

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

"Public Diplomacy: steps to the future"

London School of Economics, 23 April

Lord Triesman

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for coming tonight. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Lane, the possessor of a remarkable CV and one of the world's leading thinkers on the former Yugoslavia and – more generally – developing foreign policy.

Many of you are faces I recognise, important partners in our work on public diplomacy. I look forward to our continued co-operation in the future.

Others are new faces. And I welcome you. Because tonight I want to set out how diplomacy as the Foreign Office has conducted it for centuries has changed beyond

recognition from the days of Palmerston, Lord Grey, Anthony Eden, or even Lord Carrington.

I am honoured to be speaking here at the LSE tonight. And it is fitting. The LSE's motto is "to know the causes of things", which captures the essence of the college's work. It is equally good a starting point for an analysis of diplomacy.

Diplomats are delivers of influence. They want to be the cause of things, whether it is peace, or trade, or alliances, or protection of our nationals, or simply greater understanding between countries and peoples as understanding is the foundation of agreement. Their success at delivering influence determines whether the Government can deliver our foreign policy objectives and ultimately a safe, just and prosperous world.

But as Lord Carter has observed, where influence was once the preserve of the elites -diplomats meeting ministers in gilded ministries and the exchange of formal

written notes - it is now diverse and dispersed. The influence of the mass market, the power of the pressure groups, the media and the internet has led us to rethink diplomacy and how we deliver influence where it will have the most impact.

Where once we needed to convince a handful of people in order to serve our country's interests, we must now convince millions.

We still talk to ministers and officials, opinion formers and experts. That classic diplomacy continues. But alongside that we now talk direct to the peoples of other countries in what we call public diplomacy.

As some of you may know, about eighteen months ago, Patrick Carter published a report on the UK's public diplomacy work.

He examined whether we were closely focused on how to best deliver influence to the mass market of global public

opinion. Did we understand, to return to the motto, the causes of things?

The logic of public diplomacy in the past went something like this: if foreigners have a warm feeling about Britain, they are more likely to feel similarly about our role in the world.

So the effort pandered to the traditional comfortable view of the UK: red London buses and post boxes, black cabs, shortbread, scotch whisky, cream teas, Shakespeare.

Over time it developed to a more modern image of Britain as a dynamic and innovative society full of talent, but the objective was the same.

So what was the result? A study by Simon Anholt on how nations are perceived by others shows us that foreigners still tend to view us as efficient, inventive, scientific, cold and unemotional. And it tells us nothing about whether Shakespeare lovers or admirers of Damien Hirst think our role in the world is a valuable and credible one.

With all the resources at my disposal: bright, innovative, partners from media, diplomacy, the British Council, Wilton Park, I cannot substantially change how the world views the UK. In the face of the millions of channels of information that bombard the global public each day, we would be shouting at the wind.

So what have we changed?

We have refocused our effort on talking about the issues we care about directly with the people in the countries we want to influence. And we don't just explain our policy, we debate it, we engage with people who may agree with us or passionately disagree.

In short, we have moved away from the impossible and unmeasurable goal of trying to change how people think of the UK, to engaging people in the defining issues of our time.

There are countless examples, but let us look at three.

The FCO does an enormous amount to counter the threat of terrorism. Yes we talk to other Governments, negotiate cooperation agreements, provide support and expertise, ensure our law enforcement agencies can work together. But we also want to understand and change the cause of the terrorism. So our embassies and high commissions work with those groups who may be susceptible to the terrorists' narrative. We examine why the terrorists are effective with some people and use our own messages to overcome the narrative of hate.

A key part of that is to break down the false message that we are faced with a clash of civilisations, that Britain is the enemy of Muslims. We reject the clash of civilisations and defend vigorously the reality that British Muslims are integral to British society, not marginalised. So the Foreign Office team works with the organisers of the Hajj, giving medical support and other assistance to the 25,000 British pilgrims undertaking Hajj. We work too with

community groups in the UK and overseas, with schools and madrassas, with those who share our vision and those who don't, because agreement and understanding is often hard won.

In Afghanistan, our battle with the Taliban is as much one of ideas as it is one of arms. We want Afghans to be persuaded that the democratic process they voted for in huge numbers is the best future for their country. The Taliban want a repressive and cruel society based on their warped world view and equally warped interpretation of Islam. In Afghanistan the BBC Pashtu service, part of the World Service which is funded by the FCO, is a vital tool in that process and crucially reaches Helmand, where our armed forces face taliban fighters. Through public diplomacy, we hope to make their job easier by making it harder for the Taliban to find safe haven.

Take climate change. The pressure for action came from individuals across the planet changing their behaviour and demanding their Governments do the same. We are

working to maintain that pressure, influencing the debate. For example, one of our diplomatic posts is planning a competition on YouTube for a short film on climate change from the perspective of youth. They will then produce a DVD of the winning entries and circulate this to business leaders for whom the youth market is vitally important. Will it have an impact? I think so. Last week the Foreign Secretary led a debate in the Security Council in New York on climate security, the first time that subject had been discussed in that Council. Our efforts, and those of likeminded groups who also work directly with the public, have created the pressure on Governments to take this issues seriously. Classic and public diplomacy work best together.

And that brings me to another point. The new public diplomacy relies as much on alliances and cooperation as classic diplomacy. But these alliances are not just with Governments but with pressure groups, charities, business, human rights organisations, community and religious groups, the media and countless others who

want to achieve the same thing as us. Make Poverty History brought together many disparate groups who shared a common goal and drew strength and ideas from their different backgrounds and supporters. The result was a broadbased global movement of incredible power and influence. We shared many of their goals and worked with them to get a commitment from the G8 during our G8 Presidency in 2005.

Of course much of what we do will not involve Bono, or world leaders, or make news. But it will make a difference.

Take our work on social rights and particularly the issue of forced marriage. In Pakistan, a twelve- part radio drama was broadcast on the BBC World Service's Urdu Service and relayed on Pakistani FM stations. It chronicled the lives of an ordinary Pakistani family in an area with strong links to the UK. The storylines covered forced marriage, immigration, human rights and drug trafficking. It was

followed up with a public debate through radio phone-in, seminars and Internet site.

Or in Uganda and Ethiopia the British Council organised a project to look at diversity issues facing people and organisations. A cross-section of people, including the government's Ministry of Gender, were invited to contribute research. Within three months of the publication of the resulting report, that report and the subsequent public debate which was stimulated have contributed to the adoption of Uganda's Equal Opportunities Act.

Where does this leave the other traditional tools of public diplomacy: educational exchanges, the arts and culture?

We still operate those programmes. The Chevening Scholarships still offer access to UK universities for candidates from across the globe who we think will be among the important opinion formers in their countries in future. There may be some here tonight. We want them to

get an understanding of Britain they can take away with them and which may help us understand each other and work together in future.

The British Council still does vital work in education too. Its language schools also help ensure that we can communicate with other societies. Cultural diplomacy may at times be part of our public diplomacy effort. I can see that, in some countries, when understanding and agreement can be elusive, art, or poetry, or theatre can be our first language and open the door to greater understanding.

Over the last year, we have carried out a number of public diplomacy labs to identify new ways to work. New ways of reaching key audiences that excite and make sense to those audiences.

Initially, the instinct was to try small variants of what we had done before.

Because, yes, it is difficult to break out of our comfort zone. And I want ideas that are different, scary, alarmingly new.

So I took the position that if an idea didn't startle me, it was probably wrong.

My default position was challenge. It was necessary to shake up the kaleidoscope so that it wouldn't settle back to the same old picture.

You might think that I am just bored of the status quo.

But how can I be, when I have such innovative, imaginative people to work with – some in government, some outside, but increasingly, all looking for new ideas, new ways to establish peace and security across the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Patrick Carter didn't cover all of this. But he prompted us to think about change. And we have done so. We have created new machinery. And this has in turn, led to new ideas and crucially new synergies with partners' organisations. And we are determined to find new ways of measuring whether we are having the impact we intend.

I do not believe it is necessary for the UK to get credit for its role in raising consciousness or nudging a foreign government towards a new policy.

I want to see the change take place. I don't mind if there are no bouquets.

Because, sometimes, quiet diplomacy works best. At other times, partners will and should play a more prominent role. What matters is getting the right result.

It is not always easy to kick of the shackles of the old ways. After Pat Carter published his report, I detected

caution. But I was confident that, in a few months, we would all be enthusiastic participants right in the middle of the reform, working together.

And this has proved true. Our long term partners, particularly the BBC World Service and the British Council remain central to the delivery of our new policies.

Together, we want to reach out to new partners, because that is what will make us stay relevant, inventive, innovative. Today, I want to hear your views both on our approach, but also the detail.

Have you any ideas you would like to share? How should we sell tolerance and respect for women to a particular culture? How can we galvanise Americans on climate change? What is the best way to engage with the Islamic world? How does it differ in Saudi and Southampton?

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A good Ambassador needs to listen carefully and speak persuasively. And this is our approach to all forms of our diplomacy.

Tell me what you think. I once learnt from Shakespeare that "they that thrive well take counsel of their friends".