

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TODAY

Cristina IVAN*

Abstract:

We believe special attention should be placed on this highly interdisciplinary mechanism and its ability to advance soft power in ways unprecedented and complementary to classical hard power. Therefore, in this particular section of the journal, we will place under microscope traditional and non-traditional public diplomacy initiatives aimed at promoting peace building and conflict resolution.

Keywords: *soft power, public diplomacy, international arena*

In a statement dated as early as 2002, Ulrich Beck, the famous German sociologist, voiced what we would call now a visionary position, according to which the 9/11 terrorist attacks confronted *the world with an existential choice: not only between nationalism and multilateralism but also between regressive multilateralism based on surveillance states and progressive multilateralism based on cosmopolitan states.*

While the first (i.e. regressive multilateralism) would imply the emergence of a dystopian world, in which individual freedom would be sacrificed for the sake of collective security, a rhetoric that today has come to populate so many instances of public discourse, the latter (i.e. the progressive multilateralism), focuses on a notion of security that is generated bottom up by the inviolable preservation of human rights, international law, democracy and hospitality at transnational level.

This global dilemma also invites us to ponder on resources and mechanisms that could be employed to preserve and advance in the 21st century the advantages of civilisation as we know it and the overall ideological position

* National Institute for Intelligence Studies

of cosmopolitanism. It is no secret to anyone that violence has, post 9/11, become endemic in so many parts of the world; that hard power, governmental discourses and military interventions across the world have, if performed by themselves, have proven ineffectual in terms of peace building. Therefore, if they are to curb the spiral of violence and contribute effectively to the implementation of conflict resolution, not to mention promoting own peace and stability at home, governmental authorities have to look elsewhere for new resources and new mechanisms to be employed. And one of the most promising seems to come these days from a reinterpretation of public diplomacy.

Defined some years ago (2001) by the IR scholar and Harvard professor Joseph Nye as *means of promoting a country's soft power, that is its ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment*, public diplomacy has evolved in a spectacular new way of doing business in the international arena. We may yet not be aware of its inner dispositions and interacting mechanisms. However, proof of its influence can now be observed everywhere.

At the turn of the Millennium, public diplomacy could be found in various governments outreach efforts, aimed to expose 'the other' to own national identity, cultural, political and ethical values, in an attempt to identify convergence of interests. Communication Programs aimed at international audiences, cultural programs, granting academic scholarship, performing educational exchanges, and international visitors' programs, all were employed by governments across the world as instruments in a toolkit of conflict resolution. Yet they remained what they were – a leverage to influence and produce change in favor of one own's state national interests.

Today, 15 years onwards into the 21st century, public diplomacy has changed and become a new and powerful narrative of non-state, subnational or supranational actors and global communities of action. This *new* public diplomacy is outsourced by a cosmopolitan global narrative, captures emerging trends in international relations and takes soft power to a whole new level. As it has become increasingly clear, the new public diplomacy has come into existence as a direct consequence of the democratization of information through the new media, is empowered by communication technology and acts in a global, fluid environment.

Therefore, today, it can longer be defined with ease who the actors of public diplomacy are. NGO's, virtual communities of belief and/or action, informal leaders of opinion and change-makers interact in a system of

mutually beneficial relations that is not, at least apparently, state centered or state generated. As individuals and communities make a stand and demand to occupy the public space of political decision, the degree to which public diplomacy interventions are likely to influence political decisions is gradually growing.

This is the reason why we believe special attention should be placed on this highly interdisciplinary mechanism and its ability to advance soft power in ways unprecedented and complementary to classical hard power. Therefore, in this particular section of the journal, we will place under microscope traditional and non-traditional public diplomacy initiatives aimed at promoting peace building and conflict resolution. Piece by piece, we will hopefully manage to assemble a global puzzle in which Thomas Jefferson's once declaration of faith could become the motto of a new generation of diplomats: *I hope our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us, that the less we use our power, the greater it will be.*