

Public Diplomacy Personal Definition
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President Obama is spending his last months as president traveling abroad in an effort to solidify the foreign policy agenda he outlined to accomplish during his presidency (Harris, 2016). His term has been marked by frequent international travel and made history in March 2016 when he visited Cuba to meet with President Raúl Castro, which led to the reopening of embassies in both countries. The president's trips can be considered successful acts of public diplomacy, each serving the purpose of connecting with international governments and publics to listen, engage and move forward with foreign policy initiatives. Although President Obama's travels primarily focused on foreign policy, it is important to note public diplomacy is more than accomplishing foreign policy objectives.

The interest in public diplomacy blends the essential need for communication and persuasive messaging with government and international publics that receive these messages and provide feedback. With no clear definition of public diplomacy, it can be unclear as to what public diplomacy professionals are trying to accomplish or what tools they can use to best address the publics and situations they face. The purpose of this research is to define what public diplomacy means from a personal perspective by examining definitions proposed by other professionals and synthesizing this information to outline and clearly define public diplomacy.

Research Question: How have other scholars defined public diplomacy?

Definitions of public diplomacy and the factors that influence those definitions will be explored first to establish what public diplomacy means to the professional practicing individual. Exploring these definitions may also introduce

other concepts or relevant elements to keep in mind when forming a personal definition of public diplomacy.

Throughout the course and class discussions, public diplomacy has primarily focused its attention on the United States and how the United States uses public diplomacy to engage with international publics. Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2005) define public diplomacy as it relates to the United States by saying it is characterized as “marketing communication...sharing information or meaning that helps to identify, stimulate or satisfy customer wants and needs” (p. 299). This definition identifies communication and sharing information as vital to public diplomacy, but it doesn’t include feedback to that communication. Publics don’t readily accept messages without giving feedback, and there is no indication in this definition of the importance of listening to the public first before attempting to identify or satisfy wants and needs.

Building on the definition of public diplomacy as marketing communication, the thoughts of Yun and Toth (2009) on public diplomacy expand this idea to include attraction. They argue the role of public diplomacy is to “create attraction for a country’s culture, ideals and policy which can build an environment that enables national interests (Yun, Toth, 2009, p. 7). Moving from sharing information to creating an attraction for information that comes from culture, policies and ideals highlights an important aspect of public diplomacy: the public’s interest. Capturing the public’s interest before trying to share ideas or communicate ensures that the public is actually receiving what’s being said. It also ensures that the sender of messages is talking *to* the public and not *at* the public. This definition doesn’t

emphasize the importance of listening, but it does make public diplomacy seem less similar to advertising and more like public relations by creating attraction and interest in particular values and cultural elements.

Gilboa (2008) has his own definition of public diplomacy, but his citing of Signitzer and Coombs, who define public diplomacy as “the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government’s foreign policy decisions”, is the most concrete definition that identifies specific actors who engage in public diplomacy efforts (p. 57). This definition is effective because it sums up public interest, wants and needs into one word: influence.

There are two ways public diplomacy can influence international publics: using hard power or using soft power. Hard power is influence that uses coercion or threats. Military power, aggressive force or the threat of enacting both to promote an agenda can be effective, though it may not leave a nation with a favorable image if another country is forced to adopt their views and communication messages. On the contrary, soft power is influence concerning the attractive aspects of a nation: the culture, food, values, ideals and other elements that someone would readily associate with a country. The kind of influence a nation has determines how international publics respond to their communication messages, which in turn can affect the success of public diplomacy initiatives.

Gilboa’s definition also acknowledges that actors can be the government or private individuals which means it’s not just leaders talking to each other and making decisions for those underneath them. Instead, the leaders are

communicating on a higher level but the private individual can communicate to other individuals at a lower level and engage in public diplomacy efforts too.

One final definition provides a foundation for personal attempts to define public diplomacy. Joseph Nye (2008) makes the argument for good and effective public diplomacy when he says, “ good public diplomacy has to go beyond propaganda. Nor is public diplomacy a mere public relations campaign... public diplomacy also involves building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies” (p. 101). Nye’s definition doesn’t include the private individual, but he does stress the importance of long-term relationships, which is vital to the success of public diplomacy. Any foreign policy effort or public diplomacy initiative takes time for all actors involved to agree on the same principles and act on them. Once action takes place, there still has to be a relational commitment to what happens next and what will happen in the future. Public diplomacy isn’t something one can employ and think the end result is final; it is ongoing and those relationships have to be maintained.

Research Question: Does public diplomacy share similarities to other disciplines? How is public diplomacy different?

By looking at how professionals have defined public diplomacy, similarities to other disciplines may make one question what makes public diplomacy different from international relations or public relations. The goals and implementation of both disciplines is what makes them different from public diplomacy. In regards to public relations, the goal is to promote an image and maintain that image along with reputation to particular publics. As discussed in class lecture, nations have an image

and reputation that fluctuates with global publics. Nations want to maintain their image and reputation in the most favorable way possible. Public relations can definitely help persuade publics to think a certain way about a nation but too much promotion of an image can also appear to be one-sided and border on propaganda. Keeping this in mind, public diplomacy isn't all about the image and reputation; there is another side that has to speak to the real, concrete issues and policies that make the international society function where nations aren't constantly fighting each other nor are they in a constant state of utopian peace where underlying tensions aren't addressed.

International relations addresses the real, concrete issues and policies from a government perspective. It also serves as a checks and balance for all government and non-state actors to make sure no country or government has too much control that threatens established relationships within the international community. Public diplomacy uses elements of international relations when communicating with domestic and international publics, but it is not limited to government and policy communication only. It has to address high-level government issues and lower-level community issues, sometimes at the same time. Public diplomacy certainly incorporates elements from both international relations and public relations, but public diplomacy is not exclusively an extension of one or the other. Instead, public diplomacy is what connects these two disciplines by taking elements from both on a case-by-case basis in order to be used successfully. Incorporating public relations and international relations into public diplomacy ensures a balance of both so that a

nation isn't strictly focused on government affairs or only maintaining an image and reputation for the international public's approval.

Research Question: What is one's personal definition of public diplomacy?

After careful consideration of professional and scholarly thoughts on public diplomacy as well as distinguishing it from similar disciplines, a personal definition of public diplomacy was created:

Public diplomacy is multi-faceted (cultural, political, economic, etc.) strategic communication from both state and non-state actors that is based on listening and aims to foster and maintain mutual respect between nations through interpersonal exchange.

A personal definition of public diplomacy looks at first at public diplomacy as multi-faceted strategic communication. It is multi-faceted because it includes many aspects society, like culture, politics and the economy, that regularly affect a nation and its publics. Strategic communication includes the hard and soft power a nation can use to persuade another by using coercion or attraction. Also, the same communication tactics can't be used with two different publics, so this definition means one has to be smart, plan and know the said public well enough to engage them in a way that best serves their needs and accomplishes public diplomacy goals. It is important to emphasize this strategic communication comes from state actors - which refers to governments and those who represent them, and non-state actors - the common citizens who don't represent government entities and may also engage in public diplomacy domestically or internationally.

In order for any communication to be successful, one has to listen. Listening serves as a foundation for communication and favorable outcomes can't be achieved when both sides aren't first listening before making important decisions or resolving a problem. Public diplomacy efforts have goals that usually lend themselves to mutual respect or relationships so it is important to include a main goal in the definition so that other professionals know what they are working towards when engaging in public diplomacy. The concept of image and reputation can also be connected to this goal because if there is a mutual relationship, there is, to some extent, a favorable image and reputation that provides the opportunity for those relationships and respect to be created and maintained.

The last part of the definition indicates how public diplomacy professionals will achieve these goals: through interpersonal exchange. Interpersonal exchanges give both parties involved an opportunity to not only communicate, but to also debunk negative images and reverse unfavorable thoughts about the other. These exchanges are the heart of public diplomacy because without them nations that were once at odds with each other wouldn't be able to come together and agree to policy and global initiative decisions. It is important to clarify that interpersonal exchanges do not simply mean two world leaders in a room discussing the state of affairs between their respective countries; it can also be applied to any cultural, political, economic or other initiative where nations or publics from different backgrounds are coming together and engaging in exchange for the purpose of learning from one another which in turn evokes change in their community or nation.

The personal definition of public diplomacy is only a foundation. Understanding concepts and other topics yet to be discussed about public diplomacy will have an impact on this definition and are welcome to alter it accordingly. Changes in world leadership, policy decisions and how the international society as a whole communicates and engages with each other are reasons why public diplomacy is so important. However, without some direction and a clear definition, one cannot expect professionals to employ public diplomacy strategies and accept solutions when they don't know what they are doing, how they should do it and what they are trying to accomplish as a result of the knowledge and action. Professionals and scholars will continue the study of public diplomacy in the hopes of coming to a universal understanding for all, and having a definable working foundation that's open to critiques and changes is a start any public diplomacy professional can use, adjust and adapt for his or her career interests within public diplomacy.

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