



Report on Wilton Park Conference 1034

Public Diplomacy: Moving From Policy to Practice

7 –9 June 2010

**In co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the US
Department of State**

Summary of Key Points

- Modern day Public Diplomacy practitioners must place greater emphasis on listening to and understanding their target audiences. If key messages are created and delivered without the target audience in mind then the risk of misinterpretation increases substantially.
- Public Diplomacy campaigns should focus on building long-term relationships with target audiences and not aim solely on achieving short-term results.
- In the 21st century, collaboration between the public, private and academic sectors will be key to the success of Public Diplomacy campaigns.
- Web 2.0 platforms are tools for engagement with the general public and not a Public Diplomacy strategy in themselves.
- Evaluating the impact and value of Public Diplomacy campaigns is as essential as the overall campaign in difficult economic conditions. If we cannot robustly prove the effect and return on investment of campaigns then we cannot improve them in the future.
- Public Diplomacy campaigns demand coherent narratives emphasising cooperation and understanding to achieve key objectives. They should not attempt to influence people overtly.
- Nations will only improve their image in the eyes of the global public by what they do rather than what they say.

Are We At A Critical Soft Power Moment?

1. There is a distinct strategic advantage in having a clear diplomatic agenda that is person-to-person or institution-to-institution, in tandem with traditional diplomacy strategies which emphasise State-to-State dialogue. As discourse becomes increasingly fragmented through various media channels, messages become more difficult to manage. This emphasises the ever-greater need for well-planned Public Diplomacy campaigns.

2. Today's world demands that when delivering key government strategic messages, the people-to-people component is extremely important to consider when conducting foreign policy, in addition to using a multitude of tools to connect with people than has been the case hitherto. The person-to-person element of Public Diplomacy campaigns is particularly important in strategically important countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3. Traditional diplomacy has historically been conducted between governments, without a clear understanding of the impact it has on the people it claims to serve. However, despite this lack of understanding, it is important to emphasise that there are no roadmaps or universally accepted methods of conducting Public Diplomacy. This presents a unique opportunity to practitioners to lead and develop best practice.

4. It is imperative that we better understand the audiences we are trying to reach, in particular, how they consume and interpret key government messages. If we understand the sentiment of the way our target audiences interpret key messages, then we better ensure that they are understood in the correct way.

5. The so-called 'new media' is no longer revolutionising Public Diplomacy but a permanent fixture. It is imperative that as Public Diplomacy experts, we engage with it. If there is no engagement in Public Diplomacy campaigns from representatives at the highest level of government then key strategic messages become open to misinterpretation.

6. Engaging with domestic and foreign publics requires governments to recognise that they are developing both short and long-term relationships. The US State Department has therefore developed a strategic programme that emphasises the development of robust, long-term relationships through real public engagement. There is a real risk of alienating the very people we are trying to help if relationships are first cultivated and subsequently left to deteriorate.

7. Public Diplomacy Secretaries should also be placed in specific countries with the responsibility to ensure that the opinions of local people are included in the foreign policy formulation process, in addition to assuming overall responsibility for implementing Public Diplomacy strategies locally.

8. The UK government needs to improve coordination of its regional Public Diplomacy efforts. It is important to remember that Public Diplomacy is a relationship race - the goals are long-term rather than short-term.

9. The UK Government is deeply committed to Public Diplomacy. However, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office needs to become more creative in its implementation. One of the problems with Public Diplomacy today is not a lack of theory but a lack of imagination in how to successfully implement campaigns. Practitioners have to keep in mind that the essence of Public Diplomacy is to connect the message with the overall strategic outlook of government.

10. A good example of Public Diplomacy in action is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's digital campaigns for the climate change summit in Copenhagen and the G20 meeting in London 2009. The Middle East Public Diplomacy programme is a more long-term process and a prime example of the long-term relationship building that the Foreign and Commonwealth office focuses on. However, the Public Diplomacy campaign for Africa was less successful because the UK lacked a coherent narrative about the region that made the region attractive and compelling in the eyes of foreign publics.

11. Strong political leadership is imperative, as are close relationships between the Heads of Office and the field operatives conducting outreach programmes. It is also essential to have clear evidence of the impact of Public Diplomacy programmes, especially in difficult economic times. If its value can be proved then it has a future but if not, it will languish. The ideal situation for the UK Government would be a Public Diplomacy strategy that has high impact across Government departments and is capable of international collaboration. Collaborative Global Public Diplomacy therefore is the model of the future that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should emulate.

12. Effective Public Diplomacy requires the ingenuity of practitioners rather than theoreticians, and can save money and lives if implemented successfully. It can help governments achieve their objectives of helping people and forging better relationships. The first job of Public Diplomacy should be to listen before communicating to wider publics.

13. Governments are taking 'baby steps' in the use of Web 2.0 and consider the technology to be a tool of engagement and not a strategy in itself. Governments are now thinking of how the general public can play a greater role in key dialogues / discussions, and not simply deliver messages to them.

14. The US Department of State is developing its evaluation tools as it is currently difficult to assess the impact of long-term programmes. The most challenging element in effective evaluation is not quantitative but qualitative techniques. It is important to be able to capture trend data, to obtain and analyse data over a period of time and assess the quality of the impact of Public Diplomacy campaigns.

15. Countries have brands which are as important to them as any other corporate brand. Every country in the world has to compete with more than 200 other countries for positive reputations. However, the concept of nation branding is invalid because it is not possible to reduce something as complex and beautiful as a country to something as banal as a brand.

16. The findings of the Nation Brands Index regularly conclude that people almost never change their minds about their perception of countries. When asked to consider and remark on a particular country, most people think of: 1) their own country, 2) the United States, 3) the country generating the most media attention at the time.

17. The general public's perception of a country is dictated by what they **do** rather than what they **say**. Germany, Japan, Ireland and South Africa are some of the few cases in which countries have positively changed their image. Countries need to equip themselves with the collective evidence of good practice and activities that can be carried out to change their image before promoting themselves.

Public Diplomacy and the Military

18. Public Diplomacy in the new security environment must do more than just sell a country's position. If foreign publics can be influenced to sit on the fence then the goal has been achieved. The difficulties arise when there is an attempt to drive a wedge between 'us' and the enemy: this forces people off the fence by encouraging them to make a commitment one way or the other with the risk of publics choosing the wrong side.

19. The role of the military has changed in the past 20 years. NATO forces now perform a wide range of roles covering the entire mission spectrum including engagement in combat operations, humanitarian relief, supporting reconstruction or development, securing elections, fighting pirates off the coast of Somalia, negotiating with tribal leaders in Afghanistan, liaising on human trafficking with government and NGO officials and engaging with the global media, policy makers and think tanks.

20. Soft power has become more than a Public Diplomacy tool; it is an operational objective for the military. Successful soft power missions increase the security and stability of nations while simultaneously improving the conditions necessary for free peoples to prosper. In the future, soft power will be applied across the spectrum of military operations, combining kinetic effects with economic, political, cultural and military soft power campaigns.

21. The battlefield has also become more transparent as the behaviour of armed forces is increasingly visible to a global community of information consumers, viewers, commentators and the enemy, leaving a lasting impression on the local population in any given theatre of operation. The images from Abu Ghraib had a devastating effect on the credibility and confidence in the US forces in Iraq, as have the killings of civilians in Afghanistan. Modern communications have reinforced this trend – Web 2.0 tools have made every soldier a ‘me-journalist’ and a multiplier of information.

22. NATO is attempting to apply Joseph Nye’s definition of soft-power to enhance the organisation’s public image and credibility through three different initiatives: daily communication with the media, strategic communication campaigns aimed at long and short-term objectives, and developing lasting relationships with key nations through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences and access to media channels.

23. Today, the most pressing threats come not from sovereign States but marginalised states of mind which are as likely to be found in individuals from Western democracies as from oppressive political regimes, military dictatorships and in the political and security vacuums arising from failed states. The fact that the new security threat resides within foreign and domestic publics makes the task of linking Public Diplomacy with security all the more difficult.

24. The enemy’s terrorist ideology is already being marginalised; so a campaign against it would simply assist them by amplifying it. Al-Qaeda’s ideology is not popular especially amongst the Taliban. However, after the terrorist attacks on 11 September, everyone knows al-Qaeda and their ideology, although only a very small percentage of people indulge it.

25. Al-Qaeda's defining failure has been its inability to generate widespread mobilisation and it is now forced to recruit individually or in low numbers. In order to do this, it has to continually inflate its global brand and as a result, it is al-Qaeda's very illegitimacy that attracts would-be adherents. Al-Qaeda recruits thrive on narratives that portray themselves as marginalised, victimised outsiders and underdogs against majorities.

26. To treat al-Qaeda as a military army would be to miss the point as its threat depends almost entirely on its soft power and the power of its global brand to inspire. If it is one percent organisation, it is 99 percent brand. To its recruits, al-Qaeda represents a set of ideas and to engage it militarily is to breathe life into its brand by elevating and fuelling its fantasy of being a player on the world stage.

27. Militaries operating in the new security environment engage with al-Qaeda in a psychological and media conflict rather than kinetic war, of which the strategic centre of gravity revolves around terrorist recruitment. Once recruitment dries up, morale fails and the brand loses credibility. The 'War on Terror' can only be won when the terrorist recruitment cycle has been broken and the al-Qaeda brand is no more. Contemporary warfare can therefore be defined as the ability to know, understand and influence how people think and feel, falling entirely within the domain of soft power.

28. There is clear evidence that the pursuit and focus on narrow measures of military success make progress much more difficult and can even destabilise the countries we seek to bolster. Messages emphasising national security cannot be expected to impress or gain foreign public approval.

29. There is a need to encourage would-be terrorists to recover, within their own cultures, the values and practices that are in accord with those of our own societies. So, addressing new security threats with Public Diplomacy is not really about using warfare in the classical sense but about incremental social change and embedding big, user-friendly, local ideas and values which overlap with our own. We are not involved in the 'long war' or the 'war on terror' but the 'long change'. Only soft power will bring that about.

Reaching Audiences and Generating Trust

30. Communications in the commercial sphere are all about developing a long-term brand. A brand is a promise, at the heart of which is trust. The advertising industry has been around for thousands of years and we can confidently say that it has learnt to communicate, influence and persuade far more effectively in that time than governments. Government Public Diplomacy campaigns have a great deal to learn from communications practices in the commercial world, such as the techniques developed over years related to the power to communicate and influence.

31. The commercial sector has history of helping government to augment the impact of their key initiatives. Judith McHale of the US Department of State, the former President and Chief Executive for the Discovery Channel, and UK Business Secretary Vince Cable, a former Chief Economist for Shell, are excellent examples of ways in which individuals with corporate sector experience can bring new insights to government.

32. It is imperative that Public Diplomacy experts realise that communication is not all about us; it is about the wider target audience. Public Diplomacy is not about winning arguments but influencing emotions. It is about emphasising the key underlying narratives of the message you are promoting. The media attention paid to al-Qaeda following the UK and US military operations in the Middle East therefore provided fuel for the movement.

33. In the Middle East, many appreciate the music and fashion of the West but foreign policy tarnishes this favourable perception. For example, among the most influential people in the Middle East are American celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Tupac Shakur. This suggests there is potential for positive Western brands in the Middle East if Public Diplomacy campaigns are conducted effectively. Governments should therefore invest in the power of brands for the long-term.

34. Public Diplomacy campaigns should seek to achieve long-term goals that are designed around the demands of the target audience, such as the Iraq Peace Process. It is not about winning in the short term but that rather, in five to ten years, the Iraqi people consider the US to be its strongest ally.

35. Post 9/11 governments have become far too suspicious of religious communities when in fact, they should be engaged as if they were a part of civil society. Civil society is important – the State is not government and society comprises all peoples in the State.

36. There is a growing public mindset that is becoming increasingly secular particularly since the 9/11 US terrorist attacks. This mindset is very short-termist, oriented around quick results rather than long-term objectives. The State is a complex organism and is not the same as government; therefore we have to think in terms of a common good for all of humanity as there are many self interests. This viewpoint is made clearer given the challenges facing governments that go beyond narrow self-interests such as climate change, weapons proliferation and international terrorism.

37. In order to change behaviour, it is necessary to identify suitable moral agents to do so, such as religious actors. Religion has an extremely important role to play in understanding and influencing the motivations of people. Governments are not necessarily effective at connecting with people's hearts and minds. People are only intermittently interested in politics, meaning that the discipline has to work doubly hard to engage with people for an extended period of time. Faith communities are mature and have credibility; they command respect within their community of followers and have understood the effects of a powerful idea for centuries. There is far more that we can do together than separately.

38. There is a great deal of inter-religious dialogue that preceded 9/11, taking place from the local to the highest levels such as the Common Word initiative launched by the Jordanian Government between Christian and Muslim communities. Western countries therefore need to move past the secularist mindset to achieve aims and engage with faith groups towards an instrumentalisation mindset that emphasises what we want to do and how we can do it. There is a need to adopt a spirit of partnership and cooperation to help achieve shared goals.

39. It is extremely important to work with faith communities in failed states because stable government structures are sparse. We also need to break free of the inhibitions that secularism has delivered and work with whoever we can to achieve our goals in order to build long-term relationships.

Reaching Audiences: Exploring Communications Platforms

40. Facebook's vision is to provide people with a platform to share and make the world more connected and open. The perceived downside to this is that an open and more connected world makes a number of people apprehensive. There are a range of privacy issues that Facebook needs to address such as whether people should have the option to post brands or pictures of others online without their consent. Should soldiers engaging in theatre be allowed to communicate their experiences with a wider public and risk violating operational security?

41. In the early days of the Web, the conception was widespread that it was not possible to identify accurately people online. Today, however, as the Web becomes more ubiquitous, people want to identify with certainty who they are connecting with.

42. Facebook is used for a variety of Public Diplomacy initiatives such as political campaigning, celebrity news and social change. The Marks and Spencer company for example has 116,000 friends, Barack Obama has 8.7 million and the actor Vin Diesel has 8.1 million.

43. You cannot control your brand entirely on Facebook; it is in the hands of groups of individual users. There are many examples of Facebook groups that have large memberships but propagate negative messages about a country or a particular brand.

44. There are some basic rules of engagement when conducting a social media campaign or simply contributing to it:

- Disclose your position as a representative of your department or agency unless there are exceptional circumstances such as a potential threat to personal security. Never give out personal details such as your home address or telephone numbers.
- Always remember that participation online results in your comments being permanently available and open to being re-published in other media. Stay within legal frameworks and be aware that libel, defamation, copyright and data protection laws apply. This means that you should not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activity on behalf of government unless you are authorised to do so.
- Be credible, accurate, fair, thorough, transparent and consistent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Be responsive. When you gain insights, share it when appropriate. Be integrated wherever possible

45. Facebook is now available on a range of devices such as games consoles and mobile devices, presenting opportunities to reach a far wider audience than had been possible hitherto. Facebook also connects to the wider Web with initiatives such as the 'like button' on general Web articles. Facebook is also moving to location-based connectivity, presenting considerable opportunities to Public Diplomacy practitioners to connect with their target audiences. However, there is a real dilemma as to whether information or commentary that is generated on Facebook, that in general is impossible to validate, should be factored into strategic policy decisions.

46. Facebook will soon become a part of everyone's daily lives and because of this, government has the opportunity to use the platform and connect with a wide range of people. There will never be communities of millions seeking government websites. The objective is to attract people to pages that have government links on them and create and distribute content that is authoritative. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's strategy therefore is to focus on International Hyperlocality where sites and content are created for local populations in their language. In addition to this, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has given its staff licence to engage with other bloggers on strategically important issues facing the organisation. This initiative is linked to the concept that if you do not listen to the audience, and respect its opinions, then you will not fully engage with them.

47. There is a dichotomy between people in the United States who require openness of information and Europeans who prefer privacy. Facebook is not a media company, it is a platform; it works in a unique way and you cannot broadcast into it in the same way as traditional media.

48. Large corporations and diplomats are very much accustomed to the way they communicate and generally resist change. The models of communication for broadcasters and corporations are generally one-to-many whereas diplomats tend to use one to one.

49. The BBC is changing from a “London-knows-best” model to an “end user–knows-best” paradigm. There is increasing competition for the BBC from other media organisations- this means that they have to collaborate more with local organisations in addition to listening to the audience. The BBC has also embraced social media; it aggregates testimonies from people around the world, using them as creators of news and information in addition to traditional media sources.

50. The BBC’s content is the most widely shared on the Web, particularly amongst US bloggers. The popularity of BBC content underscores the need for openness and transparency in the way that information is shared. Consumers turn to the BBC’s content as a reference point because it is perceived as authoritative and trustworthy in addition to other local perspectives.

51. The international debates held on the BBC World Service website underscore the ability of the Corporation to host such discussion in a way that Facebook does not. It also gives broadcasters the opportunity to link new media platforms to the old and develop tolerance standards in new methods of communication. The aforementioned debates held on the BBC World Service demonstrate the need for a protected space where people can debate with each other. The audience creates the rules of engagement in the forums, meaning that people who break the forum rules are not in breach of the guidelines set by the BBC, but those set by the community.

52. Digital democracy is not something that is widely embraced in the diplomatic service. However, diplomats face the same challenges as broadcasters and journalists of becoming more connected and digitised in the 21st century.

The Power of Partnership

53. Successful Public Diplomacy is very hard to achieve and requires a significant amount of imagination. Foreign Ministries are always looking for more credible messages from increasingly better skilled practitioners.

54. Public Diplomacy is important but how well is it adapting to an increasingly transnational digitised world where the citizen is far more media literate?

55. Authoritarian governments are widely criticised by foreign publics. If such nations wish to positively engage with foreigners then it is highly likely that in the future they will adopt more liberal attitudes.

56. Public Diplomacy professionals need to adopt a “slow-cooking approach” when forging and maintaining relationships with foreigners. Public Diplomacy can only be used by actors who intend to enhance their soft power through socialisation and persuasion.

57. Cultural relations are strongly related to dialogue, listening and learning but crucially, this discipline is influenced more by civil society and the general public. Corporations and non-governmental organisations, for example, have no relations with government but still have an important role to play in Public Diplomacy.

58. The discipline of cultural relations is a response to the diversity of cultures in the world and the general ease that people identify with them. Top-down messaging from governments in today’s globalised world often does not work as opposed to real engagement with a target population, which does. Governments in the 21st century should enter into negotiations willing to be influenced. Trust will be the foundation of the new order of the 21st century as countries have to behave, invest and earn positive reputations amongst the populations of the world.

Sport as Public Diplomacy

59. Sport is a highly influential vehicle to enhance understanding between cultures. We have to understand that the world now draws its perceptions of nations through the profile of a famous footballer as well as that of a government minister. It demonstrates that people are always more impressed by the power of our example rather than the example of our power.

60. China endeavours to implement successful Public Diplomacy campaigns where the overall aims are to ameliorate its global public image and provide a foundation for mutual understanding. China has teams in nearly all sporting events and in doing so has cultivated numerous positive international relationships. For example, ping-pong diplomacy demonstrated the pivotal role that sport can play developing positive relationships between nations and peoples.

61. There were numerous voices of dissent during the Beijing Olympic Games which continued until the end of the event. In spite of this however, the Beijing Games demonstrated that sport is a crucial mechanism for Public Diplomacy, and enabled China to promote global cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

62. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office believes that the 2012 Olympic Games in London presents it with the opportunity to enhance the UK's reputation amongst all nations and to disseminate key Government messages and British values. Sports stars can help deliver key messages to target audiences.

63. Sport does not belong to any one nation but is rather a collective ritual that transcends languages and national differences. The London Olympics slogan "we're all in this together" is a strong message that is applicable across many key policy issues such as terrorism, climate change and the global economic recovery.

64. Collaboration between global actors such as governments and corporations are essential in the implementation of effective Public Diplomacy campaigns. Web 2.0 tools are a key component of such campaigns, allowing modern-day Public Diplomacy professionals to connect with and engage large numbers of individuals and groups in real time to deliver key messages effectively. It is however crucial to listen actively to the needs and opinions of audiences to understand fully the potential effects specially created campaigns will have on them. It is also vital that the overall impact of Public Diplomacy campaigns is evaluated in order to improve them and continue building successful, long-term relationships.

Lawrence Ampofo
July 2010

Wilton Park Reports are brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of a conference. The reports reflect rapporteurs' personal interpretations of the proceedings – as such they do not constitute any institutional policy of Wilton Park nor do they necessarily represent the views of rapporteurs.

Should you wish to read other Wilton Park reports, or participate in upcoming Wilton Park conferences, please consult our website www.wiltonpark.org.uk To receive our e-newsletter and latest updates on conferences subscribe to <http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/news>