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Reinforcing global legitimacy and efficiency: the case for strategic discursive public diplomacy

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Although we have gone a long way from *old* to *new* public diplomacy, it is widely accepted that it underperforms. We thus aim to offer strong grounds for the term *strategic discursive* public diplomacy and to show how taking this path can fundamentally refocus and improve the practice of public diplomacy. *Strategic* refers to the need to refocus the thematic orientation of public diplomacy: instead of working predominantly on issues of culture and education, public diplomacy should focus on the mounting threats common for all. The *discursive* element boils down to a shift of public diplomacy towards fully explaining one's policies and showing how they contribute to the delivery of global public goods. Strategic discursive public diplomacy, then, focuses on the principal issues of global politics and engages foreign publics in an open debate with the aim to communicate standpoints, but also listen and reply to potential counter-arguments. This becomes an important means in dealing with the accountability, transparency and legitimacy deficits of global politics. This reconceptualization is applied in a number of cases, such as the (a) debate on growth and development, (b) climate change and (c) Iran and nuclear proliferation. Taking the strategic discursive path bears particularly significant implications for diplomacy and world politics since it renders public diplomacy more profoundly political and shall facilitate the delivery of foreign policy goals within a more developed and aware global public sphere. Opening venues with foreign publics can be seen as a form of foreign intervention. In some cases, this may sideline or even go against a government's entrenched position, thus potentially creating friction between governments. At the same time, however, it carries the potential of reshuffling political alignments at a global level and changing the contours of the global political environment.

Keywords: public diplomacy; foreign policy; legitimacy; efficiency; sovereignty

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world suffers from a debilitating global democratic deficit that is generated by the deepening of the challenges that are global in scope and character, and the underperformance of global mechanisms for their resolution. In this environment, legitimacy cannot be confined to strictly sovereign and territorially based communities. Consequently, diplomacy itself needs to adjust to new conditions and limitations, but also to seize on new opportunities created by technological innovations (Pigman 2010).

Stemming from the above, it is no surprise that an increasing number of scholarly works has been published outlining what public diplomacy is, describing its mechanisms and evaluating its performance. Public diplomacy is not a new development in diplomatic

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practice (Cull 2008). It became a substantial tool during the Cold War as it framed the need of the superpowers to win ‘the hearts and the minds’ of the people in their quest to win the ideological battle of the Cold War and to garner support for the delicate balance of nuclear weapons. This strictly state-controlled public diplomacy drew from propaganda studies and conveyed a particularly positive image for the campaigning state and a rather negative one of the targeted adversary. In general terms, public diplomacy as practiced by most states, before and after the Cold War (Manheim 1994), has followed a linear, monological model and is aimed to use the media in order to deliver strong messages with an eye to shape the international environment in favour of the campaigning state. It can be summarized as framing, through promoting cultural events and relations, a more conducive overall environment within which states can more efficiently pursue their policies (Henrikson 2006).

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, scholars and practitioners began to distinguish between ‘new’ and ‘old’ public diplomacy (Riordan 2004; Melissen 2005a; Gilboa 2008; Snow and Taylor 2009). In a ‘polylateral world’ (Wiseman 1999), ‘new’ public diplomacy should aspire to influence foreign publics through soft power and broader relationship-building with citizens, social movements and NGOs (Melissen 2011). The profound changes in both the structures of the global system and the technological and communications sector, it is stressed, provides new opportunities for citizen participation as members of the public are developing new competencies for global engagement through the use of information and communication technology. This argument, although it suggests and supports the broadening of the actors and instruments of public diplomacy, remains too narrow as it downplays important issues of a profoundly global political nature. Moreover, although there is mention of ‘integrated diplomacy’ (Hocking et al. 2012), this only focuses on engagement with organized groups (social movements and NGOs). Furthermore, although some scholars do stress the need for open dialogue with people at large, they hardly develop this idea (Leonard 2005; Taylor 2009). Existing approaches to public diplomacy do not directly engage people with reference to certain critical global issues, and with the aim to persuade them over the campaigning state’s policies and strategies on them.

Bearing the above in mind, the aim of this article is to argue for a fundamental shift in public diplomacy’s goals, orientation and aspirations. In this view, public diplomacy should aspire to contribute to the overarching need on how states can, in an asymmetrically globalized world, design and implement sound foreign policies that can help in the provision of global public goods. It thus deviates from the orthodoxies of public diplomacy. Instead of viewing it as a promotional, image-exporting and place-branding campaign, public diplomacy should be at the heart of diplomatic processes, conducted with reference to all the main issues plaguing our world (economic crises, environmental issues, human rights and so on) and in dialogue with the citizens of the world. Hence, public diplomacy should be taken out of the realm of ‘low politics’ and enter the ‘heart’ of global politics. It is crucial to mention here that the concept and function of public diplomacy presupposes a wider focus on objective, public goods, rather than a narrow focus on national interests.

In this direction, the article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the changing global environment and nature of foreign policy and the corresponding need to devise new pathways to foreign policy. In particular, it discusses the ascending significance of public diplomacy in a world that is no more monopolized by the use of ‘hard power’ but also driven by ‘social’ and ‘soft power’. In this context, the legitimacy and efficiency of states’ foreign policies, as well as the concepts of national interest and sovereignty, need to be

unwrapped from their traditional understanding and connotations. On this basis, Section 3 constructs a theoretical framework on which we develop the argument for strategic discursive public diplomacy. Section 4 elaborates on this theoretical framework through its application on three distinct case studies, namely growth and development in the twenty-first century, the management of global climate change and nuclear negotiations with Iran.

2. Foreign policy and public diplomacy in the twenty-first century

Mainstream public diplomacy practice focuses on (a) cultural diplomacy (arts, educational and sporting exchanges), (b) advertising and sponsorship of media programming and events, (c) media relations (meeting and communicating with journalists, editors, producers), (d) hosting and participating in public events, and (e) radio and television broadcasting (Cull 2008). Such actions are not only aimed at informing and influencing audiences overseas for the purpose of promoting the national interest and foreign policy goals, but are also focused on improving the image or reputation of a country. Although important, such actions, as we have seen with the United States, are not sufficient for creating a favourable global environment. This is not surprising as the emphasis of such public diplomacy actions is on constructing a friendlier environment within which states can pursue their policies. Public diplomacy as practiced is monological, aiming at making individuals in other countries supporters of ideas, views and values that are friendly to the country/ies exercising public diplomacy, disregarding, however, that in today's world it is what one hears and understands, not what one says that is important.

The rise of global communications, the spread of democracy in central and eastern Europe and the recent upsurge in North Africa and the Middle East, the growth of global NGOs and the development of powerful multilateral organizations have changed the nature of power, government and diplomacy. They are affecting the way in which governments conduct their diplomacy and increase the importance of the public dimension in foreign policy. They provide new opportunities for citizen participation as members of the public are developing new competencies for global engagement through the use of information and communication technology. In addition, domestic issues such as health, crime and the environment have become essential elements of global security. Moreover, as the concept of security has been broadened, the gap of what used to be domestic and foreign policy has rapidly closed, making citizen's everyday concerns the concerns of foreign policymakers.

'International' politics, as Heywood (2011) clearly illustrates, has been transformed into 'global' politics through a variety of new developments. Although it would be absurd to dismiss states and national governments as irrelevant, equally absurd would also be to deny that over a significant number of issues states operate in a context of global interdependence and interconnectedness. This has not only facilitated a shift from geopolitics to a foreign policy that emphasizes the primacy of values and ethics (Ronfeldt and Arquilla 2009), but has also opened up the field of global politics to other actors and other types of activity, which mainly rely on the social power of individuals and NGOs. Social power, defined as the ability to set standards, create norms and values that are deemed legitimate and desirable, without resorting to state-centric power, is a central part of contemporary global politics (van Ham 2010). States compete with global communication networks and NGOs to communicate information to the public. Foreign policy and diplomacy is taking place in a system of mutually beneficial relations that is no longer state-centric, but is composed of multiple actors and networks that not only operate in a fluid global environment of new issues and contexts, but also cooperate and learn from

each other (Melissen 2005b). As a result, and as the recent literature on the subject underlines (Riordan 2004; Melissen 2005a; Gilboa 2008; Snow and Taylor 2009; Pigman 2010), public diplomacy today can only be successful if designed to operate within a 'polylateral' world of multiple actors. The challenge for public diplomacy is to be inclusive and collaborative, facilitating substantive dialogues with broader foreign societies and actors, such as domestic and global NGOs and civil society movements, not only when trying to convey messages and develop friendly relations, but also when dealing with global issues (Melissen 2011).

In the realm of contemporary global politics, therefore, public diplomacy cannot only depend upon the attractiveness of a country's culture or way of life. This approach is too limited as it aims only at affecting the policies, dispositions and actions of other states in an indirect way (Henrikson 2006). In today's world, establishing and maintaining public diplomacy requires building mutually beneficial relationships with internal and foreign publics. Engaging other actors, internal and external, and incorporating their views should be at the centre and not the periphery of public diplomacy. This understanding of public diplomacy fits well with and complements amply cited notions of 'soft power', according to which states' leverage in the global scene is more often than not correlated with attraction and persuasion (Nye 2004). States with positive reputations among the global public can exert more influence on the citizens of the world, which enhances the implementation of their subsequent policies. This is not to oversee the persisting importance of traditional means of foreign policy, as military instruments and coercion, but to state that they are not *a priori* the principal foreign policy tools. This requires a shift from a hierarchical public diplomacy communication model to a network-oriented one. The first, as noted above, transmits top-down information flows to a target audience, seeking to influence foreign public opinion, which in turn influences the foreign policy of other countries. The network model, on the other hand, and in light of common transnational problems, seeks to build relationships around common interests in order to promote action in fields where governments seem unable to deliver. It requires more diverse membership and less hierarchical organization to incorporate new actors and their specialized knowledge more efficiently, which means abandoning the logic of transmitting carefully crafted messages to a large but static audience in order to achieve policy objectives. Instead, there needs to be a focus on building sustainable relationships with foreign publics as an end in itself through message exchange, dialogue and interaction. The changing global environment, characterized by cultural diversity, turbulence, the emergence of new actors and the rise of interactive media, makes this all the more necessary.

This is so because we no more live, if we ever did, in closed communities, but in an open and interconnected global system. The defining principle of this system, sovereignty, is dynamic and has been redefined several times in several ways in the past centuries (Barkin 1998). In the last two decades, and given the post-Cold War developments, we have witnessed the passage from nominally *absolute* sovereignty to *responsible* sovereignty (Ki-Moon 2008). This signified a break away from the belief that internal affairs and security can only be decided by national leaders and governments on the basis of 'national interest' calculations, towards a more holistic understanding that is also contingent upon respect of human rights, welfare standards, and democratic and participatory decision-making processes. The current signs of environmental degradation and climate change can serve as triggers for humanity to give fresh meaning and content to the concept of sovereignty. In this new conceptual framework, public diplomacy creates new possibilities for reconsidering state sovereignty with an eye to serve global public goods. This may seem groundbreaking, radical and even problematic for national

communities that function on the basis of national democratic legitimacy and accountability. Nevertheless, legitimacy and accountability can no more be confined within strict territorial limits/borders since the world is composed increasingly by *communities of common fate* (Held 2004) and a number of issues are of a global character and nature. With regard to those, national chains of legitimacy and accountability obviously remain inadequate and need to become global. This can be attained in either input or output forms, namely through global participatory decision-making processes and/or through catering for global public goods. Accordingly, it is irrational in many cases for the national interest, traditionally defined as the maximization of utility and powers of states, to be constructed in terms of opposition to the others; to the contrary it makes much more sense to be constructed in conjunction with the interests of others. In particular, the dismantling of the global economy and the perpetuation of climate change carry costs for everyone and thus defy narrow understandings of national considerations and instead require global treatment. Absolute rather than relative gains are thus increasingly more pertinent to dominate the construction of national interests and foreign policy in the twenty-first century. To put it bluntly, there is little point in having sovereign states facing the dreadful consequences of global climate change, global terrorism, an overshoot of the global economy, further nuclear proliferation, human trafficking and uncontrollable migration, which will cast a shadow on the future of humanity.

International politics *via* traditional diplomatic means and intergovernmental venues, and operating on the norm of sovereignty, has for decades now failed to efficiently tackle what can rightly be seen as truly global critical threats. In the very end, sovereignty is not so much an end in itself as a means to human welfare. In the ‘global village’ of the twenty-first century where state sovereignty is frequently an anachronistic impediment to global cooperation, which is no more an option but an indispensable need, alternative diplomatic theorizations seem to be in demand. As the school of social constructivism has amply shown, the evolution of global politics rests on the way ideas, norms, states’ identities and interests are developed and on the way these factors interact at the global level (Wendt 1999). Public diplomacy is very relevant in an era when the logics of appropriateness and persuasion are increasingly powerful, and the logic of consequences can no more account for the bulk of world politics. Nowadays, the need for the states to fully explain their policies is more explicit than ever. Great powers need to persuade the public of their good intentions and sound policies in order to be entitled to a supreme role in the global society. Realism in foreign policy has to take into account and increasingly be based upon commonly shared policies and values and cosmopolitan ideals.

3. Strategic discursive public diplomacy

Public diplomacy, although it fits well with the needs of states in the twenty-first century, seems to underperform. We begin our analysis on the premise that public diplomacy should focus on all pressing international issues like environmental degradation, the nature of the economic system and economic crises, trade-related justice, humanitarian interventions and so on. This is not to downgrade the benefits stemming from the emphasis of public diplomacy on cultural activities, nor to advocate their termination. The point is that those are inadequate and there is urgent need for public diplomacy to work on a broadened thematic agenda that does not leave out any of the paramount global issues. The goal of public diplomacy should be to explain fully one’s policies and show how they contribute to the delivery of global public goods, such as peace, security, respect for human rights and international law, prosperity, sustainable development and more. As

public diplomacy cannot only be about selling policy, values, national image and culture, it requires building mutually beneficial relationships with internal and foreign publics.

While dialogue is widely advocated, however, scholars do not elaborate on this issue and jump to what they see as more essential: engagement with foreign publics by means of coining mottos and through a number of joint events. The oft-cited work of Leonard, Stead and Smewing locates three dimensions of public diplomacy – daily communications, strategic communication and development of lasting relationships – all of which lack profound discursive processes (Melissen 2005a). Leonard, Small, and Rose (2005) even raise the point that the challenge is to move from supplying information to foreign audiences to capturing their imagination, a point shared in a study on the essence of photojournalism as part and parcel of cultural relations (Welsh and Fearn 2008). Although it is valid to say that masses are moved and persuaded by images, slogans and mottos (Sproule 1988), discursive processes remain indispensable. When European concerns for genetically modified products are taken for protectionism and the United States' spread of democracy campaign taken for imperialism (Leonard, Small, and Rose 2005), images and slogans cannot bridge the gap; only dialogue can in the medium term change these perceptions. For this reason, asserting that there has been a marked change from geopolitics to a world of images and influences does not fully capture the processes in global politics and is misleading to the needs of public diplomacy. In these treatments, public diplomacy remains basically apolitical (van Ham 2001).

To the contrary, messages should be very broad, fully explaining one's position, the advantages as well as limitations and shortcomings stemming from it, and the space for improvement. This idea is not alien to mainstream literature, but far from fully developed. Thus, insistence on the message is a mistake; oversimplification needs to be substituted for by reasoned dialogue (Henrikson 2006). There is the suggestion that the provision of discussion material and the subsequent encouragement of discussion to key target groups is one where 'one has to share dilemmas sincerely' and encourage dialogue that takes serious note of the criticisms raised by foreign audiences (Gonesh and Melissen 2005). Public diplomacy attempts to build bridges between cultures and, to be successful, has to mobilize mutual comprehension (Cohen 1999). The goal should be persuasion, not submission (Vlachos 2009).

While 'emphasis on image building rather than genuine dialogue is a problem and a mistake,' readiness to 'listen and change, to engage with foreign publics at the communication level and at the policy level' is highly promising (Nelson and Izadi 2009). In one observation, 'dialogue may or may not lead to changed foreign policy positions or changed opinions about those foreign policy decisions.' However, a willingness to listen and show a respect for thoughtful, alternate voices may help to ameliorate conflicts or, at least, facilitate understanding of positions taken by helping participants to articulate their policies in more easily understandable terms (Cowan and Arsenault 2008). The concept of the 'noosphere,' introduced by Ronfeldt and Arquilla more than a decade ago, is particularly helpful at this point. Drawing from the ancient Greek word 'noos,' which means 'mind,' it points to the public sphere, the sphere of knowledge, ideas and discourse. It refers to a 'global realm of mind,' where information and power are increasingly intertwined, that redefines the contours of power, security, strategy and diplomacy in the information age. The 'noosphere' becomes a sphere of ideas, values, norms and arguments within which both state and non-state actors are engaged; politics cease being only power-maximizing but also adopt power-sharing aspects; and national interests are redefined taking into account the interests and preferences of the wider society. These deliberations lead to *noopolitik*, which does not substitute but works in parallel with *realpolitik*; *noopolitik* is about whose story, not army or economy, wins (Ronfeldt

and Arquilla 2009). In this understanding, public diplomacy is the major means at the disposal of states and other international actors to participate in and influence the *noosphere* with the intent to satisfy their own interests, which, however, increasingly – have to – align with broader public interests that know of no national borders. This is why public diplomacy is ‘too precious to let it be viewed as an exercise in marketing and manipulation, sound-bites and slogans’ (Ronfeldt and Arquilla 2009). What is missing from public diplomacy, then, are the discursive processes that will allow it to play its essential role in global politics in the twenty-first century. Public diplomacy experts should formulate convincing answers to the critiques by means of raising persuasive counter-arguments. Public diplomacy then can create hubs for discussion, argumentation, counter-argumentation and feedback. Public diplomacy should become a reflective process that helps to understand the shortcomings and deficiencies of one’s policies. Taking into account that public diplomacy is not distinct from reality, and an efficient public diplomacy campaign can only promote good causes, public diplomacy expands to become the means for the improvement of foreign policies (Amr 2004; Riordan 2005). The necessity exists for international messages to resonate at home; what the people of other countries perceive as the identity of the organizing state has to come in accordance with its own self-perceptions (Melissen 2005a, 2011).

This brings us to the concept of strategic discursive public diplomacy (Proedrou and Frangonikolopoulos 2012). *Strategic* refers to the need to refocus the thematic orientation of public diplomacy: public diplomacy currently works predominantly on communicating aspects of culture, education and identity in an apolitical way. It should, to the contrary, focus on the mounting threats common for and relevant to most, if not all, parts of the global population. In today’s critical global juncture, meta-issues, such as climate change, and access to water and clean air, have ascended in importance in the global arena and should be increasingly targeted by public diplomacy campaigns. Such problems are traditionally dealt within intergovernmental fora, which not only prove inadequate in yielding substantial results, but also remain confined to diplomatic practices that fail to engage citizens of the world.

Discursive refers to the need to create hubs for discussion, argumentation and counter-argumentation, and feedback. Public diplomacy, as practiced today, only aims at promoting cultural images but fails to engineer dialogue exactly on the cultural, educational and identity-related aspects that lead to conflictive and polemical relations. It should, thus, expand substantially to become the means for the improvement of foreign policies and the management of global problems, with states and intergovernmental organizations investing on further enhancing the deliberation, links and networks with citizens, social movements and NGOs. Strategic discursive diplomacy requires that states move beyond their narrow national-minded foreign policies, working to achieve global public goods, as well as the resolution of global problems. In this effort they can ally with citizens of the world and substantially gain from deliberation and feedback from the global public.

The main argument is that strategic discursive public diplomacy works in the trajectory of enhancing *transparency*, *legitimacy* and thus also the *efficiency* of states’ foreign policies. Strategic discursive public diplomacy can be applied across a wide spectrum of issues and can have three specific functions. In particular, it may

- (1) Create space for alternative theorizations to mainstream paradigms, aiming to shape conducive ground for alternative, potentially groundbreaking, policies to follow, as well as enlightening the discussion on the optimal policy (*policy initiator*).

- (2) Function in the direction of existing policies, making them more efficient (*policy enforcer*).
- (3) Criticize current policies and discuss new potential paths to action (*policy changer*).

With reference to the first function, Section 2 discusses the case of *development and growth* in the twenty-first century. Section 3 examines and analyses the second function with reference to the *global climate change issue*, while Section 4 scrutinizes the third function with regard to the *West's policy vis-à-vis Iran*. Last but not least, we conclude by discussing the implications of the implementation of strategic discursive public diplomacy policies on the nature of sovereignty, the global democratic deficit and the engineering of agreements on global problems.

4. Case studies

4.1. Policy initiator: growth and development in the twenty-first century

The twenty-first century is distinct from previous eras mainly due to progressive resource scarcity, as well as multiple environmental hazards and challenges stemming from a handful of dangerous wastes. An evolving body of scholarly work makes a strong case that economic growth can no more form the panacea to all economic problems plaguing the world and that, to the contrary, *de-growth* is a much more viable option (Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 2005; Jackson 2009). While one could utter many counter-arguments against this position, the point is that the alternative emerging paradigm is barely featured in public discussion. A closer look reveals that elements of a more sustainable strategy that respects the limits of the environment and works in the direction of *de-growth* and a *steady-state economy*¹ can be traced in many policies; nevertheless, arguments of this kind hardly enter the public sphere with an eye to communicate the pros of these policies. At least at a time of stagnation and persistent unsatisfactory economic indicators it would be worth opening this path of dialogue with an eye to influence local, national and international policies.

Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the solution to all economic problems has been enlarging the pie. This was feasible in an *empty* world, where fossil fuels and other resources were in abundance, but faces its limits in a *full* world, where resources are in short supply. Nevertheless, the policies for rejuvenating the economy remain strongly embedded in the mainstream anachronistic scenario of growth (Constanza et al. 1997).

At this historical juncture, a number of factors seem to undermine faith that growth can serve as a magical band for all humanity's problems. Our industrial societies are still based on the broad use of fossil fuels. The price of oil, however, which remains the most important fuel, is quite high and it is difficult to envision how its price will decrease in the mid- to short term in the face of rising demand and not accordingly high supply. Technological promises to make up for fossil fuels have not materialized for some decades now since fossil fuels remain much more efficient and convenient in use in comparison to alternative sources of energy. We can of course not preclude that this may happen in the near future, but we can be far from certain that it will; what is more, it would be irrational to designate policies on this presumption. A steady increase in the global population assures we will be needing more resources, more food and more water, and we are going to crowd the earth's *sinks* all the more, with no solutions to these problems yet at hand (Wackernagel et al. 2002; Victor 2008). Environmental disasters, lastly, raise dramatically

the costs in an overburdened global economy, where accumulated debt is manifold higher than the value of actual products and services, and thus finds itself in a deadlock. Growth, far from being the solution, seems only as a deteriorating factor and multiplier of all the above-mentioned problems (Heinberg 2011).

In this light, it may be worthwhile considering alternative paradigms for development. Understanding limits to growth, and taking into account the fact that under current conditions growth can only be short term and relative (Daly 1996; Dietz and O' Neill 2012), and that, however, there is space for economic entrepreneurship that would be adjusted to the needs and conditions of today's world, could potentially provide alternative lenses for improving the welfare of people around the world. In this new paradigm, we are seeking development, qualitative progress and improvement, rather than growth, expansion of the scale of economic activity. It is mandatory, to the contrary, to reduce economic activity in order to decrease current problems (scarce sources and full 'sinks'). The motor of the international economy for the last two centuries and more, profit maximization, should be re-conceptualized, adjusted for and geared towards social goals. A diversified tax base, where resource throughput rather than capital and labour would be most heavily taxed, as a number of ecological economists have suggested, could gear the economy towards a more sustainable economy (Heinberg 2011).

Bearing the above in mind, the issue is how governments and international institutions may take up this path, and communicate and spread it internationally through strategic discursive public diplomacy. This might in the beginning sound utopian and long term, but a closer examination might change this perspective, as many governments and international institutions conceive that current problems need alternative treatment. A few states, the most prominent examples being Sweden, Denmark, Japan and Germany, hardly depend on high rates of growth to provide for their people and have adopted a number of sustainable policies. In particular, Sweden has decidedly moved in the direction of dematerializing its economy and runs it to a significant extent on renewable resources, organic farming and sustainable agri-business (O' Neill 2012, 223). The EU in addition has been working in the direction of considering alternative to GDP accounting indicators that incorporate much more convincingly environmental and social factors. These steps attest to these countries' understanding of the limits the environment creates to economic activity and could form the basis for even more groundbreaking paths to economic development. In this context, there is ample space and rationale for communicating the sustainability path. A debate on the limits of growth, as well as on the re-conceptualization of the notion of development and the profit-maximization rationale, might well be more apt for the twenty-first century.

Northern European states are pioneers in this sector and influence overall EU-policymaking substantially. Domestic and EU-wide interests have clustered to lobby for and implement more environmental-friendly policies. Nevertheless, results remain mediocre and out of proportion with the magnitude of the challenge of climate change. Public diplomacy is not particularly focused on this issue and lacks a truly discursive component. An efficient strategic discursive public diplomacy campaign should aim first to engage the public of the other European states. The aim would be to communicate the examples they have set and depict how they work and deal with persisting environmental and economic problems. European citizens can be expected, and trusted upon, to then exert pressures on their governments to take a similar path experimenting with groundbreaking policies. This spiral could be taken up by European institutions that not only entertain expertise on these issues, but also have an inherent inclination to designate supranational schemes. In case the EU, a regional institution with half a billion citizens, a strong social model and welfare

state paradigm, wide economic, political and social networks with all corners of the world and the greatest contribution to aid and humanitarian projects, shifts from its mild sustainable model (mainly through its renowned 20-20-20 policy²) to the steady-state paradigm, this could have a forceful impact on the public debate on developmental paradigms. Although one could argue that this model will not work for the rest of the world, for example, the United States, Russia or China, since it contravenes their national interests, this is a matter of definition of the very concept of the national interest. Exactly the contrary, it is hard to see how national interests are served when the overarching threat of climate change remains non-dealt with. The EU is, thus, well-suited to inaugurate public dialogue on this issue.

Assuming that the EU and other states are willing to initiate public debate on this fledging issue, the discussion could have three basic pillars. First, there is strong evidence that the current global economic underperformance is rather different than the previous economic crises. While stimulus packages boosted the global economy from the 1930s to the 1970s under the aegis of Keynesianism, the monetary injections of 2008 saved the system from total collapse but have failed to generate substantial recovery of the economy. While for some this may just be a matter of time, there are strong grounds to believe it is not since the environmental limitations make profitability much harder to achieve and render the initiation of a virtuous economic cycle more difficult (Heinberg 2011). Secondly, our industrial societies are embedded firmly in the paradigm of growth. We tend to forget, however, that historically growth is only two centuries old. If there is a normal condition for the economy, this is a steady state, not a growing, one. Thirdly, the mechanisms through which the environment works are not entirely understood. Uncertainty for the future, however, is discounted, and we tend to disregard potential negative impact on the environment. In the light of the incomplete nature of human knowledge and understanding of environmental functions and repercussions, it would be more rational to follow a more reserved attitude. Again, it is the generations of the last two centuries that have held an aggressive attitude towards the environment, which proves in many accounts destructive and deficient (Daly 1996).

Bearing the above in mind, it is also important to stress that all public diplomacy activities that touch upon environmental and economic issues are not systematic and only aim to inform on specific parameters and aspects of these issues. They do not aim at initiating a public dialogue on the issue. Strategic discursive public diplomacy could play this role. A significant bulk of information on steps for action and actual policies should be delivered in order for the publics to become acquainted not only with the practical aspects a transition to a steady-state economy entails, but also with the philosophical, political, economic and social rationale behind it. This, it should be stressed, forms a crucial pillar since we only deal with environmental problems in an instrumentalist way. It is necessary to get across the point that human life is so intimately connected to the well-being of the planet that the two have to be dealt with together in a holistic manner. Space should be created for dialogue with the public, answering to one's queries and a special suggestions forum that can carry the debate on steady-state economics further. This aims at furthering knowledge and welcomes new proposals under different conditions. Taking into account the technological revolution of the last two decades, the states undertaking these strategic discursive public diplomacy campaigns would be best advised to create open-access, interactive websites where all the above can take place. A good helping hand would be a direct link to post-growth websites that promote and discuss these alternative theorizations and policies, as well as common tools and joint applications that could deliver information and serve as feedback loops. None of the above is to be seen in

current public diplomacy campaigns. The above-mentioned measures would be boosted by more traditional public campaigns, with politicians, their advisers and celebrities joining or hosting public events with such thematic content. In these dire economic conditions for much of the global population, even in the most developed parts of the world, where rising prices of necessary resources makes recovery very difficult, and costs of global climate change multiply, the above could stimulate dialogue and induce popular pressures to governments around the world to consider policies of post-growth economics.

4.2. Policy enforcer: managing global climate change

While discussion on an alternative developmental paradigm is wide-ranging and suggests new ways of life sustenance and progress, the issue of global climate change is more apt and forces all governments to seek solutions. In this understanding, there are already a handful of policies in place to tackle them. Nevertheless, all these remain at a national (and regional, mostly, in the case of the EU) level, while agreements of a global scale remain miniscule and disproportional of the magnitude of the problem (Laferrere and Stoett 1999; Elliott 2004; Betsill, Hochstetler, and Stevis 2006; Dessler and Parson 2010). The Copenhagen summit in late 2009 attracted wide coverage and high expectations for groundbreaking global collective measures, triggered by prior efforts to combat climate change. Nevertheless, outcomes were rather mediocre, or disappointing, and this was also the case with the successive summits in Cancun and elsewhere. The North-South divide as to who should bear the highest cost for global climate change, and relative gains considerations, most prominently between China and the United States, led the global community to a deadlock. As a result, efforts at combating climate change remain piecemeal, the problem persists, if it does not aggravate, and predictions for the future become direr.

Strategic discursive public diplomacy, therefore, should aim to go beyond these economic and geopolitical obstacles and interstate competition by fostering a public debate that will empower and elevate the role of the people. While governments, taking into account their short-term horizon, may initially be hesitant or sceptical to do so, the people of the world share the interest in mitigating climate change and can feed their responses back into government apparatuses. In this understanding, an appropriate policy for the countries that push for global measures is to focus their attention not exclusively in deliberations with other governments, but also with the people of the world. The EU members and institutions, for example, have held long discussions with various departments of the U.S. government on the issue. Nevertheless, they have not found common ground in light of the official U.S. reluctance to finance measures against global climate change. It would be pertinent, then, to engage the U.S. public on the issue with an eye to exert pressure on their government. While U.S. taxpayers would in the beginning be normally reluctant to bear the brunt, a more holistic understanding of the threats and magnitude of the problem might well persuade them to adopt a more conciliatory stand. One could note at this point that a significant portion of the U.S. society remains unconvinced of the seriousness and scope of climate change. Al Gore's documentary contributed to the awakening of the U.S. public opinion to the issue, but it is no surprise that it did not suffice to produce the radical change needed. The same is true also for long-standing NGO campaigns, such as those undertaken by WWF and Greenpeace that have played an important, although partial, role to the same aim. Although there is no certainty that taking the strategic discursive public diplomacy path will yield the expected fruits, it will act as a potential multiplier.

This strategy, of course, is not only confined to targeting the U.S. public. Russia and China, among others, are also significant stakeholders in the issue and any serious effort to combat global climate change needs their contribution. These cases, however, one has to admit, are far more difficult since the governments in both countries are, to varying degrees, quite immune to public pressures. Interaction between the popular will and state decisions is much more limited; hence, strategic discursive public diplomacy is much more difficult to be implemented in these countries. Nevertheless, such a strategy could generate a positive spiral of change in policies in democratic states that could then form conducive ground for more conciliatory and compensatory policies from other states. One should note at this point that the EU itself would also gain from strategic discursive public diplomacy targeting it (which could come most probably from states like Canada or Norway). Such policies would generate more profound dialogue and potentially lead to more efficient climate-change-related policies.

First, in the face of advanced globalization and interconnectivity, as well as truly global threats, the concept of the national interest has to be substantially rethought of. As discussed above, the national interest cannot be fulfilled in the mid-term in contrast or in conflict with global interests, but only in conjunction with them. Strategic discursive public diplomacy can re-situate the discussion from a conflictive debate between the national interest and collective good to a different dilemma, relating to whether any country has the luxury, despite reluctance of other states to take up substantial costs, not to take up full-fledged environmental policies. Although there may well be a justice-related counter-argument, one would expect from democracies to take the high moral ground *vis-à-vis* non-democratic regimes.

Secondly, a good starting point for international cooperation would be to focus the debate on a simple bargain that reflects a cooperative and mutual responsibility logic. While the West has been the culprit for most carbon emissions, growth in third countries is a catalytic factor for the fast exhaustion of natural resources and crowding of the earth's 'sinks'. Accordingly, while it is the responsibility of the global North to cut down on its consumption, the global south has to check upon its dizzying demographic trend. Mutual, parallel and simultaneous steps towards a common good should sound like a totally acceptable solution to a common problem (Jackson and Michaelis 2003).

Thirdly, strategic discursive public diplomacy should initiate a detailed information campaign, in cooperation with or straightforward acceptance of the work of authoritative NGOs, stressing the actual and potential costs that climate change involves. It is of paramount importance that all these, contrary to popular beliefs, have not only a long-term but also a rather short- and mid-term horizon. Such a campaign, together with variable scenarios seen under the light of high uncertainty for the future of the planet since human knowledge and understanding is not so developed as we like to think, can shift popular mindsets, as argued above, to a much more reserved approach to the environment that will also support and demand much greener agendas, both domestically and internationally. Such a campaign should be proactive and suggest ways that could prove economically profitable or sustainable. In other words, it should not reproduce the zero-sum logic of environment vs. economic gains, but aim to synthesize them in a holistic manner. These steps could make foreign publics much more receptive to climate change legislations and policies.

Bearing the above in mind, it is essential that strategic discursive public diplomacy functions outside official intergovernmental avenues and fora, which are usually characterized by slow bargaining processes and monopolized by relative gains considerations. A good starting point in understanding how such campaigns could function and even

succeed is provided by the case of Canada and its political entrepreneurship in the 1990s to support and facilitate NGO-sponsored suggestions for the banning and prohibition of use of land mines outside formal intergovernmental fora. As it is well known, this led to the Ottawa Treaty of 1997. This attests to the importance of working with NGOs, which is an easy case in the field of environmental issues. This, however, is not enough since strategic discursive public diplomacy aims to engage not only NGOs but overall concerned citizens. Again, an excellent example is also provided by Canada through its interactive website of the Ministry of Foreign and Development Affairs that works as a network for information and opinion exchange on relevant issues (Potter 2003; Vickers 2004). This, however, is more an exception, rather than the norm. Such instruments should be widely used as tools of information and argumentation, which will at the same time create space for feedback and counter-argumentation. The empowerment of the public sphere will not only sensitivize more and more citizens, but also widen the spectrum of ideas and suggestions and test the plausibility and feasibility of environmental policies, creating the potential for improved understanding of the criticality of the situation and the alternatives ahead.

All these have both *domestic* and *international* dimensions. With regard to the first, such schemes may put pressure on governments to take more and better measures to protect the environment. At a second level, they aim to lead to significant changes to official positions, which then can create the basis for more open deliberations, mutual understanding and cooperative schemes in the international domain. Any global agreement on climate seems infeasible in the current geopolitical environment. An informed and systematic effort to convince the people around the world to exert pressure on their governments could alter mainstream thinking, surpass current obstacles and lead to international cooperation on climate.

4.3. *Policy changer: building bridges with Iran?*

Iran, especially after the inauguration of the so-called war on terrorism, has been in the spotlight for its nuclear program. The international community, and primarily the United States, has responded to Iran's nuclear ambitions with policies that range from outright confrontation to more conciliatory approaches. More specifically, the Bush administration was contemplating a military intervention in Iran in the mid-2000s, while Israel has as of late rejuvenated this scenario with provocative statements. It has also repeatedly urged Obama's administration to harden what they see as an unreasonably mild U.S. stance on the issue, which, one should note, is more in line with traditional, low politics and conciliatory EU theorizations of the problem and international relations in general.

Nevertheless, although worst-case scenarios have for the time being not materialized, the situation remains critical and in a stalemate. This is no surprise if one takes into consideration that recent U.S. foreign policy record pushes Iran's leadership to consider the acquisition of nuclear weapons not only as the sole means that will avert a U.S. military attack, but also as a constitutive factor for Iran's hegemonic role in the region. From the standpoint of the international community at large, and most fervently by Israel, the United States and the EU, Iran's nuclear ambitions feature not only a direct threat to overall security and balance of power in the wider Middle Eastern region, but also a critical setback to the non-proliferation nuclear regime.

The major venue through which the stalemate has been addressed has been inter-governmental fora, such as the UN, and particularly the International Atomic Energy Agency and the 5 + 1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and

Germany). Their efforts, nevertheless, have failed to yield fruits since all states remain rigid in their positions, increasing therefore the potential for further destabilization and turbulence in the Middle East, as well as risking the proliferation of nuclear weapons (Hymans 2006; Solingen 2007). Is then a way out of the deadlock feasible?

In the face of the mounting difficulties of traditional diplomacy to tackle with Iran's nuclear ambitions, and despite the recent deal agreed upon, it is worthwhile attempting to utilize strategic discursive public diplomacy in the service of this challenge. Western endeavours have to face a regime that, in order to retain its leadership, pursues a mostly hard-line and inflexible approach. Nonetheless, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as the aversion of further instability in the region, is the goal to be appraised by the majority, at least, of the Iranian people as well. Iran, despite the authoritarian character of the regime, enjoys a vibrant and active civil society, which often disputes and openly challenges the policies and priorities of the central government, as the recent election of the reformist politician Hassan Rohani clearly indicates. More amply shown in the Iranian Green Wave Democracy movement that emerged following the 2009 fraudulent presidential elections, a significant portion of the Iranian society understands the concepts of central power, national security, prosperity and welfare in a radically different way than the Iranian leadership. Taking into account that two-thirds of the Iranian population is under 25 years of age, as well as the increasing use of social media and the internet as the basic source of information and activism, new ideas and new demands start to substantially penetrate the public sphere and Iranian society (Salem and Mourtada 2011a, 2011b).

All the above should not be lost on Western policymakers as has been the case for years now. The West would be prudent to learn from the inadequacies of its approach towards and understanding of the internal political situation in all North African and Middle Eastern countries (Laipson 2011). As evident with the case of Egypt in 2011, and Syria in 2012, the West was taken by surprise since it concentrated on *governments* rather than *societies* in the region, failing to comprehend the fluidity of ideas, movements, cultures and social structures in the wider Middle East and how they combine their concerns for national dignity, social justice and democracy. Western governments and analysts perceive civil society as a solely Western privilege and phenomenon in general, while the wider Middle East region is attached to 'Islamic Exceptionalism'. According to Laos (2011, 209–211):

Neither space nor time exists without the human being. If, therefore, an international actor conquers space, but fails to 'conquer' the human factor, i.e., if his cultural superiority is not acknowledged by the others, then spatial conquests will be annihilated by time. The collapse of colonialism is a characteristic case in point [...] On the other hand, the commitment of many Western policy-makers and political theorists to a geopolitical way of thinking which subjugates values and generally cultural issues to power politics and ephemeral geopolitical and geoeconomic interests has made the West perpetrate very costly political mistakes and endorse short-sighted approaches to its interests [...] In the 21st century, many Western policy-makers and political theorists have difficulties in understanding that many forms of 'Westernization' of Islam do not reflect a substantial cultural transformation of Islamic societies, but they merely signify that certain Islamic forces adopt Western modes of political and economic communication and utilize Western political and economic institutions and technological infrastructures, without adopting the substantive content of the Western humanistic culture itself [...] Geopolitical calculations can yield power, indeed. But even the most ingenious geopolitical calculations will end up in failure if they are not combined with a cultural proposal which can claim ecumenical authority and be internationally attractive; for, they will be defeated by time.

The combination of a rigid regime and a vibrant civil society influenced by Western ideas should make it obvious that dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation are by far easier with the latter. Does, however, the West take advantage of this? Up to now, public diplomacy remains basically monological, culturally oriented and fails to develop the conditions for engagement of Western governments and societies with the people of Iran. Despite the popularity of global information networks such as Voice of America and BBC, what would benefit the Western approach, and bring the relationship with Iran on a more constructive path, would be to open up more venues of dialogue with the people of Iran. Moreover, explanations of Western policies and perspectives, venues for dialogue and the possibility for feedback are totally absent, with the result that U.S. foreign policy is not well taken and appreciated by the Iranian society. Western governments would be wise to create interactive fora, most probably websites, that would explicate their foreign policy line *vis-à-vis* Iran, substantiate their positions, answer potential questions and justify points of inconsistency, as well as create space for potentially valuable feedback in terms of understanding culturally sensitive ideas, preferences, etc.

As Kathy Fitzpatrick (2011) has amply shown, strategic discursive public diplomacy also aims at self-reflection and improvement of one's policies. This means that this process of explanation, dialogue and communication may well reveal points of inconsistency that create justified concerns to the Iranian society as to the aims, goals and policies of the West *vis-à-vis* Iran. Polemical policies and threats of war, it should be obvious, undermine the credibility of the West as an honest and benevolent broker of peace that seeks cooperative solutions and genuine dialogue (Bertram 2008).

One has certainly to admit that the closed political system of Iran, and most significantly its Islamic Council that virtually runs the country, presents a rather difficult case for strategic discursive public diplomacy. In other words, even if Western governments do take up the strategic discursive path and cement dialogue and mutual understanding with the Iranian people, this by itself does not guarantee the solution of the Iranian problem. Nevertheless, societal changes alter the background in which official policies are designated. A more positive approach by the Iranian society *vis-à-vis* the West and the pressure for an exit from stalemate could persuade the regime to switch gradually its position. This is so because all governments need to be to a degree receptive to their people's preferences. One cannot underestimate the possibility that engagement with the Iranian people could also render the Western stance milder, which can spark a positive spiral of more conciliation between the West and Iran. Switching away from confrontational positions, which in any case carry multiple dangers and do not serve any of the players, could materialize through more efficient communication that fosters understanding. In the face of the persistent international stalemate that continues to dominate the international arena for a decade now, following the path of strategic discursive public diplomacy carries certain promise for diminished turbulence in what undoubtedly forms a hard case for soft power instruments.

5. Concluding remarks

Strategic discursive public diplomacy redefines the concept of sovereignty, in a manner that fits the needs of the globalized international system in the twenty-first century. No wonder this approach could trigger suspicion and accusations for intervention in internal affairs, as well as more hostile bilateral or inter-state relations. Campaigns to inform and persuade one's public on the need for specific policies may put governments into very uncomfortable positions, create friction between governments and their publics, and

provoke hostile governmental reactions. In other words, strategic discursive public diplomacy, as every foreign policy tool, may have adverse effects. This is why campaigns should be very carefully designed and executed, taking into account cultural sensitivities and political and economic realities in the ‘target’ countries. One should expect, at least initially, that such campaigns may face even exaggerated reactions. This does not mean, however, that this is not necessary if global deliberations on global problems stand a better chance of leading to more satisfactory results.

Refocusing public diplomacy carries the potential to reshuffle political alignments at a global level and to change the contours of the global political environment. In the main part of the article, we prescribed ways in which the issues of global development, global climate change and nuclear non-proliferation could be better managed to cater for global needs. The problems analysed are only indicative. Terrorism, the management of the global financial crisis and migration, to name just a few, can also be approached through the conceptualization and logic of strategic discursive public diplomacy.

With respect to terrorism, public diplomacy as designed by the Western states, especially after the end of the Cold War, has focused on building bridges with the Islamic and Arabic world. Persistent animosity and a number of episodes between the West and Islamic terrorists, the most important being that of 11 September 2001, however, testifies to the underperformance of their approach. Instead of trying to ‘sell’ a positive image of the West and secure the acceptance of Western values, a discursive approach could be more promising. Instead of being treated as an object of Western public diplomacy, the Arabic Islamic public should be engaged as an equal partner in a frank debate on Western policies towards it, something emphatically missing from current public diplomacy campaigns. Moreover, the West should listen to Arabic and Islamic world views and aim at deliberation and understanding, rather than imposing, its own position. If one understands terrorism, at least partially, as acts of revenge and resistance to U.S. hegemony in the world, then a more holistic approach could serve as a stumbling block to terrorist activities.

Regarding the global financial crisis, a more profound approach would be to engineer a dialogue with the people of the world on the root causes and potential solutions to this problem. It should not be lost that economic crises are a repeated feature of both national and international economies. As such, they should not be regarded as random and surprising, but something with traceable causes (e.g. the workings of capitalism, boom and bust cycles, etc.). In this understanding, it would be not only logical but also more effective for states and global economic institutions to engage in strategic discursive public diplomacy in the understanding that in an interdependent world national economic recovery is very difficult within a stagnant international economic environment. Opening venues of dialogue with citizens of the world exactly on the root causes of the crisis and the corresponding solutions could enrich global public debate, provide more options for consideration to governments and potentially lead to more optimal outcomes. In an issue in which persistent orthodoxies remain preponderant, despite their difficulty in managing the crisis, enriched dialogue and more ideas are more than ever before in demand.

Migration, finally, remains a persistent global challenge. Measures undertaken are only partial, mostly national and at best regional in scope, and fail to address the complex nature of the issue. Migration is a multidimensional issue that stems from persistent and endemic factors such as poverty, epidemics, civil wars and trafficking, affecting, in one way or another, most citizens of the world. Since attempts at international management remain inefficient, states that push for more holistic solutions could find it useful to address the global publics. The most concerned and proactive governments would find

conducive ground for extensive deliberations, exchange of information and valuable feedback, not only to enrich their understanding of the problem, but also to exert pressure *via* foreign publics to less willing governments. Strategic discursive public diplomacy could help overcome the international stalemate on the issue, offering solutions to the different aspects and levels of the issue.

In a nutshell, strategic discursive public diplomacy is an indispensable foreign policy tool for the twenty-first century. It aims to adjust to the changes that have taken place in the international system in the last decades, appreciates new forms of power that have elevated in importance and, accordingly, focuses on addressing the foreign publics and creating solid partnerships with the less appreciated and reckoned with global actor, the people of the world. A new research agenda can be built upon these new understandings and assumptions that could further elaborate on strategic discursive public diplomacy's promises, effects, deficiencies and implications on specific sectors and cases of international relations.

Notes

1. Herman Daly (1991, 17) defines a steady-state economy as 'an economy with constant stocks of people and artifacts, maintained at some desired, sufficient levels by low rates of maintenance "throughput," that is, by the lowest feasible flows of matter and energy from the first stage of production to the last stage of consumption.'
2. This envisions a 20% increase in energy efficiency, a 20% use of renewables in the energy mix and a 20% decrease of carbon emissions by 2020.

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