

**Xu Beilin***Northwest University of Political Science and Law (Xi'an, China)*

## On American Public Diplomacy in the Era of Post-Cold War

Public diplomacy, which is a specific concept in international relations research, refers to "guiding the public attitude" in other countries, and thus affecting foreign policy of its government. Public diplomacy is different from "traditional diplomacy", and is also different from the ordinary "non-governmental diplomacy". Public diplomacy transcends the formal diplomatic relations between countries, and gradually affects the people's political beliefs and political behaviors in other countries by this informal diplomacy. The active and extensive public diplomacy carried out by the American government played an extremely important role in the victory of the Cold War. But after the end of the Cold War, public diplomacy was marginalized in the United States. In the 21st century, the United States wavered in its world hegemony, so American government urgently needed to reshape its image of hegemony and repropose "public diplomacy" for its foreign strategy. New media, such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter in the US, becoming the main tools usually used by the American politicians, rapidly spread American history, culture, values and social system in the world, and Big Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are used to create a favorable public opinion environment for the American political project. Meanwhile, the other countries' communication platforms are restrained seriously in the US, in order to promote the implementation of American foreign policy. The heyday of American public diplomacy is coming step by step from Joe Biden being the owner of White House. His main purpose, advocated by the policy of "restoring middle-class diplomacy", is to expand the global influence of "American globalism" by secretly curbing the development of rival countries, and ultimately serve the national foreign strategy of the United States. But the strong hegemonism inevitably makes American public diplomacy set narrow shackles. Sovereign states must pay attention to their image positioning in the international community and avoid being shaped by other countries and the public as their enemies. Profitable public diplomacy is important to sovereign states in the world, and should not be ignored or limited.

**Keywords:** *the United States, Post-Cold War, foreign strategy, public diplomacy, foreign policy, new media, Joe Biden, middle-class diplomacy*

**Сюй Бейлін***Північно-Західний університет політики та права (Сіань, КНР)*

## Про американську публічну дипломатію в епоху після завершення холодної війни

Публічна дипломатія, яка є специфічним поняттям у дослідженні міжнародних відносин, має на увазі «керування суспільним ставленням» в інших країнах і таким чином впливати на зовнішню політику свого уряду. Публічна дипломатія відрізняється від «традиційної дипломатії», а також від звичайної «неурядової дипломатії». Публічна дипломатія виходить за межі формальних дипломатичних відносин між країнами і поступово впливає на політичні переконання людей і політичну поведінку в інших країнах за допомогою цієї неформальної дипломатії. Надзвичайно важливу роль у перемозі холодної війни відіграла активна й широка публічна дипломатія американського уряду. Але після закінчення холодної війни публічна дипломатія була маргіналізована в Сполучених Штатах. У 21 столітті Сполучені Штати коливалися у своїй світовій гегемонії, тому американському уряду терміново

потрібно було змінити свій імідж гегемонії та перепропонувати «публічну дипломатію» для своєї зовнішньої стратегії. Нові медіа, такі як YouTube, Facebook і Twitter у США, стаючи основними інструментами, які зазвичай використовують американські політики, швидко поширюють американську історію, культуру, цінності та соціальну систему у світі, а великі дані та штучний інтелект (ШІ) використовуються для створення сприятливого середовища суспільної думки для американського політичного проекту. Тим часом комунікаційні платформи інших країн серйозно стримані в США, щоб сприяти здійсненню американської зовнішньої політики. Розквіт американської публічної дипломатії крок за кроком настає з того моменту, коли Джо Байден був обраний до Білого дому. Його головна мета, яку відстоювала політика «відновлення дипломатії середнього класу», – розширити глобальний вплив «американського глобалізму» шляхом таємного стримування розвитку країн-суперників і в кінцевому підсумку служити національній зовнішньополітичній стратегії Сполучених Штатів. Але сильний гегемонізм неминуче змушує американську публічну дипломатію встановлювати вузькі кайдани. Суверенні держави повинні звернути увагу на своє іміджеве позиціонування в міжнародному співтоваристві та уникати того, щоб інші країни та громадськість формували їх як своїх ворогів. Успішна публічна дипломатія важлива для суверенних держав у світі, її не можна ігнорувати чи обмежувати.

**Ключові слова:** США, пост-холодна війна, зовнішня стратегія, публічна дипломатія, зовнішня політика, нові медіа, Джо Байден, дипломатія середнього класу

### 1. The concept and characteristics of public diplomacy

The concept of public diplomacy was first proposed by Edmund Gulion, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1965. At that time, the media industry was not well developed, and people's understanding of public affairs mainly depended on mass media. Likewise, the official will was also transmitted through mainstream media. In this context, Edmund Gulion pointed out that "public diplomacy is to guide the public attitude", "through guiding the public attitude to influence the government's foreign policy formulation and implementation" ([www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm](http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm)). Therefore, when explaining public diplomacy, he proposed to use the concept of "public diplomacy" to explain the interaction between national foreign policy and public behavior: foreign policy is known to the public through the media. The U.S. Department of State gave a more accurate definition of public diplomacy in 1987 in Dictionary of International Relations Terms. It says, public diplomacy is "launched by the government of the exchange program, to use the means of information transmission such as radio, understanding, learning and influencing the public opinion in other countries, reducing other national policies and popular misconceptions about the United States, avoiding to cause complicated relationship, improving the image and influence of the United States with the public abroad, and then promote the activity of America's national interests (U.S. Department of State, 1987). Public diplomacy

is a kind of diplomatic behavior, which embodies the purpose of a country's foreign policy. Foreign policy is the position, principle, viewpoint and attitude of a country dealing with foreign affairs, which are generally rigid political principles. However, public diplomacy embodies more flexible political principles. Diplomatic behavior is the concrete channel and form of carrying out foreign policy and it is a flexible and operational political behavior mode. The relationship between the two is very close. Foreign policy guides diplomatic behavior, and diplomatic behavior achieves foreign policy goals.

Public diplomacy has distinct characteristics compared with traditional diplomacy. One is the implementation of public diplomacy range beyond the traditional diplomatic field of international relations, is beyond the direct relationship between countries, both between countries and informal diplomatic relations, including a country's diplomatic relations between the government and foreign citizens. It also includes the international communication activities between citizens or private organizations. From the perspective of traditional diplomacy, diplomatic activities are mainly carried out by foreign governments and administrative officials. The relationship between the government and the public will not be part of the duties of administrative officials. But public diplomacy makes it part of the diplomats' scope of responsibility. With the development of globalization and the development of civil society, the public interest in international affairs has been growing (王逸舟,

2000). Diplomatic relations between governments only reflect the specific problems of state-to-state relations from the most direct and formal level. However, communication and understanding between people should not be ignored because of this. Mutual understanding and trust between people is the most fundamental condition for peaceful coexistence between countries (赵可金, 2003). Second, the goal of public diplomacy has strong concealment and deception. The activities of a state in the territory of other States have specific diplomatic purposes and attempt to cultivate and develop public opinion, namely: through covert means, set up radio or enterprises such as ways to influence the public cognition in these countries, including the infiltration and influence on foreign countries interest groups and organizations, thus effectively influence or change the political behavior and political beliefs of corresponding groups of another country, also can be transmitted through the enterprise brand to promote the national image and international influence (赵新利, 2021).

From the perspective of diplomatic concept, public diplomacy is informal diplomacy, including all diplomatic forms except official diplomacy. Its core idea is to influence effectively the public policies of other countries through purposeful analysis and reporting of diplomatic events. The form of public diplomacy is mainly through the communication between public diplomats, diplomatic envoys and foreign journalists to transfer the values of specific countries, such as values, cultural customs, religious beliefs, lifestyles, consumption habit and so on, and many hidden spaces beyond the control of national sovereignty (胡腾蛟, 2018). The core value of public diplomacy is that it can promote the realization of national diplomatic goals through the trans-international circulation of information and ideas.

What is the way to realize public diplomacy? On the one hand, to achieve through diplomatic means the goal of public diplomacy, and to construct "national discourse". What is the national discourse of the United States? The official propaganda is "freedom, democracy", so more often than not, we see the heroic and romantic images of Americans, as well as the romantic rivers in Hollywood blockbusters, and the pioneer spirit of white people and cowboy spirit through watching TV dramas or movies. These things are shaped for us through art and films. The more we watch Hollywood blockbusters, the more we accept the image of American romanticism and heroism. Their purpose is to use this public image to spread a political discourse propagated by officials. American values are the most advanced in the world, its political power system is the most developed in the world, and so on. On the other hand, it provides public

goods to the international community through public diplomacy activities. These public goods refer to the needs of countries or the international community. Such as setting global climate negotiations, setting carbon emissions standards. This need is provided by transnational organizations or intermediaries. So what is the value objective here? For example, whose standard is it? Is it American or European? Through more of these exchanges, we have accepted standards that have become the general rules of the international community. In fact, the formulation of such standards is a kind of cooperation between various sectors of society. It has an effective value, it promotes the recognition of standards and even builds international trust in the international community.

## 2. Reintroduce "Public Diplomacy" in the Post-Cold War Era

Public diplomacy is the product of the Post-Cold War era. The United States actively carried out public diplomacy in various ways and took covert actions to coordinate with the implementation of the Cold War strategy, which effectively resisted the expansion of the socialist camp.

The period from 1945 to 1993 was the development stage of American public diplomacy. The United States used international exchanges, art exhibitions and other public diplomacy activities to build a good national image, and at the same time enhance the recognition of American values by the people of other countries. Objectively speaking, at this stage, the effect of American public foreign policy is very obvious. In order to adapt to the changes of American foreign policy and diplomatic strategy, American public diplomacy has been constantly improved and developed, and gradually improved organizational management systems such as management, execution and law of American public diplomacy, making American public diplomacy embark on a road of healthy development. After the end of the Cold War, American public diplomacy entered the stage of marginalization, the strategic goal of the American superpower was realized, the international pattern of "one superpower and multipowers" structure was formed, and the image of the United States as the "global police" was also shaped. The State Department felt that the objectives of American public diplomacy had been achieved, and after that they resorted more to diplomatic unilateralism. The United States did not need a large financial investment to support public diplomacy, and slowly entered a period of marginalization. This period of marginalization, especially after Clinton took office as president of the United States, has undergone a major adjustment. First, the number of people working in public diplomacy in the United States has been reduced by a fifth, and funding for public diplomacy has been slashed, particularly for

the United States Information Agency. Secondly, the international broadcasting also showed stronger pertinence. The Voice of America began to focus its broadcasting on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to promote the democratic and economic system of the West. Meanwhile, it also exported culture to China, Vietnam, North Korea and other Asian countries. During this period, the administration of Clinton reduced public diplomacy funds and institutions devoted to the Soviet Union, and merged the United States Information Agency (USIA) into the State Department. This adjustment made the organizational leadership of public diplomacy fall sharply and gradually marginalized. So, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the world's sole superpower, public diplomacy was abandoned by American political strategists.

Public diplomacy is the product of the Post-Cold War era. The United States actively carried out public diplomacy in various ways, uglified the "image of the Soviet Union", took covert actions to coordinate with the implementation of the Cold War strategy, and effectively resisted the expansion of the socialist camp. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the world's sole superpower, public diplomacy was abandoned by American political strategists.

America's reintroduction of public diplomacy is an inevitable result of strategic adjustment in the 21st century. The period from 2000 to 2020 is a period of revival of public diplomacy. At this time, the global hegemony of the United States has been challenged, and they need to rebuild the image of American hegemony in the diplomatic field. On the other hand, they need to discredit what they believe is an emerging strategic imaginary enemy – China. After the 11.9 incident, the United States launched the war against terrorism, and the global war against terrorism can also be regarded as a foundation for the revival of American public diplomacy. If there is no 11.9 incident, the United States may be held the supremacy. However, after the "11.9", the American people, including the American government, thought that the United States was not safe, so they took the war on terrorism as the starting point to carry out a new round of public diplomacy, and implemented a series of strategic imaginary enemies that posed threats to the United States.

At this stage, the first diplomatic targets were China and Arab countries. The public diplomacy of Bush administration focused on the Arab world, making rebuilding America's image in the Arab world a top priority. The actions of the United States include armed intervention in the Middle East, covert support of rebel forces, and to create a good public image of the United States as the advocate of global justice, overall support for the independence

and national liberation of Arab countries or promote the development of Arab countries. The "war on terror" promoted by the United States had obvious effects during this period. Color revolution and frequent street political activities provided strategic support for the successful infiltration of the United States into middle Eastern countries.

During the administration of Obama, the strategic role of public diplomacy has greatly increased. Obama proposed to make public diplomacy one of the centerpieces of the U.S. diplomatic system, and he established a deputy secretariat for global media, led by the National Public Affairs Administration. Through this system of public diplomacy, directly under the president, the United States will serve the national goals of the United States. At this time, social media in the United States, with the strong financial support of the United States, developed rapidly and became the mainstream communicator of the American diplomatic discourse system (李忠斌, 2011). YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other new media in the United States have been rapidly promoted. Their main role is to spread American culture to the world. Obama made full use of new media platforms and developed these new social media into an important channel for modern Americans to spread and exchange information with the outside world. However, Weibo, Wechat and Tiktok of China have faced a series of boycotts and crackdowns in the United States. Although media technology itself is not ideological or diplomatic, when the media of one party is permitted and the media of the other party is prohibited, new media platforms and technologies have become important contents of public diplomacy, and technical barriers and communication modes have also become important aspects of confrontation in the field of public diplomacy.

During the administration of Trump, American public diplomacy has entered a new stage of development. After President Trump took office in 2017, the United States made strategic adjustments to its public and national policies, using big data and artificial intelligence to create a favorable public opinion environment for the United States so as to promote the smooth implementation of its foreign policies. On December 18, 2017, Trump released his first national security strategy report, which set up the technology or communication platform unfavorable to the United States. In the economic field, the United States imposed sanctions on Huawei, ZTE, Wechat, Tencent and Bytedance, because these companies can make Americans more absorb and learn from Chinese culture and even Chinese values. The American authorities believe that this is not good for the United States, and more American values and technologies should be infiltrated into China or other countries. On January

19, 2018, the U.S. Department of Defense released the National Defense Strategy Report, which proposed the impact of public opinion technology or information technology on the national strategic security of the United States. The U.S. government uses Facebook, Twitter and other large accounts to comprehensively publicize the history, culture, values and social system of the US, in order to highlight the global superiority and institutional superiority of the US and comprehensively improve its national image.

### **3. Biden's New Deal was the heyday of American public diplomacy**

The election of Joe Biden ushered in the heyday of American public diplomacy. Biden inherited Trump's concept of public diplomacy and strengthened strategic containment and suppression against China. First of all, US President Joe Biden is a master of public diplomacy. Secondly, the US is facing increasingly severe global strategic challenges. China's peaceful rise has become the strongest "challenger" to the US strategic system in the 21st century. According to the World Bank, the United States is likely to be overtaken by China in terms of the economic growth by 2035 or 2050, and will lose its position as the world's leading power. At the same time, the democratic values represented by the United States are also facing unprecedented challenges, and the clash of civilizations has become a cultural dilemma that the United States has to face. With the diversification of the international situation, the world is not necessarily dominated by the Will of the United States. Therefore, Biden put forward a slogan after being elected – to restore middle-class diplomacy and comprehensively respond to the development and changes in the global diplomatic environment of the United States. The essence of American middle class diplomacy is to carry out public diplomacy in an all-round way and provide a more favorable international development environment for American diplomacy. On March 4, 2020, Biden released a weighty piece of campaign writing called *Why America Must Lead Again? Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy after Trump* (Biden, 2020). In this article, he clearly put forward the basic policy framework for domestic and foreign affairs: restoring democracy at home and implementing a middle-class foreign policy abroad, especially China policy (Biden, 2020). Biden chose three tips:

First, uniting the US with the rest of the West to shape the rules for everything from the environment to labour, trade, technology and transparency by accounting for more than half of global GDP. Similar to Trump, Biden has adopted a hardline policy toward China, while Biden is using this "rule" to resist China's development.

Second, Biden made it clear that the United States will take tough measures against China to

prevent China from dominating future technological and industrial development, so the trade war between China and the United States is getting more and more fierce. During the US presidential election, some people said that Sino-US trade relations would ease after Joe Biden took office. However, there is no sign of a thaw in Sino-US relations since Biden took office. Because the United States believes that China's communications and space technology will be used for military rather than civilian purposes in the future, it will threaten the strategic security of the United States. It can be seen that the United States is using public diplomacy propaganda to expand the global influence of the "American globalism" and reshape its hegemonic advantage.

Third, the United States looks forward to working with China on issues where their interests converge, such as climate change, non-proliferation and global health security. However, after the outbreak of COVID-19, the world has been in a storm of public opinion. For example, the US media deliberately referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" in an attempt to turn the rest of the world against China. Of course, China has also made a series of political, policy and technical negotiations, so that the rest of the world can fully see how China is controlling the epidemic and understand that the epidemic in the United States is uncontrolled and has its consequences.

Although the form of American public diplomacy is constantly changing, its purpose remains unchanged, which is the elasticity of American public diplomacy. The core element of American public diplomacy is propaganda foreign policy, and it always serves the needs of the country's foreign strategy. Fundamentally speaking, it is the strategic priority to safeguard the national interests of the United States. The limitation of American effective public foreign policy means that it must rely on strong hegemonism and unilateralism policy to export American values and social system. The U.S. government's use of information technology and new media in shaping the national image and spread American values has achieved a certain degree of success, but some defects of the information technology and new media will also bring a certain restriction to U.S. public diplomacy. China's Tiktok, Wechat and Kwai are strong rivals for Facebook and Twitter, and it is a challenge for the US. The US boycotted foreign media platforms and imposed sanctions on foreign companies because it perceived potential threats. If China's market share and technological possession are all commercialized, then American values are bound to be baptized and impacted by Chinese culture. The United States cannot achieve its value goals or value policy orientation only by means of public diplomacy, so its public diplomacy has changed from implicit

support to hard policies, such as economic sanctions, trade sanctions and technical sanctions. Sanctions and trade wars are more effective and bring more desired results. In other words, imperceptible public diplomacy cannot achieve such effect, so only strong measures can directly block the promotion of certain technologies in the United States, so as to avoid attracting American users and affecting the value orientation of the country.

**Conclusion.** The results of the U.S. government's commitment to public diplomacy have been remarkable. People in other countries know more about the United States than people in the United States know about other countries. Therefore, a growing rift in understanding and communication between the United States and other countries. If the situation is not improved, the American people may misunderstand other countries. Once such misunderstanding is taken advantage of by some political forces, it will easily lead to hostility and conflicts between countries, which will be harmful to world peace and stability. The development and evolution of American public diplomacy are determined by the strong concept of hegemonism, sense of mission and pride (韩召颖, 2011). These superiority feelings will inevitably lead to limitations in the development of American public diplomacy.

Under the background of globalization, the advantages and characteristics of public diplomacy are becoming more and more obvious, which can not only affect the understanding and evaluation of sovereign states by the people of their own country and other countries, but also affect the status of sovereign states in the international community. We need to give high priority to public diplomacy. Take for example, *The Coldest Winter*, an American book that portrays Americans as battered victims whose families have been torn apart, a new wave of public diplomacy. Through the way of memoir, the author interviews the living conditions, mobilization for war, execution of orders, and wartime life of the combatants, and presents the image from the victor's posture in the past to the victim's appearance in the present. It is highly likely to indicate a new round of changes in public foreign policy on the world stage. Americans began to reshape their global image as a way to tell the world that America's wars were not "earned" as many countries claimed, but "lost", paying costs and lives.

Therefore, good public diplomacy is becoming more and more important for sovereign states. It is worthwhile for any sovereign state to invest more time, energy and funds to stimulate and guide more people to engage in relevant research.

## REFERENCES

- U.S. Department of State. (1987). Dictionary of International Relations Terms.  
What is Public Policy. (2008). Retrieved from [www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm](http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm).  
王逸舟. (2000). 《市民社会与中国外交》，载《中国社会科学》，第3期第29页。  
赵可金. (2003). 《美国公共外交的兴起》，《复旦学报》(社会科学版)，第3期，第88页。  
赵新利. (2021). 《品牌外交论》，载《公共外交季刊》，第1期第25-33页。  
胡腾蛟. (2018). 《美国公共外交史论》，北京：世界知识出版社，第16页。  
李忠斌. (2011). 《新媒体与奥巴马政府的公共外交》，载《美国研究》，第1期，第110-121页。  
Biden, J. R. Jr. (2020). Why America Must Lead Again? Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump. *Foreign Affairs*, 22(2), 64-76.  
韩召颖. (2001). 《公众外交：美国对外政策的重要工具》，载《南开学报》，第6期，第89-96页。  
赵启正. (2018). 《中国进入公共外交新阶段》，载《学习时报》04月11日。  
潘兴庆. (2015). 《试析美国公共外交对国家形象的塑造》，外交学院学位论文。  
唐小松、王义桅. (2003). 《从“进攻”到“防御”——美国公共外交战略的角色变迁》载《美国研究》第3期。

**Xu Beilin**

Master's Degree, College Lecturer, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7249-7154>, [beilinx@163.com](mailto:beilinx@163.com)

Стаття надійшла / Article arrived: 05.11.2021

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 29.11.2021