

The Nexus of Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, and National Security: A Comparative Study of International Education in the U.S. and Canada

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Abstract

This paper examines how international education (IE), as an important tool of public diplomacy (PD) and soft power (SP), faces unique challenges as issues of national security (NS) become more prominent in this era of new geopolitics. It presents a model to understand the relationship between PD, SP and NS and then applies this model to a comparative study. The contrasting histories, approaches and perspectives of IE as it operates as a component of foreign policy and at the nexus of PD, SP and NS in both the U.S. and Canada are analysed. The paper concludes with three challenges faced by IE in the contemporary context: first, the diminishing role of the university as a distinct and valued non-state actor; second, the weakening of foreign policy as an outward looking, distinctly international investment; and third, the problem with choosing isolation over engagement as a strategy.

Keywords: international education, national security, public diplomacy, soft power, new geopolitics

Introduction

The contemporary global political landscape is turbulent – characterized by the rise of Asia opposed by western hegemony, the relative transition of power from West to East, and the increased participation

of non-state actors in politics and policymaking (Falk, 2012; Hill & Beadle, 2014; Ikenberry, 2018; Khanna, 2019). This is resulting in the emergence of an *era of new geopolitics*, premised on the primacy of soft power criteria of influence and status, not to mention distinct shifts in global power structures and relations (Falk, 2012). Embedded in this are two critical considerations: the changing nature of conflict and security, and the creation of new rules of engagement, particularly in foreign policy and diplomacy.

In this era of new geopolitics, we argue that international education (IE) as an important tool of public diplomacy (PD) and soft power (SP) faces unique challenges. We define IE as a wide range of “activities that link people, educational institutions [and academic/research programs] across national boundaries...” (Farquhar, 2001, p. 1). Our particular perspective on IE is focused on its *engagement* as an important PD and SP tool by governments to fulfill their foreign policy objectives. IE as a tool of PD and SP encompasses exchanges, research partnerships, study abroad programs, virtual exchanges, foreign campuses and degree-seeking international students, among other forms of higher education engagement. For the purposes of our paper, we use IE as an umbrella term that is more expansive but encompasses exchanges, a term often used in PD literature.

This paper examines how IE as PD and SP is increasingly challenged as issues of national security (NS) become more prominent in this era of new geopolitics. There are growing concerns that IE exposes universities as “vulnerable” knowledge producers, to malign actors and malicious intents of espionage and theft, in this current geopolitical climate (Lee, 2019; Long et al., 2021). Rising concerns over national security are shifting governments’ perception of IE; impacting IE as a tool of PD and SP. This paper thus offers a new perspective in examining IE as it operates at the nexus of PD, SP, and NS. While there is an ever-growing body of literature devoted to public diplomacy (PD), soft power (SP) and national security (NS), there is insufficient scholarship on IE as a tool of PD/SP vis-à-vis NS. The contemporary context makes this a critical subject of study as the precarious relationship between IE, PD, SP and NS has major implications for the future of IE, in terms of its rationales, approach and impact on university-government relations.

To better analyze the context-dependent nature of this nexus as well as our proposed framework, this paper presents a comparative case study of the U.S. and Canada. The two countries provide interesting comparators; sharing several similarities along political structures and values, yet contrasting histories, approaches and perspectives when it comes to IE as PD, SP, and NS. Indeed, their foreign policy is shaped by their place in the world and relationship to it, as well as their unique bilateral relationship as neighbors and close allies. Our paper begins with an outline of our conceptual framework, followed by a reporting of findings from our comparative study, and concludes with our analysis and understanding of the implications on IE as a tool for PD/SP, under increased concerns for NS, in this era of new geopolitics.

Conceptual Framework & Model

SP has been a critical asset for foreign policy engagements of states. Deriving from “the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies...” (Nye, 2004, p. 4), SP is defined as the “ability of a state to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by co-optive means of framing agendas, persuasion, and positive attraction” (Nye, 2013, p. 565).

Higher education has been recognized as a crucial SP tool to heighten the attractiveness of a given country or culture in world politics (Altbach & Peterson, 2015; Byne & Hall, 2014; Nye, 2004, 2005, 2007). IE, particularly the education of international students is frequently identified as a strong SP resource because as an “international student returns to his or her native country and takes over vital positions in the public or private sector, the individual will eventually affect his or her country’s trajectory and, in turn, [the host country’s] foreign policy” (Mai, 2015, para. 3).

PD is a political instrument and “a tool that is used by states, associations of states, and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviors, build and manage relationships, and influence opinions” (Gregory, 2008). While SP and PD are not one and the same (Hayden, 2012), they are interrelated concepts. Nye (2013) argues that PD is one of the most effective ways for states to wield soft power. SP is intrinsically linked to a country’s PD strategy and its behavior, domestically and internationally.

IE has arguably been a tool of PD well before its emergence as a concept or practice in foreign policy or international relations. Since World War II, IE has been particularly prevalent in bilateral and international academic exchanges – a prime example being the Fulbright program. The decades that followed, particularly the early years of the Cold War, saw heightened investments in higher education programs in Area Studies, including American and Canadian Studies – all backed by key government investments. IE as a tool of PD was thus developed by the state and operationalized by and at universities as autonomous institutions in order to build relationships, promote dialogue, and cultivate long-term impact.

Given that the practice of PD is commonly associated with the notion of SP, and IE is both an instrument of SP and PD, in this paper, we do not distinguish between SP and PD, but rather use the concepts as similar/comparable. Foreign policy can be defined as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations” (Hill, 2003, p. 3). Since our focus is on IE as an instrument of SP/PD to achieve foreign policy objectives, and as foreign policy primarily lies in the domain of federal/national governments, our study is state-centric. We closely examine the role of the respective federal ministries/departments in both the U.S. and Canada responsible for foreign policy and their engagement, including shifts over time in IE.

NS refers to the security and defense of the state and is centered on “the capacity to control domestic and foreign conditions that the state believes necessary to enjoy its own self-determination or autonomy, prosperity, and wellbeing” (Romm, 1993, p. 5). Scholars have examined the relationship between NS and PD (Snow, 2017; Wiseman, 2019) and warned about the challenges of an overall shift towards the militarization of PD as it becomes increasingly used in the service of NS. Scholars such as Ruther (2002), Snow (2008) and Cull (2020) have addressed how investment in IE, particular in the case of the U.S., has always integrated state objectives of NS. However, as mentioned earlier, there is insufficient scholarship examining *how IE operates at the nexus of PD/SP and NS*, given heightened investments in NS in this era of new geopolitics.

We acknowledge that there are no standardized definitions for SP, PD and NS and that these terms have no unanimous consensus among scholars. However, our selected definitions are state-centric in nature, and as such best suit our research focus. Based on our review of literature, interviews conducted and our data analysis, we propose a conceptual framework that maps the relationship between PS, SP, and NS. Our model has five vectors (see *Figure 1*). The idea behind these non-mutually exclusive vectors is they map the non-linear, and rather complex relationships between NS and PD/SP.

Figure 1: National Security and its Relationship with Soft Power and Public Diplomacy



This model will be applied in our analysis to understand the relationship between IE, PD/SP and NS.

Below, we outline the five vectors to map this relationship:

1. PD/SP and NS as Conflictual: In this scenario, PD remains an open instrument of statecraft, where successful outcomes are driven by perceived believability and trust. In contrast, military and intelligence instruments of statecraft continue to use both overt and covert forms of influence that rely on deception, and black and grey propaganda. We are cognizant that they are both tools of statecraft that are not mutually exclusive, but in this scenario, firewalls of protection across the information spectrum often break down and influence the ability of PD to successfully function (Gregory, 2008). This push and pull dynamic essentially dilutes the efficacy of PD, and risks rendering its programs/tools at best a shill or at worst obsolete or illegitimate.
2. PD/SP as Securitized by NS: Unlike the conflictual scenario above, this scenario considers instances when for example post 9/11, there is a turning point where PD is reconfigured to be in the service of NS. In this sense, this vector is distinctly different from the first. PD traditionally an open-sourced diplomacy-to-publics outreach efforts are directed by military planners inside the Department of Defense, diluting its power (financially, persuasively) inside the Department of State (Snow, 2017). PD in effect is in decline as SP, with NS becomes the default and more pressing concern (Wiseman, 2015).
3. PD/SP and NS as Complementary: This scenario envisions a future where a state's SP will be understood with relation to a degree of reputational security – the degree of safety accruing to a nation state that proceeds from being known by citizens of other nations (Cull, 2018) – a critical dimension of NS. In other words, SP and NS are understood as mutually beneficial tools of

statecraft. NS here becomes a part of the SP apparatus and SP becomes an essential component of (advancing) NS interests (Cull, 2018).

4. PD/SP and NS as Smart power: In this scenario, unlike the complementary vector, smart power goes beyond reputational security and relies on a combination of hard and SP. In other words, states cannot rely strictly on SP strategies—using attraction to preference outcomes—or entirely on hard power—using coercion, threat of force, payment—to thwart outcomes. There is a growing recognition that in an era of new geopolitics a combination of hard, and SP strategies are required. Both sources are needed to ‘get smart’ (Nye, 2009) in foreign policy. This approach underscores the critical need for both strong military and simultaneously investments in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to assert legitimacy and expand influence (Armitage & Nye, 2007).
5. NS as Engaged/Integrated PD/SP: In this scenario states develop a SP strategy with a two-pronged approach that considers both the projection and reception of SP. In other words, just as a state creates a strategy to project its SP or cultivate it through PD initiatives, it also takes into serious account the nature of the messages and initiatives that it will receive from other projecting states. Here there is appreciation that in an era of new geopolitics, SP projection is no longer monopolized by the Global North and that there has to be reception of SP projections from others to the Global North (Hayden, 2012; Nye, 2013, Trilokekar et al., 2021).

There are two primary uses for this conceptual model that go hand-in-hand: understanding the relationship between NS and PD/SP in relation to IE, and mapping the temporal evolution of said relationship, focusing on its historical evolution as well as its possible future(s). We will demonstrate these features of the model in our comparative analysis.

Research Questions and Methodology

We were interested in three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between IE as PD/SP and NS in the U.S. and Canada?
2. How have new geopolitics shifted this relationship?
3. What are the implications for IE as a tool for PD/SP in the context of new geopolitics?

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study methodology, using the U.S. and Canada as the two cases to bolster what Bartlett and Vavrus (2019) recommend, theoretical generalizability. The U.S. and Canada offer interesting comparisons given their similarities as federal democratic states. In both countries, education is the primary responsibility of the state/province and university-government relations are defined by principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Both countries initiated IE programs post World War II as aspects of their respective foreign policy priorities. In both countries, IE enhances SP. The U.S. still retains the largest global market share of international students and is home to the largest highly ranked universities, while Canada is considered among the fastest growing popular destinations, in comparison to its competitors. These base line similarities enable a deeper contextual analysis of the nexus between IE, SP/PD and NS and map shifts in these relationships as an outcome of new geopolitics (Bray et al., 2007).

We relied on Gilboa (2008) to guide us through comparative research on PD; he recommends following George's (1979) advice of pursuing a "structured focused comparison" (p. 72) by simultaneously comparing the two cases (Bray et al., 2007) in terms of time range (post WWII- current period 2021) and government involvement (in context of foreign policy, PD/SP and NS). This comparison was based on a literature review including journal articles, newsletters, institutional and organizational websites that reflected scholarly/academic, policy and practitioner resources on IE in both countries. In addition, targeted semi-structured interviews were conducted to verify our analysis and understand the issues from a multi stakeholder perspective (Creswell, 2007). A potential list of thirty interviewees with scholars in the PD field, IE policy makers and advocates in government and non-government organizations and journalists focused on IE coverage in both countries was established. After securing approval from the university's research ethics committee, twenty interviews were conducted (US: 11; C: 7; US & C: 2). Interviews typically lasted for 60 minutes, were conducted on zoom, recorded and transcribed. To maintain strict confidentiality, the identities of the individual interviewed and their affiliations are not revealed; IE involves a fairly small and discrete community and therefore anonymity in data reporting is of utmost importance. Interview data has been selectively incorporated to substantiate our findings and analysis.

Research Findings

The following four dimensions are used to assist us with a 'focused structured comparison' of the two cases in terms of time range and government involvement:

1. International Education and its link to Foreign Policy
2. International Education as a tool of Public Diplomacy and Soft Power
3. International Education and its Relationship to National Security
4. International Education in Response to New Geopolitics

1. International Education and its Link to Foreign Policy

In both countries, IE is directly linked to foreign policy, as it is the Department of State (within it the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs) in the U.S. and Global Affairs Canada (within it the International Education Division) that have primary responsibility for IE at the federal level, albeit they are not the sole federal departments engaged in IE. Both countries initiated formalized IE programs post-WWII as components of their respective foreign policy priorities, with the Cold War and anti-communism providing the rationale.

United States

The "birth" of IE (McAllister-Grande, 2008, p. 4; Campbell, 2005) is linked to Senator, J. William Fulbright's vision of the "promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture and science" (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, n.d.b, para. 3). He envisioned educational exchanges as producing cosmopolitan peacemakers and "as persons equipped and willing to deal with conflict or conflict-producing situations on the basis of an informed determination to solve them peacefully (Fulbright, 1976, as cited in Snow, 2021, p. 2). President Kennedy (1961-63) endorsed this rationale through the Fulbright Hays Act (1961). The Bureau of Educational and Cultural

Affairs (1960), later the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (1960) remains within the Department of State (DOS) endorsing this same mission (see, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, n.d.a).

Scholars have debated the consistency with which the U.S. federal government has invested and kept alive this broader commitment to mutual understanding and peace through educational exchanges (Ruther, 2002; Snow, 2008; Veerasamy, 2021). In general, Republican presidents have been less interested in investments in IE with the long-term goal of securing peace and understanding while Democratic Presidents have generally supported investing in IE to meet America's foreign policy objectives. IE serves as an important foreign policy asset. As an interviewee describes:

it has been solidly supported, like the Fulbright program, an international education role for the US government in a very bipartisan way. Even in other times of bitter divisions along ideological lines, very few people have said well let's close our doors and end all government investment in exchanges. People on both sides of the aisle get the things it does...[IE] has no real enemies. And that is why it's support has been pretty good independent of who's in the White House.

Canada

Post WWII and in context of the Cold War, Canada directed its foreign policy to building a strong reputation as a middle power committed to peace building (Potter, 2009). Unlike the U.S., Canada did not directly invest in IE as a tool linked to its foreign policy. Although a result of its foreign policy orientation, IE was supported in Canada indirectly and as part of its overseas development assistance (ODA) programs in the developing world. ODA engaged Canada's educational sector by deploying technical assistance personnel including faculty and students to developing countries and hosting students from developing countries on Canadian campuses (Bergfalk, n.d.; Bond & Lemasson, 1999).

Canada's commitment to ODA declined considerably in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Parallel to this shift, was an increasing 'trade creep' in Canadian foreign policy when trade was considered, "the brightest face of Canada's internationalism" (Cohen, 2003, p. 109). This shift in foreign policy directly impacted IE as there was growing sentiment that Canada could no longer afford educating international students because as Cohen (2003) states, "foreign policy had become a matter of what Canada could afford" (p. 83). As confirmed by an interviewee:

I compare it to what we used to have. We don't leverage that toolkit in the way that we used to. It has become narrower; it has become much more granular. And I think that has been a disservice because I think it is through those kind of tools...that we were really able to broaden the Canadian footprint globally.

IE became directly linked to Canada's trade policy; with Canada's first IE policy (2014-2019) focused on the marketing of Canadian higher education and the recruitment and retention of international students. IE in Canada lost links with its ODA origins and its once weak investments in exchanges and scholarship programs were further severed. As one interviewee confirmed: "Canada has really struggled to get to scale in terms of thinking about international education as a tool of soft power."

2. International Education as a Tool of Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

United States

The Fulbright Program is overseen by the ECA, which is in the Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs branch in the U.S. State Department (U.S. Department of State, n.d.), clearly drawing the relationship between IE and PD. Certainly the Fulbright program does have a PD rationale built into its DNA, because as Snow (1992) and Bochner (1981) suggest, educational exchanges are seen as critical to building people to people diplomacy. It is because there is recognition of IE as a key tool for PD that select U.S. governments have made targeted investments in educational exchanges at critical junctures in international relations. Most noticeably under President Bush post 9/11, capitalizing on the “why do they hate us?” sentiment (as cited in Campbell, 2005, p. 142), a spotlight was created on the need and role of PD in fighting terrorism. This begs the question: does U.S. invest in IE as PD only in critical junctures in their foreign policy?

Investments in PD enhance U.S. SP, and America’s higher education yields substantial SP; a well-recognized reality given that the “U.S. boasts the highest number of top universities in the world, attracts the largest number of international students, and contributes significantly to academic research” (McClory, 2017, p. 54). The link between PD, SP and foreign policy is made explicit when one notes that U.S. SP fell from first place in 2016 to fifth place in 2019, largely as a result of what Bista (2018) identifies as “tectonic shifts in the U.S. political and policy environments” (p. 3) under the Trump administration. Trump policies reversed the earlier trend of international student flows to the U.S. and decreased its attractiveness as a destination of study/stay. The strength and fragility of SP i.e. the image of a nation’s culture, value and attractiveness is directly linked to a state’s PD and foreign policy.

Canada

The 1970’s were the only period in Canadian history when the federal government invested in IE as a tool of PD; however, by and large there is no direct association between IE and PD in the Canadian context. During this brief period, DFAIT invested in the Canadian Studies Program Abroad (CSPA), referred to as the “crown jewel” (Potter, 2009, p. 129) to promote an understanding of Canada within academic institutions and through international scholars abroad. The program was especially valued because it promoted a less direct and intrusive approach; it did not challenge provincial jurisdictional authority over education nor university autonomy or academic freedom. These were important years; after this period, budgets for IE support were severely cut. An interviewee described the Canadian approach as:

intermittent and under-leveraged. So intermittent in that from time-to-time various governments over the last 20 years have seen the potential value and have created for example scholarships schemes with the regional focus or with a particular bilateral focus. But they are often very much in the past, they were kind of spurred by upcoming bilateral visits or upcoming summits.

Interestingly, Canada’s poor investment in PD has not translated into loss or weak SP. Canada is considered one “the [more] popular destination[s]” (Bhardwa, 2017) with its higher educational institutions witnessing an exponential growth in their international student population (El-Assal, 2020; She & Wotherspoon, 2013). While the Canadian government credits this growth to its investments in marketing campaigns and other promotional efforts, perhaps as Potter (2009) suggests Canada’s “peace keeping myth” (p. 4), “its policy of multiculturalism projected an image to the world of a tolerant nation that would

welcome newcomers” and in many respects an image of a “model nation” (p. 5) has helped build and maintain its SP internationally, positively influencing IE while also enabling Canada’s SP to be strengthened through IE.

3. International Education and its Relationship to National Security

United States

As Cull (2020) has observed the U.S. has always approached investment in IE and cultural relations with dual objectives of mutual support but also NS. According to Snow (2008), the Cold war paradigm provided the rationale for federal investment in Title VI and exchange programs. These IE programs are valued as national resources given their pragmatic and national defense rationale (Ruther, 2002, p. 124). An interviewee concurred:

national security and foreign policy aren’t seen as completely different from each other. They are not seen in the ways that some other governmental structures, they are seen as reflecting completely different poles of international relationship. And the exercise of power or military or cultural, or economic and other are all interwoven. And that is seen as a positive and not a negative in the US system.

It is important to note that while Republican presidents have not supported the broader goals of mutual understanding, under Republican presidents the NS rationale was further strengthened. An interviewee supported this observation:

100%. ... we always do better with Republican administrations. Always. There is a number of, we've done lots of research on this to try to determine why. It all boils down to a couple of key factors. One Republican administrations tend to be more robust with security issues. So, if you go back to my argument that foreign policy security, public diplomacy are connected, I would naturally expect Republicans to be bigger spenders.

It is important to note that 9/11 reframed IE as a risk to NS, i.e. instead of IE strengthening N.S. it undermined N.S. Post 9/11, a new tracking system for international students was introduced (Campbell, 2005, p. 141). American post-secondary institutions were viewed with growing distrust, with Congress proposing highly invasive legislation to regulate/monitor international academic programs. There was concern of extreme government oversight of education with threats of federal funding being stripped from Title VI programs that do not serve national interests (McClennen, 2006). Eventually however, the rationale for NS eventually led to more targeted funding not withdrawal or cuts to educational exchanges. As an interviewee stated there was always

an open question are we more secure in the long run by having people who could be our enemies here living and studying and worshipping among us. Or are we safer if we close the doors...And pretty much all of the years that the US has been doing these exchanges, we have tended to have an open doors policy and open doors approach and students from everywhere come here, our

universities welcomed that.... when governments made an investment, it's usually been for security reasons.

Canada

NS has never been a rationale for IE within the Canadian context until this current period of new geopolitics. It is important to note that when the U.S. introduced its Title VI programs, there was an interest in supporting similar programs at Canadian universities. The Canadian government rationalized its role in these proposed programs given its direct and immediate interest in meeting national needs; however, support from the federal government raised ethical issues of academic freedom as well as constitutional problems and were subsequently never implemented (Trilokekar, 2007). Within the Canadian context, such a direct role of the federal government in IE was considered inappropriate. In comparing Canada to the U.S. an interviewee states:

In the United States...security always trumps trade. In the United States security is always more important. It doesn't matter what the discussion, the first question you ask is what are the security implications. In Canada exactly the reverse is true. In any discussion we have the question is how will this impact our overall wellbeing. We are a trading nation dependent desperately for our collective wellbeing on selling some 70% of our goods and services abroad... So, I think in our case trade always trumps security.

Therefore in the case of Canada, managing risks, to ensure economic security is key, and in the Canadian context economic security is tightly associated with national security. IE is spoken of in context of risks associated with disingenuous international students threatening the integrity of Canada's immigration system and economic risk in context of the high concentration of international students in Canada from a handful of countries.

4. International Education in Response to New Geopolitics

United States

The bulk of recent policy shifts in IE are aimed at America's relationship with China. This relationship is fraught with contradictions given its quick pivot. Beginning with the normalization of relations in 1979, with "academic partnerships being a tool of rapprochement and a vehicle for soft diplomacy" (Fischer, 2021, para. 25) to Obama's active encouragement of educational exchanges/partnerships with China, there is now a fairly dramatic shift to "suspicion of China" and a rare "bipartisan agreement in Washington" to limit partnerships (Fischer, 2021, para. 30). Trump initiated restrictions on Chinese students and scholars (Fischer, 2019; Larmer, 2019), especially for those studying and conducting research in sensitive fields within STEM disciplines, or with current or past connections to "an entity in the PRC that implements or supports the PRC's military-civil fusion strategy," (NAFSA, 2021, para. 6). He eliminated the Fulbright in China and Hong Kong (Redden, 2020) in addition to closing several other academic exchanges (Williams, 2020). Trump's China Initiative resulted in arrests of visiting researchers and American academics for allegedly hiding their foreign ties (Long et al., 2021; Machida, 2010). Speaking of the Trump period as distinct, an interviewee said:

[there have always been] ebbs...because there were often other priorities or because, just a lack of necessary, a real commitment. But they weren't often hostile ebbs. So, I think that is one of the differences of the Trump era. That there was this sort of seeing of universities and colleges as kind of in an adversarial sense. And so, the international engagement, the skepticism of that, it was almost dovetailing, right? Because there is skepticism of higher education and the skepticism of international engagement or just global engagement broadly in that era of very nativist moment. So, I think you know it was almost just a perfect storm of that.

The bi-partisan support against China is evident in continued policies under the Biden administration. Most recently, the U.S. Senate passed a China competition bill that greatly increased disclosure requirements for contracts and donations received from overseas by higher educational institutions, creating new oversight role for the government. As per Fischer (2021), the bill includes a provision that could effectively give the U.S. government veto power over international academic agreements, which would be “detrimental to the safety or security of the United States” (para. 37). Institutions would have to screen foreign applicants for research positions. Also institutions that host Confucius Institutes (CI) would have their NSF and Education Department funding restricted (Hall-Martin, 2020); similar limits on Defense Department spending already triggered a wave of closures of CIs.

At the same time, Biden has attempted to set himself apart from the Trump administration. The U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education issued a joint statement titled, *Reengaging the World to Make the United States Stronger at Home* (U.S. Department of State, 2021). It speaks to IE as the link to strengthen relationships between current and future leaders and contribute to global peace and security while enhancing American prosperity and serving the interests of the American people. Speaking highly of the Statement, an interviewee said:

It specifically lays out why is international education important to American security, American diplomacy and the subtext is also explaining why a lot of its lodged in the Department of State, our Foreign Ministry as opposed to the Ministry of Education. And it's because it does have a big role to play in how people define diplomacy today. So, it is a watershed to have a statement like this from any American government.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken called IE a “foreign-policy imperative”, but it is not clear how the government plans to reconcile both objectives, keeping IE as an imperative while monitoring international exchanges that are deemed detrimental to NS concerns; especially given the large presence of Chinese students and scholars on U.S. campuses and the dense research collaborations between the U.S. and China. China is America’s top collaborator in published scientific research. Reminiscent of the post 9/11 period, there is growing mistrust and suspicion of universities because “campus laboratories aren’t just hot spots for international collaboration; they are seen by some U.S. officials as “battlegrounds” (Ellis & Gluckman, 2019, para. 28) with FBI labeling universities as ‘naïve actors’ (Douglass, 2021; Lee, 2019).

Canada

Brexit and Trumpism, marked key geopolitical shifts, a wave of growing nationalism, populism and anti-globalist and anti-immigrant sentiments across much of the world (Douglass, 2021). Canada's IE and SP benefitted from these geopolitical trends as it stood in opposition to these trends, openly welcoming international students and new immigrants. The policy shifts in U.S. immigration and with it changed perceptions of the U.S. created a so-called "Trump bump" leading to Canada's success in recruiting additional international students and attracting the "best and the brightest" of new immigrants (Paikin, 2019). While this aspect of geopolitics benefitted Canada, it soon found itself in a difficult situation with China.

Similar to the U.S., there were reports of Chinese scholars in Canada engaged in espionage (Leuprecht, 2018), effectively impacting Canadian national and economic stability. The government is concerned with Huawei's significant research investments in Canada's leading institutions (Green, 2018), with Canadian universities reported among the top 10 universities outside of China collaborating with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (Leuprecht, 2018). Large number of CIs are closed – largely because of controversies within academic and broader communities vs. directives by the government. There is concern over the perceived co-opting of Chinese faculty and researchers hosted on Canadian campuses to further Chinese interests (Quan, 2019) raising threats to free speech and academic freedom (Xu & Friesen, 2019). However, an interviewee stated that unlike the U.S.

We don't discuss it in the more explicit and open ways in which our American counterparts do, right? Right in a way that allows them to embed this as an intrinsic part of how they do business and how they engage globally etc. We have never made it explicit. It's behind closed doors and a quiet corner here and a quiet corner there.

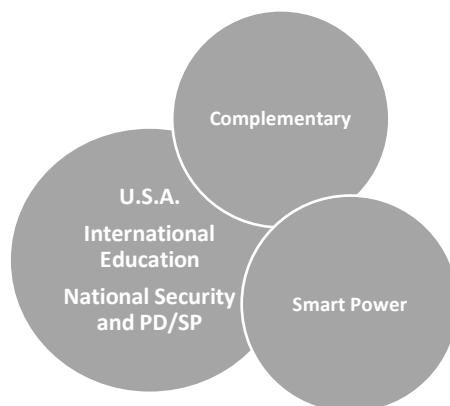
Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) is reported to have conducted closed door meetings at Canadian research universities (see Berthiaume, 2019; Blackwell, 2019; Quan, 2019; Vanderklippe, 2018). Unlike the U.S. however, there is no open government directive, except for the Building Security Awareness in the Academic Community report published by Public Safety Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2020). This report while speaking to the importance of open and collaborative environments for Canadian academic institutions, also warns of threats to the integrity of research that may compromise NS or undercut Canada's research or economic competitive advantage. Rather than prescribe measures, it outlines best practices, general indicators of concern and contacts for institutions to report incidences; China is not mentioned specifically as the threat. Another interviewee elaborates:

Foreign affairs and the security establishment have kind of gone around and done webinars for institutions...to [sensitize faculty] to this evolving of all environment and sensitivities. But no, there isn't a framework per se. I know that there is some work being done on some guidelines, some notional parameters. But I think everybody is treading very carefully given the risk aversion to really maintain anything in black and white terms.

Discussion & Policy Implications

The U.S. case reveals how IE is a tool for foreign policy and PD, and how NS provided a rationale for investment in IE. The contemporary understanding of IE as PD can be traced back to the end of WWII

Figure 2: The US IE Landscape in the 1990s: Traversing Complementarity and Smart Power



and the Cold War – particularly the development of cultural and exchange programs (Schneider, 2005) to promote dialogue and mutual understanding, and in turn expand the sphere of influence of the U.S. In applying the conceptual model above, we can draw on elements of a complementary relationship between PD and NS, because the former was effectively applied and used in service of the latter. But going a step further, we can see that the US historically also adopted a model of smart power, even if the vernacular was not commonplace at the time. Effectively, the US continued to invest in its military assets, built alliances, and invested in PD as a tool for advancing its NS interests.

By the end of the Cold War, the U.S. amassed significant SP reserves following decades of PD and IE initiatives and programs. Following the Cold War, a shift in messaging focused on sharing and spreading U.S. democratic and liberal values, especially to former Soviet republics. PD and IE were both seen as manifestations of SP – used to communicate America to the world and build appeal in the process. During the 1990s, IE as a revenue source was being widely recognized. Both 9/11 and the war on Afghanistan proved to be turning points – universities took on increased role in reporting and regulating international students and scholars, but also pathway dependency prevailed, and the relationship between NS and IE was recalibrated to one where post 9/11, IE helped secure American NS through additional, albeit more targeted PD initiatives. This is why we describe the U.S. during this period as one traversing complementarity and smart power (*as shown in figure 2*).

We argue that post Trump, and under Biden, there is shift from earlier path dependency. Similar to the post 9/11 period, there are concerns of IE as a risk to NS and questions about the university's credibility (under Trump) and naivety (under Biden); however there is a major difference. In spite of the important position taken through the Joint Statement to reaffirm IE as PD, the Biden administration had not initially revoked Trump's *China Initiative*, but instead introduced the *China Competition Bill*. Also the earlier regulations introduced post 9/11 concerned immigration processes, the purview of the federal government; current regulations aim to direct and control institutional behavior in IE by regulating partnerships; the purview of universities. Also these policies suggest a shift in the discourse on IE as NS; IE no more

Figure 3: Post 9/11 Move in the US towards a Conflictual Relationship between PD/SP and NS



enhances NS rather because it increases risk to NS, governments have legitimate authority to increase regulation and universities must comply as it is a matter of securing national interest. An interviewee warns:

I mean in legislation that passed the Senate over the summer [2020], ... there was a provision that would essentially give the US government ... the ability to veto some academic partnerships. And so, I think the concern is sort of that even if there is some legitimacy at the root of the critiques of international collaboration that the response is going to go too far.

Could this be temporary and will the current period, eventually lead to a renewed investment in PD as was done post 9/11? It is difficult to predict because as an interviewee confirms:

it is still a live issue...And I think it's going to inevitably complicate the way that universities interact with their Chinese counterparts and all countries...because they are all kind of concerned about this kind of government encroachment on really, I think on university research mainly and international collaboration.

While it is difficult to predict, based on our model, we suggest that the U.S. is now moving towards a more conflictual position between PD/SP and NS, but perhaps more importantly, one that represents a heavier securitization of PD with troublesome consequences for policy (as shown in figure three).

The Canadian experience is starkly different. Investments in ODA in the 1960s and the development of Canadian Studies in the 1960s and 1970s promoted Canada and built lasting international relationships, however these initiatives were significantly smaller in scale. IE in the 1980's and the 1990's became an activity formally linked to Canadian trade – this economic shift can be traced to the federal government's investment in the recruitment of international students. Another shift in the 1990s led IE to

be viewed as an immigration tool for workforce and population growth. IE was thus seen as an economic tool rather than a tool to secure political or security interest. In the Canadian case, PD and IE in Canada are loosely interlinked, but they cannot be historically mapped in the conceptual model used above because they were detached from NS, and their link to foreign policy was exclusively a part of the trade and immigration apparatuses.

In the present context, however, NS has entered the discourse on IE in Canada. We see the same concerns as in the U.S. when it comes to the vulnerability of IE in exposing Canada to undue risks, including theft, espionage and discussions around increased regulation of the university sector when it comes to academic/research partnerships with China. An interviewee explains:

It will be very easy for Canada just to roll over and follow the American lead. And to date I have been encouraged that there is more robust conversation and there has been some pushback. But there are tendencies. We are allies of the United States. Our defense depends on the United States. Our security depends on the United States. And so, at the same time over the decades, we played a useful role for the United States being able to do things that they themselves can't do. So, there's that.

Unlike the U.S., the Canadian government has to date steered away from developing and/or imposing regulations on universities. An interviewee clarifies

[Canada has] Not yet. Yet is the big word [moved in this direction]... And that has been part of it is how much do you want to draw attention to this because there is potentially risk that comes, especially to Canada US relationship seeing the kind of decisive steps that have been taken in the US to regulate, to give direction. And none of our institutions want to end up in that situation... They are going to have an impact on how we operate. And the other part of this is I'm fearful that they are going to become precedent setting. And so, this might be one of the more extreme examples where we are going to have to navigate complexity...[So] I agree with you that what happens with China is going to have an impact on international education going forward.

While there are concerns that the government may move in this direction, especially as it faces pressures to mirror policies adopted by its Western allies; there are also expressions of a realignment of foreign policy with Canada adopting a 4Cs approach (coexist, compete, co-operate and challenge) in how it deals with China as a maligned force (Smith, 2021). Canada's position illustrates greater caution. Unlike the U.S. it is not a super power and as such is heavily reliant on international trade; therefore, it has to take a more practical approach in accepting geopolitical power shifts. Also, IE for Canada has become its life line for institutional funding and recruitment of future immigrants; and while it cannot openly contest its closest ally, the U.S., it has to also cautiously carve its own unique position in its international relations. Canada's approach is described by an interviewee:

Both Canada and China have done a really admirable and respectful job of keeping the international education conversation distinct from other bilateral challenges. And that's important. And I think also you know it is important that our government knows, and all players know is that

Canada's universities have been involved with China for over 120 years now actually. And so, there is some deep expertise there that can be drawn on to help navigate these relationships. And that expertise has been developed through international education and international exchange. We've got to keep pathways open for conversation and dialogue. And I think there is a healthy respect for that.

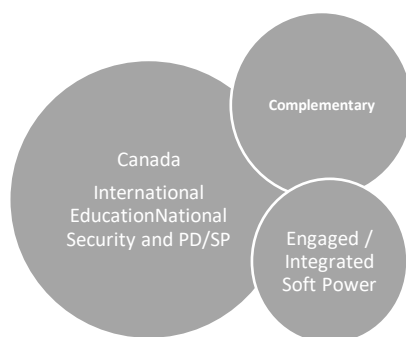
Therefore in this particular context, we place Canada in and around the complementary vector, with a growing concern for making IE work in context of growing NS concerns, but also inching towards engaged/integrated soft power, given it is not a hegemon and/or super power and its more practical approach encourages it to work with another growing super power. We surmise that given its geopolitical positioning, its foreign policy and minimal investment in PD, its contrasting objectives to the US, Canada has followed a different trajectory, see figure 4, as far as PD/SP, NS and IE go.

It is clear that contexts differ greatly between the two countries to sufficiently impact their investment in IE in relation to foreign policy and to PD/SP and NS. However, the current context is a shifting landscape and concerns over IE in context of NS, especially in relation to China, have very similar undertones in both countries. The contemporary shift in perception of IE as linked to NS is instructive in raising three key challenges for the future of IE as a tool for PD/SP. These challenges include:

1. The diminishing role of the university as a distinct and valued non-state actor.

IE is commonly acknowledged as one of the most powerful and long lasting PD tools for mutual understanding and trust-building (Scott-Smith, 2008, as cited by Snow, 2021; Machida, 2010). However, what is most important to note is that IE is well respected and valued because it is built on a model of

Figure 4: Canada Traversing Complementarity between NS/IE, and Developing an Engaged SP Strategy



partnership between a state and a non-state actor, where as a non-state actor, universities maintain an arm's length relationship with the government. It is the nature of this relationship that enables universities to earn the respect and trust of national and international communities. Speaking of the Fulbright, an interview stated: “[it is] probably the most recognizable international exchange program in the world. We have successfully managed to operate above the political fray. And I think we add value in that we end up focusing on opportunities and not politics.” As another interviewee stated:

Where things might be complicated politically, education can still cut through all of that in a very soft, kind of soft diplomacy standpoint. It can still allow us to quietly maintain relationships and build people to people ties even when things are tough....it allows us to still operate under the radar.

Undoubtedly, universities, work within not outside government policy. Indeed, as Marginson (2019) states, “when government sneezes then universities catch cold”. However, in both the U.S. and Canada, universities are founded on principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom that enable them to work with their counterparts despite international tensions. In the current context however, governments are pushing towards setting the rules of international academic engagement (Friesen, 2021, para. 24), claiming in both countries that the university sector is naïve, at times even accusing universities as subversive or anti-constitutional; this is highly problematic. Perhaps Marginson (2019) is right when he suggests that “the dangers to academic freedom in the West posed by Chinese party-state activity might be equaled or exceeded by the dangers to academic freedom in the West posed by Western security agendas” (para. 49). Speaking of the Canadian context, an interviewee confirms:

I think we are going to see probably more regulation. Something more potentially more prescriptive which is concerning because I think the luxury that our institutions have been afforded up to now as I mentioned being these kind of non-state international actors is they have had tremendous, they set their own foreign policy... But I think we are increasingly going to see those efforts to intervene. And not just in the research area. In all areas... So, I think we are in for tough times ahead.

2. The weakening of foreign policy as an outward looking, distinctly international investment

As Douglass (2021) illustrates, there has been rise of nationalism across several states, fueled by wave of rising populism and protectionist ideologies that speak against internationalization, migration and ultimately IE. Lee (2019) states, “in the past year especially, numerous federal proposals and governmental or organizational policies in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia have made clear that internationalization as a goal in itself is to be secondary to the country’s global advancement and security interests” (para. 1), promoting a kind of an exclusionary nationalism. NS interests have thrust the state and protection of its interests as priority. Furthermore, global interests are viewed as hostile to the interests of the state, setting up this dichotomous hierarchy between the two, often subsuming international interests under national interests. Biden has attempted to reverse Trump’s populist policies, however the priority given to national interests prevails. As an interviewee forewarns:

I think my biggest fear is closure...[that] everyone moves to a let's focus on our own house and pay less attention to the rest of the world. I think that has really significant implication in terms of...equity and diversity. I think it has significant implications in terms of capacity building. And I think it even has security implications because one of the values of international education it allows us to see nations as people and not as policies.

Canada is an interesting case because it has not gone down the road of heightened nationalism, anti-immigration and anti IE. However, it has had its own Canada First approach. IE is directly linked to Canada's needs and has value exclusively in context of the benefits it brings to the Canadian state. The rhetoric of national competitiveness and prosperity has even uncharacteristically transformed Canada into a fairly aggressive competitor. And this competition for national advantage is so strong that in this era of new geopolitics, Canada is singularly concerned with "securing this income ...by entering new markets and diversifying its source countries of international students" (GOC, 2019, p. 4). As an interviewee confirms:

I would say that this goes back to both to the Saudi situation and to the changing geopolitical context is the recognition that Canada is overly reliant on just a handful of countries. And so, diversification strategy that draws on talent from a broader number of countries is very much part of our pathway moving forward.

Within the national narrative, IE as a tool of PD is almost non-existent in Canada.

Ironically however, IE is directly linked to and benefits from an outward looking foreign policy. As Lee (2019) eloquently states, "a key benefit of IE is the ability to make what is 'foreign' more understandable and appreciated, including a country's complexities and the many cultural contradictions within them" (para. 50). It is critical that we not lose sight of key tenets of PD as two-way dialogue. Foreign policy and domestic or national interests are interconnected; but foreign policy has a distinct function, one that needs continued strengthening from an internationally engaged domestic public. If national/domestic policy agendas subsume foreign policy, we will erase the effectiveness of IE as a tool of PD.

3. Problem with choosing isolation over engagement as a strategy

It is important to remember that the origins of IE are directly linked to the Cold War period when rather than disengage, the U.S. and Russia began bi-national exchanges. The Fulbright Program was a Cold War strategic effort to learn about both states that were friend and foe.

As an interviewee states during the Cold war, there was investments made in relationships with countries that were adversaries: "And so, [there was an investment in] teaching Russian during the Cold War. And that is why it is very interesting to look at teaching Chinese now. It is not following quite the same pattern as teaching Russian."

Wiseman (2019) suggests that democracies have essentially two strategic policy choices: whether to isolate or engage the adversary, and he suggests that while PD "is not a panacea for easing hostile bilateral relations, it is one of many elements that a judicious government can use — in order to improve relations with an adversarial state" (p. 152). By continuing to host and participate in bilateral exercises, scholars suggest there is a possibility of diminishing extremist views and reducing the negative image/perspectives and misconceptions that exist within the hostile state. As stated boldly by an interviewee:

Because just as there are global risks, the risk of not working with some partners, if we don't work with China on climate change. If we don't, you know, there are a whole number of areas where we can and should be working with international actors with whom we have other disagreements.... it's my hope that as we've learned over the last 80 years, dialogue and exchange is healthier than the alternative. And you go through robust patches, and you go through dry patches... But I am hopeful that we don't lose sight of the need for exchange and dialogue...

With disengagement, as global competition intensifies, limiting international ties and curbing knowledge production, will not benefit any state or global society (Long et al., 2021). In fact there are fears that deteriorating relations between the United States and China could leave American researchers on the outside of important collaborations. Perhaps most importantly, as Satterfield (2021) states, “as authoritarian states such as China and Russia look to systematically curb freedom and democracy throughout the world, it's imperative that the United States continues to bolster its people-to-people diplomacy. Our most powerful assets remain those that have guided and strengthened our nation since the beginning - our democratic principles (para. 12); hence the notion that PD, in the form of engagement, is generally more effective than isolation.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to examine IE as it operates at the nexus of PD, SP, and NS, both historically and in the current new geopolitical context. It provided a comparative case study using a state-centric framework to analyze the context-dependent nature of this nexus and its influence on policy. It began with an outline of a conceptual framework, proposing a model to understand the relationship between PD and NS, followed by a reporting of findings from a comparative study of the U.S. and Canada, using Gilboa's (2008) recommended structured focused comparative method. Our analysis of the two cases sheds light on understanding the implications on IE as a tool for PD/SP, under increased concerns for NS, in this era of new geopolitics.

Cull refers to exchanges as the “soul” of public diplomacy (2019). IE is an important tool for PD/SP; however, as this comparative study illustrates, each state's geopolitical positioning shapes its foreign policy and NS interests, and with it, its investment, approaches, and very definition of IE, and its link (or not) to PD as a tool of SP. The model presented helps map these relationships and draw attention to concerns for IE moving forward. The controversies and debates surrounding IE and relationships with China in today's context of new geopolitics are shifting government's perception of IE. These shifts caution us against three challenges: first, the diminishing role of the university as a distinct and valued non-state actor; second, the weakening of foreign policy as an outward looking, distinctly international investment; and third, the problem with choosing isolation over engagement as a strategy. As democratic states, it would be best if both the U.S. and Canada, as an interviewee suggests, “invest in minimiz[ing] risk but not minimize IE as a tool”. Looking ahead, another hopeful interviewee states:

And we will also come out of it well because we will figure out how wide the door can be open. And what are the things that are absolutely off-limits. I think we'll see the government appreciate

more and more what is outlined in that joint statement that there is real value to our security, our diplomacy, our economy by being quite serious about international education.

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