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Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting as Antiterrorism Weapons: Philosophical Dilemmas

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Abstract. This article describes problematic assumptions in differentiating public diplomacy from international broadcasting as weapons against terrorism with global reach.

In a recent New York Times article, Kim Elliott, cited as an analyst in the Office of Research of the United States (US) International Broadcasting Bureau, makes a case for the superiority of international broadcasting over public diplomacy as a weapon against terrorism with global reach and, ironically, as a foreign policy tool in today's world of globalization. The main problem with Elliott's case is its unquestioned assumption that the two tools are qualitatively different. If they are not, of course, then there may be no case to be made for advancing one over the other.

Elliott maintains that international broadcasting is the communication of the truth, while public diplomacy is the communication of something that may or may not be the truth and that is intended to put the purveyor's political entity, here the US Government--I, "in the best light." Immediately, one may be struck with problematic assumptions concerning communication content and communication intent between the two tools.

That the truth can ever be conveyed, and, if so, what constitutes the truth in specific situations have significantly constituted the pursuits of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. One may sincerely believe that one is communicating the truth, but the truth still may not be communicated. In fact, there may be many different truths for different truth conveyors and truth recipients without necessarily assuming a relativism of truth. More complexly, constructivist processes of perception and more elaborate interpretation can lead to identical stimuli yielding different truths. And in addition, the perceptual--viz., cognitive, emotional, and motivational-- nature of reality can be coupled with the perception that an obvious relationship between perception and reality is quite problematic. The upshot is that a difference between international broadcasting and public diplomacy based on truth content is tenuous--even if there may be non-tenuous differences based on truthful intention and recipient priming to accept some particular truth.

The notion that the two tools differ through the purveyor's of public diplomacy intention to put a political entity "in the best light" suggests that the purveyor of intentional broadcasting may have some other intention. But can this be? One might argue that the intention to tell the truth--whatever one believes it might be and assuming one may or may be able to tell it--may lead to putting a political entity in some worst light. Yet there seems to be a fairly common transcultural notion that telling the truth about something bad is less bad than lying about the badness. In fact, putting oneself in one's best light may at least sometimes involve putting oneself in one's worst light. And, in fact, intention of the purveyor may have little to do with the meaning developed by recipients as to a communication's content and the intention of the conveyor.

In conclusion, when choosing information and communication tools as weapons against terrorism and as foreign policy praxis, one might believe that there is a concrete, qualitative choice between

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international broadcasting and public diplomacy. This belief may have much more to do with what one thinks one is doing than the heart of the matter. (See Chang, T-K, Wang, J., & Chen, C-H. (1998). The social construction of international imagery in the post-Cold War era: A comparative analysis of U.S. and Chinese national TV news. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 42, 277-296; Elliott, K.A. (November 16, 2002). Is there an audience for public diplomacy? *The New York Times*. p.A27; Korzenny, F., del Toro, W., & Gaudino, J. (1987). International news media exposure, knowledge, and attitudes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 31, 73-87; Wimbush, E., MacGregor, A., & Fraser, E. (1998). Impacts of a national mass media campaign on walking in Scotland. *Health Promotion International*, 13, 45-53.) (Keywords: Propaganda, Public Diplomacy, Terrorism.)