Public Diplomacy

By

Karen S. Wilhelm, Lt Col, USAF

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In the perfect world, after strategists have studied and understood the domestic and international context in which they function, after they identify the national interests which they serve, after they carefully choose foreign policy goals which will aid in protecting and advancing those interests, their next task is to choose the means, the instruments or tools of statecraft, which they will use to achieve those goals Ideally, those tools are used in a grand concert of efforts which proceed along parallel paths to culminate in success Because the tools of statecraft are inevitably intertwined, whether one is in the ideal or the real world, it is somewhat artificial to separate them into singular entities Such an exercise is, however, useful in gaining a basic understanding of each individual instrument Therefore, this analysis will focus on the instrument called "public diplomacy "

Public diplomacy, in its simplest formulation, is communication from a government to a people of another nation (as opposed to "classic" government to government diplomacy) A more formal definition emphasizes "the efforts governments make to influence important segments of foreign public opinion and thereby advance their policy objectives "[1] Another writer defines it as "the tools governments use to communicate both specific policy objectives and larger national values to foreign publics "[2]

These three definitions highlight the key elements of public diplomacy communication of a specific message, from a government to a foreign public (or a portion thereof), in order to accomplish policy objectives, and in some circumstances to

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[1] Dr Terry L Deibel Course 5601 Fundamentals of Statecraft' Syllabus (Washington D C National War College Academic Year 1998-99), p 44

[2] Larry Wohlers, American Public Diplomacy ' NWC Student Paper reprint (Washington, D C National War College, 1997), p 1

transmit national values It is important to recognize that inherent in the definition are two basic methods of using public diplomacy – a long-term or strategic use and a short-term or tactical use

The actions of the US government during the Cuban missile crisis provide a relevant example President John F Kennedy publicized to the world the reconnaissance photographs which showed the building of Soviet missile sites on Cuban soil His message was straightforward – to show what the Soviets and Cubans were doing and to explain the US response His target audience was essentially the people of the world, and the policy objective was to garner public support for US actions which would help pressure the Soviets to remove the missiles and other governments to support the US This public diplomacy effort can be seen as primarily tactical in nature It was formulated and conducted in response to a specific set of Soviet and Cuban actions with the ultimate overall objective of having the missiles removed from Cuba It is also possible, however, to view the US response as adding to a long-term, strategic public diplomacy campaign aimed at reducing worldwide support for the Soviet Union

A final point to be made in this discussion of what constitutes public diplomacy is that there is never just a single audience or recipient for public diplomacy Because it is public, others, beyond the primary target, will always be "listening " A message intended for mainland Chinese will also be "heard" by the Taiwanese public

Given the above definition, the most natural analogy in trying to understand the nature of public diplomacy is advertising Advertisers attempt to persuade at least a segment of the public to buy a particular product Public diplomatists attempt to persuade at least a segment of a public to "buy" a particular point of view Public

diplomacy is perhaps the "purest" of the persuasive instruments of national power because it entails nothing but persuasion – there are no adverse consequences for the target population if the message is not accepted

Another view which is helpful in understanding the characteristics of public diplomacy is presented by Joseph Nye He divides the power of nation-states into two categories – soft and hard He characterizes "soft power" as co-optive or indirect power, used to shape the preferences of others It is based on an ability to set the agenda of the relationship or present one's ideas as more attractive than those of others The nation achieves its objectives because the resulting system supports its interests or other countries choose to follow it [3] Public diplomacy is, thus, a component of soft power

If public diplomacy is to be a useful element of a nation's soft power, the act of communicating is the key to the process and can take almost any conceivable form Those forms include but are not limited to the pronouncements of public officials, cultural exchange programs, official news releases and other public affairs activities, and government-run or –sponsored radio or television stations (for example, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, Radio Liberty), or web-sites Such communication can even be as esoteric a concept as "just being" – that is, providing an open and visible example of governing principles and ideals Even silence can communicate a specific message For example, the US government often signals displeasure or disagreement with a close ally by remaining silent – neither supporting the ally nor verbalizing disagreement – but the message is clear

In analyzing the nature of public diplomacy, the realist-idealist dichotomy which runs through all US foreign policy has its impact on this tool as well The realists tend to

regard public diplomacy as a short-term tool directed at a quite specific outcome – US pronouncements following the recent air strikes against Osama bin Laden's supporters fit nicely into this narrow framework The US government wanted to make clear that it had credible evidence of support from Sudan and Afghanistan for Bin Laden's terrorist web, that it had carefully limited its strikes to appropriate targets, that it had no quarrel with either the Sudanese and Afghani people or people of the Muslim faith, and that it would strike again when it had similarly credible evidence of support for terrorism The message was clear, concise, and specific

The idealists, on the other hand, accept the short-term utility of public diplomacy, but also put great stock in long-term programs which have broader objectives such as projecting US values abroad They support, for example, open-ended public diplomacy efforts such as Voice of America or radio and television programs aimed at providing the "truth" to the Cuban people

Given the broad nature of public diplomacy, it is reasonable to assume an equally broad range of potential contributions to US strategy and policy It is true, in fact, that public diplomacy runs through almost everything the US government does and all other tools of statecraft (except, by definition, covert action) More definitively, public diplomacy must accompany government action, else the government runs the risk of having those actions misunderstood

If one accepts the necessity of a public diplomacy component to almost all government actions, then it is vital that public diplomacy be effectively coordinated with the other tools of statecraft Ideally, the public diplomatist is involved from the beginning in identifying national interests, designing foreign policy objectives which

[3] Joseph S Nye, Jr , *Bound to Lead* (New York Basic Books, 1990) pp 31-2

serve those interests, and formulating strategies which achieve those objectives He thus is positioned to contribute an effective public diplomacy program in combination with any of the other tools of statecraft deemed appropriate to the particular situation

Looking at the process from a different angle, it is impossible not to communicate – so the statesman may as well communicate in a purposeful manner directed at some specific end [4] Indeed, a certain school of thought, exemplified again by Joseph Nye, holds that as more coercive forms of power are becoming less attractive to policymakers and less effective, soft power resources such as public diplomacy are more appropriate and useful, and may be more effective

In order to insure its effectiveness, the statesman must apply as much rigor to the public diplomacy process as any other tool of statecraft There is no single best method for doing so, but the following five-step framework[5] and accompanying example may prove useful

US government studies have shown that the citizens of those countries comprising the former Soviet Union do not understand the nature of pluralistic societies and free market economies – in fact, in the Ukraine a US Information Agency (USIA) study found that a majority of people felt that private enterprise was nothing more than theft and that Western pressure for unpalatable economic reforms was nothing more than economic exploitation [6] This case, in a simplified form, will be used to illustrate the key concepts of a public diplomacy framework

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[4] Guest lecture by Mr Robert Nevitt, Special Seminar, Course 5601 Fundamentals of Statecraft National War College, 4 September 1998

[5] This framework is adapted, with significant modifications, from the Nevitt presentation

[6] Wohlers, pp 9-10

For the sake of brevity, we will assume without analysis that it is in the US national interest to overcome these perceptions and that public diplomacy is at least one appropriate tool for doing so How, then, do we use public diplomacy in this case?

The first step is to identify the objective of the public diplomacy campaign In this case, one possible objective, simply stated, is to change the negative perceptions of Ukrainians regarding private enterprise to positive perceptions

The second step is to analyze the specific context of the campaign, including both short- and long-term implications In the Ukraine, the context would include considerations such as national history, the effects of Communist ideology current economic conditions – balance of trade, gross domestic product, distribution of wealth, etc , centers of political power within the country, and so on This list is only a beginning and serves to illustrate the complexity and the need for rigor and expertise in this effort

Step three involves analyzing potential amplifiers and filters in the message path, particularly both domestic and foreign media For example, the strategist must identify which elements of the Ukrainian media are sympathetic to private enterprise and which take a negative view – and <u>why</u> they do so Similarly, the Ukrainian government will serve as either an amplifier or filter, the degree of which depends on the relationship between the government and the public The key here is identifying the leaders of public thought and opinion

Step four is to define the intended audience, keeping in mind the "others" who will be "listening " In the Ukraine, the strategist might decide to target specific segments of the population such as educators or local officials because they have influence on public perceptions At the same time, the message must be couched in terms that will not

prove offensive to potential trading partners for the Ukraine, since that might ultimately exacerbate the problem

The final step is to formulate the message and devise steps for disseminating it, taking care that it is consistently presented from the highest level principles to the lowliest public affairs officers An appropriate opening message to the Ukrainian people might include a denial of any desire to exploit them economically and a favorable description of lawful private enterprise It can be disseminated in many ways – everything from visits by high US government officials, to press announcements, to formal USIA programs in the Ukraine

Again, this framework is not an exclusive model, but it is useful in bringing to light the need for rigor in the public diplomacy process, and the complexity of that process It is also useful in helping identify the limitations and risks of public diplomacy The major limitation of public diplomacy is its inherently indeterminant nature Even with the most rigorous analysis possible, it is difficult to choose an appropriate message content and target audience which will lead to the desired outcome Indeterminancy also opens the door for potentially serious misunderstandings This risk was vividly illustrated in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 where US public diplomacy efforts promoting freedom and democracy were interpreted as promises of material aid in event of revolts against the Communists As we know, no such aid was forthcoming and the nascent revolutions were brutally suppressed

Another major limit or risk in the public diplomacy process is that of expecting too much It is readily apparent that public diplomacy will seldom be effective if used in isolation from other tools of statecraft In the Ukrainian case, no amount of public

diplomacy would lead to conclusive changes in public perceptions unless the underlying economic problems were corrected Further, public diplomacy alone cannot overcome larger failures of policy and strategy [7] Public diplomacy's effectiveness is also dramatically reduced if policymakers are not fully committed to the campaign

The inability to measure progress toward the goal is another limitation of public diplomacy Aside from political campaign methods such as opinion polls and focus groups, which are dependent upon obtaining free access to the target population, there are few means available to judge one's progress And, even if opinion does change, the fact is irrelevant unless it leads to changed behavior Furthermore, if the goal is achieved it may be as difficult to judge the degree to which public diplomacy has contributed to this success as opposed to some other instrument For example for every analyst who touts the importance of US public diplomacy efforts in the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, there is another who holds that Communism fell of its own weight and the impact of Western ideology was negligible [8]

Finally, the strategist must understand that, as with all the tools of statecraft, there is a risk of unintended consequences in using public diplomacy This risk is ever-present in spite of one's best and most rigorous analysis It is ever-present because politics is a human endeavor, and human relationships are complex beyond total understanding In recognizing this truth, public diplomatists commit themselves to doing the best they can and to leaving enough options open to survive the worst case consequences of their actions

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[7] Carnes Lord, 'The Past and Future of Public Diplomacy," *Orbis*, Winter 1998, p 67

[8] For representative interpretations see Walter Laqueur, "Save Public Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 73 September-October 1994, p 23 and Frank Ninkovich, "US Information Policy and Cultural Diplomacy ' *Headline Series* No 380 (New York Foreign Policy Association, 1996) pp 42-3

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It is an unfortunate use of language which has labeled the actions of statecraft as instruments or tools These labels imply a greater degree of precision than is either measurable or achievable in almost all cases Nowhere is this more apparent than in analyzing the "tool" called public diplomacy The nature of the tool—the end, influencing the public, and the means, communication—is inherently indeterminant This, however, does not make it inherently less useful Communication is not only an essential function of government, it is unavoidable Governments communicate specific messages to their own citizens, to other governments, and to the citizens of other nations A coherent public diplomacy program can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the other tools of statecraft In the case of the United States, public diplomacy serves a wide spectrum of purposes – from base propaganda to the projection of the best ideals of freedom and democracy The entire spectrum should be studied and understood and used as appropriate—because it serves the national interest

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