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NATO and Public Diplomacy: Opportunities and Constraints of 21st Century

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to explain and interpret the evolution of NATO's public diplomacy efforts in terms of the opportunities and limitations of today's globalized environment. Public diplomacy refers to the efforts of states and non-state actors to better explain their values to the world. It concentrates particularly on "soft power" tools, such as science, art, culture, sports and media that enable interaction between societies. Because NATO is widely associated with security and defense issues, it is important to understand how it responds to the developments of today's diplomatic trends with its own public diplomacy and communication activities. As technology continues to change and evolve, NATO's communication strategies have faced new types of networks and platforms. Now celebrating its 72nd anniversary, the Alliance seeks to embrace and implement a contemporary communication policy with new mechanisms. Within this framework, this paper will provide a definition of the concept of public diplomacy, and explore the historical evolution of NATO's public diplomacy agenda. NATO's coordination activities and values, practical means of communication and their expected impact will be discussed.

Keywords

NATO, soft power, diplomacy, public diplomacy, communication

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Introduction

The term "public diplomacy" contains the word "diplomacy." As an instrument of statecraft, diplomacy has long been used as a tool by states in their relations with other states. Although it does not have a commonly agreed-upon definition, diplomacy is generally considered to be the conduct and management of relations, through peaceful means, by and among international actors. The major international actors are states, and diplomacy mainly involves relations among states or between states, international organizations and other international actors. Today, diplomacy continues to be conducted mainly by states, but also includes international and regional organizations, multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and even individuals. Since the number and types of actors involved in international affairs have expanded, and the interaction among these actors has increased, the agenda and conduct of diplomacy has evolved in line with these developments. The expansion of intergovernmental and regional organizations does not mean the weakening of diplomacy, but rather a shift from traditional state diplomacy to new forms. Especially in today's world, international and regional organizations generally compete for better visibility, and they consider their image, identity and brand important.

As a collective defense and security organization, NATO has defined itself as the security branch of an institution of liberal-democratic norms and values, and has embraced the main principles of the Western world since its foundation in April 1949. Nonetheless, after the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, there emerged deep disagreements about the future role of the Alliance. In today's global information environment, it is apparent that NATO needs to strengthen its communication tools and approaches, consider public audiences and develop its agenda setting according to the current communication challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, the main purpose of this paper is to understand and interpret the evolution of NATO's public diplomacy efforts, taking into account the opportunities and limitations of today's globalized environment.

Public diplomacy is based on the ability of states and non-state actors to better explain their values to the world. It concentrates particularly on "soft power" tools such as science, art, culture, sports and media that enable interaction between societies. As an organization widely associated with security and defense issues, it is important to understand how NATO responds to the developments of today's diplomatic

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trends with its public diplomacy and communication activities. Since technology has changed and evolved, NATO's communication strategies must adjust to new types of networks and platforms. Having recently celebrated its 70th anniversary, and now in its 72nd year of existence, the Alliance is seeking to develop a contemporary communication policy and to implement it by means of new mechanisms.

In this framework, this paper will first present a working definition of the concept of public diplomacy; next, the historical evolution of NATO's public diplomacy agenda will be evaluated. Then, NATO's coordination activities, its values, its practical means of communication and their expected impact will be discussed. *The aim of this study is to explore the effects of the opportunities and challenges of the contemporary international environment on NATO's public diplomacy efforts.*

Definition and Evolution of Public Diplomacy

Diplomacy is derived from a Greek word *diploma* that means an official document or state paper. The Oxford dictionary defines diplomacy as "management of a country's affairs by its agents abroad and the activity of managing relations between different countries."[1] As a key process of communication and negotiation in world politics and an important policy device used by international actors, the term diplomacy has been given a number of definitions in International Relations discipline. While some definitions associate diplomacy with the activity of engaging in foreign policy, others use the term to refer to a tool or technique of foreign policy. Accordingly, the term is therefore described as "a foreign policy instrument for establishing and developing peaceful relations between the governments of the various states through the use of intermediaries mutually recognized by the respective parties."[2]

As one of the oldest instruments of world politics, diplomacy is seen as an art, specifically the art of managing relations among sovereign actors. Originally, diplomacy was considered an instrument used by states in order to deal with other states. After the establishment of international and regional organizations, these entities too became involved in diplomatic practices. It can be stated that communication is the focus of diplomacy in managing relations among different international actors. In order to create effective communication mechanisms among different players, diplomacy is supported by an established body of rules and practices.[3] Since diplomacy is based on the conduct of relationships using peaceful means, these rules and practices should be implemented by governments and other international actors alike. In practice, diplomacy aims to create a favorable image of the global actor. Modern communication, in that sense, functions to shape views and perceptions around the world.

In contemporary global environment, although states and governments remain the main actors within the international system, the number and variety of actors, from governments to regional and intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations and NGOs, have been rapidly expanding. In tandem, the domain and scope of the diplomacy have expanded to involve different sectors that expand beyond traditional high foreign policy issues. Globalization with its the complex web of interdependence has increased the range of negotiations, especially in multilateral meetings.[4] Under these circumstances, diplomatic activities require the use of diplomatic tools to directly influence the people of nations as well. In that respect, public diplomacy can be regarded as one of the efficient means of diplomacy in use today. Thanks to this tool, relations between states and global actors progress more peacefully, with inclusion of public opinion alongside that of official representatives.

The term 'public diplomacy' was first coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion. According to Gullion, public diplomacy is concerned with the influence of social viewpoints have on the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.[5] Indeed, the rise of the concept of public diplomacy is best understood in terms of its relationship with soft power. As mentioned above, with the increase in numbers and types of actors, with the expansion of the subject matter or content of diplomacy, and with the change in the modes, types, and techniques of diplomacy, a new terminology of Public Diplomacy as the language of prestige and international image has brought the concepts like soft power and branding to the nation states' agenda.[6] In IR discipline, power is generally defined as the ability to affect others to obtain desired outcomes. According to Joseph Nye, others' behavior can be affected in three main ways: threats of coercion; inducements and payments; and attraction that makes others want what you want.[7] While discussing the concept, Nye puts a distinction between hard power and soft power.[8] The former is achieved through military threat or use, and by economic menace or reward. However, in the 21st century, under the influence of technological developments and globalization, international politics is also changing, and a state cannot address its problems or achieve all of its goals by acting alone. In this environment, it is important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, as it is not always feasible or desirable to force them to change by means of threats or the use of military or economic weapons. In that sense, 'soft power' co-opts people rather than coerces them. Nye coined the 'soft power' as "the ability of affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment."[9]

While military force remains the fundamental form of power in international system, abilities like communication, organizational and institutional skills, have also become important instruments in today's global environment of growing interdependence.[10] Diplomacy is a crucial instrument enabling allies to cooperate, and adversaries to resolve conflicts without

using force. International actors communicate, influence one another, bargain and adapt their differences through diplomacy. As a key process of communication and negotiation, diplomacy is used as a significant policy instrument by global actors. Today, diplomacy takes place between actors with a wide range of authority, power, tools and impact.

A country's soft power capacity has a crucial role in the success of an actor's public diplomacy as much as efficacy of its policies; indeed, a country's political values, culture and foreign policies are important indicators of its soft power.[11] Credibility is the significant source of soft power. Since reputation has become one of the main objectives of today's global actors, they make efforts to increase their credibility around the world. States compete with other states, and also with other actors including media, NGOs, international organizations and other networks in the quest to gain and maintain credibility.[12]

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Public diplomacy is about relationship building. It is about understanding the requirements of other countries, cultures and people; communicating one's perspectives; correcting misperceptions; and searching areas of common ground.[13] Nye defines public diplomacy as an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than only their governments. Public diplomacy seeks to attract by bringing attention to potential areas of commonality, interest and attraction through broadcasting, supporting cultural initiatives and organizing exchanges.[14]

The main distinction between traditional and public diplomacy is that the latter involves a much broader group of people on both sides, and a wider set of interests that go beyond those of the government of the day.[15] Listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and international broadcasting are five components of public diplomacy.[16] Understanding, planning and engagement are also very important concepts for the establishment of powerful relationships.

In the 20th century, public diplomacy was considered a state-based tool used by foreign ministries and other governmental entities to engage and persuade foreign publics with the aim of influencing their governments. Today, public diplomacy has become 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.[17]

Public diplomacy is a process of creating an overall international image that strengthens a country's ability in order to achieve diplomatic success. This is also important for "propaganda." Propaganda is an attempt to influence another country through emotional techniques rather than minds by creating fear, doubt, sympathy, anger or other feelings. In order to change or influence other actors' opinions, actions or policies, propaganda also operates by means of symbols, such as words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, etc. Propaganda acquired negative connotations in the 20th century, although it was an effective tool of foreign policy during the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Cold War. During these times, propaganda was associated with manipulating populations at home and abroad.[18]

Unlike public diplomacy, propaganda is generally not interested in dialogue or any meaningful form of relationship-building.[19] The main objective of the propaganda is to influence opinion and behavior of its targeted audience. Although both public diplomacy and propaganda intend to convince people to create a favorable image, the distinction between propaganda and public diplomacy lies in the pattern of communication. In that respect, public diplomacy goes beyond propaganda. It is comprised of what is actually said and done by political figures, as well as practices of promotion and other forms of public relations that are utilized by the business sector.[20] In other words, public diplomacy, like propaganda, is about creating influence. However, unlike propaganda, that influence is not a one-way street from the speakers to their target audience. Public diplomacy is perceived as a two-way street with a process of mutual influence, in which the foreign public is seen as an active participant.[21]

In that sense, the objective of public diplomacy is not propaganda, but building a strategic language of communication based on objective facts and truth. Nye asserts that if public diplomacy degenerates into propaganda, it not only fails to convince, but can undercut soft power. Since soft power depends upon an understanding of the minds of others, an efficient public diplomacy is regarded as a two-way street.[22]

After the end of the Second World War in 1945, a new type of conflict emerged between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, known as the Cold War. The Cold War was based on a contest of ideologies that divided the world into a bipolar competition characterized by a war of words and the threatened use of nuclear weapons, rather than their actual use. In that era, the idea of nuclear war was ever-present in the minds of the international public. U.S.-Soviet relations became the main global, political agenda, and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 became the symbol of a world separated by the "Iron Curtain."[23] Moreover, in both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and in their alliance blocs of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the objective was to convince people that fear of the enemy was genuine, legitimate and justified. This, in turn, would legitimate and justify the need to sustain a

nuclear arsenal that would have to be at least equal to that of the other side, although there might never be a use for it. This climate of fear was also played out in the media. Propaganda exploited these fears, and the 'other side' had always to be portrayed as aggressive, militaristic and repressive.[24]

In other words, during the Cold War period, propaganda had a special importance in the foreign policy objectives of the U.S. and the USSR. Both used an organized form of propaganda activities with one-sided, deformed messages, mainly based on their respective ideologies; while the U.S. underlined the material prosperity of the Western world and the desirability of individual freedoms, the USSR emphasized the adverse sides of capitalism. This kind of propaganda sought to stress the admirable side of one's own country, while denigrating the other side by focusing on specific issues.[25]

In order to shape public attitudes all over the world toward their respective ideologies, the main tools used by the two superpowers were international broadcasting and radio stations, such as the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe on the American side, and Radio Moscow on the Soviet side.[26] The U.S. government developed a number of propaganda channels through the work of the United States Information Agency (USIA), and promoted the universal attractiveness of such American brands as Coca-Cola, Levi jeans and McDonalds, as well as American music and Hollywood films.

With the end of the bipolar world, the international environment faced new problems with the rapid expansion in the number and scope of interactions. Contemporary challenges emerged in a new, global communication that had different features from that of the Cold War period. Under these circumstances, it can be claimed that the end of the Cold War made public diplomacy much more important.

The spread of democracy, media proliferation and the expansion of global NGOs changed the nature of power and now exert much more influence on the freedom of action of national governments than ever before.[27] With these developments, public diplomacy has been used in non-traditional forms with new participants, such as non-state actors; with new sorts of relations between state and non-state actors; and with new goals, such as gaining the support of foreign actors to maintain profound relations rather than using propaganda to influence them. The mechanisms used by these actors to communicate with the world public are supported by new, real-time, global technologies, especially by the Internet. These new technologies have blurred the formerly rigid lines between the domestic and international news spheres. A new emphasis has emerged on people-to-people contact for mutual enlightenment, with international actors playing the role of facilitator. Consequently, instead of top-down messaging, "relationship-building" has become the chief task of the new public diplomacy.[28]

Although public diplomacy is accepted as a two-way relationship, there is no agreement on how to measure its impact and success, as there is no clear variable that shows the political outcome of public diplomacy initiatives. However, the establishment of daily communications with the target audience to explain foreign policy decisions and the enhancement of lasting relationships with target groups, including individuals, may help to build relationships and to foster understanding. Since public diplomacy begins with listening, one of the pathways of understanding the success of its activities is to measure "public opinion" to see the largest impact of the attraction. In that sense, successful public diplomacy projects increase favorable public opinion toward the practitioner actor. Another pathway for understanding an initiative's success is "agenda setting," which determines the issues covered in the media or discussed in the target population. "Framing" is yet another pathway that changes the media coverage of the practitioner actor's foreign policy in the host country.[29]

In sum, public diplomacy increases people's familiarity with one's country or international institution by making them think about it, update their image of it and change negative opinions. It also increases people's appreciation of one's country or international institution by creating positive perceptions, getting others to see issues of global importance from the same perspective. Moreover, it also helps strengthen ties by getting people to understand and subscribe to common values. More importantly, it influences people and/or politicians by making them favored partners.[30]

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NATO and Public Diplomacy Mechanisms

NATO has been established by the Washington Treaty on 4 April 1949 with the purpose of safeguarding the Western lifestyle that includes democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law and free-market economy. Although the Treaty itself identified no enemy, given the delimitation of the area of responsibility of the allies to defend and the definition of the challenge to the members, it was clearly designed to counter Soviet expansion and balance Soviet Union's military power.[31] The Alliance was founded for the purposes of the "collective defense", and at the core of the North Atlantic Treaty is the agreement in Article 5 "that an armed attack against one or more of them (the parties to the treaty) in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all," obligating all member states to

assist the member attacked when the state consents.[32] Nevertheless, while NATO's main mission was collective defense, from its creation, the Alliance understood that it was essential to communicate to its citizens to ensure their support.

Therefore, NATO's founding members took some initial steps toward informing public opinion; on May 18, 1950, the NATO Atlantic Council (NAC) issued a resolution in which it aimed to "Promote and coordinate public information in furtherance of the objectives of the Treaty while leaving responsibility for national programs to each country..."[33]

When the historical evolution of NATO's public diplomacy policies is examined, some initial steps for the development of communication strategies can be seen. For example, in August 1950, a NATO Information Service was initiated with the nomination of a director. Although it did not receive a budget until July 1951, it developed into an information service in March 1952 with the establishment of an International Staff headed by a Secretary. In 1953, the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations was created. The role of this committee was to address the challenges of communicating the Alliance's policies to the public. It organized regular meetings with NATO Information Service to exchange and share information for the development of NATO's communication programs.[34] Despite all these institutional structures, however, it is not possible to refer to an effective public diplomacy activity undertaken by NATO throughout the Cold War. Rather, during that period, the leaders of the two blocs carried out "propaganda" activities with the support of their media tools in order to influence the masses. For this reason, the activities of NATO were shaped around the ideological rivalry of the second half of the 20th century, and by a corresponding discourse in which NATO was described as a military alliance

The collapse of the Warsaw Pact after the disintegration of the Soviet Union eliminated the Soviet threat to the security of the West. In that period, NATO sought to advance dialogue and cooperation with the former Eastern Bloc countries in order to extend security and stability beyond the traditional NATO territories. Therefore, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program was initiated in 1994. In the 1990s, NATO sought to transform from a collective defense alliance into an organization embracing European security. The main issues it has faced since that time have concerned NATO's enlargement, its relationship with Russia, and the scope and nature of its missions.[35]

As mentioned above, with the 21st century, there emerged a global debate on the forms of public diplomacy, and NATO took broad steps to develop an institutional framework for its public diplomacy efforts. For instance, NATO's Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) in Brussels was created by the former NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson in 2003. Alongside the

Allies' own communication efforts, PDD's programs are created to inform public audiences about security issues and promote the Alliance's policies and aims in an accurate and responsive manner. Therefore, beyond daily press relations and website management, most of PDD's activities are designed to have long-term effects. These activities generally include building both relationships and networks with opinion formers and journalists; facilitating dialogue among security experts, policy-makers and NGO representatives; and generating interest in transatlantic issues among larger segments of the population, in particular the successor generations.[36]

At NATO headquarters, members of the PDD who carry out communications and public diplomacy programs from among the international staff, work closely with the International Military Staff and the Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Advisor to the Chairman of the Military Committee (MC). The PDD also works with staff from Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformation (ACT) who communicate on operations, exercises and other activities. In that sense, NATO engages in communication strategies with interactions between the civilian and military side of the organization.[37]

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In addition, as an advisory body to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on communication, the Committee on Public Diplomacy (CPD) deals with issues about the media and public engagement. The CPD was founded in 2004, succeeding the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations (CICR), which was one of the Organization's first committees to be created. The CPD is responsible for making recommendations to the NAC on "how to encourage public understanding of, and support for, the aims of NATO."[38] In this respect, the Committee is responsible for the planning, implementation and assessment of NATO's public diplomacy strategy. As part of that process, members of the CPD share their experiences and exchange their views on national information and communication programs and public perception of NATO's activities. In order to improve and strengthen the information flow in NATO Partner countries, the CPD also specifies Contact Point Embassies (CPEs). In this regard, within non-NATO countries, the CPD agrees on an embassy from a NATO member country to act as the point of contact for information about the Alliance in the respective host country. The CPD also seeks to establish a collaborative dialogue with NGOs such as the Atlantic Treaty Association.[39]

In fulfilling its main duties and responsibilities, the CPD functions with

the support of some working mechanisms. As mentioned above, the Committee includes representatives from each of the NATO member countries with the Assistant Secretary General of the Public Diplomacy Division serving as the Chairperson and the Public Information Advisor representing the Director of the International Military Staff.[40] During committee meetings, the CPD examines and approves an annual Public Diplomacy Action Plan, and may make additional reports or recommendations to the Council as necessary. The CPD meets regularly with member countries, and meets in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) format in order to allow the participation of representatives from partner countries. Representatives from Contact Point Embassies in partner country capitals also join CPD meetings at times.[41]

NATO states its objectives regarding public diplomacy and communication strategies as follows:

NATO communicates and develops programs to help raise awareness and understanding of the Alliance and Alliance-related issues and, ultimately, to foster support for and trust in, the Organization. Since NATO is an intergovernmental organization, individual member governments are also responsible for explaining their national defense and security policies as well as their role as members of the Alliance to their respective publics.[42]

NATO and its member states typically use a combination of press releases, official speeches and public diplomacy initiatives to generate an impact on public opinion. Alliance press offices and spokespersons attempt to tell the organization's point of view to the widest public through the media, and also seek to influence media portrayals of events. Public diplomacy is about direct contact in order to persuade an international public, as opposed to state-to-state ties. As mentioned above, in order to share values and ideas, international actors use public diplomacy to respond to short-term news events, build positive news agendas and develop long-term relationships with populations. In addition, strategic communications intend to shape the information environment to gain support for particular policies and military operations. NATO's has used strategic communications to this end during military operations such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

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New security challenges, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, NATO's crisis management experience in the Balkans and Afghanistan and the significance of cooperating with partners around the world drove NATO to scrutinize and review its communication power. In that context, NATO has

determined some key principles for governing its thinking on a new public diplomacy approach:[43]

1. Public diplomacy is a matter of listening;
2. Public diplomacy must be associated with policy;
3. To be effective, public diplomacy must be credible;
4. Public diplomacy needs to respond to the challenges of the 2.0 web world;
5. The most effective public diplomacy will take place under media spotlights, but at other times, policy issues are better communicated by third parties, such as think tanks and academics than through official statements;
6. Decent planning, training and resources are required for public diplomacy.

NATO's 2010–2011 Public Diplomacy Strategy identified two key underlying areas that need a special effort: support for NATO's role and achievements in areas of operations and missions, and the Alliance's identity and strategic direction. The document stated that "NATO's overall public diplomacy efforts would continue to aim at promoting awareness of and building understanding and support for NATO's policies, operations and missions in the short, medium and long term and in a complement to the national efforts of the Allies."[44]

Under these circumstances, former Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy at NATO, Tacan İldem, highlighted NATO's policy of "projecting stability beyond NATO's borders" with neighboring regions as part of its defense and deterrence strategy. He underlines the importance of cooperation between the EU and NATO on issues like joint defense, capability development and burden-sharing.[45] Accordingly, public diplomacy is seen as a long-term process of creating trust, interest and affinity in the public. All of these communication mechanisms demonstrate that the Alliance regards communicating with and influencing publics as very important.[46]

In this context, NATO took some initiatives to expand public understanding of its role. For example, under the headline "WeAreNATO", the Alliance puts effort to explain NATO's core mission of guaranteeing freedom and security for its citizens. This concept focuses on the advantages of unity and solidarity between Allies, and the role NATO plays in sustaining Euro-Atlantic security. This Alliance-wide communications effort, with contributions from Allied nations, uses branded multimedia content to display how NATO members work together across numerous areas, including diplomacy, military cooperation and crisis response. Ildem stated,

…In times of uncertainty and unpredictability, a strong NATO alliance is more important than ever. It's crucial that all of our citizens understand what NATO is and what we do. Our continued success depends on our citizens understanding the essential role that NATO plays in our security, on which our prosperity is based. We will remain fully transparent and proactive in explaining our essential work to the outside world.[47]

Furthermore, on 8 June 2019, NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, started an initiative "NATO 2030" which was proclaimed at NATO's London Summit in December 2019. The goal of this initiative is to make the Alliance, and its member states, more prepared for new threats and challenges. According to Stoltenberg[48]: "Using NATO more politically also means using a broader range of tools such as military and non-military, economic and diplomatic…"[49] Especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic active public engagement and strategic communication in all member states of NATO are seen as necessary. In that sense, NATO citizens and allies should be actively informed about what the Alliance has been doing for them, including providing airlifts, medical support, and transporting patients during the pandemic. In order to meet the challenges of the pandemic crisis, NATO is using digital communications on the pandemic response across all platforms. Moreover, due to the pandemic, NATO's public diplomacy efforts have pivoted face- to- face events to online engagements to shape the policy debate.[50]

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With the rapid communication and technological developments resulting from globalization, all actors in the international system are looking for new ways to 'express' themselves. In pursuit of this aim, NATO has begun to adopt many communication strategies, including public diplomacy efforts. However, in this globalized world, in tandem with evolution in communication strategies and tools, the shape and scope of conflicts has also changed. As a security organization, NATO also faces contemporary security challenges. In this process, it cannot be expected that all NATO's public diplomacy activities will be carried out impeccably. In today's world, the Alliance faces many challenges in the conduct of its public diplomacy, as discussed in the next section.

Public Diplomacy Challenges for NATO

In the constitution of NATO's identity, public diplomacy plays a very crucial role. However, there are some arguments that claim the Alliance faces some public diplomacy challenges and has a public perception problem. According to Wolff, weak or varying public support for the Alliance and its

specific missions, general lack of public awareness of the alliance's post-Cold War transformation, diverging opinions on its proper role in the world and parochial and domestic interests filtering into NATO's agenda are the main public perception challenges confronted by NATO.[51]

Today, the Soviet Union does not exist, and the conflicts and adversaries NATO faces are more diverse. Moreover, NATO serves as the primary military connection between Western Europe and the U.S.[52] Since the 1990s, NATO has been involved in a number of conflicts, including the Balkans and Afghanistan. More recently, NATO served as a strike force in Kosovo and Libya and has contributed to combat operations in Afghanistan. Yet NATO may be conceptualized not just as a military alliance, but also as a diplomatic network in which many actors and institutions work. While the unpredictable security environment may impact the role of public diplomacy, it remains important to determine what challenges NATO faces and the best practices that can be applied to address them. After the end of the Cold War, NATO experienced some changes in public support; public opinion was mainly affected when the alliance intervened militarily in Bosnia and Kosovo and when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003. NATO's command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan caused a new wave of public discontent about the function and purpose of the alliance. European populations in particular consistently opposed many aspects of this mission.[53]

After the end of the Cold War, NATO underwent a number of changes that resulted in the adoption of three new strategic concepts. The current strategic concept, titled "Active Engagement, Modern Defense," was adopted in November 2010 during the Lisbon Summit; it presents NATO's three essential core tasks as "collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security." It also underlines Alliance solidarity, the importance of transatlantic consultation and the need to engage in a continuous process of reform.[54]

Taking advantage of the power of communication and public diplomacy to cope with the new threats identified in this new strategic concept will be a complementary element for NATO. However, national and international surveys show that the public at large, and particularly the post-Cold War generation, has obscure ideas of the NATO's new missions and policies.[55]

NATO's Former Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Stefanie Babst states that:

No single government can tackle these expanding problems on its own. The Alliance remains the best and most effective transatlantic forum to do exactly this. But NATO's role as a security provider has not been fully understood by our publics. For sure, the Allies have come a long way in embracing a new and modern understanding of their common communication

policies. Transparency, responsiveness, accuracy of information and direct engagement with people across Allied territory and beyond have become pillars of NATO's public diplomacy…In recent years, we have especially reinforced our efforts to reach out to the young generation, by facilitating networks among students and young political leaders, offering summer schools and fellowships and organizing seminars and workshops across NATO and partner nations. We have also overhauled our technological capabilities, bringing the NATO website and other audio-visual tools and products up to scratch. Online lectures, videos and discussions have made NATO's interface to the outside world more transparent and interactive.[56]

In the contemporary era, NATO faces the problem that the post-Cold War generation does not know very much about the Alliance's concrete activities and the transatlantic values for which NATO stands. Thus, the Alliance is often burdened with stereotypes within broader parts of the public in both Allied and partner countries.[57] National and international surveys demonstrate that although NATO is seen as essential, it needs to make much more effort to regain wider public support. Being supported by the masses is one of the most important criteria in measuring the success of public diplomacy.

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For instance, according to a Transatlantic Trends Survey conducted in 2013, 33% of Americans, 42% of Europeans and 40% of Turks thought that their side of the transatlantic partnership in security and diplomatic affairs should take a more independent approach. Nevertheless, NATO was seen as "still essential" by 58% of EU respondents and 55% of Americans. Within the majority that felt NATO was still essential, the main reason given was its identity as "an alliance of democratic countries that should act together." 15% of Americans, 12% of Europeans and 27% of Turks said that NATO helps share the costs of military action. 9% of Americans, 13% of Europeans and 15% of Turks agreed with the statement that "military actions are only legitimate if NATO supports them."[58] Another, recent survey was conducted by the PEW Research Center in which half of Americans (48%) said NATO does not do enough to help solve world problems; 31% said NATO does the right amount, whereas only 5% said the alliance does too much to solve the world's problems.[59] YouGov conducted a survey in many NATO nations, and found that support for membership had fallen in several European countries over the last three years; while in 2017, 73% of Brits approved of membership, this number had fallen to 59% by 2019. Likewise, in Germany, support fell from 68% to 54%, and in France from 54% to 39%. Nordic nations Denmark and Norway experienced drops from 80% to 70%, and 75% to 66%, respectively.[60]

In order to overcome its public image issues, the Alliance has determined some key communication priorities. One of them is explaining and promoting NATO's role and achievements in areas of operations and missions; the other is explaining and promoting the Alliance's identity and strategic direction.[61] In parallel with these priorities, in today's global environment, NATO can best use digital tools to reach global audiences, as one of the most immediate ways to reach people is to use digital channels effectively.

Communication technologies such as radio and television have long been the instruments through which public diplomacy messages are conveyed to the public. However, these technologies are also thought to be "twentieth-century public diplomacy mediums" since they consist of one-way information flow that restricts interaction between messengers and recipients.[62] In other words, conventional mass media does not give people the opportunity to respond to messages of public diplomacy. With the advent of global media vehicles and the growth of the digital society, however, the 21st century has witnessed a conceptual change among practitioners of public diplomacy. The expansion of digital tools and social media channels provides opportunities for the "direct engagement with people" called for by NATO's Former Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, Stefanie Babst.

Today, NATO can implement a networked social media strategy that consists of educating the public about its missions, officials and institutions. In addition, networked social media campaigns can focus on NATO's core activity, its multilateral diplomatic initiatives and its response to the growing international security concerns. The content of such campaigns might be tweeted through the network in order to reach target audiences. Such a strategy would utilize NATO's assets and may expand the global scope of its online network.[63]

Conclusion

Public diplomacy can be considered an expression of soft power; it is about attraction, persuasion and winning hearts and minds. It is a mechanism used by governments and other international actors, NGOs and even individuals to mobilize resources to communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than only their governments. In order to reach their goals and bring about change, every actor in the international environment needs to listen, engage, discuss and influence others. It is not meaningful to investigate the public diplomacy activities developed by NATO since its establishment without understanding the transformations in its identity. Diplomacy is a vital instrument empowering allies to cooperate and adversaries to settle disputes without using force. International actors interact, negotiate, influence one another and adjust their differences through dip-

lomacy. In the 21st century, diplomacy has been used in non-traditional formats, by new players such as non-state actors, in a context of new types of relations between state and non-state actors and with new priorities. Although this new form of diplomacy does not abolish the conventional understanding of diplomacy, its power has largely been influenced by these new dynamics. The increase of the network society brings more opportunities for public diplomacy activities.

On 4 April 2021, NATO celebrated its 72nd anniversary whose identity has rested largely on its hard power for a long time. Founded as a military-based international organization during the Cold War, NATO's longstanding communication strategies harken back to its past at the alliance level. Nonetheless, its institutionalization in the field of public diplomacy accelerated in the 2000s. After the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, there was much debate about the alliance's raison d'être. The debate revealed an essential need for more responsive and effective means of communicating with the public and raising awareness, particularly among young people, of the value of NATO's role in an increasingly globalized world. The transformation in the identity of the Alliance, the need to go beyond its "collective defense" mission, the attempts at dealing with the conflicts in the Balkans and Afghanistan, the new security challenges of the global era and the turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa have all been very demanding circumstances that the Alliance has worked hard to address. Contemporary security challenges cannot be dealt with by military responses alone. It is also necessary to implement strategic communication tools to achieve public accountability and build public support.

One of the most important tasks in this digital age is the incorporation of public opinion research into public diplomacy. It is apparent that NATO needs time and resources to expand its communication tools and public diplomacy strategy. In analyzing NATO's public diplomacy efforts and institutionalization process, it should be considered that the alliance is an intergovernmental organization founded by sovereign states. In terms of the definitions of public diplomacy made so far, the main objective of NATO's public diplomacy is expected to be directed at the public opinion of countries outside NATO. Currently, however, NATO's public diplomacy efforts are primarily directed at the public opinion of its member states. Therefore, it is important to overcome the political and bureaucratic barriers to building common and holistic public diplomacy within the alliance. An institutional public diplomacy strategy is difficult for NATO to formulate due to the prioritization of individual interests within its member countries; thus, a cooperative, dialogue-based approach will play a crucial role in the development of NATO's vision and goals in this new era. In that sense, social media platforms should be used more frequently and effectively since they provide simultaneous social interaction among users. NATO's official statement is pertinent here: "A 'NATO decision' is the

expression of the collective will of all thirty member countries since all decisions are taken by consensus."[64] In this framework, NATO's ability to develop a consistent public diplomacy strategy, to share responsibilities among its members and to support this mission within the Alliance is a test that will show its effectiveness in the field of public diplomacy.

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