

# Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories

By  
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Public diplomacy is a term much used but seldom subjected to rigorous analysis. This article—which draws heavily on a report commissioned by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the spring of 2007—sets out a simple taxonomy of public diplomacy's components and their interrelationships. These components are (1) listening, (2) advocacy, (3) cultural diplomacy, (4) exchange, and (5) international broadcasting. It examines five successful and five unsuccessful uses of each individual component drawing from the history of U.S., Franco-German, Swiss, and British diplomatic practice. The failures arise chiefly from a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality. The final section applies the author's taxonomy to the challenges of contemporary public diplomacy and places special emphasis on the need to conceptualize the task of the public diplomat as that of the creator and disseminator of “memes” (ideas capable of being spread from one person to another across a social network) and as a creator and facilitator of networks and relationships.

*Keywords:* public diplomacy; definition; history; taxonomy

## 1. The Core Approach to Public Diplomacy

The term *public diplomacy* (PD) is new. It was first applied in 1965 to the process by which international actors seek to accomplish the goals of their foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics and has gained international currency only since the end of the cold war. Its constituent parts are, in contrast, old: essentially as old as statecraft. This article will establish a simple taxonomy of public diplomacy, dividing its practices into five elements:

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listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting (IB). It will consider, in turn, the nature, past success, past failure, and possible future of each element.

### *Listening*

While most of the elements of public diplomacy are presented here in no particular order, the choice of the first is deliberate, for it precedes all successful public diplomacy: listening. Listening is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas and using that data to redirect its policy or its wider public diplomacy approach accordingly. This has traditionally been an element of each constituent practice of public diplomacy, with advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and broadcasting agencies each attending to its own audience and opinion research. Information on foreign public opinion has also been gathered as part of the regular function of conventional diplomacy and intelligence work. In its most basic form, this covers an event whereby an international actor seeks out a foreign audience and engages them by listening rather than by speaking, a phenomenon that is much promised but seldom performed. It is common to see public diplomacy responding to shifts in international opinion; cases of listening or structured opinion monitoring shaping the highest levels of policy are harder to find. This is the holy grail of public diplomats, to be, in the famous words of United States Information Agency (USIA) director Edward R. Murrow, "in on the take-offs" of policy rather than just "the crash landings" (Cull forthcoming). While systematic assessments of foreign opinion are a modern innovation, the attempts to know the mind of a neighbor's population have been a feature of intelligence reports as long as there have been spies. No state has made responding to international opinion central to its diplomacy or even its public diplomacy, but—as will be seen—Switzerland has made some interesting experiments in the field.

### *Advocacy*

Advocacy in public diplomacy is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by undertaking an international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy, idea, or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public. Today this includes embassy press relations (frequently the hard end of policy promotion) and informational work (which can be somewhat softer and less angled to hard-and-fast policy goals). Elements of advocacy are to be found in all areas of public diplomacy, and its short-term utility has historically led to a bias toward this dimension of public diplomacy and a tendency to place it at the center of any public diplomacy structure. The unique features of the other fields of PD have led to an almost universal centrifugal force within all public diplomacy bureaucracies as they strain to be free of the "taint of policy."

Ancient examples of advocacy may be found in Herodotus, where envoys from Xerxes of Persia appeal to the people of Argos for their neutrality in the Empire's

invasion of Greece in 480 BC. While advocacy is common to all states, it is a dominant concept in American public diplomacy, where each element is scrutinized during congressional oversight for its contribution to selling the idea of America.

### *Cultural diplomacy*

Cultural diplomacy is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad. Historically, cultural diplomacy has meant a country's policy to facilitate the export of examples of its culture. Ancient examples include the Greek construction of the great library at Alexandria or the Roman Republic's policy inviting the sons of "friendly kings" from their borders to be educated in Rome. Today this includes the work of organizations like the British Council or Italian Cultural Institute. The great spenders in cultural diplomacy have been the French, who have heavily subsidized an international network of schools to sustain the French language, understanding that their prestige and influence is largely tied to the survival of the *francophonie*. Discomfort with advocacy roles and overt diplomatic objectives has led some cultural diplomacy organizations to distance themselves from that term and the term *public diplomacy* also. The British Council prefers to describe itself as a "cultural relations" agency, though its core tools are cultural work and exchanges, and its objective falls within the definition of both public and cultural diplomacy. Some scholars (see for example Feigenbaum 2001) restrict their use of the term *public diplomacy* to the work described here as *advocacy* and therefore support the exclusion of cultural diplomacy from public diplomacy altogether.

### *Exchange diplomacy*

Exchange diplomacy is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by sending its citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation. While this can be conceptualized as a one-way process (the argument runs, "My students will go overseas and tell you how wonderful my country is; your students will come here and learn how wonderful my country is."), the element of reciprocity has tended to make this area of public diplomacy a bastion of the concept of "mutuality": the vision of an international learning experience in which both parties benefit and are transformed. Ancient examples may be seen in intercommunity child-fostering practiced in Nordic and Celtic Europe (Arndt 2005). Exchanges often overlap with cultural work but are also used for specific policy and/or advocacy purposes as when targeted for development or to promote military interoperability with an ally. When housed within a cultural diplomacy agency, the aspect of mutuality and two-way communication within exchange has sometimes been subordinated to the drive to project national culture.

While the United States has invested heavily in exchange through the Fulbright Scholarships, this work never displaced the centrality of advocacy in its public diplomacy. Japan, in contrast, has always emphasized exchange as an organizing concept for its public diplomacy. This attitude dates back to the Meiji period of nineteenth-century modernization when the government swiftly learned to make use of the readiness of foreigners to trade their modern knowledge for experience of Japanese culture. Japanese diplomats routinely use the term *exchange* to refer to the entire world of public diplomacy.

### *International news broadcasting*

IB is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio, television, and the Internet to engage with foreign publics. IB work as practiced by states can overlap with all the other public diplomacy functions including listening in the monitoring/audience research functions, advocacy/information work in editorials or policy broadcasts, cultural diplomacy in its cultural content, and exchange in exchanges of programming and personnel with other broadcasters. The technological requirements of IB are such that the practice is usually institutionally separate from other public diplomacy functions, but the best reason for considering IB as a parallel practice apart from the rest of public diplomacy is the special structural and ethical foundation of its key component: news.

Historically, the most potent element of IB has been its use of news, especially when that news is objective. This aligned the entire practice of IB with the ethical culture of domestic broadcast journalism and turned IB into a mechanism for diffusing this culture. While IB dates only from the mid-1920s—with the Soviet Union and the Netherlands leading the field (Brown 1982)—it is possible to find state-funded news much earlier. Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) distributed a newsletter about his court's activities around neighboring capitals. Thanks to the achievement of the BBC World Service, IB has long been the most widely known element in British public diplomacy.

While various states have emphasized a particular element of public diplomacy in their approach, the ideal structure would balance all and allow each the space and funding to make its own necessary contribution to the whole. One of the regrettable features of public diplomacy around the world is that this is seldom the case and that rather than competing with the organs of hard power for their share of funding, the agencies of soft power and public diplomacy have fought each other for funds and for the dominance of their outlook.

The basic taxonomy of public diplomacy discussed above is shown in Table 1.

While these subfields of public diplomacy share the general goal of influencing a foreign public, they diverge in four important respects: their conceptual time frame, the direction of flow of information, the type of infrastructure required, and the source of their credibility. The interrelationship of time, flow, and infrastructure is shown in Table 2.

Like all forms of communication, the effectiveness of each form of public diplomacy hinges on credibility, but here the fields radically diverge. Each finds

TABLE 1  
BASIC TAXONOMY OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Type of Public Diplomacy	Sample Activities	State in Which This Form of Public Diplomacy Has Been Salient
1. Listening	Targeted polling	Switzerland
2. Advocacy	Embassy press relations	United States
3. Cultural diplomacy	State-funded international art tour	France
4. Exchange diplomacy	Two-way academic exchange	Japan
5. International broadcasting	Foreign-language short-wave radio broadcasting	Britain

TABLE 2  
TAXONOMY OF TIME/FLOW OF INFORMATION/INFRASTRUCTURE  
IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Type of Public Diplomacy	Time Frame	Flow of Information	Typical Infrastructure
1. Listening	Short and long term	Inward to analysts and policy process	Monitoring technology and language-trained staff
2. Advocacy	Short term	Outward	Embassy press office, foreign ministry strategy office
3. Cultural diplomacy	Long term	Outward	Cultural center and/or library
4. Exchange diplomacy	Very long term	Inward and outward	Exchange administrator, educational office
5. International broadcasting	Medium term	Outward but from a news bureaucracy	News bureaus, production studios, editorial offices, and transmitter facilities

its sources of credibility in a radically different place, and hence each ideally requires the *appearance* of a wholly different relationship to government to flourish. International broadcasters know that the impression of an editorial connection to government runs counter to credibility; cultural organizations are able to flourish in places where a formal arm of the state would have no credibility and any hint of a connection between psychological warfare and public diplomacy is so damaging that the whole subject is excluded from public diplomacy discussions (see Table 3).

TABLE 3  
 TAXONOMY OF CREDIBILITY IN STATE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Type of Public Diplomacy	Source of Credibility	Helped by Perceived Connection to Government?	Helped by Perceived Distance from Government?
1. Listening	Validity of methods used	Yes, if it implies the actor is listening to world opinion	No, if it implies the actor is not listening to world opinion
2. Advocacy	Proximity to government	Yes	No
3. Cultural diplomacy	Proximity to cultural authorities	No	Yes
4. Exchange diplomacy	Perception of mutuality	Yes, if it implies the actor is listening to the world	Yes, if it implies the exchange is not self-interested
5. International broadcasting	Evidence of good journalistic practice	Usually no	Yes

These structural differences between the elements of public diplomacy only become critical when a state attempts to administer all its public diplomacy under a single bureaucracy. The two classic models of state public diplomacy take opposite positions on this question. In the U.S. model of the 1980s, all the overt arms were grouped within a single agency (USIA). In the British model, they are disaggregated into separate functions with the sole grouping being the linkage of cultural diplomacy and exchange diplomacy within the British Council. Both models have their limits, but the centrifugal forces within the U.S. system, and especially the tensions between advocacy and mutuality-based exchange, on one hand, and journalistically based IB, on the other, proved wasteful and often crippling. While an element of strategic direction is necessary to maximize the utility of public diplomacy for the state that is picking up the bill, this has to be handled with care to avoid compromising the perceived integrity of each element of public diplomacy work.

The most potent voice for an international actor is not what it says but what it does, and history is full of examples of international actors who found the best public diplomacy to be no substitute for a bad policy. Hence, the most important link in any public diplomacy structure is that which connects research to policy making and ensures that the impact of an actor's decisions on foreign opinion is weighed in the foreign policy process. There is also a need to coordinate between each element and elements whose role could be considered "public diplomacy by deed," such as an international development agency. It is possible for good policies to make no difference to a nation's "soft power" if they are not publicized or coordinated.

## 2. Five Cases of Success

When handled well, public diplomacy can be essential to the success of a foreign policy. Each element in the taxonomy has its success story, which carries broader lessons for the wider operation of public diplomacy.

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### *Listening: Rebranding Switzerland, 2000-2007*

In the late 1990s, following the revelation of the Swiss banking system's willingness to handle Nazi gold during World War Two, Switzerland faced a serious crisis in its international image. In 2000 the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs founded a new unit to coordinate the country's international brand image with the title Presence Switzerland (PRS).<sup>1</sup> The mission of PRS was to connect with opinion makers overseas and coordinate the international outlook of international players across Swiss society with the motto, "Joint action, joint promotion." Its CEO was a diplomat with the rank of ambassador, and its staff included individuals with backgrounds in media analysis, public relations, and branding. PRS operated under a board drawn from the foreign ministry; banking; and other businesses, media, and state agencies for culture, sports, tourism, and youth affairs. The board met three times a year to determine the organization's strategy and priority countries and green light any project with a budget of more than CHF 250,000 from its annual budget of CHF 10,000,000. PRS designated seven priority countries in which it would initiate or support activities (its immediate neighbors Germany, Austria, France, and Italy; and the United States, United Kingdom, and People's Republic of China) but also had the leeway to focus elsewhere as the need was perceived. Early ad hoc venues for work included Russia, Central Europe, and Scandinavia. PRS has mounted a series of major set-piece events that included the "House of Switzerland" exhibits and the Athens and Turin Olympic Games and the Swiss pavilion—the Mountain—at the World Exhibition Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. The United States, United

Kingdom, and Spain all saw major campaigns in the first three years. All reflected a high degree of state-private cooperation and high production values.

The key to PRS's success was its listening research. From its foundation, PRS launched seven ongoing image surveys in key target countries. Methods included polling and media analysis. The data were used to determine and refine the activities necessary to reposition Switzerland in the minds of selected audiences. Follow-up surveys were used to evaluate performance and generate the next round of surveys. The surveys proved an effective mechanism for identifying discrepancies and local problems in the image of Switzerland. It seemed, for example, that exactly the qualities the Swiss valued about themselves—their political system with its direct democracy, their modernity, their humanitarian commitment—were not understood overseas or not known about at all.

Both PRS's own data and independent research suggest that Switzerland successfully moved beyond the crisis of the 1990s and returned to a position of respect in the international firmament. The relative contribution of PRS against the genuine reforms and work to set right wrongs dating back to the war remains moot, but sound policy is the best public diplomacy in any case. It has had some success in coordinating the international efforts of stakeholders including business, local and regional government, and public relations researchers. PRS's feedback mechanisms include training for high-level and midlevel Swiss diplomats to generate understanding of the branding approach, but there is little evidence that PRS has been able to feed back into the wider making of Swiss foreign or domestic policy. Unfortunately, the achievement of PRS was not appreciated. In 2007, the Swiss parliament "reformed" its structure as part of an attempt to reduce the number of independent boards in the Swiss bureaucracy. It will be harder for PRS to coordinate its country's image in the future.<sup>2</sup>

*Advocacy: U.S. public diplomacy to support intermediate nuclear force deployment in 1983*

In 1975, the Soviet Union began deployment of intermediate nuclear forces (INF) in Eastern Europe in the form of the SS20 missile. As NATO had no equivalent missiles in place, Moscow had gained a massive strategic advantage in the cold war. For the purposes of deterrence and to stimulate serious arms reduction talks, the United States needed a counterdeployment but faced mounting public opposition in Western Europe to nuclear weapons. In 1979, NATO decided to pursue a "twin-track" policy seeking an arms reduction agreement while deploying its own INFs in Europe. It fell to the Reagan administration in 1983 to accomplish the deployment of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and the Pershing II ballistic missile.

The master stroke of the INF campaign was the selection of a new U.S. ambassador to NATO, David M. Abshire. Abshire was the founder of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., and already had a special relationship with the European think tank circuit and defense journalists. He also knew senior people in the European peace movement. He, in

turn, recruited an experienced USIA man, Stanton Burnett (then minister counselor for information in the U.S. embassy in Rome) and a colleague from CSIS named Mike Moody to run his campaign and began to call in favors and rekindle old relationships in the cause of deployment. The core of his argument was that the Soviet deployment of the SS20s in 1975 was the real disruption to peace, rather than America's plan. Abshire was not averse to branching off into just war theory or talking about real peace—he liked to use the Hebrew *shalom*—being more than the absence of war but rather an international system based on real respect between countries. In June 1983, Vice President Bush made a European tour and obtained the necessary agreements for the deployments, which went ahead everywhere planned except the Netherlands. While follow-up polls showed that the INF deployments were unpopular with the wider population, Europeans were apparently convinced of the sincerity of the American approach to arms reduction and attached far more significance to other issues of the day like social and economic concerns. The point was that opinion had shifted enough to allow the missiles to be deployed. The Americans had made a move that compelled the Soviets to negotiate and in retrospect now looks like the winning play in the cold war confrontation. Abshire received the Distinguished Public Service Medal for his service around the deployment.<sup>3</sup>

This campaign is notable for its carefully strictly limited objective (tolerance of INF deployment rather than nurturing a love of the Reagan administration), careful selection of the audience (European opinion makers rather than an unwinnable mass audience), and careful selection of a credible messenger (Abshire) who was already known to the target audience. It is notable that the Reagan administration was not concerned that its public diplomacy be seen to be effective by a domestic American audience, nor that any credit be seen to accrue to the administration as a result. The focus remained getting the vital missiles into place. Abshire was doubtless helped by the fact that he had a good case springing from the prior deployment of Soviet missiles, and credibility was given to U.S. statements of intent to negotiate once the missiles were in place.

### *Cultural diplomacy: America's Family of Man exhibit, 1955-1963*

Throughout the early 1950s the United States trailed the Soviet Union in key aspects of its international image. The Soviets had successfully associated international communism with peace, whereas the United States with its leadership of the UN in Korea seemed associated with war. Similarly, Moscow aligned with overarching values of international class solidarity and human progress and their local expression in movements for revolution and liberation, while the United States was identified with the status quo. To meet this challenge, in 1955 President Eisenhower's USIA deployed a spectacular new tool of cultural diplomacy: a magnificent photographic exhibition originally developed for the Museum of Modern Art in New York called *The Family of Man*. Created by the legendary photographer Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man* comprised 503 pictures by 273 photographers, both professional and amateur, from sixty-eight

countries including the Soviet Union. The pictures provided multifaceted glimpses of human life in all its diversity, including courtship, birth and parenting, work, learning, self-expression, and beyond. The entire show glowed with life-affirming energy (Sandeen 1995; Steichen 1955).

Within months of the exhibition opening in New York City, the USIA created two touring editions and sent one to Berlin and the other to Guatemala City. In Berlin, crowds three and four abreast flocked to see it. Many came from the eastern sector, wearing sunglasses to avoid being recognized. Further editions toured simultaneously to wildly enthusiastic reviews for the rest of the decade. In 1959 the show even opened in Moscow as part of the American National Exhibition that summer. In Paris the cultural critic Roland Barthes raised a rare voice of opposition, attacking the show in his seminal book *Mythologies* for presenting its images without reference to history. This was—of course—the point, because history meant either the dialectic of class conflict pedaled by Moscow or the local national experiences that held human beings apart. By 1962 when it stopped touring, the exhibition had visited ninety-one locations in thirty-eight countries.

*The Family of Man* was a remarkable piece of cultural diplomacy on many levels. It certainly succeeded as a work of art, winning friends for America by virtue of its emotional impact. On the surface it was not an argument for American culture specifically. It displayed many cultures and sought to emphasize their shared experiences. Only a few images were identifiably American, and these included images that showed the downside of life in the United States such as Dorothea Lange's pictures of dust bowl poverty in the 1930s. Similarly, only a few images were overtly political—a rioter in Berlin, a Nazi round-up of Jews in Poland, a dead soldier in Korea—yet its politics was clear. Rather than crassly presenting America to the world, America presented the world to the world and gained credit thereby, and in the process America highlighted certain aspects of life that were repressed in the Soviet Union. The diverse religious experience of mankind was in the foreground of the exhibition, as was the idea of democracy. To hammer the point home, short texts taken from the world's great holy books and political philosophers accompanied the pictures. While no specific geopolitical shifts can be attributed to the show's progress around the world, it certainly challenged Moscow's monopoly of humanism and was a testament to the eclecticism and diversity of American culture that would prove the foundation of the country's "soft power."<sup>4</sup>

### *Exchange: Franco-German rapprochement, 1945-1988*

In the history of the West, no relationship had been as fraught as that between France and its neighbor Germany. In 1945 a number of war-weary, influential people in both France and Germany placed *Versöhnungsgedanke* (reconciliation) between their two nations at the top of their agenda. The public diplomacy process began with individual initiatives. In 1945 a Jesuit priest named Jean du Rivau founded a Bureau International de Liaison et de Documentation (BILD) with a German equivalent Gesellschaft für übernationale Zusammenarbeit (GüZ) to promote Franco-German knowledge and understanding, and the associated

publications *Documents* and *Dokumente* to the same purpose. BILD pioneered the exchange of schoolchildren. In 1948 three German politicians, Carlo Schmid, Fritz Schenk, and Theodor Heuss, founded a Deutsch-Französisches Institut in Ludwigsburg. Meanwhile leaders in local government were already looking to international exchange as an expression of a vision of a European culture founded on free municipalities. In 1947 French and German mayors came together in a Union Internationale de Maires (UIM), which in turn devised a network of “twinning” (*jumelage/Städtepartnerschaft*) agreements linking French and German towns of similar size, history, or industry. The first such agreement came in September 1950 with the twinning of Montbéliard and Ludwigsburg. Hundreds of others followed suit, steered from 1951 by a Council of European Municipalities (CEM). Civic exchanges, student exchanges, and sporting fixtures followed. By the end of the century, more than two thousand communities up to and including cities and entire provinces had twinned (Vion 2002).

The localities led the way and the national governments followed, in part as the generation of youth exchanged in the late 1940s moved into their adult career. The mutual proliferation of *Goethe Institutes* and *Instituts français* was one example of national institutions following where the mayors had led. In January 1963, it reached the very top as Konrad Adenauer and Charles De Gaulle signed the Elysée Treaty with a preamble that spoke of an end to the “centuries-old rivalry” and a “fundamental redefinition” of the relationship between the two countries. The first step to this redefinition was the creation in the summer of 1963 of a Franco-German Youth Office (Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse/Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk) with an annual budget of 40 million DM. Annual participation topped three hundred thousand, and by 1997, 5 million students, around 70 percent of whom were high school age, had been exchanged. One analyst called it “the greatest mass migration ever.” This generation in turn added another intergovernmental layer to the Franco-German relationship. In 1988 France and Germany concluded a series of bilateral cultural agreements including the creation of a joint High Council for Culture; an Adenauer-de Gaulle prize (as the most prestigious of many prizes on offer for promoting Franco-German understanding); a structure to further facilitate university exchange and joint-degree programs; and most innovatively of all the launch of an entire Franco-German TV channel, ARTE (Association Relative à la Télévision Européenne). While the clearest result of the exchanges was more exchanges, there has been a palpable political convergence between the two nations (Krotz 2002). French and German leaders who grew up with the exchanges can look to each other for cooperation and trust that their populations will tolerate cooperation in a way simply not possible in a country like Britain with far less of an exposure to these sorts of exchanges.

While the historical enmity between France and Germany presented a formidable obstacle to success, the postwar Franco-German exchanges were helped by underlying factors. First was the symmetry between the two countries. While each had threatened the other in the past, neither had an advantage in the postwar years; in fact both were in the same situation of recovery from humiliation in

war and getting used to living in a world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. Second, there were a number of shared ideological reference points that made exchange easier, from the mayors in both countries who shared a vision of peace built upwards from cooperation between civic units, to the common culture of Christianity. Twinning ceremonies were regularly accompanied by church services and de Gaulle and Adenauer attended mass together. Third, there were ulterior motives for the move. The exchanges gave France an opportunity to export its language—an ongoing obsession—and West Germany had a mechanism for countering the internationalist youth propaganda aimed at its young people by East Germany. Finally, and paradoxically, the enormity of the challenge—the scale of Franco-German historical enmity—was a major impetus to addressing the problem. Such factors notwithstanding, the case shows how exchanges can snowball especially when future leaders are specifically targeted, with the immediate postwar generation instituting the state-funded exchanges of 1963 and the generation brought together by that experience going on to conclude the agreements of 1988 and beyond.

*International broadcasting: Britain and U.S. isolation, 1939-1941*

In the summer of 1940, the British Empire found itself alone facing the combined might of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Survival lay in gaining support from the still-neutral United States; unfortunately the United Kingdom had low credibility in the United States owing to the record of appeasement and the exposure of Britain's propaganda in that country during the First World War. The United Kingdom's assets included the infrastructure of U.K. IB; the arrival of a new, dynamic, and half-American prime minister in Winston Churchill; and the relative cohesion of the British public.

The keynote of the British campaign against U.S. neutrality (Cull 1995) was to avoid anything heavy-handed and, wherever possible, to facilitate description of events by American voices rather than attempt to export British voices. Britain's broadcasting facilities were used to allow U.S. radio correspondents—most famously Ed Murrow of CBS—to report on the war. Murrow brought Britain's war into the living rooms of America (Seib 2006). Retooled in the spring of 1940, the BBC North America service played a supporting role. Programming included material angled to appeal to American tastes but alien to British broadcasting to that point, most notably a soap opera about life during the Blitz that was designed to dramatize the conflict for American women. This program was rebroadcast on the Mutual network within the United States.

The BBC emphasized the absolute credibility of news. Stories were reported whether or not they reflected well on Britain. Britain escaped its reputation for propaganda earned in the Great War. The whole effort was helped by the willingness of Americans to see the coming of Churchill as a new era in British politics and the dissemination within the British and U.S. media of the idea that Dunkirk represented a clean break with the old Britain of class divisions and Empire and that a new wartime "people's Britain" had emerged. Radio speakers like J. B. Priestly both expressed this view and—as regional voices—were representative

of it. Churchill's broadcasts were relayed to the United States but were crafted to largely avoid any direct appeal to America but, rather, to be a spectacle of a leader addressing his people and mentioning his hope that America would come to Britain's aid, which Americans could overhear and from which they could draw their own conclusions. The cumulative effect of this strategy was not to sell any particular British idea or war aim to America but rather to promote an American identification with the British cause. Polling revealed a gradual process whereby Americans did not so much reject their neutrality as came to believe that the survival of Britain was more important than preserving it, which permitted President Roosevelt to take ever more explicit steps to assist the British. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was that empire's response to the resulting mood in U.S. foreign policy, and hence U.S. belligerence can not be wholly separated from the story of British public diplomacy (Cull 1995).

The case of Blitz-era Britain is one of many examples of trusting that a foreign correspondent, once embedded with one's own population or forces, will report from your point of view. More than this, it shows the value of an indirect or overheard message having greater credibility than a direct appeal. Like a modern corporate rebranding/relaunching, it helped that the beginning of Churchill's premiership could be presented as a clean break with the past and the beginning of a new Britain, though there were obviously more continuities than ruptures. It also helped that the British people were susceptible to the narratives of defiance and resistance that accompanied the Blitz and "lived the brand." Had a significant split emerged between the image and reality of Britain during these years, the impact on American opinion would have been severe. Later indications that Churchill himself might have ideas that ran against U.S. hopes for the postwar world produced tensions in the Anglo-American relationship. The bottom line is the effectiveness of the broadcasting channels, especially in presenting a partisan perspective on the news and fostering an emotional connection to the British case, which was not present before the war but which was destined to long outlast it.

### 3. Five Cases of Failure

The greatest failure accrues to the nation that neglects its public diplomacy altogether, but once a public diplomacy policy has been put into operation, much can go wrong, and there are clear examples of failure across the taxonomy of public diplomacy. The reader will soon begin to identify certain overlapping traits that mark many failures, the most common of which is an assumption that appearance and reality can somehow be two different things without the audience ever noticing.

*Listening: The U.S. "Shared Values" campaign, 2001-2002*

The usual problem with listening and opinion research in public diplomacy is that it either is not done or, when done, it is not fed into policy. One of the most notorious failures of recent U.S. public diplomacy, the "Shared Values" campaign

of 2001-2002, reveals flawed listening. It was the brainchild of an undersecretary of state for public diplomacy whose background at the highest levels of the advertising industry had taught her that no campaign could succeed without proper research and responsiveness to the audience. She initiated a TV and newspaper advertising campaign to show the Muslim world that Americans shared their most cherished values of faith and family and that Arab-Americans lived in prosperity amid tolerance. The campaign was thoroughly tested before and after delivery and always scored well. The problem was that it answered a question that no one was asking. Muslim hostility to the United States was based not on an erroneous idea that Arab-Americans had a hard time in Dearborn, Michigan, but a fairly accurate idea of American policy in the Middle East.

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The whole question of listening leads into the evaluation of public diplomacy and thereby into deep water. In a world where public diplomacy is judged by its short-term ability to “move the needle,” the longer-term projects (like the use of exchanges) appear to contribute little while the short-term advocacy initiatives alone seem relevant. Attempts to evaluate cultural diplomacy can seem like a forester running out every morning to see how far his trees have grown overnight. Evaluators of public diplomacy must maintain an awareness of the distortions that may proceed from their analysis. One obvious danger is to evaluate an international broadcaster by the size of his audience rather than the influence of his audience.

*Advocacy: The United States in Vietnam*

The United States invested an immense amount of time and money in advocacy around its war in Vietnam. The effort marked the all-time high in U.S. expenditure on public diplomacy as Washington worked to sell its Saigon clients to their people and sell its effort in South East Asia to the world. The essential problem with the campaign was that it relied on claims that were undermined by the wider reality of the war. The cluster bombing, search-and-destroy missions, mounting civilian casualties, and GIs “destroying the village in order to save it”

proved more powerful than any protestation at a Washington press conference that the United States was fighting in the best interests of the Vietnamese people. No less significantly, the credibility of America's presence in Vietnam was limited by the quality of its client regime in Saigon, which deteriorated with every Washington-backed coup or reshuffle. Both factors played into the rival claims to legitimacy made by the communist enemy. The Vietnam War is the classic reminder that the best advocacy in the world cannot offset a bad policy.

### *Cultural diplomacy: The image of the Soviet Union*

Throughout the cold war the Soviet Union invested heavily in projecting its cultural image. Arts diplomacy, sports diplomacy, radio broadcasts, film exports, and a massive international publishing operation were all used to build a picture of the Soviet state as a place that valued expression, cultivated excellence, and tolerated diversity. Cheerful, colorfully costumed Soviet minorities were always prominent in any representation of Soviet culture. The problem was that these elements were present within Soviet cultural exports precisely because they were not typical of life in the Soviet Union. Moscow portrayed itself as it wanted to be, not as it was. The investment won admiration in the medium term, especially in the developing world, but could not counter the reality of political oppression or economic decline so clearly revealed in the 1980s.

### *Exchange: The case of Sayed Qtub, 1948*

Advocates of public diplomacy frequently speak as though all that is necessary is for a foreigner to be admitted to the country on an exchange program for the scales to fall from his or her eyes and for understanding to dawn. This is not the case. While empirical studies suggest a strong correlation between exchange experiences and international understanding, there are important exceptions. The most famous case of failure is that of Sayed Qtub, the Egyptian writer who spent 1948 in Colorado as an exchange visitor studying the U.S. education system. He was appalled by what he saw: consumerism and lasciviousness run amok. On his return to Egypt he became a founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and a major voice warning against the coming corruption of the West. Analysts of Qtub's career have argued that he held unsympathetic views about the United States before his exchange experiences (Van Drehle 2006), but it seems clear that the experience amplified these and perhaps motivated him to greater militancy. The fact that he had actually been to the United States also enhanced his credibility when talking to countrymen who could not dream of visiting. The role of the students from the "Hamburg cell" in the 9/11 plot is a reminder of the danger that without support, the exchange student can draw the "wrong conclusions" from a public diplomacy point of view and retreat into an echo chamber of prejudice rather than advance into a new understanding. The lessons of Qtub and Hamburg are that exchange students need support and monitoring and that exposure to a culture may have unintended consequences. Intervention to

improve the experience of exchange students and other visitors through visa reform, and even reminding the travel industry and citizens groups of their duties as host would also mitigate the risks of an exchange having a counterproductive effect.

*International broadcasting: British/Free French broadcasting to France in World War Two*

It is only to be expected that an international actor in possession of a mechanism for communicating to foreign publics as potent as IB will succumb from time to time to the temptation to distort for short-term gain, but messages spun in one year have returned to haunt their originator. The French theorist Jacques Ellul (1973, 77) cited the following example: during World War Two, British/Free French broadcasts from London and Algiers blamed the food shortages on German occupiers requisitioning production for themselves, which was not happening. This created unrealistic expectations of the liberation of France and led to ill feeling and unrest when the postoccupation government in France had to maintain rationing and proved unable to control inflation.

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#### 4. Public Diplomacy in the Information Age

The information age has brought with it both a spirit in some quarters that anything can be accomplished by public diplomacy and a certain defeatism among others who feel confounded by the proliferation of media of mass communication. This final section will examine the extent to which new technologies transcend the public diplomacy lessons of the past or underline their enduring value. Examples of the power of this new technology to wrong-foot the powers-that-be abound, from the ability of a photograph from a cell phone to circle the

globe and derail a carefully planned media event to the speed with which an SMS text message can be passed from person to person and rally citizens to a protest. Besides new technology, it is equally important to also consider the new demography and political economy that underpin contemporary international relations. International communication is not necessarily about CNN or multi-million-dollar cultural centers overseas. Any message that crosses a frontier is an international communication. A letter home from a family member working overseas or an encounter with a returned refugee is international communication, and one that might have more credibility for the recipient than a newscast from London or Atlanta. The potential for interpersonal international communication has increased exponentially as a result of the Internet revolution but also because of an unprecedented mobility of populations. In addition to the familiar categories of refugees and migrants (both documented and undocumented/illegal), scholars have identified an entirely new class of international person: the *ampersand*, workers who live in communities that exist simultaneously in both the developed and developing world and spend part of the year in each. Their hierarchies, institutions, and social networks are the same in either country. These too are transmitting information, and their communities can as easily be enclaves of American life in El Salvador as Salvadoran life in Queens (Huntington 2004). While mobilizing both the digital and interpersonal connections to the ends of public diplomacy is a daunting prospect, small changes could have big results.

### *Listening in the digital era*

One of the great clichés of contemporary public diplomacy is to speak of the “need to listen,” but listening has to be more than a rhetorical strategy. It has to be visible, and while no international actor could sustain a foreign policy driven entirely by the whims of its target audience, the actor would do well to identify the points where foreign opinion and its own policy part company and work hard to close the gap or explain the divergence.

Beyond the basic courtesy of listening, the systematic integration of foreign public opinion research into public diplomacy remains the most important task in the digital era being as neglected a field as it was in the previous epoch of public diplomacy. Advances in software and the proliferation of online source material (not least blogs) have made it possible to monitor online media in English in real time and other sources in near real time. Public diplomacy resources might sensibly be used to facilitate the development of monitoring software in strategic languages. Such work can produce indices of success and failure, but yet more important is the qualitative research to actually identify the ideas emerging from the target audience.

In traditional public diplomacy, the qualitative research function was usually the province of the public diplomat in the field: the press attaché or public affairs officer who knew the key editors and intellectuals and had his or her finger on

the pulse of the nation to which he or she was assigned. That officer routinely fed back his or her responses into the policy mix and could argue against the use of a particular approach or bluntly suggest a new policy altogether. One feature of recent U.S. public diplomacy (especially in Iraq) has been an unprecedented emphasis on contractors to deliver key public diplomacy functions. In these cases, the feedback is unlikely to suggest a different approach, let alone a different policy; more typically feedback stresses success and recommends further expenditure with the contractor. This is a dangerous precedent.

The ideal public diplomacy structure would provide for systematic listening, research, and analysis within each strand of public diplomacy and ensure a mechanism to feedback results and advice into the administration of public diplomacy and back into the highest level of policy making. This is hard to achieve as it necessarily treads on toes—another approach would be to supplement enhanced listening on one's own side with enhanced speaking on the part of one's target: building the public diplomacy capacity of other nations. This is already happening in the area of nation branding and could usefully be extended through established mechanisms as educational exchanges and targeted grants. The mechanisms of peer-to-peer media that offer an obvious new way for "us" to speak to "them" could be used to give "them" a voice amongst "our" public.

One recent case of foreign policy listening—albeit in a domestic context—is that of Canada's posting of certain draft policy documents online to allow interested citizens to contribute to their development. The experiment brought a feeling of engagement and ownership on the part of respondents and excellent suggestions and refinements to the policy documents so published. In the summer of 2007, the new administration of Gordon Brown in the United Kingdom conducted a similar experiment.

### *Advocacy, from global real-time news to an ideas-based public diplomacy*

One core problem of contemporary advocacy is the disruption of old news boundaries and cycles. Not only is a message crafted for Kansas heard in Kandahar, but a message from Kandahar has circled the globe several times before Kansas is awake. The prime method adopted to counter has been to move the advocates closer to their target audiences so they are responding in the same news cycle (a classic example being the eventual deployment of a coalition spokesman in Islamabad to counter the advocacy of the Taliban ambassador and spokesman Mullah Abdul Salem Zaef).

This blurring of boundaries has led to a second problem: the penetration of domestic priorities into advocacy. This has produced messages for Kandahar crafted for Kansas and—to sustain the example—messages for Kandahar delivered with a public fanfare desired to impress Kansas with just how much was being done to win the war of ideas. There is no easy answer to this, but one is to accept that overly public, public diplomacy is counterproductive and to consider a model of advocacy based not on the advocacy of a state but on its policies and ideas. In an ideas-based public diplomacy, an idea, once cut free from its point of origin, is passed along peer-to-peer networks and reproduced in the traditional

media. The attention of the advocate should therefore be applied to shaping an idea or argument such that it will become a *meme* (an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture) and be reproduced by others beyond the immediate reach of the advocate. Historical examples of the use of memes include a project in the early 1980s for U.S. public diplomats in the Eastern bloc to collate anti-Soviet jokes and then distribute these to posts worldwide so that colleagues could spread them locally as they saw fit (Cull forthcoming).<sup>5</sup>

The advocate can boost the credibility of an idea by working to associate that idea with the messenger who will give it the most credibility and distance it from a messenger likely to undermine that credibility. For example, because of its link to the Global War on Terror, the United Kingdom has limited credibility as a messenger in many Islamic countries, so the British government might not be the best messenger for messages related to democratization, while the European Union (rather an underutilized voice in public diplomacy) would have more credibility.

The corollary of an ideas-based public diplomacy is to recognize that public diplomacy is advanced not only by the creation of memes but by the promotion of an environment that will best sustain those memes. This means that issues like media development and regulatory policy are an important facet of public diplomacy and should be planned in tandem with the rest of the public diplomacy approach.

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*If cultural diplomacy is conceived in its most basic terms as facilitating cultural transmission across an international boundary, there are many ways to do this. . . . The obvious missing dimension is attention to the interpersonal level of communication and the people whose lives cross the international boundaries who carry messages whether international actors like it or not.*

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#### *Cultural diplomacy: Diasporas and the potential of the blog*

If cultural diplomacy is conceived in its most basic terms as facilitating cultural transmission across an international boundary, there are many ways to do this

beside teaching one's language, organizing an exhibition, or sending a play on tour. The obvious missing dimension is attention to the interpersonal level of communication and the people whose lives cross the international boundaries who carry messages whether international actors like it or not. Two major groups that have been used historically for interpersonal work in public diplomacy are refugees and diasporas. Britain educated Polish and Czech refugees in its language and politics during World War Two (Donaldson 1984), while in the early cold war the United States government successfully used its Italian American community as a mechanism to reach out to Italy on the eve of a crucial election by orchestrating letters home. Today's asylum seekers and recent migrants are not generally seen as a public diplomacy resource but merely a welfare problem to be managed. At minimum the role of immigrants and migrant workers as a mechanism of international cultural transmission should be considered in the creation of policy toward them. Relatively simple reforms could make their lives easier—short of the unrestricted immigration that they might wish for—such as enabling their access to low-cost banking and international currency transmission facilities, which would both provide a valued service and stave off exploitation. The point of provision of these services—even if just a secure Web site—might be the point at which other more focused ideological cultivation could be delivered. Reminding host populations and their opinion formers that their hospitality or otherwise affects the international reputation of their country would also help.

The direct equivalent of the Italian-American letters home are the thousands of blogs that are written by expats located in the West and voraciously read in home countries. While the cold war method of providing a crib sheet of politically valuable points is too blunt an instrument for our own times, it is worth considering how Western public diplomacy might assist the bloggers. One approach would be to consider extending certain privileges hitherto reserved for the press to prominent bloggers. It would also make sense to see if there is software needed to facilitate blogging in less commercially viable languages, which, if created by a public-spirited body and made available as shareware, might open new channels.

The issue of empowering diasporas leads directly into the issue of connectivity in the developing world and the need to empower the people with whom the expats wish to connect. While certain states show extraordinary levels of connectivity (Morocco has just passed the 50 percent mark), others lag behind. Connectivity alone cannot be assumed to guarantee sympathy for the society which created the technology, but the fundamentalisms that fuel the jihad thrive on stereotype and are challenged by multiple perspectives. Connectivity will help. One example of empowerment that might be applied by a cultural diplomacy agency is that of the digital “cultural points” established by the Brazilian government in its poorest neighborhoods. These provide the computer resources to allow users to create their own artistic content and pass it on to a global audience.

*Exchange and online virtual worlds*

The potency of exchanges as a mechanism of public diplomacy is beyond dispute, but their implementation has been limited by budget and geography and by cultural barriers to participation of all members of society. One mechanism by which the proven benefits of the exchange and the new technology of the Internet can be brought together is through the development of online virtual environments that allow geographically remote users to interact in real time. The best-known examples are massively multiplayer online role-playing games like the Tolkien-esque *World of Warcraft* (launched by Blizzard Entertainment in late 2004), but the scope of virtual worlds now extends beyond gaming to the essentially social environment of *Second Life* (launched by Linden Labs in 2003) in which participants meet, build, trade, and interact in much the same way as they do in the “regular world.” By April 2007, *Second Life* had more than 5.4 million members, and the number of concurrent citizens in residence at any one time had passed thirty-six thousand. Yet more significant, in the first three months of 2007 the national origin of residents shifted from 50 percent American to around 30 percent. Linden Labs is in the process of adding an Internet voice protocol so that residents will be able to speak to each other in the environment rather than just communicate by typing into message boxes. The obvious application of *Second Life* as a public diplomacy environment would be to create locations within the virtual environment dedicated to cultural exchange that advertised themselves as a space to encounter other cultures. One model might be a virtual World’s Fair space with many countries displaying their cultural wares. Sweden has already opened an embassy in *Second Life*. Beyond this, there is room for entirely new online environments and games designed with a public diplomacy purpose in mind, like *Peace Maker*, which allows Israeli and Palestinian players to view their dispute through the eyes of the opponent rather than the self. Online games can be seen as the successor to the conflict resolution strategy of “jigsawing” by which a peace maker divides the pieces of a puzzle between factions in conflict and thereby requires those factions to cooperate in order to complete the puzzle.

Public diplomats who venture into virtual worlds should do so with the same respect that they would bring to terra incognita in the “real world.” *Second Life* already has its own mores and customs and its own “liberation front” with an agenda of opposition to corporate exploitation of their virtual world. Activity in *Second Life* is likely to be subject to scrutiny, and agencies with a firewall between themselves and central government are likely to fare better than ministries of foreign affairs.

The next generation of software will greatly enhance the possibility for exchanges using not only virtual worlds but social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. Google and Microsoft are well advanced in developing technology that will allow translation of spoken and written languages in real time much more effectively than anything that has been previously available. Again, one implication of this is to refocus the priority of the public diplomat on improving connectivity among target groups.

*International broadcasting in the era of YouTube*

IB has had its own set of challenges in recent years. Commercial channels now compete with the old state-based providers; new media offer both new mechanisms to access old services and make alternatives readily available. While there is still a place for the traditional services, international broadcasters need to respond creatively to the new world and guard against preserving old practices and approaches for their own sake. One approach is to consider the objective of the particular IB activity. If it has a developmental objective, such as democratization, sustained broadcasting by an external surrogate might at some point stifle indigenous voices in the target country. The emergence of coordination between IB and development with bodies like the BBC World Service Trust is a step in the right direction. It is also interesting to note that some international broadcasters allow their foreign language branches to act as a de facto overseas bureau for the local broadcaster in the target country.

One of the most encouraging recent developments is the rise of truly interactive programming in IB. The BBC World Service has led the way with innovative shows like *Africa Have Your Say* in which the audience is both participating in dialogue and putting issues forward for future discussion. This program, which airs three midday hours a week, has become a major site for African self-expression, with questions and comments coming in through direct calls, e-mails, and SMS text messages. Programs generated by audience feedback include treatments of taboo subjects like suicide as well as the expected developmental agenda subjects like corruption and community relations.

As already noted, public diplomacy actors should not only deliver the right messages but work to create the right environment for those messages through promoting appropriate international and domestic regulatory regimes. Yet more basically, anything that the public diplomacy actor can do to promote the connectivity of the target audience, including investment in wireless projects, creation of Internet cafes, investment in workable real-time translation software, or assisting with the acquisition of basic language skills, will help.

In the era of YouTube and peer-to-peer digital media the relationship between the broadcaster and audience has been transformed. Each audience member has the ability to create and distribute his or her own content and operate as either a multiplier for the broadcaster's original message or to distort it beyond all recognition. One way to move into this new world is to conceive of the broadcaster as a *creator of content* who might actually lose complete control of that content before it reaches the end user and to ensure that at least some of its regular content is made available in easily mashable and/or shareable forms. Making a public diplomacy actor's international news feeds available as YouTube posts would extend the reach of material that otherwise relies on the editorial choices of potentially unsympathetic stations. Other obvious techniques would be to encourage the creation of YouTube films to advance particular goals through competitions organized by actors. Such films are a classic example of an Internet meme: once called into life, the best will be passed around and have a life of their own.

## 5. Conclusion

The cases presented in this article confirm the enduring significance of public diplomacy in international relations. It has separated the elements into a basic taxonomy of equally significant functions but has argued that the historically neglected listening function does deserve special status as the starting point for public diplomacy. It has highlighted some of the present trends in technology and the international environment in which public diplomacy must work and has shown how the past can illuminate the road for those navigating this new world. The rise of the network society creates more opportunities than it closes for public diplomacy, especially if the public diplomat is mindful of the limitations of his or her craft and the necessity for thinking in terms of building relationships. These relationships, which transmit the ideas thought necessary for policy, must also carry back responses necessary to adjust that policy and steer toward a shared future.

## Notes

1. Switzerland already had an interagency mechanism that was supposed to manage its international image called the Coordinating Commission for the Swiss Presence Abroad (COCO). Founded in 1976 with twenty members, COCO was constituted within the foreign affairs department. With a staff of just five people, a budget of CHF 2.4 million, and an approach that seemed rooted in the venerable Swiss tradition of the volunteer militia, it seemed inadequate to the crisis of the late 1990s.

2. This analysis is based on the author's contact with Presence Switzerland (PRS) since 2005, including conversations with PRS's CEO Ambassador Johannes Matyassy and officials Seraina Flury Schmid and Mirjam Matti.

3. This case is based on the author's interviews with Ambassador Abshire and the National Security Council staffer who oversaw the campaign, the late Walter Raymond.

4. The exhibit has had an afterlife as a piece of cultural diplomacy. In 1965, the U.S. government presented the entire exhibit to Steichen's birthplace, Luxembourg. In the 1990s, the Luxembourg state restored the exhibit and placed it on permanent display in the magnificent Château de Clervaux in the north of the Grand Duchy.

5. While the implications of the concept of the meme for public diplomacy remain largely unexplored, practitioners would do well to begin with Heath and Heath (2007).

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