

EXERCISING CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AS A FORM OF SMART POWER IN THE MILITARY OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Maria-Lucia TALMAȚCHI

“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania
talmatchi.lucia@armyacademy.ro

ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy also manifests itself in the military context, where military activity and behavior in the strategic space approaches actions in the diplomatic domain. This article provides an overview of the current debates in this evolving field, exploring different diplomatic perspectives in the military's management of international relations in different military missions. Based on the most recent literature on cultural diplomacy in the military operational environment, in order to understand how the military interacts with the local population in a society where it conducts peacekeeping or peace-enforcement operations, it is useful to analyze the strategies employed and to assess the consistency of these activities with the classic definitions of public diplomacy. In order to achieve the proposed objectives, a careful analysis of the definition of the concept of diplomacy is carried out through the understanding of its two forms: cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. In order to minimize risks and increase the efficiency of operations, the idea of integrating cultural diplomacy as a smart power in the military operational environment is developed.

KEYWORDS: cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, smart power, military operational environment, diplomatic culture

1. Introduction

Diplomacy is a specific tool for managing international relations, whereby states and governments manage their relations without direct involvement or formal ownership. Foreign policies set by governments are implemented by specialized institutions and skilled diplomats to achieve objectives at minimal cost in the international system. When the goals set are difficult to achieve, public diplomacy may be used. In many situations, international public opinion plays a decisive role in supporting a government to achieve its foreign policy objectives. This support is most easily achieved through the use of specific public diplomacy tools and techniques. Nowadays, diplomacy is also manifested in the military environment and

represents a key aspect in the accomplishment of military missions. Actions in various military theaters of operations are aimed at directly and indirectly influencing the attitudes and behavior of the local society, thus contributing to the achievement of a country's foreign policy objectives.

2. Research Methodology

Using observation and analysis as the main research methods, this paper proposes an empirical study of cultural diplomacy applicable to the military operational environment. The aim of the research is to deepen the complexity of cultural diplomacy in this environment and to develop new perspectives on it. The study explores the idea of diplomatic culture from

an anthropological perspective, similar to a “culture of encounter”. It highlights the role of cultural diplomacy as a form of smart power in influencing military strategies by creating a favorable framework for military cooperation and alliances, reducing international tensions, and promoting mutual cultural respect and understanding.

3. Definition of Diplomacy

Since their emergence as political actors, states have experienced moments of confrontation and cooperation, military conflicts and peaceful relations, unity and disunity. This dynamic has naturally led to the need for an instrument to conclude armistices, to cease hostilities, and to agree on the conditions for maintaining and strengthening peaceful relations after the signing of peace treaties. This instrument is known as diplomacy. The term “diplomacy” has its origins in ancient Greece and was widely used by the political and military elite of ancient Rome. Over time, the concept of diplomacy has become ambivalent as its meanings have been nuanced and enriched. On the one hand, it defines a political practice in foreign relations between at least two states, on the other hand, it refers to theories and schools of thought that analyze how people have perceived and understood this political practice in historical and theoretical terms. In the modern and contemporary era, both theoreticians and distinguished practitioners in the field have contributed to defining and understanding diplomacy.

Diplomacy as an ongoing activity became concrete with the establishment of the first permanent missions. At that point, the diplomatic profession became distinct from other types of activities.

Today, the term “diplomacy” has several meanings, including: the foreign policy of a state, either in general (Romanian diplomacy, English diplomacy, etc.), or in relation to a geographical region or an epoch (traditional or modern

diplomacy), or a method (war diplomacy). In most cases, the term is used to refer to the functions performed by a diplomat and his or her activities. There are a number of definitions that outline the concept of diplomacy. Charles de Martens considers diplomacy as being a science of international relations. In the *Diplomatic Guide*, he argues that diplomacy is “*the science of foreign relations or foreign affairs of states, or, in a narrower sense, the science or art of negotiation*” (de Martens, 1866, p. 2 *apud* Toma, 2015, p. 208). Another definition focuses on the original meaning of the term and is offered by Guillaume de Garden, who describes diplomacy as “*the science of the relations and mutual interests of states, or the art of reconciling the interests of peoples among themselves, or, in a narrower sense, the science or art of negotiations*” (de Garden, 2010, p. 67).

4. Diplomatic Culture

Culture can be defined from a humanistic and anthropological perspective. The humanistic perspective defines culture as an act of cultivating the individual, a sense of awareness, development and fulfillment. The term is associated with the meaning of improvement, education through the products realized by art, music and literature. Culture is regarded with appreciation, respect and value in the society. The anthropological concept of culture began to emerge in the United States in the 1920s and came to be fully defined during the Second World War. This concept focuses on the idea of difference, emphasizing diversity and the elements that separate people (Valbjorn, 2004). In Edward Tylor’s classic definition, “*culture or civilization, in its broad ethnographic sense, is a complex that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and other skills and practices acquired by an individual as a member of a society*” (Reeves, 2004, p. 64). According

to this perspective, each community has a unique culture that must be appreciated on its own terms and is characterized by a distinct logic (Reeves, 2004, p. 64).

A certain ambiguity in their approach to culture can be seen in the works of the early scholars of the English School. On the one hand, they individualized culture in anthropological terms, writing about “cultural differences” or “other cultures”, and on the other hand, they went beyond the anthropologically defined boundaries of national cultures, somehow addressing a certain unity at the international level to transcendent difference. This notion is somehow related to the idea of culture in the interwar period, in which culture was understood not as a source of difference, but as a tool for overcoming differences expressed in other than cultural terms (e.g., racial, national, civilizational). This very specific idea of culture can be found in the concept of “diplomatic culture” as conceptualized by Geoffrey Wiseman (Šumberová, 2007).

Geoffrey Wiseman defines diplomatic culture as “*the accumulated norms, rules, and institutions of communication and representation that emerge between interacting political entities*” (Wiseman, 2004).

He recognizes the desirability of mutual recognition and representation, continuous dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes as norms and values, including institutions, foreign ministries and embassies, and diplomatic communication and accreditation processes. To circumscribe the unique world culture, he uses the definition of Geert Hofstede, who describes culture as “*the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or one category of people from another*” (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 6). This is a classic anthropological definition, with its emphasis on diversity, and in accordance with it, we should be able to recognize more diplomatic cultures.

Culture as “collective programming of the mind” resembles the concept of habitus proposed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002): “*Certain conditions of existence produce a habitus, a system of permanent and transferable dispositions. A habitus . . . functions as the basis for practices and images . . . which can be collectively orchestrated without an actual conductor*” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 88-89; translation by GH).

After the Second World War, the anthropological concept of culture was taken up by the realists as a new stream of theory in the field of international relations. Morgenthau’s work, “Politics among Nations”, relies entirely on this idea, marking its integration into the field of international relations. He argues: “*The same information and the same idea mean different things to an American, a Russian, and an Indian because they are perceived, assimilated, and filtered through minds influenced by different conceptions of what is true, good, desirable, and politically expedient*” (Morgenthau, 1993, p. 265).

From the point of view of American social sciences, culture has been approached as an anthropological concept. It was strongly influenced by the systemic theory of Talcot Parson (1951), which was adopted from the Bertalanffy’s theory of the metabolic system. Culture was described as a system of constructed rules of human activity that provide balance and enable society to function. According to this idea, culture is everything that defines the members of a particular community, without involving value judgments about good or bad behavior. But this concept was not widely accepted from the very beginning. The British continued to perceive culture in a humanist sense, or at least they were preoccupied with the idea of a common universal culture on an international level, reflecting the influence of the humanist concept.

Wiseman emphasizes the universality of his concept of diplomatic culture. He identifies as universally accepted within the international system the norms, values, processes and institutions listed above. He acknowledges the normative Western origins of diplomatic culture: *“Diplomatic culture can rise above its Western origins and emerge as a new transcendental discourse that appeals to all comers in the society of states: great and small powers; rich and poor; democratic and undemocratic”* (Wiseman, 2004, p. 7). Over the course of time, diplomatic culture has evolved through political entities.

Paul Sharp sees diplomatic culture differently, as *“a shared set of experiences, a pool of memories, and a way of thinking, reasoning and communicating”* (Sharp, 2004, in Slavik, p. 378) that governs the interactions between diplomats and political entities. From an anthropological perspective, he sees diplomatic culture as an environment where diplomats develop a sense of shared identity and solidarity, enabling them to be effective communicators and negotiators regardless of national or cultural differences. In maintaining order and stability in international relations, Sharp emphasizes the importance of ritual, protocol and diplomatic etiquette. He also recognizes that diplomacy involves a delicate balance between national interests and the need for international cooperation, and emphasizes the crucial role of diplomatic culture in facilitating this balance. The ability of diplomats to operate in the space between cultures (understood as the “great cultures” represented by states) is the autonomous component in Sharp’s account. The aim of diplomatic culture is to find a “way of living with difference”, rather than to reconcile the differences between different ways of life.

5. Cultural Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy

The interaction between peoples and their cultures creates a universal civilisational profile. This interaction is addressed by public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and international relations. Cultural diplomacy develops international cultural relations, cooperation and intercultural dialogue. Public diplomacy focuses on the promotion of national interests and foreign policy objectives guided by domestic consensus on national identity and values.

Representation, negotiation and observation are the main functions of diplomacy under international law. Article 3 of 1961 *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* defines the functions of diplomatic missions as follows: *“representing the sending State in the receiving State; protecting in the receiving State the interests of the sending State and its nationals, within the limits permitted by international law; negotiating with the authorities of the receiving State; ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State; promoting and strengthen friendly relations between the two States and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations”* (State Council, 1968).

The aims and objectives of public diplomacy should not be confused with those of international lobbying, which are aimed at directly influencing the policies and individuals involved in the political process. Rather, public diplomacy is an effective way to build bridges between different cultures, especially when bilateral relations are complicated by cultural differences (Melissen, 2005, p. 15). Cultural diplomacy benefits from promoting models of intercultural tolerance, even though the work of public diplomacy focuses on promoting national interests and foreign policy goals.

Cultural diplomacy also has a form of manifestation that is specific to the military space. The activities and behaviors carried out by the military in the strategic sphere are similar to those carried out in the diplomatic sphere (Wallin, 2015). To understand how the military communicates with foreign publics in a society where it carries out peacekeeping or peace-enforcing actions, it is recommended to analyze the strategies of action and whether these activities of military structures correspond to the classical definitions of public diplomacy. Activities in various military theatres of operation are designed to influence, both directly and indirectly, the attitudes and behavior of the public in that society in support of the foreign policy objectives of a particular country. For example, the US military has conducted public diplomacy activities in Afghanistan and Iraq that have created positive attitudes towards the US among certain segments of the local population. Today, public diplomacy activities fall under the modern concept of “information and influence operations”, a term recently adopted by the US military to replace the old *intelligence operations*. This concept brings together various intelligence structures to coordinate themes, messages and actions with US information operations, with the aim of influencing foreign public opinion, limiting the decision-making capacity of adversaries and protecting their own decisions (Wallin, 2015).

6. Exercising Cultural Diplomacy as a Form of Smart Power in the Military Operating Environment

As an area of foreign policy, cultural diplomacy has evolved over time to encompass various manifestations, including military ones. While traditional cultural diplomacy has focused on the use of cultural resources to achieve foreign policy goals (Clarke, 2020), modern states have also explored non-state actors, such as

cultural institutions that engage in digital diplomacy in order to project cosmopolitan messages globally (Grincheva, 2015). The importance of structured cultural policies in the shaping of a state’s international image has been emphasized, highlighting the role of culture in state diplomacy and the promotion of mutual understanding between nations. Furthermore, the tensions and contradictions that can arise when projecting a nation’s cultural message internationally have been described as a disruptive, inertial and irregular field of cultural diplomacy. Reflecting the diverse and evolving nature of this diplomatic practice, cultural diplomacy therefore has specific manifestations in the military space.

Cultural capability is a relatively new method used by the US military to enhance the performance of military structures engaged in specific (joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational) JIIM environments (Tudorache & Ispas, 2018, p. 250-256). The development of a cultural capability of military personnel, in general, and leaders, in particular, was generated by the introduction into the US military doctrine of the seventh war function – engagement, the assumption that “*capabilities and skills necessary to work with host nations, regional partners, and indigenous populations in a culturally attuned manner that allows bridging language barriers, opening lines of communication and connections with key political and military leaders in a way that is both immediate and lasting*” (Department of the Army, 2014, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-5, 2014, p. iii apud Tudorache & Ispas, 2018, p. 250-256).

Cultural diplomacy influences military strategies by creating a favorable environment for military cooperation and alliances, and reduces international tensions by promoting mutual understanding and cultural respect. Cultural diplomacy helps to create a positive perception of a nation abroad, facilitating cooperation and military alliances.

A positive image can help build international support for military intervention or action. Cultural diplomacy reduces tensions that could lead to military conflict by promoting mutual understanding and respect between cultures. Potential conflict situations can be defused through cultural events, academic exchanges and artistic collaborations. Strengthening military alliances is also achieved through cultural diplomacy activities that reinforce existing relationships between nations, thereby strengthening military alliances. Strategic ties can be strengthened by promoting shared values and cultural cooperation.

Cultural diplomacy can also shape public opinion in target countries, creating a more favorable environment for military strategies. A favorable public opinion facilitates political support for military action. By promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, cultural diplomacy helps to prevent radicalization and extremism, thereby reducing the risk of armed conflict.

In this respect, the exchange of information between states, including information relevant to military strategic planning, can be facilitated by relationships developed through cultural cooperation. A deep understanding of a country's culture and mindset can provide significant advantages in assessing and anticipating its military actions. Cultural diplomacy is an essential component of soft power. It is through cultural influence that a nation can achieve strategic outcomes without having to resort to military force. This type of influence can complement and support hard military strategies (hard power).

Through cultural diplomacy, the Army is able to establish and maintain effective partnerships with the civilian population and the decision-makers in the societies of the host countries in which it operates. The manifestation of cultural diplomacy as a form of smart power in the

military operational environment explores a relatively new field in which diplomatic and cultural interactions are strategically used to influence and stabilize the military and political context in international operations. It implies a multi-dimensional approach in which culture and diplomatic relations are integrated into military strategies in order to achieve advantages that do not depend on either hard power or soft power alone, but on a balanced combination of the two.

Cultural diplomacy is an essential part of what can be called *smart power*, which means adapting to new realities and challenges, and responding in an adapted and holistic way. This vision was first put forward by Suzanne Nossel (2004) in an article in *Foreign Affairs*. She presents this concept of *smart power* as the ability to promote US interests through alliances, international institutions and smart diplomacy, and also through the power to promote American ideals (Nossel, 2004, p. 138). Thus, the military through cultural diplomacy needs smart strategies that combine hard and soft power tools to coerce, persuade and attract. Diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural resources are used to meet challenges in this essential part of cultural diplomacy, smart power. As a result of the new approach, the perception of the military by others is one of less fear and more optimism and confidence. This is made possible by a strategy that focuses on alliances and cooperation with other military or international organizations, organizational development, strategic communication, economic integration, promoting technology and innovation.

Smart power is the ability of a military organization to combine elements of hard and soft power in order to achieve the objectives of its military mission. Cultural diplomacy, a soft power dimension, manifests itself in military operations through methods that promote

intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and respect for local society's values and traditions. In the military context, smart power balances demonstrating power (e.g. military presence) with promoting cultural and humanitarian values that build trust and local support.

The relationship between the two components of smart power – hard and soft power – is complex and characterized by multiple interactions. Military missions can be supported by a strong and positive image, which can attract more security commitments. The possession of hard power can make a nation a role model, and a strong military arsenal and successful hard power strategies can help build soft power by increasing respect and admiration. The use of military force can only generate soft power if it is used for widely accepted objectives such as protection against aggression, peacekeeping and liberation (Năstăsioiu, 2015).

The threats in today's security environment are complex and require a comprehensive approach. In this context, the integration of cultural diplomacy into military strategies fulfils the following functions:

- By creating an environment conducive to cooperation and alliances through shared cultural values and mutual respect, cultural diplomacy can facilitate military alliances, building commonalities across political and economic barriers.

- Cultural diplomacy helps to ease tensions and avoid conflict during peacekeeping operations, reducing perceptions of occupation and repression by fostering positive perceptions of military forces through activities that demonstrate respect for local culture.

- By encouraging local groups to work together and participate in peace efforts, cultural diplomacy can support reconstruction and reconciliation processes in post-conflict areas.

The manifestation of cultural diplomacy in the military operational environment can take various forms, such as: cultural exchange activities (organizing educational or artistic activities in which the military and the local population interact can reduce tensions and build trust); respecting local traditions in operations (adapting operational behavior and plans to local cultural and religious norms can minimize the risk of incidents and help gain community support); military cultural awareness campaigns (these help prepare soldiers for interacting with the local population, thus avoiding actions that could be perceived as offensive).

Despite the strategic benefits of cultural diplomacy, the integration of cultural diplomacy into the military environment is fraught with challenges, such as: cultural differences and language barriers (these can limit the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy and lead to misunderstandings or even negative reactions); ambiguous perceptions of military presence (local society may perceive the presence of foreign military forces as an occupation, regardless of diplomatic efforts, which can limit the success of cultural initiatives). Unlike traditional military action, the impact of cultural diplomacy is more difficult to quantify and requires long-term analysis to assess changing local attitudes and perceptions.

The analysis of these variables argues in favor of the inclusion of cultural diplomacy in the category of important elements of military strategies in the operational environment.

7. Conclusions

As a form of smart power, cultural diplomacy is a key component of military operations in support of stability and international cooperation goals. Not only does it make it easier to gain local support, but it also helps to shape a more positive

image of the foreign military presence. Although the integration of cultural diplomacy into military strategies requires complex planning and the overcoming of significant cultural barriers, the results can be beneficial in the long term, contributing to better mutual understanding and the achievement of a country's foreign policy objectives. The military organization should use cultural diplomacy to relate to the host state's organizational environment and establish an effective and credible dialogue with the host civil society, which plays a central role in this potential partnership and

contributes significantly to the success of the military mission. Cultural values, human rights, cultural sensitivities, tolerance, negotiation, the fight against disinformation and propaganda, health care, social development and innovation must be part of this dialogue.

In conclusion, these aspects underline the crucial role of cultural diplomacy in supporting and complementing military efforts and in creating a more stable and cooperative international environment, in facilitating alliances and in preventing conflicts.

REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. (1980). *Le sens pratique*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, *apud* Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. (3rd Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 6.

Clarke, D. (2020, November 19). Cultural Diplomacy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-543>, accessed on 07 October 2024.

de Garden, G. (2010). *Traité complet de diplomatie: Ou, theorie generale des relations exterieurs des pussances de l' Europa, d'apres les celebres autoriter*. Vol. 3, Editor Biblio Bazaar.

de Martens, Ch. (1866). *Le guide diplomatique*. Ed. V, Vol. I, Leipzig, p. 2, *apud* Toma, R.-M. (2015). Important Historic Landmarks in the Evolution of Diplomacy. *Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, Vol. 2, No. 3*, p. 208, available at: <https://revista.unap.ro/index.php/revista/article/view/197/192>.

Department of the Army. (2014). *TRADOC Pam 525-8-5: U.S. Army functional concept for engagement*. Fort Eustis: Training and Doctrine Command, p. iii.

Grincheva, N. (2015). *Cultural Diplomacy of a Different Kind: A Case Study of the Global Guggenheim*. PhD thesis, Concordia University, available at: https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/980595/1/Grincheva_PHD_S2016.pdf accessed on 08 October 2024.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 6.

Melissen, J. (2005). *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 15. available at: https://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/soft_power/The_New_Public_Diplomacy.pdf, accessed on 07 October 2024.

Morgenthau, H. (1993). *Politics among Nations*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Năstăsoiu, A.-I. (2015). *Puterea soft și smart: Implicații asupra securității internaționale*. Cluj-Napoca, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai. Available at: <https://mcb-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Alexandra-Ioana-N%C4%83st%C4%83soiu-Puterea-soft-%C8%99i-smart.-Implica%C8%9Bii-asupra-managementului-securit%C4%83%C8%9Bii.pdf>, accessed on 23 September, 2024.

Nossel, S. (2004). Smart power. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No.2, 131-142.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The Social System*. New York: Free Press.

Reeves, J. (2004). *Culture and International Relations*. London: Routledge.

Sharp, P. (2004). The Idea of Diplomatic culture and its Sources. In Slavik H. (Editor). *Intercultural communication and diplomacy*. Malta and Geneva: Diplofoundation, p. 378.

State Council. (1968). *Convenția de la Viena* din 18 aprilie 1961 cu privire la relațiile diplomatice. *Official Bulletin*, No. 89, Julie 08, 1968, Bucharest.

Šumberová, M. (2007). Investigating the Idea of Diplomatic Culture. *The 6th Pan-European Conference on International Relations*, Turin, p. 6.

Tudorache, P., & Ispas, L. (2018). Educating Land Forces' Leaders to Think from IIIM Perspective. *Land Forces Academy Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 250-256. <https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2018-0030>.

Valbjorn, M. (2004). Culture and IR – Culture in IR; Ignoring, introducing, up-dating or forgetting the concept of culture in International Relations. *The International Studies Association, Quebec, Canada*.

Wallin, M. (2015). *Military Public Diplomacy. How the Military Influences Foreign Audiences*. American Security Project, available at: <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ref-0185-Military-Public-Diplomacy.pdf>, accessed on 08 October 2024.

Wiseman, G.R. (2004). Diplomatic Culture and the New American Empire Paper. *The International Studies Association*, available at: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p72393_index.html.