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Report Part Title: Power and the Evolution of Public Diplomacy

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1. Power and the Evolution of Public Diplomacy

The Failure of Exercising Soft Power through (New) Public Diplomacy

The events of the new millennium's first decade made it painstakingly clear for the West how crucial it is to engage with foreign publics in the Arab and Muslim world in order to create goodwill and to foster relationships. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq sparked growing awareness of the importance of a country's external reputation. As a result, public diplomacy moved away from the sidelines and shifted to the core of diplomatic activity. Rather than being a diplomat's additional task to 'reach out to the population', winning hearts and minds became an important and visible component in diplomatic activities ranging from nation-branding to development aid.

Public diplomacy has been described by Paul Sharp as 'the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented'.[2] An even broader definition has been provided by Nicholas Cull, who termed public diplomacy an 'international actor's attempt to manage the international environment

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2)   Paul Sharp (2005), 'Revolutionary States, Outlaw Regimes and the Techniques of Public Diplomacy', in Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy* (London: Palgrave), p. 83.

5

through engagement with a foreign public'.[3] Under the umbrella of these definitions, the concept has evolved greatly in both theory and practice; so greatly that the public diplomacy label has been simultaneously evolving and eroding as it is pasted on an ever-widening range of activities that consist of some form of diplomatic engagement with foreign publics.

While the concept of public diplomacy changed in importance, shape and form along with the demands of diplomatic practice and new communication technologies, it simultaneously became more omnipresent and, as a consequence, harder to define. After all, US President Obama's famous Cairo speech in June 2009 calling for a new beginning with Muslims around the world, the extensive exchange programmes with people from the region that are organized by the American National Council for International Visitors, and USAID's efforts in establishing partnerships in development cooperation can all be listed as comprising one part or another of public diplomacy. The public diplomacy concept has become so elusive because it is no longer a distinct tier of diplomacy. Nowadays it can best be seen as the component of diplomatic practice that specifically nourishes and invests in the relationship with a foreign public.

One of the most influential frameworks in shaping ideas concerning the use of public diplomacy is the 'soft power paradigm'. According to Nye, power is the ability of actors to get others to do what one wants. This ability stems from either hard or soft power. Whereas hard power uses carrots and sticks—that is, payment or coercion—soft power draws on attraction to shape the preferences of others to obtain one's preferred outcomes. In Nye's famous words, soft power is 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment'.[4] This 'attraction', in turn, can mainly be derived from a country's culture, its values and its policies. According to this perspective, public diplomacy is a tool to wield soft power because it can use soft power resources in engaging with foreign publics in order to shape their preferences and attract them to certain goals and policies.[5]

It is therefore unsurprising that public diplomacy came to represent the heralded solution to winning the war on terror through attracting Arab and Islamic populations to Western values, society and policies. But as much as 9/11 and its aftermath revealed the need for public diplomacy, the failure of the Bush administration's approach revealed that the narrow use of soft power through public diplomacy can actually decrease an actor's attractiveness and

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3) Nicholas J. Cull (2009), 'Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past', *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy*, p. 12.

4) Joseph S. Nye Jr (2008), 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science,* 616, March, pp. 94–109 at p. 94.

5) Nye, *Soft Power*; and Joseph S. Nye (2009), 'Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power', *Foreign Affairs* July/August, pp. 160–161.

6

consequently diminish, instead of increase, its soft power base.[6] Approaching a foreign public with the goal of directly shaping its preferences to align with what best serves your interests is in many cases more likely to cause resistance than attraction.

In the case of the Bush administration, one-sided messaging about the universal values of human rights and democracy did not sit well with a critical public that saw the paradox in a US government that was supposedly pursuing democracy yet was promoting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while simultaneously being a loyal supporter of the region's long-term authoritarian regimes and denying democratically elected parties their share of power, most notably in the 2006 election of Hamas in Gaza—not to mention numerous other controversial issues, such as the United States' refusal to participate in the International Criminal Court, human rights violations in prisoners' treatment in Guantanamo Bay, and the seemingly unrelenting support for Israel whether Israel breaks international laws or not. So when a public diplomacy approach like Bush's lacks mutuality, and fails to take content, context and the actual foreign public that it aims to engage into account, it can easily become counter-productive and actually decrease the attractiveness of the actor in the process. This is exactly what happened with the United States' one-sided public diplomacy strategies that were launched to win Arab and Muslim populations' support.

In these cases, possibly well-intended public diplomacy strategies run the danger of being tainted by the negative impressions that cling to suspicions of propaganda and manipulation. This happened, for example, to the US government-launched *Al Hurra* television station and *Hi* magazine. The million-dollar initiatives were meant to connect with Arab and Muslim populations through popular mediums to promote better understanding of, and ultimately attraction to, 'American values'. Both, however, failed to attract their intended audiences, as they were perceived as merely pushing the US agenda and disregarding dissenting voices in an already crowded and professional Arab media environment.[7]

The fear of propaganda understandably haunts any discussion and exercise of public diplomacy, as a thin line admittedly runs between the two. There is no denying that public diplomacy owes much to propaganda and the spotlight that it placed on the need to consider and influence the opinion of foreign publics. While the two often go hand in hand in national strategies to some extent, Jan Melissen argues that the fundamental difference lies in the

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6)   Cull, 'Public Diplomacy', p. 15.

7)   Marwan M. Kraidy (2008), 'Arab Media and US Policy: A Public Diplomacy Reset', Policy Analysis Brief, the Stanley Foundation, pp. 6–7;, *Battles to Bridges: US Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy after 9/11* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 33–34.

pattern of communication that is used for persuasion.[8] Public diplomacy's most distinctive feature from propaganda is the fact that it is not attempting, or even able, to coerce. A foreign public is not a controllable target, but free to judge and conclude whether partially or completely to accept or reject public diplomacy efforts.[9] In order to be successful, sound public diplomacy therefore has to mitigate any suspicions of propaganda by communicating truthfully, while respecting freedom of opinion and the critical voices of the foreign public that it aims to engage.

The failure of public diplomacy to function as a state-centred soft-power tool that can directly affect the goodwill of foreign populations led to reconsiderations of the subject, given the continued urgency of the subject matter for the West in the Arab and Islamic world. On the one hand, soft power scholars re-emphasized public diplomacy's need by calls to improve the marriage between hard and soft power in a *smart* power strategy based on contextual intelligence.[10] The argument goes that skilful combination can balance the two power bases by decreasing reliance on and the costs of hard power and help to foster cooperation to win hearts and minds.[11] In this new conception of smart power, the CSIS Commission headed by Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye rightfully points out that a comprehensive smart power strategy can greatly enhance reputations when the pursued policies are perceived as credible and legitimate.[12] Credibility can be enhanced or decreased by the perceived intent with which an actor aims to apply soft power through public diplomacy. When the objective is no longer limited to narrow national (security) interests, but includes the interest of the foreign public, public diplomacy efforts are likely to become more legitimate and effective. In other words, it should service mutual interests, or at least create a situation where both the government and the foreign public gain some form of profit.

Meanwhile, public diplomacy scholars were also reconfiguring the concept of public diplomacy and presented the *new* public diplomacy. According to the new public diplomacy, diplomats ideally enter into a dialogue with foreign publics where it is just as important to listen as it is to be heard.[13] This new understanding of public diplomacy moved away from

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8) Jan Melissen (2005), 'Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy', *Clingendael Diplomacy Papers*, no. 2, pp. 19–22.

9) Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, p. 143.

10) Nye, 'Get Smart', defines contextual intelligence as 'the intuitive diagnostic skill that helps policymakers align tactics with objectives to create smart strategies' (p. 161).

11) Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye (co-chairs) (2007), *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies).

12) Armitage and Nye, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power*, p. 13.

13) Jan Melissen, 'Wielding Soft Power', pp. 19–22.

the old usage of public diplomacy as a sole top–down practice of state-centred communication with a foreign public, aimed at managing the international environment, promoting national interests and advancing foreign policy goals.[14] After all, applying this old-style public diplomacy in the Arab and Islamic world had clearly underestimated the critical public that it aimed to persuade; indeed, bypassing it completely, merely sending information and launching projects without listening to actual needs or addressing grievances.

The framework of the so-called new public diplomacy instead stresses that actors operate in the fluidity of the globalized network environment, in which it has become necessary to engage with foreign publics through two-way communication that is aimed at fostering *mutual* understanding.[15] The new public diplomacy is about working with publics, not just informing them. It is more often about establishing long-term relationships that will build trust than about quickly resolving policy problems.

This new public diplomacy by no means reduces the importance of old-style public diplomacy. One-way messaging and nation-branding, for example, are still highly beneficial for the goal of image-building and enhancing economic relations. The new public diplomacy in its own right is better suited for building long-term relationships that can cushion shorter-term crises. The evolution of different types of public diplomacy can thus be distinguished and the emphasis should not be put on their rivalry but on how these different types co-exist and strengthen one another. The realization that different forms of public diplomacy are appropriate for different goals and settings should underlie the entire study of diplomacy. Monologue, dialogue and collaboration therefore all have an important role to play in the public sphere of the networked society.[16] This means that state-centric and multi-centric diplomacy are developing alongside and interacting with each other, creating official and non-official diplomatic intersections in the process.[17]

The reconfigured concepts of smart power and the new public diplomacy are notable developments, as exemplified by the leading roles that they both play in the Obama administration's strategy to reconnect with people in the Middle East. But despite these developments, the new public diplomacy did not provide an ultimate solution for winning over sentiment in the MENA

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14) Cull, 'Public Diplomacy', p. 14.

15) Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy*.

16) Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault (2008), 'Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy', in Geoffrey Cowan and Nicholas J. Cull (eds), *Public Diplomacy in a Changing World*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage), pp. 10–30; and Manuel Castells (2008), 'The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance', in Cowan and Cull (eds), *Public Diplomacy in a Changing World*, pp. 78–93, at p. 78.

17) Brian Hocking (1999), 'Catalytic Diplomacy: Beyond "Newness" and "Decline"', in Jan Melissen (ed.), Innovation in Diplomatic Practice (London: Macmillan), pp. 25–26.

region. This is because while the separation lines between the old and new public diplomacy have proved useful, in reality the two go together. The new has not substituted the old, but the old has incorporated the new. There is nothing surprising about this, because states always pursue public diplomacy with their own interests at heart. All three functions of public diplomacy thus remain important: informing foreign publics of policy decisions; strategic communication; and building key long-term relationships. New public diplomacy is mainly associated with the latter, but states need a comprehensive approach to safeguard their interests. In order to move forward, the current debate on public diplomacy should therefore not merely propagate the new public diplomacy alone, but address the tension and troubles that governments face in their attempts to apply comprehensive public diplomacy effectively.

Whereas it is advantageous that varying forms of public diplomacy suit different goals and situations, in a comprehensive approach this actually puts governments in a tricky position. The two sides of the public diplomacy coin can at times appear to be a Jekyll-and-Hyde-like combination, wherein one undercuts the other. Notorious in this regard is that the one-sided pushing of apparent state interests can undercut the legitimacy of parallel two-sided relationship-building. We have seen this over and over again with the double agendas of Western public diplomacy in the MENA region. In order for a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy to work, governments have to make changes in the ways in which they are currently applying public diplomacy.

These changes should start by readdressing the underpinnings of the actual workings of public diplomacy. The understanding of the soft-power mechanism that forms the core of public diplomacy needs to change in order to use attraction more effectively in any public diplomacy strategy.

Social Power through Socialization

The oldest form of public diplomacy can best be understood as the direct application of soft power by states to attract a foreign public 'through the interactions of specific actors by mechanisms of "persuasion"'.[18] However, the later-evolved forms of public diplomacy focus on an entirely different aspect in the causal mechanism of soft-power projection, which departs from the assumption that attraction can only take place, and soft power can only be exercised, if there is some *susceptibility* in a foreign public. In the words of Alan Henrikson:

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18) Yong-Wook Lee (2011), 'Soft Power as Productive Power', in Sook-Jong Lee and Jan Melissen (eds), *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in East Asia* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan).

10

> […] to assimilate *publicly* conducted diplomacy in particular to 'soft power' would be a conceptual mistake, and far too reductionist; for a diplomacy that is expected to have public appeal and to win favour for a country must rely on the moral, political, and intellectual assent of the populations addressed by it.[19]

Any actor who engages in public diplomacy does so in order to gain or maintain a foreign public's favour, thereby to create greater opportunities to serve national policy goals directly or indirectly. The nature of these goals are always selfish but can still be perceived as selfless. Safeguarding economic interests, for example, easily appears as direct selfishness, while safeguarding the international rule of law is of a more indirect amiable form, even though it indirectly and selfishly serves the safety and security of one state as much as those of others. The fact that the latter serves a national as well as a broader interest, and can more easily be pursued in a multilateral fashion, renders it greater legitimacy in the eyes of a foreign public. With a more legitimate perception of the intentions of an actor's public diplomacy strategies, foreign publics become more susceptible to actively engaging in such a strategy.

The most powerful, ideal and cheap way to get others to do what you want is—unsurprisingly—when they actually come to want what you want. The best way to attain this for the long term is not through an aggressive public diplomacy strategy that attempts actively to change preferences in line with direct interests, as already discussed over the Bush administration's attempts in the Middle East, but when actors come to value certain norms and ideas voluntarily. Yong-Wook Lee calls this the *socialization* process that necessarily precedes persuasion: 'the act of having others accept new ideas or norms for their legitimate quality'.[20] Socialization is therefore a necessary step between the causation of the sources of attraction and actual attraction or persuasion. It is the essential step to allow for the eventual conversion of the use of soft-power resources into a foreign public's behavioural outcomes.[21]

Public diplomacy should focus on fostering this socialization process rather than on aiming to achieve instant behavioural outcomes. The socialization process aims to create space for dialogue, an exchange of values and ideals, and the possibility of their transformation. It is worth the investment, as it serves to enhance an actor's soft-power capacities strategically. It provides a great window of opportunity for rebuilding legitimacy and gaining trust, which are ground conditions for the second step

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19) Alan K. Henrikson (2005), 'Niche Diplomacy in the World Public Arena: The Global "Corner" of Canada and Norway', in Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy* (London: Palgrave), p. 73.

20) Yong-wook Lee, 'Soft Power as Productive Power'.

21) Joseph S. Nye (2008), 'Foreword', in Wanabe Yasushi and David L. McConnell (eds), *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (Armonk NY: East Gate Book), preface, p. x.

in the soft-power mechanism: attraction. Instead of garnering direct compulsory power over a foreign public, the possibility of voluntary attraction is created. It thereby focuses on the 'productive power' of diffuse social forces to shape one another by forming and transforming meanings, discourses and experiences.[22] According to Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, 'the bases and workings of productive power are the socially existing, and, hence, historically contingent and changing understandings, meanings, norms, customs and social identities that make possible, limit, and are drawn on for action'.[23] Public diplomacy strategies should focus on this normative aspect of productive relational soft power, rather than on the possibly counter-productive aspects of trying to apply soft power in which the aim of relative power increases, or gaining direct power over another.

A term that has been used in this regard is social power, a notion that stresses that this particular form of non-coercive power is embedded and shaped by the reciprocal relationships of actors and the complex social context.[24] Dependent on these contextual realities, social power is derived from 'communication, social knowledge, and economic and political interaction'.[25] Social power does not aim to control others or move them in different directions, but focuses on enabling openness to challenge and changing the mutually constitutive relations and contexts so that actors can come to mutual understanding and attraction. Since social power is 'intangible and versatile', it becomes most obvious and measurable when the created attraction between actors leads to joint behavioural outcomes towards a common goal.[26] Merely measuring social power by tangible outcomes, however, does grave injustice to the crucial but indirect impact that fostering mutual understanding through attraction can have towards better relations with foreign publics.

As was mentioned earlier; attraction without compulsion is only possible when a foreign public perceives the engagement as legitimate and is consequently susceptible to it. Ian Hall leaves no doubt about the crucial impact of legitimacy on the practice of diplomacy when he states that 'the institution of diplomacy is, in other words, constantly subject to stress by the very nature of its construction and the fragility of its legitimacy'.[27] Legitimacy is a necessary condition to allow for voluntary rapprochement, because social

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22) Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (eds) (2005a), *Power in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 20.

23) Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (2005b), 'Power in International Politics', *International Organization*, 59(1), p. 56.

24) Peter van Ham (2010), *Social Power in International Politics* (London: Routledge), p. 3.

25) Van Ham, *Social Power in International Politics*.

26) Van Ham, *Social Power in International Politics*, p. 5.

27) Ian Hall (2010), 'The Transformation of Diplomacy: Mysteries, Insurgencies and Public Relations', *International Affairs*, 86(1), pp. 247–256, at p. 249.

12

power's effects cannot be fully controlled by its sender. Because attraction needs to take place in the mind of foreign publics, whether this can and will take place depends considerably on their perception and role in the relationship. As Arab and Islamic publics around the world have already shown, foreign publics are not merely subjects; they judge and interpret the social power application of others, and thereby wield control over its outcome.[28] They, alone, control whether another actor's public diplomacy activities actually attract them enough to alter their preferences, thinking and/or behaviour.

Engagement must therefore be perceived as credible and legitimate in order to attract and activate a foreign public voluntarily. The importance of an actor's legitimacy greatly complicates matters, since the actor itself cannot guarantee this 'quality'; it depends on 'some form of consensus by those whose opinion matters' (that is, the foreign public) as to whether legitimacy is bestowed or not.[29] In reality this means that 'those who determine what is legitimate have social power'.[30] The fact that legitimacy cannot be controlled or guaranteed does not leave actors aiming to engage in socialization powerless in their efforts. Legitimacy, credibility and trust can be earned and improved.

Whereas legitimacy tends to stem from shared values and norms, these are much harder to grasp in situations where mutual mistrust is widening the gap between an actor and a foreign public. This was clearly the case for the United States and many European governments, which struggle with their reputation and relationships in the Arab world because of one-sided communication strategies and unpopular (foreign) policy decisions. But even in the Middle East, where public diplomacy is most pressing and hardest to do, there are opportunities to earn legitimacy for public diplomacy efforts. Opportunities are greatly enhanced, for example, by the current Arab Spring, which is narrowing the gap by exemplifying the common values and mutual interests that people in the MENA region have with the West. In order to grasp this opportunity, five factors are crucial for legitimate engagement through public diplomacy: perceived intent; shared interests; dialogue; space for dissenting voices; and collective ownership.

To gain legitimacy, an actor has to start by talking the talk and walking the walk. Ensuring that intent is not perceived as malicious, however, does not mean that an actor should hide the fact that he is pursuing certain self-interests. After all, self-interest is evident, since there is no other reason to practise public diplomacy than to bring certain objectives closer. Legitimacy, however, lies in which interests are pursued. An actor should therefore pursue

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28)   Nye, 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power', p. xiii.

29)   Shane P. Mulligan (2006), 'The Uses of Legitimacy in International Relations', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 34, p. 364.

30)   Van Ham, *Social Power in International Politics*, p. 14.

interests that are shared with a foreign public so that there is mutual gain in the engagement, so while engagement through socialization serves a strategic purpose, it is not a zero sum game; it needs to create a win–win situation wherein socialization also works in reverse.

In summary, when faced with a rightfully critical Arab public, Western governments have to do everything in their power to avoid propagandistic connotations to their public diplomacy. This is best undertaken by securing the perception of legitimate intent through the pursuit of national interests, which simultaneously serve a broader shared purpose with the foreign public. The wave of demonstrations for democracy and universal human rights that resulted in the monumental ousting of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, and continued open demands for freedom across the region in the face of oppression, prove that these shared interests run deep. However, the intent to create a win–win situation on the basis of shared interests alone is not enough.

In order to have longer-term legitimate engagement with a foreign public, this engagement should be dialogical with space for dissenting voices. This means that an actor that aims to engage does not attempt merely to press home its viewpoints and intentions, but that it should be opening up to the socialization process as well. So while an actor attempts to create and increase social power by affecting the preferences of a foreign public, this actor is actually dependent on allowing the simultaneous social-power creation, increase, and projection of a foreign public. Success depends on the mutuality of the process and the actor therefore needs to open up to the possibility of adapting its preferences as well. Collective ownership over this dialogical process is therefore the most ideal way of ensuring the legitimate pursuit of shared interests on the basis of mutuality.[31]

In public diplomacy, the national interest is served not only through dialogue and increased understanding of one's policy, values, ideals and ideology by foreign publics, but also by expanding one's own scope and understanding one's counterparts' behaviour and ideological underpinnings. In the long term, a healthy mutual relationship with a foreign public can lead to greater goodwill, possibilities for effective cooperation in numerous areas, and direct and indirect support for certain policy choices. In times of crises, the created capacity of understanding can help to cushion some of the negative effects that stem from foreign policy choices, or even domestic events with an international impact. With regard to the Arab world, examples that quickly spring to mind are possible future cases that resemble the Danish cartoon crisis and the crisis surrounding the release of Dutch politician Geert Wilder's movie *Fitna*. In such cases, prior legitimate engagement has already laid a foundational relationship that renders foreign publics more susceptible

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31) Van Ham, *Social Power in International Politics*, p. 16.

14

to interpreting events in a nuanced frame and more invested in searching for common ground to prevent crises.

It is important here to maintain a realistic outlook and to underscore the modest way in which public diplomacy can play a role. Public diplomacy will not overturn negative feelings or responses, despite wishful thinking; as much as it is not a *direct* soft-power tool, it is also not a direct counter-terrorism tool. In a nutshell, public diplomacy should first and foremost focus on creating the possibility of attraction through socialization. The goal remains to affect foreign publics' preferences to suit your interests better, but the focus is on creating susceptibility for attraction rather than seeking direct control. During crisis periods this translates into a possibility to mitigate tensions through the opened space and increased susceptibility for what you do and say. In that sense, legitimate socialization through public diplomacy can grant you the legitimacy that is needed to gain access to key influential figures, but also to foreign publics at large, in order to address controversies and grievances. Mutual understanding then equips a foreign—but also your own—public with a more accurate and legitimate frame to interpret events and developments (both positive and negative). However, increased mutual understanding can only be expected to be accompanied by foreign audiences' greater susceptibility and understanding of a country's domestic developments and foreign policy choices if the time is granted for this understanding to grow on the basis of trust, legitimacy and reciprocity. The strength of public diplomacy therefore lies in mutuality and a long-term scope, because the connections that can cushion the tensions of tomorrow have to be built today.

Effective public diplomacy creates social power through socialization. This adds nuance to the dominant soft power thinking by incorporating the necessity of gaining susceptibility and building trust in a foreign public before attraction—the working of soft power—can take place. This can be a very slow process with a pay-off that is hard to measure and define. Governments that are voted in and out of office, and that are pressured by policy agendas and the need for quick wins, do not always have the patience or the luxury to rely solely on this strategy. Nor do they always have the possibility to follow the five factors of effective socialization: pay attention to the perceived intent of the initiative; pursue shared interests; use dialogue; allow space for dissenting voices; and propose collective ownership of the initiative. Diplomatic reality differs from ideal theoretical concepts, and applying the most effective public diplomacy strategy encompasses more than an about-turn in foundational concepts alone. In acknowledging and accepting the limitations of diplomats, the fundamentals of why and who is practising public diplomacy may have to change alongside the nuanced understanding of the workings of soft power.