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Socially Distanced Diplomacy

The future of soft power and public diplomacy in a fragile world

Sanctuary
Counsel

USC Center on
Public Diplomacy

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About the USC Center on Public Diplomacy

Established in 2003 at the University of Southern California, the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) is a research, analysis and professional training organization dedicated to furthering the study and practice of global public diplomacy. Since its inception, the Center has become an ambitious and productive leader in the public diplomacy research and scholarship community and plays host to robust discussions about the future of public diplomacy. To learn more about CPD, please visit www.USCPublicDiplomacy.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Just as the dominant trends driving culture, fashion, art, and politics for any given decade require several years to find their eventual form, so too it is for centennial shifts. In all likelihood, historians will regard 2020 as the definitive pivot point between the 20th and 21st centuries. Indeed, over the last fifteen months the standard models of operation for governments, businesses, civil society, cultural and educational institutions, and day-to-day life have been upended.

As the world continues to come to terms with the new normal of the pandemic age (and attempts to adapt accordingly), diplomats, international organisations, and NGOs working to keep global politics moving have had to do the same. For those operating in the fields of foreign policy and diplomacy, simply maintaining a minimum level of functionality from early 2020 onwards has been nothing short of a generational challenge. While much of the world remains frozen in a socially-distanced stasis and international travel remains nearly impossible, the need for meaningful global engagement, higher levels of trust between allies and international partners, and effective cross-border collaboration has only intensified. The role of soft power and public diplomacy in delivering on these fronts remains paramount. Yet, both soft power (as a concept and a practical tool) and public diplomacy are hardly immune from the upheaval wrought by the pandemic. Given such disruption, two critical questions must be asked: firstly, what is the future for the global balance of soft power? And secondly, are the traditional strategies and tactics for public diplomacy still viable now? While the immediate challenges of the pandemic are certainly the most pressing in any attempt to address these questions, it is equally important to set them in the wider geopolitical context.

Looking beyond the current fog of the pandemic, three pillars largely underpin the current geopolitical context and will thus shape the strategic calculus

that drives global affairs for at least the next decade. The first factor is the now well-established assessment that the rules-based international order is frayed, if not in total disarray. This argument is well rehearsed, and its conclusion has broadly been accepted by thinkers across the International Relations theory spectrum, from ardent realists like Mearsheimer[1], to neo-liberal institutionalists like Ikenberry[2]. A rising China and revanchist Russia began challenging the predominance of the 'liberal' international order from the start of this century and have only intensified those efforts over subsequent years. The political earthquakes of 2016 – Brexit and Trump – provided a further jolt to the system, pushing the brief Pax Americana into the current era of geopolitical volatility.

The second pillar is the rise of 21st century great power politics, driven primarily by heightened competition between the United States and China. As with the first pillar, US-China relations as the dominant geopolitical lens is a well-established narrative, but it is important to underline how deeply it will impact strategic calculations, day-to-day execution of foreign policy, and every aspect of diplomacy – even down to the most benign forms of cultural relations work between countries – for actors in every region of the world. The intensity and reach of US-China competition are most obviously felt in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in South East Asia, which traditionally strives for neutrality between the two. Yet many Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states are increasingly feeling the pressure to take one side over the other. Australia has come to serve as a cautionary tale for the perils of balancing deep economic ties to China with close American security cooperation, resulting in punitive trade restrictions for Australian exporters to China. Transatlantic relations too have been affected by the new US-China dynamic. The EU's push to rush through an investment treaty with China over the concerns of the new Biden Administration has already soured what should have been a banner year for rebuilding a traditionally strong alliance. Meanwhile, countries in Africa and Latin America stand to benefit from greater competition between America and China, as each vies for influence with greater investment, aid, and offers of partnership. The impact will vary widely by region, but US-China competition is now the dominant geopolitical lens.

The third pillar is unique in that it pervades both foreign policy and domestic politics: the rise of disinformation and malicious influence campaigns. While the early years of the digital revolution and the proliferation of social media use seemed to herald the 'death of propaganda',[3] where transparency and the democratisation of information would expose untruths and render deceit impossible, such enthusiasm was badly misjudged. Indeed, the exponential growth of digital platforms and increasingly easy, cost-efficient means of transmitting content has served as a double-edged sword: capable of informing and confusing in seemingly equal measure. As more information on the extent and reach of state-backed efforts to shape the information environment in third-party countries comes to light, pressure is growing on governments and industry to mitigate or halt such practices[4]. As such, efforts to secure the public information space – thereby making good-faith debate, based on shared truths and facts, in the digital public square possible – have climbed the list of global policy priorities. Yet, despite wide international agreement on the urgency of this issue, there has been limited

progress on addressing it in a systemic way. For the time being, disinformation is both a discrete policy challenge, as well as a force shaping the wider geopolitical context.

Of course, these three pillars are hardly an exhaustive list, but they are the most potent forces shaping the global operating context for foreign policy makers and diplomats. With those pillars in mind, it is worth quickly considering the biggest global policy challenges facing today's international actors. Combating the current pandemic is obviously the most immediate, but equally urgent is combating climate change – with the next milestone being the United Nations' COP26 summit in Glasgow in November 2021. Following on from these top priorities are arguably the need to promote peace and stability; nuclear non-proliferation; developing new governance arrangements on cyber security and outer space; and delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. While these urgent challenges vary widely in nature, they are united by the fact that none of them can be solved through unilateral – or even bilateral – action.

Indeed, these most pressing challenges of today are transnational by nature, which means global leaders must return to the principles of multilateralism and collaboration over the nationalist, zero-sum approaches of recent years that have allowed the international rules-based order to decay. Successfully confronting what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called 'problems without passports' will not be possible without a renewed commitment to multilateral cooperation from the world's leading nations. A significant push to reform and update the 20th century structures of global governance, which are incapable of managing 21st century challenges, would be a boon for future cooperation. Any renewed push towards effective multilateralism – to say nothing of progress in overhauling the international order – will require the deft deployment of soft power to marshal willing networks of actors. Moreover, the process of bringing soft power to bear on these issues will be heavily dependent on effective public diplomacy.

Research Questions & Methodology

The recent change in American leadership does makes such a return to multilateralism likely, but the effects of the pandemic throw up significant uncertainty. With this in mind, the purpose of this publication – and indeed the research underpinning it – is threefold. First, to better understand how the pandemic has impacted the soft power of the world's major powers. Second, to test whether foreign policy practitioners and experts have changed the way they assess the soft power or reputation of countries (either by factors or weighting). Third, to identify the ways that the pandemic has impacted on the tactics and tools of public diplomacy, essentially asking, what are the current challenges PD practitioners now face? Finally, this report aims to provide some initial solutions and adaptations that have been (or could be) used to address the identified challenges to public diplomacy, cultural relations, and global engagement. Reflective of the transatlantic partnership of Sanctuary Counsel (UK) and the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy (US), the paper also takes a practical look at how the US and the UK can strengthen their respective public diplomacy efforts going forward.
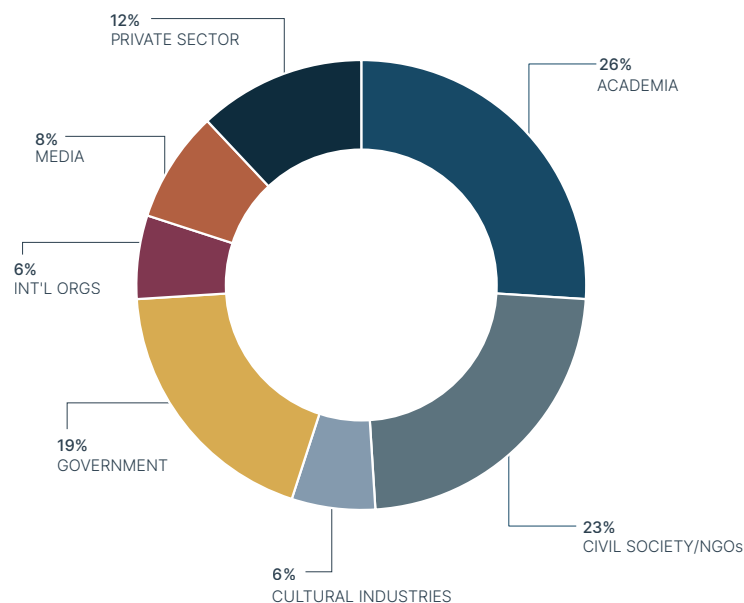
"Indeed, these most pressing challenges of today are transnational by nature, which means global leaders must return to the principles of multilateralism and collaboration over the nationalist, zero-sum approaches of recent years that have allowed the international rules-based order to decay. Successfully confronting what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called 'problems without passports' will not be possible without a renewed commitment to multilateral cooperation from the world's leading nations."

These research objectives are admittedly far too ambitious to be fully addressed in this publication alone. As such, this paper should be read as an attempt to establish a useful starting point for policy makers, diplomats, and researchers as they continue to assess the full impact of the pandemic on soft power and public diplomacy. Our approach to the above research questions is primarily a qualitative one, using primary research derived from experts and practitioners working in the field. In partnership with the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy and others[5], Sanctuary Counsel hosted a global series of virtual roundtable discussions between October and December 2020. Seven sessions were held in total, each focusing on a distinct region or country, which were as follows (in chronological order):

- United Kingdom: October 2020

- Japan: October 2020

- Southeast Asia: November 2020

- United States: December 2020

- Australia & New Zealand: December 2020

- European Union: December 2020

- India: December 2020

Each roundtable session followed the same semi-structured approach with a set of common questions, as well as several specific to the region or country of focus. The roundtables averaged about twenty participants per session. A total of 121 participants took part across all seven roundtables. Attendees were drawn from foreign ministries, NGOs, academia, media, cultural institutions, and relevant private sector organisations. Figure 1 below provides a breakdown of participants' professional background by sector across all seven sessions.

FIGURE 1
BREAKDOWN OF ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS BY PROFESSIONAL SECTOR

12%
PRIVATE SECTOR

8%
MEDIA

6%
INT'L ORGS

19%
GOVERNMENT

6%
CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

26%
ACADEMIA

23%
CIVIL SOCIETY/NGOs

The discussion questions that were consistent across all seven sessions were as follows:

- How do people think about soft power and country reputation one year into the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Who are the winners and losers so far?

- What are the most pressing challenges to public diplomacy practitioners and related organisations with a core international engagement function?

- What are the emerging solutions and adaptations that have proved effective?

- Can the US recover its relative soft power and position of leadership and if so, how should it go about doing so?

In addition to these qualitative discussion questions, flash polling questions were put to each group throughout the moderated roundtable discussions. This supplemented the richness of the discussive roundtable format with some immediately comparable snap-shot opinion data. Of course, these are extremely small sample sizes. However, we feel that the polling data does provide some

useful insights, given it is derived from leaders in the field of foreign affairs, which can be read as "expert opinion". Finally, it should be noted that a second session for our US group was held in early March 2021. We did not run polling during this roundtable, and it followed a completely different structure from our 2020 discussions. This eighth roundtable was used to share the preliminary findings and probe further on key issues emerging from the original set of seven roundtables.

Soft Power & Public Diplomacy in the Time of COVID-19

Drawing on the qualitative data from our roundtable discussions, as well as the polling conducted during those sessions, the following paper sets out to make sense of a very turbulent year for all aspects of foreign affairs, but particularly public diplomacy and soft power. Turning first to soft power, we look at how the pandemic has altered perceptions of the world's major powers and even impacted the reputations of entire regions of the globe. We then underline the major challenges to the conduct of public diplomacy in the pandemic era, reviewing how our roundtable participants identified the most pressing tests to their field of work, with additional analysis on the US and the UK. With those challenges in mind, we then look at how public diplomacy practitioners (both governments and NGOs) are adapting and how they might continue to do so going forward. Putting those ideas in a US context, we then explore the potential road map for a reset of US foreign policy under a new administration, and how a renewed focus on effective public diplomacy might help 'Brand USA' to recover (some of) its lost sheen. We then turn to the UK for another in-depth look at a state looking to establish a positive new role for itself in the world at a post-EU inflection point.

Mindful of the concerns of all public diplomacy practitioners, we set out an initial set of guiding principles designed to help keep the important work of cross-border engagement on track in the context of the pandemic as a limiting factor. Finally, the paper concludes with an overview of remaining issues that need attention, the future of measurement frameworks for soft power resources and public diplomacy impact, and the next steps for this ongoing research project.

THE PANDEMIC AND SOFT POWER: WHAT HAS CHANGED?

The research carried out for this publication was undertaken with three core objectives in mind. First, to assess the impact of the pandemic on the global balance of soft power. Second, to identify the new, emerging challenges to the strategies and tactics of public diplomacy. Third, to establish a clear point of departure from which to explore the likely future direction of public diplomacy as practitioners adapt and utilise digital platforms for a larger share of global engagement efforts than would have been the case had the pandemic not occurred. In striving towards these aims, we want to begin with an account of what has changed over the last fifteen months. In order to address the first research objective, we must first look back at the state of play just before the pandemic upended the operating context.

A Pre-Pandemic Snapshot of Soft Power

24 October 2019 was the publication date of the last *Soft Power 30* index and annual report. Launched in Seoul at the Korea Foundation's Public Diplomacy Week Conference 2019, it captured the state of global soft power at that moment in time. The study was conducted well into the second half of the presidency of Donald Trump, and those rankings, published in the final quarter of 2019, reported that the US had fallen to its worst ever position in the annual ranking, which ran from 2015 to 2019[6]. Indeed, the US slipped in the rankings every consecutive year following its first-place finish in 2016, landing at a final pre-pandemic overall ranking of 5th in 2019. The top 30 countries in the study can be found in Table 1.[7]

TABLE 1

Soft Power 30 Index – 2019 Results

01 **FRANCE** Score: 80.28	*02* **UNITED KINGDOM** Score: 79.47	*03* **GERMANY** Score: 78.62
04 **SWEDEN** Score: 77.41	*05* **UNITED STATES** Score: 77.40	*06* **SWITZERLAND** Score: 77.04
07 **CANADA** Score: 75.89	*08* **JAPAN** Score: 75.71	*09* **AUSTRALIA** Score: 73.16
10 **NETHERLANDS** Score: 72.03	*11* **ITALY** Score: 75.71	*12* **NORWAY** Score: 71.07
13 **SPAIN** Score: 71.05	*14* **DENMARK** Score: 68.86	*15* **FINLAND** Score: 68.35
16 **AUSTRIA** Score: 67.98	*17* **NEW ZEALAND** Score: 67.45	*18* **BELGIUM** Score: 67.17
19 **SOUTH KOREA** Score: 63.00	*20* **IRELAND** Score: 62.91	*21* **SINGAPORE** Score: 61.52
22 **PORTUGAL** Score: 59.28	*23* **POLAND** Score: 55.16	*24* **CZECH REPUBLIC** Score: 54.35
25 **GREECE** Score: 53.74	*26* **BRAZIL** Score: 51.34	*27* **CHINA** Score: 51.25
28 **HUNGARY** Score: 50.39	*29* **TURKEY** Score: 49.70	*30* **RUSSIAN FEDERATION** Score: 48.64

SOURCE: *The Soft Power 30*, London: Portland, https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf

"If the world's political leaders largely embody the collective failures of the pandemic, then it is the scientific research teams – exemplars of international cooperation – that should serve as the blueprints for success in international collaboration and a multilateral approach to solving generational challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic."

The further fall in American soft power was the standout story for the 2019 rankings. As was covered in the 2018 and 2019 editions of *The Soft Power 30*, the impact of the Trump administration and its 'America First' doctrine served as a considerable constraint on the country's soft power. Under Trump, the US retreated from its traditional role of global leader and champion of the multilateral system – the very system it did so much to construct. This turn inward under the Trump administration resulted in a transactional, zero-sum approach to foreign policy. The Trump administration's radical departure from decades of bi-partisan US foreign policy orthodoxy shook the foundations of the rules-based international order, accelerating its degradation and throwing global geopolitics into a state of uncertainty. As International Relations scholar Jonathan Kirshner recently wrote, "Trump's foreign policy was different: short-sighted, transactional, mercurial, untrustworthy, boorish, personalist, and profoundly illiberal in rhetoric, disposition, and creed".[8] The damage done in four short years could echo through a lasting legacy of reputational damage. "From now on," Kirshner continued, "all countries, everywhere, must hedge their bets about the United States".[9] Ultimately, a return to Trumpism is now on the cards with each US election cycle into the foreseeable future.

While the decline of American soft power really was the overarching narrative of the 2019 index, there were several other noteworthy results to consider in taking stock of the pre-pandemic landscape. At the other end of the league table, China sat at 27th, which is the same position it held in 2018, and two places off its 2017 high of 25th. 2017 was the year China's President, Xi Jinping, launched a global charm offensive – looking to capitalise on the global discord wrought by Trump's confrontational brand of populist-nationalism. However, the lofty tone

of a landmark speech given by Xi to the World Economic Forum at Davos in early 2017 soon reverted to the spiky and confrontational 'wolf-warrior' diplomacy characteristic of diplomats, spokespeople, and interlocutors of the Chinese Communist Party.[10]

Looking over other notable countries in the last pre-pandemic rankings, France just barely pipped the UK – then consumed with resolving its stalled divorce from the EU – to the top spot in 2019. Germany held on to its 2018 ranking in 3rd place, Sweden broke into the top five for the first time, and Japan fell from its 2018 all-time high of 5th to 8th place. With this pre-pandemic snapshot in mind, one cannot help but speculate about how global perceptions – and thus the balance of soft power – might have shifted since the 2020 lockdowns came into force. While this research project – a starting point for a long-term programme of work – is far more limited in scope and methodology than *The Soft Power 30*, it still yielded new data that allows us to sketch out the impact of the pandemic on soft power and public diplomacy worldwide.

Winners & Losers

Stepping back to look at the big picture, the pandemic yielded clear winners and losers. Either by sector, profession, age, or otherwise, some groups have benefitted either reputationally, financially, or politically, while others have clearly suffered disproportionately – many through absolutely no fault of their own. While it sounds cold and cynical, tallying up the winners and losers helps to give a structured account of how humanity has responded and adapted over the period of the pandemic – for better and for worse. Looking first at those who have come out ahead, the tech industry, global scientific community, and 'big pharma' (and its backers) have all emerged as clear winners.

The resilience of digital platforms and the global internet in this period has been nothing short of miraculous. As historian Yuval Noah Harari recently wrote, "In 2020, schools, offices and churches shifted online almost overnight, but the internet held up".[11] While 'Zoom fatigue' has been a common complaint amongst workers able to operate remotely from home; the ability of so much of our professional and private lives to migrate from the physical to the digital world so seamlessly has been remarkable. And one need only look at the skyrocketing valuation of technology firms over the last year to gauge how well 'tech' has ridden the pandemic wave.

Similarly, science and the pharmaceuticals industry have been a shining ray of hope in an otherwise bleak year. The speed with which the SARS-CoV-2 virus was identified, its genome sequenced, and the critical genetic blueprint shared around the world was a triumph of modern science and technology working in concert. That a phalanx of effective vaccines could be developed and produced at scale so shortly after the discovery of a new virus is joint testament to the global scientific community, international research collaboration, and the rapidly scaled efforts of pharmaceutical manufacturers.

And what of the other side of the COVID-19 coin? The total number of deaths is a global, generational tragedy, and the grief of family members and friends of those lost is impossible to quantify. We will never fully know the extent

of pandemic hardships suffered in aggregate, but it is obvious that the burden has not been shared equitably. Students, young people, gig workers, and economic migrants, as well as those working in the travel, tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries, have taken the lion's share of the pain. Inequality across the digital divide has also left many behind. Ensuring students are able to catch up after so much time out of the classroom will be one of the great policy challenges in the post-COVID-19 world. Young people already in work or in higher education have also been disproportionally hit by the restrictions imposed in many countries to contain the pandemic.[12]

Tourism – and countries who rely heavily on it – have also had an awful year. The UN World Tourism Organization reported 2020 as being the worst year on record for tourism, with 1 billion fewer international tourist arrivals than in 2019 and $1.3 trillion in lost tourism export revenue.[13] These figures represent a devastating hit to the global tourism industry and while would-be travellers remain grounded, millions of economic migrants around the world have beaten a path back home. This has been bad news for countries that are particularly reliant on the remittances of foreign workers. From 2020 through to the end of 2021, the World Bank expects global remittances to shrink by 14 per cent.[14]

While these groups have suffered through no real fault of their own, the same cannot be said of far too many world leaders and their cabinets. True, some countries, through effective leadership and timely decision making, had a relatively 'good' pandemic, resulting in enhanced reputations (e.g. New Zealand). The underperformance of most Western countries however has been woeful, as evidenced in the Lowy Institute's recent comparative study of countries' pandemic performance.[15] As such, and with a few exceptions, politicians are – reputationally speaking – amongst the most conspicuous 'losers' of the pandemic. And compounding their myriad domestic failures in pandemic management, is the lack of cooperation and coordination between countries which has resulted in a total lack of a coherent, collaborative effort to tackle what is, at its core, a global challenge in need of a global solution.

If the world's political leaders largely embody the collective failures of the pandemic, then it is the scientific research teams – exemplars of international cooperation – that should serve as the model for successful international collaboration and a multilateral approach to solving generational challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Soft Power Shift

With that wider context in mind, we can turn to the question of the pandemic's effect on the global balance of soft power. During each of the seven roundtables we held, a set of polling questions was put to the group over the course of the discussion. Most of these questions were focused on the pandemic's impact on the reputation of given countries and regions. However, the first questions put to the group were designed to test a simple hypothesis: that foreign policy professionals and experts may have changed the way they calculate and assess the reputation and soft power of a given country as a result of the pandemic. As public health infrastructure and government competence are the determining factors in a country's ability to manage the pandemic effectively,

it would follow that such attributes, capacities, and capabilities might take on a greater significance when external observers form a view on a given country – thus affecting that country's relative soft power.

To test this hypothesis, participants were asked the following question: "Has the pandemic changed the composition or weighting of factors that drive the way that you would assess the favourability of a given country?" The response, both in aggregate and broken down by each session is reported in Figure 2 below.

FIGURE 2

HAS THE PANDEMIC CHANGED THE COMPOSITION OR WEIGHTING OF FACTORS THAT DRIVE THE WAY YOU WOULD ASSESS THE FAVOURABILITY OF A GIVEN COUNTRY?

■ NO, NOT AT ALL   ■ YES, BUT ONLY A LITTLE   ■ YES, SIGNIFICANTLY
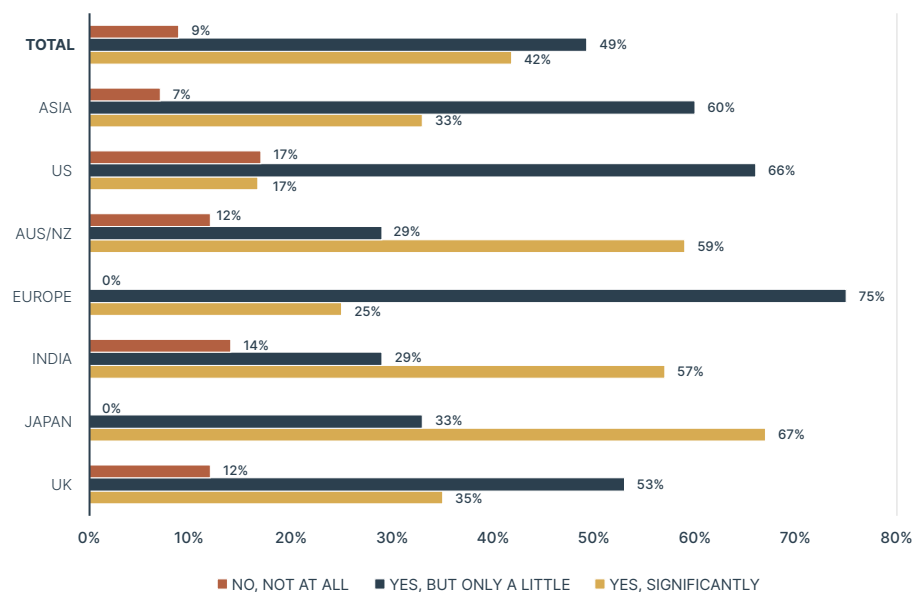
Participants overwhelmingly responded 'yes', that the pandemic had changed the way they form an opinion on a given country. Across all groups, 91 per cent said that the pandemic had changed how they assess other countries, with only 9 per cent saying it had not changed their views on the matter. Looking at those who responded 'yes', 42 per cent of our total sample said the change was 'significant' for them, while 49 per cent said it had changed 'a little'. For participants in our Japan, Australia/New Zealand, and India roundtables, this change seemed to be most pronounced, with a majority in each saying the pandemic had 'significantly' changed the way that they assess a country's reputation.

Having tested and affirmed our hypothesis, we then turned to the question of the pandemic's soft power winners and losers. Before drilling down to individual countries, participants were asked which region had gained the most reputationally in its collective handling of the pandemic. Figure 3 reports the responses across all roundtable participants. Aggregating the data from all seven roundtable sessions, we see the biggest reputational gains have accrued to Asia. While it is a geographic oversimplification, we combined East Asia and Southeast Asia into one for the purposes of the survey question. East and Southeast Asia dominated the field in our combined seven surveys, which should come as little surprise. Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand and – though not without controversy – China, have all outperformed the rest of the world in their handling of the pre-vaccine stages of the pandemic.

Trailing by some distance, Europe was the next best performing region by reputational gain in our combined surveys, followed by Oceania. However, it is important to note that these polls were conducted between October and December 2020, well before the vaccine rollout started in earnest. Regardless, Oceania and Europe are so far behind East and Southeast Asia in perceived performance in containing the pandemic, that second and third place are hardly worthy of a shared podium finish.

FIGURE 3

WHICH PART OF THE WORLD HAS MANAGED THE LARGEST REPUTATIONAL BOOST THROUGH ITS COLLECTIVE HANDLING OF THE CRISIS?
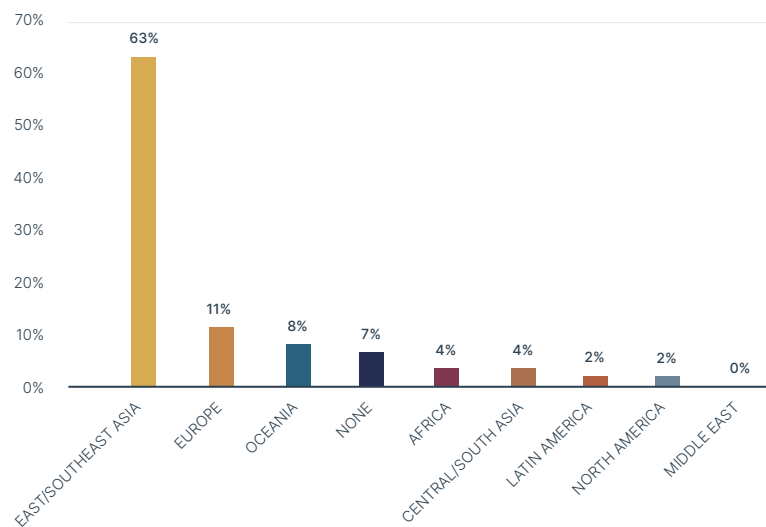
After probing the roundtable groups on reputational impact at a regional level, we drilled down to test the pandemic's effect on individual countries. Given the overriding importance of their bilateral relationship for global geopolitics, we asked each group to give their view on the pandemic's reputational impact on the US and China. Participants across all roundtable groups were first asked whether the US came out of the pandemic as a 'winner', 'loser', 'no impact', or 'not sure' in terms of reputation and soft power. Figure 4 reports the aggregated responses from all groups.

FIGURE 4

IN SOFT POWER TERMS, HAS THE US EMERGED AS A WINNER, LOSER, OR SEEN NO IMPACT AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC?
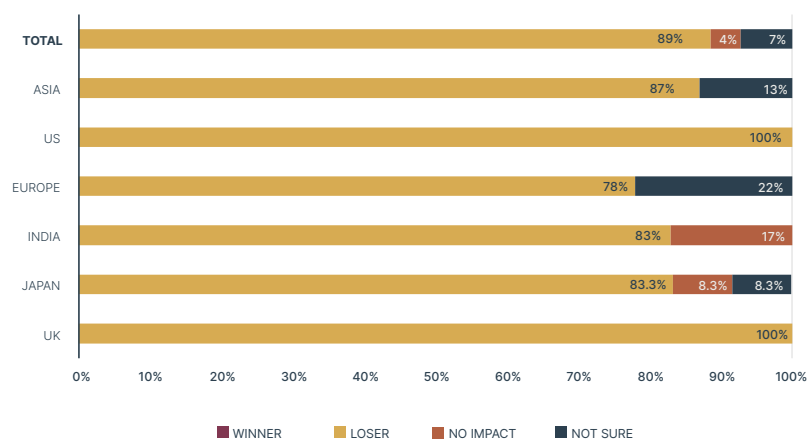
As Figure 4 clearly shows, the Trump administration's disastrous response to the pandemic had an overwhelmingly negative impact on America's reputation. The vast majority of respondents – 89 per cent – felt the US had come out of the pandemic as a 'loser' in reputational terms. Interestingly, 100 per cent of the US participants agreed that the US was a reputational loser as a result of the pandemic.

The same question was then asked for China. Respondents were much more divided in their assessment of the pandemic's reputational impact on China, as reported in Figure 5. With the exception of India-based respondents – who unanimously recorded China as a reputational 'loser' – a solid minority of respondents in other countries felt China's reputation had actually benefitted from its handling of the pandemic. However, most respondents across all groups still felt that China's reputation had suffered over the course of the pandemic.

FIGURE 5

IN SOFT POWER TERMS, HAS CHINA EMERGED AS A WINNER, LOSER, OR SEEN NO IMPACT AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC?
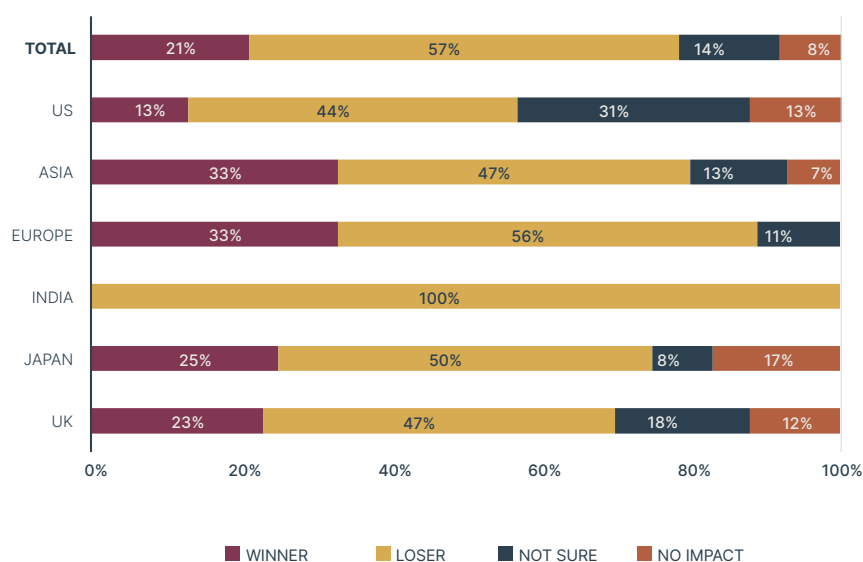
Along with asking our roundtable groups to assess the reputational changes for the US and China, we similarly asked them to do so for their own country (or region). The Australia and New Zealand group were not polled on this question. The combined graphs in Figure 6 below show how each group responded.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their comparatively high infection and mortality rates, the US and UK participants were the most self-critical. Europe were the least sure in their assessment, with a majority opting for a 'not sure' response. With the exception of Europe, all other groups had a majority of respondents reporting an impact, one way or the other, on their country or region's reputation as a result of its handling of the pandemic.

FIGURE 6

IN SOFT POWER TERMS, HAS YOUR COUNTRY/REGION EMERGED AS A WINNER,
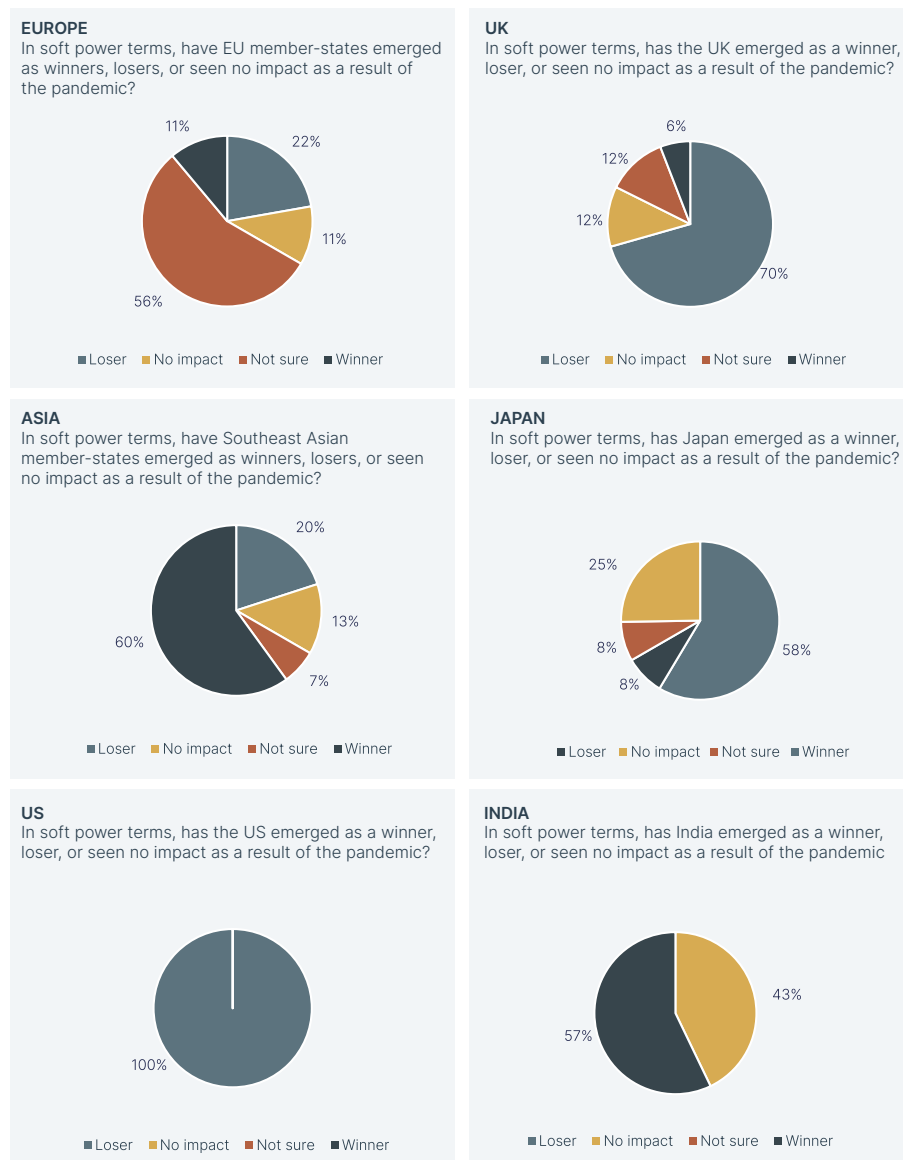LOSER, OR SEEN NO IMPACT AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC?

EUROPE
In soft power terms, have EU member-states emerged as winners, losers, or seen no impact as a result of the pandemic?

22%
11%
11%
56%

■ Loser ■ No impact ■ Not sure ■ Winner

UK
In soft power terms, has the UK emerged as a winner, loser, or seen no impact as a result of the pandemic?

6%
12%
12%
70%

■ Loser ■ No impact ■ Not sure ■ Winner

ASIA
In soft power terms, have Southeast Asian member-states emerged as winners, losers, or seen no impact as a result of the pandemic?

20%
13%
7%
60%

■ Loser ■ No impact ■ Not sure ■ Winner

JAPAN
In soft power terms, has Japan emerged as a winner, loser, or seen no impact as a result of the pandemic?

25%
8%
8%
58%

■ Loser ■ No impact ■ Not sure ■ Winner

US
In soft power terms, has the US emerged as a winner, loser, or seen no impact as a result of the pandemic?

100%

■ Loser ■ No impact ■ Not sure ■ Winner

INDIA
In soft power terms, has India emerged as a winner, loser, or seen no impact as a result of the pandemic

43%
57%

■ Loser ■ No impact ■ Not sure ■ Winner

Looking across the data from all seven roundtables, it is clear that the pandemic has indeed had an impact on the global balance of soft power, and on the ways that informed experts working in the field of foreign affairs make their internal calculations of countries' soft power standing.

None of these findings is likely to come as a surprise, but the polling conducted during our roundtables does provide a clear data set to confirm our dual hypotheses: that foreign policy professionals now think about the components that account for a country's reputation differently, and that there have been clear reputational – and by extension, soft power – winners and losers as a result of the pandemic.

"...foreign policy professionals now think about the components that account for a country's reputation differently, and that there have been clear reputational – and by extension, soft power – winners and losers as a result of the pandemic."

LOCKDOWN BLUES: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE COVID-19 ERA

As underlined in the previous sections, the pandemic has presented huge strategic and practical challenges for foreign policy professionals and diplomats. This is especially true for those working directly in public diplomacy (PD) and state-to-state relations. Our roundtable series for this project underlined the extent of the difficulties faced by diplomats and other non-state actors working in public diplomacy, cultural relations, and international engagement. Indeed, in all of the roundtable sessions, discussions overwhelmingly focused on identifying and unpacking the various challenges faced by diplomats and partners operating in the context of the pandemic. The following section aims to bring some order and coherence to the myriad challenges our participants highlighted during the roundtable sessions.

We can broadly structure the challenges to public diplomacy into three overarching categories: structure-driven, digital-driven, and pandemic-driven. The first two categories capture existing challenges that pre-date the pandemic – though some have been exacerbated by it. These challenges were present in January 2020 before pandemic-induced lockdowns came into effect, and in some instances were identified decades earlier, while others were still emergent. Structure-driven challenges are bureaucratic or operational in nature, while digital-driven challenges relate specifically to the adoption (or lack thereof) of new technology and digital platforms in public diplomacy efforts.

The third category of challenges – pandemic-driven – captures those that are newly arrived and, as the name suggests, uniquely attributable to COVID-19. While many will likely fade as the pandemic abates, diplomats and partners will

still be faced with legacy barriers well into the future. Indeed, some may become permanent features of the post-pandemic, 'new normal' operating environment.

Of course, the first step to addressing any problem is defining it. That is exactly what the following section aims to do. In providing a broad taxonomy for the identification of current challenges, we begin below with the existing, structural issues, and then outline the new, pandemic-specific impediments facing the discipline of public diplomacy.

Structure-Driven Challenges

The impetus behind this research project, and the organisation of a series of global roundtables, was the desire to understand the emerging challenges to, and future direction of, soft power and public diplomacy as a result of the pandemic. Assessing how the last fifteen months has changed the field of public diplomacy – and country reputation – was at the heart of this endeavour. Despite our research interest in the pandemic's impact, a set of pre-existing structural challenges were highlighted by roundtable discussants that ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) around the world will need to address as they chart a course toward post-pandemic 'new normal' operation in the future. These structure-driven challenges may not be new, but that does not make them any less inhibiting to effective public diplomacy.

The first of these structural issues is that senior officials leading public diplomacy directorates in MFAs rarely have "a seat at the table" when it comes to developing foreign policy strategy. 60 years ago, the broadcaster-cum-diplomat, Edward R. Murrow, vented his frustration at this problem with a quip while serving as the Director of the United States Information Agency: "if you want me there for the crash landing, I need to be there for the take-off".[16] Said differently, if people like Murrow have to deploy crisis communications and public diplomacy to clean up a policy mess, they ought to have a chance to feed into the planning and policy making process that precedes it. At best, this practice would help avoid reputationally-damaging incidents through better policy making; at worst it would give communications leaders time to plan for worst-case scenarios. At present, being treated as a bolt-on or a nice-to-have, public diplomacy finds itself left out of the policy making and strategy process to which it is integral. Ultimately, this makes for poorer strategy and policy development, and less effective public diplomacy.

The second structure-driven challenge, raised by one roundtable participant, is very much related to the first: "too many public diplomacy initiatives are not tied

to strategic objectives".[17] Driving this point home, it was argued that yes, it is a net positive for Country A to be liked by Country B, but the purpose of PD initiatives has to be more than simply generating goodwill amongst target audiences. PD programmes – and their budgets – should be tied to specific objectives, not just undertaken for the sole purpose of improving sentiment towards the country in question.

The third structure-driven challenge facing public diplomacy practitioners is the lack of reliable impact measurement frameworks. The challenge of good measurement is hardly unique to public diplomacy. It is a perennial public sector challenge affecting virtually all policy areas across all levels of government, from the hyper-local to the supra-national. As was repeatedly raised during the roundtable discussions, impact measurement is an unresolved challenge. Improving the measurement of public diplomacy initiatives remains urgent for two stand-out reasons. First, practitioners would benefit greatly from new measurement frameworks capable of clearly identifying what works and what does not. Second, as MFAs – and indeed all parts of governments – come under increased pressure to reduce public spending post-pandemic, a clear link between programme spending and impact will be crucial to protecting PD budgets that would otherwise likely face swingeing cuts.

Digital-Driven Challenges

If the ubiquity of the word 'zoom' is anything to go by, then the most obvious legacy of the pandemic will be the acceleration of the physical world's migration to the digital. True, the digitalisation of everything has been underway for some time. Made possible by the precipitous fall in the cost of computing power and further propelled by the proliferation of smart phones and greater global coverage of high-speed internet networks, digital transformation has been the story of the 21st century. Governments have subsequently laboured to adapt to this new reality accordingly.

In the foreign policy sphere, the incorporation of digital tools into the practice of foreign policy has been captured under the umbrella term of 'digital diplomacy'. The concept tends to be over-emphasised and can be a bit of a catch-all. For the purposes of this report, it can best be understood as the conduct of public diplomacy by digital means. The process of MFAs, diplomats, and diplomatic missions building their capacity and capability in digital communications has been well documented by scholars working at the intersection of International Relations, public diplomacy, and political communications.[18] Early adopters have shown the power of deft use of digital platforms and sustained efforts to engage through social media channels.[19] But there are huge disparities in uptake and capabilities across countries.[20]

Roundtable participants across the different countries and regions pointed to years of underinvestment in digital resources and capabilities as an ongoing challenge. This underinvestment is not unique to ministries of foreign affairs, but common across the public sector. That said, MFAs are typically the most institutionally conservative of all government departments. As one roundtable discussant put it, "we remain risk-averse in adapting to new platforms and methods of international engagement...we need to push ourselves to engage in

"At present, being treated as a bolt-on or a nice-to-have, public diplomacy finds itself left out of the policy making and strategy process to which it is integral."

the less comfortable digital environments".[21] Across all groups, the majority felt that digital tools can help public diplomacy practitioners achieve about 50 per cent of what they would manage to do under normal, pre-COVID-19, conditions. But this could arguably be higher with greater investment in digital infrastructure, and a more open approach to embracing new social media platforms. This likewise requires investment to continually create the content required to populate those platforms, attract audiences, and drive engagement.

The next major digital-driven challenge is a multi-faceted and evolving one: keeping pace with the changing habits, preferences, and interests of target audiences. Public diplomacy does not exist in a void. By name it requires a 'public' with which to engage. Participants from several of the roundtable groups expressed concern about their ability to reach a broad enough set of audiences and engage with them meaningfully via existing PD tactics. The bulk of this concern centred specifically on younger audiences (students and early-career professionals). There was a recognition that younger audiences have different priorities and that "PD institutions need to touch on issues that younger people care about, including tolerance, security, human rights, inequality, and climate change".[22] Likewise, the traditional methods and platforms of PD are unlikely to reach younger audiences. A participant in our Australia and New Zealand roundtable stressed the need to pivot towards engagement with younger audiences: "young people form the core of PD audiences and so new modes of engagement are key".[23] This is especially true in emerging market economies with much younger populations.

Another component of the audience challenge for PD practitioners is the falling levels of public trust in governments. One discussant in our Japan session argued that "younger audiences are suspicious of anything that is government branded or seen as state-backed".[24] This makes either working through partners or simply providing a platform for other voices more important, as a heavy-handed, state-backed initiative might simply turn younger audiences off.

While the practitioners and experts taking part in our roundtables recognised the challenge of adapting approaches to the evolving nature of international audiences, they also identified the need to better connect with citizens at home. The existing disconnect between domestic, day-to-day life and the impact of

"Roundtable participants across the different countries and regions pointed to years of under-investment in digital resources and capabilities as an ongoing challenge."

foreign policy was viewed as a serious, but underappreciated problem. Connecting the day-to-day, lived experience of citizens with the impact of world events and foreign policy is a critical task in need of new champions and dedicated action. While this is not an exclusively 'digital' challenge, it is inherently tied up with digital. governance, cyber security, and digital means of communicating with audiences. In many ways it serves as an example of how most policy issues now have a strong digital component. The issue is arguably linked to the need PD professionals have for a greater say in the wider strategy development and policy making process.

The final digital-driven challenge, identified earlier as one of the major trends shaping the geopolitical context, is the rise of disinformation and malicious influence campaigns. This was raised by virtually every roundtable group. However, it should be noted that it was a particularly dominant theme in our European Union roundtable, where there was near universal concern for the state of the "digital public square for debate" and the strain on an "increasingly contested information space".[25] The pandemic has given even greater urgency to this issue, as the rise of "anti-vaxxer" disinformation poses a direct threat to societies' eventual emergence from the pandemic. Building up information resilience amongst citizens and combating state-backed disinformation efforts were seen as top priorities for ensuring a healthy democratic society, despite the recognition that there are no immediate, 'silver bullet' solutions. In an operating context where information and truth are contested, messaging from embassy communications that should be straightforward becomes a potential minefield. Moreover, diplomats must stay constantly alert to potentially being the target of disinformation campaigns and know how to disarm them.

Pandemic-Driven Challenges

Stemming from the various implications of combating COVID-19, a host of new global challenges have emerged, and many of the existing ones have taken on a greater complexity. In discussions with our roundtable participants, five major challenges, driven specifically by the pandemic, were identified. The first and most obvious challenge is that the traditional face-to-face tools of PD have been unavailable for over a year now and are likely to remain severely limited until 2022 at the earliest. This, frankly, is devastating, with the most effective

PD initiatives often relying on what Edward R. Murrow called "the last three feet". Travel, exchanges, meetings, events, festivals, overseas study, and anything of an in-person nature is impossible at present, posing a huge blow to diplomats and partner organisations working to build trust and forge new relationships between their country and citizens in others.

This loss of face-to-face interaction poses problems for state-to-state diplomacy too. Though related to the above, it was discussed enough in a separate context for us to see this as the second pandemic-driven challenge. Participants in our Southeast Asian roundtable were particularly vexed by the loss of in-person diplomacy. Whether meetings for track I or track II diplomacy, the Southeast Asian group felt the loss of opportunities for face-to-face 'informal diplomacy' was a major problem lacking an easy solution. Perhaps member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) feel this challenge so acutely because consensus-based, unanimous decision-making is core to ASEAN's operating culture. Thus, every diplomatic touchpoint and opportunity for discussion – formal or informal – is critical to keeping ASEAN functioning.

This also holds true for the biggest stages in global diplomacy: international summits. As has been argued by IR scholar Tristen Naylor, the pandemic has caused a "hollowing out of summit diplomacy".[26] Gone is the pageantry that can elevate political leaders to meet challenges and produce major breakthrough moments. Behind the pomp, the potentially pivotal informal moments on the margins of summits – the *pull-aside, the brush-by, the walk-and-talk*, or the quick *tête-à-tête* in a side room – are now impossible to recreate in a digital format.[27] As our Southeast Asian roundtable group made clear, these moments may seem small, but they can have an outsized impact.

The freeze on face-to-face diplomacy was also seen as a huge career development challenge for younger diplomats, who are now unable to "learn by doing". They are also deprived of opportunities to observe their senior colleagues in close-contact diplomatic exchanges. Moreover, as all diplomats posted abroad will know, building up one's network at present is virtually impossible. For young diplomats just starting out, the inability to forge their own professional network will likely set them back by years. It is a problem that spans professions and sectors and not one with any easy solutions. It should be noted that concern over the negative impact on young diplomats was expressed most forcefully in the Southeast Asia roundtable group, though no one was sure how this problem can best be addressed.

The third challenge, "Zoom fatigue", is simply a by-product of life having shifted from the physical to the digital world. This of course is another issue that cuts across sectors, industries, and professions. As virtually all meetings, events, conferences, and other gatherings have moved to digital and video-conferencing platforms, the fatigue of sameness has become inescapable. For PD practitioners working to continue engaging with audiences via digital-only platforms, the deluge of online events can be difficult to compete with. The challenge is how to make the most of platforms and keep audiences interested and engaged.

The fourth pandemic-driven challenge is that many of the traditional partners that embassies or other relevant arms of government partner with (e.g. NGOs, cultural institutions etc.) are facing unprecedented financial hardship. A significant amount of PD activity is carried out in partnership with non-profit organisations,

and given the operating constraints of the pandemic, roundtable participants expressed concern that some will fold. If many of these critical delivery partners cease to exist, it was argued that certain PD delivery models will not be possible once 'normal life' is able to resume.

The final pandemic-driven challenge raised in the roundtable discussions is admittedly an "Atlantic" one, and something of a hybrid combining pre- and post-pandemic issues. The collective pandemic response of most democratic, advanced-economy countries in "the West" has been woeful. The shocking underperformance of most European states, the US, and Great Britain – juxtaposed with the relative success of less democratic Asian states – has led to more forthright questioning of the merits of the "Washington Consensus" model of governance. In short, the pandemic has seen Western states take a reputational beating. By combining the pandemic-driven humbling of Western states with the well-established principle that "foreign policy begins at home", the fifth challenge comes into focus. Namely, that the need for traditionally soft power leading nations to get their own houses in order serves to undermine their ability to push others to change values, policies, or actions in the way they would wish.
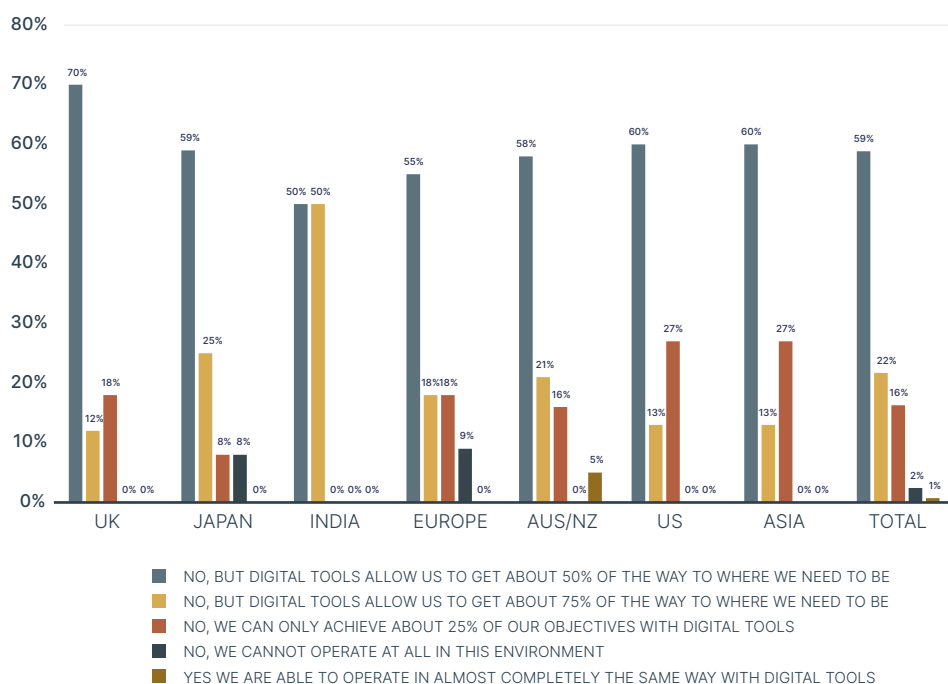
Perhaps ironically, the roundtable group that expressed the greatest awareness of this issue – and its implications – was in Australia and New Zealand. This was surprising, given the comparative success Australia and New Zealand have had in controlling coronavirus – admittedly with some help from their geographical positioning and tightly-controlled borders. Along with the US group, the Australia and New Zealand roundtable discussion group underlined the need for humility in tone and approach with all public diplomacy efforts going forward. For virtually all advanced-economy democracies, PD engagement will need to orientate more towards listening than lecturing.

Forcing everything online has put digital diplomacy to an unprecedented test. With all public diplomacy activity pushed to the digital realm from early 2020, practitioners needed to experiment much more than would have otherwise been the case. With even more recently accrued experience of digital diplomacy, diplomats are now well-placed to make clear-headed assessments of its utility. There is arguably a much better collective sense of which types of engagement can be done effectively through digital platforms, and where digital tools are lacking or simply unfit for purpose. As part of our roundtable discussions, we wanted to understand the extent to which digital tools and platforms have allowed public diplomacy efforts to carry on as before. Have they allowed diplomats to engage public audiences with same level of impact, or has the loss of face-to-face opportunities ground public diplomacy efforts to a halt? As Figure 7 reports, the truth is somewhere between the two extremes.

Testing whether digital diplomacy has enabled practitioners to maintain pre-pandemic levels of public engagement, we asked our roundtable participants the following: "are digital tools and 'digital diplomacy' enough to make up for the lack of in-person engagement and people-to-people exchanges?" Figure 7 breaks down the responses by group and gives the aggregated total across all seven sessions. 59 per cent of respondents felt that digital diplomacy tools allow them to achieve about 50 per cent of what they would be able to do if in-person engagement was possible. A further 22 per cent were more optimistic and felt they could achieve three-quarters of what they needed to through digital means.

ARE DIGITAL TOOLS AND "DIGITAL DIPLOMACY" ENOUGH TO MAKE UP FOR THE
LACK OF IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGES?

- ◼ NO, BUT DIGITAL TOOLS ALLOW US TO GET ABOUT 50% OF THE WAY TO WHERE WE NEED TO BE
- ◼ NO, BUT DIGITAL TOOLS ALLOW US TO GET ABOUT 75% OF THE WAY TO WHERE WE NEED TO BE
- ◼ NO, WE CAN ONLY ACHIEVE ABOUT 25% OF OUR OBJECTIVES WITH DIGITAL TOOLS
- ◼ NO, WE CANNOT OPERATE AT ALL IN THIS ENVIRONMENT
- ◼ YES WE ARE ABLE TO OPERATE IN ALMOST COMPLETELY THE SAME WAY WITH DIGITAL TOOLS

The remaining respondents were not as positive, with 16 per cent feeling digital diplomacy only allowed them to meet a quarter of their objectives, and 2 per cent insisting they could not function at all in a digital-only context.

Overall, the responses are both encouraging and disappointing. That most respondents felt they could continue to operate to at least 50 per cent effectiveness in public engagement efforts during a global pandemic is a testament to the resolve and ingenuity of those working in the field. At the same time, it reveals what is lost without face-to-face engagement with each passing day of the pandemic.

Towards Solutions

The vast majority of time allotted to our roundtable discussions was taken up by debate on what has changed as a result of the pandemic, how the balance of soft power has shifted, and how the pandemic has thrown up new challenges to the conduct of public diplomacy. As such, it was the obstacles and problems – set out above – that really dominated the series of discussions. Adaptations have largely been improvised, with little certainty so far as to what has and has not been effective. The next section compiles the collective thinking and reported experiences of our roundtable groups on the solutions and opportunities that have emerged during the last chaotic year.

IMAGINING A POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought major strategic and practical challenges for foreign policy professionals, it has also inspired a great deal of reflection and innovation with regard to public diplomacy. Past innovations in public diplomacy can similarly be pegged to major global and/or cataclysmic events. As the United States has been such a driving force in the theory and practice of public diplomacy, its evolution illustrates the way catastrophe ushers in adaptation. During World War II, the recognition that stronger alliances can be built through citizens and people-to-people connections led to the US government's creation of the International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) in 1940, which is now the longest-running US-sponsored international exchange programme.

Later, during the Cold War, an infrastructure for official US public diplomacy efforts took shape with the US Information Agency; along with it, a more developed toolkit for educational, cultural, and informational programmes to build relationships with foreign citizens emerged. While this infrastructure was dismantled and investments in public diplomacy decreased in the 1990s, after 9/11, public diplomacy work accelerated. Professionals started to build networks with young leaders, especially in Muslim communities, to create online tools to connect with new audiences to counter extremism and disinformation, and to support civil society development worldwide with opportunities such as grants and exchange programmes.

Each historic, global event reinforced the critical need for the United States to build relationships that foster peace and collaboration to solve global

challenges. The same is true now, in 2021, and for public diplomacy practitioners in every country. But what sets this period apart from the others is that while COVID-19 forced the public diplomacy community to go entirely digital, it also provided a tremendous opportunity to slow down and reimagine what public diplomacy should look like in the post-pandemic era.

The four areas defined below demonstrate that while technology has carried us through COVID-19, it also has its limits for creating meaningful connections that build trust. To move forward in the field, and with a focus on how public diplomacy practitioners can help build the alliances needed to get through the next global crisis, we need to be more inclusive of diverse voices — both at home and abroad; embrace technology platforms, but as an enhancement and not a replacement for in-person connections; and increase the overall scale of PD work. All of this starts with listening.

The Primacy of Listening

As public diplomacy historian Nick Cull has repeatedly emphasised, effective public diplomacy must begin with listening, defined as "the process of engaging a foreign public by gathering information from that public and responding in dialogue or through policy initiatives."[28] Nowhere was this better demonstrated last year than with the international exchange community.

Thousands of the world's emerging leaders travel to the United States each year though exchange programmes like IVLP, founded 80 years ago. Through the Global Ties US Network, which includes non-profit organisations in more than 80 American cities, these visitors spend time receiving professional development training in American communities. Yet, when the travel activity stopped due to the pandemic, the Network was forced to slow down, listen, and reflect. As COVID-19 was a shared, global experience, exchange practitioners began to find ways for community-to-community connections with the alumni of programmes to better understand how others were coping, and adapting, to the pandemic. The work turned virtual and with the active travel involved with exchanges eliminated, there was a singular focus on speaking and listening.

The power of listening is often underestimated. The pandemic forced a slowdown of activity to create the space to listen, and it is integral that this not be abandoned when the hustle of programming returns. Better listening to understand audiences' values and preferences, to build trust and demonstrate empathy, will always serve diplomats and public diplomats well. We must be more mindful to create those opportunities to listen to people, whether it be through creating better and more consistent data, including audience research and

feedback loops for programmes, or engaging with programme participants and alumni on difficult issues, and/or taking the time to be thoughtful and responsive in social media dialogue. Every public diplomacy touchpoint for engagement should be designed for better listening.

Listening and engaging in conversations is what separates public diplomacy from propaganda. A recurring point made in the roundtable discussions was the limitations of a heavy-handed, lecturing style approach to engaging international audiences. Moreover, the importance of listening and dialogue holds true not only for foreign citizens but also domestically, as governments need to better engage their own citizens.

This is arguably most urgent in the US. American soft power has long rested on its culture, political values, and foreign policies — but, most importantly, whether or not the US can live up to the values it preaches abroad and have moral authority.[29] It is critical, therefore, that American leaders look inward to grapple with how to better embrace the country's stated democratic values. Moving values of diversity, equity, and inclusion to the centre of a national dialogue is essential to being, and projecting, a truly open society. Within greater domestic engagement, there is also a tremendous opportunity to leverage citizen diplomacy. Through international exchange and speaker series programmes, motivated foreign ministries can engage with their fellow citizens and with publics abroad simultaneously.

Lifting Up Diverse Voices

Public diplomacy professionals need to identify who their target audiences are. But, in doing so, they should also aim to be inclusive and to lift up new, more diverse voices.

From a US perspective, the State Department's public diplomacy efforts have long tried to reach people beyond urban elite communities, working to include them in various opportunities. Initiatives like the Micro Access English Language Programme help to provide access to English-language education for under-served youth, helping them to eventually gain access to higher education and/or exchange programmes, for which they would otherwise not have the language skills. This is based on the belief that, "talent is evenly distributed, opportunity is not."[30] Innovations like these that broaden the scale for meaningful engagement must continue, as leaders of the future will increasingly be distributed beyond the cities. Public diplomacy practitioners should question any potential biases held on those they are targeting with opportunities to connect to their countries and why.

To appeal to diverse audiences, public diplomats need to identify issues that youth and young professionals in the country care about, which often include human rights, social justice, and climate issues. Again, this was a refrain from participants across roundtable groups from the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan. There was a clear recognition that going forward, public diplomacy efforts need to reach beyond traditional audiences, with a particular focus on young people. Where possible, public diplomacy professionals should also partner and collaborate with local, grassroots organisations, which can have a deeper reach into communities.

"Lifting up diverse voices also means foreign ministries finding new individuals and organisations to become involved in foreign policy and active participants in international affairs."

Lifting up diverse voices also means foreign ministries finding new individuals and organisations to become involved in foreign policy and active participants in international affairs. Both the Biden Administration and the UK's Government have emphasised the critical link between foreign policy and domestic policy, and there are likely to be more opportunities for community organisations in both countries to take part in subnational diplomacy efforts. This is an approach all democratic countries should look to develop and expand.

From a US perspective, leveraging citizen diplomats through organisations like Global Ties US, World Affairs Councils of America, and Sister Cities Networks, will continue to be a force multiplier for public diplomacy efforts. Some of the United States' greatest soft power assets are its cities; city and community leaders are naturally out seeking opportunities to build greater international networks for their communities and local economies. There are more than 100 grassroots organisations across the US built to connect their cities with the world and they are apt at finding curious Americans who are eager to learn about foreign policy and engage directly with foreign leaders. As mentioned, during the pandemic, when all events moved online, these organisations broadened their audiences to ensure that diverse perspectives were shared, both within their communities and also internationally.

Hybrid Public Diplomacy

Another critical lesson from the pandemic is this: virtual activity is not a replacement for in-person programming. It is, however, a powerful enhancement for relationship-building. For the last 20 years, digital diplomacy was often treated as being mutually exclusive from other kinds of public diplomacy. The future, however, is hybrid – especially for exchange programmes.

The virtual format allows for connections to become more meaningful, while also creating a better feedback loop on the success (or lack thereof) of exchange programmes. Before participants travel to a community, there is an opportunity

to first meet online to give a sense of what they will experience. This will help prepare the participants – on both sides of the exchange – to more meaningfully engage while they are together in the communities. On the back end, it will help with sustaining dialogue between the participants, incentivising them to meet again in the future. Long-term virtual engagement will also help in better measuring the effectiveness of the programme so that professionals can learn and ultimately improve.

Public diplomacy practitioners should continue to get creative and be bold in identifying digital tools, whether they be Zoom or augmented reality. But they should, wherever possible, be aiming for hybrid formats where people are able to engage with one another online and in-person. What is important is that, when people are unable to gather in-person, opportunities to stay in touch with critical audiences are maximised. At the same time, we must think about potential barriers to access for some audiences – especially in efforts to identify new, diverse voices – and get creative in how to deliver that access. The digital divide, which is more pronounced in some countries, was a concern raised in several roundtable discussions. This is also why building relationships with professionals in technology and development, both government and non-government, is important for public diplomacy practitioners to increase the scale and impact of their work.

Public Diplomats Need Allies

As the British Council has emphasised,[31] trust in international affairs matters if countries are to build alliances that effectively address the major challenges of today, like climate change and global health. Much of this trust is derived from a country's credibility, or its soft power. We need to further evolve the concept of soft power. The post-pandemic world will usher in a new era. As we enter it, a nation's soft power should be understood as its degree of reputational security,[32] a critical dimension of national security. Public diplomacy professionals, in their effort to support reputational and national security, will be set up to fail if they have little soft power to leverage.

For any of this to be realised, to unlock the full potential of this work, public diplomats need allies. The need to think about soft power and to engage with foreign publics is often so obvious, so omnipresent, that it is often taken for granted. World-leading governments need to demonstrate its value by dedicating meaningful levels of funding and expertise to it. As foreign policy strategy is increasingly inclusive of domestic publics, incentives need to exist for all diplomats to engage foreign citizens, as well as their own. And for public diplomacy programmes to increase to the scale necessary to engage critical foreign audiences, lift up diverse voices, and provide more complicated – but effective – hybrid programming, public diplomacy practitioners need their colleagues within foreign ministries – but also in defence, development, industry, and the non-profit space – to speak up about their centrality to foreign affairs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed that a nation's soft power and its ability to promote it through public diplomacy is the best possible tool for building the trust required for global cooperation. A connection that national leaders and diplomats will hopefully make.

"Another critical lesson from the pandemic is this: virtual activity is not a replacement for in-person programming."

A RED, WHITE & BLUE RESET: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

American soft power sits at a crossroads. The new administration is facing a number of fundamental challenges as it seeks to reset US foreign policy and repair the reputational damage incurred under President Biden's predecessor. As the deadly storming of the Capitol demonstrated, the United States remains deeply divided politically, culturally, and economically. These divisions and the perceived instability of the US system carry significant risks that weigh on American soft power and impinge on its ability to conduct a coherent and effective foreign policy.[33] Set in the context of great power competition with China, the current political divisions and dysfunction in the US put the nation at a real disadvantage. Compared to the last great American rival, the Soviet Union, the US now struggles to claim the same moral high ground as it did during the Cold War.[34]

While the Biden administration begins to re-engage with the world through renewed partnerships and reconciled alliances, the long-term commitment of the US to international collaboration is viewed with a sense of trepidation. The legacy impact of "America First", combined with the early mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic is seen externally as a dual crisis of moral leadership and falling government competence. Testing this impact with our roundtable participants, we asked specifically if American soft power would recover from recent lows. Figure 8 reports the aggregated responses across all roundtable groups to the question: can US soft power recover under President Biden?

FIGURE 8

CAN U.S. SOFT POWER RECOVER UNDER PRESIDENT BIDEN? (AGGREGATED)
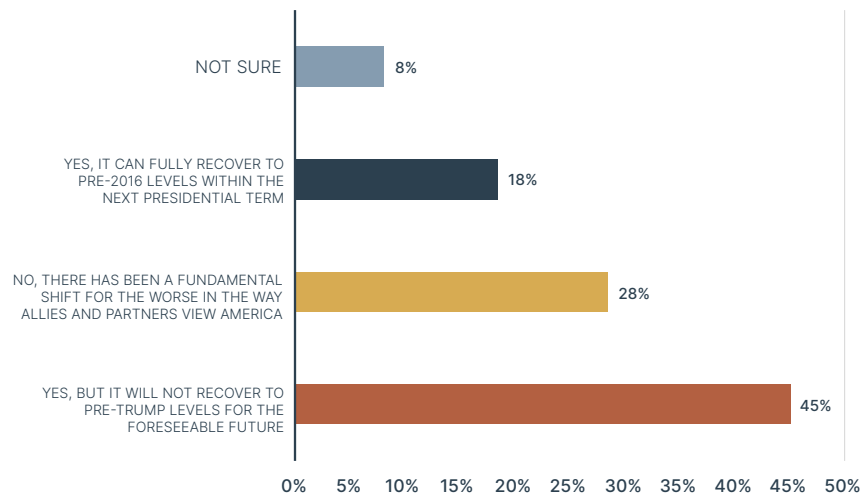
The majority felt that US soft power will recover, but the overall plurality of the group felt it is unlikely to recover to pre-2016 levels. Nearly three in ten felt that it will not recover at all and a significant shift in how allies view the US has occurred. Figure 9 breaks down the responses to the question by country of respondents. The Australia/NZ, EU and US roundtable groups had the highest proportion of pessimistic takes on America's soft power prospects going forward.

FIGURE 9

CAN AMERICAN SOFT POWER BOUNCE BACK UNDER A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION?
(BY COUNTRY/REGION)
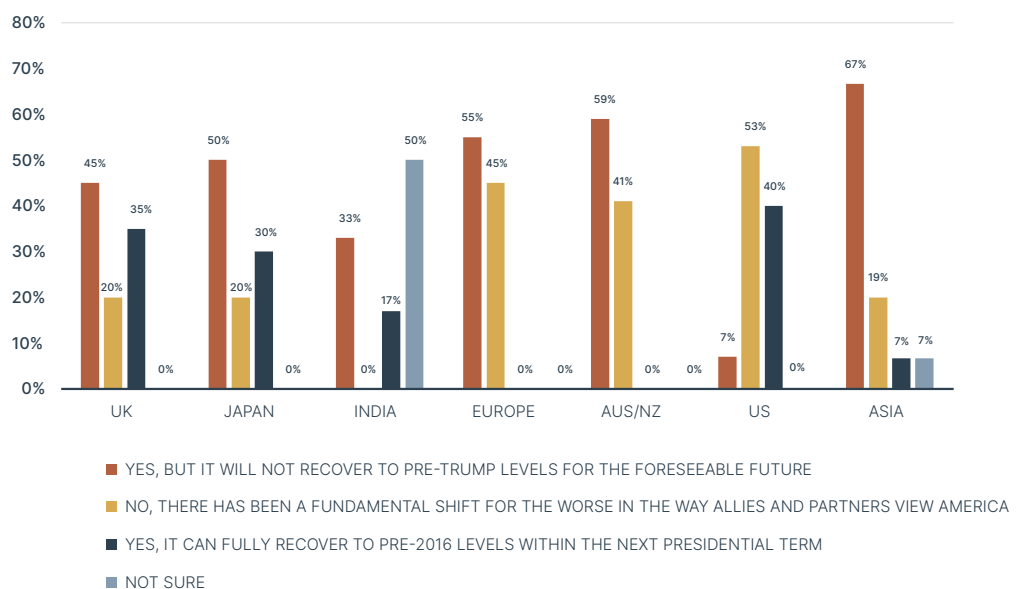
"The communication space, flattened by digital technology, has become ever more competitive, with active engagement by other countries and actors, especially those keen on deploying misinformation and disinformation against US interests and values."

Meanwhile, America's most potent soft power sectors – from arts and entertainment to tourism and higher education – have been amongst the hardest hit during the pandemic. In short, both internally and externally, the US faces an uphill climb to make up the lost ground.

So how should American public diplomacy practitioners operate in such a trying context? How can American diplomats best explain that the process of American politics is one of continual improvement, not without its regular significant setbacks? And how can greater humility be incorporated into their public diplomacy efforts? It is a delicate task to be open about America's shortcomings, whilst also promoting the country as a reliable international partner.

If the US is to pull off a successful reset, the communication challenge remains a fundamental task for American public diplomacy. The communication space, flattened by digital technology, has become ever more competitive, with active engagement by other countries and actors, especially those keen on deploying misinformation and disinformation against US interests and values. It is a formidable task to protect freedom of expression and counter disinformation at home, while equally recognising the global nature of this challenge. It will require coordinated, inter-agency action on multiple fronts including more focused efforts to inoculate citizens with improved digital literacy; aggressively calling out malicious disinformation campaigns from state or state-backed actors; working with international partners to sharpen collective capability in combating disinformation; and collaborating with allies to shape the new norms and global governance structures in the digital information space. The new administration has started making progress in some of these areas, like calling out – and punishing – malicious disinformation campaigns.[35]

Building on this, the US must also consider new ways of engaging with foreign audiences. As a global leader in technological innovation, the US is exceptionally well-placed to drive change in the realm of digital engagement. However, the American public diplomacy apparatus is still built around the structures of the past which dictates the distribution of resources. Public diplomacy innovation requires robust data on audiences, providing diplomats with key insights that allow them to tailor campaigns and messaging to better resonate with target audiences. Although listening to and understanding foreign publics remains the fundamental building block for public diplomacy, many of the tools for performing such functions have been rendered inadequate in the evolving information and media landscape. This calls for broad-based capacity and capability building in public diplomacy infrastructure and personnel. Public diplomacy practitioners will also need to devise innovative and strategic ways to reach audiences in societies that are increasingly cut off from news and information beyond that of their own country's state-controlled media.

Next, there is an urgent need for structural reforms around public diplomacy, which should begin with strong senior leadership to scale up public diplomacy efforts and ensure they align with foreign policy goals aimed at rebuilding trust. Policy makers and practitioners must clarify the strategy for US public diplomacy activities and the roles of different actors in realising its success. For the US government, public diplomacy should be defined as a way to achieve concrete foreign policy goals. Government public diplomacy is not merely about making other countries admire the United States; public diplomacy in this context is a means to supporting and advancing American foreign policy interests with all US agencies working in alignment. With better inter-agency coordination, American public diplomacy should have a more targeted and effective approach.

The US also needs to play to its soft power strengths, particularly in science and technology, higher education, civil society, creative industries, and the private sector, to harness their combined potential. Private organisations and companies could be called upon to do more as representatives of the United States. A private-public collaboration will require the private sector to demonstrate a willingness to work with the government, as both sides have a shared interest in promoting technology and innovation. The importance of American educational services and institutions remains a key part of American public diplomacy efforts and should be strengthened further. Programmes with a proven track-record, such as the Fulbright Program, warrant greater attention and investment. Given the more competitive landscape of international student recruitment in other countries such as Canada and Australia, bolstering US higher education signals to international students the value that the US places on diverse perspectives and exchanges themselves, while projecting the US as a welcoming and open nation to ambitious young people from around the world. As the US continues to host the largest international student population, greater attentiveness to their experience and transition into American society would serve to enhance American educational services as an important platform for mutual understanding.

Finally, rebuilding America's soft power requires a more internationally engaged domestic public, now more than ever. Political leaders need to call on the American public to become more involved in public diplomacy initiatives – and provide them with the platforms to do so. Citizens and civil society themselves are the best ambassadors for the United States. The unique diversity of the

country gives American public diplomats an unparalleled resource to draw upon in demonstrating that the US, despite its faults, is comprised of people from all over the world and from all walks of life. Although the American government and public may be perceived as sharply divided on a host of issues, the American people themselves personalise their experiences and can honestly and openly portray life in America from their own perspective. While all government public diplomacy programmes should attempt to achieve some foreign policy end, exposure to Americans themselves gives the US greater credibility in showcasing both the benefits and shortcomings of American freedom and democracy through the lens of the people themselves. This demands a bold vision and big ideas to broaden citizen engagement and advance a shared purpose and understanding that America's international engagement and domestic prosperity are interconnected and interdependent.

The roundtable participants' collective assessment of America's current soft power standing will make for painful, if unsurprising, reading in US foreign policy circles. In both the polling of our roundtable groups and their discussions, participants made clear that the US has taken a significant reputational hit over the course of the pandemic. Very few expressed confidence that American soft power can recover to pre-2016 levels. Yet, reinvention is a fundamental American construct and if any country can pull off a reputational rebound, it is the United States. While there are multiple historic precedents for American reputational recovery, delivering it in the post-pandemic era will require bold leadership, greater adoption of digital tools, substantial organisational change, and a more engaged public.

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CAN SOFT POWER DELIVER GLOBAL BRITAIN?

In March 2021, the British Government published its long-awaited, *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.* The publication of the review could not have come at a more urgent time. Having completed its separation from the European Union with a limited free trade agreement in place, the UK must now seek out an appropriate role in a turbulent world, grappling with fundamental shifts in the balance of global power and an upended foreign policy operating context wrought by the pandemic. The Integrated Review is meant to provide a strategic roadmap by which the UK can navigate this process in a comprehensive and coordinated way. Ultimately, effective strategy is the appropriate alignment of objectives with the necessary capabilities and resources.[36]

The Government's effusive "Global Britain" rallying cry does not hint at diminished ambitions, though resources are likely to be under strain for the foreseeable future. If "Global Britain" is to be a success, the leveraging of the UK's soft power will have to do much of the work in meeting current priorities. So how best to ensure the country's soft power assets maintain a relatively strong position, and how should they fit into an emerging new national "grand strategy"?

Casting an eye to the future, we put this question to the UK roundtable group convened for this project, asking – in terms of soft power – what the Government needs to do as it shapes a new post-Brexit, post-pandemic foreign policy approach. Drawing on the exchanges of our assembled group of practitioners and experts led us to three main recommendations to address this question. Encouragingly, there was a noteworthy level of alignment between the

roundtable group's suggested areas of focus and the priorities latterly set out by the Government.

The Integrated Review was billed as the most important strategic document for British foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. As such, it is worth highlighting the central pillar of the Review: its articulation of the UK's role in the world as "a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation with a global perspective".[37] In setting out such a bold narrative, the Review clearly signals that the UK has the necessary capabilities to help meet major global challenges, and the political will to do so. This is the modern essence of soft power, and what really generates global goodwill: the blending of power, purpose, compassion, and action. This link is backed by polling analysis carried out for *The Soft Power 30* reports,[38] as well as additional well-regarded research in the field.[39]

The Integrated Review explicitly underlines the importance of soft power to the UK and recognises the role that assets like the British Council, the BBC World Service, top-ranking universities, museums, tourism, heritage, and sport play in delivering greater prosperity and international influence for the UK.[40] While the long-standing bedrock institutions that contribute to British soft power will need continued investment and protection, it was argued in our roundtable that culture and heritage will not be enough to maintain Britain's soft power edge.[41]

As a result, the first recommended action is to place a much greater emphasis on science and technology in reinforcing and substantiating the UK's global narrative. This is not just about the context of the race for technological superiority. In harnessing (and sharing with partners) future innovations in life sciences, biotech, and green energy, the UK will demonstrate its ability to help tackle major global challenges in need of novel solutions.

To the Government's credit, the Integrated Review sets the aim of making the UK a "Science and Technology superpower" by 2030.[42] There are, however, questions as to whether the current Government will meet that objective. Projected cuts to UK research budgets – and the slashing of development aid spending hitting international research collaboration – threaten to undermine the Government's stated ambition.[43] If science and technology are going to be central to the "Global Britain" strategy, resources and action will need to align accordingly. On the public diplomacy side, building up diplomatic capacity in science would be a welcome step forward. Increasing the number (and seniority) of science and technology posts in key diplomatic missions worldwide would better project a "science and tech" narrative and generate new opportunities for international collaboration.

The second major recommendation emerging from the roundtable is to create a better link between citizens and foreign policy. For the UK, this is an

especially urgent challenge. There are two burning issues that require a much stronger, clearer connection between British foreign policy and the day-to-day lived experiences of its citizens. The first issue is the Government's desire to "level up" parts of the country that have not shared equally in economic growth and inward investment over the last several decades. The Integrated Review explicitly ties British foreign policy objectives to the Prime Minister's levelling up agenda to meet this objective.

Creating a viable link between citizens' daily lives and the high politics of statecraft is hardly straightforward, but the roundtable group insisted on the importance of creating and using the right mechanisms to do so. One participant argued, "we need more of a grass-roots approach to [communicating] the importance of foreign policy and how it affects everyday lives. We need to defend the roles of our communities in this process and champion them as an asset of British soft power."[44] The importance of civil society as a significant source of soft power has also been emphasised by Joseph Nye, the originator of the concept.[45]

The second burning issue requiring better citizen engagement concerns the very future of the Union itself – maintaining Scotland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. The future of the Union is set to dominate British politics for the foreseeable future, and the stakes could not be higher. Here again, the group underlined the significant interplay between citizens, foreign policy, and preservation of the Union. The Government needs to take three key actions on this front. First, it needs to demonstrate to the whole of the British public the positive global impact made when four nations – greater than the sum of their parts – act in concert, and how this ultimately leads to better outcomes for all citizens. Second, the Government needs to ask the public what their foreign policy priorities are and what they want "Global Britain" to be. Finally, the Government needs to encourage and empower the public and civil society groups to engage more on the international stage and play a more active role in delivering "Global Britain".

Admittedly, foreign policy has always operated as the most remote, secretive redoubt of government. Democratising diplomacy will require a significant investment of time, effort, and thought, but it is urgently needed. In the first instance, the Government should launch a review and wide consultation on how best to engage with the public and civil society on issues of foreign policy. With a high-profile, public-facing review producing a viable plan to make foreign policy more inclusive for the whole of the country, the Government should build effective mechanisms for engagement. With structures in place, the Government needs to maintain a genuine, iterative, and long-running public dialogue across all regions of the UK that link the public to foreign policy, creating a sense of public ownership of "Global Britain", and inspiring grass roots participation in citizen diplomacy.[46]

Making the development and execution of foreign policy much more inclusive for the British public would amount to a transformational change. This principle of inclusion is also at the heart of the final recommendation for the future of British soft power: a total operational shift toward collaboration in all public diplomacy activity. As the pandemic begins to abate and a new normal mode of operation takes shape, the UK's public diplomacy efforts must centre on partnership.

Calling for a greater focus on partnership in public diplomacy is not new. However, trends, fads, and political whims have a way of pulling organisations away from what works. As recently as 2010, the UK's Foreign Office reached a high

"Creating a viable link between citizens' daily lives and the high politics of statecraft is hardly straightforward, but the roundtable group insisted on the importance of creating and using the right mechanisms to do so."

watermark for collaborative international engagement when it redefined public diplomacy by putting partnership at the heart of it.[47] A change in government later that year brought with it the creation of the GREAT Campaign. While not without its uses, the arrival of GREAT marked a significant departure in tone and shifted focus away from partnership toward one-way promotion of the UK as a tourism and investment destination. Our expert discussants made clear that it is time for a major shift on this front. Operationally, no new public diplomacy initiative should be undertaken unless it incorporates meaningful collaboration with an international or local partner.

The focus on partnership ought to serve as the guiding principle for all aspects of future British foreign policy. This sentiment runs through an insightful Chatham House report, published just before the launch of the Integrated Review, which made the case for Britain's new post-Brexit role as one of a "global broker".[48] The report argues that the UK has the unique blend of capabilities, assets, and networks to serve as a global convener of coalitions for solving major challenges. This is essentially a role built around the UK's soft power strengths.

Broadly in line with this idea, the Government has set combating climate change and leading on the reform of multilateral institutions like the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization as its top two immediate priorities. Making progress on either of these will hinge on the UK's ability to form and mobilise coalitions to act – in short, encouraging partnership. At the heart of these three recommendations is collaboration, both within the UK itself and externally with international partners. If the Government is going to live up to the aspirations of the Integrated Review it must make the most of its soft power through effective partnership with others. All the while, in keeping with the principle of grand strategy, the Government must keep its resources and actions aligned with its ambitions.

CONCLUSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SOFT POWER & PUBLIC DIPLOMACY GOING FORWARD

Those working in the fields of public diplomacy, cultural relations, and international engagement are unlikely to experience another disruption equal in scale and duration to that of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its all-encompassing nature and universal impact put diplomats – and indeed all people – to a severe test. Yet reflecting on the mood and tone of discussions across our seven global roundtables, the participants resisted any sense of despair. There was a collective, clear-headed recognition of how the pandemic has shifted the operating context, that existing and emerging challenges are daunting, and that the structures underpinning multilateral cooperation are under strain.

However, the discussions carried a reassuringly resolute tone, as participants shared experiences and ideas to help identify the current challenges, sketch out potential ways to meet them, and ultimately push the development of public diplomacy forward as the world emerges from the pandemic.

As set out in the introduction, the aim of this project was to take a broad, sweeping look at how and where the pandemic has had an impact on soft power and the practice of public diplomacy. As repeatedly heard from roundtable participants, it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions from the experience of the pandemic. As such, detailed recommendations on how public diplomacy practitioners must adapt going forward feels premature. Moreover, diplomats in different countries will face varying operational constraints and priorities. However, by drawing on some of the more poignant, forward-looking insights shared in the roundtable discussions, we have arrived at five broadly applicable guiding principles that suggest a way forward for the practice of post-pandemic public diplomacy.

Post-Pandemic Principles

The first guiding principle is to prepare for a hybrid future. The various tools and platforms of public diplomacy will need to be overhauled to incorporate both live and digital elements in new and adaptive ways. Our roundtable groups were unequivocal in their insistence that in-person, people-to-people meetings are the most effective for building relationships and creating trust. However, digital platforms have opened up opportunities for new conversations, new participants, and new ideas over the course of the last year. Hybrid engagement platforms should lead to more inclusive exchanges, particularly when regular international travel is likely to remain a logistical challenge in the near term. That said, practitioners also need to be aware of the digital divide that exists in some settings and take steps to mitigate its impact.

The second guiding principle is the need to both ramp up and overhaul the practice of "listening" in public diplomacy, which arguably is more important than ever. As digital communication platforms have proliferated, so too have ways to listen, with better tools and more data available to foreign ministries. However the pace of advancements in digital communications and analytical tools has raced ahead of governments' ability – and willingness – to adapt accordingly. Ministries of foreign affairs need to adopt much more sophisticated approaches to technology. Doing so means going beyond listening as it is done today, e.g. via social listening tools and moving towards predictive listening. Foreign ministries and their diplomatic missions would benefit immensely from the better and faster interpretation of signals from relevant data so that they can modify communications accordingly. This is essentially about combining improved capability with greater agility: listening quickly, analysing quickly, and acting quickly.

Better listening tools, backed by more sophisticated data analytics should help diplomats to engage more effectively with broader and younger audiences, a recurring theme in several roundtables. Better listening and analytical tools, should also help usher in new, more precise performance measurement frameworks as well. Improved impact measurement is needed to better assess public diplomacy performance, and to demonstrate the value of spending on global outreach activities.

For democratic countries – and especially the United States and United Kingdom – linking foreign policy back to the home front is the third guiding principle. This issue was raised most forcefully by American and British roundtable participants. The need to better link citizens and domestic policy to foreign policy has become a major talking point in foreign affairs circles, and rightly so.[49] Going forward, governments need to prioritise and overhaul the mechanisms for

engaging the public on foreign policy and public diplomacy. In the development of foreign policy, there needs to be greater cross-government coordination that links citizens' economic prospects and day-to-day lives with international priorities and global affairs. Likewise, political leaders need to do better in communicating to citizens the importance of engaging with the world in a productive manner. Finally, as part of this drive, citizens and civil society should be encouraged and empowered to contribute more to the public debate on foreign policy and play a more active role in the delivery of public diplomacy programmes – essentially expanding opportunities for citizens to engage internationally.

The fourth guiding principle is to put partnership at the centre of all future public diplomacy initiatives. An operational shift to a default of partnership in all engagement programmes is a necessary response to two factors. First, falling levels of public trust in government make heavy-handed, banner-waving engagement attempts much less compelling, and thus less effective than approaches with a lighter touch, delivered with local partners. As a basic principle of strategic communications, third-party advocates are always more compelling messengers than embassies or governments themselves. Second, many traditional partner organisations – cultural bodies or civil society organisations – have been in stasis during the pandemic and will likely need to work with partners who have the resources to accelerate a much-needed return to normal operations.

To bring this principle to life, public diplomacy practitioners will need to eschew any temptation to pursue one-way, broadcast-like programming and operate more of a collaborative platform with local partners. As societies spring back to post-pandemic life, one action to ensure a move to greater collaborative public diplomacy would be for MFAs – particularly the US Department of State – to overhaul the management of their various scholarship and exchange alumni networks. Smarter deployment of what is a tremendous, underused resource for many countries' foreign ministries will require them to take a network perspective of relationships and invest more in the tools and capabilities that will help better match perspectives, priorities, ambitions, and resources of various potential partners.

Our final guiding principle is aimed less at public diplomacy practitioners and more at the most senior leaders in foreign ministries and the very centre of government: the structures of MFAs need targeted reforms that better integrate public diplomacy into the architecture of foreign policy making and execution. Specifically, organisational structures in MFAs need to be shaped so that public diplomacy leaders play a more active role in the development of foreign policy strategy; wider foreign policy objectives are incorporated into public diplomacy programmes; and public diplomacy tools, skills, and awareness are better spread throughout MFAs.

Admittedly, this last guiding principle calls for a significant amount of work. Moreover, it will apply differently to any given country's architecture of international-facing departments and central government. But organisational change in pursuit of more effective public diplomacy – and ultimately better foreign policy and international outcomes – is critical. This was a point repeatedly raised by participants in our roundtable series.

The operating context facing governments and their diplomats has moved on rapidly over the last decade. The pandemic has only accelerated the prevailing

technological and geopolitical trends driving this change. The upshot is that the organisational structures in most MFAs are woefully out of date. Foreign policy – and by extension public diplomacy – is being run largely through 20th century organisational design. Without significant structural change, MFAs will struggle to adequately address the challenges set out in this report.

Research Programme Going Forward

This report should be read as the first offering in a sustained programme of research. The aim of this project was to provide an initial assessment of the impact of the pandemic on global soft power, identify the emerging challenges facing public diplomacy practitioners, and begin to sketch out the changes required to adapt effectively. Owing to the complexity and wide-ranging nature of these lines of inquiry, this report was never going to produce a definitive set of detailed recommendations. Our aim going forward is to explore the issues raised above in greater thematic and geographic detail.

We were very fortunate to have an accomplished group of global participants contribute to our roundtable discussions. Likewise, we benefited greatly from working in collaboration with a distinguished set of partners including the Lowy Institute, Lund University, The India Foundation's Center for Soft Power, the Singapore International Foundation, and Tama University's Center for Rule-making Strategies. We have done our best to reflect the major insights from the seven international sessions, and we hope to continue to engage with the network created out of the primary research undertaken for this report.

In addition to facilitating an ongoing exchange of views and experience within our global roundtable groups, we will be especially focused on the measurement of soft power, as well as public diplomacy impact assessment. As we found in the polling of our roundtable groups, the nature of soft power has changed. The pandemic has had an effect on the reputations of leading nations and altered how elites assess other countries. There is now an urgent need to better understand and define these changes and overhaul the existing methodologies for measuring and comparing the soft power resources of countries accordingly. Going forward, Sanctuary Counsel will work to develop the next evolution in soft power measurement, building a framework designed to account for the context of the post-pandemic world.

As with the need to improve "listening" through better digital tools and data analytics, the same holds true for improving the measurement of soft power resources and reputational assets. Improved measurement of soft power resources and inputs should be complemented by better impact assessment of individual public diplomacy initiatives. A more strategic, objectives-based approach to public diplomacy would help facilitate this.

The guiding principles above will hopefully provide a constructive foundation for further research in the field and inspiration for tangible action on behalf of practitioners. At a minimum, they should serve as a useful point of departure for further debate on how public diplomacy practitioners can best navigate a post-pandemic future.

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Jonathan McClory is a Partner at Sanctuary Counsel. He is a globally recognised expert on soft power, public diplomacy, and place branding. Jonathan has advised governments across four continents on matters of reputation, policy, campaigning, place branding, and effective global engagement.

Before joining Sanctuary Counsel, Jonathan was General Manager for Asia at Portland, where he built up and oversaw the company's work across Asia Pacific from Singapore. Jonathan also served as a Partner in the Government Advisory practice in London and is the creator of *The Soft Power 30*. Prior to his time at Portland, Jonathan oversaw place branding strategy at Winkreative (the sister company of *Monocle* magazine). While at Winkreative, Jonathan led the development and launch of a new nation brand and global campaign for Thailand, commissioned by the then Prime Minister. He also worked as a consultant in the London office of the Boston Consulting Group.

Before working in the private sector, Jonathan was a Research Fellow at Policy Exchange and Senior Researcher at the Institute for Government (IfG). While at the IfG, Jonathan developed the world's first composite index for measuring the soft power of countries. This earlier work informed Jonathan's creation of *The Soft Power 30*, which has been used as a benchmark by researchers and governments around the world. Jonathan is a regular commentator on international affairs, appearing regularly on broadcast and in print media.

Contributors

Dr Katherine Brown

Dr Katherine Brown is the President and CEO of Global Ties US, the largest and most-established citizen diplomacy network in the United States. There, she leads a committed team to power individuals, communities, and nations to build trust and advance peace and prosperity through international exchange and subnational diplomacy programmes.

In prior lives, she served in the White House as an assistant to the National Security Advisor; in Congress as a Professional Staff Member at the House Foreign Affairs Committee; and in the State Department as the Executive Director of the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and as a Public Diplomacy Officer

at the US Embassy in Kabul. Katherine was also part of the original editorial team for Bloomberg Opinion and spent much of her early professional career working throughout Asia for The Asia Foundation and Operation Smile, Inc. For her Ph.D. in Communications from Columbia University, she conducted her fieldwork in Afghanistan and Pakistan, studying the media's representation of the war and its effects on civil society, governance, and diplomacy.

Her recent book with Oxford University Press, Your Country, Our War, assesses the global reach and power of US news media in the context of international conflict. She is a 2018-2019 French American Foundation Young Leader, a University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy Advisory Board Member, an Alliance on International Exchange Board Member, and a Truman National Security Project Board Member.

Dr Jay Wang

A scholar and consultant in the fields of strategic communication and public diplomacy, Jian (Jay) Wang is director of the Center on Public Diplomacy and an associate professor at USC Annenberg. He previously worked for the international consulting firm McKinsey & Company, where he advised clients on matters of communication strategy and implementation across a variety of industries and sectors. Wang has written widely on the role of communication in the contemporary process of globalization.

He is co-editor of the newly published book Debating Public Diplomacy: Now and Next. He is the author of Shaping China's Global Imagination: Nation Branding at the World Expo and several other books. His research has been published in Journal of Communication, Journal of Broadcast & Electronic Media, Management Communication Quarterly, Public Relations Review and Place Branding & Public Diplomacy. He serves on the editorial board of the International Journal of Communication. Wang has led successful partnerships on numerous research and programming topics — ranging from soft power in global affairs, to US public diplomacy and national security, to digital advocacy, public diplomacy performance and evaluation — with several organisations, including the BBC, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the European Union Delegation to the US, Global Affairs Canada, Global Ties US, the Japan Foundation, NATO, Pew Research Center, the United Nations Foundation and the US Department of State.

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