

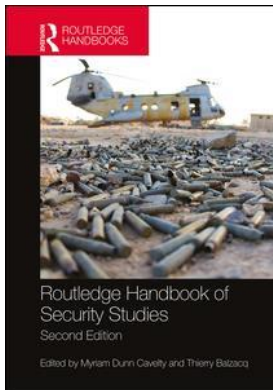
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PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN A NATIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

Nancy Snow

There is a steep learning curve between government efforts to inform, influence, and engage global publics (public diplomacy) and the need to preserve and protect the interests of the state (national security) and its people. Its key challenge today is how individuals and institutions can strike a balance between growing demands for global communications transparency and accountability, a challenge in the twenty-first century, with strategic communication classification and secrecy, the legacy of the twentieth century. In the age of WikiLeaks, information exchange is neither scarce nor sacred, and diplomacy to publics in service of national security objectives is open to scrutiny from all levels of education and ability. Public diplomacy is everybody's business because the state as primary international actor has lost its lofty spot of credibility. We trust our smart phones and our Facebook friends as much, if not more, than our elected officials, and this reality has led to many non-state actors jumping into the public diplomacy fray.

This chapter has three parts. It is written from the viewpoint of my personal experience as a former USIA official and details both the origins of public diplomacy as we know it and the changes that public diplomacy underwent as a result of 9/11.¹ The first part provides an overall overview of public diplomacy as a field of research and teaching. The second deals with the founding fathers of public diplomacy in the US, showing their influence in shaping the field. The third part shows the influence of 9/11 on public diplomacy, with particular emphasis on the turn to 'total' diplomacy in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and an overall shift towards the militarization of public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy research

The present state of public diplomacy research and literature is so broad and varied that it suffers from what was once the common refrain of late 1930s America, 'it's all propaganda, anyway' (Sproule 1997: 16). This is a field that consists of scholars, practitioners, and just about anyone who has ever taken at least one course in public diplomacy; many of those practising public diplomacy operate in the realm of non-coercive persuasion and influence, which we know better as soft power (Nye 2004) or 'smart power' (Nye 2009).

Unlike soft power, no one scholar or practitioner has the advantage in explaining just what public diplomacy is. It is at times home in public relations (Fitzpatrick et al. 2013; Golan et al.

2015) post-9/11 national security (Gregory 2008; Wiseman 2015) or modern propaganda studies that covers the post-Second World War years, including the Cold War (Carroll 1948; Green 1988; Snyder 1995). For Wiseman, public diplomacy is dichotomous when confronting enemies: ‘The US government has essentially two choices when dealing with adversarial states – isolate them or engage them’ (2015: 1); engagement is the realm of public diplomacy. Former Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes (2005) utilized the ‘four E’s’ of public diplomacy (engagement, exchanges, education, empowerment) and former Secretary of State Colin Powell described public diplomacy as nothing short of salesmanship. In explaining his support for advertising maven Charlotte Beers as public diplomacy czar, he explained just days before 9/11:

I wanted one of the world’s greatest advertising experts, because what are we doing? We’re selling. We’re selling a product. That product we are selling is democracy. It’s the free enterprise system, the American value system. It’s a product very much in demand. It’s a product that is very much needed. It is our job to be salespersons.

(Hayden 2007: 237)

Winning friends and repelling enemies has become far murkier territory in the decade-and-a-half since Powell made those remarks. What has been called ‘thick globalism’ drives today’s global competition for attention and influence. Gregory (2008: 2) describes it as a recipe consisting of ‘non-state actors, a mix of secular and religious “big ideas”, digital technologies, and new forms of communication’. All of these were not as pronounced pre-9/11 as they have become post-9/11.

It was the post-9/11 era when public diplomacy study really took off at the university level.² Public relations scholars and practitioners began to embrace it as a natural fit or sub-field to their curriculum and practice, an integration that has met with some scepticism (Snow 2015a, 2015b). Public diplomacy is not historically associated with corporate-driven public relations; moreover, public relations has its own ‘identity crisis’ problems (Heath 2001: 212) not shared by the more accepted public diplomacy. There are scholars who believe that the best way to win the hearts and minds of global publics is through the stomach, what is known as culinary diplomacy or gastrodiploacy (Chapple-Sokol, 2013; Rockower 2012). There are scholars who choose to distinguish reputable and credible public diplomacy from propaganda (Gass and Seiter 2009), with the former associated mostly with non-controversial efforts to persuade and the latter with a full spectrum of persuasion tactics, including deception, omission of facts, and/or bias (Taylor 2003).

The origins of public diplomacy

When did diplomacy to global publics as a subset of national security really start to matter? We can trace modern roots to three individuals, one military (Elihu Root), one journalist (Walter Lippmann), and one diplomat (Edmund Gullion), although there are others who contributed historically to wartime propaganda efforts (like Harold Lasswell or Edward Bernays).

Elihu Root served as Secretary of War and Secretary of State for President Theodore Roosevelt, and received the 1912 Nobel Peace Prize for his arbitration efforts. In his own words, Root (1922) explained the rise of what he called ‘popular diplomacy’ in the premiere issue of *Foreign Affairs*. The piece was so influential that upon his death, the leading journal of international relations reprinted ‘A Requisite for the Success of Popular Diplomacy’ (Root 1937). He places public opinion and public information at the heart of international negotiation that precedes or follows international conflict: ‘We have learned that war is essentially a popular business’ (Root 1922: 3). He also bemoans the lack of interest for international relations among

the isolationist and world-affairs-ignorant Americans. Root proposed nothing short of a public education overhaul. In that capacity, the former Secretary of War would also become 'founding father' to the nation's leading military education training school, the US Army War College, to train a new generation of information warriors who would help unite the social sciences (communications, psychology in particular) with the business of war.

In that same year of 1922 when Root wrote about popular diplomacy, Walter Lippmann, lifelong adviser to presidents from Wilson to Johnson, and in his time the world's most influential pencil press man, made essentially the same argument as Root. Representative government works best when specialized experts manage information and repackage it for the public, which is prone to irrational or incomplete pictures of persuasion that are largely driven by prejudice, emotion, and stereotypes. An absolute democracy can never exist, in that the world is too complex for a novice follower of public affairs to understand it; the experts must preside (McPherson 1980). In service to the best policy, organized intelligence and media censorship (propaganda) must bookend efforts to manage international affairs (cf. Steel 1980).

Root and Lippmann, whose influence is explicitly tied to intelligence and security affairs, are not regularly cited as formative influencers of the field of public diplomacy, however. That title belongs to Edmund Gullion, who is regularly mentioned as the first to coin the new US term 'public diplomacy' in the 1960s. Gullion was a career foreign service officer who later served as longtime dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Massachusetts (Schneider 2005: 159). At Fletcher, Dean Gullion established the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy in 1965, to honor the journalist turned government propagandist who served as director of the USIA under JFK before his death in April of that same year.

Public diplomacy as defined by Gullion in the mid-1960s was rather milquetoast in comparison to the total diplomacy profile it has today. Gullion explained its purpose at the dedication ceremony for the Center:

[Public diplomacy] deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies . . . encompasses dimensions of foreign relations beyond traditional diplomacy, the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications. Central to public diplomacy is the transformational flow of information and ideas..

(Szondi 2008: 8)

Public diplomacy was chosen over Edmund Gullion's preference for the term propaganda. Gullion viewed public diplomacy as a euphemistic replacement for what many Americans considered then, as now, as a dirty word (Cull 2006). It was a public relations move. The Murrow Center's directive was to build mutual understanding, not only between American diplomats and their global audiences, but also between diplomats and those who cover international relations. Gullion said shortly before his death: 'I always thought journalists and diplomats could learn a great deal from one another' (Saxon 1998). Ironically, Edward R. Murrow himself referred to his work with President John F. Kennedy as that of a government propagandist (Snow 2013).

Edmund Gullion's legacy to public diplomacy has been reduced to mostly an etymological one, which downplays his extraordinary diplomatic career that placed him in the front seat of history from South East Asia to Africa. Gullion's appointment by Kennedy as ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) in 1961 shortly after the shocking assassination of its

anti-colonial leader, Patrice Lumumba, reveals an ongoing debate in the field of public diplomacy about its natural home. Is it diplomacy, where it is linked to public affairs and public information, or military, where it takes on a tougher sheen of strategic communication (STRATCOM) and psychological operations (PSYOP)?

Gullion, the diplomat, placed priority on mutual understanding and sensitivity to the nationalistic goals of people who had lived under colonial rule. He did not view the world through a strictly bipolar (Communist/Anti-Communist) lens. As J. F. Kennedy's ambassador, Gullion sought more US support for the national revolution in the Congo, not condemnation or intervention. This put Gullion at odds with the CIA and its then director, Allen Dulles, who viewed Third World anti-colonial nationalist movements as Soviet propaganda tools that must be directly challenged and put down (Kinzer 2013).

After the Bay of Pigs debacle, a direct consequence of this policy advocated by Dulles, Edward R. Murrow pleaded with the new Democratic president to have his USIA 'in on the take-offs, not just the crash landings', a proposal that elevated public diplomacy to more of a national security concern (Bennett 2003). Kennedy's political assassination in 1963 and the subsequent buildup of troops in Vietnam set the US on a foreign policy path that would increasingly utilize public diplomacy in a battle of narratives that continued with the systematic integration of full-spectrum dominance surrounding the post-9/11 Global War on Terror (GWOT).

9/11 as tipping point

11 September 2001 was the tipping point in favour of reuniting public diplomacy in the service of national security and counterterrorism. The architectural foundation had already been in place from Truman's Psychological Strategy Board (1951) to Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 77 (1983) to Clinton's Presidential Decision Directive 68 that created an International Public Information to address problems of confusion identified during military missions in Kosovo and Haiti, 'when no US agency was empowered to coordinate US efforts to sell its policies and counteract bad press abroad' (Barber 1999; David 2009: 118).

Towards 'total' diplomacy

Less than a month after 9/11, British magazine of influence, *The Economist*, named the new post-9/11 era 'The propaganda war' (*Economist* 2001). That war preceded the invasion of Afghanistan; it involved how the United States would explain its motives and intentions to the world vis-à-vis invasion of Muslim-majority countries like Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), while it simultaneously engaged in a GWOT against Islamic terror organization al-Qaida and its host regime, the Taliban. In this propaganda war, all assets of national power and security would be deployed through a STRATCOM campaign that would make the military and Department of Defense take the lead over the Department of State on a global influence scale (Gygax and Snow 2013) that was reminiscent of a new cold war, or what Dean Acheson under Truman once called 'total diplomacy'.

In total diplomacy, as in total war, national goals require sacrifice on the part of the people in giving up peacetime privileges and rights. In return, the democratic state is required to educate the public about foreign relations management. In a total diplomacy milieu, a network of experts leads the public education effort to instruct about the rightness of mission. In the Truman total diplomacy case, Secretary of State Acheson led the cause in forcing countries to choose whose side they were on, what *Time* magazine called 'seeking allies with the grim realism of war':

We are not dealing here with the kind of situation where we can go from one country to another with a piece of litmus paper and see whether everything is true blue. The only question we should ask is whether they are determined to protect their independence against Communist aggression.

(Time 1950)

Half a century later, the US president (Bush 2001) led these public education efforts ('Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'), an indoctrination of Manichaeic principles that forced the hand of the American people to accept unpopular invasions in order to take the fight to the terrorists and win the GWOT. Just as Acheson and Truman viewed the Soviet Union as a formidable threat to US interests in geopolitical influence, so did Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Rice view al-Qaida and its offshoots in the same 'us' vs. 'them' light. The total defeat of the enemy required the total spectrum of communication. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, put it this way to explain the ratcheting up of communication efforts after 11 September 2001:

If we've learned nothing else these past eight years, it should be that the lines between strategic, operational, and tactical are blurred beyond distinction. This is particularly true in the world of communication, where videos and images plastered on the Web – or even the idea of their being so posted – can and often do drive national security decisionmaking.

(Mullen 2009: 2)

The militarization of public diplomacy

Such an 'all in' philosophy drove public diplomacy campaigns, traditionally an open-sourced diplomacy-to-publics outreach effort, into the arms of military planners inside the Department of Defense. The militarization of public diplomacy raised its internal credibility among intelligence and information specialists, but diluted its power (financially, persuasively) inside the Department of State.

For example, when I was working at the United States Information Agency in the early to mid-1990s, our annual budget was roughly \$1 billion or one three-hundredth of the budget of the US military. After 9/11, the budget for public diplomacy stayed roughly the same while the Pentagon budget rose substantively to accommodate two active wars. In a two-year span (2010–11), the US embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, funded 560 public diplomacy grants at a cost of about US \$148 million or just over \$100,000 per day. In contrast, the combined costs for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are now estimated to be over \$4 trillion.

A Stimson report, 'The Pentagon as Pitchman: Perception and Reality of Public Diplomacy' (Rumbaugh and Leatherman 2012) downplayed any rise in the military's public-diplomacy-like activities, but acknowledged that it had no figures for the two highest-budget war zones, since they were classified. Further, the report seemed to disregard what the Pentagon's own brass (e.g., Rumsfeld, Gates, Mullen) was saying about the Pentagon's pitchman role: 9/11 required its expansion.

It was Bush's former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who had proposed an Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) in October 2001 to expand PSYOP in the GWOT, not unprecedented for the US, which had done the same in the Cold War and Vietnam War. The office lasted just a week in the wake of a *The New York Times* hit piece reporting the concerns of unidentified Pentagon officials, most likely senior public affairs officials, who forecast a loss of credibility in

the wake of massaged information: ‘The Pentagon is developing plans to provide news items, possibly even false ones, to foreign media organizations as part of a new effort to influence public sentiment and policy-makers in both friendly and unfriendly countries’ (Dao and Schmitt 2002).

The OSI may have gone under, but its legacy was preserved in the form of a counter-insurgency doctrine of post-9/11 that required the new twenty-first century soldier to be a nation-builder as much as a traditional warrior, tracking, capturing, or killing the enemy. The 2008 Army’s Field Manual (Caslen 2011: 84) established ‘full-spectrum operations – simultaneous offensive, defensive, and stability or civil support operations – as the central concept of Army capabilities’ in the Afghanistan and Iraq theaters.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who had served both Republican and Democratic presidents, described the battle of narratives between the Soviet Union and the United States as a mixture of both military and non-military efforts, including the work of the US Agency for International Development and the US Information Agency. ‘In all, these non-military efforts – these tools of persuasion and inspiration – were indispensable to the outcome of the defining ideological struggle of the twentieth century. I believe that they are just as indispensable in the twenty-first century – and maybe more so’ (Gates 2008). Gates would become the chief architect, along with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, of what came to be known as ‘smart power’ – a national defence strategy that combined the military with the civilian, the public with the private, to address the new counterterrorism challenges.

In other words, nations cannot rely strictly on soft-power strategies – using attraction to preference outcomes – or entirely on hard power – using coercion, threat of force, payment – to thwart outcomes. At times, both sources are needed to ‘get smart’ (Nye 2009) in foreign policy. Consider, for instance, the military and economic power of the United States after Japan’s triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear power plant breakdown) known as 3/11. The US military relief mission Operation Tomodachi was able to rebuild roads and airstrips and provide victim assistance in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. It generated enormous goodwill for the United States. A June 2011 survey by the Washington, DC-based Pew Center showed that 85 per cent of the Japanese had a favourable opinion towards the United States (Wike 2012), nearly a decade-high percentage in a country that has had mixed feelings about the US military presence in its post-Second World War history.

The position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, first created under President Clinton in 1999, failed to produce memorable occupants, except for the eighteen-month tenure of Charlotte Beers (2001–3) and the two-year tenure of Bush’s closest communications confidante, Karen Hughes (2005–7). But neither Beers nor Hughes was memorable for being particularly effective in this position; rather, each woman was remembered for her respective reputation – Beers in advertising and Hughes in public relations and press communications. The around-the-clock persuasive news campaign to ‘sell’ the GWOT objectives to the American people and an overseas public was placed in the hands of a network of experts that included high-ranking military officials as well as military veterans and military analysts – a military-academic-industrial network that David Barstow (2008) referred to in *The New York Times* as the ‘Pentagon’s Hidden Hand.’

While the American people were very much on board with Afghanistan when nerves were frayed and anger was raging for military action in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, it was a much harder sell of sacrifice for Iraq, which, to the amateur international relations observer, seemed remotely tied, at best, to the attacks of 9/11. In relation to Afghanistan and Iraq, global publics were never swayed, raising the ever-present question of why propaganda designed exclusively for an overseas audience seemed to have its greatest impact on the domestic audience.

The Council on Foreign Relations' 'Finding America's Voice' report (2003) stated what dozens of similar task forces and white papers concluded – that public diplomacy influence was part of the battle of narratives in the US-led GWOT:

Washington must realize that defending the homeland, seeking out and destroying terrorists, and using public diplomacy to make it easier for allies to support the United States and to reduce the lure of terrorism are all parts of the same battle.

(Peterson et al. 2003: 6)

This report from the most influential elite foreign affairs organization came on the heels of the US invasion of Iraq and President George W. Bush's triumphant 'Mission Accomplished' speech aboard the USS Lincoln, and hereafter secured the Department of Defense as the leading government entity involved in America's total diplomacy approach to the GWOT.

The Department of State would take a back seat to the DoD's efforts to sell a security-led and military-central public diplomacy. The Defense Science Board Task Force (2004) calls its efforts 'strategic communication,' consisting of four core instruments: public diplomacy, public affairs, non-military US international broadcasting services, and open military information operations. Problems arise when public affairs and public diplomacy careerists at the Department of State or in overseas embassies try to do their jobs in an international communications arena that they define as overt and open and not subject to the military intelligence environment tendency to look at the world in terms of bipolar realities (Domino Theory, GWOT, Cold War).

George Washington University scholar Bruce Gregory (2005) explains the problems that are inherent in this. He refers to public diplomacy as an open instrument of statecraft where successful outcomes are driven by perceived believability and trustworthiness. In contrast, military and intelligence instruments of statecraft use both overt and covert forms of influence that rely on deception and black and gray forms of propaganda. Firewalls of protection across the information influence spectrum often break down and impact the ability of public diplomacy professionals to do their jobs:

Political leaders, ambassadors, military commanders, and public affairs officers know that to persuade others they must be credible. To build consent for strategies, there must be a basis for trust in what they say and do, an inclination by others to believe, and perceptions of their reliability over time. Credibility is diminished when words and actions do not match, when statements directed to multiple audiences are inconsistent, when overt and covert activities are seen to be co-funded and co-located.

(Gregory 2005: 17)

The firewalls of protection between information warfare and open statecraft broke down for good when the events of 11 September 2001 took place. The surprise attacks served to spark efforts to incorporate communication technologies into the service of the US national security framework. Security-above-all and a net-centric philosophy in the war on terror targeted radical Muslims particularly and all Muslims generally, who were thought to be susceptible to the grips of those who sought to attack US interests around the world. Senior diplomat, Richard Holbrooke, who had served as President Clinton's US representative to the United Nations and who would later be appointed special representative for the AfPak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) region under President Obama, accurately described this new war from the start as a battle of narratives:

Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or – if you really want to be blunt – propaganda. But whatever it is called, defining what this war is really about in the minds of the 1 billion Muslims in the world will be of decisive and historic importance.

(Holbrooke 2001)

As the wars in two theaters waged on for years and the war in Afghanistan became the longest war in US history (2001–14), US military top brass acknowledged their deficit in the perception game. Admiral Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, projected sensitivity to a culture-learning perspective that reflects the US military missteps taken in Pakistan and Afghanistan that favoured the short-term hunting, killing, and capturing of the targeted enemy over the longer-term relationship-building task of rebuilding a society from a war zone:

No, our biggest problem isn't caves; it's credibility. Our messages lack credibility because we haven't invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven't always delivered on promises. The most common questions that I get in Pakistan and Afghanistan are: 'Will you really stay with us this time?' 'Can we really count on you?' I tell them that we will and that they can, but when it comes to real trust in places such as these, I don't believe we are even in Year Zero yet. There's a very long way to go.

(Mullen 2009)

On the other side of the Potomac River from the Pentagon sat Foggy Bottom, where State Department leadership downplayed the propaganda/security angle in favour of a public diplomacy emphasis on long-term relationship building. In a speech titled 'Public Diplomacy – A National Security Imperative', and presented at the Washington, DC think tank, Center for a New American Security, Under Secretary of State Judith McHale put it succinctly: 'This is not a propaganda contest – it is a relationship race' (2009). Her prescription for rebuilding America's loss of credibility generally, but also specific to the two long wars, was to utilize a hybrid model of traditional engagement and cutting-edge technology:

Broadly speaking, public diplomacy operates on two levels. First, communication. This is the air game, the radio and TV broadcasts, the websites and media outreach that all seek to explain and provide context for US policies and action; and second, engagement, the ground game of direct people-to-people exchanges, speakers, and embassy-sponsored cultural events that build personal relationships.

(McHale 2009)

This getting back to basics approach of the Department of State was a continuation of the philosophy of her predecessors, like former Ambassador to Morocco Margaret Tutwiler (2003) who had said at her confirmation hearing in October of that year that Washington needed 'to do a much better job of listening. I have served in two Administrations in Washington and one from overseas. As much as we would like to think Washington knows best, we have to be honest and admit we do not necessarily always have all the answers.' The problem with Tutwiler, as it was with public diplomacy leaders in place at State, is that more often than not they rotated in and out or disappeared altogether without cementing any lasting legacy. At six months, Tutwiler's tenure was the shortest. The US military may wish for the Department of State to take the lead in public diplomacy, but with such vacuum in leadership at the helm (Armistead 2010) DoD has stepped in to fill the void with its own strategic communication, information operations, and psychological operations.

Conclusion

It has been almost a decade and a half since the events of 11 September 2001. The 9/11 Commission Report of 2004 called on what amounts to a total diplomacy in support of a total war that would include 'all elements of national power: diplomacy, intelligence, covert action, law enforcement, economic policy, foreign aid, public diplomacy, and homeland defense' (Kean and Hamilton 2004: Executive Summary).

With the drawdown of US and NATO forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are likely to see some shift away from the post-9/11 ideologically-driven and security-driven models of public diplomacy, although questions remain as to the matter of degree. Will the rise in Cold War-style rhetoric between the United States and Russia, and the rise of the Islamic State, in reality and in media consciousness, perpetuate this full-spectrum dominance in shaping perceptions and attitudes? Perhaps so. Most assuredly, the US model of public diplomacy, which has favoured the military-security paradigm tactical approach to 'winning hearts and minds', will remain the dominant model in funding and personnel, but not necessarily effectiveness.

The balance between government's drive for credibility through more openness and transparency, and non-state actors, many adversarial to state interests, to use whatever means necessary to win allegiance to their cause, puts democracy – and accountability – driven public diplomacy at a distinct disadvantage. As Gregory notes (2008: 2), 'Network societies challenge organizational hierarchies. Attention – not information – is today's scarce resource.' With or without public diplomacy, the balance of power of old, which favoured superpowers and big-power parity and stability, is neither equipped for nor fully invested in the challenges faced by the imbalance of power today.

Notes

- 1 The author was a United States Information Agency (USIA) official from 1992 to 1994, which was the US Government's official independent agency of foreign affairs (1953–99) devoted to public diplomacy. In 1999, USIA public diplomacy efforts were integrated into the Department of State, but many strategies and tactics of public diplomacy can be found throughout government agencies today. In the US, the Department of Defense uses affiliate names like strategic communication and information operations.
- 2 The author was involved with the establishment and expansion of two leading US postgraduate programmes in public diplomacy (University of Southern California; Syracuse University), as well as internationally (UiTM; Tsinghua University; Interdisciplinary Center-Herzilya).

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