

CPD PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Paper 4, 2010

Spectacle in Copenhagen: Public Diplomacy on Parade

by Donna Marie Oglesby

La Diplomatie Publique

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Общественная дипломатия

Public Diplomacy

PUBLICZNA DYPLOMACJA

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Publieksdiplomatie

Diplomacia Pública

公共外交

Δημόσια Διπλωματία

Публична дипломация

**SPECTACLE IN COPENHAGEN:
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ON PARADE**

Donna Marie Oglesby

**December 2010
Figueroa Press
Los Angeles**

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Donna Marie Oglesby
Published by
FIGUEROA PRESS
840 Childs Way, 3rd Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90089
Phone: (213) 743-4800
Fax: (213) 743-4804
www.figueroapress.com

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ISBN 13: 978-1-932800-77-7

ISBN 10: 1-932800-77-8

*For general inquiries or to request additional copies of this paper
please contact:*

USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School
University of Southern California
3502 Watt Way, G4
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0281
Tel: (213) 821-2078; Fax: (213) 821-0774
cpd@usc.edu
www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org

CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

This paper explores the role the public plays, or is assumed to play, in global climate change politics as revealed by the observable relationships between power, publics and policy during the crucial global climate change negotiations in Copenhagen in December 2009. It tests the values-based theories that characterize nascent public diplomacy scholarship against the empirical puzzle presented by the apparent failure of the highly networked global green movement to influence the COP-15 outcome. Finally, it concludes that a singular focus on the global public sphere as the political space within which ideas are contested by geopolitical actors misses the fact that decisions about global warming mitigation and adaptation policies will be made in the capitals of nation states. While there is a crucial relationship between domestic and international politics on the issue, there is no assertion of scientific prerogative, no global civil society lockstep, no path to a binding international law that will eliminate local, national or geopolitics in the struggle to achieve effective climate change policy and implementation. To be effective, public diplomacy must therefore be grounded in the particulars of politics both within states and between them in the media-saturated crossroads of international life.

Keywords

Public diplomacy, global governance, Cop-15, climate change, transnational civil society, strategic communication

Introduction

The new public diplomacy (PD) scholarship over the past decade is largely characterized by normative based claims that make a series of assumptions about the changing fabric of world politics. While there is no overarching public diplomacy theory, threads of thinking from different disciplines are woven into a loose academic consensus that the drivers for the new public diplomacy are:

- Globalization forces;
- Complex nature of transnational collective action problems;
- Potential requirement for global governance solutions;
- Increased activism of a transnational civil society, networked and empowered by sufficient information technology and legitimacy to challenge state power to set the global agenda and compel policy action;
- And, therefore, a transformed communication dynamic in the global public sphere.

Given this, perhaps idealized, mapping of the global landscape, most scholars such as Jan Melissen, Brian Hocking, Paul Sharp and others included in *The New Public Diplomacy* (2005) argue that what we understand to be public diplomacy both has, and must, adapt to the new contours of networked and mediated world politics.¹ This paper begins to test our emerging conceptual frameworks against the empirical puzzle offered by the political spectacle in Copenhagen on the occasion of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 15th Conference of the Parties (COP-15) during two weeks in December 2009.

There is rich debate about who public diplomacy actors are, given this changing context, and what effective public diplomacy should be. The definitional debate seems never ending.² As befits a knowledge community concerned with the transformed conceptual

boundaries between diplomacy, communication, and international politics, the discussion reflects an intense interdisciplinary search to understand just what is going on and what it means. Recognition of this increasingly productive community of scholars is being aided by the establishment of a Working Group on Public Diplomacy at the ISA Annual Convention in Montreal, March 15–19, 2011. This paper offers initial reflections on the implications of a potential, focused study of the climate change case for the community.

Definitional debate

Recently, influential international relations scholar Joseph S. Nye Jr. issued a summary statement of what this “new public diplomacy” is. Writing in *The International Herald Tribune* he said, “the greater flexibility of nongovernmental organizations in using networks has given rise to what some call the *new public diplomacy*, which is about building relationships with civil-society actors in other countries and about facilitating networks between nongovernmental parties at home and abroad.”³ While this is a slippery formulation open to interpretation, some public diplomacy scholars, largely European, do embrace a civil society centric definition of public diplomacy like the one offered by radical Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells. He asserts that public diplomacy, is the “diplomacy of the public, not of the government” and that it “intervenes in this global public sphere, laying the ground for traditional forms of diplomacy to act beyond the strict negotiation of power relationships by building on shared cultural meaning, the essence of communication.”⁴

Castells’ trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (initiated in 1996) influenced Jessica T. Mathews in the writing of her seminal *Foreign Affairs* article, “Power Shift” published in 1997.^{5 6} Her article brought what had been an academic discourse about the changing political sociology caused by the information technology (IT) revolution into the conversation of foreign policy elites. As president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP), Mathews immediately saw, and welcomed, the seismic implications of Castells’ ideas to her advocacy work on nuclear non-proliferation and moved to rebrand CEIP as a global (not American) institution.

Having served as Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs in the Clinton Administration, she also intuited and cautioned about the general unease and potential for backlash (particularly from China)

that this shift in power away from states and to NGOs could cause. Rereading “Power Shift” with post COP-15 eyes, however, I was surprised to note that Mathews then based her conclusions about the power realignment she celebrated on the ability of tightly organized global and regional Climate Action Networks (CANs) to bridge North-South differences among governments during the creation of the UNFCCC in 1992. As a result, she wrote:

Delegates completed the framework of a global climate accord in the blink of a diplomat’s eye—16 months—over the opposition of the three energy superpowers, the United States, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. The treaty entered into force in record time just two years later. Although only a framework accord whose binding requirements are still to be negotiated, the treaty could force sweeping changes in energy use, with potentially enormous implications for every economy.⁷

In a rigorous academic analysis a decade later, Michele M. Betsill, writing in *NGO Diplomacy* (2008) and focused on the COP-3 Kyoto Protocol round, credits environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) with only moderate influence, reminding readers that only states have formal decision-making power during international negotiations and that G-77 and EU states pursued the same positions on the basis of self-interest.⁸ ENGOS for the purposes of this article are transnational non-profit and non-governmental advocacy groups focused on environmental issues.

International political economics (IPE) scholar Scott Barrett contends in his superb study on the strategy of environmental treaty making, *Environment and Statecraft* (2003), that “we might do better if we acknowledge that the constraint of sovereignty is not so easily disarmed or pushed aside.”⁹ Largely an exhortation to international co-operation, the Kyoto Protocol failed to solve the enforcement problem which is necessary to sustain a co-operative climate policy according to Barrett, because the treaty itself did not spring

from an assumption of state sovereignty. This is an example of the “governance *minus* government which means virtually no capacity to ensure compliance with collective decisions” that Thomas G. Weiss warns us about in his Presidential Address given on the occasion of the 50th Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) in New York in February 2009.¹⁰

Keohane and Victor, writing for the *Harvard Project on International Climate Agreements* (2010) add, that from a strategic standpoint, the benefits of a global comprehensive regulatory system are not sufficient to justify the “bargaining efforts and concessions” required of individual states with divergent interests.¹¹ Additionally, the policy choice to treat global greenhouse-gas emissions as a pollution problem made economic development the culprit, put developed nations in the dock and put the world-wide human desire for material well being at odds with the requirement to restrict and reverse emissions.¹² These frames made future advocacy efforts to garner public support for the Kyoto Protocol very difficult. The failure of ENGOs to shape public opinion in support of policy positions they had advocated over the ensuing twenty years also raises questions about the perception of their political power which rested on assumptions that they would be able to do so.

The unraveling of the Kyoto Protocol process during the fifteenth session of the Conference of Parties in Copenhagen could therefore be seen as the consequence of the initial dream woven cloth. Minus the threads of sovereign power woven through the fabric, it lacked the tensile strength required to withstand the stress over time of the pulling and tugging by great and emerging powers whose interests were not served and whose values were not reflected.

Others who focused on the organized public’s inclusion in international relations were not as quick as Castells to push the state actor out of the global public sphere. For some, Nye and Anne-Marie

Slaughter, then Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and now Director of Policy and Planning in the State Department among them, public diplomacy came to mean NGO inclusion in international relations as a potential asset for continued American leadership in international affairs.¹³ They saw public diplomacy as an instrument of soft power wielded both by official entities, such as states and international organizations, and unofficial entities like the transnational advocacy networks (TANs).

Political scientists Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink define TANs as “those relevant actors, working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.”¹⁴ This is an apt description of the ENGOs that played such a critical role both in placing global warming on the international agenda and framing the policy remedy during the Kyoto round of the conference of parties (COP-3).

Critically, while operating transnationally, ENGOs, heavily rooted in the United States, framed the policy solution to global warming in such a way that the United States could not participate.¹⁵ This should have been apparent to them because in 1997, the Senate went on record 95–0 putting down a marker for Clinton administration negotiators that “nothing in [the Kyoto Protocol then being negotiated] could be construed as threatening serious harm to the United States economy, including significant job loss, trade disadvantages, increased energy and consumer costs, or any combination thereof.”¹⁶ Secondly, the Senate stipulated that the Kyoto accord must back away from the concept of differentiating between obligations for developed and developing countries that had been adopted in Berlin (COP-2).¹⁷ Neither admonition was respected when President Bill Clinton signed the Kyoto Protocol though he recognized political reality by not submitting the treaty to the Senate for ratification.¹⁸

Although communications scholar R. S. Zaharna does not reference the case in her significant book, *Battles to Bridges* (2010), the climate change case might be explored as an apt historical example of networked transnational NGOs acting as “highly formidable opponents” to U.S. public diplomacy in order to outflank the American government internationally.¹⁹ On the other hand, the case may exemplify a Democratic administration allied with and succumbing to constituent pressure when viewed through an American domestic political lens. American based ENGOs have generally been more active in Democratic politics and responding to their pressure might be seen as a domestic political imperative: a form of domestic political networking exercised internationally in order to generate domestic political leverage. A similar focus on the EU’s climate change policy leadership might explore whether the EU was responding to ENGOs applying pressure transnationally or to the Greens who had acquired domestic political power in their parliamentary systems.²⁰ If having domestic political power in key states within the international system is a prerequisite for exercising influence in the global public sphere, then NGO power is really dependent on the power of the states in which they are rooted to a greater extent than generally acknowledged in the new PD literature.

If, on the other hand, as Zaharna contends, TANs generate their own soft power specifically through their mastery of the relational, networked communications approach that uses information to “co-create credibility, identity and master narratives,” then they are more independent actors on the global stage.²¹ According to this line of thinking, the lumbering PD efforts of official entities “to advance their interests and extend their values” through a process of engagement with foreign publics is being circumscribed by more agile civil society actors “capable of mobilizing support at a speed that is daunting for rather more unwieldy foreign policy bureaucracies.”²² Speaking to this sentiment and acknowledging

diplomacy's new complicating third dimension, former Australian diplomat and current diplomatic studies scholar Geoffrey Wiseman constructed the term, "polylateralism" to capture what he observed in 1999. Polyilateralism is:

the conduct of relations between official entities (such as a state, several states acting together, or a state-based international organization) and at least one unofficial, non-state entity in which there is a reasonable expectation of systematic relationships, involving some form of reporting, communication, negotiation, and representation, but not involving mutual recognition as sovereign, equivalent entities.²³

This is a good description of the initial sustained relationship ENGOs participating in international environmental negotiations had with official negotiators over the previous two decades.²⁴ ENGOs had no formal voting authority in international negotiations and attended as observers, unless named to official state delegations, but because of their relevant expertise on a transnational issue new to international negotiators they had been welcomed. Recognition of the dependency of ENGO participation in international negotiations on the rules decisions made by states gets lost over time in a literature prone to extol the virtues of NGO inclusion in and transformation of the process. Writing a decade later, Wiseman seems to sense a drift in the new PD literature from his empirical theorizing to a more normative tone. To mark the change, he reprises "Hedley Bull's cautious words about 'premature global solidarism'" saying, "too much should not be asked too soon of the many actors—state and non-state—that make up world politics."²⁵

Traditional, particularly retired American, PD practitioners entering the public diplomacy debate needed no such caution. They were not swept away by the theoretical musings of the academy. Informed by their own ground truth, they contend that placing so much emphasis on the rise of non-state actors in the international political

arena romanticizes their role, misappropriates terms with specific meaning like “diplomacy” and “ambassador” and underestimates continuing state resilience in the conduct of international relations.²⁶ At times, their defense of old school methods and attitudes seems colored by nostalgia and wounded pride of place, yet there is underlying wisdom in their insistence that states and their official representatives do continue to matter.

There is a fundamental difference between official representatives who can commit sovereign units to action and those who try to influence them and shape the context within which they exercise power. The eyes of American Foreign Service officers are also habituated to seeing nation states as the primary locus of foreign policy decision making even though they recognize that globalization forces and cosmopolitan concerns are transforming the decision space. Consequently, the publics that count most, in their view, are those who influence national decisions made primarily on the basis of communitarian concerns. To understand and influence these particular publics, deep and specific cultural awareness and language facility is required and respected by the corps focused on the societal particularities within our pluralistic, multi-leveled international arena. Arguably, as the long, easy hegemony of the West over the world lurches to an end, cultural differences move the foreground complicating international efforts to co-operate for the common good.

One way out of this tangled naming knot is to strip away the glamorizing euphemisms to focus on the functions performed by the groups engaged. As a public diplomacy practitioner for twenty-six years and an academic for half as long, I find myself straddling the boundary. I contend that above all, public diplomacy is a political instrument of power. It is purposeful communication in support of diplomacy. It strives to understand, inform and influence publics because they constrain or facilitate the foreign policies of their

governments, particularly in democratic states. Public diplomacy also strives to create, maintain and thicken the bonds of connectedness across bounded national societies because a disposition (mood) to trust and cooperate is needed if we are to achieve the international compromise and coordination necessary to be safe and secure in today's world.²⁷

However defined, one should certainly be able to observe the new public diplomacy empirically in the case of climate change. To do so strikes me as important, because despite the robust conversation about the new public diplomacy, there is less empirical research on how well networked civil society actors are actually implementing strategies on significant global issues and to what effect. If their work indeed characterizes the new public diplomacy, it seems appropriate to dig in and examine the body of lived experience beyond the inspirational and oft cited Nobel Peace Prize winning *International Campaign to Ban Landmines* begun nearly two decades ago with a treaty in force for more than a decade.

After all, the climate change case also has its Nobel Peace Prize winners in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and former Vice President Al Gore Jr. for his work on *An Inconvenient Truth*. They were jointly awarded the Nobel "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change."²⁸ Surely, the Nobel Prize is used to influence global politics in the direction of the values espoused by the transnational civil society Nobel Committee. In this case, the Nobel Committee, Al Gore and the IPCC are all political actors trying to nudge global politics in a direction they favor by intervening in the global public sphere with an argument about global climate change and their preferred international policy remedy. Clearly, they are networked and empowered by sufficient information technology and legitimacy to challenge state power in their efforts to set the global agenda and compel policy action. Some might call this an example of the new PD cubed.

While the networking dynamic is clearly a key, understanding networks should involve more than analysis of their internal process dynamics with the shift from “push” to “pull,” well discussed in the work of new PD scholar Ali Fisher.²⁹ We also need to come to terms with the relationship of networks to the interplay of power within the international system. It would be useful as well to locate the publics that really matter to the decisions that get made by the actors who count in the current international society on the, perhaps existential, collective action problem of global climate change.

In that regard, the effect of this Nobel award on the American public should be explored. Did it help or hurt the advance of climate change legislation in the United States? I think it is fair to evaluate what the Norwegians thought they understood about the political culture of the United States if they believed that their expressly political PD effort would effectively influence American behavior on climate change policy. As the work of political scientist Ronald Krebs (2009) has shown, a backlash is always possible when the Nobel Peace Prize is bestowed.³⁰ In this case, it may well have contributed to the growing partisan divide on climate change politics in the United States, eroding the possibility of the bipartisan policy agreement necessary for effective American action to mitigate the challenge of climate change.

Finally, we might reflect on the possibility that our PD framework of knowledge and understanding rests on liberal soft power assumptions that may themselves have arisen in an historical period dominated by Western culture as a consequence of the preponderance of Western hard power. I share Zaharna’s view that “further research into the origins [and evolution] of public diplomacy may help expose the culture-bound nature of scholarship today.”³¹ Given the rapid erosion of Western centrality to the global political and economic universe, it seems fair to ask whether the emerging “truths” of the new public diplomacy scholarship survive the empirical challenges arising from what former U.S. National security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (2008) called “the global political awakening.”³²

Conflicting strategies, competing values

The ENGOs, who Mathews had observed moving from the hallways to the negotiating table during the opening rounds of international climate diplomacy, were left out in the cold by round fifteen.³³ The thousands of official diplomats who had been focused for nearly two decades on the creation of a single comprehensive global treaty with legally binding commitments on mitigation and adaptation funding modeled on the Montreal Protocol (ozone agreement) were in the warmth of the Bella Center; but, they were not in the room where the political deal, known as the Copenhagen Accord, was struck by a handful of world leaders in an unscheduled meeting. What explains this reverse power shift in fewer than twenty years? Perhaps, as British foreign policy analysis scholar Christopher Hill reminds those anxious for the coming of global governance, we need to accept that “there are two sides to the politics of foreign policy—the slow-moving international system, and the darting, sometimes unpredictable movements of the players the system contains.”³⁴

Having decided that they were more likely to be able to influence an international treaty on climate change in cooperation with EU and G-77 policymakers, than first achieve domestic climate change legislation given American fossil fuel interests, many TANs rooted in the United States became committed globalists. For them, the Kyoto Protocol process was everything. Once the treaty was fully in place establishing new global norms, they assumed the leverage would exist to achieve required domestic American legislation changing national policy. This two-step political strategy can only have been based on the assumption that the American people, *en masse*, could be persuaded of its merits, want to join the world effort and would pressure the Senate to ratify the treaty despite its early forceful objections.

In a scathing analysis of their “political blindness” and “clueless arrogance,” *American Interest* editor Walter Russell Mead recently wrote that in pursuing such a strategy, environmentalists had “fallen into a pattern of overlooking and assuming away complexities and difficulties to build public support for catchy, headline grabbing Big Ideas. But those complexities and difficulties are real and in the end they emerge and wreak a horrid revenge.”³⁵ A political strategy based on organizing public opinion around their preferred environmental values through transnational action is an example of the new public diplomacy, by some definitions, and deserves rigorous analysis as such. This liberal strategy assumes that the pluralist model of public opinion influence does hold true. It also may reflect a failure to come to terms with the political implications of the collapse of the mainstream mass media and the rise of partisan media filter bubbles in the United States. The political communication research on public opinion and foreign policy as well as that on the changing media landscape would provide useful theories against which the proposition could be tested.³⁶

Defined as a “pattern of transparent and inclusive processes to address complex transnational collective-action problems,” the concept of global governance is key to much of the new diplomacy scholarship that has transformed the study of public diplomacy over the last decade.³⁷ Weiss (2009) considers the “development of a consciousness about the human environment and especially the 1972 and 1992 UN conferences in Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro” as key events in the evolution of the concept of global governance itself.³⁸ Because of the European experience with the formation and consolidation of the European Union (EU) there has been an expectation that history would move the world in the same direction. In *Fast Forward* (2010), William Antholis and Strobe Talbot remind us that Europeans made the concept of “pooled sovereignty” work to such an extent that they had developed a “coherent, forward leaning policy in Kyoto.”³⁹ It shouldn’t surprise us if many in the new public diplomacy community observed it and reflected that shared state of mind.

Canadian diplomat and author of the important new book, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations* (2009) Daryl Copeland articulated the post COP-15 disappointment he shared with his European brethren by writing that, after Copenhagen, “the ramifications for global governance are little short of depressing.”⁴⁰ Perhaps global governance, like the theory of deliberative democracy on which it is based, could only ever take place in “utopian time and space” as American political philosopher Michael Walzer insists.⁴¹ ⁴² If so, events in Copenhagen in December 2009 may support the claim made by some critics of the globalization thesis, that states are not withering away and the world is not marching into global governance, let alone world government.⁴³ There is no single cosmopolitan decisional space wherein policies are to be decided. More attention to the foreign policy analysis scholarship might be helpful to those in the new public diplomacy community as we work out the relationship “between states but also between states and transnational actors of many different kinds, and across a range of issue-areas in what is a multi-level international system with a hugely varied cast.”⁴⁴

From its inception in the 1970s, the process of international environmental negotiations has been characterized by the active participation of advocacy NGOs who worked hard to influence governmental negotiators by framing issues, setting the agenda and shaping the positions of key states.⁴⁵ Their numbers have grown from the 250 NGOs accredited in the first Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, to the 20,611 registered NGO observers at COP-15.⁴⁶ Their credibility derived from their subject expertise. Their legitimacy derived from the perception that they were a moral and democratic force representing the views of citizens who aligned with their positions and could be mobilized to apply political pressure on member state governments to move them in the desired direction.

Mobilize in Copenhagen they did. The Climate Action Network (CAN) alone brought 3,000 people to Copenhagen though only 54 eventually got inside.⁴⁷ CAN, and other longstanding environmental stakeholders, were deprived of the opportunity to understand the positions of key governmental actors and to influence them during the crucial stage in negotiations because the unprecedented number of NGO observers wanting to participate overwhelmed the process.

Poor planning on the part of the UN organizers and the Danes shares some of the blame. Secretary of State Clinton is reported to have briefed President Obama on the chaos upon his arrival in Copenhagen by saying that COP-15 was “the worst meeting I’ve been to since eighth-grade student council.”⁴⁸ Presumably, the NGO delegations would have been nimble enough to cut their numbers of planned delegates had they been told in advance of the oversubscription and consequent restrictions on the number of civil society observers. We don’t know if that level of coordination existed since those who had registered for the fifteenth round of talks were not all primarily motivated by “shared causal ideas.”⁴⁹ As it was, the massive NGO community watched in separate venues on TV screens far from the action as a handful of world leaders bickered and bargained away the legally binding essence of the Kyoto Protocol in a room out of view.

Surely there were significant causes other than logistical failure to account for NGOs being left out in the cold in Copenhagen. The ENGOs, traditionally central to international climate conferences, were joined for the first time in Copenhagen by a broad coalition of human rights campaigners, anti-capitalists and freelance protesters who swelled the ranks of would-be participants inside the Bella Center and added 60,000 to 100,000 demonstrators on the streets of Copenhagen.⁵⁰ Cheered by many long interested in privileging economic justice concerns in climate policy, new participation in the process by different sets of activists nonetheless changed the

tone, muddied the image projection and led to altered global media coverage of just who these people were and what they wanted, raising questions about their legitimacy and credibility.

The street demonstration outside the Bella Center was one of 5,200 demonstrations in 181 countries on the same day, “the most widespread day of environmental action in the planet’s history,” according to 350.org organizer Bill McKibben whose influence strategy is to organize “an outside game, a big mass movement to get lots of people involved across the United States (and the world, since the dynamic is the same everywhere) in pushing for change.”⁵¹ As sociologist Dana Fisher points out in her fine analysis of what happened in Copenhagen, the emergence of the “climate justice movement” combined with the outside protest (conflict) strategy of McKibben and others to disenfranchise the ENGOs who had traditionally pursued a co-operative inside game.⁵² Protests outside led to security concerns and lockouts inside.

By choosing to challenge the power of official actors to determine policy by appealing to global public opinion directly, 350.org and other TANs pursuing a conflict strategy were parading public diplomacy through the streets of Copenhagen and the world. Or, were they? Their chosen conflict strategy may have polarized the situation and led to influence failure. This dynamic would serve as an excellent subject for further research measuring PD effectiveness. It highlights the point that measures of activity and assessment of influence are not the same. It raises once again the question about who is a public diplomacy actor.⁵³

In the merging of movements, the networked civil society actors encountered the problem of prioritizing values and interests and coordinating strategies. It may be that in the specific case of climate change politics, beyond a lack of co-ordination, there are fault lines within the networked civil society movement. Environmental,

global justice, human rights and anti-capitalist activists have converged on the climate change issue with differing perspectives and varied concerns that may, in fact, be at odds. The best example of a value conflict concerns the early reliance of ENGOs on cap and trade as a market based approach to reducing emissions. That policy preference has been completely undercut by the anti-capitalization stance of many in the global justice movement. Attacked also by libertarians on the right in the American domestic political debate on the climate change legislation, cap and trade is now dead as a policy option.⁵⁴

It doesn't help that *The Guardian* recently published a report showing that although the vaunted EU cap and trade program did succeed in cutting European emissions, it did so only by outsourcing jobs and exporting pollution to China whose emissions exploded. As *The Guardian* reported, "EU progress in meeting the Kyoto Protocol targets [was] dampened by emissions from goods produced abroad [yet consumed in the EU] which have risen by 40%."⁵⁵ Now, ENGOs are split between those favoring a straight carbon tax or regulation in developed economies, those arguing for clean energy research to unleash market ingenuity, and those whose focus is sustainable development based on environmentally sound energy justice.⁵⁶ Rather than being strengthened by heterogeneity therefore, the composite social movement may be weakened because their ideas do not cohere and political trade-offs must be made.⁵⁷

Some Greens had expected to experience a form of participatory democracy at COP-15. They were disappointed. With reference to the *Copenhagen Accord*, John Sauven, executive director of Greenpeace UK, said: "the city of Copenhagen is a crime scene tonight, with the guilty men and women fleeing to the airport....it is now evident that beating global warming will require a radically different model of politics than the one on display here in Copenhagen."⁵⁸ What NGOs, believing in direct personal action, such as Greenpeace do as a

consequence of COP-15 may, in fact, run counter to achieving some control over climate change according to Anthony Giddens writing in *The Politics of Climate Change* (2009).⁵⁹ Giddens, who sees climate change as a grave and immediate collective action problem, insists that progress will require a more orthodox politics and the drawing of climate change efforts into “the existing framework of social economic institutions, rather than contesting those institutions as many greens chose to do.”⁶⁰

It could be that transnational NGO activism is showing its age and is less flexible in the face of the changing international political and media ecology than it is assumed to be. Political strategists Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, co-founders of the Breakthrough Institute and authors of *Break Through: Why We Can't Leave Saving the Planet to Environmentalists* (2009), were sharply critical of the “simulacrum of reality” that was the spectacle in Copenhagen:

After the realization that the Copenhagen summit would result in nothing—no new treaty, no emissions reductions, no new technology—the hunger for symbolism grew stronger. Greens formed the magic number 350 with their bodies, tweeted deliriously, and threw their lot in with tiny island countries like Tuvalu and the Maldives, which championed green demands for deeper emissions cuts.⁶¹

Instead of the deep ties and commitments sustained over time that characterize the original ENGOS making them enduring and effective over time and space, social media may have spawned multitudes of pick-up protesters whose ties are mercurial and shallow. This argument, made popular by a much-discussed Malcolm Gladwell piece in *The New Yorker* is only the tip of a deeper germane scholarly debate best sampled in the work of Clay Shirky and Evgeny Morozov.⁶²

Change blindness is an alternative explanation for why the largely Western social movement has not been able to see or adapt to the political implications of “rise of the rest” they have championed.⁶³ Rising authoritarian states, like China, do not have a domestic politics as susceptible to activist penetration as the European or North American states. They are, nonetheless, very cognizant of the power over public opinion that E.H. Carr conceptualized and have vastly increased resources dedicated to their international messaging and relational apparatus as a result.⁶⁴ The idea that TANs are culture bound—or that our understanding of them is culture bound—is worth further exploration in this case. As non-Western states rise in power and in their determination to use power to advance their interests, the influence of networked transnational activists, rooted in the West, may fade. Another way to acknowledge the rise of the rest is to recognize that the dispersion of political power in our flat and fluid world also empowers non-territorial global political cultures not centered in the Americas and Europe or their values.⁶⁵

John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt hinted at this possibility nearly two decades ago when they speculated in *The Emergence of Noopolitik* (1993) that a benevolent hegemon, like the United States, would be necessary for NGOs, individual activists, and others, to have the space to build the networked fabric of a global civil society—and a noosphere.⁶⁶ The political reality underlying the success of the Montreal Protocol, on which Kyoto was modeled, was that the placing of ozone concerns on the global agenda, the framing of the issue as a CFC pollution problem and the design of the remedy were driven by the United States government networking with national ENGOs and business interests.⁶⁷ It is also possible to read the creation of UNFCCC as driven by EU hard power gusseting ENGO activity because it served the interests of enhancing EU global leadership in the aftermath of the Cold War. As American hegemonic power diminishes, along with the relative fortunes of the EU, the space for transnational activism rooted in their societies may shrink on

the global stage. At a deeper lever of critique, I think it is fair to explore the idea that what we have witnessed in the climate change case is less some new form of international politics than a global performance of a self-referential working out of an EU and/or U.S. domestic political struggle. While our attention was focused on the dialectic between official and unofficial Western actors competing on a world stage, the true power of gravity in the global system was shifting East. “The inclusion of newly pivotal powers in international fora does not just add a few more talking heads to the old club. It brings to the table representatives of societies with cultural norms divergent from those in the West and is, therefore, potentially transformative.”⁶⁸

Two images from the spectacle in Copenhagen remain with me. One is of the ENGOS, rooted in the West, left out in the cold while the process they had unleashed nearly two decades earlier went off the rails fatally. The second is the President of the United States wandering the halls of the Bella Center in search of the meeting where new global power players were dealing and designing the future of international climate change policy. The American President eventually found the room, took a seat, and entered the fray. European leaders never did. It may be that the “Power Shift” observed by Jessica Mathews nearly two decades ago, was more wish than reality. Or perhaps, she was correctly reflecting a post-Cold War Western reality but ethnocentrically projecting it onto the entire world. Mistakenly, she saw a Western, technologically empowered, civil society wave and read into it a potential swelling tide of world history. In fairness to Mathews, she did end her seminal article with a question that we should all be asking: “Might the decline in state power prove transitory?”⁶⁹

Conclusions

The birth of the UNFCCC in June 1992 and its death, effectively in December 2009 in Copenhagen but expiring officially in 2012, provides an optimal case for testing the emerging conceptual frameworks of the new public diplomacy. It may be that this is the mother of all collective action problems whose density seems impenetrable. In its very complexity, if we are not careful, we may be overly subjective, imposing patterned thinking on the reality we try to comprehend. I hope I am not guilty here. Still, all the drivers we assume to be changing fabric of world politics are shuttlecocks in motion as we weave a collective response to a planetary problem. The new public diplomacy, whatever it is, has been operating with changing effect as the climate change issue evolved from being a low politics transnational issue to become of high political concern with severe security and economic implications. The empirical puzzle that presents is a challenge to scholars and well as practitioners. Antholis and Talbott call climate change a political “rubik’s cube.”⁷⁰ With the failure of the ideal one big solution from the big top down, now the multi-level politics of nations, states, cities and other localities must be worked in alignment if free-riding is to be minimized, and solutions, perhaps in a disaggregated fashion, are to be found.

With the collapse of the single narrative driving toward a global governance solution embodied in the UNFCCC process, the global competition of ideas is now fully unleashed. In that competition, there is little room for “residues of formerly adequate modes of thought and action now rendered obsolete by new social reality,” as Hans Morgenthau wrote sixty years ago.⁷¹ The changing geopolitical ecology must be faced. We must grapple with the negotiation of power relationships obviously not erased by information technology as Castells had predicted. At every level, the contest to reframe climate change is already underway.

There is renewed argument as to whether climate change is anthropogenic and irreversible or natural and cyclical. Civil society counter-movements and states have caught up with the information technology revolution Castells wrote about twenty years ago and have proven adept at working information networks to their own advantage. For example, in the run-up to COP-15, climate skeptics were extremely effective in drawing global media attention to the e-mails hacked from the Climatic Research Unit of Britain's University of East Anglia. Sometimes collectively referred to as "Climategate," the timely media coverage of accusations that climate scientists were squelching dissent eroded the credibility of the climate change science relied on by ENGOs in the eyes of the attentive public.⁷²

To take only the case of the United States as a consequential example, a declining number of Americans believe that climate scientists can and are accurately predicting the future. According to the National Survey of American Public Opinion on Climate Change known as the Muhlenberg - Michigan study, "between 2008 and 2009 the percentage of independents who believe average temperatures on the Earth are increasing fell from 74 percent to 61 percent. This 13 percent decline was larger than the 3 percent drop among Democrats and the 4 percent drop among Republicans."⁷³ These findings of a single year shift were echoed in polling done by ABC News/*The Washington Post*, Pew Research Center and Gallup.⁷⁴ Interestingly, the increased global warming skepticism of independents correlates with a shift in their voting preference from Democrats to Republicans in the 2010 mid-term elections with significant consequences for the division of political power in American domestic politics.

Most Americans know something is happening but they question the "know it all" assertions of these scientific "bearers of doom" according to Brookings Institution managing director,

William Antholis.⁷⁵ Leading foreign policy thinker, Walter Russell Mead captures a reality about how Americans, who deny the existence of human-caused global warming, view climate change. He says:

... the environmental movement has gotten itself on the wrong side of doubt. It has become the voice of the establishment, of the tenured, of the technocrats. It proposes big economic and social interventions and denies that unintended consequences and new information could vitiate the power of its recommendations. It knows what is good for us, and its knowledge is backed up by the awesome power and majesty of the peer-review process.⁷

In the aftermath of COP-15, polling done by the Pew Research Center for People and Press demonstrated that American environmental concerns had fallen to dead last (28%) on a list of twenty issues of concern.⁷⁷

This has been of critical importance in the 2010 American election year given the highly partisan nature of the current climate change debate.⁷⁸ With the improved fortunes of the Republican Party, of whom only ten percent believe the cause of climate change is anthropogenic, little if any progress will be made on this issue at the American national level for at least another two years.⁷⁹ This, in turn, will undercut the global leadership pretensions of the United States as China is quick to point out. The State Department seems well aware of the strength of its critics as revealed by a found copy of its strategic communication strategy published in *The Guardian* in April 2010.⁸⁰ By not finding a way to address the climate challenge, the dysfunctional American political system has contributed to a loss in U.S. standing in the global leadership competition on a host of issues beyond climate change. The erosion of the economic foundation of American hard power which complicates the politics of climate change domestically also subtracts from American global

leadership capability. The combination of diminished political and economic competence erodes America's soft power as well. How can the United States attract others to "want what we want" if we cannot decide what that is or fund it?

Exploring the change in Republican attitudes on this issue over the last decade would be a worthy research topic given the swirling interplay of forces between current domestic and international politics. To some extent, the global governance strategy pursued by American-based ENGOs may have fed into a popular nationalist backlash that Republicans are working to their advantage. For example, organized counter-movements using the FOX News Network have made effective use of a series of leaked internal briefing documents from the executive office of U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The briefing papers prepared for a September 2010 executive staff retreat in Alpbach, Austria purport to show the UN "plotting for global governance" and fighting for the climate change agenda as a way to leverage the crisis for power, control and funding at the expense of national sovereignty.⁸¹ Nationalism is a powerful force in the United States and it has played its part dressed as a preference for communitarian over cosmopolitan concerns in the 2010 election year.

Rather than breaking down the walls of the international state system as some expected, technologically empowered transnational activism seems to have penetrated the newly porous sovereign walls generating a national infection response in its stead. China and the United States are key countries worth exploring in that regard because of their shifting power positions and their essential roles as both contributors to (40% of all global carbon emissions) and potential solvers of the global climate change problem.

In the aftermath of COP-15, the location for climate change policy and politics is dispersed. Meaningful action may take place nationally as individual countries decide to act. It may take place bilaterally, between China and the United States, for example, if the disagreements on display in international negotiations on climate change can be overcome. Or it may take place in ad hoc groupings of countries like the Major Economies Forum (MEF) comprising seventeen members. Complicated by shifts in the international political economy resulting from the recession of 2008, “the divisions between developed and emerging economies have moved center stage making moral arguments about fairness and justice much more significant.”⁸² With rhetoric about equality and freedom once more central to the discourse and the global leadership competition between the United States and China, the foundation stones are in place for a new ideological age.⁸³

Each of the steps on the path to addressing the global climate change challenge will be climbed politically and publicly. It will be chaotic. How could it really be otherwise given the extremely high stakes and the dilemmas faced by governments at all levels as they try to reconcile climate, energy and economic policies while attending to their citizens’ welfare and mobilizing them to change their behavior? Political actors at every level will try to influence public opinion both within and outside their own domain. Then, the new public diplomacy will really come into its own and the new public diplomacy community of scholars should be ready to explain what we are seeing unfold with more nuanced conceptual tools.

Endnotes

This paper is revised from the version presented at the Annual Studies Meeting of The International Studies Association Meeting–South (ISA-South) on October 22, 2010 in St. Pete Beach, Florida.

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Author Biography

Donna Marie Oglesby is Diplomat in Residence at Eckerd College, in St. Petersburg, Florida. She came to Eckerd College to teach following her retirement from a twenty-five year career in the U.S. Foreign Service that culminated as Counselor of Agency (USIA), the ranking career position (1993–96). She is a member of the Public Diplomacy Council and devotes her teaching and writing to spanning the boundary between practitioners of statecraft and scholars of the art.

While in the Foreign Service, Prof. Oglesby served abroad in Latin America, Europe, and Asia, and held senior headquarter positions, including Director of Latin American Affairs and Director of the Presidential Youth Exchange Initiative as well as Counselor of Agency. She has received the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange Award for Outstanding Service, the Presidential Honor Award, U.S.I.A. Distinguished Service Award and the Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy.

Prof. Oglesby graduated from Washington College and earned a masters from Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs. She was an East West Center grantee focused on East Asia during her junior year and studied in Japan. She taught at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1992–93. Since her retirement she has served on two exchange organization Boards: Youth For Understanding (YFU) and the Council for International Educational Exchange (CIEE). Her articles on public diplomacy have been published by the United States Institute of Peace, The Foreign Service Journal and The SAIS Review.

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