Engaging Technologies: A Comparative Study of U.S. and Venezuelan Strategies of Influence and Public Diplomacy

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Nation-state efforts to account for the shift in the global communication environment, such as "public diplomacy 2.0," appear to reflect interrelated transformations—how information and communication technologies (ICTs) change the instruments of statecraft and, importantly, how communication interventions serve as strategically significant foreign policy objectives in their own right. This article examines two cases of foreign policy rhetoric that reveal how the social and political roles of ICTs are articulated as part of international influence objectives: the case of public diplomacy 2.0 programs in the United States and Venezuela's Telesur international broadcasting effort. These two cases provide evidence of the increasing centrality of ICTs to policy concerns and demonstrate how policy makers translate contextualized ideas of communication effects and mediated politics into practical formulations.

Keywords: Public diplomacy, social media, international communication, rhetoric, international politics

Social networking websites, virtual worlds, and Web 2.0 technologies present distinct challenges to conceptions of communication and influence that define public diplomacy. Yet the significance of these technologies for international influence is not intrinsic to the technologies themselves but rather in how such technologies are conceived as crucial to the politics of international engagement and persuasion. Nation-state efforts to account for the shift in the global communication environment, such as "public diplomacy 2.0" and novel forms of satellite international broadcasting, appear to reflect interrelated transformations—how new information and communication technologies (ICTs) change the instruments of public diplomacy and, importantly, how communication interventions such as public diplomacy serve as strategically significant foreign policy objectives in their own right. This article examines two cases of foreign policy rhetoric and programs that reveal how the social and political roles of ICTs are articulated as part of international influence objectives and how the affordances of ICTs are refracted through strategic discourse.

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The case of public diplomacy 2.0 and the advent of 21st-century statecraft in the United States reveal implications of new technology that tightly bind methods to outcomes relevant to foreign policy objectives. The case of Venezuela's Telesur television network demonstrates how a traditional public diplomacy–related concept—international broadcasting—has been appropriated to perform a communication intervention into regional political identity. These cases provide comparative evidence of how ICTs have transformed foreign policy practice and demonstrate how policy makers translate ideas of communication effects and mediated politics into practical formulations.

It is important to recognize that communication technologies have historically played a role in strategies of foreign influence (Cull, 2009, 2013; Dizard, 2004; Hanson, 2008; Taylor, 2003). The instances explored here, however, suggest a more constitutive and systemic role for such technologies in foreign policy reasoning (Livingston, 2011). The linkage between ICTs and attempts to influence foreign audiences reflects both the "art of the possible" as well as foreign policy ends in themselves. How ICTs are argued as necessary to strategies of engagement in each case suggests different forms of what Joseph Nye calls "contextual intelligence"—how actors translate resources and available means of communication into anticipated soft power outcomes (Nye, 2011, p. xvii).

To explore each case, examples of public arguments—reasoning articulated to justify, explain, and establish strategic definitions and requirements—are examined alongside developments in strategic communication programs, public diplomacy, and other implementations of international communication to achieve state objectives. This evidence is presented to illustrate how the United States and Venezuela both *react to* and strive to *utilize* the available communication infrastructure as a crucial context for their foreign policy objectives. Methodological attention to the discourse of foreign policy argumentation demonstrates the *constructed* relation between ICTs and their expected utility. Argument theorist G. Thomas Goodnight explains the use of rhetorical analysis of foreign policy arguments: "we examine arguments (everything from public debates to expert discussions) not to theorize about the ends of persuasion, but to see the limits and inventive possibilities of the cultural, social, practical contexts within which actions and judgments are contested" (Goodnight, 1998, para. 17). To assess the implications of ICTs for foreign public diplomacy and public diplomacy, it is necessary to see how these concepts are discursively justified, advocated for, and implemented.

The cases discussed suggest that the anticipated capacity of ICTs—whether social media technologies or satellite broadcast technologies—to shape international politics is as much a contrived notion as it is a reflection of inherent technological affordances. The rhetoric of and about technology, in other words, has serious implications for how ICTs are incorporated into foreign policy ambitions (McCarthy, 2011). The social construction of information technologies is not a new concept, though how these technologies are rendered as a political tool within the mission parameters of public diplomacy requires further explanation (Castells, 2004; Jenkins, 2008; Winner, 1988).

It has been more than a decade since Ronald Deibert's (1997) "medium theory" analysis of communication technology within international relations scholarship, which proposed that media technology by its own properties profoundly influences the contours of international politics. Manuel Castells (1997, 2007) has likewise offered that the socially constructed properties of ICTs enable distinct

individual and group-based "projects"—where technology reflects both a *perceived need for technological solutions* as a much as a *capacity to transform* the power of actors in international politics. But how has this translated into articulated imperatives for the embrace of technology by nation-states specifically as a tool for influence?

As international actors articulate and justify the use of such media, they reveal expectations about anticipated media effects, the efficacy of persuasive messages, the subjectivity of transnational audiences, and, more generally, the ways in which ICTs are imbricated in the fabric of political and social life (Hayden, 2011; Neumann, 2003). Debates over the use of ICTs in public diplomacy and international broadcasting parallel long-standing questions about media effects and mediatized culture by extending the significance of ICTs into the realm of necessity for foreign policy objectives (see Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). How media effects and notions of audience are conceptualized in public diplomacy discourse is not just an intellectual puzzle that animates media studies and communication scholarship; it also signals important developments in how international communication has converged upon enduring questions of foreign policy analysis.

The Case of Venezuela

Venezuelan public diplomacy and the ICTs it employs reflect the influence of Hugo Chavez and the "Bolivarian revolution" in Venezuelan politics. As Venezuelan president, Chavez has been an outspoken critic of the United States and U.S. hegemony in Latin America (Noya, 2008, p. 8). Chavez assumed the role of president in 1999, after decades of discontent over political corruption and poverty (Coronel, 2006). Since that time, Chavez has used various international and domestic platforms to denounce the United States and to promote Venezuelan policies.

The Bolivarian revolution that defines the Chavez government also informs Venezuelan foreign policy. Venezuela's foreign policy under President Hugo Chavez has aimed to cultivate a multipolar international relations based on opposition to the unipolarity of the United States and the ideological program of capitalism (Dodson & Dorraj, 2008, p. 71; Massey, 2009).

The Venezuelan government's emphasis on ideological conflict is argued here to be significant for how media have been deployed in the service of international influence. The Bolivarian movement emerged in reaction to the perceived negative influence of private capital and, in particular, the politicized media that controlled much of the political reporting and information flows in Venezuela. Through domestic and international broadcasting, Venezuela lays claim to stewardship of a regional identity with a message of opposition to the United States and media oligopolies and of establishing regional financial and media institutions that symbolize Venezuela's efforts at counterhegemonic influence (Boyd-Barrett & Boyd-Barrett, 2010; Painter, 2006).

The Venezuelan government significantly consolidated its control over political institutions in the wake of an unsuccessful coup in 2002 that was largely supported by media opposed to Chavez. Since that time, supporters of the Chavez government have presented the so-called oligarchic media as the government's principal domestic political scapegoat and implicated the United States in using media to

foment the 2002 coup (Elliott, 2010, 2012). The Chavez government depicts Venezuelan media space as interpenetrated by capitalist and counterrevolutionary forces. Venezuelan outreach to other countries—in particular through its international broadcaster Telesur—is considered here as a set of *public diplomacy* practices that aims to demystify the manipulation of Venezuela's image in international media and to demonstrate the purportedly inherent hypocrisy of the United States and its political institutions.

According to Javier Corrales (2009), the strategic aim of Venezuelan foreign policy is "soft balancing" against the United States through the application of "social power." According to Corrales, power is cultivated through generous amounts of unconditional monetary aid and oil subsidies distributed to Latin America and Africa. Aid distribution carries expected symbolic value, deters other nation-states from criticism of the Chavez government, and offers a ready-made platform to sustain critiques of the United States (Bustamante & Sweig, 2008).

Development aid, however, is not the only dimension to Venezuelan public diplomacy. Rather, payments and development aid serve as a symbolic component of a larger public diplomacy strategy of cultivating regional identification. International communication provides a vehicle for this mission to secure strands of identification between Venezuela and its imagined regional compatriots. Venezuelan public diplomacy invites its audience into the Bolivarian narrative of revolution and independence—a tradition that extends back to Simon Bolivar's historical reliance on media as the crucial "artillery of ideas" (Golinger, 2010a). Regional foreign publics are imbricated in Venezuela's foreign policy objectives, which suggests the significance of technologies of outreach and an implicit mandate for public diplomacy.

Speaking on Telesur in 2009, Venezuelan foreign representative Egardo Ramirez described the need to cultivate relationships with neighboring countries and, importantly, that Venezuelan foreign policy must reflect the views of people as much as governments. "Venezuela can not go forward alone. . . . A foreign policy today legitimized by the people is a foreign policy that is invincible and can work on any front" (Ramirez, 2009, para. 9). Diplomatic outreach in this view necessitates appeals to publics.

Such engagement operates through the competitive terrain of international and domestic media. Venezuelan diplomat Carlos Davila (2008) writes on Aporrea.org (a quasi-governmental website for news and editorials) that Venezuela is engaged in a "media war" that requires a "strategic communication plan." Davila elaborates the imperative underlying the need for a communication plan: "[w]e need to transmit the Venezuelan reality to gain allies"; in addition, he asserts that diplomatic institutions should aggressively promote Venezuelan achievements. His proposal amounts to a form of coordinated nation branding: "The political and communicational work strategically articulated must represent the central nucleus of tourist, cultural, scientific, sport, consular and military." For Davila, Venezuela "must mobilize its emotions and shared . . . common values" with intelligent and truthful messages (Davila, 2008, para. 1).

The significance of media for these efforts undoubtedly reflects the historical impact of media on domestic politics as much as it continues the tradition of dependency theory critiques of media in Latin America (Thussu, 2007). Sensitivity to media intervention continues to dominate Venezuelan public argument about the role of media as a political force. Andrés Izarra, the former president of Telesur and

current minister of communication and information, argued before the Organization of American States in 2009 that the private media in Venezuela were already embroiled in a strategic communication conflict:

> Venezuelan private media carry out . . . activities of media terrorism. Messages of hatred are broadcasted on TV and radio newscasts. Private media have used subliminal messages and deceptive advertising against the Venezuelan people and government. ("Director of Telesur," 2009, para. 2)

In this characterization, the boundaries between a media-centric public diplomacy and aggressive media policy in the domestic sphere are blurred. Chavez has been supportive of domestic efforts to empower communities to create local media outlets that allow community-based reporting and storytelling (Duffy & Everton, 2008). Broadcast media is perceived by the Venezuelan government as an essential aspect of political efficacy and social betterment.

This logic is embodied in the launch of La Nueva Televisora del Sur (The new television station of the south), or Telesur, in 2005. Telesur has been described as a "subtle public diplomacy tool of the Venezuelan government" that advocates and demonstrates independence from corporate news programming and a prosocial agenda (Bustamante & Sweig, 2008, p. 233). Shortly after its launch, it achieved a respectable degree of penetration into regional media markets in its first year, including 17 Latin American countries through over-the-air satellite and terrestrial broadcast programming as well as early plans to expand into North American Hispanic media markets (Pearson, 2006; Sreeharsha, 2005).

Telesur was initiated by the Venezuelan government as a collaborative international broadcasting effort with shared ownership among Latin American countries and was designed to provide an alternative to corporate-owned news and information programming. Telesur aims to "integrate a region that currently knows other parts of the world better than it knows itself" (Bustamante & Sweig, 2008, p. 232). As conceived, the channel is an intervention in international news flows that reflects concerns originally voiced in the United Nations New World Information and Communication Order controversy and the MacBride Commission of the 1970s (Cañizares & Lugo, 2007; Sian, 2011). Telesur was designed to foster citizenship among South Americans, free from the perceived distortions of commercial advertising support (Machado, 2006).

The rhetoric of justification and amplification surrounding Telesur, however, is a revealing body of discourse about how Telesur is imagined as a foreign policy tool. It represents an *emancipatory* political effort to cultivate identification across national boundaries as much as it imagines the transformative potential of satellite news media. Yet Telesur also represents a potent social power; Telesur could conceivably be a crucial force for integration across the Latin American world. To borrow from Janice Bially Mattern's depiction of soft power, Telesur's promoters envision a kind of "representational force" (Bially Mattern, 2005, p. 586). In this view, Telesur's strategy of representation through inclusivity cultivates political allegiance and transforms the political agency of Latin American publics.

Aram Aharonian, the general director of Telesur in 2008, spoke plainly of its objective: "to develop and implement a hemispheric televised communications strategy, of world-wide reach, to promote

and consolidate the progression of change and regional integration, as a tool in the battle of ideas against the hegemonic process of globalization" (Burch, 2007, p. 227). Aharonian features media as a crucial aspect of cultural identification, while dependence on foreign news sources equates to vulnerability to exploitation: "From the North they see us in black and white—mostly in black: We only appear in the news when a calamity occurs—and in reality, we are a continent in Technicolor" (Burch, 2007, p. 228). Andrés Izarra, speaking at Telesur's launch, claimed the channel would give voice to the diversity of the region and serve the crucial function of promoting debate over the persistent social concerns (ibid.). Telesur is pitched as a kind of corrective to imperialist intervention, yet also justified as liberal and deliberative in potential.

In practice, Telesur has garnered the support of the governments of Argentina, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Bolivia alongside Venezuela's role as the primary sponsor of the network (Sian, 2011). It has been recognized by other leaders as a model to emulate. Jean Ping, president of the African Union, spoke in 2009 of the need for a Telesur-like station to connect nations in the global south. "We become accustomed to listen as the North speaks. . . . We must give our countries the opportunity to express themselves, that it be the South-South voice" (Suggett, 2009, para. 6). The south-south perspective also extends to the Middle East. Telesur announced content-sharing agreements with Al-Jazeera in 2006 (Suggett, 2009, para. 6).

Telesur: Identity Politics in International Broadcasting

Telesur, as a form of international broadcasting, is framed by its advocates as a force for social and cultural integration with the idealized goal of political empowerment. It is conceived to be more than a corrective to systemic misinterpretation in international news flows, but also a means to circumvent obstacles to political reform caused by agenda setting and framing effects perpetuated by "hostile" media organizations. Aharonian makes the case that Telesur is a tool to promote a collective awareness:

> The problem in Latin America is that we don't know anything about each other, we are blind to ourselves. We always saw ourselves through the lens of Madrid, London, New York. . . . We begin with the idea that first we must get to know ourselves. Our problems are similar, the expectations are similar. Telesur is merely a tool so that people get to know what's happening in Latin America, and this may spur the process of integration. (Kozloff, 2007, para. 29)

Telesur in this view is necessary for both the Venezuelan government and its imagined partners, given the purported corrosive effect of corporate media on the democratic governance of Latin American countries.

The politics of Telesur builds on the assumption that democratically elected governments are held hostage to the increasingly global flows of capital by working to establish credibility through shared values, perspectives, and, importantly, adversity. It foregrounds the shared predicament of media partisanship and the effacement of particular cultural and political groups in corporate media and suggests

that media such as Telesur can foster a previously unrealized solidarity. Promotional slogans tellingly reflect these intentions:

> "Finally, we can see each other's faces."
> "Getting to know one another."
> "There's space here for everyone." (Telesur brochure, 2008)

Understanding Telesur as a subtle form of public diplomacy has implications that extend beyond its capacity to improve the image of Venezuela. Telesur aims, rather ambitiously, to subordinate the collective social imaginary that upholds the political status quo in Latin America. In this view, targeting the symbolic resources that sustain regional international relations would benefit Venezuelan foreign policy. It is nevertheless striking that broadcast media's social function is so clearly envisioned as a kind of political engineering. Telesur's own promotional text on its website offers a literalization of Benedict Anderson's (1991) "imagined community" metaphor and declares a kind of political instrumentality:

> [Telesur's mission is] to develop a new communicational strategy for Latin America. One that promotes the right to information and considers veracity as its main principle. A strategy that stimulates the production and projection of regional content, promoting the recognition of the Latin American imagery. A channel with social vocation that serves as historical memory and cultural expression, a space for meeting and debating ideas, made up of a diverse and plural programming as diverse and plural as the population of Latin America. ("TeleSUR es," 2010)

In practice, however, Venezuela still produces nearly 70% of Telesur's programming and has been criticized for supplanting an advertising-fueled news service with a celebratory voice for Venezuelan oil and economic interests (Sian, 2011). Telesur is thus less compelling as an effective tool of public diplomacy and more instructive about the manner in which technological platforms reflect political and cultural influences on foreign policy.

The National Character of Technological Interventions

Venezuela's promotion of Telesur presents broadcasting as a viable technological platform for foreign policy objectives. Yet the story of Venezuela's adaptation to new and social media forms illustrates how media technology capacity is inevitably refracted through local contexts and histories. Before 2010, the Venezuelan government opposed social media. For example, the U.S. State Department's Alliance for Youth Movements (a U.S. public diplomacy effort) was denounced by Eva Golinger of Telesur in 2009 as promoting technologies that specialize "in the subversion and destabilization of governments." According to Golinger, the "young creators of technologies like Twitter, Facebook, Google, Next Gen, Meetup and YouTube" were present to support the State Department's "new strategy of regime change," signifying "irrefutable evidence of the sinister alliance between Washington and new technologies" (Golinger, 2009, para. 2–3).

Golinger offered a dramatic appraisal of social networking technology's power: "[The] potential use of these technologies to promote psychological operations and propaganda is unlimited. Its strength is the speed of dissemination of messages and global coverage strategy." For Telesur, social networking technologies constitute a massive "destabilization plan" against nation-states that resist the "imperialist" policies of the United States (Golinger, 2009, para. 7).

In February 2010, President Chavez argued that Twitter and other social networking technologies were "terrorist threats" (Jardin, 2010). In a related move, the Venezuelan legislature moved to ban violent video games (a predominantly Western import) in 2009 (Toothaker, 2009). Yet the symbolic association of new media forms with the United States would eventually give way to an enthusiastic embrace of social media (Ghitis, 2011).

Later in 2010, the Chavez government announced that it would utilize social media tools ("In Chavez's Venezuela," 2010; Janicke, 2010). Chavez thereafter launched a blog and a Twitter account. Chavez's Twitter account, http://twitter.com/chavezcandanga, is purportedly staffed by more than 200 people charged with maintaining *Mission ChavezCandanga*. As of June 2011, @chavezcandanga had more than 1.6 million followers. Chavez explains the intent of this venture into social media as extending the frontiers of ideological conflict:

> Maybe I'll reach millions, not only in Venezuela but in the world. . . . I am going to dig my own trench on the Internet. . . . All this is a battle between socialism and capitalism. . . . Our Internet—the Bolivarian Internet—has to be an alternative press. ("Hugo Chavez," 2010)

President Chavez's Twitter account promotes the accomplishments of the government and continues the mediated conflict with the United States. For example, in response to proposed U.S. sanctions against Venezuela for alleged support of the Iranian nuclear program, Chavez tweets,

> Sanciones contra la Patria de Bolívar?Impuestas por el gobierno imperialista gringo? Pues:BienvenidasMrObama!NoOlvideQSomosLosHijosDeBolivar! (Sanctions against the homeland of Bolivar? Imposed by the Imperialist government gringo? Welcome, Mr. Obama. Don't forget we are the children of Bolivar!). (May 24 http://twitter.com/#!/chavezcandanga)

Chavez also posts messages that exhort broader thematic arguments about Venezuelan values. Here, Chavez promotes socialism's comparative advantages:

> En capitalismo nunca habrá solución para el drama de la vivienda. Sólo el Socialismo podrá solucionarlo!! (In capitalism there will never be [a] solution to the housing drama. Only socialism can solve it!)

Venezuela's turn to social media is also evidenced in efforts to train domestic youth through programs such as the Communication Thunder initiative, which uses the Internet to counter attacks on the

government and to train citizens to "promote a new way of seeing the world through socialism." Diosdado Cabello, a senior member of Chavez's political party and head of Venezuelan telecommunications firm Conatel, described the Communication Thunder project as using "all tools that are available" ("Chávez ahora tiene una 'guerrilla contra la mentira,'" 2010).

Cabello argues that technologies are not *intrinsically* the tools of those who oppose the Bolivarian revolution. "The opposition thinks they are the leaders of the social networks. They think that Twitter and Facebook are theirs. We are fighting the battle . . . everyone in the PSUV [Partido Sociolista Unido de Venezuela], let's all have an account" (Pearson, 2010, para. 7). Nearly seven years after its inception, Telesur announced major changes to its own Web presence to enable users to comment on and evaluate Telesur's posted content (Ferreras, 2012).

Why the sudden shift in attitude toward social media? Aside from its popularity, one possible factor could be the controversial release of thousands of U.S. diplomatic cables on the WikiLeaks site in 2010, demonstrating the power of collaborative social sharing technologies to aid Venezuelan strategies to negatively frame U.S. actions. Venezuelan journalists seized upon evidence in the WikiLeaks trove of diplomatic correspondence that the United States was actively leveraging public diplomacy and Department of Defense–funded strategic communication methods to confront the Chavez government (Golinger, 2010b). Specifically, they identified evidence that the U.S. embassy in Caracas was seeking the assistance of the Department of Defense in a strategic communications plan to support prodemocracy movements and diminish the impact of anti-U.S. rhetoric.

Overall, the Venezuelan turn to social media may not constitute a dramatic shift in attitudes about strategic communication and Venezuela's international communication policies. Such moves, however, reinforce the claim that there may be significant linkages between the domestic and foreign dimension of the government's strategic objectives—the promotion of widespread identification with Bolivarian ideals and the Chavez government. Former Telesur president Andres Izarra bluntly characterized the goal of Venezuelan media strategy as a form of "communication hegemony" (Pradas, 2007). These objectives are conditioned by perceptions of media influence as the crucial site of struggle and assumptions about the susceptibility of media audiences to manipulation and representational strategies. Telesur and later social media initiatives illustrate how media is rendered as a potent political tool of engagement. Yet while Venezuela has recently acknowledged the potency of new media platforms for persuasion and for promoting a politically charged narrative, U.S. media engagement strategy has shifted toward the invitational stance of *facilitation* based on the constitutive changes wrought by social media on international politics.

The Case of the United States

U.S. arguments for using ICTs as a platform for public diplomacy can be traced to the legacy of technological adaptations during the era of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the considerable number of reports and recommendations that have emerged from the analyst community since 2001 that have pushed for ways to accommodate how audiences crucial to U.S. foreign policy goals actually use and access media outlets (Cull, in press; Lord, 2008). The precipitous decline of positive

opinion about the United States frustrated public diplomacy planners and advocates, who were already marginalized by the integration of resources from the dismantled USIA into the State Department in 1999.

Arguments suggestive of a *technological* approach stand out in the many reports and white papers on U.S. public diplomacy course corrections. In particular, awareness of the global communication infrastructure appears as a common theme (Vitto, 2004). Unlike Venezuela's strategy, which reveals expectations of powerful media effects, the U.S. reports highlight the opportunity represented in media technologies and the communities (or networks) that engage them. A U.S. Government Accountability Office report in 2009 captures the concern that this "environment" (networked communication) is crucial:

> [T]he current information suggests a failure to adapt in this dynamic communications environment could significantly raise the risk that U.S. public diplomacy efforts could become increasingly irrelevant, particularly among younger audiences that represent a key focus of U.S. strategic communication efforts. (United States Government Accountability Office, 2009)

Such concerns emerged alongside growing recognition that communication and media flows constitute significant challenges for nation-state action. Joseph Nye implicates the global media ecology, stating that publics important to foreign policy confront a "paradox of plenty" (Nye, 2008, p. 99) as they are inundated with multiple channels of information, news, and perspectives. This also has consequences for the political agency of foreign publics. Individuals are likewise *empowered* by what Manual Castells calls "mass-self-communication" to affect political change (Castells, 2007, p. 239). In the wake of the Arab Spring, the capacity of social media technologies to enable networks as significant political actors suggests a requisite change in the practice of diplomacy (Ross, 2011). As Roger Cohen argued in *The New York Times*, "there are more networks in our future than treaties" (Cohen, 2011, para. 11).

This context for foreign policy has fueled increased attention to technology as a *solution* to foreign policy objectives. This also highlights the increased importance of public diplomacy as a strategic orientation toward global engagement (Morozov, 2009), an idea at least in part justified by the stream of scholarly writing about the significance of media and information technologies for the practice of international politics (Deibert, 1997; Gilboa, 2005; Hanson, 2008; Potter, 2008). The convergence of technology, diplomacy, and practice has led to a reconsideration of statecraft itself (Kelley, 2010; Ross, 2011).

21st-Century U.S. Statecraft

In the case of the United States, calls for technologies of engagement reflect a justification for public diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy rather than as a means for persuasion or information dominance. Instead of emphasizing the penetration of the global communication infrastructure with messages that exhort the common values and motives of the United States, new arguments for public diplomacy and diplomatic messaging call for actions to demonstrate the role of the United States as a respectful global partner. Donna Oglesby, a retired Foreign Service officer and counselor with the USIA, describes this as requiring "an understanding of what is credible and politically viable in the context of

other societies who interpret messages sent to them in terms of their own realities" (Oglesby, 2009, p. 100.

Oglesby offers that a "mediated diplomacy" would emphasize what the United States does to recognize and respond to the particular context of those it is engaging instead of reflecting an overt messaging objective (Oglesby, 2009, p. 7). This kind of diplomacy also requires a degree of reflexivity and attentiveness. Global communication scholar Monroe Price argues that public diplomacy should move from "primarily a means of projecting perceptions of the U.S. . . . to one which would be a platform for cooperation, mediation, and reception—a mode of being informed as well as informing" (Price, 2008, para. 4). Price's and Oglesby's prescriptions underscore the value commitments apparent in calls for a "21st-century statecraft"—an "agenda" that "complements traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments that fully leverage the networks, technologies, and demographics of our networked world" (Ross, 2011, p. 452).

This ethic reorients *both* diplomacy and public diplomacy to a facilitative and symbolic role as opposed to being directly concerned with image management and representation. Public diplomacy works in this view by performing rather than declaring the values and ethics that messaging cannot by itself do in a pluralistic and complex global media environment. It is *facilitative* in the sense that public diplomacy programs offer communicative and deliberative provisions for foreign stakeholders to empower them in some way. It is *symbolic* in that public diplomacy should not be obviously self-referential but rather demonstrate credibility through how its actions enable identification with the U.S. in some fashion.

James Glassman, the last Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs under the George W. Bush administration, proposed a shift in perspective that was not about a technology per se but was clearly grounded in the affordances of technology for diplomacy and international politics. Speaking in December 2008, Glassman made the case for a diplomatic practice that is derived from the social and cultural consequences of technology among crucial audiences:

> We have arrived at the view that the best way to achieve our goals in public diplomacy is through a new approach to communicating, an approach that is made far easier because of the emergence of Web 2.0, or social networking, technologies. We call our new approach Public Diplomacy 2.0. PD 2.0 is an approach, not a technology. (Glassman, 2008, para. 13–14)

The shift to technology as a vital means to conduct public diplomacy also suggests public diplomacy's instrumental role in delivering foreign policy goals directly as an end in itself. For example, Alec Ross, a senior advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and staunch advocate of technology as a policy tool for the State Department, argues that "the goal is to move beyond just government-to-government relationships and enhance government-to-people and people-to-people relationships around the world" (Buxbaum, 2009, para. 7). Such relationships are conceived in this discourse as strategic ends.

Technology for Its Own Sake

The reformulation of public diplomacy as a "2.0" form of statecraft is framed within a rhetoric of urgency as much as a celebration of technological capability. Taking the rhetoric at face value, the scene of international relations for the United States appears populated with agents waiting to be enabled by technological assistance—that a liberal, pluralistic public sphere is waiting to be catalyzed by a more robust technological intervention: something the United States can provide. For example, U.S. senator Richard Lugar explains the logic of using technology in a facilitative mode:

> The adroit use of social networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and others, coupled with text messages and increasingly widespread mobile-phone technology, can help lend support to existing grassroots movements for freedom and civil rights, connect people to information, and help those in closed societies communicate with the outside world. (Lugar, 2010, para. 5)

Lugar's arguments also portray the communication context as the terrain of conflict, which requires an appropriate technological response to America's opponents:

> Terrorists and other anti-American propagandists have for some time been using the Internet and other techniques to communicate and recruit. America needs to beat them at their own game, especially since we invented most of the technology. (Lugar, 2010, para. 10)

Lugar warns that technology *as a national asset* has been co-opted by the enemy. The U.S. must use the appropriate tools not only to combat the enemy—in a public diplomacy reconceptualized as symbolic conflict—but also to reclaim a kind culturally defined technological dominance. To do this requires the fusion of both technology and a new kind of diplomatic practice: "I would encourage the administration and our diplomats to be nimble, flexible, and innovative as they pursue a wide range of foreign-policy initiatives that use these new communication and connection techniques" (Lugar, 2010, para. 11).

Public discussion of this new kind of public diplomacy *cum* "battle of ideas" should not be read as simplistic technophilia (see Morozov, 2011). Rather, Lugar's statements represent part of a larger (if perhaps belated) acknowledgment about the global communication infrastructure and the way in which this infrastructure transforms the political and *interpretive* agency of foreign publics. In 2009, Michael Doran, the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy under the Bush administration, described how changes in the Defense Department's thinking on strategic communication reflected awareness of audience engagement with ICTs and its ramifications for U.S. public diplomacy. Doran describes that during the Cold War era, audiences were "deferential" to information and media messaging. Since that time, there has been a steady delegitimizing of authority for information received through mass media outlets. Whereas at one time international audiences were *deferential* to mass communication, they are now *referential* (Doran, 2009). Articulated in theoretical terms, Doran's

argument justifies a presence in the networks that cultivate and sustain credibility—to be a peer in the network that also outlines the media dependency of foreign audiences (Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

Twitter-Craft

Does the advent of 21st-century statecraft reflect a change in public diplomacy or, more broadly, a transformation in U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy? Senator Lugar is explicit in calling the use of ICTs symbolic of 21st-century statecraft without couching this in terms strictly limited to public diplomacy. In particular, he points to the ways in which the State Department has paid for social network services in Pakistan, the new mobile phone–based social network Humari Awaz, or "Our Voice" (Lugar, 2010). Yet Lugar frames these actions as instrumental to "winning the hearts and minds" of audiences abroad—as if the provision of communication technology is both a charitable demonstration of U.S. goodwill as much as a persuasive action to lead audiences toward the conclusion that U.S. policies are at least acceptable. The emphasis on *facilitative* technological engagement is defined by this tension. Yet influence remains at the core of arguments for so-called 21st-century statecraft. Social media enable a kind of diplomacy in public that is both public diplomacy and a diplomacy with symbolic benefits.

Jared Cohen, formerly of the State Department and now director of the Google Ideas think tank, has been an outspoken advocate of technological innovation for diplomatic ends. Cohen has argued in frank terms about the capacity of technologies to "disrupt" the conventions of state-centric international relations (Larson, 2010). His explanation of the Alliance for Youth Movement of 2009 summit reveals fundamental assumptions about the requirements of international political action as transformed by ICTs. "So it's not about how many people have access today, it's about how many people have access tomorrow and a year from now" (Cohen, 2009, para. 8).

For Cohen, *civil society* and other non-state networks constitute the flexible range of actors that U.S. public diplomacy must engage and empower to promote the objectives of U.S. foreign policy. U.S. public diplomacy must locate and encourage such political actors that share some aspect of the value orientation that U.S. foreign policy seeks to encourage. Yet even Cohen's argument for facilitation is interspersed with the (increasingly anachronistic) impulse to *control* the technological sphere:

> And at the end of the day, we have two options: We can recognize that nobody can control these technologies—bad people will continue to use them, but that's all the more reason to engage in these spaces. And the other option is to be fearful that hostile actors might use it and shy away from it. (Cohen, 2009, para. 10)

Thus, for Cohen, ICTs are a means to amplify the agency of actors that represent U.S. interests, even in a loosely coordinated fashion that diminishes the imprint of U.S. action. This represents a rudimentary logic of influence through ICTs. But Cohen demurs when asked about why the Iranian Twitter revolution, a potential proof of concept for Cohen's social network–based diplomacy, failed to overturn the results of the Iranian election in 2009. He points to the *potential* of technologies rather than the demonstrative evidence that such social technologies were exploited by an authoritarian regime to diminish the pro-democratic potential of Twitter: "That just even putting the use of these technologies out

on the public domain, that showcasing the power of these technologies as a tool to organize and express oneself, is in and of itself a victory" (Cohen, 2009, para. 12). Cohen's arguments were eventually vindicated by the pivotal role that such technologies played in the revolutions of the Arab Spring (Howard et al., 2011).

Toward a Cohesive Strategy

The unresolved tensions in U.S. ICT-based public diplomacy were left unaddressed in the official strategy statements that emerged in 2009, which declared that the *relationships* enabled by technologies are strategic ends in their own right. Speaking at a December 2009 briefing on diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere, Secretary of State Clinton outlined a broad mandate for technological integration:

> We have, more than ever in today's world, the chance to cooperate, collaborate, and innovate. It's why the United States is committed to building what I've called a new architecture of cooperation, one where we leverage all the tools at our disposal, our diplomacy, our development efforts, civil society, the private sector, through crosscutting partnerships that are really necessary if we're going to address and hopefully solve the complex problems we confront. (Overmann, 2009, para. 2)

These arguments formed the core justification behind Clinton's subsequent 21st-century statecraft initiatives, such as the Tech@State events, which convene state and non-state actors to resolve complicated foreign policy objectives, including development projects using open-source technologies to support civil society (Comenetz, 2011). Tech@State programs bring together technology developers, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government stakeholders and embody the kind of diplomacy envisioned in Clinton's attempts to transform diplomatic practice (Clinton, 2010).

Secretary Clinton's rhetoric blurs the lines between public and traditional diplomacy by declaring the cooperation theme as both means and ends to U.S. foreign policy. Alec Ross, speaking at the Brookings Institution in December 2009, explained this logic and its technological basis, with some caveats about technology:

> I don't take a utopian view of technology. I don't believe you can just sprinkle the Internet on a foreign policy challenge and get a good outcome. That point of view is naïve and it's wrong. . . . What is clear, however, is that this technology and the global connectedness it creates is at the core of the exercise of power in today's world. And while these technologies are new, the correlation between access to information and power is not. (Ross, 2009, para. 17)

Ross elaborates how the State Department used the "new connection technologies to engage and empower our interlocutors in new and different ways that are consistent with our foreign policy goals." He describes how the State Department developed a program by which individuals in poor areas of Mexico can provide free text messages to local NGOs, which then can pass information along to public authorities about drug-trafficking and crime activities. These kinds of activities are not public diplomacy per se, but

they reflect the kinds of tools states need to contend with so-called hypertransparency and the diffusion of power in what Ross calls a "post-Westphalian" system (Ross, 2012).

Although it is clear that the events of the Arab Spring have driven arguments to increase investment in engagement technologies for U.S. diplomacy, transformation in U.S. influence practice predates those events (Comor & Bean, 2012). Ross has described the case of Iran and the exploitation of Twitter as a demonstrative example of the media as a space for conflict and as an argument for more technology-based intervention, not less:

> So we clearly can't take a sort of kumbaya approach to connection technologies. They can and are being used by our enemies, like al-Qaeda, and by authoritarian regimes . . . Times have changed and those changes require pivots in our statecraft. (Ross, 2009, para. 43)

Ross' rhetoric seizes on a perceived exigency for U.S. diplomacy. For Ross, the embrace of technology is a matter of *urgency* as much as a *practical response* to the strategic realities that constrain the United States in the 21st century. "Look, if Paul Revere were alive today, he wouldn't have taken a Midnight [sic] ride from Boston to Lexington, he would have just used Twitter. And the lantern hangers would have helped make it viral by re-tweeting" (Ross, 2009, para. 45). Ross appeals to the historic narrative of the American Revolution to emphasize the immanent significance of technology for contemporary diplomacy. To not embrace technology is tantamount to obsolescence—foreign policy objectives are simply out of reach without technology. This sentiment would later be echoed by Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Judith McHale in her address to the Council on Foreign Relations in 2011:

> In a world where power and influence truly belongs to the many, we must engage with more people in more places. That is the essential truth of public diplomacy in the internet age. . . . The pyramid of power flipped because people all around the world are clamoring to be heard, and demanding to shape their own futures. They are having important conversations right now—in chatrooms and classrooms and boardrooms—and they aren't waiting for us. (McHale, 2011, para. 8, 12)

ICTs as the Necessary Component of Diplomacy

One important aspect of the U.S. turn toward ICTs in public diplomacy is the gradual *diminishment* of public diplomacy as a distinctive concept in the arguments for technology. The State Department is already pushing to integrate how it accomplishes its core mission through ICTs, such as modernizing internal communications through message boards and other intraorganizational ICT-based planning tools (Johnson, 2009). Likewise, technology advocates such as Ross and Cohen have backed away from characterizing their proposals as a prescriptive for "public diplomacy" (Larson, 2010; Ross, 2012).

The breakdown of definitional boundaries between public and traditional diplomacy in the United States can be understood as an issue of institutional identity and would represent a significant break from the inertia of diplomatic tradition. If fully embraced, it could signal a move toward what Ali Fisher (2008) describes as "open source" diplomacy, which acknowledges a radical reorientation toward the stakeholders and constituents of (public) diplomacy: "the open-source approach to public diplomacy engages in collective effort among peers (both foreign and domestic), whether they are governments, NGO[s], commercial enterprises, or members of a blogroll or *Facebook* group" (Fisher, 2008, p. 12). The convergence of diplomacy and public diplomacy could translate into a "collaborative" diplomacy defined by the convening power of U.S. diplomatic institutions and not so much the imperatives of influence directly over subjects to American power (Fisher, 2012; Slaughter, 2011).

Yet arguments for more ICTs in diplomatic practice feature the need to justify the particular interests of U.S. policy abroad—a balance of reasons that might ultimately be untenable. Left unresolved, the embrace of technology becomes a symbolic adornment on the more traditional edifice of diplomacy.

For example, commentator Evgeny Morozov waxes pessimistic about the rush to embrace technology:

> You don't win a war of ideas by growing the number of new media staff who sit by their computers and, much like robots, respond to every online thread that mentions U.S. foreign policy with an official position of the State Department. (Morozov, 2009, para. 6)

While the failed Iranian Twitter revolution raised doubts about the rhetoric of technology for public diplomacy, the centrality of new media technology during the Arab Spring in 2011 undoubtedly reenergized the pivotal place for such platforms in subsequent public diplomacy (Comenetz, 2011). The key point of contention remains the way in which technology is imagined, however unrealistically by its advocates, to circumvent the powers of authoritarian regimes.

The *telos* of an ICT-centric strategy of public diplomacy might also dissolve the ultimate authority of diplomacy as a distinct institution to manage international affairs (Kelley, 2010). Yet the expression of Ali Fisher's model of influence in open-source diplomacy via ICTs is difficult to reconcile with the imperatives of the sovereign nation-state and its parochial goals. As Micah Sifry and Andrew Rasiej of the Personal Democracy Forum describe:

> The tricky part of 21st-century statecraft, like 21st-century political campaigning, is this: If you want to engage more people in the process, you have to give up some control and trust that they will help spread your message. (Sifry & Rasiej, 2009, para. 11)

The significance of ICTs has nonetheless been central to the discussion of 21st-century statecraft in the U.S. case. Technology is presented as both a pivotal context for strategic rethinking and a crucial policy component in the repertoire of necessary tools to engage in international politics. Technology's potency is discursively constructed; it is endowed with particular capacities that raise new questions about the obligations of a foreign ministry to achieve policy objectives. Assumptions about what technologies *do*

are important in understanding how to articulate problems that need to be solved. The fungible capacities of ICTs in the case of U.S. public discourse thus reflect larger questions about the purpose and identity of diplomacy as an institution.

Conclusion

Information and communication technologies, as tools of statecraft, are inevitably refracted through the prism of history and the exigencies of contemporary policy. This exploration into the reasoning around prominent public diplomacy trends in Venezuela and the United States reveals dissimilar attitudes toward the nature, role, and necessity of specific technologies and how they facilitate international influence.

The case of Venezuela presents a view of technological effect and purpose that is strongly tied to the way in which media have been implicated in that country's tumultuous political history. Telesur is an outgrowth of what the Chavez government believes media can do—grounded in the ideological frameworks of dependency as well as the experience of a media-orchestrated coup in 2002. Telesur is also justified in sweeping assumptions about the centrality of media in the fabric of political identification. It is positioned as a tool of political integration. Telesur may also signify an emulation of Al-Jazeera as an effective international broadcast—that a regional satellite network can yield credibility and stature in the geopolitics of media with consequences that clearly resonate outside the media (Powers, 2009; Powers & Gilboa, 2007).

The rise of public diplomacy 2.0 and 21st-century statecraft in the United States comes in the aftermath of rudderless public diplomacy throughout the George W. Bush administration and a near neglect of public diplomacy in the wake of mounting global unpopularity after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Yet the technocentric aspects of public diplomacy 2.0 are balanced by a careful articulation of expectations. Advocates of an ICT-focused public diplomacy have extolled the potential of technology as a means to engage foreign audiences while denying technology as a panacea.

More revealing is how the arguments for ICTs reference the requirements of international politics by identifying relevant actors, networks, and modes of interaction essential to U.S. foreign policy. These arguments correspond with calls for the reimagining of diplomacy itself. In the U.S. case, public diplomacy is reconfigured as a facilitative exercise in relationship building (engagement)—either in the direct sense of entering into networks or through the symbolic demonstration of a receptive and reflexive dimension to U.S. foreign policy. And the inclusion of ICTs into discussion about public diplomacy begins to implicitly efface the boundary between diplomacy and public diplomacy by collapsing the means of public diplomacy with the ends of foreign policy. ICTs are offered as crucial for this strategic shift.

It is perhaps in the nature of such advocacy to invest some sort of potency in the media proposed as a strategic necessity. Obviously, promoters of these technologies are going to emphasize the technology's efficacy—but technological affordances are as much constructed as they are inherent. In both cases, the media are profoundly salient in strategic concerns and have significant anticipated impact on policy outcomes. In the case of Venezuela, ICTs (considered both as satellite networks and, increasingly,

social media) strongly influence media audiences, and, by the same token, audiences are susceptible to strong media effects. Media technologies in this case reflect public diplomacy conceived as political warfare (Brown, 2012). In the case of the United States, ICTs serve a more sociological function to impact the communication context of deliberation. Arguments for U.S. use of technology in public diplomacy call for intervention in the spaces and practices where relationships (indeed, status and credibility) are established and validated across audiences for ICTs (Comor and Bean, 2012, p. 208). ICTs also stand in as the manifest linkages of social networks that make up civil society, which are argued to be a vital partner in the "architecture of cooperation" that defines U.S. diplomacy.

This study illustrates the particular and often radically contextualized attitudes expressed by nation-state spokespersons toward ICTs and how such technologies are made pertinent to the central concerns of international policy planners. The attitudes and arguments that define ICTs' relevance to foreign policy establish the discursive foundation for future policy that is reactive to ICTs and create a lens through which nation-states anticipate their role and impact. The rhetorical construction of ICTs is also an important vantage from which to gain perspective on the convergence of public diplomacy with other challenges to statecraft and perhaps signal more fundamental challenges to the historical practices of diplomacy as an institution of international politics.

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