

Mass Diplomacy and International Security in a Networked World

An Essay on Soft Power by Destin Moag, A Junior at the University of Maine Orono

The United States Government and the vast think tank culture it has engendered share an extraordinary fetish for acronyms. GWOT, COIN, and C4ISR are just a few examples of this overriding obsession for beltway policy makers/commentators. There are hundreds of similar terms; but the expression DIME, short for Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economic, the four principal instruments of national power, exemplifies this phenomenon best. It elegantly encapsulates the essential tools of foreign policy, which together constitute the single most important factor in any crisis situation. The first question an informed observer should make when faced with an international security dilemma is; what diplomatic, information, military, and economic assets can we bring to bear? Background is important but the tools a state can put into action and consequent feasibility of intervention is the crucial factor. DIME's central role in the field of international relations is further reinforced by the many inside jokes it has spawned. DIME for example, with its obvious focus on the military aspect of the national power equation, is used to describe the United State's tools of intervention. This pun, though lacking in humor, perfectly describes the current modus operandi of our country. No other contemporary nation on earth is so quick to resort to a military solution. This is ably reflected in the history of the past decade which has seen our armed forces committed to several costly and disastrous nation building schemes. These failures of military intervention in Iraq/Afghanistan, which came despite having the most powerful armed forces in the history of mankind, show that the DIME model is not a viable national strategy.

It is imperative that we as a nation move past this outdated, costly, and clearly failed habit of crafting a largely military centric foreign policy. Instead of viewing hard power as the first line of defense and tool of policy it must be regarded as a last resort. Diplomacy, in particular the sort of mass diplomacy that has only just recently been made possible, should replace force as the United States goes to policy implementation. There has never been a better time to execute such a paradigm shift in US policy. Our economy can no longer support a hegemonic worldview and our populace is tired of military adventurism. President Obama, with his unprecedented global popularity, is the perfect candidate to practice mass open diplomacy on the world stage. Even more importantly technological innovation has resulted in a truly networked world. Social media has gone from being a buzzword to a real force for change across the world. The Arab Awakening uprisings, which to a large degree owed their genesis and eventual success to Twitter/Facebook, prove this point dramatically. As the US moves into an age of austerity our government must craft a national strategy with an innovative use of mass diplomacy at its heart. To turn the old joke about US foreign policy on its head we must move from DIME to D3IME; using people to people contacts in order to spread liberal culture and influence opposing nations' decision making from the ground up.

This second point is the hardest task to accomplish with any tool of foreign policy. Once a country's leadership decides to embark on a course of action it is incredibly difficult to force them to change their minds, especially if they have a large degree of support from their population. The Iranian Mullah's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the international community's efforts to stop them is perhaps the best contemporary example of this phenomenon. The West is using all four DIME tools, secret bilateral diplomatic talks, inter agency information sharing, military exercises in the Gulf, and targeted economic sanctions, in an all out effort to halt Iran's enrichment program. These classic influencing tools have obviously weakened Iran. The Rial's plummeting value and consequent societal unrest dramatically prove this point. Despite these efforts though, Ayatollah Khameni is persisting in his efforts to acquire a nuclear program.

A new diplomatic approach, designed to inform the Iranian people rather than furtively hash out a backroom deal with their leadership, must be used to complement the more conventional methods of persuasion we are already utilizing. We need to employ a combination of new and traditional media to emphasize the moderate policy of the Obama Administration: that it's ok with a peaceful power program as long as the process is conducted under full IAEA supervision. Secretary of State Clinton, among others, has articulated this position in the past, but a full court press via Facebook, Twitter, and the more traditional media outlets must make this compromise position clear to the Iranian people. Obama's resounding win in the 2012 presidential election, where his campaign showcased an unparalleled ability to raise money, rally support, and articulate his policy online, clearly shows that he can command a vast array of new media talent. He must leverage this talent to "go public" with the US policy in Iran. Obama should take the 20th century presidential phenomenon of courting American public opinion in order to implement domestic policy, which is on full display right now in the fiscal cliff negotiations, to the logical endpoint of campaigning internationally for grassroots support of our foreign policy. There are already constant Twitter/Facebook posts by the Obama Administration urging Americans to declare their support for an immediate extension of middle class tax breaks. The broad base of support that comments on these posts puts pressure on intransigent congressmen to compromise. There is no reason why this model shouldn't be applied to Iran as well. We should see just as many new media pleas for IAEA inspected Iranian nuclear power that the average American and Iranian, who both support this compromise, can comment positively on. This mass diplomacy offensive would ensure that the Iranian populace knows that Khameni's framing of this issue as a fight for a fundamental national right is bogus. This would drive a wedge between the Persian nation's theocratic ruling class and its common people. Iranian anger at their sanctioned wracked economy would be largely focused against its fanatical leadership rather than the international community. This domestic pressure in Iran is the only way that the Ayatollahs will compromise on the nuclear issue. It must then be a policy of the United States to engender this unrest through mass diplomacy.

While incredibly useful, clarifying policy/engendering discontent in Iran through social media engagement is an essentially reactive strategy. America can and should use mass

diplomacy to dynamically act in response to crisis situations, but the scope of its possible impact upon US foreign policy implementation extends far beyond this function. Secretary of State Rice said that, "America needs... a diplomacy that not only reports about the world as it is, but seeks to change the world itself." Mass new media diplomacy, much more than the nation building Rice's superiors attempted, is the perfect tool to accomplish this task. Spreading liberal democratic culture with Marines in the Helmand is so expensive in lives and resources that it is essentially impossible. The Government of the United States should instead mobilize its average citizens to act as online emissaries to men and women across the world.

There are several innovative ways the United States can incentivize these kind of global person-to-person connections. Language lesson swaps, where a native English speaker trades an hour of lessons in his or her language for an hour of Mandarin tutoring by a Chinese citizen via Skype, would be perhaps the best place to start. These internet exchanges help American's learn critical languages, promote English as the global language of trade, and almost inevitably lead to both participants gaining a greater appreciation for the others culture. The US government should then strive to create an online "global language institute" that offers an easy place for language lesson swappers to meet up and where American participants are rewarded with community service hours or federal education aid. The government should also push for US high schools and middle schools to incorporate "language pen pals" into their curriculums. Schools could partner with sister programs that teach English as a second language in Uruguay if they have a Spanish language program or Kenya if they are teaching Swahili. The pen pals would use Skype to spend half an hour speaking in English followed by half an hour speaking in whatever foreign language they are learning. These young students could then form real relationships with people halfway around the earth, all while helping to teach English and learn a foreign language when the human brain is most able to digest a new tongue. This contact almost always breeds empathy and ensuring that future high achievers across the globe have fond memories of interacting with likeminded American students is a long-term plan for the growth of liberal democratic values. Most importantly this quantum increase in our soft power and benign global reach could probably be accomplished for less than the cost of a company of Abrams Tanks.

This is just one of many long-term plans for online person-to-person diplomatic action the US could implement today. The United States government must realize that the global environment has changed in a way that makes mass diplomacy initiatives the cheapest and possibly most effective tool of national power. The spread of technology has empowered the average citizen, both at home and abroad, in ways that were inconceivable even five years ago. Pahlavi (2004) sums up the implications of this change perfectly in his thesis, *Mass diplomacy: Foreign Policy in the Global Information Age*, when he states, "This new hypermedia environment creates incentive for diplomacy to extend its traditional sphere of action by reaching into the heart of foreign nations ... and to influence them through their public opinion. If the US is to regain the respect and likability it once enjoyed we must be the first nation to innovatively leverage this development. It is imperative begin to execute both long terms plans to increase the

United States soft power and court international public opinion in places like Iran to better manage crisis situations.”

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