Now That It’s Part of a Global Conversation, Should We Keep the Term Public Diplomacy?

Bruce Gregory
Director, Public Diplomacy Institute
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Media and Public Affairs
George Washington University
BGregory@gwu.edu
(202) 994-0389

Prepared for presentation at the
Centre for International Governance Innovation Conference
Worlds Apart? Exploring the Interface Between Governance and Diplomacy

Wilton Park, UK, June 23-25, 2006

Abstract

This paper identifies public diplomacy as an instrument used by state and non-state actors to understand cultures and attitudes, engage in dialogue, advise political leaders, and influence opinions and behavior. Commonly associated with governments, public diplomacy is used also by non-government groups and individuals when they engage in governance apart from governments, not just as partners with governments. Writings of European and North American scholars have influenced thinking about public diplomacy and suggest scholars have much more to contribute to understanding public diplomacy principles and practices. Areas for collaborative inquiry between scholars and practitioners include connecting hierarchies and networks, leveraging technologies and trust, and increasing knowledge about public diplomacy’s role as a strategic instrument in diplomacy and governance.
Now That It’s Part of a Global Conversation, Should We Keep the Term Public Diplomacy?

When CIGI invited me to participate in this conference, I accepted with thanks having two goals in mind. First, it is a chance to learn from a gathering of accomplished scholars and practitioners knowledgeable on global governance and diplomacy. Second, it would compel me to refine my own thinking on these issues. I was confident I would achieve the first goal. The second is more problematic.

My task on this panel, as I understand it, is to talk about public diplomacy and governance from the point of view of government. This, I will try to do – from a perspective that views public diplomacy as an instrument used to understand, engage, and influence what publics think and do in support of interests and values. But first a disclaimer. I am not a diplomat. Much of my career was in government public diplomacy. However, I served in headquarters assignments in Washington followed by long association with a public diplomacy advisory commission and nearly a decade of teaching. This may account for an approach that views public diplomacy more broadly than some of my colleagues – as an instrument used not only by diplomats, but by a variety of actors in and outside governments.

In this paper I would like to reflect on changes in the meaning of the term public diplomacy, acknowledge four intellectual debts, and suggest three areas for collaborative inquiry by scholars and practitioners.
What is Public Diplomacy?

The term public diplomacy in its current meaning is generally believed to have been coined in 1965 by retired U.S. diplomat Edmund Gullion, then dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Professor Nick Cull has written recently about a “forgotten pre-history” dating back to the 19th century in which the words public diplomacy were used in a variety of different ways in newspapers and diplomatic discourse.¹ For perhaps a decade after Gullion used public diplomacy to describe “dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy,” the phrase had few adherents among professionals, scholars, or in the media. The usual operative terms were information, educational exchanges, cultural relations, public affairs, international broadcasting, and propaganda. Beginning in the 1970s, however, public diplomacy gained currency in the United States through Congressional hearings, reports of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, and increasing acceptance by practitioners, who used it as an umbrella term for government information, cultural, and international broadcasting activities and as a way to avoid invidious connotations of the word propaganda.²

In the 1990s, a few practitioners and scholars focused on changes in diplomatic practice as part of a broad inquiry into globalization, new information technologies, and the devolution of power from governments to non-state actors. In his 1991 book, I’ll be with you in a minute, Mr. Ambassador: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington, Canadian ambassador Allan Gotlieb wrote: “The new diplomacy . . . is to a large extent public diplomacy and requires different skills, techniques, and attitudes than those found in traditional diplomacy, as it is practiced in most countries, including
Canada.” Canadians and Europeans contributed to the U.S. Institute for Peace’s *Virtual Diplomacy Initiative* in the late 1990s and to Barry Fulton’s 1998 *Reinventing Diplomacy* study and *Net Diplomacy* series first published in July 2001. In 2000, Mark Leonard and his colleagues at the UK’s Foreign Policy Centre undertook a two-year multi-country research project on public diplomacy practices in several large European countries, India, South Africa, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. Essays in Jan Melissen’s excellent recent book, *The New Public Diplomacy*, chronicle ways in which public diplomacy has become “the bread and butter” of mainstream diplomatic activity.

Government structures have changed as well. The UK has a Foreign Office Minister of State responsible for Public Diplomacy and a Public Diplomacy Strategy Board to coordinate activities of three main public diplomacy partners – the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the British Council, and the BBC World Service. The EU and NATO have public diplomacy components. Kuwait sends diplomats to George Washington University for public diplomacy training. And last month *The Times of India* reported that “India’s external affairs ministry has created a new public diplomacy division to . . . project a better image of the country commensurate with its rising international standing.”

Public diplomacy is flourishing as part of a global conversation. I suspect Dean Gullion would be pleased and no doubt surprised.

Widespread use of a phrase does not of course mean agreement on definitions and purposes. Asserting that “no one-size-fits-all,” Melissen lists some of the reasons that countries use public diplomacy: to strengthen economic performance, support long term foreign policy goals, enhance visibility and project identity, prevent and manage crises, and counter adverse stereotypical images. He observes that the public diplomacy of
small and middle powers, which often takes place in a conversation dominated by the United States, faces challenges driven by limited resources, a desire to be noticed, and to be noticed for the right reasons.4

If you will permit a small digression: the U.S. achieved some success in public diplomacy when it was a small, “non-state actor.” Benjamin Franklin and John Adams knew the value of public diplomacy. They worked as hard to gain support from the citizens of Holland and France in seeking loans and alliances for the American Revolution as they did to persuade their governments. The U.S. today faces significant public diplomacy challenges. Being noticed usually is not a problem, but being noticed favorably is. Military spending dominates foreign affairs budgets in American political culture. Americans have a history of episodic commitment to public diplomacy and, except in wartime, an aversion to “propaganda ministries” whatever they may be called.

Interests, ways, and means in public diplomacy unquestionably are diverse. Nevertheless, I suggest there is common conceptual ground with respect to core elements of public diplomacy understood as an instrument of governance used by governments, groups, and individuals to:

-- **Understand** attitudes, cultures, and media frames of events and issues,

-- **Engage** in a dialogue of ideas between people and institutions,

-- **Advise** political leaders, diplomats, and soldiers on public opinion and communication implications of policy choices; and

-- **Influence** opinions and behavior through communication strategies, messages, message authority, and persuasive narratives.
Taken together, these core elements comprise an analytically distinct instrument among a range of persuasive and coercive instruments intended to serve interests and values. The public diplomacy instrument is broadly political. It is a tool available to governments and other political actors when they establish goals and priorities. It is a consideration in their strategic logic when they analyze trade offs among costs, risks, and benefits. It is used to frame narratives intended to set agendas, explain threats and opportunities, shape communication strategies, influence discourse in civil society, advocate policies, persuade publics and governments, and build political consent. Public diplomacy is also critical to the use and success of other political, economic, and military instruments. Whether we call it public diplomacy or something else, it is an instrument that is essential to governance.

Does it matter what term we use? This is not a trivial question. Naming is part of a struggle over meaning. In naming, we judge as well as describe. Understandings are shaped positively and negatively by the names we use. There are other candidate terms. Strategic communication, political communication, cultural diplomacy, branding, propaganda, perception management, and information operations come to mind. Some have invidious connotations. Others are less rewarding conceptually. But with careful explanation other terms might do the job. Nevertheless, public diplomacy is today’s consensus choice for a bite-sized label that is less invidious and more conceptually relevant than alternatives, although in the U.S. “strategic communication” is gaining ground.

In naming, we also open the door to important analytical distinctions. Public diplomacy differs from education, journalism, advertising, public relations and other
ways groups communicate in societies apart from governance, albeit successful public diplomacy imports methods and discourse norms from society and depends greatly on private sector partnerships. Education norms matter in academic exchanges. Peer review ensures that scholars funded by government grants are chosen on the basis of academic merit, not for partisan reasons or their policy views. International broadcasters import journalism norms and construct institutional shields that protect them from interference by policymakers in news gathering and reporting. Public diplomats use public relations and political communication strategies. They value truth and credibility norms and seek to protect them through their words and actions – and through institutional arrangements. The latter can mean a degree of distance from foreign ministries (e.g., the UK’s British Council and the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors) and structural firewalls between open and covert information operations.

Public diplomacy is conducted by government actors other than diplomats and broadcasters. These include public and private professionals engaged in educational and cultural exchanges, communication consultants to political leaders, democracy-building activists, and military officers conducting open information operations. I have argued elsewhere that these professionals are players both in organizations and in tribal cultures whose identity and behavior – and whose intramural competition – are associated with particular norms, rules, and skills. Mayors and governors also conduct public diplomacy. When Chinese President Hu Jingtao visited the United States in April 2006, his welcome in Washington state and at a dinner hosted by Microsoft CEO Bill Gates was seen to be more successful than his welcome in Washington, DC and his luncheon at the White House. The governor of Washington engaged in public diplomacy when she
publicly welcomed a Confucius Institute in Seattle and proposed a Washington state cultural center in China.

Time frames are also essential to a conceptual understanding of public diplomacy. It is useful to consider three. One is driven by the relentless demands of 24/7 news and media relations. If political leaders and diplomats do not get inside news cycles, others will, often with disadvantageous perspectives. A second time frame relates to communication campaigns on high value policies that may last months and a few years. Here choices need to be made. Not all policies require public diplomacy campaigns. Nor are resources available to conduct them effectively on all policies. What policies are most important? How should consistent themes be tailored to different countries and regions? When is an ambassador the best messenger? A foreign minister? A head of state? A credible voice outside government? What themes, messages, messengers, symbols, narratives, and communication tools are best suited to persuade, tap favorably into emotions, mobilize alliances, and serve political objectives? A third time frame is long-term engagement – the development of relationships between people, groups, and institutions – in the realms of ideas, culture, shared knowledge, common ground, discourse norms, reasoned dialogue, and vigorous debate about issues. Here, investments are made for years, decades, and generations.

Public diplomacy in each time frame has limits. Public diplomacy does not trump flawed policies or weak political leadership. Governments are constrained because much of what their citizens and societies project, and much of what global publics perceive, is beyond government control. Results can take years to achieve or may never be achieved. Success is difficult to measure, although not impossible with appropriate methods and
sufficient resources. Shared understandings may not overcome deep disagreements or interests in conflict. Cross-cultural experiences may reinforce hostilities and competing values. Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood thinker, whose ideas inspired a generation of radicals including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, studied for several years in Washington, DC and Colorado. In contrast, Alexander Yakovlev, a man who greatly influenced the perestroika and glasnost impulses in the Soviet Union, had close ties to Canada and studied at Columbia University, where he studied theories of democratic pluralism taught by political scientist David Truman.

**Is Public Diplomacy an Instrument of Governance?**

What I have said thus far is, I trust, generally acceptable. It applies to public diplomacy as an instrument of statecraft – an instrument used by governments. But I suggested also that public diplomacy can be used by groups and individuals. Here the argument is a bit trickier. I mean we can think of public diplomacy as an instrument used also by non-government groups and individuals when they engage in governance apart from governments, not just as partners with governments. Here Professor James Rosenau’s definition of governance is helpful.

Governance is not synonymous with government. Both refer to purposive behavior, to goal oriented activities, to systems of rule; but government suggests activities that are backed by formal authority, by police powers, to insure the implementation of duly constituted policies, whereas governance refers to activities backed by shared goals that may or may not derive from legal and formally prescribed responsibilities and that do not necessarily rely on police power to overcome defiance and attain compliance. Governance, in other words, is a more encompassing phenomenon than government. It embraces governmental institutions, but it also subsumes informal, non-governmental institutions whereby those persons and organizations within its purview move ahead to satisfy their needs, and fulfill their wants.
Rosenau suggests also that in place of government’s command mechanisms, governance relies on “control or steering mechanisms, terms that highlight the purposeful nature of governance without presuming the presence of hierarchy.”

Using Rosenau’s thinking, we can make a case that many non-government groups and individuals conduct activities intended to “understand, engage, and influence publics” in support of goals that satisfy needs and fulfill wants. That they act in ways that may be less accountable and that are not backed by command powers and legitimacy granted by formal authority is another matter. Should we use a different name for what non-state actors do when they seek to “understand, engage, and influence” in support of governance interests and values? Shall we call what they do political communication, or outreach, or discourse, or advocacy, or something else? Is public diplomacy a term to be reserved only for government actors seeking to “understand, engage, and influence” in furtherance of interests and values backed by the formal authority of governments? It is increasingly difficult to make categorical distinctions between state and non-state public diplomacy.

Consider three examples. When Dr. Bernard Kouchner went to Nigeria in 1968 to deal with humanitarian calamities in the province of Biafra, he mounted what Paul Berman calls a “one man insurrection against the Red Cross,” its principles of neutrality and silence, its respect for the principles of international law, and its emphasis on discretion in return for access. In Berman’s account, Kouchner wanted an emergency medical organization “capable of reacting to crises around the world quickly and flexibly, and yet capable also of reporting on whatever volunteer workers might happen to see.”
would be a “more political Red Cross,” an organization that could act and speak, “devoted to health, and also to truth.”

Today, according to its website, the Nobel Prize winning Doctors Without Borders is a global organization devoted to providing emergency medical care in more than 70 countries and “to speaking out.” Its volunteers and staff are conducting a campaign for access to essential medicines, speaking at international and national conferences, arranging informational events and traveling exhibitions, and managing special public education projects. Its 2004 budget was $568 million -- 80 percent from private donations, 20 percent from “international agencies and governments.”

“Advocacy is an integral part of our work,” said Nicholas de Torrente, U.S. executive director of Doctors Without Borders, in a speech on the organization’s activities in Afghanistan in 2002. At the same time, and in effect building a firewall to protect credibility, he rejected Secretary of State Colin Powell’s call for NGOs to be part of a U.S. led “‘combat team’ forming a military, political, economic, and humanitarian response against terrorism.”

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was established in the United States in the 1980s as a “QUANGO” (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization) to fund labor, business, and political party organizations interested in promoting democratic institutions and values in other countries. Modeled in great part on the German Federal Republic’s political party foundations (Stiftungen), NED has existed for nearly a quarter century as a publicly funded private corporation, with an independent board and staff, to distribute grants to NGOs participating in democracy promotion. Counterpart institutions, with similarities and differences, include Canada’s International...
Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the UK’s Westminster Foundation, and foundations in many other countries.¹²

NED’s purpose is to help build civil societies and strengthen democratic groups and institutions in other countries. Government funds provide much of the capital. Non-government groups do most of the work. NED and its collaborators view the private sector as more appropriate to democracy building. They value bipartisan, long-term approaches. They stand apart from short-term government policies. Their goals are to build and support institutions and values essential to democratic governance. Their means are networks and “networks of networks.”¹³ In so doing they seek to “understand, engage, and influence” publics in support of interests and values.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a non-profit California corporation established by the Clinton administration in 1998 to regulate the Internet’s domain names, root server system, and other technical elements of the Internet. ICANN replaced a single individual, Jonathan Postal, who worked at the University of Southern California under contract to the U.S. Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency. Seen as a way to bypass the bureaucratic inefficiencies of the International Telecommunications Union, ICANN is, in Kenneth Cukier’s words, “an experiment, a bottom-up, multi-stakeholder approach toward managing a global resource on a nongovernmental basis.” Cukier notes that ICANN’s critics concede its efficiency and flexibility, but question its transparency, accountability, and legitimacy. For some, it is another example of American unilateralism or evidence of neocolonialism. Others simply prefer an intergovernmental approach to regulation.¹⁴ The U.S. projects ICANN as a liberal alternative to state regulation. Management of the
Internet as a “highly robust and geographically diverse medium” is best achieved through government consultation with the private sector and civil society. U.S. concerns that institutional arrangements for managing the Internet would be overturned at the UN-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in November 2005 proved unfounded. ICANN remains a private corporation that provides a public good.

Although ICANN maintains an informational website, it does little in the way of advocacy on policy issues. In effect, ICANN subcontracts public diplomacy to the U.S. Government and other likeminded constituents. Speeches by U.S. ambassadors and cabinet secretaries frame American views on ICANN and related Internet governance issues. Contrasting views often are advocated by governments and international organizations. Much of the debate goes beyond infrastructure to focus on the Internet’s benefits in health, education, and politics – and its problems in terrorism, pornography, and criminal activities. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in an artful opinion column in *The Washington Post*, managed both to support current Internet management as “effective collaboration among private businesses, civil society, and the academic and technical communities” and to urge change that would make “governance arrangements more international,” meaning more intergovernmental and more responsive to Internet growth in developing countries.

These are just three of many examples. They suggest several considerations. First, Doctors Without Borders, NED, and ICANN provide public goods to society as non-state actors. They do so independent of the command authority and taxing powers of states, although in varying degrees each receives government funds.
Second, each uses persuasive instruments to succeed, but they do so in different ways. Doctors Without Borders handles its own political communication. Shall we call it public diplomacy? Similarly, the National Endowment for Democracy conducts its own advocacy activities, and it occasionally has been willing to provide a forum for U.S. government officials on policy issues. ICANN relies on the U.S. Government for communication that seeks to “understand, engage, and influence” on its behalf – communication that clearly is government public diplomacy.

Third, whatever term we use, non-state organizations and governments face similar strategic communication challenges. They must gain attention in a world where there is an abundance of information. They must understand the cultural and influence environments in which they seek to communicate. Their messages must have moral authority and find common ground. They must use persuasive words and symbols capable of building political will. And they must be credible. In each case, this depends on actions – on the quality of the public goods they provide. For Doctors Without Borders it also means disassociation from governments, whether it is keeping its distance from Colin Powell’s counter terrorism government/NGO “combat teams” or speaking out against the political acts by governments that lead to humanitarian tragedies. NED depends on government funds, but contends “such support cannot be governed by the short-term policy preferences of a particular U.S. administration.” For ICANN and its government agents, it means framing messages in ways that appeal to the interests of skeptics and more importantly matching deeds with words.

Finally, some cautions and concerns. As Jessica Mathews has argued, non-state actors have great strengths in addressing global public issues – focus, credibility,
expertise, energy, passion – but they have significant limitations as well. NGOs judge public acts by how they affect particular interests. As they expand, they face problems in determining priorities driven by the need for larger budgets and compromises that limit flexibility and independence of mind. Core issues in thinking about non-state actors in governance are trade-offs in building consensus and accountability. However benevolent their agenda, Eckerd College Professor Donna Oglesby observes, “NGOs are most often advocates for a single issue and never have to face the trade-offs required of governing.” Princeton’s Anne Marie Slaughter makes the accountability point. There are “many ways in which private actors now can and do perform government functions . . . The problem, however, is ensuring that these private actors uphold the public trust.” Governments should interact with a wide range of non-state actors, but government’s role in governance is “distinct and different.” Governments, at least in a democracy, she argues, must represent all their different constituencies.

These are strong arguments. Nevertheless, governments too face problems. Governments can and often do represent particular interests rather than genuine consensus. Governments often fail to address many global governance needs quickly and well. Although governments are better able to provide coercive power needed to provide for security as a public good, they often are less able and willing to provide the kind of goods and services that can mitigate threats to security. Governments also acquiesce in limitations on their own sovereignty when it serves their interests. Alternatively, non-state actors can act in ways that build trust and legitimacy based on pragmatic understandings and long term public approval of what they do. Formal government agreements can enhance such legitimacy, but arguably they are not a sine qua non.
lines between government and governance it would seem are already blurred with consequences for how we think about the instruments of governance including public diplomacy.

**A Word on Intellectual Debts**

Much of the analytical work on public diplomacy has been done by think tanks, government advisory bodies, and retired practitioners. This is true of the small body of literature developed in the U.S. after the Cold War and of the now nearly 40 reports and studies issued after 9/11. I suspect the same may be true in Europe. There is good thinking in these reports. But much of the writing is descriptive. Most recommendations are broadly focused. Many emphasize past accomplishments, enabling advocates to justify priorities and budget increases advantageous to the tribal cultures in which they are comfortable. Largely missing in this literature is scholarship that bears directly on public diplomacy. This is not to say, as my George Washington University colleague Kristin Lord points out, that there is not a substantial body of scholarship relevant to public diplomacy. There is, and the following examples, two Europeans and two Americans, suggest academics have much to contribute.

*Jurgen Habermas.* Habermas’s thinking about the public sphere as space between the state and private institutions and his theories of language and communicative action inform elements of public diplomacy that emphasize engagement and intersubjective discourse. Cultural diplomacy, long-term people-to-people exchange programs, and advocacy activities – to the extent they seek shared knowledge and common ground – likewise benefit from a reading of Habermas (and the American philosopher John
Dewey). Cultural diplomats import ideal speech and education norms. In their emphasis on listening and dialogue, they also import methods of hermeneutics. They value learning through questions, reasoned argument, an orientation toward openness, not seeking to “win” every argument, not talking at cross purposes, considering the opinions of others, shared knowledge, and working out common meanings.

Scholars such as Harvard’s Michael Walzer appreciate Habermas’s discourse logic and contributions to deliberative democracy. Walzer contends, however, that politics has other important values that are non-deliberative and necessary to strategies and decisions. These include mobilization, organization, bargaining, and management of conflict. Society’s need to make decisions places constraints on discourse. Simone Chambers finds value in deliberative communication for purposes of will formation and rationalizing public opinion. “Discourse,” however, “is essentially open ended. Decision making is essentially closed ended.” Dialogue leading to mutual understanding is a fundamental part of politics and public diplomacy. The closer participants come to closure, she argues, “the more participants will be motivated to act strategically rather than discursively.”

Manual Castells. No summary can do justice to Castells’ path breaking three volume study of networks, society, and culture in the information age. In his account of the “information technology revolution” and its consequences, all societies are “penetrated, with different intensity, by the pervasive logic of the network society, whose dynamic expansion gradually absorbs and subdues pre-existing social forms.” Flexibility (meaning constant change, organizational fluidity, and reversible processes) is a distinct feature of the information technology paradigm. Networks are more flexible
than hierarchies and better able to adapt to interactive complexity in human relationships. For Castells, networks can be liberating or repressive: value judgments are contingent on empirical circumstances not on technology.  

Doctors Without Borders and Al Qaeda are emblematic of networks capable of adapting to complexity and using information technologies to advantage. 

Diplomacy is no exception to the “logic of the network society.” Castells’ project has influenced public diplomacy directly and indirectly through the writings of John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, Brian Hocking, and others. It was five years ago that Hocking’s concept of “diplomats as boundary spanners” entered the conversations of public diplomacy enthusiasts in the United States through his online essay in Net Diplomacy: Toward the Year 2015. Hocking’s work led practitioners to think about diplomats less as gatekeepers between governments and more as mediators between state and non-state actors on multiple issues in changing patterns of interaction, about interdependence between state and non-state actors based on their “interlinked autonomy,” about questioning the logic of boundary control and hierarchical models, and about the increased importance of bureaucratic bargaining and networks. His essays are read in State Department training programs and in the handful of public diplomacy courses now taught in U.S. universities. 

Walter Lippmann. Public diplomacy owes a debt also to the American journalist and public intellectual Walter Lippmann and to subsequent scholarship in the social sciences on propaganda, media, and communications theory. Public diplomacy courses in the U.S. seldom omit Lippmann’s 1922 classic, Public Opinion. One reason is his argument that we make sense of a complex, confusing external world “out of reach, out
of sight, out of mind” through stereotypes and mental filters – the “pictures in our heads” that collectively form public opinion. For Lippmann, informed elites are best equipped to provide meaning and context that make sense of the external world. Political actors should seek to influence opinions advantageously through top down communication strategies that enlist the interest of publics, find common ground, establish credible symbols and authority, and create consent. Lippmann’s instrumental rationality is goal oriented and driven by interest-based preferences.33

From the news shaping strategies of presidents to the public opinion research of their advisors, Lippmann’s thinking continues to inform. The implication of Lippmann’s psychological model, although not his views of its consequences, was contested famously by John Dewey, and it remains under siege from discourse theorists and civil society activists. For Lippmann’s critics, democracy and governance are best served through a “bottom up” process in which dialogue, the media, and exchanges of views on shared concerns play pivotal roles. Critics assume the possibility and desirability of achieving political legitimacy and fairness in the distribution of public goods through open debate. Language that seeks mutual understanding and rational consensus is distinguished from language used instrumentally (and for Habermas more problematically) to advance interest-based calculations. Returning to the core elements in public diplomacy, and at the risk of oversimplifying, Lippmann and his successors help us understand public diplomacy’s “influence” component; his critics contribute to our understanding of “engagement.”

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. Harvard’s Joseph Nye has earned fame and credit for his writings on “soft power,” the term he invented to describe the ability to shape the
preferences of others through attraction. Few scholars have had greater direct impact on analytical thinking about public diplomacy both in the narrow sense in which governments wield soft power and in the broader sense in which soft power is gained and lost through cultural and political attraction.\textsuperscript{34}

Nye’s writings about power, globalization, and the information revolution are laced with implications for state and non-state public diplomacy actors. Two examples illustrate. First, what Nye calls the “paradox of plenty” has changed the relationship between information and attention. In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, information often was a scarce resource; public diplomats (with message and moral authority) found it relatively easy to gain attention. In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, Nye contends, “a plenitude of information creates a poverty of attention.” The task for those who disseminate “free information” is more difficult. Because attention rather than information is the scarce resource, power flows to the credible and to those who “can distinguish valuable signals from white noise.” Reputations and asymmetrical credibility are sources of power.\textsuperscript{35}

Second, hard power and soft power are directly and inversely related. They are related directly when military power serves as a “force multiplier” for diplomats seeking to persuade – or when soft power (for example, embedded reporters when things were “going well” for a few weeks in 2003 in Iraq) helps to reinforce political will at home and dilute the political will of one’s adversaries. Hard and soft power are inversely related when more soft power means less need for the costly carrots and sticks of hard power. Because information technologies are changing “the very nature of states, sovereignty and control,” Nye argues, fewer issues that we care about can be solved through dominant military power. “Policy makers will have to pay more attention to the politics
of credibility and the importance of soft power. And they will have to share a stage crowded with newly empowered non-governmental actors and individuals.  

Acknowledging these intellectual debts serves several purposes. It suggests that academic scholarship has much to contribute to public diplomacy. These brief references to the work of Habermas, Castells, Lippmann, and Nye barely scratch the surface. Constructivist theory, media framing studies, social psychology, anthropology, languages, hermeneutics, communications research, and other disciplines can provide insights into public diplomacy and governance – especially if scholars put public diplomacy into their analytical focus and if practitioners pay attention. It means there is a solid basis for developing courses and graduate programs with structured sequences of courses on public diplomacy, governance, and related subjects. Finally, it points the way to possibilities for further inquiry by scholars and practitioners. Let me suggest three.

Suggestions for Collaborative Inquiry

Connecting hierarchies and networks. Reorganization and process solutions have a bad name because too often they are default choices of parliaments, officials, and practitioners in the business of appearing to do something. Lasting impact on thinking and habits is rare. If we assume, however, that networks are dominant social structures in information societies, then change is required, and at some point becomes inevitable, in the silos, stovepipes, hierarchies, and dysfunctional practices of governments. Eliminating hierarchies in government is neither desirable nor possible. Changing them so they adopt network characteristics and connect more easily with networks is both desirable and possible.
In public diplomacy this means greater attention to the practical work of knowledge sharing and building flexible and adaptable hybrid institutions. Knowledge sharing of course has been central to public diplomacy for decades in the sense of government support for cross-cultural dialogue: academic and professional exchanges, cultural diplomacy, democratization and civil society initiatives. These activities can strengthen networks in civil society. They serve state interests. They also serve the governance interests of non-state actors.

But knowledge sharing also means listening. Listening means comprehending cultures, attitudes, memories, beliefs, demographics, media trends, and social networks at a very high level. It means recognizing that countries, cultures, sub-cultures, tribes, religions, influence structures, and virtual communities are extraordinarily diverse. Understanding them requires a variety of interpretive tools. This in turn requires investing more of public diplomacy’s operational budgets in penetrating cultural analysis, ethnographic studies, hard languages, social network analysis software, polling and media analysis – and sharing what is learned from these efforts. It also means going beyond sweeping categories such as “the Muslim world” or “Central Asia” or “emerging democracies” to concentrate on people and groups in the context of their multiple identities and affiliations.

At a recent conference on public diplomacy at Ohio State University, Barry Fulton acknowledged again the importance of thinking about diplomats as “boundary spanners.” He reminded, however, that formidable challenges come from those responsible for “boundary maintenance.” Boundaries exist within as well as between nations. Maintaining separate communities, reinforcing cultural and ethnic identities,
and preserving lines between insiders and outsiders provides work for many in politics and religion – and yes, in the tribal cultures of diplomacy and college campuses.

Stakeholders in public diplomacy too often minimize the difficulty and the desirability of listening. Diplomats tend to think they understand indigenous cultures sufficiently through their own perceptions. Campaigning politicians spend large sums on research to understand voter preferences; then, when in office, they routinely ignore opinion and social network research in their public diplomacy. We have yet to get serious about the work of building – and using – the listening tools needed for knowledge sharing and boundary spanning.

Much of what public diplomacy needs to know lies outside government. Universities, research organizations, and NGOs offer untapped resources in knowledge domains, area and language expertise, planning and consultative services, opinion and media analysis, and evaluation methods. Much can be accomplished in public diplomacy through collaborative relationships with civil society organizations – and through collaborative relationships between public diplomats within and between foreign ministries. Such collaboration can do more than leverage knowledge and expertise. It can reduce information costs, foster communities of interest, generate better understanding of what works, and create appetites for more collaboration.39

In building flexible networks and hybrid institutions, a number of process solutions are worth considering. Visa policies that create disincentives to cross-boundary exchanges and profile groups for unfavorable treatment need to be changed. In foreign ministries, separate career paths for political and public diplomacy officers matter less, because more of what ambassadors and political officers do involves outreach beyond
government ministries. Canada’s diplomats are merging these career paths. U.S. diplomats could learn from their example. Collaborative software and improved technology infrastructure are needed for hierarchies to adapt to network environments, but creative use of incentives in diplomatic career systems are likely to have greater transforming impact. If senior officer promotions are contingent on demonstrated public diplomacy skills and accomplishments, it will change traditional foreign ministry cultures. Public diplomacy training, inter-agency and private sector assignments, and knowledge sharing skills must be, and be perceived to be, career enhancing. To succeed in understanding and responding to complexity, foreign ministries and public diplomacy institutions must have continuously adaptable structures and the capacity to network people and their expertise. The U.S. has a long way to go in recruiting and training public diplomats, in building strong networks, in adjusting investment priorities that privilege military power, and in recognizing that what it does is more important than what it says.

Leveraging Technologies and trust. Governments seldom are first adopters in information technologies, and public diplomacy is no exception. Diplomats can learn a great deal from non-state actors in creative uses of the Internet and other technologies for governance and public diplomacy. At one level this means simply more effective use of interactive tools – podcasts, blogs, text messaging, web chats, MP3 players, DVDs, and tailored websites – for listening, communication, and evaluation. Josh Fouts and his colleagues at the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy, for example, are doing interesting work on the development and use of multiplayer online games as venues for cultural dialogue. Can shared experiences in virtual games, they
ask, build relationships and facilitate cultural understanding? Case studies in which activist NGOs have used the Internet to advantage are numerous and compelling. Cases in which governments have done the same are hard to find.

At another level, and perhaps more importantly, inquiry by scholars and practitioners can enhance understandings of the strengths and limitations of technologies for public diplomacy. The Internet hosts countless forums in which people argue, agree, share, and talk past each other. Enthusiasts celebrate the deliberative advantages of free public spheres. Thomas L. Friedman tells us “the world is flat.” Benjamin Barber urges greater attention to the countervailing power and influence on global opinion of citizen groups empowered by web-based technologies. Some observers have begun to explore the benefits of reputations built through cheap, multiple, and redundant information channels and use of network “trust technologies.” In blogospheres where millions "vote" with hyperlink clicks, top bloggers gain "authority" in their content domains through navigation services that analyze citations and traffic patterns.

Skeptics, however, contend that online forums can become “echo chambers” where people sort themselves into likeminded groups in which conversation “is specifically tailored to their own interests and prejudices.” Others point out that the Internet, more than earlier media, decontextualizes information from the social frames that give it meaning.” Social context and sender identity on the Internet are not necessarily self-evident – a characteristic used by Al Qaeda and others to advantage. Technologies are changing not just how we communicate; they also are changing the ways we construct personal identities and culture. The Internet has become a forum not only for discourse about content, but a place where memories, stories, and narratives
resonate emotionally – a virtual public sphere in which “boundary spanners” and
“boundary maintainers” contest ideas and use stories to connect with the past and shape
the future. The point is not to try to resolve these issues. Rather it is that scholars,
NGOs, and practitioners have plenty of room for mutually advantageous inquiry into the
meaning of Internet technologies for public diplomacy. There is also need and
opportunity for state and non-state actors to collaborate on making these technologies
available to those without access to them.

**Public diplomacy and governance.** A third area of inquiry builds on
assumptions about power and strategy and ways scholars and practitioners can shed light
on the instrumental role of public diplomacy in governance. The assumptions are these.
Public diplomacy relates to hard and soft power. Public diplomacy is one among a range
of persuasive and coercive instruments available to state and non-state actors in
formulating strategies to achieve goals. Public diplomacy has significant limitations, and
its effective use is contingent on situational contexts and vicissitudes of attraction and
repulsion. Let me suggest three ways to build on these assumptions.

First, we should think more comprehensively about public diplomacy as an
instrument linked to hard and soft power and as an element in strategic logic. As Nye
points out, “Hard and soft power sometimes reinforce and sometimes interfere with each
other.” In discussions about public diplomacy as a soft power concept, it is easy to
neglect its relevance to hard power and the interplay between the two forms of power.
Public diplomacy is instrumental in war and peace and a range of conflict/cooperation
possibilities in between. It is instrumental also in achieving public safety, a discrete
public good, as well as health care, economic wellbeing, and tolerant civil societies, and the many other public goods on which safety often depends.

The debate on public diplomacy should include not only its methods and characteristics, but its place in strategic logic – public diplomacy’s role as an instrument that helps to answer the question “how” once choices about interests and values have answered the question “why.” How can public diplomacy adapt to strategic calculations about highly diverse geographic and social contexts? How does public diplomacy fit in calculations about trade-offs among policy goals, trade-offs among all available persuasive and cooperative instruments, and trade-offs between short and long term objectives? Different actors will have different “whys” and “hows,” and we need to respect these differences. However, this should not keep us from seeking to develop broadly applicable public diplomacy principles and practices and from systematically mapping strategic and public diplomacy connections over time.

Second, we can build on these assumptions by continuing to examine the interface between governance and diplomacy. One approach might be research, in multiple empirical settings, on whether governance activities of non-state actors fit easily with the core components and time dimensions of public diplomacy as practiced by states. Diplomats and foreign ministries seek to understand, engage, and influence publics in support of interests and values in time dimensions ranging from news cycles to decades. But so also do Doctors Without Borders, Amnesty International, Transparency International, and hundreds of other non-state actors. Speeches by Doctors Without Borders executives are intended to frame perceptions within news cycles. Its Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines is a multi-year communication effort to lower drug
prices and reduce trade barriers to medical treatments. And after more than 30 years of international networking, long term dialogue and engagement are a high priority. If the instrumental characteristics of public diplomacy as used by states fit easily with the activities of non-state actors engaged in goal oriented activities intended to satisfy needs and fulfill wants, can we say that non-state actors engage in public diplomacy? On this account, I think the answer is yes.

Third, we should take care to separate analytical judgments about political actors and public diplomacy from political and moral judgments about policies and strategies. But conflating them is a path to confusion. Non-state actors often challenge the legitimacy of state (and corporate) power, but they do not enjoy political and moral superiority simply because they are non-state actors. Nor do state actors have political and moral legitimacy simply because they are sovereign states. Political and moral judgments about the actions of both state and non-state actors turn on assessments of the means and ends they employ, not on perceived taint based on their institutional status in governance.

A different point relates to the use of language. Political leaders say they employ public diplomacy in the service of goals they believe have merit. Their adversaries, they often say, engage in propaganda. NGOs and UN officials worked hard to build political will for famine relief and nation building in Somalia in 1991. Were their advocacy efforts public diplomacy and those of Somali war lords propaganda? Were NATO’s websites used to gain support for policies in the Kosovo conflict public diplomacy? Was Milosevic’s impressive English language website – a website intended to credibly engage and persuade NATO publics – propaganda? Are Osama bin Laden’s messages on global
media platforms public diplomacy or propaganda? Political and moral judgments about the actions and strategies of state and nonstate actors are critical, but they do little to help us understand what we mean by public diplomacy and its role in governance.

Finally, it is useful to draw a few bright lines. Public diplomacy is open communication. It is not covert. Public diplomacy should be credible; it should not be deceptive. Public diplomacy imports norms from education, journalism, and other parts of society. Limited structural firewalls are needed to protect imported norms. Public diplomacy necessarily entails discourse and two-way communication. This leads to an emphasis, exclusively by some, on long term cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is dialogic, but it is also instrumental in that it serves group interests and values. Public diplomacy also matters in news cycles and in short term advocacy. Effective short term advocacy initiatives also have dialogic characteristics – understanding publics, choices of issues on which there is common ground, credible and persuasive words and symbols, and message authority. Public diplomacy entails actions as well as words and images. It can be a powerful tool, but it cannot triumph over flawed policies, fundamental differences, and other barriers. Public diplomacy is hard work.

Those whose patience has not been exhausted will note that nowhere have I categorically answered the question in the title of this paper: Now that its part of a global conversation, should we keep the term public diplomacy? So let me conclude with a provisional yes. Let’s keep the term for now. It’s no small thing that public diplomacy has become part of a global conversation, but let’s broaden its meaning to include activities of nonstate actors engaged in global governance. And let’s consider the
possibility that we eventually may adopt a more generic term – political communication or strategic communication. Contrasting views and alternative approaches are welcome.

Thank you for listening.
Endnotes


18 National Endowment for Democracy website, [http://www.ned.org/about/principlesObjectives.html](http://www.ned.org/about/principlesObjectives.html).

19 Commenting on the decision of the World Summit on the Information Society to leave management of the Internet to ICANN, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce Michael Gallagher observed that the onus is now on the world to expand the Internet to benefit developing countries. “The key here, he said, “is to get countries around the world, but particularly in the developing world, to adopt and ingrain the use of technology to help better their economies, jobs, economic opportunities.” Quoted in U.S. Department of State, “No New Oversight for Internet Management, Summit Agrees,” November 16, 2005, [http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2005/Nov/16-857624.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2005/Nov/16-857624.html). Secretary Gallagher will be more influential if actions accompany his words.

20 Mathews outlined these strengths and limitations in her seminal article on the devolution of government power in “Power Shift: The Age of Nonstate Actors,” *Foreign Affairs*, (January/February 1997), 50-66.

21 Donna Oglesby, Email to the author, June 11, 2006.


Kristin M. Lord, “What Academics (Should Have to) Say About Public Diplomacy,” (paper presented at the American Political Science Association Conference on International Communication and Conflict, Washington, DC, August 31, 2005); 2, http://www8.georgetown.edu/ctt/apsa/papers/lord.doc. Lord finds it surprising that “academics have had little to say about public diplomacy,” because public diplomacy matters in foreign policy, and scholars usually weigh in on major foreign policy issues. “Academics sometimes complain that policymakers do not listen to them,” she adds, “but in this case, the neglect is mutual.” If policymakers were to listen, “they could hear a pin drop.”


Joseph S. Nye, Jr., The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go it Alone (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5-18. According to Nye, the sources of soft power are a country’s culture (when it is attractive), its political values (when it lives up to them), and its foreign policy (when seen as legitimate and having moral authority), Soft Power, 11. For an argument that soft power can “make enemies,” see Josef Joffe, “The Perils of Soft Power,” The New York Times, May 14, 2006.

Nye, Paradox, 67.

Nye, Paradox, 76.
Barry Fulton, “Geo-Social Mapping of the International Communications Environment or Why Abdul Isn’t Listening,” Remarks at the Mershon Center, Ohio State University, April 21, 2006, paper forthcoming.

Timothy Garton Ash reports on scholarship showing that “more than 300 languages are spoken in London” and that approximately “one out of every twelve people now living in Britain belongs to what are awkwardly classified as ‘minority ethnic groups.’” Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West (New York: Random House, 2004), 17-18.

For an interesting discussion of collaboration in intelligence analysis from which lessons might be drawn for public diplomacy, see Jeffrey R. Cooper, Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis (Center for the Study of Intelligence, December 2005), 54-5, http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/curing.pdf.


Barber, “Globalizing Democracy.”


Nye, Soft Power, 25.

A different but interesting question is whether citizens in a democracy should support strong public diplomacy instruments in the service of policies democratically arrived at with which they disagree.