

Nov 04, 2016 by **Daryl Copeland**

Public Diplomacy and Branding ^[1]

Delivered with equal measure of art and science, diplomacy is a non-violent approach to the management of international relations and global issues which seeks to resolve conflict through discussion, negotiation and partnership. The diplomats' brief is unambiguous: to advance or defend their country's political and economic place in the world by the most effective means. That is the purpose, the essence of diplomacy.

In the past, diplomacy was very much the private preserve of senior politicians and foreign ministry officials, speaking usually to each other with great discretion on behalf of the states they represented. Diplomatic practice in this context was highly formulaic, largely scripted and profoundly tradition-bound. In recent years, however, mainly in response to globalization, the transformed international security environment, and the significant power asymmetries associated with the unipolar world order which emerged in the wake of the Cold War, diplomacy has been democratized. It is no longer practiced solely by "envoys of the sovereign, extraordinary and plenipotentiary" but instead by a wide variety of actors, ranging from government officials, to opinion-leaders from universities and the media, to private sector and NGO reps, to prominent individuals - Bono, George Soros, Bill Gates. The like-minded - be they in government, journalism, business or the academy - have become partners, and the nature of those joint-ventures typically changes with each new issue.

Why the shift? In the compressed, accelerated, information-saturated precincts of the early 21st century, you are what you seem. As the Dane's have recently learned, image projection and reputation management are now far from optional - they have become critical elements of statecraft. In this highly fluid and complex environment, the requirement to connect directly with populations, both domestic and international, has become vital, as has the imperative of mastering the tools of public relations, advocacy, lobbying and strategic communications. In this milieu, the front line is more likely to be a barrio, or souk, or a Quonset hut inside the wire. In other words, the only rational response in a competitive, volatile, and dangerous world has been to move from an exclusive, boutique diplomacy catering mainly to the pin stripe set and down to main street by taking diplomacy public.

The territory? Cerebral. The currency? Ideas. The marketplace? Global. The diplomat? Part activist, part cross-cultural communicator, part street-smart policy entrepreneur.

Public diplomacy (PD), then, is a whole new game, a business model governing nothing less than the way we work, and may be defined as the sum of efforts by government to promote values, policies and interests abroad by influencing international public opinion. It is non-coercive and based on the use of what Professor Joseph Nye has so aptly called soft power - making others want what we want through the power of attraction rather than coercion. PD goes well beyond public affairs, which seeks more to inform than to persuade, and has more in common with dialogue than propaganda, which is a one-way flow of information often characterized by inaccuracy and bias. Purpose-driven and outwardly directed, PD is about

shaping attitudes and the winning of hearts and minds of foreign audiences, increasingly, though by no means exclusively through the new - web and wireless - media. In short, PD is all about engaging the world, and enlisting the support of foreign publics in service of national objectives - which may in fact be conterminous with their own. Mutual interest is, after all, the mother of all cooperation.

Branding is intimately related to PD, but as a complex, longer-term process of image shaping and reputation management it is both larger and more comprehensive. It is what sets you apart, makes you distinct, differentiates you from others. Good brands are suffused with attitude. They have soul. They are positive and evoke a favourable predisposition, a smile rather than a scowl.

A nation's public diplomacy will - ideally - support its brand. When the two track separately, or, worse yet, diverge... you've got trouble.
