

EVALUATION OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A FORM OF SOFT POWER PROJECTION IN EUROPEAN UNION CSDP MISSIONS

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In this article, we aim to analyze the digital diplomacy of the European Union from the perspective of how it can become a tool of power. The analysis will be made from the perspective of international practice theory, so that the ways of projecting soft power in The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions to manage an international environment affected by crises and conflicts can be identified.

Keywords: digital diplomacy; international relations; international practice theory; CSDP.

The study of digital diplomacy, as a modern form of diplomacy, is not done per se, but is subsumed to a very clear objective, namely the delimitation of practical applications of digital diplomacy by identifying ways in which it can be transformed and operationalized as a tool of soft power¹ and can be used as such, in an international environment affected by turbulence.

In the following lines, I will try to achieve this goal by invoking in our analysis the theory of international practice, with the simultaneous study of the possibilities of designing the soft power of state actors through digital diplomacy.

Given the premise that digital diplomacy can be conceptualized as a foreign policy strategy, we

this article, we have highlighted in Figure 1 the sequence of ideas and the increasing emphasis on digital diplomacy practices in CSDP missions and operations.

Therefore, this article should answer the following questions:

- Can digital diplomacy be an instrument to design soft power?
- How can the soft power of the European Union be designed to manage changes in the international environment?
- What are the EU's digital diplomacy practices that are representative of its status as a soft power design mechanism in crisis management in the international environment?

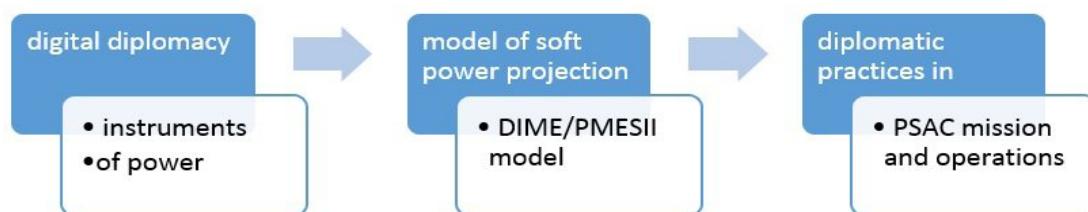


Figure 1 Digital diplomacy as a power tool in CSDP missions and operations
(Author's conception)

will show that in order to operationalize digital diplomacy, it must be equated with a mechanism for managing change in the international environment. In order to illustrate more suggestively the way we will approach the issue of digital diplomacy in

The interpretation of digital diplomacy from the perspective of international practice theory allows a detailed analysis of diplomatic customs to identify discrete diplomatic practices useful for intervention in the international environment. The theory of international practice was conceptualized by extrapolating concepts specific to social psychology, analyzing the conditions that cause turbulence in the international environment. The resulting conclusions will be applied to the

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specifics of digital diplomacy, in order to highlight the conditions under which diplomacy can be used effectively to manage change at the macro political level.

Interpreting digital diplomacy from the perspective of international practice theory as a mechanism for producing knowledge in the international environment

Traditionally, the study of diplomacy has been approached by reference to the traditional structural theories of international relations, and this theoretical framework has narrowed the research to the dynamics of diplomacy in the distribution of power, seen as a distribution of capabilities². Although not considered an element of power, state diplomacy was heavily dependent on that power. The fact that mostly diplomatic practitioners or historians of diplomatic practice, and less theorists by profession, were mainly involved in the study of diplomacy, was an important reason why the study of the diplomatic field stagnated from the theoretical point of view³.

The antagonism between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War was mainly aimed at acquiring a position of superior power, especially in terms of military capabilities, because the acquisition of this position would have conditioned the conduct of negotiations. And yet, at the time, diplomacy was considered only an antechamber of power, and was not really taken into account when the situation called for the resolution of significant issues. Corroborated between this premise and the fact that the field of international relations failed to predict the end of the Cold War, determined the orientation of the study of diplomacy towards other theories, despite the fact that structural theories reinterpreted from a neorealist, neoliberalist and constructivist perspective⁴ continued to be used.

Understanding how erroneous it was to analyze only structural factors, such as diminished military capabilities or economic performance, in order to anticipate how the international situation would evolve, analysts also turned to the study of practices that accompanied change. Thus, it turned out that there were a number of signals, not included in the specialized analyses that could have foreshadowed the following situation, if they had been considered in time. The fact that Mikhail Gorbachev was meeting with Ronald Reagan and

George Bush showed that changing international practices should be among the first elements analyzed in order to understand the international system⁵.

Thus, the theorization of diplomacy was grounded and justified with the help of the theory of international practice, respectively the interpretation of social situations and existing habits, a theory that emerged from the interpretation of customs that tried to mediate many of the dualistic positions specific to international relations.

In the spirit of this theory, international practices are understood as routines performed at the level of individuals or groups of individuals⁶, highlighting the factors involved in structuring the environment in which they occur. Practices can be both institutional and structural, and intervene in the ideas that the individual or group has about the world⁷.

The involvement of the theory of international practice in the theory of diplomacy determines several re-evaluations, because diplomacy is understood as a phenomenon in the service of power policy, with well-highlighted effects in the international system.

The most substantial change produced by this way of understanding refers to the change of approach to diplomacy which is no longer seen as a materialization of power, but as a discreet practice, able to change the environment by itself.

A substantial change in previous approaches produced by the theory of international practice is to relate to the effects of the environment on the functioning of the individual and groups. As neuroscience developed, the customs at work in the international system and the type of internal coherence it presents were examined, a landmark article in this new field belonging to Ted Hopf⁸. Hopf's view based on the elements of social psychology as an argument is that much of the life of the individual and groups is automatic, unconscious, and routinized. These habits guide our lives to a greater extent than what we presume, and the trend is found in all groups, including jobs in the international system. Of course, such an approach is not only difficult to accept, but also contradicts previous theories regarding international relations as processes governed by rationality, logic, consciousness and rules⁹. Moreover, in diplomatic meetings where diplomats meet face to face, the



manifestation of these specific human tendencies can lead to unconscious disclosures of important information. Todd Hall¹⁰ and Keren Yarhi-Milo¹¹ extensively referred to the way emotions are managed in interpersonal relationships, showing that in the absence of extensive use of social and cognitive psychology knowledge, the specific manifestations of diplomacy will be impossible to understand. We dare to say that any field in which an important share is held by interpersonal relationships is impossible to be understood if the specifics of interpersonal relationships are not properly analyzed. Therefore, the investigation of international practices based on methodologies specific to social psychology must become a common tool of diplomatic analysis.

Given the functions of knowledge production and management in the international system, diplomacy can be interpreted more as a discrete practice with observable and measurable effects in the international system. More than other types of diplomacy, digital diplomacy allows for more sophisticated analysis with information technology-specific tools. The most important social networks are used in digital diplomacy with remarkable results, to which the potential addition of specific tools such as Big Data analytic, data mining, computerized generation of scenarios and simulations would exponentially multiply its potential.

The objective of achieving long-term goals through diplomatic strategies requires the development of innovative tools, including on the dimension of digital diplomacy, to facilitate the resolution of crises and conflicts specific to the international environment, but also to identify potential partnerships. The European Union could take advantage of the potential of digital diplomacy as a discreet international practice capable of facilitating the pursuit of its interests in the international environment.

Digital diplomacy therefore has two important and distinct statuses in the international environment: both the knowledge creation mechanism and the knowledge management mechanism. The combination of the two mechanisms and the emphasis given to each can be different depending on the theories invoked for analysis: from a rationalist and structuralist perspective, diplomacy is a zero-sum game, in which one international

actor can win only if another loses; from the perspective of international practice, diplomacy is conceptualized in a broader, humanistic vision.

Theorists in the field believe that contemporary diplomatic practice involves the creation of knowledge through the collection, processing, dissemination of information and the transformation of knowledge into a specific institutional resource¹². The study of the role of technology in the diplomatic field highlighted the importance of disseminating information so that the objectives of diplomacy are achieved quickly. In this context, it matters both how the information is transmitted and what information is shared with the public. The function of strategic information control is more strongly highlighted in this practice, supplementing that of data collection, processing and analysis. Contemporary diplomacy is in a position to manage huge amounts of data, an activity possible only with the help of information technology. The way in which information is produced, identified, disseminated or managed in the international environment benefits from the support of web technologies, so that the best interest of the state is achieved.

In conclusion, the role of digital diplomacy is becoming more prominent in the use of digital technologies, and states have a duty to be aware of the potential of this field. Digital diplomacy therefore involves the dissemination of information through the use of digital technologies to manage change in the international system. In fact, through the function of change management, digital diplomacy expands the scope of public diplomacy.

The role of digital diplomacy in the management of crises and changes in the international environment

Going beyond the restrictive framework of structural theories of international relations, the theory of international practice provides an innovative and much more generous framework of analyzing the habits of individuals and groups in relation to how change occurs. Routines facilitate social life through simplification and lead to constancy and predictability. Although it seems a concept in opposition to stability, change is, in turn, an intrinsic part of the international environment, and the correct understanding of the functioning of social life in all its dimensions is a correct premise



to determine the pace and direction of change. It is interesting that the development of activities in the area of competence can at the same time lead to the consolidation or change of the international system¹³. In both cases, with the support of digital technologies, digital diplomacy is in a position to intervene more effectively in their management. The competitive advantage of digital diplomacy, unlike other forms of it, is the ability to analyze significant data sets, the ability to instantly disseminate knowledge over long distances, to simulate certain events using technology. For these reasons, digital diplomacy should be incorporated into the foreign policy strategy that can make it operational as a discreet practice of implementing ways to strengthen national interests, pursuing each of the political, military, economic, social, infrastructure and information dimensions.

By incorporating the tactical, operational and strategic levels, the analytical model DIME / PMESII / ASCOPE / ICR was conceptualized. DIME is the acronym for the main elements of power – diplomatic, informational, military and economic. PMESII considers the political, military, economic, social, informational and infrastructure systems. ASCOPE refers to Area, Structures, Capacities, Organizations, People and Events, and ICR refers to the need for civilian information during an intelligence gathering campaign – *Intelligence Collection Requirements*.

The systemic analysis of a situation based on these models allows the identification of opponents and allies and deciphers their behavior, highlighting the strengths, weaknesses, critical factors, resilience of the actors involved. The importance of using multidimensional models lies in the complexity of conflict situations in the international environment, each crisis having a historic, social, cultural, economic background.

Each factor must be identified, analyzed, measured and managed as much as possible¹⁴.

In CSDP missions in the European Union, digital diplomacy can be very useful as a tool of power. Through its knowledge-producing function, digital diplomacy contributes to the functioning of subtle mechanisms that can influence and manage changes in the international environment: practices such as the dissemination of social norms, speech control and information are just a few examples that can help achieving established goals.

Among the models mentioned above, the most frequently used is DIME, which analyzes the diplomatic, informational, military and economic power. Sometimes DIME becomes DIMEL (legal dimension is added), DIMEFIL (with financial, intelligence and law enforcement). In essence, these are the levels of power that a state has, and diplomacy stands out as an essential resource for achieving the strategic objectives of that actor.

Following Nye's theorizing, the power continuum is configured with the two forms of power (hard power and soft power) at the extremities¹⁵. Steven B. Rothman renames hard power as command power, and soft power is relabelled as co-opting power. Between the two ends of this continuum of power infinite combinations of the two types of power are found, which are manifested through specific tools and behaviors.

From this perspective, the concept of power acquires a dynamic perspective, and the behavior of international actors becomes comparable from the perspective of the form / forms of power they exercise in international relations. If the main form of manifestation of hard power is physical, often accompanied by coercion, soft power is evaluated according to the attractiveness it exerts, most often through rules, ideology, knowledge.

However, the model of the power continuum,

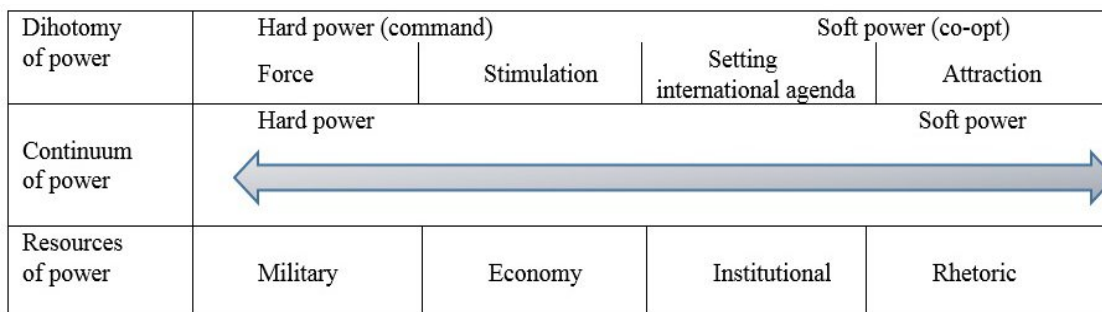


Figure 2 Concept of power: dihotomy and continuity
Source: G. Goertz, *Social science concepts: a user's guide*¹⁶

Power dichotomy	Hard power (command)		Soft power (co-opt)		
	Force	Stimulation	Setting international agenda	Attraction	
Power continuum	Robust power power (hard power)		Smart power (hard +soft power)		Soft (soft power)
Power resources	Military	Economy	Intelligence	Diplomacy	

Figure 3 Continuum of powers
(Author's conception)

proposed by Steven B. Rothman, is less specific in the middle area of the power characteristics, which are neither soft nor hard, but in which elements specific to both types of power are found. In the context of the continuum of power, diplomacy is becoming an essential element, and in the conditions of this global technological transformation, digital diplomacy is emerging as a prominent element. However, for the gray area, Rotman's model does not clearly highlight the fact that diplomacy is part of the soft power instrumentation.

Therefore, starting from Rotman's model, but also considering the limits we have identified, we propose a more complete version of this model, by introducing the form of intelligent power in the gray area of the continuum of soft / hard power and, also by highlighting digital diplomacy as an additional resource, which can be mobilized by political actors in crisis situations.

Conclusion

In this article we started from the premise that digital diplomacy is becoming more and more prominent in the international diplomatic landscape, amid the diversification of technologies and their multiplication of applications in everyday life and we argued that digital diplomacy can turn into an instrument of power. The theory of international practice has been used to highlight ways of projecting soft power in managing an international environment affected by conflict and crisis. In order to operationalize digital diplomacy, it must be equated with a mechanism for managing change in the international environment and conceptualized as a foreign policy strategy specific to soft power.

NOTES:

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