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Beschreibung:

Geo-Social Mapping of the International Communications Environment or Why Abdul Isn't Listening*

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Summary

The paper suggests a radical redefinition of public diplomacy, asserting its primary role should be to stimulate the imagination of those who make a difference within their own cultures — to give them the means and motivation to address the global requirements of the 21st century, therein enhancing security for the sponsoring nations. Public diplomats also have an ancillary role in supporting other elements of international engagement, including promoting foreign investment, new energy resources, developmental assistance, education, medicine, and law.

A three-point agenda for reforming the conduct of public diplomacy is proposed: reach beyond short-term parochial interests by providing knowledge to the curious, the innovative, and the restless. Hold public diplomats responsible for enabling connectivity and serving as cultural interpreters. Recruit and train artists, scholars, and scientists as public diplomats to engage actively in indigenous social networks.

The article concludes by citing famed American journalist and former distinguished director of USIA, Edward R. Murrow: "there is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference." To join this battle, public diplomacy can best honor its past by rethinking its future.

Keywords

Public diplomacy, new rules of engagement, transforming diplomatic roles and training, rhetoric, identity, image, information, imagination, boundaries, networks.

Introduction

This paper is guided by three axioms, two assumptions and one rule — all of which are relevant to the conduct of public diplomacy. An axiom is defined as a self-evident truth: number 1, the twenty-first century is not the twentieth century; number 2, information scarcity has been supplanted by an information

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Merston Center conference entitled 'Public Diplomacy as a Global Phenomenon,' Ohio State University, 28 April 2006.

surplus; and number 3, the division between East and West has been replaced by a division between prosperity and poverty.

My two assumptions are: first, that the elements of public diplomacy — ranging from broadcasting to educational exchange — constitute what theorists call a *complex adaptive system*; and second, that the twentieth-century problem set that public diplomacy addressed has passed into history, and so consequently have the rules that heretofore guided public diplomacy.

And, finally, there is one rule to which public diplomacy must adhere. It is not original, but borrowed from animator Chuck Jones. It is his Rule # 3 for the engagement of Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner: *The coyote can stop any time — if he were not a fanatic* ('A fanatic is one who redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim' — George Santayana).

I will argue that it is time to stop much of what we have done in the past or, like the Coyote, we will be outsmarted by the more agile and less powerful Road Runner.

Barriers to International Communication

That Public Diplomacy often fails to deliver is not surprising. That it occasionally succeeds is the real surprise. There are notable successes, ranging from the role of US shortwave broadcasting to Eastern Europe to the removal of the Soviet Union's SS-20 missiles aimed at Western Europe. These, however, are exceptions.

The traditional barriers to success are well known to academicians and practitioners, and include culture (religion, language and family); community; identity; beliefs; attitudes; cognition; memory; geography; demographics; income; education; and media access.

Neither the end of the Cold War nor the 'End of History' have crased these barriers to international communication. On the contrary, the bar has been raised in the twenty-first century.

Former US Secretary of State George Schultz, speaking at the Library of Congress in February 2004, asked, 'What should we do [about terrorism]? [...] First and foremost', he said, 'shore up the state system. The world has worked for three centuries with the sovereign state as the basic operating entity, presumably accountable to its citizens and responsible for their well-being'. Observing that the 'state system has been eroding', Schultz said: 'I see our great task as restoring the vitality of the state system within the framework of a world of opportunity, and with aspirations for a world of states that recognize accountability for human freedom and dignity'.

Perhaps, however, the genie is out of the bottle. James Rosenau, Professor of International Affairs at George Washington University, coined the term 'fragmentation' to represent the emerging global dynamic: 'The label [...] is intended to suggest the pervasive interaction between fragmenting and integrating dynamics

unfolding at every level of community [...] Equally important, the *fragmegration* label captures in a single word the large degree to which these rhythms consist of localizing, decentralizing, or fragmenting dynamics that are interactively and causally linked to globalizing, centralizing, and integrating dynamics'.¹

The breakup of Yugoslavia is illustrative. The paralysis in Iraq and the fissures in Somalia are visible indicators of new patterns of strains towards separation. The European Union, on the other hand, is the best example of the convergence of which Rosenau speaks. The watchword for the twenty-first century is the contradiction between integration and fragmentation. Curtailing the erosion of the nation-state system, as it operated for three centuries, may be impossible.

Robert Kaplan reminds us that even if the state is in transition, its rumoured demise is premature. 'Borders may be eroding', he writes, 'and stateless terrorist groups like al-Qaeda proliferating, but don't be fooled: The traditional state remains the most dangerous force on the international scene'.²

While the nuances of change are debatable, most would agree that the nature of the state, and therefore the relationship among them, is changing significantly. It follows that diplomacy — and as I will argue public diplomacy — of the twenty-first century must change significantly.

In addition to the constraints over which we have no control, US public diplomacy suffers from limitations that we have imposed, including: (a) resources that pale in regard to the opportunities; (b) a professional corps that lacks adequate training and experience; and (c) a profession that operates without agreed principles or operational standards. There are few countries that do not share these same self-imposed handicaps.

Mental Images of our World

For centuries we have fashioned our worldview with maps, one of the earliest being a sketch of southern Italy from around 500 BC. Today, the Mercator map of the world remains the view that many carry in their heads. We — Americans more than many — see the United States at the centre of the globe, with each nation distinctly separated from others by a solid line. Physical geography is the variable through which we view the world. New Yorkers are alleged to have a more myopic view than others, as illustrated by a classic *New Yorker* cover mapping the world from Manhattan, but it is surely a conceit of most of us.

Another, and less common, view is a world map where each country is represented with its familiar shape, but sized proportional to its population. The United States looks smaller, and Europe is the incredible shrinking continent

¹ James Rosenau, *Distant Proximities* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 11.

² Robert Kaplan, 'Old States, New Threats', *Washington Post*, 23 April 2006, p. B1.

compared to India and China. There are hundreds of variations, each crafted to show some aspect of the world in addition to physical geography.

Tom Friedman's best-selling book, *The World is Flat*, posits that information technology has changed half of the world practically overnight, through innovations ranging from the Internet to FedEx. But he worries about the other half; 'In many ways, the line between those who are in the flat world and those who are not' is what Friedman calls the 'line of hope'. He speaks of the grand challenges faced by the developing world, including hunger and health, and writes: 'Until and unless we can meet some of these grand challenges, much of the 50 percent of the world that is still not flat will stay that way -- no matter how flat the other 50 percent gets'. Friedman also wonders about the old boundaries: 'The biggest source of friction, of course, has always been the nation-state, with its clearly defined boundaries and laws. Are national boundaries a source of friction we should want to preserve, or even can preserve in a flat world?'³

In another insightful book, *The Pentagon's New Map*, Thomas Barnett (who Joseph Nye calls the poor man's Tom Friedman), also divides the world into two camps, which he labels 'the Core' and 'the Gap'. The Core includes North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, plus China, India, Argentina, Brazil and Chile. What these countries share is 'connectivity'. The rest of the world, from Peru to Papua New Guinea, constitutes the greatest threat to world stability. Barnett urges a strategy that brings the countries now in the Gap into the Core. 'Our model', he writes, 'is the Internet, which was unleashed to revolutionary effect around the planet; we administer this system primarily to raise its collective standards for robustness and stability. Our global security strategy must be very similar in approach'. In what he calls 'the global transaction society', Barnett proposes a 'US national security vision that recognizes the primacy of these global flows: people, energy, investment, and security'.⁴

Boundaries

Brian Hocking, Professor of International Relations at Loughborough University, has observed that diplomats must shift from being gatekeepers to becoming what he calls 'boundary spanners'. He writes:

This image proceeds from the recognition that boundaries, not simply those associated with territory but also those demarcating issues and policy arenas, are increasingly porous. [...] Whereas the gatekeeper image rests on the assumption that the defining function of diplomacy lies in controlling

³ Tom Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).

⁴ Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Putnam Adult, 2004).

national boundaries and insulating the state from its environment, the boundary spanner image stresses the importance of mediating within and across the points of interface between the state and its multiple environments.⁵

But boundary spanners are sure to be frustrated by those who are responsible for maintaining traditional boundaries. Boundary maintenance is recognized as a means of maintaining a sense of community, of cultural and ethnic distinctions that set one community apart from another. Membership in a community is defined not only by boundaries, but also by a common identify.

Boundaries may cross state lines, as illustrated by the Amish community in the United States, the Muslim community in France, or the Berber immigrants in the Netherlands. The Amish maintain their boundaries through strict family rules and a rejection of modernity. Devout Muslims in the Paris suburbs defy French law by the ritual killing of a male sheep in their apartments at the conclusion of Ramadan. Recent Berber immigrants from Morocco's Rif mountains protect their cultural identify by isolating themselves from Dutch culture. Through these common acts, boundaries between the actors and outsiders are strictly maintained — and cultural identify is reinforced.

We can all recognize examples of boundary maintenance from our professions, religions, or other institutions that we strive to preserve. The challenge for the boundary spanner, who transverses these lines, is considerable.

Identity

I suggest that just as the nature of the state is rapidly changing, so too is the concept of identity. Friedman writes that: 'The most common disease of the flat world is going to be multiple identity disorder'.⁶ I would suggest that the corollary among those who have not joined the Flat World — that is, those living in Barnett's Gap — is *identity rigidity*. In traditional societies, identify tends to be fixed and, with a few exceptions, unquestioned. The citizens of the industrialized world and increasingly what Barnett calls the Core have learned to transcend their identities. That your father is a sheep herder does not constrain your choices. Harvard economist Amartya Sen, in his recent book *Identity and Violence*, writes that 'The main hope of harmony in our troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities'.⁷

I will explore the concept of identify through literature and then — fair warning — suggest that its bounds can be expanded by the exercise of imagination. Consider,

⁵ Brian Hocking, 'Diplomacy: New Agendas and Changing Strategies', 23 July 2001, published on the Virtual Diplomacy website of the United States Institute of Peace, at <http://www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/publications/reports/14h.html>.

⁶ Friedman, *The World is Flat*.

⁷ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: Norton, 2006).

first, Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, for which the *fatwa* for his death was issued. The protagonist, in a dream state, flies above the London cityscape and spots:

[...] the house where Talleyrand lived in his old age when after a thousand and one chameleon changes of allegiance and principle he took on the outward form of the French ambassador to London, and arrives at a seven storey corner block with green wrought-iron balconies up to the fourth, and now the dream rushes up the outer wall of the house and on the fourth floor it pushes aside the curtains at the living room window and finally there he sits, unsleeping as usual, eyes wide in the dim yellow light, staring into the future, the bearded and turbaned Imam.

Who is he? An exile. Which must not be confused with, allowed to run into, all the other words that people throw around: émigré, expatriate, refugee, immigrant, silence, coming. Exile is a dream of glorious return. Exile is a vision of revolution: Elba, not St Helena. It is an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back. The exile is a ball hurled high into the air. He hangs there, frozen in time, translated into a photograph; denied motion, suspended impossibly above his native earth, he awaits the inevitable moment at which the photograph must begin to move, and the earth reclaim its own. These are the things the Imam thinks. His home is a rented flat. It is a waiting room, a photograph, air.⁸

A dream also awakens the imagination in a young Iranian woman in Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, as she discusses another issue of identity:

In his memoir, *Speak Memory*, Nabokov describes a watercolor that hung above his bed when he was a young child. It is a landscape, an image of a narrow path disappearing into a forest of trees. His mother read a story to him about a boy who disappeared one day into the painting above the bed and this became young Vladimir's wish as he prayed every night. As you imagine us in that room, you must also understand our desire for this dangerous vanishing act. The more we withdrew into our sanctuary, the more we became alienated from our day-to-day life. When I walked down the streets, I asked myself, Are these my people, is this my hometown, am I who I am.

All this was on my mind one Thursday evening after class as I was looking at the diaries my girls had left behind, with their new essays and poems. At the start of our class, I had asked them to describe their image of themselves [...]

I have one of these responses in front of me. It belongs to Sanaz, who handed it in shortly after her jail experience at the seaside. It is a simple drawing in black and white, of a naked girl, the white of her body caught in a black bubble. She is crouched in an almost fetal position, hugging one bent knee. Her other leg is stretched out behind her. Her long straight hair follows the same curved line as the contour of her back, but her face is hidden. The bubble is lifted in the air by a giant bird with long black talons. What interests me is a small detail as opposed to the more obvious imagery of the girl, the bubble and the girl's hand that reaches out of the bubble and holds on to the talon. Her subservient nakedness is dependent on that talon, and she reaches out to it.⁹

One more example of conflicted identity from contemporary literature comes from Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, as Coleman Silk, described as 'one of a handful of Jews on the Athena faculty when he was hired and perhaps the first of the Jews permitted to teach in a classics department anywhere in America' is forced to sever his ties to the college because of a 'single self-incriminating word'

⁸ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (London: Viking, 1988).

⁹ Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (New York: Random House, 2003).

which renders a colossal irony of identify. After the death of his wife, his unschooled girlfriend, searching for her identify, speaks these words:

Imagine if the crows were in charge. [...] The thing about them is that they're all practicality. In their flight. In their walk. Even in their color. All that blackness. Nothing but blackness. Maybe I was one and maybe I wasn't. I think that I sometimes believe that I already am one. Yes, been believing that on and off for months now. Why not? There are men who are locked up in women's bodies and women who are locked up in men's bodies, so why can't I be a crow locked up in this body? [...] I am a crow. I know it. I know it!¹⁰

Imagination

The thread that runs through my argument begins with maps, moves to boundaries, and leaps (or perhaps 'flies') to identities. What was once solid is now permeable. Geography defines relationships less and less in the Flat World, but even more so in the Gap. Identities are dynamic in the Core, but immutable to those without hope. If Friedman and Barnett are right, the security of those in the Flat World requires no less than giving those in the Gap an opportunity to join them.

The requirements to do so are staggering — including foreign investment, new energy resources, developmental assistance, education, medicine and law. It can be argued that public diplomacy has an ancillary role in meeting all of these requirements.

However, the primary role of public diplomacy, bounded as always by scarce resources, is to stimulate the imagination of those who may make a difference within their own cultures — to give them the opportunity to expand their identities to the global requirements of the twenty-first century.

Three Points

The usual cure for public diplomacy is structural, but that works only for mechanical, linear processes. It has not worked for US Homeland Security. And SAIC Chief Scientist Jeffrey Cooper finds in a recent monograph, entitled *Curing Analytic Pathologies*, that it is not working for the US intelligence community. He concludes that in this 'complex adaptive system', true reform requires 'analytic expertise, deep understanding, and self-imposed professional discipline'. Managers must provide the expectations and the tools for change, but should not assume that reorganization is a solution. By the same token, I would argue, returning to the past is an even less promising answer.

¹⁰ Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (New York: Vintage, 2001).

Instead, consider redefining the role of public diplomacy by acknowledging both its promise and its limitations. A modest redefinition might include these three points:

- In the dialogue named for the rhetorician Gorgias, Socrates enquires about the nature of rhetoric (the fifth-century version of public diplomacy). Gorgias describes it as the art of persuasion. Socrates then elicits his agreement that there are 'two sources of persuasion -- one which is the source of belief without knowledge, as the other is of knowledge'. Eventually, Gorgias all but admits that rhetoric is an art that is empty of content, taught by rhetoricians to allow those without knowledge to persuade the ignorant. Public diplomacy, to be effective in the twenty-first century, must surely embrace the best communication practices, but must in the last analysis have a knowledge core of value to our interlocutors. The need, I submit, is no longer overtly and narrowly to represent the short-term parochial interests of our countries, but to provide knowledge to the curious, the innovative and the restless whose imagination can be nurtured — through the arts and sciences. It is an affirmation of the first principles of Senator William Fulbright.
- Second point: The activities that follow from this prescription may vary markedly from region to region, country to country, and province to province. We need a multi-dimensional map that attends not only to geography, but also to all of the constraints that inhibit change. And in each case, the first role of the public diplomat is to serve as cultural interpreter, for the many other programmes — public and private — that intersect with public diplomacy. Beyond that, the role of public diplomacy is carefully to identify those in society who may make a difference and to feed their appetite for positive change — through the arts and sciences. The public diplomat must enable connectivity.
- Third point: We need to recruit and train public diplomats who are, themselves, artists, scholars and scientists. To be sure, we need managers and administrators as well, but more importantly we need role models who can genuinely interact with those who thirst for change. We require professionals who can participate in indigenous social networks. We need provincial, country and regional specialists who, when charged with clientitis, will understand it as a complement. The public diplomat must be a boundary spanner.

I am suggesting a radical redefinition of public diplomacy -- with a new supporting cast. Some may argue that the proposed role is too modest, although the contrary is more worrisome: I suspect that it is too ambitious. And it will not work in isolation from the other elements of statecraft, as it would require serious

rethinking of how we engage the rest of the world. Nonetheless, the stakes are high enough to warrant challenging our traditional approaches.

Conclusion

A recent profile of illustrator and author Maurice Sedak observes that 'his narrative is almost always about a child in danger, whose best defense is imagination'. If our security is at risk, then one element of our defence is to raise the imagination quotient and challenge the constraints of identity. In his 1958 address to the Radio-Television News Directors Association, Edward R. Murrow said: 'There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference'. To join this battle, public diplomacy can best honour its past by rethinking its future.

Dr Barry Fulton is a consultant at the Department of State and Research Professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University. He serves as a board member of *InterMedia*, the Salzburg Seminar, and the Public Diplomacy Institute. He is the author of *Leveraging Technology in the Service of Diplomacy: Innovation in the Department of State* and project director and author of the CSIS study, *Reinventing Diplomacy in the Information Age*. He was named by President Clinton as Associate Director of the United States Information Agency in 1994. During a 30-year career as a Foreign Service Officer with the United States Information Agency, he served in Brussels, Rome, Tokyo, Karachi, and Islamabad.