

Public Diplomacy Between Home and Abroad: Norway and Canada¹

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Received 23 November 2005; accepted 30 January 2006

Summary

Public diplomacy represents an opportunity for small and medium-sized states to gain influence and shape international agenda in ways that go beyond their limited hard power resources (related to size, military and economic strength). The literature on public diplomacy has been dominated by accounts of major powers, and the character of public diplomacy performed by small and medium-sized states has hardly been explored so far.

Based on an elaboration of the concept of soft power as being based on image and value assets of societal actors, this paper suggests a definition of public diplomacy as including activities by the state abroad and at home with the aim of increasing its attractiveness. Three areas in which the public diplomacy strategies of small and medium-sized states differ from the corresponding activities of major powers are then suggested. Finally, the development of public diplomacy strategies and their coordination by the foreign ministries of Canada and Norway — two countries with widely similar foreign policy agendas but different domestic constituencies — are then described and compared. The paper concludes by suggesting that successful public diplomacy by small and medium-sized states is well served by positioning the state not only in locally attractive image and value platforms, but also in their global equivalents.

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Key Words

Public diplomacy, domestic constituencies, small and medium-sized states, Canada, Norway, institutional change

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented to the International Conference on Multi-stakeholder Diplomacy, Malta, 11-13 February 2005. For comments and suggestions I am grateful to Elin H. Allern, Daryl Copeland, John E. Fossum, Ljupco Gjorgjinski, Alan K. Henrikson, Brian Hocking, Nikola Hynek, Dominic Kelly, Bertrand de la Chapelle, Chris Lamb, Janne Haaland Matlary, Jan Melissen, Evan H. Potter, Gerhard Reiweger, Raymond Saner, Biljana Scott, Øyvind Østerud and two anonymous reviewers.

Introduction

The media explosion and information revolution that swept the globe in the 1990s have created a complex information-intensive global environment in which international crises play out directly into nations' domestic political debates and domestic issues are debated by foreign audiences. Foreign policy, previously an exclusive realm managed by diplomats behind closed doors, is increasingly democratized — citizen activists, NGOs, domestic ministries, private enterprises, academics and other actors participate directly in foreign policy and frame public debates about foreign policy issues in value-based terms.² Peter van Ham suggests that there is a shift in political paradigms from the modern world of geopolitics and power towards a postmodern world of images and influence.³ Power in such an environment no longer stems solely from persuasion or coercion, but increasingly from information-sharing and attraction.⁴ Given these fundamental shifts in the international environment, *public diplomacy* — the development, maintenance and promotion of a country's soft power — is widely perceived as an increasingly important tool for governments. Yet the very dynamism in the international environment that prompts governments to place greater emphasis on public diplomacy brings about an evolution of the basic tenets of public diplomacy. There is a need for more sophisticated understanding of public diplomacy, and perhaps its reconceptualization, along at least three dimensions.

First, despite the generally accepted idea that foreign and domestic policies are increasingly blurred in an information-intensive environment, few observers have thought systematically about the consequent necessity to reorient or reconceptualize public diplomacy as an activity directed primarily at foreign audiences towards a new notion encompassing the engagement of domestic publics.

Second, for small and medium-sized states, public diplomacy represents an opportunity to gain influence and shape international agenda in ways that

² J.H. Matlár, *Verdiplomati: kilde til makt? En strategisk analyse av norsk utenrikspolitik*, Report 46 (Oslo: Maktutredningen, 2002); and M. Leonard, C. Stead and C. Smewing, *Public Diplomacy* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2002).

³ P. van Ham, 'Branding Territory: Inside the Wonderful Worlds of PR and IR Theory', *Millennium*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2002, pp. 249-269 at p. 252.

⁴ J.S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); J.S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and J.S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).