

Report of Proceedings

Forum on Public and Citizen Diplomacy

6-7 June 2011

Australian National University, Canberra

A Forum on Public and Citizen Diplomacy was held in June 2011 by the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the Asia-Pacific Centre of Diplomacy at ANU in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Public Diplomacy Branch. The event was contributed to by the Ian Potter Foundation, the National Film and Sound Archive Australia and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Forum Objectives

The Forum's key goal was to provide a platform in which public and citizen diplomacy could be discussed as key tools in building international understanding.

Both public diplomacy (activities aimed at influencing the views of foreign publics) and citizen diplomacy (people-to-people contact and exchange) have an important role in improving relations between countries. Public and citizen diplomacy merit greater discussion in Australia given their vital role in shaping perceptions and promoting Australia's interests.

Specific objectives of the Forum included:

- To bring together a select group of Australian experts to discuss public and citizen diplomacy
- To analyse Australia's current engagement in public and citizen diplomacy
- To debate, share ideas and formulate recommendations for the future direction of Australia's public and citizen diplomacy
- To educate the public about Australia's engagement in public and citizen diplomacy
- To establish a platform for future collaboration between diplomatic and governmental policy makers and the institutions that participate in public and citizen diplomacy
- To produce solid policy recommendations for Australia's public and citizen diplomacy

Summary of Proceedings

This summary does not provide a consensus of views, but represents the variety of views that were expressed by the more than 80 people who attended the Forum. The event was very fortunate to attract an expert group, with many participants having extensive experience as practitioners of public and citizen diplomacy.

This summary focuses on the main points of discussion and recurrent themes. These can be divided into four categories:

- Why public and citizen diplomacy matters
- Australia's current practice in public and citizen diplomacy
- What Australia can learn from its experience and international examples
- How Australia can augment its public and citizen diplomacy

1. Why Public and Citizen Diplomacy Matters

How it is perceived by foreign publics is crucial to Australia. Senator Russell Trood noted that Australia depends on the “uncoerced choices of foreigners” such as how they see Australia as a place to invest, study and visit, and their overall view of whether or not Australia can be trusted.

This is important in the promotion of Australian security and prosperity. John McCarthy noted that the countries that matter to Australia in its immediate region have very different cultures. Senator Trood noted that this means that an effective public and citizen diplomacy strategy is required to get inside their “cultural prism”.

Professor Bill Maley noted that the provision of accurate and credible information to foreign publics is both proactive in the development of relationships and reactive in countering negative public images.

Public diplomacy impacts on Australia's international relationships as reputation is an integral aspect of many parts of foreign relations. For example, Dr Caitlin Byrne talked about the link between public diplomacy and UN Security Council campaigns noting that public diplomacy “lays the groundwork for diplomacy.”

Australia cannot be complacent about its international reputation. Dennis Murray of International Education Association Australia noted that nation-branding expert Simon Anholt has classed Australia's image abroad as “very decorative, but not very useful.” Alison Broinowski from ANU backed this up with her view that the only index Australia tops is the “self-image table.”

While Australia's whole overall rankings are not too bad, John McCarthy noted that Australia does best in countries which are culturally similar and worse in countries where Australia's reputation is most important to it. According to Alison Bronowski, this “vacuum of ignorance” about Australia must be engaged; otherwise, it will be filled with negative stereotypes.

It was noted that Australia needs to be viewed as “a relevant, useful and interesting country” in order to be successful internationally. This is at the heart of public and citizen diplomacy.

2. What is Australia's Current Practice

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Margie Adamson reported that public diplomacy is integral to DFAT as part of its "core business." There were many examples given in which DFAT works to project an accurate vision of Australia for a positive impact in the international community, including:

- International broadcasting such as the Australia Network and Radio Australia
- The international media visits program and developments in e-diplomacy tools
- The Australia International Cultural Council
- Initiatives such as the Shanghai World Expo, 2010 Year of Australian Culture in China and Australia Korea Year of Friendship 2011
- Foundations, Institutions and Councils such as the Australia Korea Foundation and the Australia-India Council
- Work done at diplomatic posts overseas

Vipan Mahjan of International Education Australia noted that Australia currently has 600,000 overseas students enrolled in its universities, including on scholarships such as the Endeavour Awards and the Australia Awards. Dennis Murray of the Australian Education Association Australia noted that this is creating a real but underutilized asset for Australia's soft power.

Various community programs were discussed which give primacy to the people-to-people contact of citizen diplomacy. Alderman Bill Willson outlined sister city relationships as an example of how effective this can be. Jenny McGregor of AsiaLink discussed school twinning and track II diplomacy while Jill Byrne of Austraining International and Dimity Fifer of Australian Volunteers International demonstrated the links built by international volunteering. Paul Grigson noted initiatives such as Australia building 2,000 high schools in Indonesia. The role of culture such as Australia's representation in film was also described.

Reviewing current Australian practice, the concern was raised that on international comparisons, Australia seems to be making an insufficient investment in public and citizen diplomacy. Fewer concerns were raised regarding implementation. John McCarthy noted that DFAT does well with the resources allocated.

A number of factors were considered that give a sense of the challenges for Australia in this area. Senator Trood noted that it is a very "crowded space", that events that affect Australia's image are volatile and can quickly undermine its international standing while Australia also has to counter perceptions of racism stemming from an entrenched negative image of Australia that is hard to uproot. Margie Adamson noted the challenge of a fast moving public diplomacy landscape with a growing range of international actors wanting to have their voices heard.

It was suggested by participants that Australia's track record in public and citizen diplomacy is hampered by three main factors: lack of investment, lack of vision and lack

of coordination. Annmaree O’Keeffe suggested that three elements are needed for successful public diplomacy: a clear aim, a clear plan and enough money. There was a consensus throughout the day on the lack of resources for public and citizen diplomacy, both within and outside government.

In terms of vision a clear idea of what Australia is trying to achieve in public diplomacy was regarded as a major requirement, particularly with a need for political support to unlock the creativity that is lying dormant. Public diplomacy needs to be established as a major priority for government.

In terms of coordination there was an expression of concern over coherence, given the range of actors involved. The fractured approach to Australia’s public diplomacy is due to the large number of actors in both the public and private sectors with a tendency to work against rather than with one another. Julianne Schultz noted that it is unusual to have strong actors in both sectors. Paul Grigson noted that 19 Departments now have international divisions.

3. Lessons to be Learned

A lesson that came through strongly in discussion was that the need for accurate and credible information is paramount in public diplomacy. Propaganda and disinformation are not viable. For example, on issues such as violence against Indian students, there is no point trying to send messages that will be perceived as contrary to reality.

Sometimes, this will require Australia to deal with reality as well as image. John McCarthy noted that a country’s image is primarily comprised of three factors: what sort of country it is, what its policies are and the ways in which these are projected.

A key lesson is the importance of dialogue, rather than self-promotion. This means connecting with issues that engage foreign audiences and listening as well as talking.

A number of lessons were drawn from international experience:

1. ***Some other countries make significantly higher investments in public and citizen diplomacy.*** Annmaree O’Keeffe noted that the US spends more on public diplomacy than Australia does on its entire DFAT budget: \$1.8 billion. Alison Broinowski looked at a closer comparator such as Canada which also makes a much larger investment, particularly in the cultural realm. It was noted that while it is possible to gain a good reputation without investment in public diplomacy, this is unlikely to last.
2. ***There is the need for a change in mindset in understanding public diplomacy.*** Professor Jan Melissen noted that some countries now don’t distinguish between ‘traditional diplomacy’ and ‘public and citizen diplomacy,’ and see these as morphing together. He quoted Parag Khanna who noted: “Diplomacy is no longer the stiff waltz of elites, but the jazzy dance of the masses.” Professor Melissen

suggested that Australia could learn from other countries in Asia on the importance of strategic orientation rather than crisis management, the need for a relationship-orientation and having greater expectations of what public diplomacy can actually achieve.

3. ***Public diplomacy should be normalised.*** UK Deputy High Commissioner Jolyon Welsh saw this occurring where public diplomacy is viewed as a tool to achieve overarching diplomatic objectives. In this paradigm, public diplomacy is not an end in itself but occurs every time that a country engages with people not in government to achieve diplomatic outcomes. Paul Grigson noted the DFAT view that public diplomacy is now a part of every officer's job. Jolyon Welsh suggested that good diplomacy is about co-development and co-implementation, with diplomats acting to bring people together as if in a "global dinner party." His view was that best that diplomats can do in nation-branding is show aspects of their country that are true but not known.
4. ***Public diplomacy should be increasingly involved with young people and new media.*** The US Embassy's Judy Moon spoke of citizen diplomacy as part of 21st century statecraft. She noted that public diplomacy should be increasingly involved with young people and equally social media. To engage with social media, diplomats need training and encouragement to take risks. There needs to be leadership and regulations that allow staff to use new media platforms for discussion to reach out to new audiences: to be creative and see if it works.
5. ***Public and citizen diplomacy must be seen within larger changes in media and communications.*** ABC Managing Director Mark Scott noted that the removal of barriers to entry means that a transformation as big as the invention of the printing press is underway. Every day 60,000 new blogs are created, and there are currently 700 million Facebook users. Fergus Hanson noted this new faculty gives diplomats the potential to reach a far greater audience than ever before. He noted the need to trust diplomats to use these tools.
6. ***People-to-people contact is crucial to how a country is viewed abroad.*** US Center for Citizen Diplomacy Ann Schodde noted the role of individual actors and the way that volunteer and private sector contact can help build cross-cultural knowledge and respect. She noted the importance of citizen-to-citizen contact to a country's reputation and explored the potential role of government in encouraging people-to-people contact.
7. ***Institutional support is important.*** The role of a dedicated agency for public and citizen diplomacy was discussed, with the British Council given as a model for such an organisation.
8. ***Domestic support is needed for public and citizen diplomacy.*** The impact of domestic debate on international opinion was highlighted. The role of domestic diplomacy – communicating with a country's own citizens – was noted as an element of public diplomacy.

4. What Australia can do to Augment Public and Citizen Diplomacy

Discussion on ways to augment Australian public and citizen diplomacy practice centred around two positions: either a fundamental rethink or incremental improvements.

Those advocating a fundamental rethink spoke of the need for a complete overhaul of Australia's image and image projection, including changing policy where needed, thus "changing the problems that are causing the problems". The need for a substantial change like a dedicated body modeled on the British Council was discussed. Paul Grigson raised the issue of whether taxpayers consider that they get value for money from such bodies.

Incremental improvements suggested were improved leadership, vision, coordination and investment of resources, including through increased efforts in e-diplomacy and focus on education.

Recommendations made by participants were summarised by Virginia Haussegger as falling into the following areas:

Leadership

- Maintain high ambitions in Australia's public and citizen diplomacy.
- Encourage political leaders to place increased importance on public and citizen diplomacy
- Commission a study of Australia's current efforts in public diplomacy and citizen diplomacy. This would survey world's best practice, identify where Australia lags behind compared to other similar countries and synthesise recommendations from previous studies. A policy paper could be produced for government setting out the case for improved public and citizen diplomacy with costings for action.
- Raise awareness of public and citizen diplomacy, including through the media.

Vision

- Accept that Australia's image abroad can be improved.
- Build greater clarity on the image that Australia wants to convey. This should capture complexity and represent Australia as it is today.
- Remove stereotypical images of Australia from Embassy and High Commission websites.
- Emphasise the importance of Australia's immediate region in public and citizen diplomacy given that this is the region when Australia's reputation is most at risk.
- Be willing to make changes to policy causing reputational issues when desirable.
- Include "domestic public diplomacy" to educate the Australian domestic public as an important part of efforts.
- Encourage Australians to see themselves as "citizen diplomats" when representing their country abroad.

Resources

- Increase the resources invested in public and citizen diplomacy, including funds allocated to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, non-government organisations, international broadcasting and cultural activities.
- Consider ways to harness existing human capital, including additional training, greater use of new media and encouragement to use creativity and take risks.

Coordination

- Continue to improve agency coordination, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade playing a leadership role.
- Establish a loose network of individuals and agencies involved in public and citizen diplomacy.
- Conduct an inventory of citizen diplomacy to find out what current efforts are being made by which Australian actors.
- Consider establishment of an agency responsible for coordinating public and citizen diplomacy efforts in Australia.

Conclusion

A number of metaphors were used to describe public and citizen diplomacy throughout the Forum:

- Professor Ramesh Thakur noted the existence of a risk averse culture that looks at public and citizen diplomacy and asks: “will it rock the boat?”
- Jolyon Welsh shifted this to pose the question “will it make the boat go faster?”, changing the focus to look at how public and citizen diplomacy can augment traditional diplomacy.
- Professor Jan Melissen described public and citizen diplomacy as “two people rowing in boats in more or less the same direction”.

Metaphor aside, the Forum on Public and Citizen Diplomacy stimulated much-needed debate.

Participants’ contributions suggested a consensus that public and citizen diplomacy is integral to Australia’s economic and security interests and that a renewed effort is required for Australia to promote an effective international image.

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