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Book Review

A Review of American Diplomacy's Public Dimension: Practitioners as Change Agents in Foreign Relations by Bruce Gregory, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 481pp., $39.99 (Softcover), ISBN 9783031389160

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In 2014, Bruce Gregory published a consequential argument that got the attention of public diplomacy scholars and practitioners. Discussions often focused on public diplomacy as a separate field, with frustration that it wasn't elevated more within statecraft. In "The Paradox of Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and Demise,"[1] Gregory said we were missing the point: "Public diplomacy as a term and concept for a subset of diplomatic practice has diminishing value. It marginalizes diplomacy's public dimension, which is now central in what all diplomatic actors think and do." Public diplomacy is diplomacy; diplomacy is public diplomacy.

A decade later, he has expanded the argument into the book *American Diplomacy's Public Dimension: Practitioners as Change Agents in Foreign Relations*. It is a treasure for everyone who practices, researches, legislates, and thinks about the role of public engagement in foreign affairs. Public diplomacy as a term, he continues to argue, "problematically conveys that it is bolted on to diplomacy rather than what is now central in diplomatic practice overall and better described as diplomacy's public dimension."[2] The book provides a

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1) Gregory, Bruce. "The Paradox of U.S. Public Diplomacy: It's Rise and Demise." Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication, The George Washington University. February 2014. https://publicdiplomacy.org/docs/IPDGC-Special-Report-2014.pdf
2) Gregory, Bruce. American Diplomacy's Public Dimension: Practitioners as Change Agents in Foreign Relations. Washington:

sweeping overview of American diplomatic history, demonstrating that considerations of the public sphere and civil society have always been central to diplomacy.

This book makes multiple contributions, and while in no way exhaustive, I want to recognize three of them.

First, Gregory underscores that diplomacy is about influencing and managing relationships with human beings, especially decision-makers and influencers within government and society. Therefore, its scholarship requires a multi-disciplinary lens (i.e., history, sociology, communications, international affairs). Throughout the book, Gregory weaves in critical scholarship and philosophies that grounded early practices to connect with people via diplomacy. By extension, engaging and influencing publics as a dimension of diplomacy involves practitioner communities beyond the U.S. Department of State. How we organize ourselves in government is not readily apparent to the international citizens and leaders we seek to influence. Gregory nails this, demonstrating that while soldiers and Marines, development officials, broadcasters, intelligence officers, and presidential aides work in different bureaucratic realities–funded by different budgets and speaking different acronyms–they aim to influence people who perceive them all as Americans. We must understand this. Efforts to contain public diplomacy as one scholarly discipline or as one field of practice will fail. By nature–and especially in today's hyper-mediated world–diplomacy demands multi-disciplinary examination and multi-practitioner action.

Second, Gregory unpacks in compelling detail the degree to which diplomacy's public dimension is shaped by war and the U.S. defense apparatus. The change agents who shaped international exchange, communications, and public diplomacy programs did so in response to the horrors of the 20th century, starting with World War I. While American officials often marginalized public diplomacy, they "turned to it enthusiastically during wartime."[3] The United States prefers soft power in the context of hard power. Diplomacy and public diplomacy funding in the International Affairs budgets are fractional to Defense appropriations; lately, the State Department Authorization bill often only passes if it is part of the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).[4] "War is still about lethal force," Gregory explains, "but it is also about languages and cultures, stories and mindsets, social and traditional media, and relations with civil society,"[5] which requires defense actors to operate in the public dimension. U.S. citizens also repeatedly demonstrate that in U.S. national security, defense leads, "which means inevitably soldiers are diplomacy practitioners."[6] Public Diplomacy is repeatedly "discovered" during times of war, most recently in the post-9/11 wars of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Palgrave Macmillan. 2024. P. 87

3) Ibid,P. 71

4) True Story: In 2013, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, which Gregory and I both led at different points, was re-authorized via the NDAA

5) Ibid, P. 244

6) Ibid, P. 265

This is an ambitious book. It spans colonial times to the Biden Administration. The change agent practitioners who shaped diplomacy's public dimension passes from Benjamin Franklin to Linda Thomas-Greenfield. It describes key moments in creating programs (e.g., International Visitor Leadership Program, Fulbright) and infrastructure (e.g., offices, bureaus, titles). It summarizes the near-constant battles within and between the Executive Branch and Congress to elevate the work. Gregory often pauses his narrative skillfully to dive into multidisciplinary scholarship and connect it with key events.

Those who study and/or practice diplomacy (and public diplomacy) will likely extract the most value from this book. It is an advanced analysis, and while it is well-written, the content is intensely packed together. The penultimate chapter on U.S. public diplomacy post-9/11 and its expeditionary diplomatic efforts especially feels rushed. It's a testament to the research, though, that nearly every chapter could be expanded into a book. Gregory has brought together nearly 250 years of public diplomacy history in less than 500 pages, which offers an invaluable reference tool for anyone curious about different periods of diplomatic history.

The book also serves as a springboard for further research and ideas for honing the practice. Gregory offers sage advice for the next generation of change agents: embrace a culture of learning, develop new research, acquire new skills, and understand how technology can/cannot advance diplomacy. While the book focuses on the expansive, natural role of foreign public engagement in national security–including diplomacy, broadcasting, defense, development, and intelligence–its concluding recommendations are directed largely toward the U.S. Department of State, acknowledging that for further positive change to happen, it must start there.

I want to conclude with the third core contribution: understanding the innovators who shaped modern diplomacy and the philosophies that motivated them. Why is there no U.S. Department of Culture? Because the United States had no "official culture," Ben Charrington, the first Director of the U.S. Department of State's Division of Cultural Relations, said in 1938. Therefore, the U.S. would not have a "Minister of Culture" but instead focus on cultural exchange, putting the American people at the center of the work.[7] Why do we refer to "mutual understanding" as a goal for educational and cultural exchange programs? Because Franklin Delano Roosevelt coined the term, believing that actively building it between Americans and foreign citizens would lead to more "friendly cooperation" and then "a civilized world order under law."[8] Half a century later, who pushed for the dissolution of the U.S. Information Agency? Senator Jesse Helms, who wanted smaller government and forged an unlikely alliance with Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who wanted a larger State Department.

Gregory, as a deeply respected scholar and practitioner, also introduces us to the many

7) Ibid, P. 181
8) Ibid, P. 182

practitioner change agents from the U.S. Information Agency and the U.S. Department of State in the 20th and 21st centuries. Just as we learn about Helms and Christopher, we also learn about the talented diplomats who managed that change: Joe Duffey, Diana Oglesby, Barry Fulton, Penn Kemble, Kenton Keith, Rick Ruth, Michael Schneider, Betsy Whitaker, just to name a few. His respect for them shines on the page, and it's heartening that future scholars and practitioners will know who they are.

"Public diplomacy's practitioners began as diplomacy's rebels," Gregory writes. In many ways, *American Diplomacy's Public Dimension* reads as a tribute to those on the frontlines forging relationships so critical to history's turning points–those who have gone the "last three feet" to build trust and mutual understanding to lead to international cooperation and peace. They instinctively recognized that American diplomacy could not succeed without it, and we stand on their shoulders.

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