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# The New Public Diplomacy

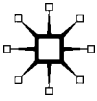
## Soft Power in International Relations

Edited by

Jan Melissen

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*For Isabel, Eugenia and Daniel*

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# Contents

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
<i>Introduction</i>	xix
Jan Melissen	

## Part I: The New Environment

<b>1. The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Jan Melissen</i>	
Introduction	3
Beyond American public diplomacy?	6
Defining the new public diplomacy	11
Public diplomacy and related concepts	16
Conclusion: diplomacy and the ordinary individual	23
<b>2. Rethinking the ‘New’ Public Diplomacy</b>	<b>28</b>
<i>Brian Hocking</i>	
Introduction	28
Unpicking the threads of public diplomacy	29
Public diplomacy and power: hard, soft and sticky	33
Public diplomacy: hierarchies and networks	35
Public diplomacy and diplomats	39
Conclusion	41

## Part II: Shifting Perspectives

<b>3. Power, Public Diplomacy, and the <i>Pax Americana</i></b>	<b>47</b>
<i>Peter van Ham</i>	
Introduction: an American Empire by default?	47
Soft power, hard power, and the ‘indispensable nation’	49
Public diplomacy: wielding soft power	56
The limits of PR and spindoctoring	59
Conclusion: a tough sell for liberal imperialism	63

<b>4. Niche Diplomacy in the World Public Arena: the Global 'Corners' of Canada and Norway</b>	<b>67</b>
<i>Alan K. Henrikson</i>	
Introduction	67
The power of 'the better argument'	69
'Niche diplomacy' in the public arena	71
Soft power and political strategies	73
Canada: risks and rewards of open confrontation	75
Norway: a parallel and still independent course	79
Conclusion: lessons from northern corners?	82
<b>5. Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China</b>	<b>88</b>
<i>Ingrid d'Hooghe</i>	
Introduction	88
China's foreign policy and diplomacy	89
Targeting foreign audiences from 1949 onwards	91
China's present public diplomacy goals	92
Assets and liabilities	94
Target groups	95
The instruments	96
The inner working of China's public diplomacy system	98
China's public diplomacy strategies: the case of Tibet	100
The limits of China's public diplomacy	101
Conclusion	103
<b>6. Revolutionary States, Outlaw Regimes and the Techniques of Public Diplomacy</b>	<b>106</b>
<i>Paul Sharp</i>	
The public diplomacy of the Bolsheviks and the Berne mission	107
The public diplomacy of Qaddafi's Libyan <i>Jamahiriya</i>	110
Iranian public diplomacy under Khomeini	114
Conclusions: public diplomacy and the 'war on terror'	117
<b>7. The EU as a Soft Power: the Force of Persuasion</b>	<b>124</b>
<i>Anna Michalski</i>	
Introduction	124
Scope of analysis	125



External policy and normative power	126
The internal dimension of EU communication and information	127
EU external communication	130
The evolving European foreign policy and the significance of communication	139
Conclusion	141
<b>Part III: Improving Practice</b>	
<b>8. Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy That Works</b>	<b>147</b>
<i>Cynthia P. Schneider</i>	
Introduction	147
American culture and understanding America until the Cold War	149
Diplomacy that worked: cultural diplomacy during the Cold War	151
The role(s) and position(s) of cultural diplomacy in the US government or 'déjà vu all over again'	155
Comparative practices of other countries	157
Cultural diplomacy in the twenty-first century	158
The challenges of cultural diplomacy today	160
Conclusion	163
<b>9. Making a National Brand</b>	<b>169</b>
<i>Wally Olins</i>	
Introduction	169
France and nation-branding	170
Projecting the national brand	172
Conclusion	177
<b>10. Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy: a New Foreign Policy Paradigm?</b>	<b>180</b>
<i>Shaun Riordan</i>	
Introduction	180
Building bridges to moderate Islam	180
Promoting civil society	184
Beyond selling policies, values, and national image	186
Collaboration with non-governmental agents	190
Practitioners as public diplomacy entrepreneurs	193

<b>11. Training for Public Diplomacy: an Evolutionary Perspective</b>	<b>196</b>
<i>John Hemery</i>	
Introduction: training in transition	196
Barriers to training	197
Changing attitudes: flexible approaches	198
Formal public diplomacy training	200
Public diplomacy as a profession	203
The way forward for training?	204
Designing the perfect course	205
Conclusions	208
 <i>Index</i>	 210

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# Acknowledgements

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Editing books is, however, also great fun. The early stages of such a joint venture with colleagues from various countries first of all offer an excellent excuse for a stimulating international conference, and in the process of making a book one often gets to know people with whom it is a pleasure to work. The group of authors contributing to this book has expanded my intellectual horizon and understanding of public diplomacy considerably. Our contacts via email, at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' in The Hague, and subsequently at academic gatherings in other places, have resulted in a greater circle of friends and colleagues in diplomatic studies.

I am indebted to numerous diplomats who kindly shared their views and personal experiences with me, and I am also grateful for the support received from colleagues at the Clingendael Institute, where the study of diplomacy is now prioritized alongside diplomatic training for countries from many corners of the world. Time cannot be beaten when making an edited book, but distance is fortunately irrelevant. Rebecca Solheim, who is based in Sweden, went through all of the texts meticulously and from start to finish has turned out to be a fantastic copy editor. I can only hope that we continue to work together on future projects. I am also indebted to Ashvin Gonesh, who compiled the index to this book. Finally, Isabel, Eugenia and Daniel have been enormously supportive. I owe them a lot for putting up with me: the man in the family who was not always there to be a family man.

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# Introduction

*Jan Melissen*

The idea to create this book was triggered by the feeling that the debate about public diplomacy after September 2001 had mainly taken place in the press and that the time was ripe for students of diplomacy to look at this phenomenon.

In the early stages of the book it became clear how much confusion still surrounded public diplomacy (that is, the relationship between diplomats and the foreign publics with whom they work) with public debate on the concept being particularly intense in the United States. Between '9/11' and the outbreak of war in Iraq, public diplomacy was beyond any doubt the hottest item in the US foreign policy establishment. Most American think tanks produced advisory reports on public diplomacy, some of them more helpful than others, but so far there has been remarkably little academic literature on post-Cold War public diplomacy. Those interested in it are confronted with an overload of press coverage, comment and analysis as well as instant advice for policy-makers. What is missing, however, is a lack of analysis of deeper trends, and a perspective on how official communication with foreign publics should be seen in the context of wider diplomatic practice.

There are, of course, many ways to look at public diplomacy, and students of diplomacy are fortunately by no means the only academics interested in it. It seems probable that the vantage point of students of global communication, historians of propaganda or international relations' theorists leads to views on public diplomacy that differ from those of students of diplomacy. In this book the practice of diplomacy is the starting point for the majority of the contributions. Most authors believe that public diplomacy can be better understood in the context of broader changes in diplomatic practice and that public diplomacy can at least partly be seen as a symptom of change in the conduct of international relations. In a broader historical perspective it may even be ventured that – for better or for worse – the practice of foreign ministries and embassies in engaging with civil society groups and individuals abroad demonstrates that the evolution of diplomatic representation has reached a new stage. The truth is that foreign publics now matter to practitioners of diplomacy in a way that was unthinkable as little as

25 years ago. In some of the more pioneering countries in this field, one can clearly observe that public diplomacy is gradually moving away from the periphery of diplomatic work. The same has happened to commercial diplomacy – that is, activities by foreign ministries and embassies in support of their country's business and finance sectors – or, at least in Western countries, to consular relations and in particular the effort put into looking after the well-being of a country's own nationals abroad. Many practitioners in the world's diplomatic services may not yet have grasped the significance of communication with foreign publics, but it is a telling sign that in a considerable number of countries it has captured the firm attention of senior management in foreign ministries as well as the political leadership.

It is worth looking at public diplomacy beyond the experiences of the United States or the anglophone world. The debate about the new public diplomacy after 11 September 2001 has become dominated by US public diplomacy, and it has been characterized by a strong emphasis on international security and the relationship between the West and the Islamic world. The US experience should, however, not distract from the observation that many countries became interested in public diplomacy long before '9/11', and for very different reasons. In order to understand public diplomacy properly, it is equally interesting to look at big, medium-sized, small and even micro-states, and also to analyse the way in which non-democratic countries explore this new form of 'outreach' in foreign relations. The strong emphasis in the United States on homeland security, the 'war on terror' and 'winning hearts and minds' in the Islamic world does not mirror the concerns and interests in public diplomacy that are articulated in many other countries. To be sure, September 2001 was an important trigger for the present debate on public diplomacy throughout the global diplomatic community, but for many countries it was not the beginning, nor did the US experience set the terms for thinking on this issue outside North America. This volume is a first attempt to lift the veil on a range of approaches towards public diplomacy. After all, for those who are interested in diplomatic practice, the public diplomacy of the government of Kyrgyzstan is potentially as interesting as the way in which the US State Department is addressing the challenge of communicating with publics overseas.

This book is meant for students of diplomacy and for diplomats. An important driver for some authors is their intellectual curiosity and desire to understand public diplomacy; others tend to blend academic analysis with recommendations for practitioners; and a third category of

authors is primarily motivated by the idea that a proper understanding of public diplomacy can contribute to better diplomatic practice and can help to prevent practitioners from misunderstanding its requirements. The book was deliberately conceived as a collective effort by authors from different countries and with varying professional backgrounds. They currently live in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands or Spain, and are not just academics, but also scholar-diplomats, and consultants or trainers in diplomacy. They are first of all trying to come to grips with public diplomacy from a set of different thematic and national angles, although the book is not designed as a straightforward comparison between different countries. Second, this book looks at public diplomacy as it is practised by different types of countries and by the European Union as an increasingly autonomously operating international organization. Third, the book tries to clarify how practitioners can be more effective as 'public diplomats'. It does not, however, constitute an exercise in school building, nor does it try to force its authors into any form of academic straitjacket. On the contrary, the close reader will not fail to notice that the authors disagree on a number of fundamental points. The book's relatively modest aim is therefore to reflect on public diplomacy today, to assess its importance in the conduct of international relations and, by doing so, to contribute to a wider academic debate on recent trends in diplomacy. The study of public diplomacy is bound to lead to disappointing results if it is dissociated from a broader understanding of diplomatic practice, and students of diplomacy who ignore public diplomacy do little justice to a fundamental aspect of diplomacy's contemporary evolution.

In the first part of this book, Jan Melissen's introductory chapter on the new public diplomacy and Brian Hocking's theoretical reflections on the subject first of all aim at conceptual clarification. They evaluate the new public diplomacy's importance in the present international environment. Both authors consider the new public diplomacy as part of the fabric of world politics, although some of their conclusions on its significance are fundamentally different. Melissen introduces the new public diplomacy as a concept and assesses current developments in this field. His analysis identifies characteristics of good practice and it distinguishes between on the one hand propaganda, nation-branding and cultural relations, and on the other hand public diplomacy. Hocking continues to unpick the various threads of which public diplomacy is composed, re-examines the 'soft power' argument that often surfaces in relation to the discussion on public diplomacy, and contrasts public

diplomacy in a hierarchic state-centric image of international relations with a network model.

In the second part of the book, five authors show some of the diversity displayed in the practice of public diplomacy across the world. They look at radically different types of countries and one international organization: the world's leading superpower; two democratic middle powers; an authoritarian great power; revolutionary public diplomacy and communication with foreign audiences by rogue states; as well as the European Union's experiences as a unique international actor. Peter van Ham looks specifically at US public diplomacy and Alan Henrikson's chapter evaluates how the niche diplomacy of Canada and Norway relates to their policies towards the United States. Van Ham's chapter is about US public diplomacy in the context of the debate on 'US Empire'. He examines the normative assumptions on which the dominant discourse of the emerging *Pax Americana* is based, how the US's soft power base has been instrumentalized for the cause of liberal imperialism, as well as the role of public diplomacy in the US's nascent empire. Alan Henrikson's paper compares how Canada and Norway have demonstrated them to be adroit users of public opinion, and how they have succeeded in gaining the respect of other countries as well as public opinion overseas. He discusses the two countries' political strategies in the spheres of power politics and public diplomacy, distinguishing between a confrontational strategy towards the United States, parallel action and an approach aiming at active partnership.

The three remaining chapters in the second section deal with rather exceptional forms of public diplomacy compared to the dominant discourse, which appears to regard public diplomacy as an activity of democratic states or at least states in transition. Ingrid d'Hooghe looks at the characteristics of China's public diplomacy. The Chinese case is particularly interesting because China has a considerable track record in the field of political propaganda and it is a one-party state with a centralist authoritarian regime. D'Hooghe evaluates China's global and bilateral actions in this field, and she points to the public diplomacy asset of China's culture. Paul Sharp's contribution deals with public diplomacy on the periphery of the prevailing international order. His key observation is that a lot of what is called public diplomacy can in fact be traced back to activities practised by revolutionary states such as the Soviet Union, and that it bears striking similarities to communication with foreign audiences by so-called rogue states. Against the background of the 'dark side' of public diplomacy, Sharp's analysis cautions that attempts at counter-revolutionary public diplomacy will undermine the

values that public diplomacy purportedly seeks to advance among a wider global audience. The final chapter in this section deals with the European Union as a soft power. Anna Michalski argues that the power of persuasion becomes an existential requirement for the EU's popular legitimacy and credibility, but that in spite of the many actions of the European Commission and the Council Secretariat, the concept of public diplomacy is not employed by many Brussels officials. She discusses how certain values, norms and principles are nevertheless integrated into policies and are instrumentalized in the EU's information and communication strategy.

In the final part of this book, four authors explore public diplomacy's potential. As in Melissen's introductory chapter, they deal with some of the practical aspects of how public diplomacy can be undertaken. Cynthia Schneider argues that cultural diplomacy is a prime example of soft power, but that it is often easily dismissed as too soft and peripheral to the real issues of policy. Her chapter provides an overview of US cultural diplomacy until the end of the Cold War and it examines the reasons behind the decline of US cultural diplomacy from the 1990s. Schneider also identifies good practice and she discusses the strengths and limitations of US cultural diplomacy from a comparative perspective. The contribution by Wally Olins makes a case for nation-branding and stresses that nations have always tried to create and modulate their reputations in order to achieve loyalty at home and influence abroad. He distinguishes a number of areas in which nations are in direct and overt competition with each other and in which he sees nation-branding as an inevitable activity, but he also cautions that it is for the long term, and that the pay-off is slow and not readily measurable. Shaun Riordan states that public diplomacy is part of a newly emerging paradigm of collaborative diplomacy, which requires an approach that is fundamentally dialogue-based. His chapter looks at nation-building and the struggle against international terrorism as two prime examples where such an approach has the potential to contribute to international stability. In this view public diplomacy is increasingly about ideas and values, and involving non-governmental agents is seen as one of the most effective ways of promoting and developing it. In the last chapter in this section, John Hemery looks at variations in training for public diplomacy across the world and discusses what a good course on public diplomacy might look like. He observes that a very limited number of foreign ministries appear to train their diplomats to be players in amorphous transnational networks, and that in many countries public diplomacy training programmes are packages of disparate skills

development that fall short of preparing diplomats for operating in the changed architecture of international relations.

Finally, it is self-evident that knowledge of, and a feel for, diplomatic practice is indispensable for a proper understanding of traditional, peer-oriented diplomatic communication. This book's authors, however, believe that students of diplomacy are equally well-placed to make an assessment of diplomacy that takes practitioners out of their protected realm. It is therefore hoped that this book – and indeed diplomatic studies generally – contributes to the debate about public diplomacy, rather than leaving it to others to deal with as mere international communication. Last but not least, this collection of essays indirectly advocates more research on current trends in diplomatic practice. Studies into the history of diplomacy and diplomatic thought have proven to be a boost for the small niche of diplomatic studies in the field of international relations. Confronted with sweeping change, however, it would be appropriate if students of diplomacy also reflect and theorize on current trends and innovations in diplomatic practice, or even turn to scenario studies of what may lie ahead.

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