

An English School Approach to Public Diplomacy – social power and norm creation

*Uma abordagem da Escola Inglesa da Diplomacia Pública
– poder social e criação de normas*

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Abstract

This article attempts to lift the veil on the connection between public diplomacy practices and some tenets of the English School. The general argument is that in the context of an anarchical society of states that govern themselves through shared institutions, norms and values, public diplomacy is an important instrument to influence the manufacturing of the norms and values that functions as the milieu of world politics. It is also maintained that states with effective public diplomacy policies are those with the greatest social power.

Key-words: Public Diplomacy; English School; Norms Creation

Sumário

Este artigo tenta levantar o véu sobre a conexão entre as práticas de diplomacia pública e alguns princípios da Escola Inglesa. O argumento geral é que, no contexto de uma sociedade anárquica de estados que governam a si mesmos através de instituições, normas e valores compartilhados, a diplomacia pública é um instrumento importante para influenciar a fabricação de normas e valores que funcionam como o ambiente da política mundial. Também se afirma que os estados com políticas eficazes de diplomacia pública são aqueles com o maior poder social.

Palavras-Chave: Diplomacia Pública; Escola Inglesa; Criação de Normas

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Introduction

The English School of International Relations Theory holds that we live in a world structured as an international society of sovereign states that are governed by international law and that communicate among themselves through the institution of diplomacy (BUZAN, 2010 e 2014; CASTRO, 2012; KAUPPI and VIOTTI, 1999; SUGANAMI, 2010). English school thinking shares beliefs with realism concerning the anarchical nature of the international system (BULL, 1977) but it also dialogues with the constructivist theory for it recognizes the societal dynamics of international relations, particularly in what regards the existence of order, justice, norms and values that are socially developed (SUGANAMI, 2010). According to such a theoretical construct, non-state actors play a significant role. Buzan and Little (2000), for instance, put forward that the contemporary world system is marked by the emergence of a plethora of non-state, non-territorial actors that challenge the stability in states' territorial boundaries and the idea of power as solely being military or economic (2000, p. 16).

It is widely believed that public diplomacy has become an important facet of this contemporary world system, especially due to the major events of September, 11, 2001 that took place in the United States. The terrorist attacks of astounding magnitude that brought the World Trade Center down and damaged the Pentagon in Washington encouraged the great superpower of the world to wonder how its image had been portrayed and interpreted in the Middle East and in the Islamic community as a whole. United Statesians posed questions such as "Why do people hate us so much?" (Nye, 2004).

The importance of public diplomacy has increased not only to the US and other countries that considered themselves under terrorist threat

(GILBOA, 2008; GREGORY, 2008; MELISSEN, 2005). Besides being a matter of national security to some countries, public diplomacy has also gained currency due to the changed architecture of contemporary international relations in what regards the ever increasing interdependence among nations as well as the importance of the international media, communication technologies and non-state actors. In this instance, much discussion has been made on the significance of issues such as public opinion, image, prestige and relationship building in the international arena. Yet, the purpose of public diplomacy and how it should be conducted is still not clear, particularly given its recurrent misuse as mere 'propaganda' (BERRIDGE, 2010) or 'international public relations' (CHARLES, 2001; DEAN, 2006; KENDRICK, 2004; MELISEN, 2005). The way a country uses public diplomacy in order to obtain 'soft power' and to influence other countries' behavior is also subject to some uncertainty (HAM, 2010).

Having said that, this article is an attempt to lift the veil on the connection between public diplomacy practices and some tenets of the English School. The overall argument is that in the context of an anarchical society of states that govern themselves through shared institutions, norms and values, public diplomacy is an important instrument to influence the manufacturing of the normative and moral framework that functions as the backdrop to world politics. It will be held that states with adroit, effective public diplomacy policies are those with the greatest social power.

The first section of the article will clarify the meaning of public diplomacy and analyze its importance in today's international politics. It will be held that public diplomacy goes beyond the notion of country image formation and branding, being more appropriate to understand it from a three-dimensional perspective: news management, strategic

communication and relationship building. The second section briefly explore the concept of “social power” and its relationship with the construction of norms and institutions, which are deemed as essential to provide order and justice for the international society of sovereign states, as far as the English School is concerned.

The concept of public diplomacy and its importance for today's international politics

It could be said that the public facet of diplomacy started to be consciously incorporated in international relations after the end of the I World War. The Woodrow Wilson speech on the Fourteen Points in 1918 perhaps delimits when secrecy and deceit started to be openly condemned in diplomatic practice (IYAMU, 2004, LAMBINO, 2005). Hamilton and Langhorne (1995) claim that it was the beginning of a ‘new diplomacy’ open to public inspection and control, although this initiative was more related to the public obtaining information about agreements than public involvement in international affairs. The important fact is that this new diplomacy activated a process of deliberation concerning world public opinion and its role in constraining the behavior of belligerent countries.

The term ‘public diplomacy’ was first used in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, Dean of Tufts University’s Fletcher School (US) in the creation of Fletcher of the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy (FISHER, 1972; IYAMU, 2004). According to Gullion:

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 in-

terests 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 (SNOW; TAYLOR, 2008, p. 19).

At the time when the concept ‘public diplomacy’ was first coined by Gullion, the term was used to refer to previous propaganda activities conducted by the United States government during the Cold War in order to influence public opinion abroad. Propaganda activities were fundamentally international broadcasting, such as *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty*, which intended to spread the capitalist ideology and ‘the American way of life’ throughout Communist-led Eastern Europe (STONE, 2003).

Currently, there has been much confusion about the concept of public diplomacy, which has been interchangeably used with “culture diplomacy”, “foreign propaganda”, “public relations” and “media diplomacy”, for example. Probably due to the revolution of communications technology and the role played by international media channels such as the CNN and BBC², some commentators have tended to still understand public diplomacy as mere “propaganda” or “international marketing” (BERRIDGE, 2010; CHARLES, 2001; DEAN, 2006; KENDRICK, 2004; MELLISEN, 2005). This notion is not *per se* incorrect, however it only accounts for a specific aspect of what public diplomacy largely entails. Additionally, it tends to adopt a rather ethnocentric view in the sense that it considers foreign audience as passive, in a way that it would promptly buy in the information that is being conveyed.

Ideally, public diplomacy should be regarded as a fundamental part of foreign policy and not something that comes afterwards to sell it (PETERSON,

2. The CNN effect is a concept that some authors use to refer to the influence of the international media in determining agendas and affecting international policy making. (GILBOA, 2008, p. 63).

2002). In this instance, not only is it necessary to construct a country's image, but also to bring stereotypes down, to influence international public opinion, to understand and be understood by other societies in addition to consider actors such as non-governmental individuals and organizations.

Possibly, Mark Leonard's concept of public diplomacy is the most comprehensive in the literature on this topic. He holds that the goal of diplomacy is three-fold: to transmit information, to sell a positive image of a country and to build long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies (LEONARD, 2002). In other words, public diplomacy is considered to have three dimensions: (i) daily communications; (ii) strategic communications; and (iii) relationship building.

The first dimension of public diplomacy is the management of news, which must support both the traditional diplomacy of one government and the national interest put forward by its foreign policy. It operates in a rather short-term timescale with a preventive purpose, which aims to explain the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions, in conjunction with a reactive promptitude, which should give quick responses to deal with crises that have the potential to damage a country's image. Another important point is that news management should address both non-governmental and governmental audiences, be they mass or elite.

Image formation or 'nation branding' is the second dimension of public diplomacy. Its main goal is to communicate strategic messages, supported by cultural events, in order to promote one country in the international arena. This would account for the 'selling' or 'marketing' aspect of public diplomacy, especially as an attempt to influence the foreign audience, very much like a political or advertising campaign.

Finally, the third dimension regards the development of durable relationships with key individu-

als over a long period of time via training, seminars, conferences, language teaching, scholarships as well as scientific, educational and cultural exchanges. It is important that the host country attempts to give a positive experience to the individual, although this infield image building also incurs unpleasant moments to the visitor. Nonetheless, exchange programs will eventually deepen the foreigner understanding concerning the background against which foreign policy is formulated.

Public diplomacy has therefore emerged as a response to lasting transformations of the world in which diplomacy operates, such as the greater mobility (physical and intellectual) of individuals caused by the evolution of transport and communication technologies; more access to education, which helped to create a critical mass of individuals that no longer passively accept decisions taken by governments (at home and abroad) (FISHER, 1988; ROSS, 2002); and the multitude of media channels and their growing interest in reporting issues related to international affairs (COHEN, 1986; GILBOA, 2001). Gilboa (2008) has categorized those post-Cold War and post 9/11 challenges under three interconnected revolutions in mass communication, politics and international relations. The revolution in communication technologies, which brought about the Internet and global news networks (CNN International, BBC World and Al-Jazeera, for instance), enabled states, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), communities, companies and individuals to obtain and exchange ideas at a global level. The revolution in politics regards the democratization of many societies, leading to an increasing mass participation in political processes. The revolution in international relations refers to changes in the goals and means of foreign policy. Whereas in the past states were more concerned about territory, natural resources, population and other tangible capabilities, traditionally acquired through military and economic methods,

at present intangible assets such as a favorable image and reputation around the world are progressively moving center stage.

The next section will tackle the oft-cited relation between public diplomacy and soft power. It will also present the Peter van Ham's concept of "social power" (2010) and how it relates with the creation of norms and values in the international arena.

Social Power and Norms Creation

The practice of public diplomacy is oftentimes associated with the Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (NYE, 2004, p. x). The overall idea is that public diplomacy and the wielding of soft power help to advance and legitimize a country's foreign policy in the eyes others. Accordingly, whereas in the past military clout and how to operate armed conflicts would be crucial in determining the level of power of a state, modern world affairs demand additional sources of power as well as different ways to develop and apply them. As it became clear for the United States in the war of Iraq in 2003, military success and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime were not sufficient to legitimize the intervention and, what is more important, to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world and lessen the anti-Americanism that abounded in Islamic societies (HAM, 2010).

Since Nye first introduced the idea of 'soft power' in the early 1990s,³ several other related concepts have been created to add different nuances such as "sharp power", "sweet power", "sticky power" and "smart power" (HAM, 2010) and some

authors have also tried to analyze the interplay between soft and hard power (HAM, 2005, 2008 e 2010; NYE, 2008). Recently, Peter van Ham (2010) has come up with a more embracing concept that he coined as "social power". Ham believes that whereas Nye's perception is overly agent-centered, besides being focused on attraction and persuasion, the concept of "social power" goes beyond that notion since it comprises discursive power, norm-advocacy, agenda-setting, the impact of media and communications and practices such as place branding and public diplomacy (HAM, 2010, p. 8). According to Ham (2010), social power is "the ability to set standards, and create norms and values that are deemed legitimate and desirable, without resorting to coercion or payment" (p. 8).

As it can be seen, the concept of social power intertwines with one of the most important tenets of the English School, that is, the acknowledgement of the relevance of norms and values as shapers of the behavior of international actors. But how does it happen? For the comprehension of social power, normal advocacy is clearly of paramount importance. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) maintain that norm advocates are actors with "strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community" (p. 897), meaning that they will try to wield social power as a way to set agendas, build opinions, draft plans, propose policies and cognitively frame how the involved actors see the subject matters.

The state no longer monopolizes the process of rule-making, at least when it comes to "soft law", that is, "standards of good practices and codes of conduct endorsed at the international level but lacking legal standing, so that their implementation in the various countries is essentially left to the discretion of national authorities" (HAM, 2010, pp. 76 and 77). Consequently, a vast array of non-state actors now uses their expertise and authority to le-

3. The concept of soft power was originally developed by Joseph Nye in 'Bound to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power', a book published in 1990, which discussed the then prevalent view that America was in decline. (NYE, 2004., p. xi)

gitimize their claims to set standards and rules as well as to convince their peers, colleagues and their national governments. Campaigns that were coordinated by NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International are emblematic examples of how non-state actors are able to mobilize and convince big audiences for a global cause. The 1997 Ottawa Convention to ban landmines is one of the most prominent examples in which an NGO acted as a catalyst to push diplomats and national governments to embrace a cause (HOKING, 2005).

These transgovernmental policy networks thus require states to use public diplomacy as a way to influence and understand foreign publics and transnational actors. Public diplomacy has been increasingly becoming woven into the fabric of mainstream diplomatic activity and contemporary international politics, especially because traditional diplomacy should go beyond government-to-government relations for diplomats now compete with a vast array of 'non-official reporters', actors and channels of international communication, which are considerably impacting on governmental decisions taken at the international arena (FISHER, 1988; MELISSEN, 2005).

Conclusion

Interest in the psychological or the human dimension of international relations as well as touching the hearts and minds of foreign publics is not a new idea. Even purported realists such as Hans J. Morgenthau argued in his book *Politics Among Nations* (1948) that a government should gain support of the public opinion of other nations for its foreign and domestic policies. This is an idea that underscores the relationship between public attitudes in other countries and both the elaboration and implementation of foreign policies. In today's world system, this notion is even more conspicu-

ous, given the revolutions in communication technologies, politics and international relations.

This article sustained that public diplomacy and the English School perspective have some common ground, especially in what regards the use of social power by state and non-state actors in constructing norms, values and institutions. Agents that are able to find skillful ways to cognitively frame the discussion of global issues will wield the greatest power. One way of accomplishing this goal is developing effective public diplomacy policies. Hence, it could be ventured that public diplomacy has been moving from the fringes of diplomatic work, although some diplomatic services may yet not grasped the magnitude of effectively communicating with foreign publics and transnational non-state actors.

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