modern-day propaganda. While the reconfiguration of power structures infused changes within the public diplomacy landscape, the common denominator remains to build and maintain a national image abroad by influencing public attitudes, which reflects on the target government's foreign policy decisions. As the Cold War years heightened public diplomacy efforts, governments seized opportunities to provide domestic and foreign audiences with information to form opinions and make decisions. With the progression of the post-Cold War diplomatic intercourse transcending classic state-centric efforts to include non-state actors as new players in international affairs, the concept of new public diplomacy emerged. With soft power at its core, new public diplomacy takes on the actor-people approach, in which the traditional mode of state-crafted communication, hierarchical in nature is eclipsed. Accordingly, the media centralized approach remains paramount to the public diplomacy apparatus.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the need to win the hearts and minds of the American and foreign conscious resurfaced, with inherently-propagandistic approaches institutionalizing the 'war on terror' as a U.S. foreign policy. With this propaganda-driven agenda, the U.S. public diplomacy efforts were counterproductive, failing to restore its credibility. In this regard, this study pinpoints the flaws of many public diplomacy efforts and their formidable tradition of propaganda-making. Yet, the significant issue remains in identifying the practical way of harmonizing foreign policy strategies and public diplomacy efforts through centralizing soft power and accentuating the notion of attraction over coercion devoid of negative connotations producing propaganda.

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