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Is Public Diplomacy for Everyone? [1]

If public diplomacy (PD) is understudied as a discipline, then even less is known about PD as practiced - or not - by less developed countries (LDCs) and their representatives abroad.

In constructing the research base upon which the argumentation presented in Guerrilla Diplomacy">*Guerrilla Diplomacy* rests, I noted that the literature is largely silent on the thinking of developing country foreign ministries, diplomats or academics about PD per se. There is little data on their PD objectives, resources and performance. Not enough is known about how - and if - the tools and techniques of public diplomacy are being used, or could be adapted to meet the strategic needs and capacities of LDCs, particularly as regards their activities in major metropolitan centers where effective practice could make a demonstrable difference.

New knowledge about the diplomatic practices and priorities of resident envoys from developing areas would benefit not only LDC practitioners, but also the operations of foreign ministries in OECD countries and states everywhere.

In our wired - and wireless - world, most if not all diplomacy eventually becomes public. And, in a world of insecurity, diplomacy, which is dedicated to the non-violent resolution of differences, does matter. It can play a critical role in the achievement of both development and security. But diplomacy is not only a neglected, almost obscure area within contemporary academic research; it has been relegated to the sidelines by many governments. Its practice has not adapted well to the challenge of globalization, or to the continuing militarization of international policy. A panoply of grave threats and challenges, many rooted in science and driven by technology, have been left to fester, or have been addressed by other means, mainly involving armed force.

Assessing and bridging that diplomatic performance gap, and identifying ways to retool diplomats as globalization managers are becoming central preoccupations for all governments and their foreign ministries.

As a serving diplomat and foreign service executive, I frequently noticed that the representatives of developing countries seemed in large part unaware of PD, and tended both to pursue, and to be more comfortable with the traditional, state-to-state model. A thumbnail survey of the dominant image and reputation, or nation brand of major LDCs in North America, provides at least notional evidence of chronic PD under-achievement. China, for example, has opened some 130 Confucius Institutes world-wide and is credited with putting on a dazzling display at the Beijing Olympics, yet their "charm offensives" in Asia, Latin America and Africa have raised hackles, and attempts by Chinese corporations to make acquisitions in the USA and Canada routinely raise suspicions and are sometimes blocked. India has just announced plans to open more cultural centers, and makes much of its credentials as the world's largest democracy and a cost-competitive, English language back office and software incubator. But there was significant opposition in the USA to the

normalization of nuclear relations, and caste and communal difficulties often figure prominently in media coverage. Indeed, China and India, which together represent almost half of the world's population, are generally viewed uneasily, with human rights violations and military threat dimensions often surpassing any appreciation of burgeoning economic and political opportunities.

Brazil is perceived as a country with enormous, but perpetually unattainable potential; Rio's successful Olympic bid notwithstanding, relative to its size and resources, Brazil's near-invisibility and apparent lack of influence on the world stage must be considered a weakness. Indonesia, a nascent democracy and the world's largest Muslim-majority country, is also largely unknown - except for recurrent overtones of Islamic extremism and political violence. Egypt is widely perceived as troubled and unstable, a breeding ground and training academy for potential terrorists. Nigeria's image has never recovered from the Biafran civil war and famine, the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, and various campaigns highlighting the eco-devastation wrought by big oil in the Niger delta. Turkey is viewed as a fair-weather NATO ally, clearly not up to the standards required for EU entry.

Yes, these are caricatures, but they are certainly out there and in a world in which perception is reality, it would be unwise to ignore them.

Other examples, at a higher level of analysis, abound. Considerable thought, for instance, has been devoted to analyzing how PD might better be harnessed in service of developed country objectives such as conflict resolution and the promotion of democracy ⬚, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. Far less attention, however, has been devoted to the transformational dimension, that is, a consideration of how PD might be used to achieve not only particular national goals, but also to address some of the root causes of underdevelopment and insecurity. These include issues related to inequalities in the terms of trade and the distribution of wealth and resources, environmental degradation and the international education deficit. By tapping into the global political economy of knowledge, perhaps especially as regards the role of science and technology in development, the net result of this kind of improved diplomatic practice could be to increase the resilience and reduce the vulnerability of developing countries in face of both capacity constraints and the challenges imposed by globalization.

All of this suggests that for developing countries, which must not only manage their own reputations but also engage with effect on big issues such as climate change, world order and the structure of international organizations, there is considerable PD work to be done.

Clearly this is an area in need of much further research. In the meantime, however, I wonder if PD - and, for that matter, soft/smart power - is not by nature somewhat culturally or ethno-centric? PD, after all, has been defined, developed and practiced almost exclusively in, and by, individuals and institutions associated with advanced countries.

I will return to these themes in future posts.