

Refereed Paper # 3

Post-9/11 U.S. Public Diplomacy in Eastern Europe: Dialogue via New Technologies or Face-to-Face Communication?

Antoaneta M. Vanc, Ph.D.
Department of Public Relations
Quinnipiac University

Keywords

Public diplomacy, public relations, dialogue, relationships, engagement, communication, new technologies, social media

Abstract

Has the fabric of communication between the United States and the countries once behind the Iron Curtain changed from simply delivering messages through international broadcasters to collaborative relationships built on dialogue? This work seeks to discern whether diplomats have embraced and applied dialogic principles with foreign publics by examining how U.S. diplomats engage with foreign publics and what tools they use to engage in dialogue. Interviews with U.S. diplomats in Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia show that U.S. diplomats embraced and applied dialogic principles, and employed dialogue to establish long-term collaborative relations with people abroad. Communicating with foreign publics in transitional societies required a multifaceted approach that required a variety of communication tools, among which the prevailing preference was for face-to-face communication.

Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, prompted the United States to review and improve its public diplomacy efforts around the world. The assessment resulted in disagreement and the views on “what an effective public diplomacy should look like or what it should achieve” (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 6) were split. One group believed that U.S. public diplomacy can do a better job communicating its message abroad, while the other believed that “better messaging techniques are not the key to public diplomacy’s effectiveness in a world transformed by globalization and new technology” (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 6). As part of the former group, the 9/11 Commission recommended that the United States better define what its message is and what it stands for, while at the same time defending its values and ideals abroad. As part of the latter group, public diplomacy scholars and practitioners have advocated for a new public diplomacy which

should consist of new forms of engagement based on dialogue and collaboration.

For much of the twentieth century, public diplomacy was viewed as an instrument used by governments to “engage and persuade foreign publics for the purpose of influencing their governments” (Gregory, 2011, p. 353). The monologue style of communication, often viewed as “an extended lecture” held by an “overly busy professor lecturing the world with little time for class discussion or questions” was seen as the result of a “lack of ability to listen to other visions of freedom” (Quainton, 2006, p. 29-34). Not surprisingly, a wave of public diplomacy scholars have “criticized existing government practices that conceived of ‘PD’ as mere information work characterized by one-way communication to foreign publics and relatively little leeway for embassies in their contacts with foreign publics” (Melissen, 2011, p. 9). However, a change toward a dialogic approach required a “change of attitude and style as well as a shift toward new techniques and technologies (Quainton, 2006).

The new communication environment has posed new challenges for diplomats as the tools of engagement have multiplied and the internet has continued to enable endless opportunities for interaction through the embassy website, embassy blog discussions, digital conferences, Wiki collaborative websites, Tweeter, or/and Facebook. Today, public diplomacy remains an instrument, but it is used for other purposes. As noted by Gregory (2011), public diplomacy has come to mean an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes and behavior; to build and manage relationships; and to influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (p. 353).

The relationship management paradigm and the dialogic principles proposed by Fitzpatrick (2007, 2011) have opened new avenues for investigating public diplomacy practices. In Fitzpatrick’s (2007) view, all public diplomacy efforts should “contribute to the establishment and maintenance of positive supportive relationships with strategic publics” (p. 208) while public diplomats become the “managers of institutional relationships, in which communication is viewed as a tool rather than an objective” (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 206).

The main purpose of this study is to explore the shift in U.S. public diplomacy from “telling the America’s story to the world” to “engaging with the world” during the years following the events of September 11, 2001. More specifically, this work explores whether U.S. diplomats continue to adopt the one-way style of communication specific to the Cold war or have embraced new forms of engagement based on dialogue with the people of other countries. In addition, while examining how U.S diplomats engage with foreign publics, this work seeks to identify the communication tools diplomats employ to dialogue with foreign public. Finally, this work seeks to discern whether diplomats have embraced and applied dialogic principles while engaging with foreign publics and examines the implications for public diplomacy practice.

To explore these issues, this study focuses on U.S. public diplomacy in Eastern Europe, specifically Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The selection of this region is

based on the assumption that after the fall of Communism, countries in Eastern Europe have become an area of strategic interest for the United States. Several reasons justify this statement. First, from a geostrategic perspective, Eastern Europe's location is important to the United States, since Russia is not yet a stable country and its future is unpredictable. Second, most countries in Eastern Europe have supported the United States in the war against terrorism and Islamic extremism. Third, countries in Eastern Europe are not yet advanced democracies due to their problems with corruption, economic and financial instability. These countries are in similar phases of economic and political development, and are members of the European Union. Fourth, Eastern Europe is a region which offers various business opportunities to the American companies. It is a region with educated workforce and skilled labor. Finally, these countries have very good political, economic, and military relations with the United States.

Theoretical framework

This paper employs dialogue theory to discuss the transformation of public diplomacy practices from "monologue to dialogue" (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008) or from "messaging to mutuality" (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Public relations scholars Kent and Taylor (2002) noted that an organizational commitment to dialogue reveals "the nature of the organization-public relationship by placing emphasis on the relationship" (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 24). Kent and Taylor (2002) traced the concept of dialogue to relational communication theory and said that "its inclusion in the public relations vocabulary is an important step toward understanding how organizations can build relationships that serve both organizational and public interest" (p. 21). In this view, Fitzpatrick (2007) noted that "effective public relations produces supportive public relationships that are built on trust and accommodation created through genuine dialogue produced by two-way symmetrical communication that is designed to accommodate dual interests" (p. 205).

Fitzpatrick (2011) explored U.S. public diplomacy through the lens of dialogue theory and noted that a relational model of public diplomacy established on principles of dialogue and mutuality offers a promising framework for improving U.S. international relations. The author raised important questions about the feasibility of *genuine* dialogue as a defining conceptual framework for public diplomacy in the United States and other parts of the world. In doing so, the author noted that nations must "engage with" rather than "communicate to" foreign publics in the pursuit of more collaborative relations (Fitzpatrick, 2011).

In a comprehensive analysis of the meaning of dialogue in public diplomacy practice, Fitzpatrick (2011) proposed eight criteria for a dialogic model of public diplomacy. These are, 1. *mutuality* (reciprocity of parties and interests and opportunity for expression); 2. *presence* (parties should be available and open to each other, and involved in current matters); 3. *commitment* (proactive in engaging with others and willingness to participate in efforts to reach mutually satisfying outcomes). 4. *authenticity* (presumption of honesty, transparency and genuineness by each party); 5. *trust* (authority and power

should be set aside, also each party should be empathetic to the other); 6. *respect* (parties should recognize and accept “strange otherness,” or the unfamiliar views and unique traits of others); 7. *collaboration* (sincere engagement between parties in which the relationship is not viewed in terms of winning or losing or as an attempt to defeat the other’s ideas); 8. *risk* (parties accept the uncertainty of dialogic outcomes).

Literature review

For public relations scholars, the concept of dialogue is an important component that lies at the foundation of long-term relationships. In public relations practice, a “relational approach, grounded in dialogic principles, requires that the organization tailor communication and organizational action to specific recipients based upon relational needs” (Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008, p. 29).

Public diplomacy scholars have a similar belief. Although one-way communication strategies are important at critical moments and for day-to-day explanations of policy (Nye, 2008), reciprocal communication is the foundation of lasting friendships between individuals because in public diplomacy, dialogue is a way to improve relationships or to increase understanding (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008). Hence, to achieve mutual understanding, effective public diplomacy requires governments and private enterprises active in the international realm to communicate with foreign public by moving from monologue to dialogue (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008). As noted by Cowan and Arsenault (2008), “nothing helps build mutual understanding as well as a thoughtful dialogue. And nothing creates a sense of trust and mutual respect as fully as a meaningful collaboration” (p. 11).

Brown (2002) viewed dialogue as one of public diplomacy’s greatest achievements, because “by maintaining an on-going international dialogue, public diplomacy assures linkages between the U.S. and other nations, even when government-to-government relations are struggling” (p. 9). Scholars argued that to achieve the public diplomacy goal of “open dialogue and the sharing of ideas” (Metzl, 2001, p. 84), public diplomacy should become “a dialogical, largely collaborative way of working in diplomacy” which “takes on board lessons from others” (Melissen, 2004, p. 122). Fisher and Bröckerhoff (2008) also noted that as part of a dialogic approach, listening “can sometimes achieve more in changing people’s behavior than talking to them,” and “can open up new territory for mutuality” (p. 23). Hence, today’s public diplomacy should be increasingly about dialogue and engagement rather than monologue and should be based on listening to ‘the other’ with the focus on long-term relationship-building (Melissen, 2011).

Engagement

Engagement is one of the core principles of public diplomacy. In Gregory’ (2011) view, engagement is based on “dialogue, reasoned argument, openness to the opinions of others, learning through questions, not talking at cross purposes and working out common meanings” (p. 357). Melissen (2011) noted that diplomatic engagement with foreign people has been “instrumental in opening up the traditionally closed domain of

accredited practitioners and made diplomats more visible than they have ever been” (p. 2). Most importantly the author noted, “collaborating with those outside government and operating in the field is fast becoming a necessary condition of success in diplomacy” (Melissen, 2011, p. 2).

Human interaction is the most popular and powerful method of engagement. In fact, Kiehl (2006) noted that human interaction “at the grassroots level is an unbeatable way to generate dialogue” (p. 5). Similarly, grassroots public diplomacy engagement with an extensive commitment to collective actions and emphasis on activities requires various methods of engagement aimed at reaching a dialogue between diplomats and foreign publics. Among the most common public diplomacy activities that generate dialogue “exchange programs, cultural programs, support for English-language and American studies programs and representational events” (Sreebny, 2006, p. 94) represent communication actions essential for building long-term relationships with foreign publics. Sound familiar? According to Kiehl (2006), these methods of engagement “have been in use for more than sixty years (p. 5).

Nevertheless, today’s globalized revolution in communication technology has changed the rules of engagement and the way people want to interact (Davidson, 2008). The international dialogue between governments and foreign people can take place through an assortment of communication tools and new information technology. As Johnson (2006) noted, “information technology has eliminated one physical barrier after another to global communication” (p. 103).

However, although the use of internet in public diplomacy practices is viewed as essential, it remains somewhat unexplored and underutilized. For example, Murphy (2006) noted, “we need to get out and about more on the web, recognizing that we need to go to where other people are, rather than expecting them to come to us” (p. 14). Similarly, Potter (2008) highlighted the innovative potential of Web 2.0 applications such as the wikis, blogs and social networking applications toward the benefits for public diplomacy. The author noted, “Web 2.0 will redefine how foreign ministries communicate and collaborate with publics (and their own employees) more than any previous technologies (Potter, 2008, p. 122). However, Johnson (2006a) noted that although several steps have already been taken to promote international dialogue through the World Wide Web, they continue to “feel tentative and exploratory” (p. 106).

Overall, a review of the public diplomacy literature reveals an increasing number of scholars advocating for a transformation of public diplomacy practices from “messaging to mutuality” (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Specifically, scholars argue for a shift from a one-way communication approach centered on disseminating messages, to a two-way communication approach based on shared understanding and mutual benefit, centered on personal engagement and new technologies.

Research questions

In order to explore U.S. public diplomacy's shift toward dialogue and mutuality, this work looks into U.S. public diplomacy practices in Eastern Europe. Specific objectives were to investigate how U.S. diplomats communicated with foreign publics (i.e. one-way or two-way communication), the communication tools they employed (i.e. media, personal engagement or new technologies), and the role of dialogue in public diplomacy practice. Also, this work explored whether diplomats have embraced and applied dialogic principles in their efforts to engage with foreign publics. The following research questions were proposed:

RQ 1: How do U.S. diplomats communicate with foreign publics?

RQ 2: What tools do U.S. diplomats employ to communicate with foreign publics?

RQ 3: What is the role of dialogue in U.S. public diplomacy practice?

RQ 4: Have U.S. diplomats embraced dialogic principles? If so, which ones?

Method

Sample

A combination of snowballing sampling technique and internet search was employed to reach participants. The only criterion for selecting participants for this study was that they served in a U.S. embassy in an Eastern European country during 2001 – 2009. A total of 14 U.S. diplomats who served in U.S. embassies in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania participated in the study. Participants included six ambassadors and five public affairs officers representing all four countries, and three deputy chiefs of mission representing three countries (Poland, Slovakia and Romania). Positions held by these participants are pivotal to the success of an embassy. For example, the ambassador is the primary representative of the President in the respective countries, the deputy chief of mission is number two in command in an embassy and assumes the chargé d'affaires role when the ambassador is not in post, and the public affairs officer oversees educational and cultural exchanges and press and information activities. The participants represent the diplomatic corps in these embassies. Given the confidentiality agreement, participants' names and other identifiers were removed from text.

Data collection

Data were collected during long interviews conducted by phone. The interview guide was unstructured and allowed for open-ended responses to the research questions. During the interviews, which lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, probes were used to elicit information pertaining to the research questions. For example, probes were used

to clarify what communication approach was used (i.e. one-way or two-way communication) in specific situations, to provide details regarding the communication process for both one-way and two-way approaches, the steps diplomats took to engage with targeted foreign publics, and the communication channels (what tools) they used to engage with foreign publics.

Method of analysis

Since participants did not agree to be tape-recorded, interviews were transcribed by hand during the conversation, and for accuracy of transcripts, participants were sometimes asked to repeat or clarify their answers. An initial coding was conducted after each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All transcripts together with the initial coding were carefully gathered for analysis. The examination of data revealed redundancy in responses which were then aggregated around central themes.

Findings

The analysis considered all respondents' comments and examined all the themes that emerged from the data. In the following section, quotes are used to illustrate the findings that emerged across the interviews. Several contradictions are discussed.

RQ 1: How do U.S. diplomats communicate with foreign public?

RQ 2: What tools do diplomats use to communicate with foreign publics?

The idea that the embassy needed to engage foreign publics in every one of its activities was acknowledged as a leitmotif across the interviews. The analysis revealed two main trends in how the embassy communicated with foreign publics: one, by focusing on messaging via media and new technologies, and two, by engaging with foreign publics directly by means of personal engagement.

1. Messaging

Raising awareness of the embassy's messages was an important activity and diplomats employed various means to get the message in the media, on the World Wide Web, or to specific target publics via new technologies.

We communicated via every way we could. We used all the communication tools. So, we were blitzing across multiple media channels. (Ambassador)

Communicating with media is a very powerful way of carrying out public diplomacy. Not that personal, but still gets the message across. (Ambassador)

Whether local or national, TV, radio or print, media were viewed as the most powerful way to reach the largest number of people in foreign countries. For example, media were used as direct way to communicate with foreign publics via interviews, press releases or weekly roundtables with reporters and editors.

We would certainly try to place in [*their*] media articles written in Washington, so we were trying to reach a broader audience that way. (Deputy Chief of Mission)

We would issue press releases to the media from the embassy and I would have interviews in the media with different publications, magazines or newspapers on various issues that would come up. (Ambassador)

The nightly TV news was probably the best way to communicate, as well as interviews to the newspapers, the media. (Ambassador)

In addition, when a U.S. speaker would present at specific events or conferences, that speaker would also visit various local institutions, companies and schools. Most importantly, the speaker would give interviews to the media, participate in televised conversations promoting and making visible the embassy's concern for or interest in a particular topic.

Another way to disseminate U.S. messages was to invite media to all embassy events. Hence, indirectly, media were used to disseminate topical messages at conferences and events, during diplomats' visits with local leaders or meetings with various target audiences.

On an initiative of concern for both of us, we had the ambassador go out in a very public forum, and with all the media there, we had to be out and talking with them. (PAO)

I was the most traveled ambassador in the whole country. When the local media knew the American ambassador was in town, they covered it. (Ambassador)

However, even though television was considered the most high impact method of disseminating the U.S. message, participants also acknowledged its main drawback: the language incongruity. Participants recognized the irony of trying to communicate in English with foreign a population who spoke a different language. In fact, participants sometimes contradicted themselves in the same breath.

Obviously television is the most high impact way of communicating with people. But in some ways is also difficult of communicating particularly if it is complex ideas. Because, I was in [*a foreign country*], I do not speak fluent [*their foreign language*], and there would be translation or voice over

into [*the foreign language*]. That is less desirable. But TV is actually the high impact. (Ambassador) (*Identifiers removed*)

Embassy's Website

Another way to disseminate the U.S. message was via each U.S. embassy's website in the respective countries. An important issue noted by participants was the value of posting information and photographs from the embassy's events, introducing the U.S. and local speakers or sharing stories from various programs and conferences in which U.S. diplomats participated.

When someone goes to the website I want them to see our priorities very clearly there. I want them to see what we have done for [*them*] lately on various subjects. I want that out there always and constantly being refreshed. I want photographs, speakers that come to town and little stories. We had to have our messages out there. (Ambassador) (*Identifiers removed*)

The website was viewed as a controlled vehicle of promoting U.S. values, foreign policies and news abroad, as well as "major U.S. policy statements, so that people know what is going on in the U.S." (Ambassador).

Unexpectedly, a deficiency of the embassy's website was in the way it was viewed by participants. For example, participants believed that given the sheer amount of information available on the website, foreign publics were abundantly and correctly informed about the embassy's priorities. However, even though the website provided plentiful information, it was in fact described as an information-pull technology and required one's curiosity and motivation to access it.

We began creating a website, so that people could go to the website to see what kinds of activity that we were doing. (PAO)

That is another way the embassy is on, through its information channel. You need to get tuned to that. (Ambassador)

We had a monthly newspaper posted on the embassy website. (Ambassador)

The embassy's website had a lot of information for people. We put information up there all the time. (Ambassador)

New Communication Channels

All participants noted the use of phones and emails for quick communication between U.S. diplomats and already established contacts in the respective countries. In addition,

an embassy's local employees used these communication tools to establish first contacts with various people of interest. The analysis showed that new technologies were used in mundane internal activities but were rarely employed as communication tools with broader numbers of audiences. Introducing new technologies, participants noted, took adjusting from both sides: the diplomats, who had to be trained to work with them and foreign publics who may or may not be ready for them.

We are trying to incorporate new technologies that are appropriate here. We are testing to see what our officers are willing to do and what we are capable of doing. From time to time I say, "I wish we could do that," but we don't have the staff trained, we don't have the technology or audiences are not ready for that yet. So, we try out new things – if they work fine, but if they don't, we put the tool back in the toolkit and try something different here (PAO).

Only participants from two countries noted the use of new communication tools, such as text messages in the form of SMS (short message service between cell phones) and the embassy blog.

Short Message Service (SMS)

According to participants, one new communication tool tested in Eastern Europe was the short message service. One participant said that, although "some other U.S. embassies use a lot of instant messaging to get the U.S. messages out, that doesn't work here" (PAO). The reason is two-fold. One, it is not because the population in Eastern Europe does not have a cell phone, but because the system requires subscribers to pay to receive their messages. One participant noted, "nobody is going to really appreciate getting messages from the embassy that they have to pay for" (PAO). Second, the instant messaging was viewed too personal and somewhat irrelevant, "people use the SMS for personal things, and their interest in foreign affairs and foreign policy is very [country] centric (PAO). (*Identifiers removed*).

An interesting note was made, when participants discussed the irrelevance of instant text messaging toward establishing a dialogue with the aim of long-term relationship building with foreign public.

We can all create relationships now by email or phone, but I find that the most important thing is actually to sit down with someone and listen to their story, and learn what it is that motivates them, what it is that they want to accomplish. (Deputy Chief of Mission)

Even though we are using all these electronic media and some people seem to be satisfied by the instantaneous ability to deliver messages, I am not sure how influential that is in the long run, in terms of long-term relationship building. Maybe that instant, initial access provides you with a foot in the door, but if we are going to have decent conversations with

someone, we still have to have the person-to-person communication. And all the instant messages in the world won't get that for you. (PAO)

Blog

Only participants from one country noted the use of the embassy's blog to maintain dialogue with foreign publics. In this U.S. embassy, diplomats were encouraged to disseminate the U.S. message on the embassy's blog, but most importantly, take into consideration the feedback received on it. However, a contradiction was revealed when participants noted the need to employ other types of media to address the issues that would surface on this medium.

There were times when you'd have to address certain messages that were out and were not correct. So, we had to stand up and correct the record. Some were answered in a more quiet way, some we had to decide how we can respond to them to set the record straight in a bigger way that would have a bigger coverage. For example, give a TV interview. (Ambassador)

2. Engagement

Beyond striving to make U.S. messages omnipresent across all media channels, diplomats engaged with foreign publics with the aim to find "communal interests" and to ensure "that whatever the discussion is about, you are actually listening and responding to the other persons' concerns" (PAO). Participants noted the country specific public diplomacy programs that enabled them to travel around the country and engage in open dialogue with foreign publics.

We went around the country, stayed overnight and met with as many people as we could, when we made these visits. I had the opportunity to visit citizens of small towns, meet the leaders, the mayor of various cities, the school heads, we also went to hospitals. (Ambassador)

I think that to reach people on a human relationship, the visits to towns are very important, because that way you meet with mayors. Then of course they put all that information out to all the town citizens that I was there, that we visited, and what we talked about. So people get the word. (Ambassador)

Other venues for dialogue and engagement with foreign publics were fairs, local events and festivals, because "we have to be talking with the opinion leaders in the field on whatever their interest might be and well beyond that, to the broadest public that we can" (PAO). For example, in Romania a successful collaboration between U.S. business and the U.S. embassy resulted in an annual job fair for students, which has been taking place every year since. In Hungary, the ambassador participated in travel fairs to

promote tourism in the U.S., while in Slovakia, the ambassador participated in local festivals and was received with flags. One participant remembered, “I sang a song in [*their language*] and they ended up sing it with me” (Ambassador). (*Identifiers removed*).

Most Effective Communication Tools

Overall, participants noted that the most effective way to communicate with foreign publics ranged from very informal, where diplomats would talk with people on the street, at a movie theater, a sports game, or a supermarket where they had a chance for conversation, all the way to delivering formal speeches to interested groups, or TV appearances. Embassy events and programs were also considered effective tools in communicating with foreign publics, “a lot of activities to get people involved – that is one of the things we find the people are most attracted to” (PAO).

Face-to-face conversations were viewed as humanized communication and such engagement in dialogue had ripple effects with the foreign publics. Regardless of the program initiative, the participants noted the importance of showing willingness to implement them through personal engagement. Person-to-person engagement was viewed the foundation of executing public diplomacy programs abroad. Participants noted that in Eastern Europe people are “very personal,” and stressed the importance of personal encounters, “nothing like looking someone in the eyes and shaking their hand” (PAO).

I think is true everywhere that people want to see you, they want to talk with you, they want to shake your hand, and they want to know that you are a real person, not some distant voice, and I think that that is particularly important here (PAO).

RQ 3: What is the role of dialogue in U.S. public diplomacy practice?

RQ 4: Have U.S. diplomats embraced dialogic principles? If so, which ones?

It was obvious throughout the interviews that using the full toolkit of public diplomacy programs also meant engaging in dialogue with foreign publics. According to participants, the embassy personnel were in constant dialogue with various groups of people in each respective country. For example, during local or national elections, the political section had people traveling around the country to talk with people about the election process and to understand foreign people’s perceptions regarding the “democratic process, what they think the government could do better, and what their complaints were” (Ambassador). Similarly, the economic section was “talking with business groups and farmers about their prospects and their future goals” (Ambassador). Participants emphasized that they wanted to engage in dialogue with foreign publics, listen to their concerns and be open for discussions, because “people want to have dialogue, [*they*] want to have their opinions valued” (PAO). (*Identifiers removed*).

It was a dialogue with the leaders in the community, whether I was meeting with the mayor, the bishop or the priest, the head of a plant, or participated in town hall meetings and open forums. (Ambassador)

I went out and exchange views in conversations as we all traveled around the country giving speeches at universities and professional groups and be prepared to answer questions on various topics. I really enjoyed going to the schools and taking questions from students in high schools and universities. (Ambassador)

Overall, participants noted dialogue's pivotal role in exploring shared interests between the United States and foreign publics, and discussed the role of dialogue as a mean to establish credibility and trust, central to building long-term relationships with the publics of another country.

The role of dialogue is at square one, is at the center. If there was ever a time when it was OK for us to lecture, and I don't ever think that it probably was, it certainly doesn't exist now. Listening is half of the conversation. So, if you are only prepared to talk and never to listen, then you are not only going to miss out in trying to engage your audience, and understanding their needs, interests and points of view. (PAO)

You need to demonstrate your openness, likeability and accessibility; willingness to participate, to join in, to be part of whatever the activity is. If you do those kinds of things, then you demonstrate genuineness, because often times these qualities give you more credibility, a bit of entry that you might not otherwise have. (PAO)

Dialogue was also viewed as a means to assist the embassy in establishing collaborations with members of civil society and in proposing country-specific public diplomacy programs. To achieve the public diplomacy goals, diplomats sought to reach in the society "through the grapevine to identify leaders and influence brokers" (PAO), to engage in and maintain dialogic relationships with likeminded people concerned with the same issues.

For example, for the works that we did on corruption, we collaborated with business groups, educational groups, government groups and the media. That was the broad based public diplomacy approach that enabled us to drive an effective campaign. (Ambassador)

We would naturally gravitate towards working with non-governmental organizations that shared similar views because is much more significant to work with a broader coalition of likeminded people. In (*foreign country*) we were much more likely to help foster longer term, more sustainable

reform, of more positive changes, through that kind of approach. (PAO)
(*Identifiers removed*).

Communicative actions such as conferences, visits, speeches, workshops, seminars, open forums, or American corners were considered the main public diplomacy tools that provided the U.S. embassy platforms for dialogue between the foreign publics and U.S. diplomats. Participants acknowledged their skills in finding a way to create the ideal context to deliver the public diplomacy message to the most important target public who would understand and hopefully like the message to further distribute it into their areas of influence.

Let's say we wanted to have an energy diversification conference. We would invite experts on energy diversification from the U.S., professors from [*local*] universities, members of the government (i.e., department of energy), students, businesses and the media. This would be a way for us to get people from various sectors of life involved in the dialogue about the topic. (Ambassador) (*Identifiers removed*)

The best way to communicate with the business community was through the chamber of commerce. Because, if we brought in a speaker to talk about something related to business, say corruption, the events would have a couple of hundred people. (Ambassador)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether U.S. public diplomacy practices moved away from disseminating messages via one-way communication and adopted a two-way communication approach based on dialogue and mutuality with foreign publics. This study found that during 2001-2009, U.S. public diplomacy in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia had a multilayered approach. The former one-way communication approach was still employed, while the latter two-way communication approach including dialogue and collaborations was also incorporated. These two main approaches were evident in how U.S. diplomats perceived communication: 1) as the objective of public diplomacy (Tuch, 1990) and therefore focusing on the message, or a tool to maintain dialogue (Fitzpatrick, 2007) by engaging with foreign public with the aim of building long-term collaborative relations.

This study supports Cowan and Arsenault (2008) view that all three layers of public diplomacy are "essential at certain times and under certain situations" (p. 11) and depend "on the characteristics of the actors involved" (p. 27). The examination of U.S. public diplomacy in Eastern Europe revealed that monologue and dialogue were appropriate in certain situations while engagement in collaborations were more effective in other. This work not only confirms Cowan and Arsenault (2008) view, but it also illustrates the necessity of a multilayered approach with monologue, dialogue and

collaborations as essential public diplomacy tools. Findings show that U.S. public diplomacy practices in Eastern Europe revolved around three central themes, dissemination of information (via TV), dialogue (via face-to-face communication), and engagement (via personal engagement).

Communication as the objective of public diplomacy

It is evident that disseminating the U.S. message abroad still lies at the core of U.S. public diplomacy. This work illustrates two interesting contradictions. One, television, the information-push technology, was considered the most effective way to disseminate the U.S. message to the broadest number of foreign publics, but its drawbacks lay in reaching the audiences on a human level in the desired foreign language. Second, the embassy's website, the information-pull technology, was viewed as the most comprehensive communication channel, but was in fact an online portal into the embassy's realm and required one's personal interest in U.S. issues to access it. These two examples are illustrative of practical situations when a one-way communication approach is appropriate but somewhat insufficient.

Communication as a tool to maintain dialogue

This work contributes to the understanding of the concepts of "engage with" rather than "communicate to" foreign publics in the pursuit of more collaborative relations (Fitzpatrick, 2011). One goal of this study was to understand the role of dialogue in U.S. public diplomacy practice. Results show that a quest to gain credibility and trust through dialogue was at the center of U.S. public diplomacy efforts. Various platforms of dialogue (i.e. visits, open forums, conferences) allowed diplomats to demonstrate their openness, likeability, accessibility and willingness to be part of a conversation, and enabled diplomats to engage with foreign publics, understand their needs, interests and points of view. Overall, findings show a steady incorporation of a dialogic approach in U.S. public diplomacy practice in Eastern Europe.

This study also contributes to understanding the feasibility of *genuine* dialogue as a defining conceptual framework for U.S. public diplomacy in other parts of the world (Fitzpatrick, 2011). This work sought to discern whether diplomats embraced and applied dialogic principles while engaging with foreign publics. The answer is yes. The findings illustrate that in retrospective, U.S. diplomats adopted some of the dialogic principles proposed by Fitzpatrick (2011). For example, *mutuality* was illustrated by U.S. diplomats' collaborations with foreign publics on issues of interests to both parties (i.e. reform, corruption); *collaboration* was illustrated by U.S. diplomats' sincere engagement in various programs in the countries studied here (i.e. energy diversification); *commitment* was illustrated by U.S. diplomats proactive engagement and willingness to participate in various activities with foreign publics; and *respect* was illustrated by U.S. diplomats' consideration to foreign publics' concerns, just like one would when talking around the kitchen table with a friend.

This work provides empirical support to Fitzpatrick's (2011) study, showing movement from messaging to mutuality. But unlike Fitzpatrick's study, which looked only at policy documents during the Obama administration, this study looked at actual U.S. public diplomacy practices during the Bush administration.

This study's implications go beyond the transferability of dialogic principles to public diplomacy practice. This work refutes Fitzpatrick's (2011) assertion that U.S. public diplomacy practices should move from messaging to mutuality. Findings show that a decade before Fitzpatrick's work, U.S. diplomats were already incorporating a dialogic approach and even more, were engaging in collaborative relationships with foreign publics. This is an unexpected finding that does not contradict the need for mutuality in public diplomacy, but a need for a review of policy documents to better reflect public diplomacy practices.

New communication technologies

Albeit Washington's drive to diversify the channels of communication between U.S. diplomats and foreign publics, this work found that personal engagement with foreign publics remains the most powerful method of engagement (Kiehl, 2005) and "makes that signature difference" (Kovach, 2009, p. 211) in implementing successful public diplomacy programs. This study found that person-to-person engagement still remains at the core of public diplomacy and that changes in the communication environment such as SMS, the blogosphere, or the internet are not likely to alter the bottom line of engagement for the public diplomat (Kovach, 2009, p. 211). This is an interesting finding since at the end of the period studied here, the United States embassies' presence on the internet and Web 2.0 applications have shown great potential for engagement with foreign publics.

For example, the GAO report for 2010 shows that the State Department's online activities consisted of 230 Facebook pages (including about 80 embassy and consulate accounts), 80 Twitter feeds (including over 50 by overseas posts), 55 YouTube channels, 40 Flickr sites, and 25 active blogs (mountainrunner.us). Similarly, the internet penetration and number of social media users was growing in Eastern Europe. According to *Internet World Stats* reports, internet penetration in June 2010 was approximately 38% in Romania, 59% in Poland, 62% in Hungary and 75 % in Slovakia. In addition, 18% of Romanians, 19% of Poles, 33% of Slovaks and 37% of Hungarians were Facebook users. These reports show a growing infrastructure that could allow diplomats to connect with broader audiences via social media. However, this study found that the lack of social media use by U.S. diplomats could be a missed opportunity that can provide U.S. embassy with alternative communication tools and a great potential of engagement with foreign publics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that during 2001 - 2009, U.S. public diplomacy practices were based on a multilayered approach. In addition to disseminating the U.S. message,

U.S. diplomats embraced and applied dialogic principles, and employed dialogue to establish long-term collaborative relationships built on trust and credibility with foreign publics. Communicating with foreign publics in transitional societies required a multifaceted approach and various communication tools, among which the prevailing preference was for face-to-face communication.

A limitation of this study is that interviews were conducted with U.S. diplomats who served in only one geographical region during a limited period of time. Also, a question of generalizability may arise. A broader pool of participants in various regions of the world could provide a better understanding of U.S. post-9/11 public diplomacy practices.

This study shows how dialogic principles can provide a framework that may be useful for better understanding current public diplomacy practices around the world. However, more research is necessary in assessing the congruency of U.S. public diplomacy practices with Fitzpatrick's (2011) dialogic model of public diplomacy. In addition, this work would indicate that the United States needs to perfect its public diplomacy to fit with today's communication environment and that a shift toward new techniques and technologies takes time and adjustment.

An interesting question raised here is how can diplomats make the most of the internet to include social networking sites and Web 2.0 applications in the communication toolkit they employ to engage with foreign publics? Can an internet relationship between a diplomat and a foreign public take place without a personal relationship? Or would an online "friendship" distance diplomats from their audiences, instead of getting them closer together? More research is needed to determine how social media and Web 2.0 applications can lead to a dialogic engagement and how can that be applied in societies where person-to-person engagement remains fundamental to long-term relationships.

Resources

Begleiter, R. J. (2006). You talkin' to me? In W. P. Kiehl (Ed.). *America's dialogue with the world* (pp. 35-49). Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council.

Brown, J. (2002). *The purposes and Cross-Purposes of American Public Diplomacy*. Chapel Hill, NC: American Diplomacy Publishers. Retrieved March 9, 2009 from http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2002_07-09/brown_pubdipl/brown_pubdipl.html

Bruning, S. D., & Ledingham, J. A. (2000). Organization and key public relationships: Testing the influence of the relationship dimensions in a business- to-business context. In J. A. Ledingham & S. D. Bruning (Eds.). *Public relations as relationship management* (pp. 159-173). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.

Bruning, S. D., Dials, M., & Shirka, A. (2008). Using dialogue to build organization–public relationships, engage publics, and positively affect organizational outcomes. *Public Relations Review*, 34(1), 25-31.

Cowan, G., & Arsenault, A. (2008). 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), 10-30.

Fisher, A., & Bröckerhoff, A. (2008). *Options for Influence: Global campaigns of persuasion in the new worlds of public diplomacy*. London: Counterpoint, British Council

Fitzpatrick, K. (2007). Advancing the New Public Diplomacy: A Public Relations Perspective. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2(3), 187-211.

Fitzpatrick, K. R. (2011). *U.S. public diplomacy in a post 9/11 world: from messaging to mutuality*. CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy Paper 6. Los Angeles, CA: USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School

Gregory, G. (2011). American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 6(4), 351-372

Internet World Stats. European Union. Retrieved March 11, 2012 from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa.htm> .

Johnson, J. B. (2006a). The technology dimension. In W. P. Kiehl (Ed.). *America's dialogue with the world* (pp. 103-114). Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council.

Johnson, J. (2006b). How does public diplomacy measure up? *Foreign Service Journal*, 83(12), 44-52. Retrieved March, 2012 from <http://www.afsa.org/FSJ/1006/index.html>.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28(1), 21–37.

Kiehl, W. P. (2006). Introduction. In W. P. Kiehl (Ed.). *America's dialogue with the world* (pp. 3 -8). Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council.

Kovach, P. (2009). The public diplomat: A first person account. In N. Snow, & P. M. Taylor, (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (pp. 201-211). New York, NY: Routledge

Ledingham, J. A. (2003). Explicating Relationship Management as General Theory of Public Relations, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15(2), 181-198.

Melissen, J. (2011). *Beyond the new public diplomacy*. Clingendael Papers No. 3. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael.'

Melissen, J. (2004). Public diplomacy in contemporary diplomatic practice. Public diplomacy and media, Paper presented at the *Diplomatic Academy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Conference*, Dubrovnik, Croatia, November.

Metzl, J. (2001). Network Diplomacy, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 2(1), 77-87.

MountainRunner. *GAO and U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy discuss evaluation tools*. Available online at <http://mountainrunner.us/2010/07/gao/>, Retrieved on March 11, 2012.

Nye, J. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *ANNALS, American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94-109.

Quinton, A. C. E. (2006). Refocusing America's message. In W. P. Kiehl (Ed.). *America's dialogue with the world* (pp. 27-34). Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council.

Potter, E. H. (2008). Web 2.0 and the new public diplomacy: Impact and opportunities. In J. Welsh, & D. Fearn (Eds.). *Engagement: Public diplomacy in a globalized world* (pp. 120-133). London, UK: Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Sreebny, D. (2006). Public diplomacy: The field perspective. In W. P. Kiehl (Ed.). *America's dialogue with the world* (pp. 91-102). Washington, DC: Public Diplomacy Council.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tuch, H. N. (1990). *Communicating with the world: U.S. public diplomacy overseas*. New York: St. Martin Press.

About the Author

Antoaneta M. Vanc, Ph.D., is assistant professor of public relations at Quinnipiac University. She formerly served as director of public relations for the Romanian Presidential and Parliamentary Electoral Campaign and as public relations and communications officer for Sport Vanc in Timisoara, Romania. Professor Vanc received her Ph.D. in Public Relations from the University of Tennessee.