

Chapter 2

Defining 'public diplomacy'

2.1 Generally, any consideration of public diplomacy starts with a discussion of its meaning. Indeed, the International Public Affairs Network maintained that the term public diplomacy is, 'so contestable that definitions and explanations precede most uses of it'.¹ In this chapter, the committee explores various definitions of 'public diplomacy' and in the process articulates its understanding of public diplomacy and how, for the purposes of the report, it intends to use the term.

The meaning of public diplomacy

2.2 The term 'public diplomacy' has been used on occasion since the mid-19th century but became more widely used during the First World War. Its meaning then was flexible—some used it to refer to publicly brokered peace covenants. In the 1950s, it was used to refer to the propaganda of the Cold War.²

2.3 As a field of study in international relations, public diplomacy came to prominence in 1965 with the founding of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.³ One of the Centre's earlier brochures noted that public diplomacy:

...deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications.⁴

2.4 This description identifies the important distinction between public diplomacy and conventional diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy tries to influence other nations' policies by engaging their leadership: its principal concern is with relations between national governments. On the other hand, public diplomacy deals with the influence of

1 *Submission 27*, p. 8.

2 Nicholas J. Cull, "'Public Diplomacy' before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase', USC Center on Public Diplomacy, <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/pdfs/gullion.pdf> (accessed 10 February 2007).

3 'What is Public Diplomacy?', The Edward R. Morrow Center of Public Diplomacy', <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/murrow/public-diplomacy.html> (accessed 12 January 2007).

4 'What is Public Diplomacy?', The Edward R. Morrow Center of Public Diplomacy', <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/murrow/public-diplomacy.html> (accessed 12 January 2007).

both government and non-government organisations on foreign populations. As Australia's former Foreign Affairs Minister, the Hon. Gareth Evans, observed in 1990:

All diplomacy is an exercise in persuasion and influence. Public diplomacy differs only in its methodology and in terms of whom it sets out to influence and persuade. Traditional diplomacy seeks to influence the influential. Public diplomacy too reaches out to the decision makers and opinion formers, but it also casts its net much wider, beyond the influential few to the 'uninvolved' many.⁵

2.5 Today, most practitioners and students of public diplomacy recognise this connection between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy and the differences in methods of operation between them.⁶ More recently, His Excellency Mohamed Al-Orabi, Egyptian Ambassador to Germany, said:

...public diplomacy differs from the traditional diplomacy in that public diplomacy deals not only with governments but primarily with non-governmental individuals and organizations. Furthermore, public diplomacy activities often present many differing views as represented by private individuals and organizations in addition to official Government views.⁷

2.6 The conduct of public diplomacy is therefore broader in scope and less regulated by the laws and protocols that govern relationships between elites in traditional diplomacy.⁸ The overriding concern of a country's public diplomacy is to influence in a positive way the public or elite opinion of another country in order to promote its own interests.

2.7 The definitions adopted by the United States of America (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada are based on this unifying notion that public diplomacy is about 'getting other people on your side—about influencing other people's opinion and attitudes'.⁹ They acknowledge that to persuade the leaders of other nations and their parliaments to support policies, the citizens of that country must be persuaded.

5 The Hon. Gareth Evans, 'Australia and Asia: role of public diplomacy', *The Monthly Record*, March 1990, p. 136.

6 See for example, Public Diplomacy Council, *A Call for Action on Public Diplomacy*, A Report of the Public Diplomacy Council, January 2005, p. 8.

7 Speech by H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Al-Orabi, the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 'The Role of Education in Diplomacy', New Year's reception hosted by the European Cultural Circle, Baden-Baden, Germany, 2003.

8 'What is Public Diplomacy?', *Public Diplomacy Website*, US Information Agency Alumni Association, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm> (accessed 12 January 2007).

9 See Jan Melissen, 'Public Diplomacy between Theory and Practice', The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 8 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007) and Philip Fiske de Gouveia, Foreign Policy Centre, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 4 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

Public diplomacy in the US

2.8 In 2003, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO), explained that the State Department's public diplomacy goal was:

...to inform, engage, and influence global audiences. This goal is aimed at reaching out beyond foreign governments to promote better appreciation of the United States abroad, greater receptivity to U.S. policies among foreign publics, and sustained access and influence in important sectors of foreign societies.¹⁰

2.9 In November 2005, a report by the United States Advisory Committee on Public Diplomacy defined the objectives of public diplomacy in similar terms. It noted that although public diplomacy has many facets, it was critical to understand that its core goal is 'to advance policies'. The committee added that 'Public diplomacy entails informing, engaging and influencing foreign publics so that they may, in turn, encourage their governments to support key U.S. policies'.¹¹

2.10 In 2006, the GAO introduced 'understanding' as a key element of public diplomacy. It noted that the overall goal of US public diplomacy efforts was:

...to understand, inform, engage and influence the attitudes and behaviour of global audiences in ways that support the United States' strategic interests.¹²

Public diplomacy in the UK

2.11 The UK's public diplomacy has undergone two recent major reviews which have considered at length the meaning of public diplomacy. In March 2002, the British Wilton Review defined public diplomacy as 'that work which aims at influencing in a positive way the perceptions of individuals and organisations overseas about the UK and their engagement with the UK'. The review team emphasised that the definition must seek to define the impact of this work on the target audience.¹³

2.12 In December 2005, the Lord Carter Review argued that the Wilton Review's definition was inadequate because it did 'not explain what public diplomacy seeks to achieve, or why'. It defined public diplomacy as—'work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and

10 See GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, September 2003, p. 4.

11 United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2005, p. 2.

12 GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, May 2006, p. 5.

13 UK Government, 'Changing perceptions: Review of public diplomacy', March 2002, p. 12. The report was produced by a team of three people: Chris Wilton of the FCO, Jonathon Griffin of the British Tourist Authority and Britain Abroad and Andrew Fotheringham of the British Council. See p. 9.

influence for the United Kingdom in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long term goals'.¹⁴ This definition now guides the work of the newly established UK Public Diplomacy Board.

Public diplomacy in Canada

2.13 Canada has similarly looked closely at its public diplomacy. In 2005, Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) produced Canada's International Policy Statement which recognised the growing importance of public diplomacy:

Public diplomacy is about projecting a coherent and influential voice to all those who have influence within a society—not just within its government. Canada's credibility and influence abroad will be built not only by Government action but by Canadians themselves—artists, teachers, students, travellers, researchers, experts and young people—interacting with people abroad. Public diplomacy includes cultural events, conferences, trade shows, youth travel, foreign students in Canada, Canadian studies abroad and visits of opinion leaders. All this cultivates long-term relationships, dialogue and understanding abroad, underpins our advocacy and increases our influence.

Public diplomacy is also crucial to achieving our foreign policy goals. By persuading others as to the value of our proposals and strategies, or by engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, we can take important steps in furthering shared objectives of importance to Canadians.¹⁵

2.14 Although different in their wording, the three definitions of public diplomacy have a common understanding that the main objective of public diplomacy is to influence the perceptions, opinions and attitudes of people in other countries in a way that will serve the home country's foreign policy interests. They all acknowledge that public diplomacy is not directed at influencing elites alone: that it works outside the boundaries of traditional diplomacy.

Public diplomacy in Australia

2.15 Australia's use of the term 'public diplomacy' is consistent with the general notion of influencing other countries in order to protect and promote national interests. Dr Lachlan Strahan, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, told the committee that the Department regards public diplomacy primarily 'as a means for communicating with populations of other countries, influencing opinion overseas' and projecting Australia's national image abroad.¹⁶ He stated:

14 Public Diplomacy Review by Lord Carter, presented to the Foreign Secretary of the Treasurer on 13 December 2005, p. 8.

15 Diplomacy: Canada's International Policy Statement, 'A Role of Pride and Influence in the World', tabled in Parliament, April 2005.

16 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 4.

public diplomacy is about reaching out to the populations and decision-makers of other countries and shaping their opinions and shaping their image of us.¹⁷

The scope of public diplomacy

2.16 The definitions used by the US, UK, Canadian and Australian governments or their officials are instructive. They are based on the core concept that public diplomacy is directed at influencing in a positive way the attitudes of individuals and organisations in order to build support from foreign countries for the nation's objectives.¹⁸ In this way, good public diplomacy complements conventional diplomacy—it is 'done before it is needed not afterwards', or as one scholar has stated, public diplomacy paves the way for traditional diplomacy: it lays the groundwork, 'like a sapper'.¹⁹

2.17 Although public diplomacy is clearly tied to the notion of shaping public perceptions, its application to the day-to-day activities of government agencies creates difficulties in determining whether an activity or program should be specifically designated as public diplomacy. In many cases, the primary purpose of an activity may not be public diplomacy even though it contributes significantly to public diplomacy. For example, agencies that are concerned with attracting visitors or students to their country are charged with presenting their country in the best light for these select groups. In doing so, they effectively project an attractive image of their country that contributes to public diplomacy. Similarly, cultural institutions that showcase their unique artistic achievements overseas are effectively engaging in public diplomacy. Developmental or humanitarian aid programs can also contribute to a country's public diplomacy. Even though they are primarily intended to assist countries in need and not to enhance one's influence abroad—an improved reputation is often a by-product of delivering such aid.

2.18 Professor Jan Melissen noted the way public diplomacy activities are shifting beyond established borders:

It is true that the kind of new diplomacy that increasingly moves outside its original habitat, works more and more with other agencies and

17 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 4.

18 Jan Melissen, 'Public Diplomacy between Theory and Practice, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 8 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

19 Philip Fiske de Gouveia, Foreign Policy Centre, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 4 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007) and Jan Melissen, 'Public Diplomacy between Theory and Practice, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 12 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

organisations, and operates in a variety of networks, helps create an environment in which public diplomacy is also thriving.²⁰

2.19 In this regard, the question arises as to what factors differentiate an international activity that influences the perceptions and attitudes of foreign audiences from those activities that are distinctly public diplomacy. While some people adopt a definition that embraces a broad range of activities, others restrict their understanding of public diplomacy to a simpler, narrower range of activities linked closely to government funding and management. Thus, one of the major problems in reaching a definite and agreed understanding of public diplomacy is determining the boundaries that effectively place activities in a public diplomacy corral.

2.20 The Canadian definition took the expanded approach. The University of Southern California (USC) Center on Public Diplomacy Studies also takes the broader approach. The Center's points of inquiry are not limited to United States governmental activities, but examine public diplomacy as it pertains to a wide range of institutions and governments around the globe:

...the impact of private activities—from popular culture to fashion to sports to news to the Internet—that inevitably, if not purposefully, have an impact on foreign policy and national security as well as on trade, tourism and other national interests.²¹

2.21 The committee draws on the definitions used by the US, UK and Canada. It adopts the basic concept that public diplomacy is work or activities undertaken to understand, inform and engage individuals and organisations in other countries in order to shape their perceptions in ways that will promote Australia and Australia's policy goals internationally.

The committee's definition of public diplomacy

2.22 For the purposes of this report, the committee applies this definition of public diplomacy in both an expanded and contracted sense according to the matters under investigation. It uses the expanded understanding of public diplomacy when it is considering: the coherence, consistency and credibility of Australia's public diplomacy messages; the nature of Australia's dialogue and engagement with the international community; and the coordination of public diplomacy activities. In this context, it acknowledges that the work of some agencies such as AusAID and Defence is not primarily concerned with public diplomacy but that an important by-product of

20 Jan Melissen, 'Public Diplomacy between Theory and Practice, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 11 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

21 Joshua S. Fouts, Director, Center on Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California, 'Rethinking Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century: A Toolbox for Engaging the Hearts and Minds of the Open Source Generation', Prepared for presentation at the APSA Political Communication Conference on International Communication and Conflict, 31 August 2005, p. 4.

their activities contributes significantly to Australia's international reputation. The committee is interested in exploring how the work of these agencies, as well as cultural and educational institutions and other groups including Australia's diaspora, intersects with Australia's public diplomacy.

2.23 When it comes to matters such as the qualification and training of those responsible for Australia's public diplomacy programs, the evaluation of these programs and the federal government's funding for its public diplomacy programs, the committee uses the narrower definition of public diplomacy. In these cases, the core concern of the committee is the government-sponsored or funded activities that are primarily intended to inform and influence the attitudes of individuals or organisations overseas to improve Australia's image.

2.24 Before embarking on a detailed examination of public diplomacy in Australia, the committee considers overseas developments in the practice of public diplomacy. The following chapter provides this broader international context.

