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THE NEW DIPLOMACY: ANALYSIS OF STATE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STRATEGY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Exercise *Solo Flight*

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Something is happening here but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?

– Bob Dylan, Ballad of a Thin Man

INTRODUCTION

Incredibly, it was only a decade ago that thefacebook.com was created as a means for college students to connect. Facebook, Wikipedia and their contemporaries grew quickly, and catalyzed the public's shift from consumption of internet content to actively participating in its creation, known commonly as Web 2.0. Today, Web 2.0 is no longer just the province of college students and teenagers. In fact, more than half of internet users over the age of 65 use Facebook, and more than half of all users subscribe to multiple social media sites.[1]

Beyond revolutionizing the speed and manner in which societies communicate and consume, social media has also significantly impacted the realm of international diplomatic relations. In particular, the empowerment of the 'many' at the expense of the 'elites' has created unprecedented state competition for attention and credibility in the sphere of public diplomacy. Phenomena such as the 'Twitter Revolution' demonstrate that "conceptions of political authority and influence have irrevocably changed in ways that undermine traditional institutions of foreign affairs."[2] Anne-Marie Slaughter, former U.S. State Department Director for Policy Planning, argues that public diplomacy must adapt to the emergence of 'collaborative power' in the digital age, which seeks influence by expanding the circle of power, adapting to the views of the many and replacing command with a 'call to action.'[3] Indeed, there is broad agreement among scholars

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[1]Pew Research Center, *Social Media Update 2014* (Washington: Pew Research Center, January 2015). Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/social-media-update-2014/

[2]Craig Hayden, "Social Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, and Network Power," in *Diplomacy, Development and Security in the Information Age*, ed. Shanthi Kalathil (Washington: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 2013), 20.

that public diplomacy must adapt to the new power reality created by social media technology.[4] What is less clear is how best to effect this transformation, and the extent to which states can be successful at harnessing social media towards their foreign policy goals.

Despite the imperative to adapt, there has been insufficient work done to provide a practical way forward for governments.[5] This paper develops and assesses some viable courses of action. It begins by providing a working definition of 'public diplomacy'. It then examines the factors that constrain decision making in this sphere: state public diplomacy strategy can neither involve total absence from social media, nor an overbearing presence in the space. With these limiting parameters established, two clear strategic options emerge. First, the paper will examine how public diplomacy can be effectively conducted by adopting a direct engagement strategy in social media. Second, it will examine how public diplomacy by proxy – the promotion of the foreign policy narrative through sympathetic communities – provides another effective way for states to realize their diplomatic agenda. These two strategies are neither mutually exclusive nor jointly exhaustive, and indeed a combination of these proposed strategies will in most cases represent the most effective way forward. Ultimately however, the rapid pace of social and technological change requires constant re-evaluation of any strategy under consideration.

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[3]Anne-Marie Slaughter, "A New Theory for the Foreign-Policy Frontier: Collaborative Power," *The Atlantic*, November 30, 2011.

[4]Craig Hayden, "Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for U.S. Public Diplomacy," *Global Media Journal-American* 11, no. 21 (2012): 3.

[5]Corneliu Bjola and Lu Jiang, "Social Media and Public Diplomacy: A comparative analysis of the digital diplomacy strategies in the UE, US and Japan in China," in *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes (New York: Routledge, 2015), 74. See also: R.S. Zaharna, "Mapping Out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives: Information and Relational Communication Frameworks," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 92.

SETTING THE GOALPOSTS

To begin, a discussion of a how public diplomacy is defined is warranted. It will be shown that while public diplomacy may be shaped and altered by modern social media technology, its inherent objectives predate this medium. A clear understanding of the purpose of public diplomacy will also help to distinguish it from other forms of information operations such as propaganda and psychological operations. Using this definition, this section will then analyze the factors which constrain the range of potential strategic options; namely that successful state public diplomacy can neither involve total absence from the social media space, nor can it dominate the space.

Public Diplomacy

While several definitions of public diplomacy exist, Nicolas Cull captures the essence of the term, describing it as "the conduct of foreign policy by engagement with a foreign public."[6] The term was first coined in 1965, and its common usage is due mainly the creation of the Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy. Public diplomacy aims to expand the scope of traditional inter-governmental diplomacy to influence and mold public attitudes in other countries in the furtherance of foreign policy objectives. Pahlavi uses a Clausewitzian analogy, describing public diplomacy as "the continuation of foreign policy by other means."[7]

It must be stressed that public diplomacy initiatives are commonly accepted to comprise messaging which is both truthful and largely verifiable. As such, public diplomacy incorporates

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[6]Nicholas Cull, "The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," *International Studies Review* 15 (2013): 125.

[7]Pierre Pahlavi, "Mass Diplomacy: Foreign Policy in the Global Information Age" (doctoral thesis, McGill University, 2004), 20.

the importance of engagement with a foreign public and the construction of positive relationships with those publics through information and education. This concept is admittedly difficult for a foreign public to absorb unreservedly, and indeed may be construed simply as sophisticated propaganda. However, it is generally agreed that to establish and maintain a trust relationship, public diplomacy must endeavor to relay relevance and truthfulness; to do otherwise in the modern era of global information is counter-productive.[8] In this sense, public diplomacy can be differentiated from propaganda or military psychological operations, which are unconcerned with dialogue or any reasonable form of relationship-building.[9]

Today, social media technology is challenging the conventional application of public diplomacy. The transition to Web 2.0 has been accompanied by a similar shift in public diplomacy towards 'New' Public Diplomacy or Public Diplomacy 2.0. As a result, the traditional aims of public diplomacy have been supplemented by notions of relationship building, listening, collaboration and the collaborative formulation of a state's public diplomacy narrative with the intended audience.[10] Stohl et al insightfully summarize these challenges as follows:

> In comparison with the old, the new diplomacy depends on far greater openness of communication; greater accountability of governments to their publics; greater attention to public opinion at home and abroad; and simultaneous bargaining with political factions and publics and other nations and public abroad. There are also much greater levels of media intrusion and incentives to employ the media by those engaged in the diplomatic process, whether they be diplomats, corporations,

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[8] *Ibid., 21.*

[9] Jan Melissen, "Clingendael Paper No. 3: Beyond the New Public Diplomacy," (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2011), 8.

[10] Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault, "Moving From Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 12.

> non-governmental or governmental organizations as well as private citizens and activists.[11]

With social media, the average citizen can reach as many people as any government can, and perhaps even more quickly. Furthermore, public diplomacy communications reverberate within social media spheres, and reach the domestic audience or unintended third parties. Matters are therefore further complicated because each of these groups will interpret public diplomacy messaging differently. In general, the idea of the public becoming an equal player on the diplomatic stage has a significant potential to undermine the national interest.[12] Cull notes that: "As each individual's cyber domain becomes more tailored to their own tastes and settled into a comfortable niche, the intervention of an outsider will seem increasingly incongruous."[13]

Clearly, the one-way communication model inherent in traditional public diplomacy is obsolete. Using the potential of social media to further a state's foreign policy objectives therefore requires new and bespoke strategies. The next sections identify the boundaries within which useable strategies may be developed.

THE NEED FOR DIGITAL PUBLIC DIPLOMACY PRESENCE

As we have noted, foreign policy success in the digital space is fraught with potential pitfalls. One might consider therefore that a viable course of action should include the 'do nothing' option, namely, to remain disengaged in the interests of avoiding error. Indeed, in the early years of social media's ascendance, the US Diplomatic Security Service labelled social

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[11]Michael Stohl, Cynthia Stohl and Rachel Stohl, "Linking Small Arms, Child Soldiers, NGOs and Celebrity Activism: Nicholas Cage and the Lord of War," in *Transnational Celebrity Activism*, ed. Liza Tsaliki, Christos Frangonikolopolous, and Asteris Huliaris (Exeter, UK: Intellect Ltd., 2012), 219-220.

[12]Bala Musa, "Public Diplomacy in the Age of New Media," in From Twitter to Tahrir Square: Ethics in Social and New Media Communication," ed. Bala Musa and Jim Willis (Santa Barbera, USA: Praeger, 2014), 152.

[13]Nicholas Cull, "WikiLeaks, public diplomacy 2.0 and the state of digital public diplomacy," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (2011) 7(1), 4.

media as 'too dangerous', and as late as 2011 – despite the decision to engage with social media under Hillary Clinton's Statecraft 2.0 philosophy – it continued to brief Foreign Service Officers to avoid online interactions with the public.[14] Notwithstanding these clear contradictions in US strategic direction, the disregard for social media as a public diplomacy medium is unviable for several reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, social media is not regarded a passing 'fad', and with time, will only increase in importance in daily life. Social media is the platform through which many people – and certainly most youths – get their news, with over 300 hours of YouTube videos uploaded each hour and 500 million Tweets daily.[15] As a result of these myriad global exchanges, it is now virtually impossible to hide sensitive information from the public, and certainly impossible to resort to traditional disinformation. David Faris offers a succinct evaluation of this transition, observing that:

> …policies that were possible in the Age of Secrecy—the era that ended with the explosion of social media—are more difficult to execute during the Age of Sharing—the new epoch in which ordinary citizens spend hours each day reading, annotating, and creating criticism of government policies and then sharing their thoughts with online social networks ranging from a few hundred to the hundreds of thousands. These "Twitterati," as they are sometimes dismissively referred to, have become among the most important opinion leaders in the region, not because they have their own perches on Al-Jazeera's expensive talk shows but rather because they are funny, biting, and absolutely relentless in their exposure of state hypocrisy and also of the tensions inherent in American regional policymaking.[16]

Therefore, to manage the diplomatic message – to the extent possible in the digital age – clearly an active participation in the social media domain is necessary.

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[14]Cull, *The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0, 136.*

[15]Youtube.com, "Product Statistics," last accessed 1 May 2015, https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html. See also: Twitter.com, "Twitter Usage," last accessed 1 May 2015, https://about.twitter.com/company.

[16]David Faris, "From the Age of Secrecy to the Age of Sharing: Social Media, Diplomacy, and Statecraft in the 21st Century," in *Diplomacy, Development and Security in the Information Age*, ed. Shanthi Kalathil (Washington: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 2013), 37.

Indeed, one organization's challenge is another's opportunity. Social media affords governments the opportunity to connect in real-time with a global audience. This can have significant value beyond influencing foreign publics, such as the rapid dissemination of information in the event of emergencies or catastrophes. Furthermore, digital diplomacy represents an opportunity to deliver cost efficiencies. Daryl Copeland argues that the transition from 'bricks to clicks' and the pooling of e-resources presents significant scale economies for government operations.[17] The integration of online strategies clearly provides a force multiplying effect.[18]

Finally, the need for some form of diplomatic social media strategy is perhaps most clearly evidenced by the fact that absence from the space would simply enable opposing diplomatic viewpoints to become entrenched in the global psyche. Matt Armstrong suggests that to ignore social media would be "surrendering the high ground in the enduring battle to influence minds around the world."[19] Wichowski goes further still, arguing that absence from social media "would amount to professional malpractice."[20] Thus, digital diplomacy is essential to mmaintain the credibility of information and to combat misinformation. In fact, Bruce Gregory argues that public diplomacy *is* the new diplomacy, inferring that social media has eclipsed much of the importance of traditional diplomacy.[21] With public diplomacy ascending to a place of such importance in foreign policy, it clearly behooves states to engage in social media; the most public forum ever created.

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[17]Daryl Copeland, "Virtuality, Diplomacy, and the Foreign Ministry: Does Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada Need a 'V Tower'?" *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 15, no. 2 (2009): 7.

[18]Hayden, *Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for U.S. Public Diplomacy*, 11.

[19]Matt Armstrong, "Social Media as Public Diplomacy," *Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (June 2009): 2.

[20]Alexis Wichowski, "Social Diplomacy: Or How Diplomats Learned to Stop Worrying and Loving to Tweet," *Foreign Affairs*, April 5, 2013.

[21]Bruce Gregory, "American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation," *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 6 (2011): 353-354.

AVOIDING THE TEMPTATION TO DOMINATE

It is a natural instinct in Western culture to control – and even micromanage – every undertaking to which the state has set its resources. But, overbearingness in the social media domain is counterproductive for several reasons.

Perhaps the most important reason why states should avoid dominating the digital diplomacy narrative is the requirement to maintain credibility. Public diplomacy scholar R.S. Zaharna has stressed that public diplomacy is now inextricably tied to credibility and even Joseph Nye describes future soft power relations as 'a contest of credibility.'[22] Drowning out opinion in this space is simply counterproductive to this goal. This is due to the 'hostile media effect', which suggests that the public tends to view the media as biased and hostile, acting as a partisan player in the public diplomacy discourse.[23] Furthermore, as credibility is both situation-specific and culture-bound, it is impossible to deliver every message to every public with the required nuance necessary.[24]

Case Study: Russia's State-controlled Public Diplomacy Apparatus

Russia's digital diplomacy strategy offers unique insight into the results of saturating social media. In Russia, public diplomacy policy is derived from several key policy documents. In particular, the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept states the following objectives:

> [Russia] will develop its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad, strengthen the role of Russian media in the international information environment providing them with essential state support [and] take

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[22]Zaharna, *Mapping out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives*, 89. See also: Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 68.

[23]Robert H. Gass and John S. Seiter, "Credibility and Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 159.

[24]*Ibid., 157.* See also Cull, *The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0*, 136.

> necessary measures to counteract information threats to its sovereignty and security.[25]

Control over social media strategy is highly centralized, and according to a recent NATO report the Russian governing elite maintains an extremely vigorous online presence, cultivating a virtual army of bloggers and trolls through the Presidential Administration to "spread information supporting Russia's narrative and to silence opponents."[26] Indeed, it is extremely difficult to determine whether social media sources are genuinely private, since most content is state-directed.[27] The result is the notion of an online battlespace where victory can be secured; a so-called 'information confrontation.'[28] As such, the Russian version of 'public diplomacy' becomes more akin to psychological operations, and in some regards Russia's online conduct should be assessed in the context of its larger foreign policy goals, which includes physical actions such as censorship, cyber-attack, sabotage, etc.

Several factors reveal that the Russian example of over-participation can undermine the benefits that public diplomacy can provide. First, while coordinated effort may stifle opposing views and complicate an opposing nation's counternarrative, its messaging resonates only with certain small but receptive audiences. For example, the narratives in Ukraine have yet to be adopted by the wider global community. Indeed, Denis Stukal's quantitative analysis of Twitter

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[25]Russian Federation, "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" [unofficial translation], last accessed 2 May 2015, http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/0f474e63a426b7c344257b2e003c945f!OpenDocument.

[26]NATO, "Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine" (Brussels: NATO Strategic Communications COE, 2014), 27. The NATO report on Russian social media strategy also states the following: "The Domestic Policy Department of the Presidential Administration controls the work of so-called trolls and bloggers, who have three tasks: 1) publication and distribution of ordered materials; 2) creation of fake accounts on social networks and distributing the ordered information on these accounts; 3) sending out of *spam* messages, and persecution of opponents on the Internet.] There are also several prominent cases which provide examples of deliberate falsification of information, usage of false identities and spreading of rumours with the purpose of creating either fear or hatred."

[27]Alexander Klimburg, "Mobilizing Cyber Power," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 53(1): 47.

[28]Observations of the 2015 Social Media and Cyber-Influence Workshop, 9-10 April 2015, Centre for National Security Studies, Toronto, Canada.

users during the Ukraine crisis reveals no discernable change in foreign public sentiment as a result of Russia highly active information campaign.[29] The Ukraine crisis has also shown that such campaigns tend to erode with time as evidence is revealed to counter the Russian narrative. This can lead to other unintended message recipients such as West Ukraine, the populations of NATO and EU countries and the USA, becoming radicalized or alienated.[30] In fact, whereas the Russian campaign for social media dominance reveals fractures in credibility and trustworthiness, Isaacson neatly points out that public diplomacy must represent facilitation more that brute persuasion because the preservation of online rights and freedoms via the social media platform "both *demonstrate* US values as much as well as *provide* a communication good to publics."[31] In essence, to dominate social media undermines the freedom of speech that democratic societies seek to defend, which is a key source of their credibility.

In addition credibility risk, other more practical reasons make total control of social media for diplomatic purposes untenable. First, such a strategy creates the impression that anyone can control the social media discourses and information sharing. Using Israeli Defence Force (IDF) social media strategy as a case in point, despite a full scale online public diplomacy campaign, IDF messaging is negatively received nearly as often it was positively. This is because defence forces have a very polarizing effect on the global public, and IDF messages can be manipulated and spun by their unintended audiences.[32] It is therefore surprisingly that UK armed forces are directly adopting the Israeli model through the creation of the 77th Brigade,

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[29]Denis Stukal, "Ideological Scaling of Twitter Users: Evidence from the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis [in progress]," New York: Social Media and Political Participation, New York University, 2014, 1.

[30]NATO, *Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine*, 5.

[31]Walter Isaacson, "From Samizdat to Twitter," *Foreign Policy*, February 8, 2011.

[32]Observations of the 2015 Social Media and Cyber-Influence Workshop, 9-10 April 2015.

colloquially known as the 'Twitter Troops."[33] This leads into a second major complication, which is that the public uses social media differently for private or commercial purposes than it does for issues of a public nature, and social media is not optimized to enable full control by government organizations. For example, the marketing strategies used to build relationships between companies and individuals in social media involve the fulfillment of a need, whether economic or social. Both Gyorgy Szondi and Helmus et al agree that this relationship offers no easy translation to the public diplomacy sphere.[34] Furthermore, despite the plethora of advice provided in self-help business books, there is no evidence that the 'viral video' can be purposely created or replicated; there is no scientifically proven means of determining what messaging will be widely shared and positively received.[35] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, domination of the social media space remains a highly expensive and resource intensive undertaking. Whereas authoritarian regimes are able to concentrate their resources on this endeavor, this occurs at the expense of the domestic public and is instead appears aimed at furthering their grip on power.

ANALYZING VIABLE SOCIAL MEDIA PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STRATEGIES

If one accepts that states cannot absent themselves from social media, nor can they expect to fully control it, then where does this leave the foreign policy maker? The next sections analyze viable digital diplomacy courses of action. First, public diplomacy can be effectively conducted by adopting a direct engagement strategy in social media. Alternatively, public

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[33]Channel 4, "British Army unveils 'Twitter troops' for social media fight," last accessed 7 May 2015, http://www.channel4.com/news/british-army-military-social-media-unit-twitter-troops.

[34]Gyorgy Szondi, "Central and Eastern European Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009): 301. See also: Todd Helmus, Christopher Paul and Russell Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theatres of Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007): 46-47.

[35]Liana Evans, *Social Media Marketing: Strategies for Engaging in Facebook, Twitter & Other Social Media* (New York: Que Publishing, 2010). See also: Pierre Pahlavi, "Evaluating Public Diplomacy Programmes," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2 *no. 3 (2007): 257.*

diplomacy by proxy provides another effective way for states to realize their diplomatic agenda, whereby foreign policy narrative is conveyed through sympathetic partners. In essence, the central question is no longer *how much* online presence is appropriate, but rather *how should this presence be managed*. This question is especially pressing since social media diplomacy is an area where most states have a dearth of expertise and practical experience.

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The clearest course of action is to remain a direct and present player in the social media space. Unfortunately, states, and western democracies in particularly, have little experience managing the many new challenges presented by direct engagement in social media. Whereas traditional public diplomacy involved the communication of prepared messages, there is an enhanced requirement placed upon the operational-level public diplomacy practitioner using social media to understand the strategic-level policy objectives, and to establish a clear communications goal.[36] Another key challenge is recognizing that providing information is different from generating influence. Finally, and most critically, is the time-sensitive nature of social media communications. The approvals chain within most state bureaucracies is inherently slow, and ill-suited the speed of social media interactions. Interestingly, leaked internal US State Department memos in December 2012, which discussed reducing their 30-day review and approval period down to even two days, appears to have generated strong debate.[37] In reality, with real-time communications, a delay of just hours is often excessive, and risks losing control of the online narrative.

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[36]Matthew Wallin, "The New Public Diplomacy Imperative," *American Security Project*, (2012): 21. http://americansecurityproject.org/featured-items/2012/the-new-public-diplomacy-imperative/

[37]Matthew Wallin, "The Challenges of the Internet and Social Media in Public Diplomacy," *American Security Project: Perspectives*, (February 2013): 5.

Despite the seeming incompatibility of state engagement with social media for public diplomacy purposes, solutions to the above-mentioned challenges appear achievable. They are essentially aimed at adapting government processes to reflect the need for timely and appropriate engagement. These two key aspects appear to form the backbone of any direct engagement digital public diplomacy strategy.

To overcome the issue of timeliness, processes must enable public diplomacy professionals to engage in social media with fewer clearance requirements. P.J. Crowley, former State Department Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, describes the need to avoid having "a layer of people looking over your shoulder all the time but to give autonomy to the people who are out there doing the tweeting, otherwise they are not going to do it or it's going to take them a long time to do it."[38] In fact, it is theoretically easier to gain message clearance on a 140-character Twitter comment than a formal memorandum or statement, and thus this type of communications provides a considerable incentive to streamline the message approvals process.[39] While training and education facilitate the reduction of clearance requirements, the concentration of pre-cleared staff in designated digital diplomacy units offers a further structural efficiency. [40] Furthermore, timeliness can be achieved by providing these organizations with terms of reference which they are equipped to fulfill. Timely interaction with a certain demographic is impossible if that engagement team is first required to conduct research to provide an informed response. In this respect, the knowledge capacity of digital diplomacy teams can be enhanced by adopting a whole-of-government approach that is supported by a strong inter-agency intelligence network.

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[38]*Ibid.*, 5.

[39]Wichowski, *Social Diplomacy*.

[40]Clearance procedures describe the process by which government external strategic communications are approved. These processes ensure that dissemination of information aligns with government policy.

In terms of managing the appropriateness of diplomatic communications via social media, research indicates that online relationships are optimized when organizations adopt a more informal tone .[41] This makes the interaction more conversational, and makes the message deliverer more approachable and trustworthy. Regarding the US State Department's most successful digital diplomacy programs, Fergus Hanson suggests that one key to success has been to "avoid traditional diplomatic bureaucratese and adopt a less obviously governmental style."[42] Practitioners of Public Diplomacy must nevertheless recognize that some online messaging can become viral for unintended and unwanted reasons. Therefore, great care is necessary to ensure that states understand both the forum and the audience through which they are communicating online, and guard against incompetence as a catalyst for viral message sharing.

Case Study: United States Digital Outreach Team

The US digital diplomacy strategy, or 'Statecraft 2.0', is one of enormous scope, and a complete analysis of it is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a closer look at a particularly successful initiative – the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) – offers some insight into how states can successfully integrate timeliness and appropriateness into a successful direct digital diplomacy strategy.

The DOT is part of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), within the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy. The CSCC's goal is to "coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide public communications activities directed at audiences abroad and targeted against violent extremists and terrorist organizations, especially Al-Qaeda,

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[41]Wallin, *The Challenges of the Internet and Social Media in Public Diplomacy*, 5.

[42]Fergus Hanson, "Baked in and Wired: eDiplomacy at State," *Brookings*, October 25, 2012, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2012/10/25-ediplomacy-hanson.

its affiliates, and its adherents."[43] Created in 2006, the DOT's direct engagement strategy includes participation in online forums, a Facebook site, and commentary in numerous media websites in text, graphics and video formats. These interactions bear the brand of the US State Department; content creators identify themselves as DOT members, whose logo is used in its products.[44] To generate a timely and relevant social media presence, the DOT has reduced the average online response time to 2.77 days, although often the response time is just minutes.[45] While this remains sub-optimal, it is an extremely significant improvement on the bureaucratic status quo. Three main factors underpin the DOT's ability to drastically reduce response time. First, the team operates under a separate and privileged set of terms of reference from other government departments. Concentrating a highly knowledgeable and media-savvy team in one place reassures the State Department that the strategic message will be communicated according to established foreign policy. As a result, the clearance process remains internal to the CSCC.[46] Second, the DOT is narrowly focused on areas where it has in-house expertise, namely, Al-Qaeda related diplomatic messaging, and understands that its posts must be factually accurate and well researched. It therefore avoids areas, for example Iran or China, where research would take too long to generate a timely reply. By staying on message, it can instead post the same or similar messages in multiple online forums quickly. Third, where necessary, the DOT maintains

[43]U.S. Department of State, "Ambassador Alberto Fernandez Appointed Coordinator of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC)," last accessed 2 May 2015, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/03/186790.htm.

[44]U.S. Department of State, "Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, August 2, 2012," last accessed 5 May 2015, http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg75389/html/CHRG-112hhrg75389.htm.

[45]Ibid. See also: Lina Khatib, William Dutton and Michael Thelwall, "Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Working Paper No.120, Public Diplomacy 2.0: An Exploratory Case Study of the US Digital Outreach Team," (Stanford: CDDRL, 2011), 6.

[46]U.S. Department of State, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism…, 30.

close links with other government departments to ensure their intelligence is current, and can therefore remain abreast of current events and the government's strategic position.[47]

Not only is DOT messaging on-time, but also on-target. In a deliberate play for credibility, the team embraces the notion of informality in its content, and actual staff first names are even published in posts. Results indicate that an atmosphere of authenticity has been created.[48] Posts aimed at Al-Qaeda and their sympathizers adopt a refuting yet engaging tone, and avoid debate over religious content.[49] Indeed, focusing more on refuting Al-Qaeda using facts lessens the requirement to be fully abreast of current government policy.[50] Additionally, staffs do not communicate in English, but rather in target audience vernaculars, specifically, Arabic, Urdu and Somali. This ensures that messages are as focused as possible. It also reduces the risk of misinterpretation by third parties, and suggests an extremely nuanced understanding of its audiences.

The overall results of DOT program have been positive. CSCC Director Alberto Fernandez offers the vitriolic response by extremists as strong evidence of success.[51] Furthermore, there is indication that the DOT's rhetoric has been in many cases adopted by its target audience.[52] Admittedly, states are still faced with a seemingly dire choice between controlling message accuracy and the desire to empower staff to embrace the relationship

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[47]*Ibid.*, 9, 29.

[48]*Ibid.*, 3. See also: Khatib, *Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Working Paper No.120*, 9.

[49]Khatib, *Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Working Paper No.120*, 8.

[50]The DOT aims to focus the narrative on internal contradictions in the actions of terrorist organizations, rather than more abstract questions surrounding religion or Sharia Law. In so doing, they attempt to avoid accusations surrounding what behavior might be considered unIslamic, and simply point out that the fight is not with Islam per se.

[51]U.S. Department of State, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism…, 7.

[52]*Ibid.*, 21.

building imperative of Public Diplomacy 2.0. Nevertheless, this case study illustrates that direct engagement strategies, if carefully planned and executed, can be highly productive.

DIPLOMATIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Though direct engagement strategies for digital diplomacy are viable, as discussed, social media is not necessarily optimized for the public sector. As a result, there is considerable scholarship which favours shaping the online narrative without direct participation in it. Geoffrey Pigman notes that an increasingly competitive global digital environment, where public access to information is pervasive, makes it difficult for public diplomacy to be effected by governments using their own resources alone.[53] Nye indicates that mistrust of public institutions means that "it often behooves governments to keep in the background and work with private actors."[54] Mark Leonard goes further, arguing that governments should be covert about such activities to maintain message credibility. Leonard writes:

> If a message will engender distrust simply because it is coming from a foreign government, then the government should hide that fact as much as possible. Increasingly, if a state is to make its voice heard and to influence events outside its direct control, it must work through organizations and networks that are separate from, independent of, and even suspicious of governments themselves.[55]

This section provides an analysis of 'diplomatic entrepreneurship' in the development of effective digital diplomacy strategies.

In the Western context, the search for new means of delivering public diplomacy messages emerged initially from the perceived inability of coalition nations such as the US and

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[53]Geoffrey Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy: Representation and Communication in a Globalized World* (Malden, USA: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 2012), 127.

[54]Joseph Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 113.

[55]Mark Leonard, "Diplomacy by Other Means," *Foreign Policy*, No. 132 (Sep - Oct), 54.

UK to build public support for the second war in Iraq using traditional public diplomacy techniques.[56] Indeed, there is a general sense that professional diplomats have been poor practitioners of public diplomacy.[57] It has therefore been suggested that public-private partnerships should form the core of a viable digital diplomacy strategy. This strategy bears close resemblance to the general trend which has seen many Western governments contractually outsource the delivery of public services. Some of this outsourcing may be aimed at training for diplomats who conduct direct engagement diplomacy, but in many cases it involves the formation of partnerships with the private sector – both corporation and civil society organizations – to promote their narrative. These organizations then act as proxies for the state. It is argued that private organizations enjoy a more admired and trusted reputation, and are more relevant to publics than the state can expect to be.[58] Furthermore, the inherent need for credibility within Public Diplomacy 2.0 is achieved through business and civil society mechanisms, which are possessed of a greater level of skill, efficiency and understanding of the global context.[59] Ronfeldt and Arquilla – referring to this soft power conduit as *Noopolitik* – suggest that the actual mechanism for indirect public diplomacy are not necessarily new, since it comprises government intelligence organizations, corporate marketing teams, the media, civil society, polling firms, etc. In fact, public diplomacy has always embraced non-governmental and private sector actors as key players in influencing international perception.[60] Instead, *Noopolitik* describes the issue as a matter of scale, arguing:

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[56]Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, 126.

[57]Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 279.

[58]Keith Reinhard, "American Business and Its Role in Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 198.

[59]*Ibid., 195.*

> What is new is the looming scope and scale of this sensory apparatus, as it is increasingly includes networks of NGOs and individual activists who monitor and report on what they see in all sorts of issue areas, using open-forum, specialized internet mailing lists, Web postings, and fax machine ladders as tools for rapid dissemination.[61]

Analysis of indirect digital public diplomacy strategies suggests several potential benefits. As noted, the most important advantage is that state credibility is established by others. In so doing, it is more likely that a positive message can be conveyed, because indirect strategies indicate broader support for a particular message, rather than the simple, largely explanatory effect of direct strategies. Furthermore, whereas senior diplomatic officials will seldom have time or resources to interact online with ordinary members of foreign publics, proxies conduct these interactions regularly, and are thus well-suited to the promotion of public diplomacy using social media.[62]

Indirect strategies can also be a force multiplier for promoting foreign economic interests. Here, two key advantages of public-private diplomacy strategies become evident. First, as Geoffrey Pigman suggests, the business community will in many cases see considerable strategic synergies in partnering through public diplomacy initiatives in order to advance a positive public image of the state.[63] This can in turn work towards building a positive state 'brand', which can enhance the economy by attracting foreign investors, increasing exports and drawing in tourist dollars. Second, the emergence of organizations such as the Business for Diplomatic Action (BDA) in the United States suggests that public-private engagement can spread into initiatives

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[60]L. W. Roth, "Public Diplomacy and the Past: The Search for an American Style of Propaganda (1952-1977)." *Fletcher Forum*, 8 no. 2 (1984): 370-371.

[61]David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, "Noopolitik: A new Paradigm for Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 356.

[62]Faris, *From the Age of Secrecy to the Age of Sharing…*, 43.

[63]Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, 129.

that advance public diplomacy online even without formal government linkages. The BDA has a wide-ranging private sector membership, and owns a sizeable online archive and database available for public download. Their website summarizes the aim as follows:

> This effort is not about ads or selling – it's about sensitizing Americans to the extent of anti-Americanism today and its implications, transforming American attitudes and behaviors as necessary, building on the many positive perceptions of America that still exist, and building new bridges of cooperation, respect, and mutual understanding across cultures and borders.[64]

However, even with indirect digital public diplomacy, practical disadvantages remain, which extend beyond the need to retain the perception of credibility and trustworthiness that have already been discussed. The first is that indirect strategies involve surrendering control over the online narrative. While even direct engagement strategies cannot claim to fully control the digital environment, the forfeiture is much larger with indirect strategies. Second, indirect strategies rely heavily upon states acting as transformational leaders vis-à-vis their private sector partners. The indirect approach requires the state not only to build its public diplomacy vision, but also to convey this vision to their proxies. This is a significant challenge for Western bureaucracies, which tend largely operate in a transactional nature. Finally, as Paul Sharp argues, there is a risk in these strategies that diplomats and public diplomacy practitioners remain entrenched in "vested institutional interests" regarding diplomacy, and that even organizational changes may not achieve the desired strategic shift.[65]

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[64]Business for Development Action, "Who We Are," last accessed 5 May 2015, http://www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org/who.

[65]Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations,* 281.

Case Study: India's Public Diplomacy Division

Of course, many public-private digital diplomacy linkages will not be made public knowledge. Indeed, awareness of the contractual or tacit agreements that bind the public-private collaboration together could cause publics to simply filter the message as though it were delivered directly. Indeed, as we have already noted, Russia, in addition to undertaking direct digital diplomacy, secretively retains a large number of proxies through which it communicates online. China, and to a lesser extent the United States, have similar covert digital diplomacy strategies in play. Turning back to the original definition of public diplomacy, we see the risk posed by these strategies if they cause a loss of state credibility and trustworthiness. Therefore, the case of Indian public-private partnership offers perhaps a clearer example of how indirect public diplomacy strategies can be successful.

In India, control over most public diplomacy activities is managed by the Public Diplomacy Division (PDD), under the Ministry of External Affairs. The PDD employs 'traditional' elements of direct digital diplomacy which are enacted through direct presence in every major social media site, as well as applications for smart phone users and a multimedia website.[66] However, the recognition that resource constraints limit ambition in the digital diplomacy sphere has led to the creation of a number of 'smart' partnerships.[67] While many of these partnerships have been established, three of them serve to highlight to success that indirect strategies can afford. One is the PDD's private sector partnership to create the India Future of Change initiative, which leverages the efficiency and brand management expertise of TheIdeaWorks, a leading communications and public diplomacy entrepreneur. Under this

[66]Kalathmika Natarajan, "Digital Public Diplomacy and a Strategic Narrative for India," *Strategic Analysis* 38, no. 1 (2014): 94.

[67]*Ibid., 101.*

arrangement, the PDD can determine public perceptions of India, and devise the means to reconcile this data against reality or the country's desired end-state.[68] One poignant example of this initiative's success was its ability to integrate the Gandhi 'brand' – India's most famous icon – into the narrative in Egypt surrounding the Arab Spring, by using social media to build a narrative around the question: "Did you sense the spirit of Gandhi in Tahrir Square?"[69] Another important example of public-private partnerships in India is the establishment of the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF). Pigman presents this organization as a "best-in-breed" example for how public diplomacy and national brand building can be achieved through public-private collaboration.[70] As a joint venture between the Ministry of Commerce and the country's leading business association, IBEF "collects, collates and disseminates accurate, comprehensive and current information on India."[71] IBEF has enjoyed considerable success in merging the synergies between state and business interests, and has made a significant contribution to India's recent trade and investment boom, as well as its foreign diplomacy goal of establishing itself as a great power.[72] Finally, the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre (OIFC) services the public diplomacy narrative amongst India's famously large and globally dispersed diaspora. As a not-for-profit venture in collaboration with the Confederation of Indian Industry, the OIFC has become a leading resources for attracting investments from diaspora as well as communication the state's public diplomacy message overseas.[73] Indeed, Bhattiprolu Murti contends that, in fact, the OIFC

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[68]Aparajitha Vadlamannati, "More Manpower," India: Inside Out (blog), December 19, 2011, http://www.indiapublicdiplomacy.com/2011/12/19/more-manpower/.

[69]Natarajan, *Digital Public Diplomacy and a Strategic Narrative for India*, 95.

[70]Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, 129.

[71]India Brand Equity Foundation, "About Us," last accessed 7 May 2015, http://www.ibef.org/about-us.aspx.

[72]Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, 130.

[73]Overseas Indian Facilitation Center, "About Us," last accessed 7 May 2015, http://www.oifc.in/about-us.

represents India's most successful public-private digital diplomacy initiative.[74] With these initiatives vying for such accolades, it can generally be concluded that public-private partnerships have had considerable success for India, and shows that credibility and the merging of state and corporate interests can be achieved using proxies to build an online public diplomacy narrative.

CONCLUSION

Web 2.0 has brought new complications to developing public diplomacy strategy. It has been demonstrated here that states must avoid operating at either end of the diplomatic pendulum; states can neither exclude themselves from the social media space, nor can they expect to dominate it. This paper analyzes some potential solutions to the problem while remaining cognizant that, in some ways, social media remains an unknown quantity. Indeed, a combination of both direct and indirect digital diplomacy strategies will in most cases represent the most effective way forward, though neither approach is without its own challenges. Certainly, there is a growing opinion that to be effective, states should seek indirect methods. However, as demonstrated, it is by no means clear that states and their diplomats are 'part of the problem', and even where they area, that this is cause to exclude them. As Paul Sharp notes: "It is a key principle of both politics and diplomacy … that those with the power to influence outcomes should not be left out of at least some of the conversations."[75]

Today's digital public diplomacy strategy takes places within a terrain of constantly shifting sands, where both technology and the social interactions that take place within, are in

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[74]Bhattiprolu Murti, "India's Use of Digital Media to Engage with Diaspora as Part of its Public Diplomacy Outreach: A case study analysis of the website of Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre" (master's thesis, American University, 2013), 8.

[75]Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, 288.

constant flux. We do not know yet what Web 3.0 will look like. Therefore the term 'strategy' must imply a much shorter planning horizon than it would in other areas of state-level decision-making; certainly there will be little value in deriving five or ten year digital diplomacy strategic plans. Here, the combined use of both direct and indirect strategies can be useful in managing this challenge. For example, as John Kelley points out, direct engagement digital diplomacy could be used as a 'surge capability', providing a quick and temporary reaction to support the diplomatic narrative where real-time action is required.[76] The indirect approach would complement this strategy, by using its strengths to build the longer term proactive campaign which is necessary to sway the foreign public more generally.

Regardless of the public diplomacy approach that a state adopts, social media remains, at the very least, an important tool simply for measuring the sentiment of both domestic and foreign publics. In this respect, it is important to recognize that in many cases listening is just as important as talking. Diplomats can use social media to listen for indicators of change in public opinion and therefore adjust their actions accordingly. To borrow from military parlance, the advantage of using social media for terrain mapping as part of an operational Phase 0 is a critical component of executing an effective foreign policy.

Certainly, social media has an important role to play in public diplomacy and must form part of a state's integrated foreign policy. And while states may vary in their engagement in this domain, it is clear they must clearly recalibrate – and frequently reassess – how Web 2.0 affects their ability to conduct effective public diplomacy, while minimizing the potential pitfalls that accompany it.

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[76]John Kelley, "Between "Take-offs" and "Crash-landings": Situational Aspects of Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 78.

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