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# 21ST CENTURY DIPLOMACY

A Practitioner's Guide

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**Kishan S. Rana**

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Key Studies in Diplomacy

Series Editor: Lorna Lloyd



# 21st Century Diplomacy

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### **Key Studies in Diplomacy**

Lorna Lloyd, Series Editor

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2011

**The Continuum International Publishing Group**

The Tower Building            80 Maiden Lane  
11 York Road                 Suite 704  
London SE1 7NX              New York NY 10038

[www.continuumbooks.com](http://www.continuumbooks.com)

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EISBN: 978-1-4411-4924-4

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Rana, Kishan S.

21st century diplomacy: a practitioner's guide / Kishan S. Rana.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4411-3252-9 (hardcover: alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-4411-3252-X (hardcover: alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-1-4411-6838-2 (pbk.: alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-4411-6838-9 (pbk.: alk. paper) 1. Diplomacy. I. Title.

JZ1405.R34 2011

327.2-dc22

2011006048

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India  
Printed and bound in the United States of America

To  
*Geoff Berridge, Bob Hathaway, Dietrich Kappeler,  
Jovan Kurbalija, Paul Sharp,*  
*Who helped in my transition from practice to the academe,*

&

*John Boyd*  
*A friend of five decades, much admired,*  
*Always ahead of the game*



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# Acknowledgement

This book has long been in the making. I owe a debt to many that have helped me in putting the collection together.

First of all, I am grateful to all those that have attended my teaching courses, especially the distance learning programs. A reason for the surprising strength of the text-based delivered-through-the-internet medium is that everything done in that mode—class lectures, “hypertext” comments by participants, their entries in the seminar and other blogs, and the “online” discussion records—survive as written material, which can be saved on one’s computer for subsequent reflection and use. As the ancients said, *docendo discimus*—we learn by teaching. I have gained much from those I have taught. They have helped me to rewrite and improve the texts in this book, added to my understanding, and offered a rich patina of detail.

A number of friends read the draft material and suggested improvements. They include Kamal Bakshi, Geoff Berridge, John Boyd, Brian Hocking, Dietrich Kappeler, Jovan Kurbalija, Aldo Matteucci, and Alex Sceberras Trigona. Thank you for your generous help.

Special thanks are due to all my colleagues in DiploFoundation, ably led by Jovan Kurbalija. They have become a kind of extended family for these past 12 years, following a chance meeting with Jovan in Malta in 1999. That has been serendipity at its best.

As always, I express profound gratitude to my family, Mimi, the anchor of my life, and to Ajit and Deepika, and Priya, and our grandchildren, Suneira and Karnavir. They have all provided

## *Acknowledgement*

constant, multiform support, without which both writing and teaching would have been impossible. They have tolerated my crabby moods with loyalty and love. Without their support, these past 15 splendid, post-Foreign Service years would have been barren.

A companion website to this book is at: <http://kishanrana.diplomacy.edu/books/guide/> On behalf of the publisher and myself, our sincere thanks to DiploFoundation for hosting this website.

# List of Abbreviations

APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Conference
APT	ASEAN plus three (China, Japan, and South Korea)
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia Europe Meeting
AU	African Union
BCIM	Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (a subregional organization)
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (earlier it was Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation)
BJP	“Bharatiya Janata Party,” a major Indian political party
BRIC	a political group consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (expanded in 2011 to “BRICS” with the inclusion of South Africa)
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
Cd’A	charge d’affaires
CECA	comprehensive economic partnership agreement
CENTRO	Central Treaty Organization, led by the United States, now defunct
CEO	chief executive officer
CEPA	comprehensive economic partnership agreement (this is akin to “CECA,” where the word “partnership” is replaced by “cooperation”)



*List of Abbreviations*

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy (of the EU)
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CSME	Caricom Single Market and Economy
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DCM	deputy chief of mission
EAC	East African Community
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK
FDI	foreign direct investment
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FTAs	free trade agreements
G-8	group of eight leading economies
G-15	group of 15 Non-Aligned countries
G-20	group of 20 leading world economies, which emerged as a key body after the 2008 global recession
G-77	the group of 77 developing states originally established in 1964, which now consists of some 130 countries
GATT	Government Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCHQ	General Communications Headquarters, a British intelligence agency
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
GUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, a cooperation cluster
HOM	head of mission

HR	human resources
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBSA	a group consisting of India, Brazil, and South Africa
ICT	information and communications technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC-ARC	Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation
IT	information technology
Mercosur	“Mercado Común del Sur” (i.e. “Southern Common Market”)
MFA	foreign ministry
MFN	most favored nation—a WTO provision that ensures equal treatment for all member states
MNCs	multinational corporations
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for African Development
NGO	nongovernmental organizations
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NSC	national security council
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECS	Organization of East Caribbean States
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe
P-5	five permanent members of the UN Security Council
PD	public diplomacy
PerM	performance management
PLG	plurilateral group (as distinct from a geography-determined regional group)
PM	prime minister
PNG	persona non grata

*List of Abbreviations*

PPP	public private partnerships
PR	permanent representative
RSS	“Really Simple Syndication,” a family of web feed formats that lets the user choose the material he wishes to receive, from internet, news sources, and blogs
RTAs	regional trade agreements
S&T	science and technology
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SE Asia	Southeast Asia
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Introduction

This collection of texts started as a course of six lectures developed for the Canadian Foreign Service Institute in 2004 under the rubric “Contemporary Diplomacy,” presented in a distance “self-learning” format (i.e. to be pursued at one’s own pace, without any teacher or guide) as part of their e-learning campus. Subsequently the material was rewritten and underwent expansion and in early 2007 emerged as an eight-lecture course offered by the DiploFoundation, under the present title. This course is presented annually as a standalone distance-learning program and as one of the choices for those who undertake the MA program offered by DiploFoundation under the sponsorship of the University of Malta.

This book includes additional texts developed in the course of my teaching activities at the Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi, and at overseas assignments in different parts of the world. In effect, this is a companion volume to an earlier compilation, *Bilateral Diplomacy*, first published in 2002 by DiploFoundation ([www.diplomacy.edu](http://www.diplomacy.edu)), thereafter in an Indian edition (2004), and subsequently in a Chinese translation (2005).

In September 2006, out of the blue, thanks to the wonders of the internet, I connected with and was invited by the Lim Po Institute at Paramaribo in Suriname, to handle the first week of lectures at an intensive, six-week course that a visionary, Hans Lim Po, ran for a group of 20 politically appointed Surinamese diplomats, eight of them going out to different countries as ambassadors, and the rest as consuls general and as senior diplomats; in quick time, new several texts were prepared for the 15 lectures I presented

there. I was struck by the receptivity shown toward that material by these personalities, most of whom were entering the diplomatic profession for the first time. Their need was for skill enhancement, and it seemed that the lectures and the accompanying exercises hit the sweet spot. That experience pushed me to pursue further such direct teaching opportunities.

Some months later I used that same collection of lectures at a weeklong program run at the Institute for Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, Kuala Lumpur, for a score of young Malaysian diplomats, having two to three years of work experience, going to their first overseas assignments. Since then, I have used these lectures at courses run in Bahrain, China, Kenya, Namibia, the Maldives, and Russia.

This collection has two aims; first, to present knowledge that belongs to the category of practical orientation, in a profession where the earlier method for knowledge acquisition was mentorship by senior colleagues and the years spent in slowly gathering experience. Apprenticeship remains a key feature of diplomacy. Lectures such as these attempt to summarize ideas in a simple and practical way, for young practitioners and scholars to absorb with ease. Second, this material may help in the development of trainers, who could use the texts as a starting point, to develop their own teaching material, and assist young entrants to diplomatic services to develop the needed craft skills. I strongly believe that it is important for all but the very smallest states to develop their own diplomatic teaching capacity, relying on both retired envoys and academics. The texts are thus a teaching device and a point of departure for teachers.

When training courses are offered in classes, either in situ or via distance learning, lecture texts are supported by hands-on, participatory exercises; that is obviously difficult with a textbook. In an attempt to overcome this, some practical exercises that I use with these lectures are presented in the concluding chapters and at the end of this book in the hope that these may be helpful to fellow teachers, to be modified and improved. We know from experience that hands-on training is an essential ingredient in the grooming

of diplomatic skills; that is the key area where these lectures and the courses offered by DiploFoundation differ from the vast range of high-quality academic learning offered by universities and scholarly institutes.

An old chestnut remains with us: is bilateral diplomacy more important than the multilateral? At a 2005 international conference I heard a learned US professor proclaim that multilateral diplomacy was in the ascendant, and the bilateral embassy was in decline. Certainly, the pace of global and regional diplomacy is hectic to the point where it has become a constant whirl of summits, besides countless encounters among ministers and officials. Leaders meet one another at summits, and have foreign affairs high on their work agenda, as never before. Foreign ministers barely get home to change their suits and shirts before repacking their bags for the next journey abroad. Senior foreign ministry officials probably spend more nights on aircraft and in hotels than in their beds at home. But the building block of external relations, even in relation to conferences and organizations, remains the bilateral equation between states. A constant challenge is how to manage that well, not just to resolve problems but also to carry forward joint actions, especially with high priority countries, across a panorama of activities.

William Hague, British foreign secretary, who took office in June 2010, described the centrality of bilateral diplomacy in one of his major speeches (the first in a cycle of four), on July 1, 2010:

For although the world has become more multilateral as I have described, it has also become more bilateral. Relations between individual countries matter, starting for us with our unbreakable alliance with the United States which is our most important relationship and will remain so. . . . But other bilateral ties matter too, whether they are longstanding ties which have been allowed to wither or stagnate or the new relations that we believe we must seek to forge for the 21st century. Regional groups are certainly strengthening across the world, but these groups are not rigid or immutable.

Nor have they diminished the role of individual states as some predicted. Today, influence increasingly lies with networks of states with fluid and dynamic patterns of allegiance, alliance and connections, including the informal, which act as vital channels of influence and decision making and require new forms of engagement from Britain . . .

Many MFAs have worked out proactive methods for their international policy, but there remain foreign ministries that do not methodically consider the range of external options available or learn from the good exemplars. Effective diplomacy is not more expensive when compared with its deprived cousin, what one may call routine or 'business as usual' diplomacy; it is just better organized. For any country, the international policy goal is simple: first, work out the best foreign policy options that are available to the nation, in harmony with resources, capacity, external interests and obligations, and the available opportunities. Second, establish the delivery mechanism for this policy, through its diplomacy structures, and then operate this optimally. The first task varies from country to country and depends on factors such as legacy, capabilities, resource endowment, and external ambitions. The second involves a methodology that is more or less the same for all, with relatively minor variations. It is this second set of working methods that we consider here under the rubric of diplomatic studies. It is an observed paradox that outside of North America and Europe, this is an under-studied subject, even in an advanced country such as Japan, even though the requirement is uniform; the rather few institutes of diplomatic studies that obtain in European universities work mainly on diplomatic history or elements of theory, and few among them look to the *practice* of diplomacy. That is different from the diplomatic academies that train officials of foreign ministries and others; some of them do not enjoy needed links with their own universities and thinktanks.

The cardinal task of the modern foreign ministry is the management of complex and crisscrossing relationships, bilateral, regional and international, across the range of subjects that crowd today's international dialogue. As one of my students declared:

“ . . . most States are moving towards creating bigger and denser networks with other international actors, mostly States but not exclusively, using different instruments like regional and bilateral free trade agreements (RTAs and FTAs), and other integration devices, as well as local governments, interinstitutional and people-to-people links.” The foreign ministry has also to be conscious of its multiple and layered partnerships with home institutions, state and non-state, and a matching network of relationships overseas. The foreign ministry is at the heart of this web of external connections, but is seldom its master; it often perceives itself as the football for all, especially when things go wrong. This ministry is constantly engaged in enforcing policy coherence. It has to enforce a “whole of government” hallmark on external activities, and beyond that an even more elusive “whole of country” seal, that is, stakeholder concurrence, *if* it manages to carry along the bulk of its non-state partners. This is a permanent challenge for the foreign ministry.

These relationship management tasks encompass problem resolution and conflict containment. It is possible to distinguish between the “normal” work of orchestrating and enhancing external relationships, that is, the delivery of the best results out of them, and the “special” tasks of overcoming conflicts and finding solutions to problems. The methods used in the two kinds of work are intertwined and are often similar in essence, even while there exist differences in emphasis. One might be tempted to think that it is conflict resolution or preventive diplomacy that offers the sharpest challenge to professional diplomats. But in reality it is the regular tasks of managing well the normal relationships that are no less challenging.

By way of illustration, consider some recent examples.

- Botswana, a small southern African state, is a convinced user of performance management methods, using the “balanced scorecard” that fits into a national strategic plan, and the foreign ministry’s (MFA’s) plan. This cascades down to embassies abroad, and then to every member of the mission, including locally recruited staff; performance is reviewed



each month against the “performance development plan” that each of them has signed. Missions report to the foreign ministry each quarter on their implementation of the strategic plan. Such ideas, originally corporate techniques that have been adapted for public services, are gaining currency in an increasing number of foreign ministries.

- The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has created a ‘Team Canada Inc’ network of federal departments and agencies, which works with provinces and territories and non-state partners to help Canadian businesses succeed in world markets. It assists exporters and those investing abroad with focused campaigns that promote the country’s economic interests in a synergistic manner. While many countries treat such external activity via public-private partnerships, the Canadian method formalizes this in an innovative manner.
- India has partnered its business and industry in new ways. Image management is handled by an “India Brand Equity Fund,” with a corpus fund from the government, managed by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), under the supervision of the Commerce Ministry. In 2009 the Ministry of Industry created a new promotional entity ‘Invest India’ in partnership with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), in which the government has a minority share. This comes after a series of earlier efforts to give real direction to foreign direct investment (FDI) promotion that had proved unproductive.
- In 2003–06 Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawarta implemented a corporate method, carrying out a full horizon review of the total relationships with selected countries, in a strategic review. The Thai Foreign Ministry prepared a document on the existing state of ties and the actions that different government ministries wanted to implement over the next five years vis-à-vis that country. This “whole of government” perspective was presented to the cabinet, and the action plan approved by them was then sent to all the agencies for imple-

mentation, via the Foreign Ministry, with a unit in the PM's Office undertaking supervision. Rather few countries implement such a holistic bilateral relationship development program.

- The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) now applies what is arguably one of the strictest selection methods for junior level promotions, blending this with an intensive training format. The FCO has these distinct "grades": A, B, C, D (broadly third to first secretary) and Senior Management (i.e. roughly counselor rank). All candidates seeking promotion for the final three levels have to filter through very tough "Assessment and Development Centers" (ADCs). At these, just six candidates appear before six assessors for a week: three days at exams, simulations and role-play, where they are tested intensively, and two days for feedback. An FCO document says: "the feedback interview provides candidates with arguably the clearest insight into their strengths/weaknesses they have ever received. This coupled with targeted developmental advice, makes this an extremely valuable tool both to the candidate and the FCO at large, if the candidate heeds the advice given." The typical success rate in this process is less than 30 percent, which is perhaps fine for what is also seen as a training process.
- Several advanced countries that run sizable diplomatic networks have recently introduced a new form of representation, the "hub" embassy, which is larger than the others in the region, and concentrates some service personnel that travel to neighboring embassies, as needed. This is applied in aid management, as also in running training programs in the field, for instance for local staff. This makes the 'outreach' embassies somewhat dependent on the hub mission, which is a departure from the notion that each embassy is an autonomous entity, and supervised only from the home headquarters, that is, the MFA.

These instances illustrate the myriad ways in which diplomacy methods are evolving. Sharing such information is of much utility

to others; regional organizations can play a role in organizing such exchanges. Another step could be for foreign ministries that have carried out benchmarking to make their reports available to foreign counterparts.

Managing relations with individual foreign countries, problem solving, handling regional and global issues, and advancing the country's external interests across a wide front is a seamless task. This can be called "integrated diplomacy," where each task and action area ties in with others; promotion of culture fits in with reaching out to the diaspora, and has beneficial consequences in other sectors, be it tourism inflow, expansion of business relations, or the country's national image (for states like China and India with significant communities overseas, reaching out to their diaspora has become increasingly important; as we see in Chapter 5, many other countries now actively include their diaspora in their external outreach). This is one fundamental justification for operating unified diplomatic services, where executives handle all the work segments and usually rotate among different specialties. Increasingly, subject experts, who possess knowledge in depth, supplement them. But at the top level of management, be it in an embassy or at the higher echelons of the foreign ministry, it is the ability to take a holistic perspective that is vital. This is integrated diplomacy.

In much of the non-Western world, the challenges of operating networks of external relationships, bilateral, regional and multilateral, are more daunting than in the rich states that are endowed with dense layers of institutions and experienced actors, state and non-state, that populate their international affairs community. In an interconnected world, developing countries have no option but to build up their capacities. This challenges the foreign ministries and all the other official players engaged in this arena. That also applies to the non-state actors who have their own particular interests, as also their sense of public welfare.

# Part I

## **The International Environment**



# 1 Globalized Diplomacy

## Chapter Overview

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Each age believes its time is unique, a paradigm change from the past. But as ancient Indian sages proclaimed, “Change is the only constant”. What then is so special about the twenty-first century? These essays provide an answer. I believe we are justified in the assertion that the start of the twenty-first century is a time of paradigm change in the way international relations are conducted. We examine the change elements, looking at the way states deal with one another, in what has become *globalized diplomacy*. Today, “world affairs is about managing the colossal force of globalization.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daryl Copeland, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations*, (Reiner, Boulder, US, 2009), p.1.

In the midst of a regional summit meeting, the head of government of a Southeast Asian state sends an SMS (text) message to another leader in the same room. Obtaining his concurrence to a proposal that he has just thought up, he then sends two more SMSs to canvass support from other counterparts; before his own officials realize it, a new initiative has been launched, with no official record of the exchanges, or how they came about. A number of major Western leaders are in frequent direct contact with one another via text messages, cutting through diplomatic formalities.<sup>2</sup>

On another continent, a Western envoy is frustrated with stonewalling by the local government, in his attempts to prevent local action that seems to hurt the interests of the receiving country's minority indigenous native population; even his own government seems reconciled to this impasse—perhaps appreciating that this is a matter for that nation's domestic policy. Not satisfied, this envoy uses the internet to “unofficially” alert several international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work in that country; they in turn quietly warn their partner agencies in that country that they will hold back some aid projects; that does the trick, and the action that triggered the problem is scrapped.

Elsewhere, a developing country association of industries, after gaining credibility in support of the home country's ecopolitical diplomacy, launches a series of bilateral country dialogue groups, where captains of industry, former officials, and public figures meet annually to discuss the full spectrum of that relationship, to recommend initiatives to the two governments. Their motive: a realization that sound economic relations are intertwined with politics, security concerns and

<sup>2</sup> One assumes that among these Western leaders, communication protocols ensure confidentiality. Does that apply to leaders in other regions also making extensive use of direct phone calls and text messages? We know that major intelligence systems devote sizable resources to intercepting such communications.

soft power; this industry body sees itself as a stakeholder, with ownership in the nation's foreign policy.

The common thread in these three incidents—each factual—is that diplomacy now involves many different players; it works in ways that were not envisaged by the framers of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the bedrock of interstate diplomacy. The modern foreign ministry, and its diplomatic service, has to accommodate itself to the changed circumstances, in the knowledge that it remains answerable for failings, even while control over the diplomatic process has been fragmented.

## **The Changes**

One consequence of globalization: many people feel that their lives are shaped by external events that are outside their control. Crisis has many faces. Take the global recession of 2008, producing economic insecurity, loss of jobs, decline in incomes, and slowdown in production, virtually in every country. Terrorism is another pervasive concern, with subterranean roots in foreign lands. Climate change affects all of us, threatening the very existence of small low-lying island states. Other dangers are more insidious, such as the influx of foreign cultural influence, viewed with alarm by those that struggle to conserve their own heritage. Migration is another interconnected issue, of the “home-external” kind, both for countries from where the migrants originate and for the destination states. Each of these is a new kind of security threat, a consequence of interdependence among states and peoples. These are products of relentless globalization.

Why globalized diplomacy? About two generations ago, politics was in command and was the prime focus of foreign ministry work; the best diplomats specialized in this field. Then, commencing around the 1970s, economic diplomacy began to emerge as a major component of external relations, in some ways overshadowing political diplomacy; export promotion and foreign direct



investment (FDI)<sup>3</sup> mobilization became the priority activities of the diplomatic system. More recently we have seen the rise of culture, media and communications, education, science and technology and even consular work as some new priorities in diplomacy. Taken together, this third tranche is seen as a manifestation of soft power and as “public diplomacy”. Paradoxically, after the end of the Cold War, political diplomacy has also regained salience, becoming more open and complex. The techniques of relationship building and conflict resolution have also become more sophisticated and require measured but rapid responses. Overall, diplomacy has become multifaceted, pluri-directional, volatile, and intensive.

Diplomacy has globalized in other ways. For one thing, with a breakdown in Cold War blocs, there exists no predetermined matrix of relationships. The West and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are now the dominant groups, but their former adversaries are also their networked partners, even while rivalries subsist. These are “normal” situations of contestation, driven by self-interest, as expressed through a search for resources and energy, and markets, to name only a few of the drivers; ideology is no longer an issue. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has been hollowed out, and remains as a loose coalition of have-not states; its ritualistic biennial summits persist, but NAM members are much more preoccupied with smaller, issue-based groupings. In essence, every country finds value in working with networks that stretch into far regions, in pursuit of common or shared objectives. Often, economic opportunity provides the driving force, and this too is subject to globalized concerns.

Regional diplomacy has taken on a life of its own. Virtually every country is a member of multiple groupings, many of them

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is investment by foreign enterprises in the production assets and the service industry in the receiving country; it is distinguished from portfolio investment, which is foreign investment in the shares and bonds traded on the stock market. FDI is considered the best form of foreign investment because it creates physical assets and jobs in the receiving country and is not nearly as volatile as other forms of investment, as it cannot be liquidated in a hurry. All countries, rich and poor, compete to attract FDI.

geography driven, besides those that have their locus in some other kinds of shared objectives. The membership pattern of such groups takes on a kaleidoscopic character; the names of the groups and abbreviated titles make a veritable alphabet soup. Even seasoned specialists find it hard to keep up with the profusion. Managing membership of such communities, and joining hands with different domestic ministries for this purpose, is a new challenge for foreign ministries (MFAs).

We should consider another change element. Some large and economically successful countries are seen as today's "emerging powers," joining the high table of the world's major and near-major powers. One such small group is known by its acronym IBSA, that is, India, Brazil and South Africa; none of these states is quite a major power, but seems to offer the potential of reaching this rank. Another putative group is BRICS, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and now South Africa; two of the five are permanent members of the UN Security Council, but only one is a member of G-8. Both IBSA and BRICS have emerged on the international stage as groups that pursue mutual cooperation at multiple levels, ranging from summit meetings among their leaders to functional collaboration among researchers and business groups, along mutually beneficial trajectories. Behind these small clusters are other states, such as Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, and Nigeria that aspire to recognition as emerging powers. Each seeks through its external policy to reshape the international environment in consonance with its own interests. Since 2008, G-20, which began as a gathering of finance ministers, is now a major politico-economic forum. The international process is more kinetic and more volatile than ever before, resembling a large, multi-arm mobile, constantly in motion, continually reshaping interrelations among its composing elements, large and small.

Another element merits consideration. Some countries—be they large, medium-sized or small—manage their external relationships in distinctly better ways than others. What is the key? This issue dominates the analysis presented in this book. Briefly, the success factors are clarity of objectives and mobilization of all available resources to attain these, clearly prioritized. In diplomacy,

effectiveness hinges not on the money spent, or numbers of people deployed, but on well-considered actions, nimbleness, and sound calculations of risk and gain. The best foreign ministries optimize the talent that resides within diplomatic services—the only real resource that they possess—and pursue reform and adaptation. Public-private partnerships (PPP) also contribute; governments have seen the utility of joining hands with non-state actors, both at home and abroad. Benchmarking and mutual learning are among their regular practices. They also manage knowledge in a calculated and consistent manner.

## **The Foreign Ministry and its Context**

Diplomacy is a system of the interstate communication and issue resolution. As world affairs have evolved, diplomacy as the process of dialogue and accommodation among states, has adapted, responding to opportunities. The volatility of world affairs has accentuated change, to the point that some foreign ministries treat reform as a continual, incremental activity. Today's dominant framework conditions are as follows:

- The MFA is no longer the monopolist of foreign affairs. The MFA has to partner all branches of government, since each has its external activity, goals, and priorities, and it has to reinvent itself as a “coordinator” of all external policy, working closely with them.<sup>4</sup>
- These agencies respect the MFA for the contribution it makes to their agenda, not for its notional primacy in foreign affairs.

<sup>4</sup> See, Brian Hocking, ed. *Foreign Ministries: Change & Adaptation* (Macmillan, London, 1999). This is a paradox because Article 31 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations stipulates the MFA as the principal channel for diplomatic communication; in practice, however, each ministry and department maintains its own network of bilateral ties with foreign partners, and multi-lateral contacts with international agencies and the like. The old “gatekeeper” role is lost for ever, even while some old-fashioned foreign ministries seem to hanker for it.

This is a hard lesson for many MFAs, because their leadership seemed much more assured in the past. Foreign ministries have to overcome this challenge, working for coherence in external policy.

- Subject plurality compels the MFA to listen to outside expertise, while also struggling to cultivate in-house knowledge. Professional diplomats need to be both generalists and experts in some specific fields; collectively, they are the MFA's pool of expertise. To put it another way, they need deep skills in a few areas, plus wide-even-if-shallow lateral skills in other fields; they must work harmoniously with other experts and become proficient at networking.
- Multiple non-state actors are the MFA's permanent dialogue partners and stakeholders—that is, agencies active in the media, culture, academia, civil society, NGOs, science and technology (S&T), business, and others. Some of them harbor grievances over past neglect by the MFA.
- The working environment is polarized. At one end are crisis, conflict prevention, movements of peoples and refugees, plus a range of hard and soft security issues. At the other end, traditional exchanges continue among privileged interlocutors, marked by elegant receptions and the trappings of old world diplomacy.
- The MFA professionals confront dangers of personal hazard, which makes their work that much harder. They also deal with increasing intercultural diversity. They need broad, continuous training, plus high motivation.
- The focus of professional diplomats has partly shifted from high diplomacy (involving issues of peace and security, or the negotiation of sweeping interstate accords); some of these are handled directly by heads of government and their offices. The professional now works mainly on low diplomacy: issues of detail, such as building networks aimed at specific areas, trade and other economic agreements, public diplomacy, image building, contacts with influential non-officials, consular diplomacy, education, S&T and the like.

- High volatility in international affairs means that reaction times are reduced. This demands alertness at MFAs, and at key embassies, on a 24x7 basis.<sup>5</sup>
- Consular protection and emergency actions have become more visibly important than before, owing to the impact of terrorism and natural disasters.<sup>6</sup> Diasporas are especially important as allies in advancing external relations, though not all countries are clear on their “diaspora diplomacy.”
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is vital, but most countries are still experimenting, to exploit its full potential. The opportunity cost of neglecting technology is high.

The diplomatic network is tasked with multiple demands at a time when resources and manpower in public service in most countries face cutbacks; foreign ministries are seldom treated as an exception.<sup>7</sup> Some countries still believe that the ideas of performance measurement, accountability or value-for-money are not relevant in their national ethos; it may perhaps only be a matter of time before these become near-universal demands. This is one of the consequences of globalization.

## **Domestic Interface**

In the past, external affairs drew limited attention from home publics, except during crisis; a national consensus generally supported

<sup>5</sup> In the larger foreign ministries a crisis center is essential, not just as the locus of emergency actions, but to monitor international events on a continuous basis, and to alert home agencies to events that may impact on the country.

<sup>6</sup> A Western envoy told the author that rising public concern over consular services means that despite dwindling budgets, additional resources have to be ploughed into this sector, adding to the crunch in other areas (confidential discussion, May 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Preliminary research suggests that unlike in developed countries, a fair number of developing countries still manage to obtain additional resources each year from the national exchequer, over their modest base figures; it is unlikely that additional funds will be available over the long or even medium term.

the country's foreign policy. The diplomatic machine was insulated from political crosscurrents. It used to be said that politics ended at the country's borders. That has now changed radically.

Also altered is the old distinction between national policy, as determined by the political leaders, and its execution by an apolitical diplomatic system. The mutual roles are now more permeable, and the boundary is less clear-cut. Professional diplomats are no longer insulated from home politics.

Many countries retain the model of politically neutral civil services (e.g. in the United Kingdom and its former colonies), but this is under strain; at the top levels, officials have to be politically acceptable. In Germany, after World War II, civil servants were encouraged to hold their own political affiliation (they even serve in party secretariats on deputation). The French *Grandes Ecoles* graduates have long had a revolving door relationship, covering the civil services, politics, and the corporate world. The United States runs a highly politicized system of appointment to top administration jobs, including ambassadorships.<sup>8</sup> In many developing countries politics now intrudes openly into the public services; in some Latin American and African countries the majority of envoys sent abroad are political appointees. One challenge: diplomacy is not yet recognized as a specialized profession.

The injection of new issues in the international arena (such as democracy, human rights, universal standards of governance, public accountability) leads to borderline situations where envoy activism in foreign countries can lead to political acclaim at home (for instance, when US and other Western envoys in Kenya pushed for the democratic process in the past 15 years), or political embarrassment (e.g. British Ambassador Craig Murray in Uzbekistan in October 2004, when his criticism of that government's rights record was initially supported from London, but his subsequent

<sup>8</sup> In the United States, all appointments at the federal level at and above the rank of assistant secretary of state, and the appointment of envoys abroad, need congressional concurrence, which further brings politics into the high appointments.

consorting with opposition groups, and leaking of his views to the media, led to his recall<sup>9</sup>). Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put forward the interventionist notion of “transformational” diplomacy in 2005, but the successor US administration of Barack Obama seems to have retreated from the manipulation of foreign states implicit in that notion.

Foreign ministry professionals have to factor the domestic political impact into their actions; in the British Foreign Office, every proposal that goes to the minister must assess the likely public impact. Professionals find themselves mobilized in support of the political agendas at home. In Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom, envoys attending annual conferences are asked to speak to public audiences in different towns on the country's foreign policy—we may call this public outreach, but it is also a form of political support for the government. Envoys have to consider reaching out to home political constituencies in building support for their work; in India, it is customary for envoys assigned to key foreign capitals to call on leaders of opposition parties, for two-way dialogue on their tasks.

## The ICT Revolution

Information technology and communications (ICT) has impacted strongly on diplomatic systems, bridging to *some* extent the distance syndrome that dominates the diplomatic networks. One consequence: the relationship between the foreign ministry and

<sup>9</sup> Murray initially was applauded by the British FCO for his vigorous championing of the need to improve human rights in Uzbekistan, and cited in HR surveys. But when he questioned the wisdom of treating that government as an ally in the war against terrorism, and went public with his criticism of using information gathered from suspected terrorists by use of torture by the Uzbek government, he was recalled. Charges of personal misconduct were also leveled against him in a very public showdown, heavily reported in the British media. Developments in 2005 in Uzbekistan have borne out the truth of his warnings.

the embassy abroad is much closer, and the bilateral embassy has gained in importance for many countries; we examine this in Chapter 7.

The internet provides innovative means for outreach to wide public streams, at home and abroad; “Web 2.0” offers new possibilities that are still under exploration. The foreign ministry website, supplemented by the websites of embassies, provides a starting point. “Intranets” (also called ‘virtual private networks’) permit confidential exchanges within the country’s diplomatic and public services. Blogs have come into their own both for privileged communication and for open exchanges. Canada has been a leader in the application of net-based communications, for diplomatic training, export promotion and even domestic public outreach; many others have adapted well to the new medium and found their own paths.

Other related changes are as follows:

- The emergence of the “global information village” has reduced reaction time. Official spokesmen of foreign ministries must react to events as they occur; embassies have to convey local reactions to issues, as they emerge. It has also increased the frequency and diversity of interstate communication.
- Internet-based social networks are used by foreign ministries and by embassies to reach out to publics, to communicate information, images, and video clips. In the same way, citizens use these networks to exchange ideas and news, circumventing controls imposed by authoritarian regimes. But such regimes are also agile learners of the new techniques, using the same methods for propaganda and to control.
- Inside the MFA communications are flatter. ICT permits drafts and proposals to go direct from the desk-officers to the top echelons, with copies to the intermediate hierarchy. (In the British and German Foreign Offices, seniors do not change drafts from desk-officers, though they may give alternatives; embassy recommendations travel similarly to high levels in the MFA, without running the old gauntlet of modification



by territorial desks.) This adds to responsibility for young officials and for envoys abroad.

- In a few Western countries, the cipher telegram is threatened (United States and United Kingdom; perhaps less so in Germany or France); it is replaced by the confidential “intranet-based” message sent to a single or limited cluster of recipients (unlike the cipher telegrams which are widely circulated in the government on a standard distribution template). The cipher telegram was a powerful instrument to keep abreast with diverse assessments from overseas missions. In several MFAs the classic dispatch has also withered away—this represents a loss of that comprehensive analysis of a single, usually nonurgent, but important theme. Danger: it produces a firefighting mind-set, perhaps too focused on current tasks. This devalues reflective analysis of important issues.
- Some countries pursuing efficiency prioritize ruthlessly, concentrating on bilateral tasks of direct importance, plus major global and regional issues. This makes embassies more “bilateral” in their activities, less attuned to sustained contact cultivation across a broad spectrum; it also reduces engagement with the diplomatic corps. Embassies that are stripped to the core in manpower sometimes lack reserve capacity for new tasks.

Developing and transitional countries face hard choices in applying ICT. First there is the element of cost, for hardware and software, and the need to replace systems, typically after three or four years.<sup>10</sup> Doubts over the security of intranets inhibit countries such as China and India. In contrast, small countries have fewer security worries. At the same time, the opportunity cost of not using modern communications has risen, though this is often not taken into account.

<sup>10</sup> In 2000 the British FCO spent £250 million on its intranet and confidential communication networks. In 2005 it was due to replace most of the systems at even higher cost (Dickie, *The New Mandarins* 2004).

## A Matrix of Globalized Diplomacy

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Classic diplomacy</i>	<i>Globalized diplomacy</i>
The home partners	Major line ministries active in external issues, office of the head of government, parliament. Minimal contact with the media and business.	Virtually all official agencies, plus non-state partners from business, the media, academia, think tanks, S&T, civil society, NGOs. Fairly open communication.
The external partners	The foreign ministry, the offices of the heads of government and state, the parliament, regional governments, the ministries of direct concern in dialogue plus arm's length contact with the media and business	All the above, with a special focus on the non-state actors, and the substate agencies like provincial governments, city and local administrations; plus ethnic diaspora communities, students and others from home based in the assignment country.
Subjects in international dialogue	Main focus on "high diplomacy," i.e. issues of peace, security, cooperation.	Huge diversity; MFA cannot master all dossiers, leaves technical subjects to functional ministries, while playing coordination role.
Style of external affairs governance	MFA-centric, limited role of other agencies	Each agency has external role; MFA is the coordinator and networker; "Whole of government" approach.
Role of head of government in normal times	Sporadic; infrequent summit meetings	No other ministry is supervised as closely by the Head and his Office as the MFA; MFA works closely with the Head, and his Office, as no other ministry; frequent bilateral, regional and global summits.
Typical diplomatic service	Highly professional, career stability, limited interchange with other government branches; respected public image. High morale. Routine methods of HR management.	Blend of professional career track and lateral entry, frequent churning; increasing "in" and "out" placements; public question relevance. Morale level variable, depends partly on quality of HR management.
Role of embassies abroad	To advise home government, implement policy, promote relationships. Set pattern of embassy-MFA dialogue.	Blurring of role distinction between the MFA and embassy, embassy may act as comanager of relationships. Continual dialogue with MFA.

## **Human Rights and Global Objectives**

In pursuit of global standards of democracy, human rights, and good governance, a kind of universal charter of citizen rights is under evolution, led by Western countries (e.g. the concept of “responsibility to protect” that was accepted by the UN General Assembly in 2005, as an inescapable obligation for all states toward their peoples, during conflicts<sup>11</sup>). The sovereignty doctrine does not shield countries that blatantly transgress these norms. This is international law in the making—still amorphous, selective in application, and driven by a fickle cycle of world media attention.

**Democracy** is broadly acknowledged as a universal ideal, but its application in interstate relations is conditioned by other overriding bilateral and regional objectives driven by national interest, security, or other compulsions; its proponents often end up supporting undemocratic regimes. After the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, even democracy zealots now acknowledge that it cannot be exported or imposed from outside. **Human rights** are closely monitored today, and enter the interstate dialogue, but again violations are treated with selectivity. At the UN, the abolition of the Human Rights Commission and its replacement by the Human Rights Council, composed of ‘independent’ experts has not produced expected results. **Good governance** is even harder to enforce, though aid donors now make this a condition, and [but] gross human rights abuse in some countries results in foreign aid cutoff, and even sanctions; governance standards are now widely accepted, even while those at the receiving end of Western pressure on grounds of governance resent this.

President George W. Bush made freedom around the world a major theme, but as before, calculations of self-interest, and indulgence for alliance partners, overrode declared principles. After January 2009 the Obama administration has put value promotion on the back burner. Nevertheless, value concepts have moved forward; developing countries are far more sensitive to

<sup>11</sup> This was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in a historic resolution in 2005, marking further evolution in international law.

these standards, compared with even a decade back, with their own civil society organizations leading demands for improvement. Media publicity, right to information initiatives and citizen actions, are visible in many countries. In Africa, a voluntary oversight mechanism, led by eminent experts, has gained traction in over a score of countries.<sup>12</sup>

- Western states produce global surveys, joining international NGOs, with their extensive annual reports, on application of these universal norms (e.g. Amnesty, Transparency International).<sup>13</sup>
- On the ground, pressure to improve human rights involves foreign governments in partnerships with these non-state actors; joint actions are often tacit.
- In the affected countries, foreign states cannot really substitute for the actions that must come from domestic publics; external pressures have their limits (as seen in Myanmar and Zimbabwe).

It is the powerful that project their values on the others. How far does international law support universal social and economic standards, beyond what the UN Charter and international covenants lay down? The global economic recession of 2008 has called into question the universality of market capitalism, a frequent theme in Western value prescriptions, also pushed by the World Bank and IMF.<sup>14</sup> But overall, stricter accountability for

<sup>12</sup> The annual Mo Ibrahim Good Governance Award, instituted in 2005 by a private telecom entrepreneur of Sudanese origin, giving a hefty \$5 million to the recipient is a symbol of change. A number of African countries have also banded together in quiet mutual analysis, through a peer review mechanism.

<sup>13</sup> One wishes developing countries produced their own surveys, which might add greater objectivity and balance, such as a listing of rich countries that lead in giving bribes and/or manipulating foreign states.

<sup>14</sup> An article in *The Financial Times* offered a tentative conclusion from the 2010 World Economic Forum meeting at Davos, to the effect that interventionist state capitalism had perhaps gained new respect after the 2008 recession. (FT, 2 February 2010).

governments and higher standards of governance have gained traction worldwide, and this is welcome.

## **Multilateral Diplomacy**

Has multilateral diplomacy overtaken bilateral diplomacy in importance? Such assertions are made from time to time, but this is really a nonissue. Each plays its role, as processes through which countries pursue their objectives. Some issues are best handled in a multilateral forum. But as someone observed, all diplomacy is bilateral, in that countries take positions on global issues on the merits of the case and on the basis of the quality of relations with the country sponsoring the issue under debate. Simply put, bilateral and multilateral processes are the two legs of the international system. We should not leave out regional diplomacy, which is a special form of multilateralism.

Multilateralism has grown dramatically in the past three decades. The start of the annual UN General Assembly session, in the third week of September, has become a global forum that draws 60 to 80 heads of state and government, and scores of foreign ministers. Several thematic global summits meet each year. Regional summits have also multiplied, with the proliferation of new groups. MFAs deploy their best diplomats in multilateral diplomacy.

- When complex functional issues are debated, it is the line ministries that take the lead; MFA diplomats play a supporting role. Over the years, these agencies have built considerable subject negotiation expertise.
- Professional diplomats bring to the table wider relationship management expertise, including knowledge of interconnections between different issues that are in play with a partner country, allowing leverage and tradeoffs.
- Mastery of conference technique is part of the professional's compendium of skills, honed through training and frequent exposure to bilateral, regional, and multilateral negotiations.

- Most working diplomats blend bilateral and multilateral skills, each reinforcing the other; they rotate between bilateral and multilateral posts. The Chinese are among the few that treat multilateralism as a distinct expertise area for their personnel.
- A multilateral diplomat should, ideally, master two languages besides English; possess sharp drafting ability; excel at people skills and intercultural communication.

The skills involved in multilateral work are as follows: 1. Liaison, negotiation, representation, and conflict resolution, involving the craft of communication, advocacy, and persuasion. 2. The work is labor-intensive, with great effort in building personal ties, aimed at getting colleagues to tilt in one's favor, within their "zone of discretion". 3. The envoy often has latitude for local improvisation; good MFAs ensure that this is given to their representatives on the spot. 4. Committee or conference management is a special skill, aimed at getting into the "inner group" that plays a key role at each. 5. Chairing a meeting needs sensitive judgment of the mood, a special "listening" sense, and anticipation of problems before they emerge—of course, fairness, humor, and a winning personality are taken for granted. 6. Knowledge of procedures and rules, which makes it possible to manipulate the conference to one's purpose and block others from doing the same.<sup>15</sup>

## Innovation

In business, *innovation* is distinct from *invention*; while the latter covers new ideas or concepts, innovation produces higher revenues and/or profits. In the public services, innovation stands for greater efficiency or effectiveness; that also applies to diplomatic tasks. Canada lists innovation among its four mission objectives

<sup>15</sup> See Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador* (2005), pp.109–11.

for Canada International (i.e. the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade). The British FCO abolished its Policy Planning Department in 2002 and created a directorate for "Strategy and Innovation".

At the MFA, innovation entails the following:

- Networking with domestic ministerial and non official partners, often in unconventional ways, for example harnessing NGO personnel, "in" and "out" personnel exchanges.
- Creating a learning organization, one that welcomes new ideas, involving "young turks" in system issues, integrating them with the experienced.
- Flexible response, adaptable mind-sets.
- Calibrated human resource policy, locating the best for the critical jobs.
- "Zero base" budgeting, and use of "challenge funds" to foster competitive spirit and emulation.
- Using the internet as a vehicle for outreach, at headquarters and through the embassies, using new methods.

At the embassy it includes

- Envoys geared to "public affairs entrepreneurship," willing to undertake measured risk in pursuit of clear goals.
- Open styles, use of informal local networks and advisory groups.
- Using thematic, cross-functional teams, putting aside hierarchies.
- Inculcating breadth of subject awareness, plus ability to find cross-connections between issues.
- Working outside the circuit of privileged partners in the capital, extending activities to provincial administrations, regions, and cities.
- Harnessing ethnic communities, returned students, and other affinity clusters.

### **Practical Innovation**

- In 2005, the German Embassy in New Delhi created an internet-based “Science Forum” that takes advantage of past and existing S&T cooperation, and the presence in India of a large number of holders of Humboldt and other distinguished fellowships, for generating ideas on expanding mutual cooperation.<sup>16</sup>
- In 2004, the Danish Embassy in Israel created 10 functional teams, cutting across ranks, to pursue priority subjects.
- Many countries hold annual or biennial conferences of all their envoys posted abroad (some also hold smaller conferences of ambassadors in particular regions). Such conferences are a vehicle for organizational communication. Indirectly producing experience-sharing and reform generation, they are an annual feature in some large services (China, Japan, Germany, Thailand; UK held its first-ever conference of all ambassadors in January 2002, as part of its reform process; India held its first in December 2008). A few small networks seldom use this device, but hold episodic gatherings in regional clusters. Despite the cost, the conferences are worthwhile, especially when held in the home capital, with careful planning and follow-up.
- Singapore invites its honorary consuls to a conference in Singapore every five or six years, to show the importance attached to their voluntary work, and to give them insight into Singapore’s worldview; in 2010 Kenya joined the rather few countries that do the same. Malta is to run training programs for its honorary consuls.

<sup>16</sup> Humboldt fellowships are among the most distinguished scholarships awarded by Germany, covering a multitude of disciplines.



Innovation can be facilitated but not ordered. Systems that permit easy, flat internal communication and seek out ideas from the shop floor are the winners.

## **Human Resources**

The range of entrants into diplomatic services the world over is increasingly diverse in the subjects studied, regional and personal background, as well as age (intake age has risen in most countries). Yet, they are elites in talent quality, chosen as the best among a large number of applicants.<sup>17</sup> Efficient management of this resource is the hallmark of the best services. This entails the following:

- Objective, transparent management that carries conviction with the cadre; oversight of this process is usually a major responsibility for the MFA permanent head.
- Career management that tolerates individuality and facilitates early selection of high flyers.
- A calibrated promotion system, ideally a blend of in-depth tests, transparent selection, grooming the best for high office.
- “Bidding” methods for assignments, via an open process.
- Inculcation of language, area and thematic expertise to match actual needs, as they evolve.
- Extensive “in” and “out” placement at all levels, breaking down network insularity, real and perceived, including assignments with non-state (business associations, think tanks).

The best services use elaborate methods for talent identification and selection of high value assignments.

Examples: The **British** FCO uses a “Job Evaluation Senior Posts” system to assign a numerical value to each (a JESP score

<sup>17</sup> The ratio between applicants and those selected varies between 1 in 20 to 1 in 1,000.

of 8 for the head of mission (HOM) at Port Moresby, 9 for the deputy chief of mission (DCM) in Lisbon, 20 to 22 for the top six directors general at the FCO, 22–23 for the envoys to Delhi, Moscow, Berlin, and Paris, 25 for the UK permanent representative at Brussels, and 28 for the permanent under-secretary, among the 450 senior jobs). All the posts are up for bidding, with a single page application, to be considered by the “No. 1 Board,” final approval by the Foreign Secretary. **Singapore** uses an annual “Current Evaluated Potential” (CEP) method (borrowed years ago from Shell), which calculates the level that all officials with more than five years of service are expected to reach after about 20 to 25 years of service and then guides the officials’ career tracks accordingly. The score is not communicated to the officials, but those estimated as the best are groomed for high office. **Australia** demands that those aspiring to promotion must apply. The **US**, with a like method, demands that applicants who fail to get promoted for six years must leave the service. **Mexico** requires promotion applicants to write out why they merit promotion; they take a written exam in several subjects; the board that interviews them includes a professor from a reputed university (the applicants pay their own travel cost). In 1995, **Nepal** opened up 10 percent of posts to lateral entry by qualified specialists; contrary to initial doubt, this has worked well.

## Key Themes

Several propositions permeate this work, recurring in the following chapters.

1. *A need for mutual learning:* At the EU the heads of MFA administration meet periodically to exchange ideas on management. In 2005, Canada and the UK launched a small closed Western group of heads of human resources that meets annually. No other regional group, including the advanced Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the

Caribbean Community (CARICOM), has established a mechanism for such exchanges.<sup>18</sup>

A regional group might attempt a collective benchmarking exercise, to benefit all its members. In 2000–2001, Australian foreign ministry teams visited eight countries with a lengthy questionnaire, spending three days with the selected counterparts. The results were shared, after a fashion; the participating MFAs received a homogenized summary of the results, but that gave little indication of the actual methods in each country. In 2005 Canada was reportedly in the midst of its own benchmarking effort; it is not known if they shared the full results with anyone. Why not undertake benchmarking on a regional basis?

Many MFA management ideas are transportable and can be applied by other foreign ministries, with due adaptation; perhaps 80 percent or more of the practical innovations worked out at different places fall into this category.<sup>19</sup>

2. *Stronger professionalism*: Diplomacy emerged as a profession at the start of the twentieth century, with a clear ethos and a code of conduct, partly enshrined in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relation, though some working principles remain unwritten. Diplomacy gradually emerged as a profession with specialized knowledge and skill, though in the nineteenth century diplomats were poorly paid and were expected to have independent means to offset this. But even now, diplomacy is not widely accepted as requiring specialized knowledge and skill. In most countries working professionals face difficulty in getting home administration counterparts to accept this. Is there a way out?

<sup>18</sup> The author has discussed this informally with a couple of leading ASEAN members and at the CARICOM secretariat; the idea is easy to implement.

<sup>19</sup> A recent example: the British method of “challenge funds” where embassies abroad compete for promotion funding (for trade, FDI, culture or public diplomacy activities) has been copied by a few countries, including Australia. In 2008, the Indian Commerce Ministry borrowed this idea to urge Indian embassies to do more by way of export promotion.

True, unlike the legal profession, or chartered accountancy, there is no regulated body of knowledge in this profession nor a universally recognized test to screen those that have gained a sufficiency of professional expertise. What we do have is a diffused body of craft skills and techniques, which diplomats learn when they join the profession, and begin to practice in their years of apprenticeship, that is, the junior ranks that they traverse before reaching quasi-autonomous positions. Most foreign ministries want to strengthen the professional competence of their staff, by encouraging continuous learning.

3. *Reexamining the patronage method for appointing envoys*: In a number of countries, unfortunately most of them developing states, envoy appointments are acts of government patronage rewarding political warhorses put to pasture or removing the awkward from the domestic scene. This seriously weakens their diplomatic networks and needs change. One may ask: does not the world's superpower practice a similar method?

The US method has its rationale. The approximately 25 percent of its ambassadors that are appointed from outside the professional service fall into two broad categories: those that are genuine public figures and a second motley group, composed of election campaign contributors, social climbers, and ruling administration cronies. Another element is crucial—the Washington DC culture of the revolving door and job shuffle between congressional aides, thinktank scholars, lawyers and lobbyists, and especially the politically appointed officials that run the administration at levels of assistant secretaries of state and above. Political appointees often belong to this wide class of “public” servants. Many show genuine aptitude and perform well.

Few of these US conditions are replicated elsewhere. Admittedly, in many countries, some political appointments are successful. But often, nonprofessional appointees are pre-occupied with their status, especially their influence back

home and other minor issues.<sup>20</sup> They seldom show leadership in the running of their embassies or commitment to their assigned tasks—and they are not easily amenable to MFA discipline.<sup>21</sup>

4. *Open, inclusive, and multi-owner diplomacy*: This is a hard lesson for a profession, accustomed to privileged dealings with foreign elites, to find that many new interlocutors are now to be accommodated. Dialogue with nonstate actors can be strange and even disruptive. I recall well my trepidation in late 1992 when commencing dialogue with German NGO representatives on the Narmada project, then under consideration by the World Bank.<sup>22</sup> In the event, the civil society representatives turned out to be eloquent, reasonable and more open to ideas than I had imagined. Other colleagues who have practiced such outreach speak of a like experience. Young diplomats, who do not carry the legacy baggage of their seniors, are more open to such contacts.

What is unique about these exchanges is that nonstate actors challenge the assumptions of professional diplomats and ask uncomfortable questions.<sup>23</sup> On the flip side, diplomats

<sup>20</sup> In India, head of mission appointments are the prerogative of the prime minister. While no formal quota exists, in practice the noncareer appointments do not exceed eight or ten at any point in time. This category includes appointments of retired foreign-service officials so that the number that come from outside the professional track are less than five or six. Some among them have demanded the personal status of governors and cabinet ministers, which means nothing in their country of assignment; such personal ranks tend to give them inflated notions of their importance. And yet, some noncareer envoys have delivered outstanding performance.

<sup>21</sup> While instances of errant behavior are swept under the carpet in most countries, informal conversation with diplomats from many indicates that a deeper and more pervasive problem is that political appointees are often not focused on national tasks, and pursue personal agendas.

<sup>22</sup> The Narmada project is a major river water management plan to bring irrigation and drinking water to a large region in Gujarat state in western India, and generate power as well. It has been executed in the period 1990–2010 under close supervision by the Indian Supreme Court. See: Rana, *Inside Diplomacy* (2002), p.370–3.

<sup>23</sup> In Mauritius (1989–1992) one of our local outreach groups consisted of

gain new domestic and foreign allies and strengthen their capacity for external engagement, to say nothing of credibility.

5. *Training as central to the MFA's future:* A singular exception to a lack of consultation among foreign ministries on management issues is the "International Forum on Diplomatic Training" run by the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and Georgetown University, of Washington DC, which holds annual meetings on training related issues. Regional training institutions also meet periodically, in several clusters.<sup>24</sup> The quality and depth of discussion at these events shows that foreign ministries treat training as more important than ever before. An increasing number of countries have established new training institutions of their own, or are intensifying training activities. Mid-career and senior level training is a growth area; many countries have introduced courses for ambassadors. All this is to the good.

For the past ten years I have served on the part-time faculty at DiploFoundation, specialized in diplomatic distance learning. It is self-evident that this format is ideal for foreign ministries that necessarily have about half their staff dispersed around the world, who need intensive coaching, to expand their practical craft skills. MFAs would find it useful to develop their own distance learning methods.

6. *Implementing simple human resource management improvements:* A major challenge for MFAs is to work out fair rotation in overseas postings, given that living conditions and the

diaspora representatives; we raised with them matters relating to cultural and economic cooperation, to enlist their support. When we mentioned to this group the possibility of bringing to a photo exhibition on the theme "Muslims in India," the leader of one of the community groups asked: "Excellency, when will the Indian government put together an exhibition on 'Hindus in India'?"

<sup>24</sup> In Asia, the ten ASEAN countries, and China, Japan, and South Korea meet annually, under the umbrella of the "ASEAN Plus Three" mechanism, but ASEAN has been unwilling to expand this to include other countries such as Australia and India.

attractiveness of capitals varies so greatly. A simple device is classification of embassies abroad, in terms of the conditions in the country of assignment. An adjunct to this is to implement a "bidding" system, where officials who are due to be posted abroad indicate their choices. It works surprisingly well, as preferences vary, dictated by a range of personal elements. Empirical evidence suggests that many MFAs hesitate needlessly to implement this.<sup>25</sup>

A more difficult area is the promotion system, where besides factors such as seniority, ability, equity, and transparency, one has to consider also the ethos of the country and its value system. Often efficiency and tradition have to be balanced against one another. But it is possible to engage MFA staff in dialogue in trying to find the right policy mix, while also looking to the experience of other countries. Greater professionalism demands, and hinges upon, giving weight to performance; this also means appointing young envoys and nurturing talent in a deliberate manner.

7. *Intensifying the diplomatic process*: All the change factors listed at the start of this chapter require that countries pursue diplomacy that is both extensive and intensive. They need to reach out to a wide catchment of states, and at the same time cultivate well a larger number of partner countries than before. Geography is no longer a limiting determinant in the ways it used to be in the past. One example: the group IBSA—composed of India, Brazil, and South Africa—where each member is geographically distant from the others, but each has a self-perception of a leading role on its continent, and some congruity in the positions each takes on major international issues.

In other regions of the world we see the emergence of similar innovative groups, exploiting economic and other opportunities that lie beneath the surface. Verily, each country, small

<sup>25</sup> The Indian Ministry of External Affairs put this into practice in the late 1990s and has found the results gratifying; the method is standard practice in many Western MFAs.

or big, is occupied with its own version of multipolar relationship development. This adds to demands on foreign ministries and all other home agencies that are active in international affairs.

Some of the above themes will reappear in subsequent chapters. They also provide a backdrop against which the issues raised in this book may be seen.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. What is the borderline between correct and unacceptable domestic political involvement for professionals? In part the answer may vary in different countries, but is there a line that should not be transgressed?
2. Does the evolution of humanitarian law affect the domination of the existing states system?
3. Is there a "right" technique for diplomatic systems in dealing with nonstate actors? What are the things they should guard against in such dealings?



# 2 Regional Diplomacy

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When incremental change takes place right under our eyes, it sometimes takes a while to grasp its transformational character. This is true of regional diplomacy, which has become a defining element of contemporary international affairs.

Virtually every country around the world is a member of multiple regional and other clusters of nations, practicing varied cooperative activities within these groups. Globalization and interdependence have made most countries, big and small, aware that neighborhood cooperation produces win-win outcomes and multiple side benefits. In many ways, the world’s successful exemplar is the EU, which many attempt to emulate, with varying degrees of success.

The emergence of many new regional groups (RGs) has created a veritable alphabet soup; most are identified by their acronyms so numerous as to stump even experienced observers of international affairs. A complete listing of regional organizations probably does not exist.

Conceptually, regional cooperation is a form of multilateral diplomacy, with the difference that it is practiced in proximate groups, which come together on the basis of geography or other factors, as we see below. The key drivers of this trend are as follows:

- A **compulsion for political cooperation** among like-minded states. The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is one example of pan-European activities, where West Europe has helped former communist states in their transition and transformation; it now reaches deep into central Asia. CIS, the somewhat mislabeled “Commonwealth of Independent States,” is another essentially political group, led by Russia. NATO remains the world’s major surviving military alliance group.
- An urge for **stronger economic cooperation**, often starting with the creation of regional trading groups. The Andean Community in South America is one example. The Adriatic Three, consisting of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia, is another.
- A realization that economic and other forms of cooperation lead to **better mutual security**. We see this in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF; ASEAN stands for Association of South East Asian Nations) and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) in West Africa. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) shows a security-inspired action may create new economic opportunities. Even when security is not the stated object of the regional group, the very fact of cooperation within a structure changes the relationship paradigm and provides mutual reassurance.
- A desire to **replicate successful models** from other regions. The African Union (AU) borrows some ideas and terminology

from the EU, but with limited results. Such emulation is also attempted elsewhere; it is not always realized that good models exist everywhere.

Some scholars search for a conceptual framework for regional cooperation in terms of international relations theory. It is perhaps more profitable to look to practice and empirical data, rather than try to posit an overarching framework, which simply does not exist.

## **Regional and “Plurilateral” Diplomacy**

“Plurilateral” groups (PLGs) differ from regional groups (RGs) in that they are defined not by geography but by other shared factors.<sup>1</sup> Since they operate in the same way as RGs, it makes sense to treat them as a variant of regional diplomacy.

**Regional** groups are made up of countries belonging to a geographical area, that is, a recognized subregion (e.g. the Nile Basin, Southeast Asia). The Scandinavian group consists of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; with the addition of Iceland, it becomes the Nordic group. Occasionally a non-obvious, geography-determined cluster emerges; not all are successful (e.g. IOC-ARC, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, consisting of states from South Africa to Australia, may have been inspired by APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), which covers another notional region, the Asia Pacific). Regions are political constructs, even while they are justified in the name of geography; should South Asia end in the east at Bangladesh? Why should Myanmar not be seen as part of that subregion? The same applies to central Asia and other subregions.

Other examples:

- **CARICOM**, formally established in 1973, brings together 15 small island states in the Caribbean, plus a couple on the

<sup>1</sup> “Plurilateral” is admittedly a clumsy term—it has virtually the same meaning as “multilateral”—but it does differentiate from the geography factor that determines a region or subregion.

South American continent. It started as a customs union and has progressively grown into an economic community that encompasses a free trade agreement (FTA) and extensive cooperation in other fields, called CSME (CARICOM Single Market and Economy).<sup>2</sup> For instance, it uses a joint negotiator on all EU and the World Trade Organization (WTO) economic issues, which gives concentrated powers to this block of votes.<sup>3</sup>

- Some **subregional groups** in SE Asia focus on Myanmar, Thailand, and the other countries, linking them with China's Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, exploiting the economic potential of the region (e.g. the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), in which the Asian Development Bank is an investor, and BIMSTEC<sup>4</sup> that covers Southeast and South Asia).
- **New groups** are active in the Balkans. Against the background of ethnic disputes and breakup of former Yugoslavia, the NGOs have taken the lead in rebuilding mutual confidence, working in areas such as division of assets and sharing of heritage objects. Consumer preferences have also reemerged, to the point where the Regional Cooperation Council based in Sarajevo may in effect be contributing to the emergence of a "Yugosphere," with restored societal links.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> CARICOM has a "Legislative Drafting Facility" that prepares model bills for the members on some subjects, to further develop their harmonization. Besides its 15 members (which include Suriname, a country that has limited commonalities with the principal island states), the Dominican Republic has expressed an interest in joining.

<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, this Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery represents "CARIFORUM, which consists of CARICOM members plus the Dominican Republic; it handles EU affairs. In relation to WTO, these members coordinate their position, but no joint machinery exists in formal terms.

<sup>4</sup> The acronym originally stood for "Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation"; when Bhutan and Nepal joined, the acronym was retained, and the name changed to: "Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation." Never underestimate the linguistic creativity of diplomats.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Economist*, August 22, 2009, p.39–40.

Consider central Asia after the end of the Cold War to see how regional diplomacy has proliferated. The main drivers have been security, economic cooperation, and energy networking, leading these countries to look West, East, and South in diversifying their connections. Led by Moscow, **CIS** was founded in December 1991 by Belarus and Ukraine, growing by 1993 to cover 12 of the former 15 Soviet Republics. It is now relatively inactive; following Georgia's withdrawal in 2008, four other heads of central Asian states did not attend the summit meeting of October 2009. **OSCE** (Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe), originally a European dialogue and confidence-building initiative, has extended its activities in this region in parallel fashion; its 56 members include this entire region; central Asia is one of its priorities. In 2002, Russia set up the "Collective Security Treaty Organization," **CSTO**, with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan as charter members; Uzbekistan joined in 2006. We also have a different kind of soft security initiative in the shape of **CICA**, "Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia," which first met in 1992, at the initiative of Kazakhstan. Its 18-member states include Afghanistan, India, Russia, Palestine, and Vietnam. (Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, and the US are observers.) The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, **SCO**, was established in 2001, successor to the "Shanghai Five" that first met in 1996. Its members are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. While security was its initial rationale, it has since focused on economic cooperation, especially the energy sector. "Economic Cooperation Organization," **ECO**, has at its core Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey (old partners of the former US-led military alliance **CENTRO**, that is, Central Treaty Organization). It now has seven CIS members and works on developing the oil and gas potential of the region. There also exist other smaller clusters, such as **GUAM**, joining Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, based on their security and economic interests. In October 2007 the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, announced the setting up of a cluster of their own, the **Caspian Five**, to pursue conservation and exchanges centered on that inland sea.

With **plurilateral** groups the unifying element is *nongeographic*, often based on geopolitics or economic interests (e.g. OECD, Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, or OPEC, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Heritage and language are among other possible factors. As with regional groups, when it suits the organization to extend coverage, flexibility prevails: witness the admission of Mozambique into the Commonwealth and Greece into Francophonie.

The WTO is founded on the principle of universal trade liberalization benefit to all members. But this has not prevented its members from signing over 400 “free trade agreements” (FTAs). Another example: the Antarctica Treaty Group is composed of signatories to the Antarctica Treaty, where states that have established a presence on this continent cooperate for its regulation and control.

## Typology

Regional and plurilateral institutions fall into clusters, based on both degree of integration and levels of activity, though the two indicators show varying results in specific cases.

### 1. **Well Integrated:** (the European Union)

- The EU, now with 27 member states, demonstrates unparalleled political integration, placing it in a class all its own. A sizable portion of sovereign power stands transferred to the collective entity, which decides on a wide swathe of legislation and rules. As a collective, the EU bears some resemblance to a state, even while many resist integration and prefer to see it as a federation of nation states.
- Solid economic cooperation is the foundation (a “single market”), buttressed by political vision.
- The EU legislates for its members on a number of issues; with a parliament and a court of justice, it is effectively a quasi government.
- A Common Foreign and Security Policy mechanism (CFSP) coordinates foreign policy. This works well on

secondary issues; on matters of core concern, member states sometimes opt to go their own ways.

- Member states remain as key actors; integration faces limits. Brussels is often ahead of the publics in member states, which retain their rivalries and some key differences.

2. **Advanced:** (ASEAN, CARICOM, OECD, OECS)

- Long-established cooperation extends to multiple areas, with a roadmap for future growth, but either no attempt or limited success at real integration.
- Serious bilateral dispute among members is precluded; major issues have been resolved.
- Outsiders seek membership or other forms of association.
- They often seek cooperation with other regional bodies.
- ASEAN adopted a new charter in December 2008, aiming at a single market by 2015, hoping to move closer to the EU model, but without surrender of sovereignty to the collective entity.

3. **Medium-Intensity:** (AU, ECOWAS, GCC, Mercosur<sup>6</sup>, Cairns Group)

- Some have a long history but have not fulfilled their own expectations, often due to unresolved differences among member states or inadequate will.
- A solid basis for economic cooperation is absent, despite good intentions.
- Non-members attend as observers, but arrangements with other organizations may have a pro forma character.

4. **Nascent or aspirational:** (BIMSTEC, Community of Democracies)

- Some are at the starting blocks; their promise is greater than performance, either because the organization is evolving or because there are internal roadblocks.
- A vision of mutual gains usually exists, but has not become a driving force.

<sup>6</sup> This acronym comes from the Spanish name, which means "Southern Common Market."

- Novelty may be a feature but it is not sufficient to ensure success.
3. **Dormant:** (IOC-ARC; G-15<sup>7</sup> might be headed that way)
- Weak unifying force; initial vision offset by other factors.
  - No strong “drivers,” members disinterested.
  - Lost rationale.

We include **OECS** in the “advanced” category (Organization of East Caribbean States), a group of nine island states, comprising Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands are associate members. Its aims include security, economic integration, and harmonization of foreign policy; it has joint diplomatic representation (currently at Brussels and Ottawa<sup>8</sup>) plus a common supreme court. It has a single currency and is working toward economic union.

Another classification method focuses on the motive elements:

- **Geographic:** the typical regional groups already mentioned, and subregional ones such as Pacific Islands Forum, or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
- **Thematic:** such as OPEC, the Coffee Producers Association, or Cairns cluster of agriculture exporters.
- **Geopolitical:** such as NATO, G-8, or the P-5<sup>9</sup> of the UN Security Council.
- **Geoeconomic:** such as G-77, OECD, IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa), or the new BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) group.
- **Cultural or linguistic,** as with Francophonie, though political elements underlie the cultural-linguistic affinities.

<sup>7</sup> G-15 is a group of leading Non-Aligned states established in 1988.

<sup>8</sup> OECS has a common passport and currency, and under the June 2010 Treaty of Basseterre, it is to establish an economic union. It also runs a joint technical unit at Geneva for the benefit of its WTO members.

<sup>9</sup> The five permanent members of the UN Security Council.



Foreign ministries may lose track of the different organizations to which different arms of government belong; such is their proliferation. China has a unit in its foreign ministry that looks at regional diplomacy in holistic fashion; the country is a member of nearly 50 formal and informal groups. This is a good device to ensure a “whole of government” perspective and to draw the maximum from such entities.

Typically, the evolution of a regional organization may cover the following, of course, in a sequence that will vary with each entity:

- Formation, driven by one or more countries.
- Adoption of a constitution.
- Establishment of a secretariat (though some like NAM have survived without taking this step; others have waited till a suitable moment before investing in a permanent body).
- Expansion, bringing in new members and/or observers.
- Reexamination of core objectives, and sometimes, adoption of a “vision” statement, reassessing the tasks.
- Nomination of “permanent representatives” at its headquarters (ASEAN took over four decades to take this step, whereas the Organization of American States (OAS) did this at its outset).

## **Success Factors**

The European Union (EU) brings together rich, advanced nations; this has surely helped, but at the end of World War II when Schumann and Monet advanced their vision, that prosperity lay in the future. The EU's success factors are:

- A clear **convincing vision of gain**, easily communicated to the participants, and to publics.
- One or more **vision “drivers,”** acceptable to members, steering the process.

- **Absence of serious schism**, plus ability to jointly overcome problems, including historical legacy. The “bottom-up” methods used by many European states (also reaching out to neighbors) are especially pertinent.
- **Willingness to subsume ego**, where the larger members accept some restraint on themselves, even while retaining indirect authority.

France and Germany, the two original “drivers” of European integration, implement elaborate programs that have rebuilt trust at the grassroot levels, overcoming several centuries of hostility, without which the EU could not have taken off. Examples: 1. Each year, tens of thousands of schoolchildren and youth go on several weeks’ homestay exchanges, also learning the language. 2. Every city and town has a “sister-ship” (or twin) in the other country, implementing many exchanges, from brass bands to football and darts teams. 3. Children in the border regions attend each other’s schools. 4. Hundreds of scholarships are given to students to study languages, culture, and other subjects. Thus, relations have been “humanized,” from the bottom upward. Subsequently, other European states have implemented similar programs with one another and with Mediterranean neighbors.

Based on such experience, one may identify key success factors as the following:

1. **Short and long objectives**: “quick wins” demonstrate to one another—and to publics—the gains of working together; long-term vision is no less vital.
2. Mobilization of **domestic stakeholders** and the people; securing external support as needed. In some cases a “politically correct” formula is essential to attract multilateral financial support.
3. **Tolerance of minor differences**, ability to take a long-term view of own interests. This is particularly true of economics-based arrangements.
4. A **compelling theme**, founded on logic and fact, which resonates and endures with all the members.

5. Creating **institutional links** and, where needed, helping member states to build such institutions. Example: ASEAN's "ISIS network" of foreign affairs thinktanks, worthy of emulation in Africa.
6. Sometimes **non-state actors** may help the process, in the shape of NGOs, track-two, and track-three groups that push governments in the direction of stronger cooperation, or others such as business associations or religious entities. It is essential for such external players to use their lines of communication with official agencies, as also to mobilize public opinion in support.

A weakness: many seek the EU model, but virtually none have emulated the people-to-people integration methods of the EU. Without this, much of regional cooperation remains a top-down effort.

### **South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**

The World Bank describes South Asia as the world's least integrated region.<sup>10</sup> SAARC was formed in 1981, at the urging of Bangladesh. The other five members of the group regard the long-running differences between India and Pakistan as a barrier to strong cooperation. In 2007, Afghanistan joined as SAARC's eighth member; since 2006 the group has accepted observers, who are: Australia, China, the EU, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea, and the United States. SAARC seems not to have yet found a way forward to real regionalism, but the fact of annual summits has produced beneficial impact.

*(Continued)*

<sup>10</sup> Comment by the managing director of the World Bank at a business summit in Mumbai, January 2006.

While the group has made headway in areas such as sharing of weather information, S&T, and limited people-to-people exchanges, key economic issues have been hard to resolve.<sup>11</sup> In 1993, SAARC established a preferential trade area, but the move to a free trade area has made slow progress, despite periodic declarations. Pakistan does not extend MFN (“most favored nation”) treatment to India (though it is obliged to do so as a WTO member and has long received MFN treatment from India), but it has slowly expanded the list of commodities in which it permits trade with India. Pakistan’s stand is that without a resolution of the Kashmir issue, it is not willing to normalize relations. Yet, an India-Pakistan “track three dialogue,” run by interested private individuals is vigorous. Two neighboring provinces, which both carry the name “Punjab,” conduct a fine “Two Punjab” exchange as an official activity. The net effect: Terrorism remains a major bilateral India-Pakistan problem, as shown by the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai in 2008.

SAARC is a textbook example of how a bilateral dispute blocks regional cooperation, even when cooperation is of obvious mutual, regional, and long-term benefit.

## Variations

Some novel arrangements exist—some that are **cross regional**, covering parts of countries, while others that reach out to **substate actors**.

<sup>11</sup> Another instance of soft cooperation: in 1985 India proposed a SAARC University; that idea moved forward slowly, and SAARC decided to accept India’s offer to host this entity. It began functioning in mid-2010, with an intake of 50 students, operating out of temporary premises, while its buildings are under construction.

- The **ASEM** dialogue is an instance of bi-organizational cooperation; it produces biennial summits between the leaders of ASEAN and EU states. For the latter, it has served as a kind of counterpoint to APEC, which the EU perceives as dominated by the US—and Japan and China—covering the whole of the Pacific Rim, East and Southeast Asia. **BIMSTEC** is a putative grouping with similar intent, though limited to some countries of Southeast and South Asia.
- In the subregional groups, parts of large countries join hands with neighboring countries. Instances: China's Yunnan and Sichuan provinces have taken the lead in the **BCIM Forum** (earlier called the Kunming Initiative), working for cooperation between the neighboring regions of China and India with Bangladesh and Myanmar. These Chinese states have parallel actions directed at Thailand and the Indo-China states, **GMS**, centered over the Mekong river.
- The **IBSA** initiative, linking India, Brazil, and South Africa, came from a political decision in 2001 that each large country on its continent wanted to utilize existing political affinity into stronger economic exchanges. Today that has taken a life of its own, extending activities to new areas; the three countries are now planning an FTA (which must bring in Mercosur and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), where Brazil and South Africa are respectively members).
- In the EU, the **Euro-regions** cover neighboring territories of member states (e.g. Saxony in German and the neighboring regions of the Czech Republic and Poland). ASEAN calls these "**growth triangles**" or "**quadrilaterals**," where neighboring regions develop tourism or industry. This becomes an expression of substate diplomacy, another novelty of our times, and produces devolution of external affairs, with unexpected side effects. A study on China shows how its provinces neighboring South Korea, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia have become drivers of neighborhood cooperation; they have also changed in the way Beijing looks to these

neighboring countries.<sup>12</sup> In South Asia, emerging transborder chemistry between neighboring provinces (noted above) guides governments to improve cooperation.

## Plurilateral Groups

The Plurilateral Groups (PLGs) are glued together by nongeographic factors. Members may share common resources (e.g. OPEC, or the Coffee Producers Association); or the level of the economy (e.g. G-77, OECD); or proximity on important issues (e.g. the Cairns group of agriculture product exporters); or historical legacy (the Commonwealth, La Francophonie, the Ibero-American Summit).

Factors influencing their success:

- How strong is cohesion? How important is that particular resource? OPEC was established in 1960, and gained real clout in 1973 when oil prices surged after the 1973 Arab-Israel war; Algeria (then the group's "ideologue") argued that all resource producers should form cartels. But the failed efforts of the copper producers and others showed that the outcome hinged on the relative scarcity and the economic importance of the resource. Even the exporters of natural gas have not replicated OPEC.
- How well does the group reach out to all that should be included? This may partly hinge on the political will of the main drivers and the group's guiding criteria. Example: OECD is seen by developing states as the club of the rich (in the past decade, Mexico and South Korea have joined, while Chile and Israel became members in 2010); it contributes to the economic prosperity of its members, carrying out technical work in public affairs management. It also cooperates with non-members in functional areas.

<sup>12</sup> David M Lampton, ed. *The Making of China's Foreign & Security Policy* (Stanford University Press, 2001)

- World events may determine whether the time is ripe for a particular concept, such as an initiative on disarmament (the Stockholm Six of the 1980s). Or it may fall into limbo. The Community of Democracies met in Poland in 2000, with strong US backing, but it may have lost steam, though several Western countries strongly back this coalition.

The **Non-Aligned Movement**, with 120 members and scores of observers, is a large PLG; it has lost some rationale after the end of the Cold War, though the members share some interests as have-nots. It continues with biennial summits and other encounters, though these meetings appear ritualistic. **G-77** (with over 130 members) shows that as a result of globalization and increasing disparities economic interests among developing countries have diverged. There remains a core of North-South issues on which developing states share near-common positions, but this is insufficient to drive policy actions, except to some extent at the WTO.<sup>13</sup>

## **Innovation**

Innovation in regional diplomacy consists of novel formats and unusual work methods.

### Concepts

- Asia-Europe Summit Meetings (ASEM), an ASEAN initiative that took shape in 1995, described above. A similar summit meeting between Latin America and the EU, LAC-EU, is held from time to time.
- SE Asia witnesses several novel efforts, covering river basin cooperation (the Mekong Group, partly funded by the Asian

<sup>13</sup> We should note also that Mexico and South Korea, members of OECD for some years now, have “graduated” out of the group of developing states; in contrast, Singapore, despite its per capita GDP of over \$30,000, finds it politically convenient to remain with G-77. China never joined formally, so that often the words “G-77 and China” are used to denote this cluster.

Development Bank); transport networks (plans to build a rail link, taking advantage of existing lines, and a road link); cross-regional cooperation (in Asia: SCO, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation).

- The Russia-China-India “trilateral,” described below, where non-obvious commonalities are located and pursued. A track-two group of scholar-experts initiated this dialogue and now backstops the intergovernment effort.<sup>14</sup>

## Methods

- ASEAN, at its first summit in Bali in February 1976, concluded a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation that “moved a potential source of conflict over the regional distribution of power to a plane of common interests.”<sup>15</sup>
- CARICOM’s method of a “joint negotiator” for discussions at the EU (and to a lesser extent at WTO) could be used by other small states, for example the South Pacific Forum or African regional groups.
- The ex-Yugoslav states are building energy networks and taking other practical steps, notwithstanding unresolved political, economic, and social issues, sometimes even the absence of mutual recognition between some states. NGOs take the lead, even ahead of governments.
- Mercosur is essentially a customs union, but it has retrofitted political activities into the mix; when there was a military coup attempt in Paraguay, Argentine, Brazil, and Uruguay lined up to declare that they would not tolerate undermining of democracy; the attempt collapsed. In the same fashion, that group is now bringing Venezuela into their fold, as an ecopolitical initiative.

<sup>14</sup> A number of other groups have used such support groups, as “eminent persons” mandated to throw up ideas or to provide regular support with parallel meetings.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Leifer, *Singapore’s Foreign Policy*, (London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 80–1.



## Emerging States

Three new groups have now joined **IBSA** (mentioned above); each brings together “aspirational” or emerging powers.

**BRIC** represents Brazil, Russia, India, and China, and the concept dates to 2000 when Goldman Sachs identified these as states that could be among the world's richest by 2050. After soundings and contacts at New York, the foreign ministers of the four held several meetings, leading to a summit meeting of their leaders at Yekaterinburg, Russia, in July 2009, and a second more productive one at Brasilia in April 2010. This group started as a “club,” of members that had congruent interests on international issues, but is now becoming a cluster of “emerging” powers.<sup>16</sup> As with IBSA, a Track Two process is used to throw up new ideas.<sup>17</sup>

The August 2009 L'Aquila G-8 Summit in Italy saw the emergence of a new **G-5** entity (or an “outreach” O-5), consisting of Brazil, India, Mexico, Russia, and South Africa; unlike at earlier G-8 meetings where this cluster of countries mainly met the G-8 over breakfast (besides a few bilateral meetings among some leaders), this time the dialogue between the two groups was more intensive, to the point where some commentators spoke of a new “G-13” grouping.

Finally there is the **Trilateral**, consisting of China, India, and Russia, which started in 2004 with meetings in New York

*(Continued)*

<sup>16</sup> The Economist (April 17 2010) writes: “is it now the case that life, in a serious way, is imitating investment analysis?” In 2011 South Africa has joined, making it BRICS.

<sup>17</sup> “Track Two” refers to groups of nonofficials, drawn from two or more countries, who meet usually on a periodic basis, to discuss issues concerning the countries concerned; they usually report back to their governments. When such groups are created by governments, funded by them, and given a mandate to produce ideas on issues of mutual interest, they may be called “Track One-and-Half”. On the other hand, similar groups that operate entirely independent of governments, sometimes even in defiance of own governments, are called “Track Three.”

among the foreign ministers, on the margins of UN sessions, to their standalone meetings; and a summit meeting held in 2008. Again, a T/2 process supports the official track; the three countries focus on political dialogue, while denying any intention to work against other states.

## **Free Trade Agreements**

Trade is a powerful binding force, offering the promise of wider markets, shared actions. Accords take the shape of “preferential trade agreements” (PTAs); “regional trade agreements” (RTAs); “bilateral trade agreements” (BTAs); and customs union treaties, such as Mercosur and SACU.<sup>18</sup> Since 2001 an expanded form has emerged, the “comprehensive economic cooperation agreement” (CECA; also called CEPA, where the word “partnership” replaces cooperation), pioneered by Singapore and Japan.

Typical CECA covers trade, investments, and services, and may also extend to tourism. As a single package agreement it enables each side to ensure that its priority interests are covered. It is harder to negotiate; by its nature it ensures compressive treatment of all that figures in bilateral economic relations.

Shared characteristics of all these:

- Win-win formulas that enlarge the cake. Identification of early gains in such trade concessions, by way of “early harvest,” to win support at home.
- Growth in trade, investments, joint exploitation of resources, sharing of services.
- Indirectly create a platform for deeper political, security collaboration.
- It might even grow to a “pooling of sovereignty” by states.

<sup>18</sup> SACU, the Southern African Customs Union (members: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland, and South Africa) is the world’s oldest, established in 1910.

Other elements: economic liberalization is easier for most governments when it comes from a regional obligation; membership helps in structured economic reform; small steps lead to wider actions.

The purists of multilateralism see regional arrangements as derogation from the principle of universal trade liberalization, a goal cherished by most states. Others argue that the regional arrangements serve as a building block to wider liberalization.<sup>19</sup>

### Asian Unity

In April 2009, *The Economist* inaugurated a weekly column on Asia, *Banyan*, noting that Asia's "insipid collection of regional and subregional clubs amounts to something far short of a continental project." This is harsh, but not inaccurate; it is quite remarkable that despite early initiatives such as the 1947 New Delhi Asian Unity Conference and the 1955 Bandung Conference, Asia is the only major region without a pan-continental initiative.<sup>20</sup> Today, the nearest thing to a quasi-continental forum is the oddly named East Asia Summit (EAS) that covers the 10 ASEAN states, China, Japan, and South Korea (these 13 form the APT), plus Australia, India and New Zealand. But EAS meets only at the summit level, and has no other structure or dialogue mechanism as yet.

<sup>19</sup> Noted international trade expert Prof. Jagdish Bhagwati has called them the "termites" of the world trading system. India, for instance, took a doctrinaire position that it would only work for universal liberalization under the WTO, but it signed its first bilateral FTA with Sri Lanka in 1999; based on the success of that, it has gone on to sign several others, and is negotiating many more.

<sup>20</sup> One putative issue for a pan-Asian movement is the definition of "Asia". West Asia is essentially composed of Arab states and Iran; central Asia is in thrall to Russia, for the great part. This brings one down to looking at "cultural" Asia, which too offers definition problems. See Rana, *Asian Diplomacy* (2007).

## **Limiting Factors**

Regional or plurilateral cooperation is not a universal panacea. Some limitations:

- Ambitious plans can outstrip reality. In 2001, the “Organization of African Unity” (OAU) turned itself into the “African Union” (AU), modeled on the EU. South Africa led in creating NEPAD, a self-monitoring mechanism for good governance, which has shown little result. Such actions raise expectations, but do not create political will, a prerequisite to real unity. Nevertheless, an African initiative to pursue good governance on a voluntary basis, through quiet dialogue with a group of African wise men, has made progress, in the past two years, in the shape of a “peer review mechanism.” One should also note the unique “Mo Ibrahim Prize” for good governance, launched in 2007, showing that regional actions can gain traction.<sup>21</sup>
- Vision is not sufficient; member states must be willing to subsume immediate national interests, and take a long perspective, to create mutual trust. This deficit is visible in many regional organizations. Member states too must invest effort into making regional cooperation work, giving it the priority it merits in the work of the government, and establishing the needed interministry coordination for effective participation.
- RGs are not a substitute for resolving bilateral disputes; it was assumed in 1967 that the formation of ASEAN would end all territorial disputes, but in recent years new disputes have emerged between Cambodia and Thailand. Many groups do not permit bilateral issues to be raised, which pushes such issues below the surface and ensures that the

<sup>21</sup> See [www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en](http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en) [accessed on August 11, 2010]. The Ibrahim Foundation also produces an “Index of African Governance,” ranking states on their quality of good governance.

group as a whole suffers; SAARC and India-Pakistan differences are a classic example.

- Borrowed concepts and methods do not transplant easily. One may wonder whether the change of name of the pan-African movement from OAU to AU has helped.
- Enlarging an organization can slow down integration, for example, ASEAN after enlargement to include Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. EU-27 also seems to face a similar issue.
- Most RGs treat cooperation as a top-down process, directed by their leaders. The lesson of postwar Europe, the creation of understanding among the citizens, especially the youth, through study of languages, cultures, and mass exchanges, has not been emulated by any other organization.
- An experiment is underway to join up existing organizations in southern and East Africa, that is, COMESA, EAC, and SADC, which have overlapping footprints. The jury is still out on whether this will work, given vested interests of member states and the secretariats concerned.
- A major state in a region may attempt to create a regional cooperation structure that is a form of "controlled but mediated system of regional order."<sup>22</sup> The Pacific Islands Forum, where Australia is the dominant partner, together with New Zealand is perhaps an example.

Avoiding hard issues works in the short term but creates blockage. Example: ASEAN, like many other RGs, has a rule against internal interference in the affairs of memberstates. ASEAN has a poor record in resolving issues within states, whether at Aceh in Indonesia or Mindanao in the Philippines. It has been unable to deal with Myanmar, ruled for two decades by a military dictatorship, which has imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the popular elections in 1999.

<sup>22</sup> These words come from Vaughan A Lewis, *Size Self-Determination and International Relations: The Caribbean*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica (1976).

## **Final Thoughts**

The EU of 27 states faces new challenges, even after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty at the end of 2009. Many wonder whether the high tide of integration has passed. First, publics do not share the vision of their leaders that integration is by itself a good thing; second, local identities are much stronger than anyone expected; third, while the benefits of enlarged markets and even common currency are fairly clear, the emergence of a huge new mechanism run from afar (e.g. Brussels) frightens the people; fourth, the fear of being swamped by “foreigners” persists, even for peoples known to be liberal, especially during an economic downturn. ASEAN confronts similar angst over its “over-rapid” expansion.

Regional diplomacy has the power to transform the neighborhood relationship paradigm. Plurilateral diplomacy does the same for the clusters of states it serves. When it works, such cooperation produces a dynamic momentum that opens the door to possibilities that could hardly be imagined earlier. It proves the adage that the whole is often larger than the sum of its parts.

Regional organizations wax and wane, following their own rhythm. Past success is no guarantee to sustained relevance.

Multilateral funding agencies (World Bank, regional banks) support such cooperation, financing new, mutually beneficial projects. For instance, the gas and oil pipelines proposals in Central, South and Southeast Asia offer great potential, but also face political complexity. The challenge for regional diplomacy is to find ways that overcome such obstacles.

Regional organizations sometimes play a key role in conflict resolution—a good example is ECOWAS and other entities in West Africa. SADC has shown little appetite to tackle a recalcitrant Mugabe in Zimbabwe, but it worked behind the scenes in the compromise of 2008 that made Morgan Tsvangirai prime minister, albeit with limited powers. Zimbabwe remains a challenge for SADC.

The post-Cold War world, especially the elimination of a two-bloc matrix, pushes countries to build their own network of global partnerships. This has made regional and plurilateral cooperation

a priority in most foreign ministries. Yet, rather few among them examine the methods of regional diplomacy in a thorough manner, looking to best practices to enhance effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> Today, it is incumbent on countries to handle such clusters in a thorough and sustained manner, to gain full value. We may count on further mushrooming of regional and plurilateral groups. In its own way, this is an expression of multipolarity in our times.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. How might the EU methods and experience be better used by other organizations? Should not regional organizations attempt to analyze other entities and identify “good practices”?
2. How might a foreign ministry exploit its regional and plurilateral options? To what extent can its domestic partners, state and non-state, contribute to this process?
3. Can groups of “eminent persons” be used, within and among countries, to give impetus to such cooperation, acting as brainstormers?

<sup>23</sup> Typically, regional diplomacy is handled in different territorial units within the foreign ministry. It is only the large ministries, such as China's, that have a unit that takes a holistic view of the techniques and experiences of such groups.

# 3 The Diplomacy of Small States

## Chapter Overview

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Is diplomacy a luxury for small states? How many embassies does a small country, say of one million people, need? Is there an optimal way that a small country can utilize the international system to its best advantage?

The answer to the first question has to be an emphatic no; if anything, small states need diplomacy even more than others, precisely because they depend on the international system to overcome their vulnerability and relative lack of power. That is also the opinion of many small states, as shown in discussion with their foreign ministry representatives.<sup>1</sup> As for the scale of international engagement and the methods they might use, it all depends on the

<sup>1</sup> I have had the privilege of discussing these issues with representatives of small states in Africa and the Caribbean, besides extensive exchanges with a large number of trainees from small states who have participated in distance learning courses run at DiploFoundation.



objectives that the small country sets for itself and its self-assumed vocation in world affairs.

A recent Danish Foreign Ministry report spoke of “the risk for small nations being forgotten or sidelined”.<sup>2</sup> If that is the perception of a wealthy European country of 4.5 million, how much more acute might be the problem for a small state that also lacks material resources to face its economic and social challenges?

How might we define small states?

### Definition

Several criteria are relevant. **Population:** The 1985 Commonwealth report *Vulnerability: Small States in the Global Society* applied a cut-off figure of one million or less as the criterion for a small state; later this was revised to one-and-half million. The World Bank uses this definition, and some 45 countries fall into this category. By contrast, the Forum of Small States (FOSS, a lobbying caucus at the UN) defines small states as those with a population of fewer than 10 million; it has 93 members. Another contemporary term “microstates” usually refers to countries with a population of under 0.5 million. One published study reserves the title of microstates for those with a population of under 1.5 million provided they do not have a high level of economic development.<sup>3</sup>

**Size:** this is easier to apply to island states. Some countries have small populations but huge territory (and/or a vast oceanic exclusive economic zone, or EEZ); one of their

(Continued)

<sup>2</sup> Source: One of the interim documents of the Danish Foreign Ministry, written during the course of its preparation of a report “Vision 2015,” published in October 2006; the author was one of a dozen international advisers used as a sounding board in its preparation.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Naseer Mohamed, *The Diplomacy of Micro-States*, (Studies in Diplomacy No. 72, Clingendael Institute, The Hague, January 2002). Thirty-seven states are placed in this category, but Brunei, Cyprus, Malta, and Qatar are excluded.

acute problems is an inability to police the territory. Suriname, with 450,000 people, has a land territory of 163,000 sq. km. For the South Pacific states illegal fishing in their EEZ is believed to cost around \$500 million per year, leading to serious depletion of fish stocks. **Resources + income:** this is harder to define, but clearly we should distinguish between countries with high incomes despite small size and others that have low incomes, poor infrastructure, and a modest endowment of natural resources. Thus the problems that oil-rich Oman and Qatar face are radically different from what Botswana or Namibia confront. **Vulnerability:** this is a matter of subjective assessments, but clearly states facing hazard as a result of low political development (e.g. having gained independence recently) and/or limited human resources, poor infrastructure, a modest resource base, and regional conflict confront special difficulties on the international stage.

A new concept has emerged since 2000, namely of “Small Vulnerable Economies” (SVEs), used in the WTO, UNCTAD, and elsewhere. Currently 17 countries are placed in this category.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, a state is “small” if that is its self-perception. Some small states maintain fairly extensive diplomatic networks, often to the very limit of affordability.<sup>5</sup> What is their justification?

- A need for adroit external relationship management does not hinge on size; some insist that small states need diplomacy as

<sup>4</sup> This term is used mainly in the sense of economic vulnerability. The April 2000 report of a joint task force of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank on this theme is available at: [siteresources.worldbank.org/PROJECTS/Resources/meetingchallengeinglobaleconomy1.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PROJECTS/Resources/meetingchallengeinglobaleconomy1.pdf) [accessed on 9 November 2010]

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Grenada with 110,000 people maintains 9 embassies abroad; others: Namibia, 1.8 million, 26 embassies; Guyana, 860,000 and 10; Jamaica, 2.8 million and 17.

a shield in the absence of hard power. This involves handling relations with powerful neighbors, as well as potential friends located at a distance, in a manner that widens one's options; active regional diplomacy is also useful for this purpose.

- Small states require representation at the capitals of major powers much more than the other way round—this is empirically proven.<sup>6</sup> For instance, while virtually all small states find it essential to have resident embassies in vital large states, the latter do not always reciprocate with their own embassies in the capitals of microstates and small states.
- Small states usually need representation in neighboring capitals. That also applies to the capitals of their major foreign aid donors.
- New York, the world's leading multilateral capital, is used for bilateral contacts by small states; most do not use other options, like nonresident ambassadors and "virtual" embassies, that is, representation that exists only in the shape of an internet website.

Possibly in the future the size of diplomatic networks will shrink, for large and small countries, with the tighter public funding and demands for cost-effectiveness. But so far, the reverse has occurred; many countries have expanded their embassies abroad, as part of an intensification of the diplomatic process.<sup>7</sup> Some small states have indeed cut back on overseas representation; we also note a thinning out of embassies. For example, Finland runs some one-man embassies, where apart from the ambassador, the few on the staff are all locally engaged personnel. Some Balkan countries have seen that in an embassy, the most expensive element is the

<sup>6</sup> See Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador*, p.58. The Himalayan kingdom Bhutan, with a population of barely 700,000, is an exception, having chosen to limit its bilateral diplomatic representation to four countries, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Thailand, besides the UN at New York.

<sup>7</sup> During research carried out in 2004 for *The 21st Century Ambassador*, the average number of resident embassies was calculated at 21, p. 209–10. Anecdotal evidence suggests that that figure has crept up; many capitals are now host to more embassies than in the recent past.

ambassador; some of their resident embassies are run on the ground by a junior diplomat, and the ambassador, based at home, makes brief visits to the assignment country as needed.<sup>8</sup>

Singapore, a city-island-state of just 4.5 million inhabitants, defiantly asserts: "Size is not destiny."<sup>9</sup> Hemmed in by its large neighbors, Malaysia and Indonesia, it works assiduously to enlarge political *espace* for itself. Its feisty diplomatic style is not for everyone, predicated as it is on a self-confidence that comes from its spectacular economic success and the political shelter offered by the collective ASEAN platform. Singapore does prove that astute diplomacy is a powerful instrument if one sets clear and realistic external policy goals.

## Features

The diplomacy pursued by small states can be classified in several ways. Before taking that up, we might consider some typical characteristics.

*First*, small states are upholders of the rule of law and strong advocates of both the UN system and international cooperation. Lacking the attributes of military strength or the ability to project their power vis-à-vis other states, it is the effective functioning of the international system that is their security safeguard. It is not by accident that several of them have led in the development of international law (Malta and Singapore in relation to the Law of the Sea, Trinidad and Tobago on the International Criminal Court). *Second*, they have a proclivity toward regional cooperation. The Caribbean group CARICOM, consisting of 15 states, is an advanced regional cooperation mechanism. The Pacific Island Forum has

<sup>8</sup> This is not a widely used method, and makes an assumption about an ambassador being dispensable, which suggests that such embassies have only token value; the norm is for an envoy to be more engaged than his junior colleagues in his tasks of contact-building and promotion, on behalf of the home country.

<sup>9</sup> See Rana, "Singapore's Diplomacy: Vulnerability into Strength," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2006.

many small state members, but the large states of the region, acting as the aid donors, that is, New Zealand and Australia, are also part of this Forum. ECOWAS in West Africa, starting with an initial focus on economic cooperation, has transformed itself into an instrument of regional peacekeeping. *Third*, for small states a first driver of regional cooperation is economics (in the shape of market sharing, plus economies in communication and transport networks). The second driver, often understated, is the implicit security that the group provides. *Fourth*, small states attach high priority to multilateral diplomacy, in part because it makes sense to work within the large framework that the UN and its agencies provide and partly because their missions in New York (and to a lesser extent in Brussels and Geneva) also serve as a platform for bilateral contact. Of course, this is not as efficacious as maintaining a string of adequately resourced resident bilateral embassies, but cost usually rules out operating more than a few essential bilateral embassies abroad.

In a celebrated 1998 lecture, Prof. Alan Henrikson identified small state diplomacy as corresponding to three pairs of conceptual opposites.<sup>10</sup>

- **Quiet diplomacy:** states practicing this tend to have the ear of a large state, and in effect take shelter under that umbrella. This may be the former colonial power, or the proximate large country. At the other extreme end, **protest diplomacy:** the premise suggested was that “the squeaky wheel gets the grease”. Jamaica was offered as an example; such diplomacy demands agile media outreach and carries the danger of polarization.
- **Group diplomacy:** taking shelter within a group that may be regional, or ideology-based (as with G-77), or based on a shared resource, which may give the group a nongeographic character. The opposite of that, **niche diplomacy:** this exploits

<sup>10</sup> An updated version of this 1998 lecture is available at: <http://textus.diplomacy.edu/thina/TxFsetW.asp?tURL=http://textus.diplomacy.edu/thina/txgetxdoc.asp?IDconv=3224> [accessed on 22 August 2009].

a specialty or interest that the country has, as in the case of Norway with international mediation for conflict resolution or Canada on humanitarian issues. This needs some resources and political will, and the ability to match actions with domestic expectations, mobilizing the home stakeholders.

- **Enterprise diplomacy:** this exploits opportunity, as in the case of Panama with shipping; it may lead to insularity or even isolation, if carried too far, as was the case initially with Libya and its passion for African unity. The counterpart is **regulatory diplomacy:** the example offered is of Haiti where the US intervened during a breakdown of law and order in 2004, airlifted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and subsequently UN forces took over from US marines, when its hemisphere neighbors pushed for international action. But this does not seem to be the antipode of enterprise diplomacy, as with the other categories listed above.

This taxonomy might be supplemented, as we see below.

## **A Practical Approach**

Empirical analysis shows that small states pursue different methods and ideas that frequently coexist, in varying degrees. The policy mix adopted is usually a blend of several different, even contradictory, notions.

One. **Disengagement:** In varying fashion, some small states minimize their external contacts to the degree they find practical, despite the fact that the world is globalized and interconnected. For example: **Bhutan** restricts external contact on the argument that this would erode its unique cultural personality. **Mongolia** used to pursue such a policy in the past. The net result was a reduction in external dependence and even contact; in a reversal, it now actively pursues wide engagement, recently concentrating on marketing for exploitation the natural resources that underlie its vast territory. In contrast, long before **Myanmar** became known for its disregard for human rights, it chose to stay away from the Non-Aligned

Movement, in the 1950s, on the premise that even that represented a deviation from its strict political neutrality. **North Korea's** isolation results from its paranoia as well as shrewd calculation.

Two. **Low profile:** Another option is quiet diplomacy, without becoming reclusive. Many small states pursue this, seeking neither special favor from others nor a high profile on any issue, at least not unless vital national interests are at stake. One feature in such policy is to avoid the limelight on international issues and always stick to the mainstream of opinion, be it at the UN General Assembly or elsewhere. Such countries avoid membership of the UN Security Council since that would expose them to major power pressures on issues far removed from their immediate interests.

Three. **Regionalism:** This becomes an easy path to a mildly active diplomacy, within the comfort zone of one's regional group. It is also a low-risk option. Several Caribbean countries have become the prime movers in their organization, **CARICOM**, and even more so in the Organization of East Caribbean States (OECS). In Central and West Africa, **Gabon and Ghana (and Nigeria)** have been prominent in regional peacemaking.

Four. **Magnetic attraction:** A straightforward way for a small state to actively engage the world community is to make itself "attractive and relevant" to the world, using the words of one scholar.<sup>11</sup> This is implemented in different ways. **Maldives**, with a population of barely 400,000, inhabiting 200 low-lying islands and atolls, presents itself as an extraordinary, top-end holiday destination, with the slogan "The Sunny Side of Life"; tranquility is offered in that value proposition.<sup>12</sup> In 1987 it took the initiative to warn the international community of the danger of global warming, and the hazard of rise in sea levels, and has pursued this assiduously, as a matter of survival. In 2007 it raised this issue at the Human Rights Council at Geneva, as a question of human rights. **Norway** seeks relevance in a different way; it contracted a UK think tank in

<sup>11</sup> See Jozef Batora, "Public Diplomacy Between Home and Abroad: Norway and Canada" *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol I, No. 1, p.59.

<sup>12</sup> In 2007 a tourism official at Male told me that the average room rate in their superb resort hotels (only one occupying each island) is \$600.

2002–03 to articulate a complete strategy, focused on international peacemaking, plus a self-image based on wholesome adventure. **Singapore** takes advantage of its geographic crossroad location to become the regional base for many multinational companies and organizations, which indirectly helps it to overcome its sense of geopolitical vulnerability.<sup>13</sup> **Mauritius** has taken the lead in a regional organization, to become the headquarters of the putative group IOC-ARC, linking the Indian Ocean rim countries; it is another matter that the group has not taken off. **Costa Rica** abolished its armed forces in 1949 and pays special attention to international cooperation, human rights, and environmental standards.

Five. **Niche specialization:** Partly an outgrowth of the above, this entails developing an expertise area, driven by self-interest, which may fill a real need in world affairs. This may respond to the country's interests, or matches its resources, or other attributes. **Switzerland**, for instance, often runs "interests sections" for others, when countries break bilateral ties. The fact of Switzerland's neutral posture helps in this role. **Malta** has specialized in the Law of the Sea, though some Maltese observers feel that this was really the initiative of one individual. We have already considered **Norway** as providing conflict mediators; **Finland** does the same. **Trinidad and Tobago** played a key role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court.<sup>14</sup> Such roles involve a proactive mindset and a willingness to spend resources on the chosen task; that may inhibit some developing or transition countries from pursuing this option. Perhaps more small countries could exploit such niche areas.

Six. **Defiance:** **Cuba** and **North Korea** are among the states that have chosen to defy countries much more powerful than themselves, though some may think that this "option" was forced by circumstance. Others protest on issues deemed important, even if

<sup>13</sup> This is a central theme in a book by Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping With Vulnerability* (Routledge, London, 2000)

<sup>14</sup> It also resisted US pressure to sign a "bilateral immunity agreement" exempting US personnel from ICC jurisdiction, a demand that the United States has successfully pressed on most countries, in what is extraordinary US action, to stay aloof from this institution.



the odds against them are substantial. **Libya** is a good example of a country that started with defiance and moved along to niche diplomacy, presenting itself to its pan-African constituency as the strongest—and free-spending—advocate of continental unity and the African Union.

Any form of proactive diplomacy presupposes that the country has the resources, human and material, that permit a high-profile role on the international stage. Countries bereft of resources have no choice but to stick to their knitting. A risk-gain calculation is essential in moving from concepts to implementation.

## **Networking and the Diplomacy Process**

CARICOM is one of the best examples of a regional grouping of small countries, as noted earlier.<sup>15</sup> We also saw that OECS, a subgroup within CARICOM representing nine small East Caribbean countries, is even more remarkable; it has ambitious plans to move in the direction of economic integration and already has a single currency and a common passport.<sup>16</sup> While similar conditions exist in other regions, that model of group mobilization has not found emulators.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Strictly speaking, the Caribbean mechanism (known as the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery, CRNM), is intended for mutual consultation, and the designated negotiator needs a mandate from the member countries on the issues that come up, be it at the EU or during negotiations at the "Free Trade Area of the Americas" (FTAA) which seems to face an uncertain future after the high hopes aroused some years ago. But despite shortcomings, the existence of this mechanism is a considerable improvement over the problems that individual countries would face in acting singly. See <http://www.crnmm.org/>

<sup>16</sup> The experience of OECS with joint embassies is a cautionary tale for those that are attracted by this notion, as a universal device. In the operation of the joint embassy, even small Caribbean states encountered differences in their policies in a capital such as London, leading to friction. Under the Vienna Convention, which does not recognize such devices, the joint envoy has to separately present credentials for each of the states he represents, even while he uses the title of ambassador of the "East Caribbean."

<sup>17</sup> The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has tried some

We do not see any African initiative for small states to come together. Geography does not favor this; consequently the dominant trend is for small states to work in their own subregional organizations. Perhaps there is scope for a nongeographic African small state group to pursue shared interests.

Many small states are island states; they have their own organization, “Alliance of Small Island States” (AOSIS).<sup>18</sup> It acts as a negotiating voice for “Small Island Developing States” (SIDS), created in 2005 to pursue shared interests; Mauritius hosted a conference that brought them together. The issue of climate change is especially worrisome for them, given their vulnerability to the rising sea level. These vulnerable states need greater visibility, as communicators on climate security issues. This will become a matter of life or death, before long. The World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat are two organizations that support small state activities on a regular basis.

Do small states use the diplomatic process to its full potential? A subjective impression is that many among them could do more. Some seem inhibited by a shortage of human resources. Very small foreign ministries also find it difficult to develop strong professionalism. Many of them have not applied information and communications technology (ICT) to its full potential, partly on account of cost and partly owing to a lack of trained technical personnel, but that could be changing. The net consequence: a gap in the efficacy of the diplomatic methods used by such states and the leading diplomatic powers has widened. Rich small states (e.g. the three Baltic republics), in contrast, have become trend leaders in using their websites and in exploiting ICT to their advantage. In general, it is the vulnerable small states that need to optimally

emulation— they understand the CARICOM method well—the problem is willingness by states to subsume ego. Is it that small island states are more flexible in this respect?

<sup>18</sup> AOSIS has a membership of 43 states and observers, drawn from all oceans and regions of the world: Africa, Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Pacific, and South China Sea. Thirty-seven are members of the United Nations.

develop their external affairs delivery process; perhaps the telecom revolution underway in most of the poor countries will act as a driver for new demands on the public services, including MFAs.

One area for experimentation is cost-effective options to resident embassies. *Concurrent accreditation* is the old and tried method, but if one ambassador is burdened with more than say two or three capitals, the chances are that the envoy may do justice to none of them. A better alternative is the *nonresident ambassador*, that is, an envoy that handles the assigned country from the home capital. Singapore has used this to great effect, as has Malta; it has the side benefit of giving the foreign ministry access to such envoys, many drawn from nonofficial circles, in effect building public-private partnerships.<sup>19</sup> Croatia has followed the lead of Finland, to establish miniscule missions headed by a *chargé d'affaires*, with the ambassador based in the home capital, traveling to the assigned country a few times in the year. Denmark, Finland, and the United Kingdom (and surely some others as well) operate one-man embassies, with no home-based staff, making splendid use of local staff. One insidious phenomenon should be noted: embassies of developing states in Western countries often become a haven for illegal migrants from home (embassies are exempt from work permit regulations); often they are poor performers and sometimes derail the home-based team from effective performance. Another danger: the embassy becomes a locus for home politics.

Another practical device is to appoint many *honorary consuls*, and leave it to them to fly the flag; Barbados, Grenada, and Jamaica, for instance, make extensive use of this device.<sup>20</sup> A practical problem for small states: selection of the right kind of persons; often those that seek the appointments are social climbers, unwilling to

<sup>19</sup> Singapore's nonresident envoys, most of them drawn from business or academia, travel to the country of assignment twice or thrice a year, always in the company of a foreign ministry desk officer. They play a valuable role in looking after visitors from the countries concerned, and in building some contacts, though they do not match the resident envoy in their reach. It is possible to combine this method with a web-based presence for such embassies.

<sup>20</sup> Honorary consuls mainly undertake consular work, but they also help the home country with economic and other forms of outreach. See Chapter 11.

contribute anything substantial.<sup>21</sup> Some receiving countries have tight procedures that regulate the appointment of honorary consuls in their country and that can facilitate small states that want to ensure that they have chosen the right person. Or one might make a year's trial appointment, renewing it thereafter for a finite period, using the renewal to re-verify the activities of the appointee. Yet another option is to establish small *trade offices* at places of economic interest, manned entirely by local staff; this is cheaper than missions or consulates. Small states have tended to be conservative in using such alternate representation forms.

An even simpler method is to drastically reduce embassy staff and rely on locally engaged personnel, say along the lines of the Finland model mentioned above. Often, small state embassies have many unproductive home-based junior staff.<sup>22</sup>

Brand management is another option. A prelude to gaining international attention, say by re-branding one's country—that is, to overcome a stereotype image—is an objective assessment of the existing image in key overseas locations, as we see in a later chapter. Public-private partnerships can be used to overcome shortages of public funds for such image building.

Use of imagination, brainstorming, and innovation are among the methods that are available to all states, in order to improve their diplomatic outreach. Small size makes it imperative to use such options in the most effective manner, and in effect practice *smart* diplomacy.

## **Final Thoughts**

One seductive idea put forward by theorists is that small states can pursue “soft power” in a calculated way, to gain visibility and attract others. True, an oil-rich Qatar, with a population of barely

<sup>21</sup> See *The 21st Century Ambassador*, pp.155–6.

<sup>22</sup> In 2005–09 Kenya funded the opening of about six new embassies through such savings. A related problem is that some small countries give diplomatic ranks to all home staff, devaluing the system, and adding to cost.

one million (many them foreign workers), can afford this, presenting itself as a very modern state, home to the pioneering television network *Al Jazeera*, with a glamorous airline and a brand new airport presented as a regional transportation hub; but few small states have such wealth. The development of soft power does not come cheap. The concept is valid, if an affordable and viable way can be found, in essence to differentiate one's country and claim a share in the mind-space of the world community.

Small states can benefit from their strength of numbers, by using the caucus method and improving mutual exchanges among themselves. For instance in a large regional organization, such as the African Union with 53 member states, might it not be profitable for small states to establish their own subgroup? Other forms of cooperative exchanges and experience sharing would also be worthwhile. Finally, potential exists for deeper research in the diplomacy of small states.

### Points for Reflection

1. How is it that realist scholars of international relations have little to say about small states, besides the simplistic assumption that, lacking power, such countries must be dominated by large states? That may happen, of course, but it is not inevitable, as experience shows.
2. Is niche diplomacy really an underutilized option for small states? Is there a practical way in which a small state might better identify *affordable* niches that it might pursue?
3. How might small states in different regions best pursue their shared interests?
4. What is the role of political leaders in the diplomacy of small states? Is that the key differentiator for those that are successful?

# 4 Public Diplomacy and the Country Brand

## Chapter Overview

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In our global information village much communication takes place through stereotypes and sound bites. Globalization suggests to us *superficially* that the foreign has become familiar. The country is a “brand,” seen by people overseas through shorthand that colors both its products—be it tourism or business activities—and its politics. Images are powerful, forcing countries to improve the way they are perceived, and re-brand themselves, for both tangible and intangible benefits. Managing this brand concerns foreign ministries, the functional ministries, and a number of public institutions in much the same way as international companies. In this context image carries several meanings:

First, it involves the country's reputation. In the midst of a 1994 fisheries dispute with Spain Canada decided to shift emphasis from its legalistic case to the court of public opinion; standing on a barge on East River in New York, with the UN Headquarters building in the background, the Fisheries Minister displayed the illegal nets seized from a Spanish fishing vessel, producing graphic images that "ambushed" and embarrassed Spain, and pushed it towards a settlement.<sup>1</sup> Small states such as Mauritius pursue niche diplomacy to enhance international reputation.<sup>2</sup>

Second, image governs the inflow of tourism, a major industry in many countries. Countries vie to coin memorable, evocative tourism slogans, and exert their utmost to overcome negative publicity.<sup>3</sup> When dealing with disaster, image management becomes a key concern; for instance, the Maldives deliberately downplayed the damage caused by the December 2004 Asian Tsunami, on the calculation that this might preclude it from getting some relief aid, but this was less important than ensuring that tourism rebounded rapidly, without any negative images of the damage caused to its many island resorts. That worked well.

Third, it influences external economic relations, including trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow; of course, business enterprises engage with states they dislike, but they prefer to do business in countries with a good reputation—both out of civic duty, and to avoid shareholder and media pressure.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daryl Copeland, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, (2009), pp. 148–9. In a parallel move, the Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom was photographed, surrounded by Cornish fishermen holding Canadian flags, in a public display of solidarity. This was a policy of "strategic use of the media" as Copeland describes it.

<sup>2</sup> Mauritius (which also has no standing army or air force, but it does have a coast guard) plays a leading role in mobilizing small island developing states, via the organization SIDS.

<sup>3</sup> Malaysia has gained much traction with the euphonic "Malaysia, Truly Asia"; in like fashion, "Fiji Me" is the catchy slogan that this Pacific island state has chosen for itself. Each country strives to carve a niche in public memory.

<sup>4</sup> Activist NGOs such as PETA ("People for Ethical Treatment of Animals")

Fourth, image is made up of myriad actions, ranging from how visitors are treated when they apply for visas and at airport entry points, to the reputation of home brands and products, which rubs off on countries as well. Sporting figures become international icons, and hosting the Olympics or the football world cup involves national pride, affecting the reputation of governments at home and abroad.

Finally, any deviation between a country's self-image and the actual image becomes a source of embarrassment, to the point of affecting that government's political standing at home. Country image is a concern for all countries, because a good image is also sound politics.

Image is composed of and intertwined with many different elements—most of which come under the rubric of “soft” diplomacy. While the components of public diplomacy (PD) are not new, what is novel is the realization that these elements form a holistic entity. That prompts some countries to effort at directing all these activities in an integral fashion, to show one's country at its best and to influence foreign publics, to advance one's external interests. Image is the idiom through which much of the public diplomacy takes place. Several nation brand indexes exist (see below); this is a lucrative business.

## **Definition**

How do we define PD? Experts are divided on its precise content. A suggested definition:

Activities through which governments, working with non-state agencies, reach out to publics and nonofficial actors abroad, covering inter alia information, culture, education, and the country image. PD also includes the activities of the

mobilize strong public pressure, in the shape of media campaigns and street-level demonstrations against retailers that import products from overseas partners that use child labor or ignore other social standards.



government directed at home publics, concerning foreign affairs and the image of its diplomatic network.

Some hold that PD is just a new word for propaganda. Some PD activities are propaganda, but that leaves out of reckoning promotion of the country's culture, education, and external image. Others maintain that domestic activities should be called public relations or domestic outreach, since diplomacy is not practiced at home.<sup>5</sup>

Other approaches:

- Exclude home activities; thus PD will be: "efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage".<sup>6</sup> Protagonists of this viewpoint call home activities "public relations" (PR); but since the modes of PD and PR are similar, and often tie in with one another, it is convenient to use one name for both. This is the practice in Canada, China, India, and several other countries.
- Joseph S Nye originated the "soft power" thesis.<sup>7</sup> Jozef Batora, using Nye's approach, calls PD "the development and maintenance of a country's soft power of persuasion and attraction."<sup>8</sup> But there is more to PD than soft power.

<sup>5</sup> Professor G. R. Berridge equates PD with propaganda; see G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, 2nd edition (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2004). Foreign ministries, in contrast, seem to have few qualms over the definition of PD. Most of them include domestic outreach within the ambit of PD, with the exception of the United States which is forbidden by law from deploying public diplomacy funds in activities whose beneficiaries are US citizens—even to the extent of preventing US citizens from using libraries run abroad by the US Information Agency.

<sup>6</sup> J. B. Manheim, *Strategic public diplomacy: The evolution of influence*, (Oxford University Press, New York 1990).

<sup>7</sup> "Soft power" is the power to attract and persuade. Nye developed this concept in the 1980s. See: *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Jozef Batora, 'Public Diplomacy Between Home and Abroad: Norway and Canada' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol I, No. 1, p. 54.

- Some include in PD virtually all forms of diplomacy other than political, economic, and consular. “All diplomacy is public diplomacy,” says Shaun Riordan. A problem with the Batora and the Riordan approaches: the ambit of PD becomes too wide; virtually all forms of outreach and relationship building are seen by them as PD. Even if we understand PD in this catchall way, it is preferable to deal with each of its components and activities separately, be it cultural or education diplomacy, or media relations.

If we look to the *practice* of governments, we find that they typically treat PD as covering cultural, media, education, tourism, and related activities, plus outreach to foreign and home publics.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, each is handled as a key activity in its own right, even while falling under the PD rubric.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Weight of the Publics**

How much does public opinion sway governments? Democratic government is predicated on popular consent, but although governments may use “focus groups” to measure the impact of policy measures and conduct their own polls (whose results are often not published) they are not run on the basis of such public opinion polls. Yet the mantra of popular support is one that is chanted by all governments, whether they are democracies in the fullest sense or are authoritarian. *The Economist* wrote of China: “. . . even a one party state is constrained by public opinion, including internet nationalism.”<sup>11</sup>

Leaders have always reached out to publics and sought their support on domestic and foreign issues. During World War II President Franklin Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” and Winston

<sup>9</sup> The United States is an exception in that its official public diplomacy does not address home publics, as its laws preclude this.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, these activities fall under the remit of the “public diplomacy boards” of the French and UK foreign ministries.

<sup>11</sup> “Banyan” column, *The Economist*, April 17, 2010.

Churchill's orations mobilized domestic war effort and resonated globally; that was public diplomacy of the highest order. Today's technology makes it easier than ever to communicate with mass audiences, but information overload makes it harder to win their attention and produce the desired impact, with rare exceptions. Foreign ministries are experimenting with the use of social networks, using Web 2.0, to improve their outreach.<sup>12</sup>

Public diplomacy includes accountability to citizens, implemented in different ways.

- Authoritarian states such as China and Cuba deem it important to communicate to their publics, telling their story on external issues. This is part of their strategy to sustain authoritarian rule. For them, domestic PD is a top priority, as China shows.
- Developing countries are learning the game, though practices vary widely. For instance, post-apartheid South Africa is a savvy communicator, having used techniques like scenario development since 1994 in its "truth and reconciliation" process, and for building domestic consensus. India and Pakistan have used PD methods to get publics in the other country indirectly involved in easing tensions and building mutual confidence.
- In the West, where Canada, the US, and the UK pioneered the concepts, the level of PD outreach varies; France and Germany are relative laggards, though each has long practiced cultural diplomacy as its vehicle for image projection.
- In most countries sectoral interests, advocacy groups, and elements of their "foreign affairs communities" exert influence on foreign policy. NGOs sometimes play a decisive role—for example, the diverse groups that have energized aid to Africa, on humanitarian grounds.

<sup>12</sup> 'Web 2.0' refers to the interactive forms of the internet, especially personal blogs, the social media, such as Twitter, FaceBook, and the other websites that are used for extensive interaction among users, including wide distribution of user-generated content.

It was the private group International Campaign to Ban Landmines that lobbied reluctant home governments to negotiate the Mine Ban Treaty of 1997. In 2005, G-8 accepted the crisis in Africa as a core issue again largely the result of efforts by a broad coalition of advocacy and development-oriented NGOs and public figures like the musician Bono. The world over, civil society organizations exert more influence than ever before; however, acting in defiance of one's own government in a democracy is seldom effective, as antiwar groups opposed to the Iraq campaign showed in 2002–03.

The influence of publics varies from country to country among democracies. France is one country where international NGOs have faced an apathetic public. Yet it is home to *Médecins sans Frontières*, one of the powerful humanitarian NGOs that works in some of the most hazardous locations in conflict-torn and disaster-struck countries. At the UN, a coalition of NGOs hold monthly meetings with members of the Security Council, to give them ground-level information on humanitarian crisis situations around the world, often data that is not immediately available even to the powerful states; this is especially appreciated by the 10 elected members of the Council (the “E-10”) and has improved public awareness of the working of the Council.<sup>13</sup>

## Examples

Consider some country examples as PD variations.

- The **Canadian** method has involved domestic communication, with innovative outreach at local levels, and an effort to carve a distinct identity—both of which have attracted wide attention as models for middle-states. This is an innovative and a decentralized model, which others have tried to emulate.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> .See article by James Paul, ‘NGO’s and the Security Council’: [www.global-policy.org/security-council/ngo-working-group-on-the-security-council/40406.html#meeting](http://www.global-policy.org/security-council/ngo-working-group-on-the-security-council/40406.html#meeting) [accessed on 25 November 2010.]

<sup>14</sup> See Ron Garson, ‘Canada’s Foreign Ministry: Online and Interactive’,

- The **British** take a pragmatic approach. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) chairs a periodic meeting with all the relevant agencies, including the autonomous ones like the BBC, the British Council, VisitBritain (the Tourism Agency), besides the relevant government departments. Voluntarily, they work together for a unified, coherent message. The French use a similar mechanism. This is a public-private partnership model. Many Western MFAs now interchange staff with major NGOs, in modest numbers.
- The **Chinese** have used PD as an outlet for public grievances, via internet websites and vigorous communication with those interested in foreign affairs issues; in 2004 the Foreign Ministry created a PD Department. Publics have been used for calibrated pressure on issues (e.g. Japan's war guilt). Externally, China has long practiced astute PD—witness its management of China scholars, controlling their access to source material, in effect encouraging them to apply self-censorship.<sup>15</sup>
- In **India**, at the end of 2003, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition government launched its “Shining India” campaign, seeking domestic political mileage from its undoubted success in restoring the country's economic growth momentum during its five-year rule, on the eve of the May 2004 elections. The effort backfired; given a half-full-half-empty situation in India's socioeconomy, the opposition made capital of the “un-shining” elements, including poverty and hunger, and this surely played a role in the BJP's defeat.

*Foreign Ministries: Managing Diplomatic Networks and Optimizing Value*, (Diplo-Foundation, Malta and Geneva, 2007), pp. 212–24. Also see: [www.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/discussions/index.aspx](http://www.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/discussions/index.aspx) [accessed on 24 August 2009.]

<sup>15</sup> This is a little discussed but real issue in China scholarship. In the past, control was exercised directly, through permitting access only to “approved” scholars, but since the 1980s, China has opened up very significantly, and now Chinese universities implement very large external exchange programs. The indirect control applied now is through treating some favored scholars as “old friends,” and dispensing privileged access to them; while this is never explicit, such access is predicated on not voicing criticism on issues sensitive to China.

- An increasing number of countries in **Africa, the Caribbean, East Europe**, and elsewhere are starting to work with think tanks, academia, and civil society on external issues, to improve their external footprint, and to win home support. They are on the PD learning curve. What they need to do more actively is to nurture institutions and build domestic nonofficial communities, which can take part in international exchanges.

Education diplomacy is of real long-term importance. Attracting foreign students to study in the home country is a powerful PD method (and a source of huge earnings; in 2009 the earnings from education for foreign students was estimated at \$18.5 billion for the US and \$11 billion for Australia). British universities offer a tough, one-year masters' degree, which principally attracts foreign students and is a cash cow for a financially strapped education system.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, culture and business promotion have an even more important PD dimension.

The key to good public diplomacy perhaps is not to over-organize, or to fall into the trap of advertising marketers who will always oversell its virtues. It makes sense to treat varied soft diplomacy activities in an integral, focused fashion, ensuring consistency in the message projected. One must not expect PD to solve all problems; turning a country image around is a long haul. Some believe outsourcing PD actions is better than doing it on one's own, though that also carries the danger of throwing money at problems; a better approach is to use a national mechanism (including non-state actors), even if one has hired foreign expertise.

## **The US Experience: Limits of Public Diplomacy**

After 9/11, the **United States** has invested vast effort at external PD. In 2001–03 almost a score of administration, congressional,

<sup>16</sup> This one-year MA runs counter to the EU agreement on standardization of tertiary education, but is not likely to be altered in the near future.

and public panels presented their reports on what the United States ought to do. New organizational structures were created and billions of dollars were spent. A PD coordinator was placed in the White House, and new TV and radio channels vied for the attention of target audiences abroad. Arab and Islamic states were the prime target, with initiatives such as the "Sawa" and the "Hurra" TV networks. But the results have not matched expectations, in terms of winning over audiences to the US viewpoint. Clearly, PD is neither a quick fix nor a substitute for policy change.

Some concepts are sophisticated. One US diplomat explained that when they encounter critics in the Arab world, they try to show them how their ideas match those of Americans who have similar dissenting views about US policy: "This gets them to hate the policy and not the country."<sup>17</sup>

US PD has failed on one important count. Communication is a two-way process. If the United States wants to gain sympathy, it must also listen to its critics and consider policy changes of its own. Without this, the entire effort becomes one-sided propaganda. This was especially true of the George W. Bush administration (2000–08). High technology and large resources even became counterproductive. Under the Obama administration PD has been revamped; Web 2.0 is used extensively, and this hinges on interactive communication.

In its own way the *Al Jazeera* network run out of Qatar has something to teach. *Al Jazeera*, started in 1997, operating initially out of a small broadcasting base that President Mubarak of Egypt described as a "matchbox," has taken the Arab world by storm; it became a must-see network, offering something hitherto unknown in the Arab world, dominated by TV monopolies, that is, unbiased news, equally critical of all. Between 2001 and 2004, the US administration unsuccessfully applied pressure on Qatar to try to persuade it to tone down *Al Jazeera's* criticism. The irony in seeking such censorship is obvious; it helped the network to gain greater prominence.

<sup>17</sup> This comment was made at an international conference attended by the author in 2005.

### Another perspective on PD

In an important essay, Prof. Alan Henrikson offers a fresh view of PD (*What Can Public Diplomacy Achieve?* Discussion Papers in Diplomacy No.104, Clingendael, September 2006). While PD is rarely a decisive factor in foreign policy, it is an accessory device whose value has risen owing to transformation in ICT. Henrikson identifies five action areas for PD. **Consolidation** is the most important, that is, reaching out to domestic and foreign constituencies. It also involves outreach to other like-minded partners engaged in parallel activities, to the “core communities,” bilaterally and multilaterally. **Containment** is a passive, defensive, and even preemptive strategy, to prevent the spread of the influence of another country. For instance, at a meeting in Melbourne in mid-2006 with counterparts from Australia and Japan, the US secretary of state talked of ensuring that the rise of China will be a positive force for the international community. **Penetration** involves reaching out to target audiences, with radio programs, cultural exchanges, and even business relationships. It is slow in result, and needs subtlety.

In the post-CW world, we see a shift from ideological to cultural engagement. An example is the current US effort to reach out to nascent opinion in Iran, to engage dissidents, as well as women’s groups and labor. **Enlargement** involves expanding the front along which engagement takes place. Based on a large organizing vision, it involves for the United States promoting its concepts of democracy and open markets. **Transformation** is the call that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice issued in January 2006, in some ways the most ambitious of US objectives, to take democracy and market concepts to the world; she declared: “Public diplomacy is an

(Continued)



important part of every diplomat's job description."<sup>18</sup> Further, "American Presence Posts" mean that US diplomats would move out of embassies and live among the people. The "Virtual Presence Posts" involve young diplomats engaging publics through the internet.

Seen another way, such PD becomes a form of "value promotion" on the basis of the conviction that one's own values are a universal good. Such ethnocentrism carries the seeds of its own failure in a world marked by enormous diversity. It also flies in the face of the need to achieve real intercultural understanding and communication, which is the antithesis of promotion of universal values, however logical and attractive they may seem to the proponents of these values.

## News Management

Massaging the public message is as old as politics. Much as the media abhor being "managed," all governments try to influence publics via the media, placing positive spin on their own actions and eroding the stance taken by adversaries, as during key negotiations.

The existence of global information networks producing instant transmission of news to world audiences makes it hard to manage news. Some democratic governments understand that the relationship between the official establishment and the media is necessarily adversarial.

- It becomes virtually impossible to customize news for one audience, since it spills over to other audiences. Yet politicians address domestic audiences with themes that will resonate

<sup>18</sup> "Transformational diplomacy" advocated by Secretary of State Rice expressed a great power mindset, that it must change the behavior of other states, in a broad swathe. Of course, it does not ask its targets if they seek transformation.

with them, as during elections; foreign audiences are expected to treat such rhetoric with indulgence.

- Investigative journalism, and competition for eyeballs, ensures that the media are alert and scrutinize official statements. However uncomfortable this may be for officials, openness and transparency are essential features not only of a democracy, but also of a good system of foreign affairs governance.
- Astute spokesmen and background briefers slant news, to spin the story. Control over language and the use of the “right” key phrases shapes the immediate perception (e.g. the restrained, nonemotive words with which an Israeli attack that results in Palestinian fatalities is typically reported by CNN). But over the medium-term, news management does not work, for the same reason that publics cannot be manipulated all the time.
- Often the best news management comes from the heads of government; they have a range of options for communicating their standpoint. Leaders who have media skills gain an advantage.
- A consequence of the rising importance of domestic publics is that foreign ministry spokesmen now focus mainly on the home reactions to foreign affairs issues, to the point of reduced attention to projecting home policy to the foreign media. This is an inversion of the past role of foreign ministries. By the same token, even on overseas visits, leaders are much more interested in what the home media say than on reaching out to foreign publics via the media in the countries visited. Ideally, the one should balance the other, and foreign ministries have their work cut out in ensuring that the latter are treated as an equal priority.<sup>19</sup>
- The diaspora is often a key multiplier, in terms of spreading messages about the country of origin and helping in image projection. An increasing number of countries now have an explicit diaspora outreach policy.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This comment is based on personal observations, reinforced by conversations with serving foreign ministry officials.

<sup>20</sup> Please see Chapter 5.

The job of the “official spokesman” of the government has become demanding, calling for top professional skills. Governments with large external agendas that are lax in news diplomacy, or allow multiple spokesmen, pay a price. The French and the Japanese MFAs blend real and virtual press briefings to reach out to truly global media opinion makers. Small state foreign ministries manage without regular official spokesmen, but they are not exempt from requiring training in communication skills.

For example, during the 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft, first to Pakistan and then to Kandhar, Afghanistan, different ministers and officials briefed the press several times a day, as crowds of newsmen, family members, and bystanders mobbed the emergency cabinet crisis meetings, held several times a day. The human drama took precedence, at the cost of proper public communication. The crisis ended with the Indian minister of external affairs flying to Kandhar to bring back the hijacked passengers; the terrorists released to the hijackers traveled on the same plane, including some notorious elements. The hijackers won the media battle and forced the government's hand.<sup>21</sup>

## **The Country as Brand**

In the past decade, many countries have used methods borrowed from the corporate advertising world to change the way foreign publics see them. The methods include image building and re-branding. Examples:

- In 1997–98 the United Kingdom tried to enhance its tourism appeal under the rubric “Cool Britannia”—a country that was not staid but appealed to the youth and to the trendy. Many regard that campaign as successful. Spain made a similar effort.
- In 2003 Germany tried to re-brand itself, led by private advertising agencies, supported by the government; it adopted the

<sup>21</sup> This issue continues to resonate in Indian politics. The entire episode was handled in a manner that yields many negative lessons.

slogan “Land of Ideas.” In 2004, after the falling out with the United States over the Iraq War, France tried to refashion its appeal to US corporate decision-makers, to attract investments.

- In 2004 Poland hired the noted British brand manager Wally Olins, to improve its image. Pakistan has attempted a similar exercise in 2005 to project a “softer” political image, in the face of criticism over its connections with terrorism.
- In 2008 a Kenya Brand Board was established as an official agency. It is to work with private agencies, including the tourism industry and the wildlife authorities—the latter so important in Kenya’s tourism USP<sup>22</sup>—but they are not working as a public-private partnership, as yet.
- Columbia is trying to rebrand itself, after its recent political and economic success, and attempting to put its violent past behind it; its tourism slogan affirms: “The only risk is wanting to stay.”

How effective is such branding effort? First, a simple message works, for example, Malaysia’s tourism slogan “Truly Asia” or Kerala’s tongue-in-cheek “God’s own country.” Second, complex messages get out of control or do not produce the desired impact, like the German effort, as noted above. Third, public-private partnerships work best, since the country brand is a composite of multiple actions, many beyond governmental control.

### **Advice from a brand guru**

Simon Anholt, an acknowledged expert on country branding and originator of the Nation Brand Index (NBI), sums up his advice in a commonsense manner.<sup>23</sup> Comparing a country to

*(Continued)*

<sup>22</sup> “Unique Selling Proposition,” meaning its special characteristic or selling point.

<sup>23</sup> Interview given by Simon Anholt, *The Mint*, New Delhi, September 5, 2009.

a brand is a metaphor, no more. It relates to reputation, which guides others and “makes a difference to the success of its business, trade, political relations and to its people. 90% of a country’s reputation is beyond the control of the country, as perceptions have been created over generations, but the remaining 10% is under a government’s control. It is essential to measure impact of actions taken to improve one’s reputation, which is what NBI attempts. Much of the perception is shaped by the way a country’s people deal with others.”

### **An Alternative Approach**

China has made good use of image management, some of it helped by foreign experts, first to win the 2008 Olympics for Beijing, and, second, for re-positioning the city of Shanghai as a “world city”, besides hosting the World Expo there in 2010.

An alternative approach to image activities could include:

1. Building clear, logical performance targets, be it for tourism promotion, investment mobilization, or for pushing exports.
2. Allocating funds for the pre- and post-campaign survey, handled by an outside agency, to gauge impact.
3. From conception to final assessment, the entire exercise should have participation plus financial contribution from different stakeholders. External image is not the monopoly of the state, much less of the foreign ministry.
4. Political leaders will almost always approach branding in a different way, looking to gain in domestic politics. It is possible to build convergence between such domestic and external goals, but as the “Shining India” campaign showed, blending in domestic politics can easily backfire and may make the effort a political football.
5. The final outcome will depend on many variables, some outside the control of the brand builders. But a judgment is

always possible on the impact of that effort, even if scientific measurement is impossible.

Countries have no choice but to try and manage their image. Globalization, especially economic interdependence, makes this imperative. For instance, credit rating agencies make their assessment on the lending risk for countries based on objective economic and other data as well as subjective interpretation of future trends. That in turn not only determines the cost of foreign commercial borrowing for companies, but also affects the flow of foreign investments, especially portfolio funds. Such factors are even stronger with those who make “risk analysis” for companies and banks, to judge the business environment in other states. Image affects these judgments, which in turn determines the flow of portfolio and other investments, plus the cost of borrowing.

### **Product and company brands**

Global product brands, and the reputation of the companies that make them, contribute much to the country’s image. France is known by its famous fashion brands, in the same way as its quality products define Japan.<sup>24</sup>

A *Newsweek* article (July 22, 2009) lamented that while 36 Chinese companies featured in a list of “global challengers that had produced technologies that had disrupted their industries” prepared by a major consulting firm, even the biggest among them, such as Huawei, were unknown to most consumers; Chinese companies had not approached

*(Continued)*

<sup>24</sup> This was brought home powerfully in 1994, during a visit to the Volkswagen plant at Wolfsburg with a group of Asia Pacific envoys; without any irony the official accompanying us said that a particular section of the vast plant was “comparable to Japanese standard in its automation”. And yet, in the 1960s, when Japanese automobiles first began to appear in Asia, the term “Japanese quality” signified a low grade product.

branding “as an art they must master.”<sup>25</sup> India is among the countries that prioritize efforts to create their own global brands, backed by homegrown MNCs that the world recognizes, such as Tata and Infosys.

## Final Thoughts

Developing a country's soft power does not come cheap. While Canada and Norway have done very well with their soft power (Batora's examples), they are both rich countries, and not all that small either. We do not find good examples of small developing states that have developed soft power along such lines. What a developing country may try is to keep the country image issue in focus while doing essential tourism advertising and FDI mobilization. But it may not find it cost-effective to undertake a large, expensive PD campaign.

In 1951 the director of the US Information Service said: “90% of the impression that the US makes abroad depends on our policies, and ten percent on how we explain it.”<sup>26</sup> Today's spin doctors would surely claim a much higher percentage for their art!

Public diplomacy aimed at foreign publics, when carried out with intense strategic purpose, raises questions of propriety. At what point does a “legitimate” attempt to influence end and become transformed into an insidious attempt to subvert another government/people/culture, whether or not the rubric of “transformation” is applied? Or to put it another way—what are the limits of PD?

- Good advertising needs to be backed by a “value proposition,” something that produces credibility. Images have to be founded on fact.

<sup>25</sup> This is beginning to change in 2010. We now see for the first time Chinese companies engaging in image advertising.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Joseph Frankel, *The Making of Foreign Policy*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1963).

- PD hinges on clear messages and succeeds when these are believable.
- Technology and resources are an asset, but are not enough by themselves.
- Home publics—and foreign publics as well—should be treated with respect. Their intelligence must not be underestimated.
- Mobilize the diaspora as best as feasible. Handling them well, especially with high quality consular services, which then becomes a matter of strategic policy, indirectly encourages them to become information multipliers for the country of origin.
- Advertising professionals may have a vested interest in overstating their capacity to deliver. Small and developing states need to guard against this.
- PD cannot successfully sell a bad policy; nor does it take the place of policy changes, as needed in a given situation.

External PD is not a new activity, but it provides a unified way of looking at activities that are as old as relations between states. It harmonizes actions in different areas, giving them coherence and deeper purpose. At home, it forces foreign ministries to rethink the value of the domestic audience and respect their legitimate interest in foreign affairs. It also becomes a basis for winning their support for the diplomatic network.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. To what extent will nonofficial agencies sign on to an officially directed PD program, without feeling that their autonomy is threatened?
2. Does an excess of PD drain resources from other promotional activities?
3. How can one make sure that brand management works as promised by its public relation professional advocates?



# 5 Diaspora Diplomacy

## Chapter Overview

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One does not encounter much specialist writing on the theme of diaspora diplomacy—even the term may appear novel to some—though the subject receives increasing attention in the media. Here we cover the following:

- The different ways in which diaspora communities are made up.
- Some case studies that indicate the role that these communities play in different countries.
- Their political importance in their countries of adoption and the role they play in the countries of origin.

- Their economic, social, and cultural roles, and how generational transition affects the diaspora capacity, for the origin country.
- Potential risks in using the diaspora as a diplomatic agent and likely trends.

## Issues

The presence of diaspora communities, as people (or the descendants of people) who were originally citizens of the home country, and who now live overseas, was always a factor in the relationship between the countries concerned; this has gained in importance in recent times. Many of the diaspora may have lived in their new countries for some generations; in the second generation, most are full citizens, but for the country of origin they retain special status as objects of attention. Most nations have such overseas diaspora, and an increasing number have devised special processes to deal with them. Many have created special units to handle these contacts. “Thanks to increased international migration during the latter half of the twentieth century, there are now “living links”—relations, friends, former business partners—within virtually every country in the world. The untapped potential in the global diaspora could, with sustained involvement, yield several advantages to policymakers”<sup>1</sup>.

A day may come when an international convention will regulate the interests that originating countries retain in relation to their diaspora and the manner in which these concerns might be given expression. For the present, this is a hazy area, lacking in either norms or established practices. For instance, when Zimbabwe began to take over the large farms owned by white settlers—most of whom had made their homes in that country for some generations and were full citizens—the United Kingdom led the attack against the Mugabe government. Echoes of this issue could arise

<sup>1</sup> Mark Leonard, Leonard, M. (2002). “Diplomacy by Other Means” *Foreign Policy*, 132, pp. 48–56.

in other countries where such non-natives own large tracts of farmland. The ties of blood and kinship underlie that response.<sup>2</sup> In Fiji, when a military coup in 2000, led by ethnic Fijians, overthrew an elected government that was led by the descendant of migrant Indians, it was India that similarly led the condemnation, and mobilized Commonwealth measures against that, though these actions did not materially improve the situation.

For some relatively small countries, the diaspora may be larger than the home population. This is the case with Armenia, Ireland, and Malta, and a number of others. In such cases, the diaspora can become a factor in the domestic politics of the originator countries. This adds to the need for sensitive handling of diaspora affairs. For instance in the long drawn "troubles" in Northern Ireland, it was the support of the ethnic Irish community living in the United States that for long fuelled the internecine conflict, and it was a strong commitment from US leaders that helped to break the log-jam and led to the Good Friday Anglo-Irish Accord of 1997. In situations of such imbalance between the home population and the diaspora, leaders at home are wary of making concessions to the latter that would enable them to reach into domestic affairs.

## **Diaspora Profiles**

We can find several different sources of origin for the diaspora of any country, if we concentrate only on the migration that has taken place in relatively recent times. These are as follows:

- a) Migration from Europe into new lands, that is the Americas and Australasia, was driven by opportunity and economic hardship at home. This dates to about 400 years or less; and in many instances the migrants have lost familial connections with their homelands, or even clear memory of their places of origin. In contrast, in Argentina, the different migrant

<sup>2</sup> Kenya and some states in southern Africa could confront such problems, if they act to reduce the size of such farm holdings.

communities, mainly from Spain, Italy, and England (smaller in number compared with the other two, but influential), have retained their ethnic identities and even rejoice in them. We may also put into this category the migration of colonists, primarily into Africa, and much less so in Asia. After the end of Empires, many of them returned, except in the case of the Dutch and English migrants in South Africa, and much smaller numbers of whites that stayed on in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere.

- b) Similar migration into Southeast Asia from about the seventeenth century onward, by the two major economic powers of the time, China and India. For the great part these migrants have retained familial links. Rather few of the Indian trader migrants stayed on, unlike the Chinese—thus large numbers of Indians from Burma were repatriated to India after the military overthrow of the U Nu government in 1962.
- c) Slavery and labor migration pushed by colonial regimes that sought to develop plantations and build infrastructure was another big factor. Vast numbers of slaves were taken to the United States and to the Caribbean from West Africa, but we do not list them among the diaspora of their original home countries because they have lost almost all but trace memory of their origin. Similarly, the people brought by the Dutch and the French from Madagascar and Senegal into Mauritius have since become the Creole people of that island, retaining almost no past connections; in contrast, the indentured labor that was brought in subsequently by the British from India, commencing 1814, has retained strong cultural and ethnic links.<sup>3</sup> Together with these forced migrants came traders and small businessmen, mainly from Gujarat, into East and southern Africa and the Gulf region.

<sup>3</sup> Such forced migration produces different outcomes, depending on circumstance. Thus the laborers taken from India by the French into Reunion in the eighteenth century have retained little by way of Indian identity, except lingering memories. After 1990, the French have helped them to retrace some of these old connections.

- d) In the nineteenth century, migration in relatively small numbers took place from Asia into the New World, mainly Chinese and Japanese, into California and along the US West Coast. Some farmers from Punjab also migrated to these areas.<sup>4</sup>
- e) A surge of migration occurred from Asia into North America following 1960, when US law was changed to facilitate those who came for advanced studies to stay on in that country. That brought hordes of foreign professionals into the United States. Some migrated into the United Kingdom. Uganda's unlamented former dictator Idi Amin did an unforeseen favor to many "Asians"—Indians and Pakistanis—driving them out in August 1972, bereft of all their assets; they rose out of adversity to become the drivers of new Asian business prosperity in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- f) A major wave of Latin American and Caribbean migration into the United States took place in recent decades, as a consequence of labor shortage in that country and expanding economic opportunities. That demand pull, combined with magnetic attraction for people in poor lands to better their lives, has continued to the present and has taken the shape of a presence of over 14 million "undocumented" aliens in the United States and smaller numbers in Canada.
- g) The post-1973 oil boom in the Gulf and other Arab states has brought in large numbers of skilled workers from across Asia, to the point where these expatriate communities greatly outnumber the home population in most of these countries. This boom has gone through many cycles, but shows no signs of abating; it provides a major source of remittance earnings for many Asian states. Moldova, in East Europe (population 4.3 million), earns one-third of its GDP through the money sent back by its diaspora, which mainly works in Europe. Philippines earns 13.5 percent of its GDP from its diaspora,

<sup>4</sup> During India's independence movement, these migrants launched the "Gad-dar movement," to express their patriotic feelings for the homeland.

even though many of them are grossly underpaid, working mainly as household staff, in Hong Kong and in the Gulf region.

- h) Professional and skilled migration remains a contemporary phenomenon, driven by opportunities that constitute the demand pull, and the supply pool that makes up the push. For instance, in the EU, the expansion to 27 member states has made it possible for Polish plumbers and electricians to go and work in the United Kingdom and Germany. The ending of Australia's "whites only" policy in 1973 led to a similar upsurge in talented people moving in from different Asian countries. Singapore is another country that practices a similar selective policy of bringing in top-end talent.
- i) Some students who go overseas tend to stay on when conditions are propitious. This constitutes a major and continual source of migration. Globalization brings with it wide dispersal of job opportunities; people in most professions are more mobile than the preceding generation, and this too is a source of new diaspora clusters. Taiwan and South Korea are two countries that have been alert in attracting overseas experts for entrepreneurship and technology enhancement at home.<sup>5</sup>

It follows from the above that the diaspora is not remotely a single and unified entity, even in relation to a particular location and source country. At each place, different groups have their characteristics and ways of life; policies have to be designed to take this into account.

## **Case Studies**

**Israel** is the archetype practitioner of diaspora diplomacy, given that under Judaism all those who believe in that faith have an

<sup>5</sup> Programs such as UN's "Tokten" aim to utilize experts to contribute to the home country. See: [www.unv.org/en/what-we-do/countries/viet-nam/doc/tokten-channels-global-expertise.html](http://www.unv.org/en/what-we-do/countries/viet-nam/doc/tokten-channels-global-expertise.html) [accessed on April 30, 2010].

automatic “right of return” to Israel. The global Jewish community mobilizes itself in favor of Israel, with political, material, and moral support. In the United States the Jewish lobby is a strong political force, which also dominates the media and large segments of business as well. This factor conditions the US position on the Arab-Israel issue, which in the eyes of many undermines US credibility in the Islamic world. From the perspective of diaspora diplomacy, Israel uses techniques that are not available to other states, because they cannot mobilize a similar degree of political support; but it sets the norm against which others are measured.

**Germany** is one of the few states that base citizenship on ties of blood, not place of birth (i.e. *jus sanguinis*, as distinct from *jus soli*). This means that the descendants of German communities that migrated to East Europe and Russia centuries ago have an automatic right of return to the “fatherland,” including the Russians of German origin inhabiting the Caucasus mountain regions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and German Unification in 1991, Germany has tried to regulate this return by imposing quotas; sizable movements of people have taken place in this period. Apart from this, Germany, like several of the old European states, has no distinct policy of reaching out to its overseas communities, be it in the United States or in Latin America.

**China** has traditionally had a strong presence in South East Asia through its business community, mainly descendants of southern Chinese migrants; in individual countries they control a sizable section of the commerce and industry. In Singapore, over 70 percent of the population is of Chinese origin, though the government takes care to avoid overidentification with China, even in social or cultural terms. Thailand is unique in that over a space of three centuries and more, the Chinese community has become so integrated with the Thai population that it is hard to discern persons of Chinese origin.<sup>6</sup> This is not the pattern in other SE Asian states. China amended its citizenship law in 1978, to remove the

<sup>6</sup> While serving as prime minister, Thak Sin Shianwart created a minor sensation in 2004 when on a visit to China he visited the graves of his ancestors; that was the first acknowledgment of his Chinese descent.

right of automatic grant of citizenship to its diaspora, responding to the apprehensions of several SE Asian governments over possible divided loyalties of this diaspora. After post-Deng liberalization in China, when many Chinese students went to the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia to study, many tens of thousands stayed there. In recent years, some of them have returned to China, as business entrepreneurs. A new migration of Chinese to Africa and Latin America is currently underway, in the shape of families that go into the interior of these countries, regardless of hardship, to run supermarkets and small business—Africa is estimated to have over a million of these new migrants. This issue is politically sensitive in some places and carries potential for future ethnic tensions.

**Kenya** is a newcomer to diaspora diplomacy and has recently created a section in the foreign ministry, charged with reaching out to its ethnic community, especially in the US and other developed countries (1.8 million Kenyans are estimated to live overseas). As with many other developing states, this policy is based on a desire to mobilize investments from the diaspora, and to use them as a means of accessing technology. Kenyan missions abroad are now charged with developing contacts with these overseas communities.

**India** has developed sophisticated diaspora diplomacy in the past 30 years, and uses the catchall term “Non Resident Indians” (NRIs) to refer to its diaspora, which numbers in excess of 20 million<sup>7</sup>. In 2004, it created a “Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs” to handle diaspora policy, though overseas its diplomatic missions and consulates handle this work. Leaving out historical movements of peoples in South and Southeast Asia, India’s diaspora falls into three clusters: the descendants of indentured labor that were taken to work on agricultural plantations and build rail lines in Africa, the Caribbean, and Fiji; the new generation of semiskilled and skilled workers that have gone to the Gulf region and elsewhere, under the impulse of oil-industry driven economic boom in these countries; and the migrants to developed countries

<sup>7</sup> See, Rana, India’s diaspora diplomacy. *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4(3), pp. 361–72.



of the past four decades, who consist of professionals (many of whom went for advanced study and stayed on in North America and the United Kingdom), who are joined by illegal migrants who were attracted there by economic opportunities. India treats diaspora diplomacy as a major area for developing beneficial relations with the countries concerned and a *raison d'être* for strong linkages with those countries.

**Mexico** is a highly innovative practitioner of diaspora diplomacy. In what is among the world's largest concentrations, over 30 million US residents list their ancestry as Mexican; one wonders whether this figure fully reflects about 6 million undocumented Mexicans that live in the United States, in a penumbra existence, present and mainly working, but "illegal." Some aspects of Mexico's blend of consular-diaspora diplomacy are covered in Chapter 11.

### **Brain Drain**

The outflow of high-grade talent from relatively poor to rich countries is called "brain drain"; it is a kind of subsidy by those that cannot afford to lose such scarce talent to advanced countries, which are able to offer high salaries. Thus doctors and nurses, engineers, and highly skilled professionals leave the very countries that trained them, and need them, but cannot pay the market rates for such mobile talent.

This issue involves morality, as well as rights of individuals. It is also a sad fact that the most talented—some of whom go on to win Nobel prizes—may not have found opportunities at home for the kind of advanced work that matches their capability.<sup>8</sup>

*(Continued)*

<sup>8</sup> I had experience of this in 1988, as consul general at San Francisco, when a professor friend at a major US university alerted us to the possibility that a brilliant scientist studying at the undergraduate level in Bangalore could be lured away to directly work for a doctoral degree in that university (in the

Some countries speak of “compensatory payment” for the education opportunities given to such migrants; but it has never been granted by the beneficiary states, as far as we know. In any event, it does not meet the dilemma posed, though it could serve as a minor deterrent. A better way is to work out more equitable payment at home, and improve working conditions for the scarce talent. In some cases, there are arrangements for harnessing the advanced knowledge gained by such migrants, as we see below. A different approach is to treat such overseas talent as a kind of “brain bank” on which the home country might draw in the future, when economic opportunities improve—this has been the experience of South Korea, Taiwan, India, and others.

## **Political Role**

The role that a diaspora plays in the country of its adoption is a function of the opportunities that are available to migrant communities, and naturally varies from one country to another. In general, in the “old” countries that are dominated by a single dominant ethnic community—even if that community was shaped by historical migration—it is generally harder for migrants to play a significant role in political affairs. We see this in several West European countries. A singular exception is the United Kingdom, where all the political parties field candidates from migrant communities, and up to 15 or 20 members of the House of Commons

United States, no prior qualification, such as a masters, is set for joining a PhD program, if one has real ability). On checking with our Department of Science & Technology, we learnt that our authorities were aware of the extraordinary ability of this individual and had helped him as best as they could; they were relaxed about the “loss”, acknowledging that the opportunities offered to him could not be matched at home.

are descendants of migrants. A similar number are to be found in the House of Lords.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, in North America and in Australasia, descendants of migrants, and even first generation migrants, are politically much more successful. We see this in the United States and in Canada, though a little less so in Australia and New Zealand.

From the perspective of the country of origin, what counts even more than the number of its diaspora that find their way into the legislature and high appointments in the administration is the political clout that these groups are able to build for themselves, and the extent to which they are able to speak up on issues that are vital to the country of origin. We see this best in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Thus, for the resident missions concerned, it becomes important to keep in constant contact with the leaders of the diaspora communities and to sensitize them on issues of concern to the home country. In practice, this works effectively in a win-win framework, and not as a partisan advantage only for one country. For example, after the nuclear tests conducted by India—and Pakistan—in May 1998, the United States put into force the sanctions it was required to impose under its domestic legislation. India then reached out to congressional decision makers, and to other influential figures, in part relying on its diaspora network, to invite them to visit India, meet its leaders, and take back with them a concern for the wider dimension of the relationship. This prompted an intensive official dialogue, the Jaswant Singh–Strobe Talbott exchanges of 2000–01, and eventually led, in 2007, to the India-US agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation. The 2.2 million strong Indian diaspora (which has grown to around 3 million in 2010) provided effective backing for this, justified in terms of actions that were of benefit to the deeper bilateral relationship.

Continuing with the Indian example, in the United Kingdom, diaspora leaders have participated in, and led, the bilateral process

<sup>9</sup> In the United Kingdom, the rise in the last decade or so of its “National Party,” which calls for the repatriation of ethnic minority citizens to their home countries and “restoration” of some kind of a pure home community, shows the complex forces at work even in seemingly liberal societies.

as members of the Indo-British Forum, an eminent person group established by the two governments that has provided impetus in the growth and diversification of relations. In Canada, the diaspora has played a similar role in bringing home to the federal government and the provincial administrations the potential political and economic benefit of a stronger bilateral relationship. But there is also a downside; some members of the Indian diaspora in Canada have been very critical of Indian policy in relation to Punjab.

A diaspora group is able to play a direct and open role in bilateral relations when it reaches critical mass. This is also contingent on the internal clout that the group has been able to carve for itself and, of course, an enabling environment in the country of adoption. But even when optimal conditions do not exist, a successful diaspora community always has the potential to act in favor of the home country, on a win-win basis.

Diasporas are also often involved in political relations in a completely different manner, as supporters of different political parties at home. This engages them to play a partisan role in home politics, and, much as a professional diplomat may abhor this, such activity is part of the political process, provided this is permissible in the ethos of the diaspora country. If this takes the shape of different segments of the diaspora supporting home politicians of their choice, that is one level, but if it directly involves them in fund-raising activity on their behalf or more active politics, it has the effect of splintering the diaspora. That in turn limits this group's capacity to play the kind of positive role, in its own environment, as outlined in earlier sections.

### **Economic, Social, and Cultural Role**

Compared with political influence, an economic role is easier for the diaspora, provided it has the numbers and economic success to back it. This operates in several ways. First, businessmen among the diaspora are relatively easy to persuade to invest in, and do business with, the home country, provided the environment in the home country is sufficiently conducive to business. One cannot expect

them to come in if the business opportunities are absent or are not viable. Second, for reasons of familial connections and residual affection for the country of origin, one may expect them to invest in bonds and other financial instruments, again provided this is profitable. Third, diaspora businessmen can be entry points for exports from the home country, and as partners for home-based entrepreneurs, on the basis of viable business propositions. Fourth, if business opportunities in the home country open up in a dynamic manner, the diaspora can become an agent of change, through entrepreneurship, and by bringing to the home country needed technology. Finally, some in the diaspora will want to set up aid projects in their original home areas; this is part of their re-bonding with the country of origin, and the home country should facilitate this.

The diaspora responds to economic opportunity, though some caveats must be made. If the home country has implemented a program of economic liberalization after an era of state controls, it takes a little time to win their confidence; initially, the memory of past aberration dominates. Further, much depends also on the nature of concessions offered to the diaspora, which frequently bargains for the best possible deal. If the concessions are too generous, this puts off domestic investors and creates a hiatus in relations between them and the diaspora, which does not work to the advantage of either.<sup>10</sup> In some ways, the diaspora acts as a critical and slightly distant member of the family, wanting what is good for the home country, but not always well informed, and often politically sensitive to how their advice is received by policy makers.

In the culture arena, the diaspora are natural ambassadors of the country of origin, and can and do play a special role in the development of its soft power in the target country. Again, this is borne out by practical examples. For instance in relation to the Indian and the Chinese cinema, the large diaspora of each, spread virtually throughout the world, acts as a captive audience, which gives the film-makers of each country the platform to first reach them and then a global audience for their films. In like fashion the

<sup>10</sup> This has been the Indian experience. Some African states have seen similar hesitation from their diaspora.

diaspora helps in building up a following for the music and dance of the home country. They also provide a support base for the paintings and other art forms from the home country. For the home country, it makes sense to factor in the diaspora in the cultural offerings it makes to countries where they are to be found in sufficient concentration. The same applies to satellite TV channels from the home country.

The diaspora can be encouraged to support education sector contacts. In a number of instances, they have supported studies in relation to the home country, funding professorships and centers of study, at important universities in their countries of adoption. Thus, overseas communities and wealthy individuals that retain such transborder connections have funded professorships at Oxbridge and at major US universities. In similar fashion, they also fund education projects in the home institutions that shaped them in their salad years.

Another kind of connection that the diaspora brings is in the area of knowledge, via exchanges of personnel in areas of science, medicine, and professional fields, including business management. Thus Kenya invites leading professors of Kenyan origin to its biennial conferences of ambassadors, to speak on new trends in public administration. Malaysia and many others invite their leading overseas scientists to symposia and to spend some time at their research institutes at home, again to profit from their experience. In 1977, the United Nations Development Programme developed a scheme for overseas experts to share knowledge with their home country, called *TOKTEN*—"transfer of knowledge through expatriate nationals"—this has been an enormous success across Africa, Asia, and elsewhere.

Young members of the diaspora connect with their home country in other ways, volunteering their time to work on social, educational, and other projects. Wealthy members of the diaspora contribute to development projects in the regions and places from which their ancestors traveled abroad. All these individual actions serve to anchor the diaspora closer to the home country.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> One instance is a project run in Gujarat, India, by a US-returned couple, for

## Generational Change

Often only a small section of the first generation of migrants opt to cling to the home country nationality, sometimes out of sentiment.<sup>12</sup> The second generation readily opts for the convenience of the new home nationality. This is natural.

Dual citizenship is a frequent demand voiced by the diaspora, but many developing countries, with a relatively rigid conception of statehood and obligations of citizens in their constitutions, are unable to accommodate this. Halfway measures are offered sometimes, such as India's "Person of Indian Origin" card that gives some facilities, but not voting or full property ownership rights.<sup>13</sup> Governments have to balance their diaspora policy with obligations to home citizens.

Invariably, it is the first generation of migrants that retain the closest links with the country of origin, to the point that many of them in their old age opt to return. We have seen this in the countries of Europe, especially in Italy, and a similar phenomenon occurs elsewhere. It makes sense for the country of origin to facilitate such contact, by easing rules concerning visas and ownership of property, regardless of the passports held by the diaspora.

## Diplomatic Hazard

At different times in the United States in the 1990s, Chinese and Indian diplomats were named in press reports as having engaged

a kind of peace corps volunteers, aimed at young people among the diaspora. See [www.indicorps.org/](http://www.indicorps.org/) [accessed on 19 June 2010]

<sup>12</sup> In the case of migrants to Western countries this involves considerable inconvenience, as their citizens enjoy visa-free travel to many more countries than those holding passports of developing countries. Other inconveniences also attach to those who do not take up citizenship of their adopted home states.

<sup>13</sup> Just to confuse matters, in the past decade, India has offered an "Overseas Citizen of India" card, with facilities that are different from the "Person of Indian Origin" card. The result is avoidable confusion and devaluation of the word "citizenship."

in improper activities connected with US election campaigns through advice and funding of their ethnic communities. While foreign funding is obviously illegal, when in the course of “ethnic” or “diaspora” diplomacy, countries reach out to their former compatriots for political (or economic or cultural) mobilization, such action can come close to the borderline of diplomatic propriety. On the reverse side, countries such as Nigeria have occasionally felt that some of their diaspora attempt to interfere with home politics, and that too becomes a diplomatic issue.

Political outreach to the diaspora by embassies is a delicate task and works best when it is performed as supply of information, and other efforts to make these groups aware of home issues, and to solicit their support in terms that are transparent, and focused on benefit to both the countries in the bilateral equation. Diplomats handling this work need training and sensitivity awareness. The golden rule is to act with transparency and responsibility, keeping in view the interests of both states.

Diaspora diplomacy also poses another kind of hazard. Sometimes the relative comfort of, and familiarity in, dealing with the diaspora tempts embassies into treating them as the primary focus of embassy activity, at the cost of neglecting the mainstream business, academic, or cultural actors in the country of assignment. This is obviously self-defeating. At individual levels, and as embassy teams, diplomats need to guard against such temptation, in their outreach activities, particularly in activities such as representational entertainment (Chapter 18).

## **Trends in Diaspora Diplomacy**

To sum up, diaspora diplomacy will be increasingly important in the years ahead. It may develop in the following manner:

- Greater inclusiveness in dealing with these groups, in listening to their concerns and suggestions about what the home country might do for them, even if all their ideas cannot be put into practice.



- Framing policies on long-term calculations, using the diaspora as a positive element in bilateral relations, in an open and two-way mode.
- Finding innovative ways to involve the diaspora in different fields of activity important to the home country, such as science and technology or other professional fields.
- Working to build connections with successive diaspora generations, as a permanent factor for the benefit of the home country.
- Sensitizing diplomats to the best ways of dealing with diaspora groups, on the basis of their characteristics. They must also guard against overengagement with the diaspora.

Western countries, which have been the recipients of migration from developing countries, have for the great part not developed an explicit diaspora policy. But they are beginning to use the diaspora from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in new ways. Companies send some of them to run their subsidiaries in their countries of origin, while foreign ministries send them to work in their embassies in some of these states and even as envoys.<sup>14</sup> Such cross-exchanges will surely multiply in the future.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. For most countries it is their diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent in Australia and Canada, that gets the most attention; in practice, diaspora distribution is usually much more widespread and these scattered elements also merit attention.

<sup>14</sup> The Australian envoy in New Delhi, from 2009 onward, has been a professional diplomat of Indian origin. At a time when attacks on Indian students in Australia have become a major issue, he has taken a high profile in speaking out on his country's nondiscriminatory policy and appears to have found better receptivity than a typical white Australian might have encountered. Western embassies are now populated at different levels with such "assignment country-grown" diplomats.

2. When a bilateral crisis erupts, diaspora leaders face a dilemma over their “loyalty,” but for the great part such situations are rare.
3. Countries of origin do not relish overt participation in their home politics by the diaspora, because many at home resent this duality of status, which also prevents many countries from giving them dual citizenship.



# Part II

## **Institutions and Processes**



# 6 Foreign Ministries: Change and Reform

## Chapter Overview

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In the past two decades, most ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) have carried out extensive adaptation and reform, reacting to the paradigm shift in international affairs at the end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union, and what we have called the globalized diplomacy. Another driver: changing views on what should be delivered to the public. Typically the reforms cover the following:

- A reorganization of the territorial and functional units at headquarters, to deal with the new states (e.g. those in former Yugoslavia, central Asia), and new themes (human rights, climate change, public diplomacy, and outreach to non-state actors).

- Staff cuts as part of government downsizing, particularly in rich countries. In contrast, some developing and transition states have expanded MFA budgets to deal with new external opportunities.
- Embassies and consulates have been closed, even while new ones have opened. This churning is greater than before.
- New methods and processes to improve the country's external reach have emerged. Some MFAs encourage continuous innovation.
- Intermediate MFA levels have been cut out, for example in the United Kingdom, where many posts of deputy and assistant undersecretaries disappeared in the late 1990s. Better application of ICT has flattened internal communications.

A modest body of literature now covers this subject (see below). We noted earlier that at the EU and elsewhere discussions are held regularly on MFA management issues. DiploFoundation hosted two international conferences in Geneva (2006) and Bangkok (2007) to discuss MFA reform issues, attended by more than 30 countries each.<sup>1</sup>

## **MFA Reform**

What lies behind the reforms?

First, the environment of world affairs has changed (Chapter 1), making MFA work more complicated, abroad and at home. With many new actors involved in international affairs, policy coherence is a major challenge.

Second, most states now pursue a "toute azimuth" foreign policy, looking for pragmatic partnerships and issue-specific coalitions across regions and continents. MFAs have to prioritize, focusing on the countries and issues that matter the most. Some

<sup>1</sup> Diplo regularly organizes conferences on such professional issues, perhaps the only international NGO to do so. It hosted a conference on "e-diplomacy" in June 2010.

see this as more nationalist policies, but self-interest has always been the driver.

Third, the public service is asked to deliver more, despite reduced resources and manpower; the foreign ministry is no exception. It must be leaner, meaner, and deliver faster. The internet and instant dissemination of information has heightened public expectation and capability.

Fourth, globalization has increased interdependence among states: given high velocity of international affairs, and unpredictability, foreign ministries must improve their reaction time and efficiency.

Fifth, foreign ministries have to strike a balance between nurturing in-house talent and utilizing outside expertise. They cannot master every functional area, but need basic competence to participate in expert dialogue. Subject diversity pushes them to embrace new themes, which produces contradictions.

In the past, the resident envoy had four prime tasks vis-à-vis the MFA: explain home policy to the host country, report on the local scene, tender policy advice to home authorities, and execute the instructions received. That is unchanged—though his reports now especially dwell on event interpretation and anticipation. It is his *virtual* presence in the home network that makes the envoy part of the decision chain that leads to policy and tactics, and he becomes part-author of his own instructions; this is made possible by MFA intranets (Chapter 6). Consequently, his advice (as well as briefs and document drafts) reach the MFA echelons as if he were physically in that network (this has been the case in the Austrian, Canadian, German, and the UK Foreign Offices, since around 2000). This enhances the envoy's domestic role, even while he continues with the traditional activities of *outreach*, *promotion*, and *negotiation* in the target country.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Some may hold that the traditional activities are the ones covered in Article 3 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, but that has been overtaken on the ground by the three tasks mentioned here. See Rana *Bilateral Diplomacy*, pp. 21–9.



A March 2006 Danish report declared:

MFAs are no longer the pivotal points for international relations. Prime Minister's Offices and sector ministries are operating their own international departments and attending to their own international negotiations. This is particularly true when it comes to EU matters, where direct contacts between experts, colleagues and policy makers across borders play an increasingly important role. The "lost monopolies" and the build-up of cross-border professional networks impact on the MFAs' possibilities for furthering national interests in the EU-system and more generally.<sup>3</sup>

### **MFA Typology**

An elusive goal, pursued by some scholars, is the taxonomy of MFAs (see Robertson, 2005). Simple categorization is not difficult; one can differentiate between agile or "smart" MFAs, and those that are conservative or conventional; one might add a third cluster of those that are somewhere in between. Similarly, one can identify the ministries that have made optimal use of particular instruments or techniques, be it regional diplomacy or human resources. Looking to the EU, one might distinguish between those foreign ministries that have adapted themselves to the integration process, and have retained a strong position in decision making in relation to the EU, and those that have been relatively marginalized.

If we move beyond generalities, the differences are so many that it becomes impossible to apply a rigid typology, without offering elaborate explanations.

<sup>3</sup> Danish MFA's unpublished paper entitled "Challenges of Globalization," March 23, 2006; I had the privilege of serving on an international advisory group that worked with the MFA that year.

## Reform Models

If we look around, we find foreign ministries using different formulae, some of them concurrently, to cope with reform.

- Some foreign ministries have carried out *incremental* reform; China is a case in point, engaged in steady, unannounced reform since 1993, mostly based on careful examination of the experience of others. Canada has done much the same.
- A few have opted for the opposite, *big-ticket reform*, often based on a major internal study, for example, Germany and the United Kingdom. In 2000, Germany asked a retired senior diplomat to inspect its 14 embassies in the EU, to answer the media and parliamentary comment that the EU unification process had made embassies redundant; the short, incisive Paschke Report of 2000 concluded that embassy work had changed, but they were needed as much as before.<sup>4</sup> Germany used this report as the platform for comprehensive change implemented in 2002–04, reducing some of its traditional heavy centralist orientation, using ICT to empower embassies and integrate embassies more closely into the Foreign Office. The UK example is discussed in Chapter 7.
- Sometimes reform is *externally driven*; 2001 financial scandals rocked Japan's *Gaimusho*; it was forced to reform, opening up its system to outside scrutiny; for example, 20 percent of ambassador appointments now go to officials from other ministries (another is for 20 percent of its junior branch, the expert cadres).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The full English text is available on the website of DiploFoundation ([www.diplomacy.edu](http://www.diplomacy.edu)), and can also be located via Google.

<sup>5</sup> Among contemporary diplomatic services, Japan is unique in having a cadre of experts (linguists in hard or scarce languages and other functional specialists), who have always been treated as poor cousins to the main executive or "career" branch, in promotion avenues and appointment ceilings. They have now finally been given a better deal. See Rana, *Asian Diplomacy* (2007).

- Another way: *feedback from serving officials*; it works well because the young staff often have a close understanding of current needs. In 2000, the UK empowered its young officials to network intensively for six months; they came up with radical proposals.<sup>6</sup> Those were implemented and later led to a second stage of reforms. The Germans used the Paschke report in a similar way.<sup>7</sup>
- Others have looked closely at counterparts. Australia, Canada, and Kenya have carried out global *benchmarking* exercises. Such data would be invaluable for others, but it is not published.<sup>8</sup>
- Some have engaged *business consultants* (Germany, India, Ireland, UAE, United Kingdom). Sometimes they are used, not because reform needs are unknown, but because change is more palatable when recommended from outside.<sup>9</sup>
- Some reform is *technology driven*, for instance when the MFA shifts to an intranet (i.e. a virtual private network) and links up its embassies. That flattens hierarchies, speeds up communication, and shortens response times.

<sup>6</sup> This document, "Foresight 2010" unfortunately remains unpublished. But the first two chapters of John Dickie's book carry a vivid description. See *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works* (London, Tauris, 2004)

<sup>7</sup> Speech by Rudolph, the head of central administration of the German Foreign Office, June 19, 2002: "We set up a chat room on our Intranet, which generated hundreds of messages and suggestions for reform. The Minister and State Secretary Dr. Pleuger held a series of open meetings at the Auswärtiges Amt and at many of our missions. Ad hoc groups sprang up and produced proposals covering virtually every aspect of our work. Employees of all ranks wrote to us often with very specific suggestions for reform."

<sup>8</sup> Even the countries that participated in the survey received from Australia, to their chagrin, an averaged report of the results, but not the precise information pertaining to individual countries.

<sup>9</sup> In 2003 the Indian Ministry of External Affairs announced plans to improve its economic diplomacy; two management consultants submitted reports, as a pro bono activity, mainly offering recommendations that were familiar to the ministry, but were more palatable from outside advisers. When the minister who had backed this exercise moved away to another ministry, the initiative was shelved.

### **MFAs Handling Trade, Aid, and Related Subjects**

One measure is to combine the foreign ministry with the ministry or department handling foreign trade, and often, foreign investment mobilization as well. The practice is current in the Caribbean (Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Santa Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Scandinavia (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), the South Pacific (Fiji, Marshal Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu), and a few other countries (Australia, Canada, Mauritius, New Zealand, South Korea, and Swaziland).<sup>10</sup> South Africa considered this option in 1997–98, but abandoned it. It ensures harmonization between commercial and political diplomacy. The Scandinavian countries also bring into the MFA the management of their external aid (as does Japan), which is also logical. Denmark has perhaps one of the best foreign ministries structures, handling all these four tasks, within a single unified structure, under a single civil service head.

More small countries should find the above combination profitable, as a means of improving their external outreach and avoiding turf battles on WTO and other external trade policy issues. It also ensures better mobilization of the diplomatic apparatus for the advancement of trade and investment interests.

The United Kingdom offers a different model, with its “joined-up” arrangement between the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, Board of Trade, which together supervise the UK Trade and Invest (UKTI), run from the FCO by officials from both the ministries. Mexico’s promotional agency, which brings in several home partners, “Promexico,” also uses such a model.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, St. Lucia, the Caribbean island state with a population of just 160,000, has a single ministry of Ministry of External Affairs, International Trade and Investment; it mirrors Denmark with 5 million, which has a similar combined ministry for all these tasks.

## Priorities

Let us consider the activities that should be the focus of reform.

- a) *Strategic objectives*: In the mid-1990s, under the impetus of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's public service reform, the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office commenced publishing detailed reports on its performance.<sup>11</sup> This entailed setting out its main priorities. It might have been a short step to move to "strategic goals," but this did not happen until 2004, after a conference of all its heads of mission held in January 2002 (first ever held by the FCO); it led to a document on strategic policy objectives. The FCO then took the next vital step, to apply these on the ground: all departments and missions were asked to specify how their activities contributed to the attainment of these goals. At this point the focus of its diplomatic activities shifted from *process* to *outcomes*. Such hardheaded estimation produced a disconcerting result, showing that while good relations with foreign states were always desirable, that was not an end in itself. A number of other MFAs now publish similar documents setting out the foreign policy objectives.
- b) *Diplomacy Management*: Partly learning from the corporate world, the organizational response becomes sharper. This includes the following: 1. Better procedures for the management of high policy through a national security council and other top-level coordination agencies; commercial and economic diplomacy handled either through a ministry that combines foreign affairs and trade, or via other "joined-up" arrangements. 2. Improved linkages with nonofficial stakeholders through formal and informal cooperation agreements and other institutional devices. 3. Clear procedures to handle public diplomacy, often persuading others to accept an MFA coordinating role, not by dictate, but because integrated actions for a better country image helps all of them;<sup>12</sup> methods for outreach

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 8 on "Delivering Performance."

<sup>12</sup> France and the United Kingdom have done this through a "public diplomacy

to domestic publics have improved, especially based on the internet. 4. Pushing embassies to perform better, mainly with a view to improving the laggards and improving the service delivery mechanisms, especially in consular, economic, and public diplomacy.

- c) *Techniques*: Economic diplomacy is now a priority, as much for developing countries seeking new export markets and FDI as for advanced countries competing in world markets. One method is to treat some large embassies as hubs, providing services to neighboring embassies. The diaspora is used in new ways as a contributor to bilateral ties.
- d) *Performance standards*: These cover mainly the work of embassies. The steps include contracts for envoys as well as goals and targets (Chapter 8).
- e) *Human Resource Management*: Considerable latitude exists for improvement, usually applying good practices borrowed from the corporate world. Some steps: widen recruitment catchment, adapting it to needs, applying psychological and culture adaptability tests; bring in experts at mid-career levels, also giving flexibility to the diplomatic service; base promotions on ability, downgrading the importance of seniority and introducing objective tests.<sup>13</sup>
- f) *Staff Distribution*: Some countries have thinned out overseas staff, shifting them to the headquarters (Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore). Work has moved to “back offices,” as in the corporate world, while a few experiment with outsourcing routine consular services (the embassies of EU states, Canada, and the United States). But that also produces backlash, as Australia has seen, when the staff cuts are too deep.<sup>14</sup> Deploying

board” that brings in the agencies that deal with tourism, public broadcasts, education, and others that are concerned with the country’s soft power.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Peru now requires all those seeking promotion to the rank of ambassador to hold a doctorate and master two foreign languages; Brazil bases major promotions on strict academic standard tests, including the writing of dissertations.

<sup>14</sup> This is a conclusion of a blue ribbon panel set up by the Lowy Institute,

rapid-response and crisis management teams is another step; teams in "hot" situations operate from hotels, sometimes confronting physical hazard.<sup>15</sup> Other changes: very small outreach agencies, like consulates and trade offices; a larger role for local personnel, special training for them.<sup>16</sup>

g) *Technology*: As we noted in Chapter 1, effective application of ICT is a prerequisite to full exploitation of the methods of networking and communications that are now available. This becomes a priority area in most reforms, also adding substantially to cost, since these systems need continually customized support and equipment upgrading.

## Transforming Training

Training is a key area for MFA reform. From the induction of fresh recruits to high appointment as envoys, professionals need sustained training. The old notion that apprenticeship was enough to learn diplomacy no longer suffices.

Lisa M Baumgartner, a noted theorist on adult learning, divides knowledge into three categories: L1, which is knowledge of facts (or "know-that"); L2, which is "know how"; and L3, which is "knowing in action," that is, a kind of internalizing of what has been learnt. Knowledge of international affairs belongs to L1; it is needed at the institutes that give entry-level training to new diplomats. But the bulk of the professional skills fall into the L2 and L3

which submitted its report in 2009, titled "Australia's Diplomatic Deficit."

<sup>15</sup> As part of the concept of "transformational diplomacy" announced by the US Secretary of State in January 2006, the United States talks of "virtual presence posts" run partly through the internet and partly by one-man teams sent in to secondary cities on temporary assignment. This is run as an interactive website, supplemented by targeted visits from the "hub embassy."

<sup>16</sup> The United Kingdom is the trend leader in the use of local staff, with Australia, New Zealand, and Canada not far behind. Some of its consulates, small ones and a few large ones too, are run entirely by local staff; it even designates locals as "political officers" in a few small embassies. Most others, including fellow Europeans, are unwilling to go so far in their use of local staff.

categories. That is what mid-career and senior training programs have to address. And with this goes the related need for leadership training, which is part of the L3 cluster.

- Two entry-level training methods are used: one, consisting of long-duration formal entry courses (as in Argentine, Brazil, Chile, Germany, India); several countries are cutting back course duration.<sup>17</sup> The majority of countries opt for a second method, that is, courses of a few weeks that inductees must complete before starting their first “hands-on” MFA job, supplemented with further training in one- and three-day courses that are combined with desk-work, (Canada, France, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the United States, the United Kingdom).<sup>18</sup>
- Those opting for the second method listed above use “virtual” training institutes, with limited permanent faculty of their own (Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom); short courses are run by specialists or senior officials.
- E-learning is offered by an increasing number, via a “virtual campus” by several foreign ministries, with a choice of dozens of courses, many of which are of the self-paced variety with limited or no faculty intervention. This trend toward distance learning via the internet is bound to expand, given the wide dispersal of foreign ministry personnel. Mexico and South Korea are among the recent converts.

Well-organized services have focused on expanding mid-career courses, many offered in-house. Officials are also encouraged to participate in external programs, including some that offer degrees, be it in economics, or MBA. The expanding requirement for functional expertise makes this essential. Another growth area is

<sup>17</sup> Some years ago Germany cut back the duration from two years to one.

<sup>18</sup> The United States goes to the point of sending out newly inducted officials to embassies, on regular full term assignments; that means that such officials do not even get to know well how their own headquarters functions. In contrast, Malaysia conducts its main four-month training program two or three years after the new entrants have worked in *Wisma Putra*, just before they are posted abroad. This is an excellent formula.



leadership training, on the premise that interpersonal management skills cannot be simply left to absorption in the course of career advancement. The inclusion of officials from other agencies in MFA courses is another new trend.<sup>19</sup>

Many foreign ministries now run courses of one to two weeks or longer for ambassadors and senior officials. A few also offer courses for deputy chiefs of missions.<sup>20</sup> Typically they focus on working with other ministries, leadership skills, and people management. Canada commences its course, mandatory for all envoys, with the inspector-general narrating the things that sometimes go wrong in embassies. China, Egypt, Kenya, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States run such courses.

## **Pitfalls**

The MFA is the crossover point of two different systems: it is the main, but not far-from-exclusive, window of the domestic system to the external world; at the same time, it is still a locus through which that external world accesses and deals with that country. This engenders an identity disconnect, different from that faced by any other institution in the country. Representing the domestic perspective overseas is often easier than bringing the foreign perspective home.

When any organization pursues change, it encounters problems. The nature of its work makes change management a little more complicated for the MFA. Some observed consequences in foreign ministries:

- Reform arouses high expectations, a belief that things will be vastly different from the past. A contrary reality produces a letdown.

<sup>19</sup> Several Latin American MFAs use a method that is not clear in its utility; promotion to high rank (counselor, minister, and ambassador) requires the writing of a dissertation, at the master's or doctoral level, supervised by outside faculty. One wonders how this serves modern requirements of the profession.

<sup>20</sup> In many diplomatic services, relations between the ambassador and his deputy are a key problem area; better delineation of roles, and leadership training on managing these, are needed.

- Changes implemented, and then withdrawn in favor of other new measures, lead to “reform fatigue,” even demoralization.
- The shift from an assured lifelong professional career to job mobility is obviously difficult. If experts come in at different levels and compete with those on the career track, it leads to resistance. Some Western countries now juggle with these two kinds of professionals in their MFAs.

The hardest challenge is to produce a mindset in foreign ministries that enables them to perform their changed role, from the “gate-keeper” that monopolized the international contacts (typical of the 1950s) to that of a “coordinator” in the external actions of official agencies, which act autonomously.

Today, in essence, the MFA becomes acceptable to its domestic partners when it deals with them by respecting their functional expertise, and accommodates itself to the basic agendas of these agencies. It may try and engineer subtle modifications to these agendas, in the name of harmonization, toward a coordinated “whole of government approach,” but attempting to enforce its own agenda is counterproductive. This means that the foreign ministry, and its overseas embassies, should see themselves as representing such a plurality of interests, driven by a holistic approach.<sup>21</sup> Another way of looking at this issue is that the functional ministries look at particular external issues from a perspective based on their area of competence. The MFA, with an overarching perspective, should try and accommodate that function-driven standpoint in its own agenda and, at the same time, convince these ministries that their standpoints must also conform to overall policy. This is sometimes the hardest task in our times of globalized diplomacy.

The same holds for the *nonofficial stakeholders*, who feel alienated and marginalized because they are not in the policy formulation circuit, and are often not even recognized as potential policy contributors. The foreign ministry is constrained in the

<sup>21</sup> This was one of the major conclusions of a Wilton Park conference of March 2005.

accommodation it can offer to these agencies, be they business chambers or civil society representatives, or thinktanks. The best it can do is to legitimize them as dialogue partners and receive their inputs through a clear process, without ceding policy-making space.<sup>22</sup> Embassies have to be particularly open to the non-state partners and use networking ties with them to advance a “whole of country” approach, sometimes even at home.

Handling these tasks engages diplomats with the domestic environment as never before. As often noted these days, the hardest diplomacy challenges lie at home.

## **Final Thoughts**

“All countries still perceive their foreign relations in bilateral terms . . . (there is) an ‘illusion of familiarity’ among politicians.”<sup>23</sup> While this is the viewpoint of a seasoned German practitioner, academic scholars, even those with some experience in contributing to policy formulation, take divergent views. A conference organized by the FCO’s conference center, Wilton Park, summed up the different perspectives thus:

A key need is to strike the right balance between multilateral approaches to foreign policy and bilateral connections based on a resident embassy. Three distinct perspectives emerged at the conference. The first held that the need for posts had been greatly reduced by the potential of information communications technology (ICT), which is facilitating direct desk to desk communications between relevant officials in different countries without the need for intermediaries. A second view was that more use might

<sup>22</sup> This is a complex issue. Non-state actors want their dialogue with the foreign ministry formalized in some manner, which is not a big problem, once the ministry understands the utility of this link. But these actors, having obtained access, often want some kind of a role on policy, and that is hard to cede.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Th. Paschke, at a Wilton Park conference, January 2003, unpublished notes.

be made of hub and spoke arrangements which are being used by some EU members. The third view was that far from being undermined by multilateralism, strong bilateral relations are more vital than ever as the key lever for achieving goals at the supra national level. Similarly, bilateral relations between the major actors and medium-level powers remain the key means of engaging those who are outside the G8 and P5 but are significant regional and global actors in their own right.<sup>24</sup>

More comparative studies relating to MFAs and diplomatic services should improve our understanding of this segment of international affairs and the evolution that is taking place. This would open up the subject to wider debate.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. Are there practical ways for foreign ministries to network among themselves and examine the way each has handled adaptation?
2. Do technological changes threaten diplomacy as a profession, or is the system resilient enough to absorb the many demands it faces?
3. How far can multilateral diplomacy accommodate the new stakeholders, especially the representatives of civil society and the international NGOs?

<sup>24</sup> Report on the Wilton Park conference, "Diplomacy Today: Delivering Results in a World of Changing Priorities," March 2005.

# 7 The Reinvented Embassy

## Chapter Overview

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The resident embassy is more important today than before. This is a counterintuitive notion; superficially, several factors have undermined the value of the embassy. We focus here on the pros and cons of this case. That leads logically to the issue of the new tasks of bilateral embassies and its consequences for the foreign ministry. We also consider the dangers posed if we go overboard with the concept. It should be clarified at the outset that the multilateral permanent mission—not examined here—is of no less importance; for some countries it is of greater utility than any bilateral embassy. For members of the EU, the permanent mission in Brussels is usually the most important of their embassies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The United Kingdom’s 2001 reforms, which stipulate a point ranking for the

## The Context

The resident embassy is the heart of the diplomatic process; it represents the sovereign state, the principal actor in international affairs—even while it makes room to accommodate diverse non-state actors, at home and abroad. The embassy is the field outpost of the foreign ministry, its eyes-and-ears on foreign terrain, advising all government branches on developments important to the home country; in normal circumstances, it is the intermediary for two-way communication between states (we note below the exceptions).

Some diplomacy theorists argue that thanks to several factors, the bilateral embassy (though not the multilateral counterpart) has lost much of its relevance. Some writing of the 1990s reflected these ideas.<sup>2</sup> The factors cited include the following:

The greater role played by heads of government in foreign affairs, with their offices more or less usurping the high policy functions of the MFA.

The autonomous role of the functional or line ministries and the international negotiations carried out by them.

Subject plurality, where issues of high politics are less salient than low-diplomacy issues of economics, environment, and social affairs, among others.

The activities of the non-state actors, including the media, business chambers, think tanks, academia, parliaments, and civil society, who sometimes moved much ahead of official agencies in their external contacts or set the agenda.

A decline in the high reputation that foreign ministries had enjoyed in the past.

top jobs at the FCO, permits us to see this in graphic terms. The post of permanent secretary at the FCO is rated at 28 points; the envoys to Delhi, Moscow, Berlin, and Paris are at 22, while the ambassador at Washington DC is at 24, and the envoy at Brussels is at 25.

<sup>2</sup> One example: G. R. Berridge, *The Resident Ambassador: A Death Postponed*, Discussion Papers in Diplomacy No.1 (Clingendael, The Hague, 1994); Prof. Berridge has since come round to a different view.

At an international colloquium held in Britain in March 2005, a US academic with experience in the US administration asserted that bilateral diplomacy was in decline, and action had shifted to the multilateral plane; the importance of the resident ambassador had fallen; national leaders and ministers bypassed him. He presented a case for:

- **Outsourcing** of some embassy functions, still at an early stage.
- **Decentralization** of subjects to nonofficial levels, in the multilateral process.
- **Networking** among specialists, facilitated by ICT, which challenges governments.
- **Disintermediation**, resulting in elimination of middle management in diplomatic networks.

What is the situation on the ground?

In the past two decades—more or less coinciding with the end of the Cold War—several factors have enhanced the role of the bilateral embassy.

First, the process of building relations has become more complex than before, as countries seek congruence with foreign partners, not only on political issues but also in relation to economics and other areas of external priority. Also, countries today work the diplomatic process more intensively than before. This process is omnidirectional, because countries need partners everywhere. In some cases, cooperation and contestation coexist over extended periods.

Second, subject plurality has added to the work of MFAs. That, plus the entry of multiple actors, means that the foreign ministry is overwhelmed; other than the resident embassy, no one in the system has a detailed, panoramic, and *real-time* picture of bilateral relationships with individual countries.

Third, that same subject complexity leads countries to associate with foreign partners via multiple external networks,

working groups, and coalitions, which also places greater responsibility on the resident missions.

Fourth, technology helps the diplomatic system to integrate the resident embassy more closely into its internal network, where the envoy and his team are treated as virtual members of the territorial division of the foreign ministry, even integrated into the decision process, rather than treated as units external to the MFA, as was the traditional notion.

Fifth, shrinking resources and personnel cutbacks have also contributed to shifting some more of the work responsibility to embassies, to avoid duplication.

In 2000, in the face of criticism by German parliamentarians and the media that increasing EU integration had made embassies redundant, the German Foreign Office commissioned retired Ambassador Karl Theodore Paschke to study the role of Germany's EU embassies in the new environment. The Paschke report, September 2000, presented a forceful case on the enhanced responsibilities of the embassy.<sup>3</sup> It argues: the work of embassies has changed, but not become less important. The dropped tasks include negotiation with foreign governments, briefing the home government and trade promotion (in the German system this is handled by a specialized agency; other countries depend on embassies for export promotion). The new challenges include public diplomacy, investment promotion, plus "keeping an overall view of the whole spectrum of our relations with our respective partners."<sup>4</sup> Paschke observed that documents needed for ministers, including draft speeches, briefs, and reports, should be prepared in embassies "and should be recognizable as embassy

<sup>3</sup> An English translation provided by the German Foreign Office is available at the website [www.grberridge.diplomacy.edu](http://www.grberridge.diplomacy.edu)

<sup>4</sup> In Rana, *Inside Diplomacy* (Manas, New Delhi, 2000), it was argued that the changing world affairs environment had made the resident embassy "a co-manager of bilateral relations," sharing this role with the territorial department in the foreign ministry. This is strikingly similar to Paschke's conclusions.



products." He added: "Berlin should conduct the ongoing dialogue with embassies as if embassy staff were members of the country division on the ground."

In 2002, the German Foreign Office acted on Paschke's recommendations and used its intranet communication system to integrate embassies more closely with the Foreign Office. Austria implemented similar methods, helped by the fact that in that foreign ministry there are no territorial departments; functional departments handle all work (this is a relatively rare form of MFA organization).<sup>5</sup> Starting from a different premise, the British FCO also carried out internal reorganization, giving expanded responsibility to the resident embassies. One feature common to Germany and the United Kingdom is that personnel in the territorial departments have been thinned out as a consequence of the above readjustments. Canada has also come around to a similar view.

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<i>The criticism</i>	<i>The ground reality</i>
The resident envoy is bypassed.	Subject and actor heterogeneity means that territorial departments no longer have a handle on the gamut of bilateral issues. Only the resident embassy has an approximation of the full picture. The envoy suggests linkages between unconnected issues, recommends diplomatic leverage.
Modern communications make the envoy a messenger at the end of a phone line.	Technology empowers the envoy to become a participant in the decision process, and eliminates geographic distance in that equation.
Leaders resolve key issues among themselves, reducing the relevance of envoys.	The resident ambassador's role in high diplomacy may not be visible, but the leader's dialogue needs an anchor, intense preparation, and follow-up. Further, low diplomacy discussions have proliferated.
Multilateral diplomacy has overtaken the bilateral.	Issues at multilateral conferences often hinge on bilateral equations in key capitals. This is especially visible with regional diplomacy. The bilateral and the multilateral are two legs of diplomacy.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1997, the Austrian Foreign Ministry was one of the first to move to an all-digital document record system, a virtually paperless MFA.

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<i>The criticism</i>	<i>The ground reality</i>
Political reports from embassies are overtaken by news from other sources.	True and this has shifted the embassy's focus to assessments based on the home country's interests, its priorities, and behind-the-news analysis. Anticipation of events remains a core feedback role, as also identification of future leaders.
Embassies play a small role in negotiation, on those covering technical issues.	Largely true. But embassies prepare the ground and unblock obstacles. Also, promotion has to be performed on the ground, for example in the economic arena, linking it with political, cultural, other forms of diplomacy. This is integrated diplomacy in action.
Can we depend on our envoy to tell us the truth all the time? Do we have the means to cross-check?	Countries that encourage candor from their envoys receive it; those who do not, do not. Diplomacy offers a supplementary method, akin to the "double-entry bookkeeping system," that is, the foreign envoy resident in the home capital. Naturally, states rely primarily on their own envoy, but the counterpart foreign envoy offers a means of cross-checking information.

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Let us consider another argument. In *The New Diplomacy* (Polity, London, 2002), Shaun Riordan, a former British diplomat, argues that the ambassador should be replaced by a kind of corporate agent of the state. He also criticizes the expensive residences and the paraphernalia of diplomatic representation. In reality these are attributes of the country's diplomatic "brand," that is, image multipliers that enable the envoy to play the public functions that go with the job, even while the actual business of managing relations is conducted via quiet dialogue. Another answer is that the resident embassy is actually a remarkably cost-effective institution, cheaper and more effective than any alternative that can be identified.

If resident embassies did not exist, we would have had to invent them. In effect, the envoy has become the "comanager" of bilateral relations, and an indispensable partner of the MFA.

## New Tasks

Several interrelated tasks are performed by modern embassies, different from the past.

- *Outreach* and *promotion* in the target country are more demanding and varied, covering not just the official actors in the capital, but also the substate entities, the business, the media, civil society, and all others active in international affairs.
- Public diplomacy tasks deeply involve the embassy in image building and cultivation of the publics, in an integrated fashion. As one German envoy remarked during an interview: "Instructions from home are: be visible!"
- More countries than before give their envoy responsibility as the country team leader, to provide coherence; Thailand uses the term "CEO ambassador," and has passed a law that gives a central role to the envoy vis-à-vis the other agencies.
- Improved communications integrate him and his team with headquarters, giving them a "virtual" presence at home.
- Embassies accommodate personnel from more government departments than ever before (consequence of subject diversity and direct handling of issues by these departments). This enjoins on them a "whole government" outlook, plus an obligation to mediate with a range of home agencies.
- Similarly, they are in realtime contact with a wider spectrum of non-state actors than counterparts at headquarters. This indirectly strengthens their home outreach role.

The multilateral envoy is less affected by most of the above, except that subject diversity in international dialogue has expanded exponentially; the fact that a vast range of technical subjects are handled by line ministries, who lead delegations on such issues, makes him accountable to all these agencies, like the bilateral envoy. This also enhances demands on the entire multilateral team, who need a vast range of subject familiarity, to engage with their own and other experts.

## “Benefit of Doubt” Doctrine

Diplomacy in the field remains an art of personal communication. Verbal exchanges are reinforced by the documents of diplomacy, the formal and informal communications that countries exchange; statements of policy and conference declarations are part of the process. But diplomacy is primarily a verbal art, involving the building of individual relationships of trust; taken together, these constitute the personal networks of individual diplomats, even while they act as agents of state.

When an envoy makes a demarche—to urge some action by the partner state, or to prevent an action, or simply to convey information—the demarche recipient *may* have a zone of discretion, albeit narrow, to act or not act as demanded. On major issues that zone usually does not exist, or it may be miniscule. On other issues, when some discretion in action is available, the way the demarche recipient acts hinges on objective and subjective factors. The latter include the credibility of the envoy and the quality of their personal relations. Thus, interpersonal relations are a factor in diplomacy, whether at the level of heads of government, senior envoys, or even young professionals.

This is an unchanged attribute of diplomacy, from ancient times when kings and emperors ruled their courts and foreign emissaries vied for their favor. In principle, the element of discretionary action works the same way as before, but within a much narrower range.

Simply put, an interlocutor *may* tilt in favor of the envoy and take a small risk, if trust exists, based on past experience. S/he may look the individual in the eye, to decide if that person is believable. It is only the resident envoy who can build *and* sustain that kind of trust, over a period of time, where the interlocutor may give this envoy the benefit of doubt. Technology does not replace personal equations.

That same challenge of balancing credibility and risk arises when leaders speak to one another. How far one leader will believe another, and act on the basis of that, depends on the relationship of trust established between them. When the response that one

receives from the other is positive, it enhances that trust and makes for even closer understanding.

This is borne out by examples. When Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited the United Kingdom in April 1982, Margaret Thatcher showed off her personal decision-making prowess on an issue that India viewed as the dealmaker of that visit—replenishment of international funding for a soft loan facility of the World Bank known as the International Development Association (IDA). As I witnessed, Thatcher appeared to overrule her advisers and decide on the spot to honor a request made by the Indian leader.<sup>6</sup> That was their first substantive meeting and the start of a personal friendship that was cut short by Indira Gandhi's assassination in October 1984.

Another example. In September 1991, heading a minority coalition government after the June 1991 Indian elections, P. V. Narasimha Rao visited Germany to inaugurate the year-long "Festival of India" on his first overseas tour in his new capacity. His government had just launched India's near-revolutionary economic reforms, forced by an unprecedented crisis that saw India selling a part of its gold reserves to remain solvent. Few gave any real chance for his government to survive, much less for the reforms to take root, and over the next two decades, take the country to "emerging power" status. Chancellor Helmut Kohl saw in Rao a man who could deliver. The result was a series of actions and decisions that gave a real surge to bilateral relations. I reached Germany in May 1992 as ambassador and saw over the next three years the manner in which that set of decisions led to cumulative actions, including the visits that these two leaders exchanged in February 1993 and February 1994, all of which had a transformational effect on bilateral relations.

During those three years, I had ample opportunity to see how much could be done by way of persuading interlocutors to implement action ideas, once trust was established. While many of the proposals were in line with a German decision to treat India as a

<sup>6</sup> This incident is narrated in detail in Rana, *Inside Diplomacy* (2002), pp. 244–6.

“strategic partner”—and it was the first Western country to do so—on more than one occasion, I had an impression of receiving the benefit of doubt.<sup>7</sup> Of course, that worked in the reverse direction as well; I could sometimes support a German proposal, even in the knowledge that this involved overcoming resistance in New Delhi, because I trusted the German official concerned and his assurance that the proposed action advanced our mutual relations.

### **The Envoy as a Change Agent**

International relations (IR) theory does not assign much of a role to individuals, but in the real world, the individual can make a significant difference to events.

This applies to the way different envoys and their embassies contribute to building relations in their country of assignment. Some are spectacularly successful, while others in similar or comparable situations may not produce lasting results. It must be stressed at the outset that objective conditions set the limits of action—one cannot produce dramatic growth in trade or FDI flows if both sides do not offer a potential. The same applies to political or other sectors. But there are those envoys that expand the envelope of action, use innovative methods, and reach out to the relevant constituencies in the target country to make change happen. They are comparable to business entrepreneurs, with the difference that they operate in public affairs, motivated by that same spirit of calculated risk-taking and pursuit of

*(Continued)*

<sup>7</sup> This was set out in the “Asia *Konzept*” policy paper that was produced by the German Foreign Office in late 1993, a direct result of Kohl’s February 1993 visit to India and four other countries; this was the first policy document produced as a result of the German chancellor’s request in what was by then 12 years of Kohl’s chancellorship.

opportunities. A Tommy Koh of Singapore or a John Galbraith of the United States are celebrated as change-agents because they have transformed the quality of bilateral relations at different locations. There exist similar unsung exemplars elsewhere, who leave permanent traces of their work. That is one yardstick of judgment, the name and the legacy an envoy leaves behind, say a decade or more after his assignment in a particular country.

The challenge for diplomatic systems is to find a formula that allows such entrepreneurship and innovation to thrive and spread among a wider range of its envoys.

## **Working of Resident Embassies**

The new activities of resident embassies are best visible in examples:

- For an embassy, much bilateral action takes place outside the foreign ministry in the receiving country; that is in the very nature of subject and actor plurality. Yet the wise envoy takes care to keep the MFA territorial department apprised of key developments; it is both his first partner and ally of last resort.<sup>8</sup> All issues tie in with the political relationship. Experienced envoys confirm this.
- Envoys assigned to countries that offer sizable economic opportunity spend 60 per cent and more of their time on economic promotion, mostly with non-state entities and business.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In the few countries where the MFA has no departmental divisions on territorial lines (such as Austria) this presents a problem; a former Austrian envoy remarked that new ambassadors at Vienna are perplexed that they have no counterpart entity in the Foreign Ministry. They have to carry out the coordination work by themselves.

<sup>9</sup> This is borne out by the author's experience heading five embassies (and one consulate general), and public comments by French, German, and UK envoys in New Delhi, September 2004 and September 2005.

- Media relations and image building work best under the envoy's personal direction, which buttresses the work of the embassy team. Economics and media-image issues concern the entire embassy team. Witness the thematic teams that some countries use, as task forces for specific activities.
- In a recently industrialized country such as South Korea, major Western countries have large units in their embassies to keep track of technology development, through science counselors, who work with the embassy team to draw foreign investments and technology into the home country. This involves working with the science counselor in a holistic manner.
- Team management, enforced through personal leadership, is also the envoy's personal task, even if an able deputy chief of mission assists him. An ambassador who is too detached from the day-to-day management loses out in fully exploiting the embassy's valuable assets, though actual tasks should be delegated to others.
- In all but the very smallest countries, the real action is often outside the capital, in regions, provinces, and other towns, another time-intensive process. Again, the embassy team and the consulates (if any) must work jointly.
- Blurred lines between domestic and external affairs mean that the envoy in a key location has to sometimes reach into the decision process of the receiving country, to influence policy (this challenges the rules of the 1961 Vienna Convention). This is especially true of those assigned to neighboring countries. Among EU members the integration process legitimizes such activity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In the late 1990s, the British Ambassador to Germany networked with the minister-presidents of the key "southern länder" who shared the United Kingdom's skepticism toward a "federal Europe" to push the government in Bonn toward a moderated stand on this issue. In days past such activity would have been labeled as interference in domestic affairs, but given that EU affairs are neither entirely external nor domestic, German officials acknowledged the astuteness of that set of actions, raising no objection.



- In “diaspora diplomacy,” which is of increasing importance at many locations, the envoy serves as a leader in reaching out to the diaspora communities that are often sensitive and always need careful handling (Chapter 5).

All these actions hinge on a proactive mindset and clear pursuit of embassy objectives, besides teamwork.

### **Consequences for the Foreign Ministry**

Do we see this anywhere in practice—that is, are embassies now playing such an expanded role? Is it desirable?

- Since about 2003, the Germans have an intranet that plugs their embassies directly into the Foreign Office, as if they were part of the territorial division team. Reports from embassies go up the hierarchy as their identified products, with Foreign Office officials commenting on them as needed.
- In the US system a new kind of classified message format has emerged, a one-to-one exchange that permits discreet dialogue on issues as they evolve, before the policy submission stage. This is different from the “cipher cable” (which has a standard distribution template and is read by the top hierarchy). It permits probing on a tentative proposal, as in face-to-face dialogue.
- The British FCO has used the altered embassy-ministry relationship to thin out its territorial divisions, redeploying personnel. We may see similar trends in other countries. The FCO has also strengthened its new “thematic” units that deal with issues such as terrorism, conventional weapon reduction, and human rights; the larger British embassies are also carrying out such thematic restructuring, cutting across conventional work division.
- The Danish Foreign Ministry uses “virtual working groups” to deal with international issues that cut across ministries

and departments, bringing in all the related missions abroad, via email, videoconferencing, and joint use of the MFA's archives, via its intranet.<sup>11</sup>

- The Danish Embassy in Israel has created ten task forces to deal with priority issues; they cut across hierarchies and work distribution arrangements, to generate concentrated effort.<sup>12</sup>
- Embassy personnel have also learnt fast deployment, operating with laptops from hotel rooms and satellite phones, moving into hazardous situations and moving out when the job is done. With this come the nonresident embassy and the temporary embassy. The United States calls them mobile and "virtual presence posts," which handle priority tasks, usually not handling any consular or public diplomacy roles.<sup>13</sup>
- The embassy becomes a key support to the MFA in its outreach activities at home; often the embassy has better links with the non-state actors at home than the MFA (because these actors need the embassy to intermediate for them at the foreign locations).

Mindset alterations are needed to accept the use of embassies by the foreign ministry in this new *integrated* way, for flexible, fast response.

### Possible Danger

The case for the embassy in renaissance should not be over-argued. Becoming more central in the bilateral diplomacy process also makes the embassy vulnerable to new problems.

<sup>11</sup> The Danish Foreign Ministry's 2005 Annual Report, page 21.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 22.

<sup>13</sup> Some have criticized these "virtual presence posts" as being merely "a website and nothing more", and even "a joke"; Kevin D Stringer, "Honorary Consuls in Small State Diplomacy: Through Lichenstein's Lens," Discussion Paper in Diplomacy No. 120 (Clingendael, The Hague, 2011).

1. The envoy's knowledge of the target country and tight focus on that may produce a narrow "tunnel" vision. The envoy needs strong self-control, plus a holistic perspective, treating the home objectives as his lodestar. The envoy walks a tightrope.
2. Proliferation in "personal" classified messages, that is, messages that go from one individual in an embassy to a recipient in the MFA, deprives the top management of one source of information; such messages are often not distributed across the MFA as per its standard template for classified cipher messages. To the extent that decision making is a collegial process in the good foreign ministries (e.g. via the daily "prayer meeting," for a heads-up on new developments), missing out on a wide range of key communications means that top officials may not all be on the same song sheet.
3. Personnel reduction in territorial departments, and shift to "thematic" structures, means a loss of that integrated regional view that has always been the specialty of the MFA's territorial department.
4. The burden of demand on the envoy increases further. This raises the importance of leadership training. The envoy also needs to be closely plugged into governmental thinking, via all available means, including frequent consultation visits and annual conferences.<sup>14</sup>

The kind of telescoping of the envoy into the territorial department structure outlined above occurs mainly in respect of embassies in the "first circle" of the high priority countries and perhaps even more sharply in the case of the next circle of important partners, that is, in relation to foreign countries to which the headquarters may not be able to devote an excess of attention. It will

<sup>14</sup> The British FCO's "Board of Management" now regularly invites senior envoys to its meetings; a representative of one of the junior ambassadors is also included among the invitees.

generally not apply to the third circle of countries of relatively peripheral interest.<sup>15</sup>

## Final Thoughts

Some conclusions flow from the resurgence of bilateral embassies.

- Embassies are likely to be leaner in the years ahead, with an even smaller nucleus of foreign ministry personnel (in some US embassies this is down to barely 30 per cent). But their responsibilities will increase.
- Resident embassies in *some* places of peripheral interest (the “third circle”) survive on sufferance. The next big economy drive may perhaps see a closing down of many of them, substituted by “nonresident” envoys, virtual envoys, and the like. Yet it is a mistake to think of such embassies as unimportant; they are over-the-horizon for the home MFA and therefore give potential for local initiative. It may be possible to lift the relationship to an entirely new level, if circumstances permit this.
- Some “joint” embassies will be established, especially among EU members. Germany has legislation in place to permit this.<sup>16</sup> “Co-location” is already reality, with different country embassies sharing facilities, and is likely to grow.

<sup>15</sup> This comment is built on the notion of dividing the foreign partner states into three sets of concentric circles of diminishing importance. It is an oversimplification of reality, but it does make sense to prioritize, and focus finite resources in selective fashion, even while acknowledging that priorities can shift over time and in the face of unexpected events. See Rana, *Bilateral Diplomacy* (2002), pp.18–21.

<sup>16</sup> An attempt by France and Germany to run a joint embassy in Mongolia did not work out over the issue of whose flag may fly over the embassy. Shared facilities exist, for instance at Zaire (for three EU members) and Addis Ababa (among Scandinavians).

- The envoy and his team will need even closer integration into the home system and identification with the interests of domestic stakeholders. This will give them a better “whole government” and “whole country” perspective.
- Embassy personnel will have to learn new techniques for dealing with local issues on the ground, often far from the comforts of the capital, in crisis teams, special units. The classic internal work divisions of the embassy are doomed, in the face of such flexible deployment tasks.
- Thinking outside the box, establishing new kinds of local partnerships will become the order of the day.
- Very large MFAs, like those of China and the United States may not be affected, because they have large resources that let them duplicate the work of embassies (e.g. the “country desks” at the US State Department), but they, too, seem to appreciate the expanded role of embassies.

Within the diplomatic community in any capital one can identify a few who work in new ways, breaking the mould. One such was Michael Arthur, British High Commissioner in New Delhi (2003–07). Immediately prior to taking charge of his post, he spent six weeks with two NGOs working on development projects in South India, in the conviction that this would give insights that would prove essential to his work. Several months later, he hosted a supper-reception where a classical Indian dancer gave a short performance, in front of an invited elite audience of around 80. In a short speech he said that it seemed strange for a foreign envoy to promote Indian dance, but it gave him an excuse to showcase fresh talent! This gently underscored the two-way nature of promotional activity.

The work of the multilateral mission remains largely unchanged, except that the pace is more frenetic, owing to higher frequency of conferences and of the subjects in play. These missions, particularly those representing tightly managed foreign ministries (e.g. some of the Western states) face the danger of “overmanagement.”

They need elbow room to negotiate and build alliances based on fast-changing ground conditions. One hallmark of a good diplomatic system is that it integrates its multilateral and bilateral actions, using bilateral envoys in key capitals to reinforce its actions in the multilateral locations.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. Thinning out staff at resident embassies and shifting them [shift of human resources from embassies] to headquarters carries the risk of stifling initiative in embassies, and micro-managing them from the home capital.
2. Bigger responsibility for embassies carries a greater risk of malfeasance and arbitrary action by ambassadors. Good performance management may help by way of preventing such situations from arising.
3. Most of the examples of better use of embassies come from developed countries. What problems arise if we try and transport these ideas to developing and transition countries? Is that feasible?

# 8 The Decision Process, Crisis and Risk Management

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“Domestic politics always trump foreign policy,” goes one saying. We see this today in many countries, in the way foreign policy has become more partisan than before, that is, subject to disputation among political parties. An old adage, that “politics stops at the country’s borders,” is less true than before. For instance, the George W Bush presidency (2001–08) was more divisive in its foreign policy than any other recent US presidency. That was also India’s

experience in 2008, at the successful end of hard negotiations with the United States on civil nuclear cooperation (which required the United States to square the circle, giving India access to technology, despite its long-standing refusal to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty as “unequal”); the same opposition party, BJP, that had initiated this dialogue while in power, opposed this, essentially to make domestic political capital.<sup>1</sup>

In our age of globalized diplomacy, such contention at home on foreign affairs issues is understandable on several counts:

1. Lines between foreign and home issues are blurred; major external issues have a domestic footprint.
2. Publics are much more alert to foreign issues that affect them; naturally, political parties capitalize on this.
3. Foreign countries attempt to play the public diplomacy card, reaching out to publics in other countries to put pressure on the target government(s).
4. Professional diplomats can no longer afford to be detached from home politics; they have to keep a wary eye on all the home constituencies. In many democracies, envoys based in key capitals, coming on home consultations, are required by their government to meet with domestic opposition leaders, as part of domestic outreach.
5. Envoys need proactive contact with the home media, and other stakeholders, ranging from thinktanks to leading business associations. All this means that the modern diplomat “must face both ways.” “Diplomacy has lost its insulation from domestic politics.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That initial failure to win over home publics on the civilian nuclear deal was a classic illustration of Putnam’s “Two-Level Game.” But deeper analysis also suggests that in the midst of a complex and delicately poised negotiation with the United States, the Indian government had no choice but to take that risk. It evidently feared that mid-negotiations briefings given to potential home critics might “leak” back and undermine its negotiation stance vis-à-vis the foreign partner.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Cooper, ed. *Niche Diplomacy*, (Macmillan, London, 1999).



By the same token, the MFA finds it vital to establish cooperative relations with all home partners. The embassy abroad, with its extensive home network, can even indirectly help the foreign ministry with these connections.

## **The Context**

In practical diplomacy it helps to understand how foreign policy is managed. This assists us in comprehending other states, and to apply that knowledge for better prediction of what a country might do in a specific situation. It can also aid in looking afresh at our own system, identifying its strong and weak points.

First, we may consider the **formal decision hierarchy and process**; this depends on the constitutional structure, its organization of executive authority, the public administration system, and its procedure. This is the legal framework.

Second, we should study the **institutions**, starting with the foreign ministry, the office of the head of government, the cabinet or equivalent system of national governance, the parliament, its procedures, its committees, and their relationship with the executive. All of them are involved with external affairs, in some way.

Third, we may examine the **informal process**, the actual networks, and the players and agencies that may not figure officially, but are nevertheless important to decision making. One such, relevant in most countries, is the political parties—not mentioned in most constitutions, but a major national influence.

Fourth, we should consider the **domestic forces** that shape decisions, such as the economic agents (business, trade unions, think tanks, academia), the media, civil society groups (NGOs, service clubs), and other stakeholders, visible and invisible.

Fifth, we might examine also any special **foreign influences** that might exist and affect that country's decision process in a special way. For instance in many Francophone countries, Paris enjoys a degree of influence that is unique.<sup>3</sup>

The situation will vary from one country to another, and it may be futile to seek either a normative template or an analytical typology. But when we look at specific countries, these criteria facilitate analysis of the concrete situation.

### **Leaders as Actors in Foreign Affairs**

The foreign affairs portfolio is different from others in most governments. A few elements:

- Today, heads of governments are personally more intimately involved in external decisions than ever before. The Head of Government and his Office probably engage the MFA more closely than any other branch of government.
- Sometimes, the office or secretariat of the head of government acts as an autonomous player, having “usurped” some of the MFA terrain. In many countries diplomatic service personnel are deputed to these offices; in such cases the MFA is at a slight advantage, compared with states where such a practice does not exist (e.g. China, much of Africa).<sup>4</sup>
- Leaders travel abroad far more often than before, which accentuates the element of personal control over foreign policy articulation, and sometimes, even its management.

<sup>3</sup> By the same token, *Francophonie* is a far more paternalistic organization than its counterpart, the Commonwealth. Of course, in comparative terms, France also invests more in foreign aid to its former colonies, and in cultural projection than the United Kingdom or anyone else.

<sup>4</sup> Countries such as Brazil and Italy carry this a step further, in deputing middle-senior level officials to work in key ministries, as “diplomatic advisers”; this is a sound device for interministry coordination.

- Heads maintain their own communication channels with key foreign leaders; not all such communications are shared with the MFA, or they reach the MFA after delay. Some countries designate individuals (from outside the diplomatic establishment or retired envoys) to act as “back-channel” points of contact. Often the intelligence services take over these important roles, taking advantage of their cipher communication networks, to which the rest of the government has no access. This undermines the MFA.
- Leaders engage in direct phone conversations (some even exchange text messages), yet only a few countries—mainly the Western—have built “secure” networks for this purpose. We may assume that most conversations are not safe from eavesdropping (e.g. by the US “Echelon” network).<sup>5</sup>

Countries do not often talk of the way leaders communicate, but with the growth in summits and personal diplomacy by heads, direct contacts have multiplied. At summits, leaders spend more time on direct one-on-one dialogue than at full delegation meetings—often the delegation meeting is a formality.<sup>6</sup> Regional and other summits often permit only one or two aides to accompany each leader. This complicates the coordination and decision implementation tasks of the MFA but can also add to the MFA’s clout, since it can speak with the head of government’s authority, unlike other branch of government (with the exception of the intelligence agencies). When problems have to be resolved, or a new external initiative taken, heads sometimes use a trusted person. An envoy in a particular country may be told that a delicate

<sup>5</sup> Not much information is available on such eavesdropping activities and the organizations that run them, not just out of the United States. The National Security Agency, which handles the encryption of US official communications and unraveling the codes used by others has a budget larger than that of the CIA, but is far more secretive over its activities. It is known that several countries devote special efforts to listening to diplomatic communications.

<sup>6</sup> In their frank dialogue, leaders may say: let us assume you have told me of your well-known position and I have told you about mine; let us now get down to real conversation! This does happen; author’s sources.

subject is not to be discussed temporarily with anyone, even the MFA.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, the effective foreign minister and permanent secretary work hard to remain in the loop.

We might assume that leaders and their staffs deal primarily with policy issues, but in fact they are also often involved with diplomatic tactics, the more so when the issues are tied with the frequent travel of leaders and their personal dialogue at summits, bilateral, regional, and global.

## **Decision Categories**

Let us consider the manner in which decisions are made. Adapting Joseph Nye's yardstick, we may distinguish between strategic decisions that for the country are

1. Those vital to the home country's survival;
2. Vital to its interests, but not a threat to survival;
3. Affect its interests without threatening them;
4. Decisions that simply advance national interests.

## **A Decision Matrix**

<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Tactical</i>	<i>Typically, Who Decides?</i>
1. Vital to nation	1. Vital to nation	head of government or cabinet
2. Vital to interests		
2. Vital to interests	2. Vital to interests	head of government, cabinet, or foreign minister
3. Affects interests	3. Affects interests	permanent secretary or head of department
4. Advances interests	4. Advances interests	head of department

[Note: Strategic issues vital to interests may be decided by the head of government, the cabinet, or by the foreign minister].

<sup>7</sup> Envoys belonging to the professional service receiving such directives face hard choice. They usually manage to find a way to keep the head of the foreign ministry in the loop, at least on the main points.

We may identify tactical decisions at the same four levels, leading us to a matrix that takes into account the levels at which decisions are taken.

Yet another way of looking at decisions, implicit in the chart given above, is to differentiate between those taken at the level of officials and those that require ministerial (or political) clearance.

As an alternative, one may categorize decisions in an order of importance:

- Routine application of the existing policy.
- Adaptation of the existing policy in a new context.
- Issues falling outside the existing policy.
- Issues involving adjustment in the existing policy.
- Issues requiring major policy change.
- Changes in policy arising out of a reexamination.
- Abandonment of an old policy, or its radical change.
- Formulation and adoption of a new policy.

## **Decision Elements**

The first element in decisions is the information input. Data reaches the foreign ministry in diverse ways: the media, the 24×7 news networks; reports from embassies; reportage by intelligence agencies; reports from thinktanks, scholars and academics; and material that comes to the MFA from an ever-wider range of official and nonofficial actors. Within the government system, the MFA acts as the primary, but not sole, analyst and consolidator of information, for the cabinet or the head of government, though these high agencies have their own direct sources as well.

The manner in which information is processed, and analyzed, depends on the system and its procedures. The stronger the organization, the better its methods, and the better the way it mobilizes its assets for this purpose, for as holistic and complete analysis as possible.

The next key element is a presentation of choices, or a recommendation on a course of action. Here too the foreign ministry

has a major place at the table, but it shares space with the other ministries and agencies involved in the decision, or likely to be affected by the issue. It is customary to have a mechanism for coordination with the ministries of defense and home affairs, and to make place for the intelligence agencies. Often, these agencies *may* reserve their key information and policy suggestions for the head of government, not sharing this in the first instance with their peers. MFAs need good understanding with intelligence agencies, if they can overcome institutional tensions (see below).

The extent to which the decision process is institution driven, or individual leader directed, varies from country to country. As shown in the unfolding of the 2003 decision to invade Iraq, in the United States and the United Kingdom, we saw that even in Western countries, an established institutional process can be subverted by the prejudices of leaders and actions taken by their staffs that cater to the wishes of leaders. Leaders are at the very center of decision making, and their motivation is deeply personal and complex.

Given the widening of the external policy network, in terms of the domestic actors involved, state and non-state, it is safe to say that decision-makers have to consider a broader range of home interests than before. They also need, by the same token, to usually carry out more inclusive consultation than before, even if the official actors, the leaders and ministries, are not willing to cede formal policy space to the non-state actors. Thus, consultation with media leaders, subject specialists, and other nonofficial circles is now fairly common in most countries. In particular, business leaders consider it almost their right to be consulted, or at least kept in the picture on major foreign policy issues. We see this institutionalized in “eminent person groups,” and in other interactive formats that are now customary in some countries.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Rana, “Building Relations Through Multi-Dialogue Formats: Trends in Bilateral Diplomacy” *The Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations*, Kuala Lumpur, Vol. 10, No. 1 December 2008.

## Analysis and Scholars

Scholars devote considerable attention to the study of major international events, to analyze the way in which decisions were taken, such as the 1962 Bay of Pigs attempt by the United States to topple the Castro regime in Cuba. Such studies tell us how events evolved and the role played by individuals and institutions; this discloses information on the system of governance, its distinctive qualities, and how future actions might be predicted.

Such analysis may provide a guide to the day-to-day working of a foreign ministry; usually this information is not easy to access, and we have to depend on insiders within systems to shed light. The theoretical frameworks are very useful to identify the key elements in different situations, but prediction of behavior is a very inexact art.

In his book *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Stanford University Press, 1993) Professor Alexander L George has written of the ways in which the scholar should present information to the policymaker.

## Inputs into the Foreign Ministry

Foreign ministries depend on diverse sources for the material that goes into decisions.

- **Embassies abroad** are the eyes and ears of the system, the more so as their cipher messages and other reports focus on the home country and provide predictive analysis. With the use of intranets, embassies can be integrated closely into the decision process of the MFA and the government.
- The **intelligence agencies** share some of their information, but they tend to reserve their prime data for the head of

government. **National security councils** are expected to integrate all the agencies, but this may not work on highly sensitive issues. Consequently, integration of intelligence data with other foreign policy inputs often takes place only at the highest levels of government, leaving the other levels working in their own isolated “silos.”

- The **media** and the **internet** provide breaking information; factual data is no longer needed from the embassies. In our current superabundance of information, the task is to winnow the wheat from the chaff.
- The **MFA apparatus** also provides its own analysis, some of it based on integrated compilations prepared by desk-officers. Policy planning units offer their ideas, often urged “to think outside the box,” and offer contrarian thinking.
- Advisory groups, individual advisers, media experts, and other **non-state actors** also provide inputs, as we see below. In an increasing number of countries thinktanks produce policy papers and options. Academic scholars are often brought into the process. Leaders may also depend on their personal advisers, many without any official status. Sometimes NGOs provide vital data.<sup>9</sup> Such actors often wish to join the decision process, rather than simply offer their advice, but this does not happen in practice.<sup>10</sup>

The **British FCO** uses its Research Analysis unit in an innovative way. All submissions that go to the foreign secretary (i.e. cabinet minister) must pass through that unit. With more than 50 experts (divided into eight regional teams plus one covering the UN), it guards against short-termism by looking at the historical context

<sup>9</sup> This is especially true of crisis situations, often in distant countries; at the UN in New York, NGOs working in the field in Africa and elsewhere often furnish realtime information not available to governments, during their informal exchanges with the P-5 Security Council members.

<sup>10</sup> Whatever their self-image, most non-state actors are in effect special interest groups, with limitations of their own in their policy advice.



of each issue. As full members of the Diplomatic Service they work alongside the territorial departments, attending hundreds of academic conferences on themes connected with their specialty; they are expected to be “policy-neutral.” A good research unit is a *sine qua non* in any good foreign ministry, perhaps even more vital than a policy planning unit.<sup>11</sup>

The **methods used in the decision process** vary.

1. One model is the British FCO style, where a “submission” that goes for a minister-level decision argues a single case. If that is rejected, a new submission has to be prepared, with a revised policy choice, which moves up the policy chain.
2. Another way is to present options, with or without a tilt in favor of a particular action choice; or the merits and demerits of the options may be presented.
3. Another model narrates facts, but does not offer any choice of action at the lower or desk-officer stage, leaving it to high officials to make their choice or recommendations to the political level.
4. In contrast, in strong MFAs, the lowest unit (called a section or division) initiates the decision process, and plays a major role in setting the stage for a decision; this is the case in China, Japan, and Germany. Elsewhere, decision is often a top-down process.
5. If used well, the research units of foreign ministries can make a uniquely valuable contribution, with their long-term outlook and deep memory.
6. A trend observed in some countries—often in developing states—is for the decision level to be continually pushed upward, with mid-level officials either unwilling or unable to act independently.

<sup>11</sup> Proper use of a policy planning unit is a frequent bugbear in most foreign ministries in part, because line territorial departments are usually not too anxious to share information in real time. Some small foreign ministries opt to entrust policy planning to their territorial and thematic divisions, as part of their normal work tasks.

## Other Official Actors

The official actors outside the MFA play a crucial role in foreign policy decisions. They include:

- The **other ministries** that have external agendas are involved, depending on the issues, such as defense, home affairs, the economic agencies, and others. In parliamentary democracies, the **cabinet secretariat** or the head of government's office acts as a coordinator among ministries. In countries that do not have this system (e.g. China), some other agency, such as the leadership group in the political party may mediate among different agencies to produce a coordinated decision and/or to monitor follow-up.<sup>12</sup>
- **Intelligence agencies** cherish their direct access to the head of government, reserving key information for this patron. Because of institutional conflicts of interests, the MFA is often not in synch with these agencies. Another consequence: heads of government are tempted to use the secure communication channels of such agencies for their back-channel dialogue with foreign heads, which expands the power of the intelligence networks.
- The **National Security Council (NSC)** is usually important. In the United States the NSC is the key arbiter on policy issues, since it functions on behalf of the president. Elsewhere, the NSC mechanism, with its secretariat often becomes one additional player in a plural process; it may serve as the locus for security-related dialogue, integrating the views of the defense ministry and the armed forces and other agencies, including think tanks.
- The **parliament** principally acts through its committees. In most countries (with the exception of the United States and some others), these elected people's representatives do not

<sup>12</sup> In China, the State Council is an expanded form of a national secretariat, but it is its shadowy "leading groups," consisting of politburo members, selected ministers, and others, that form the highest decision echelon.

often play an active role in foreign policy decisions, though it is customary in democracies to consult the leader of the opposition on key issues at some stage of the process.

The economic ministries play a special role, be it trade, industry, finance or those dealing with power, communications, energy, foreign aid, and the like. Access to hydrocarbons is likely to be a major concern for many countries, and this gives salience to energy diplomacy.

### **Non-State Actors**

In practice a range of nonofficial actors influence the decision process. Collectively they form part of the country's "international affairs community." Their role is usually indirect, sometimes hard to discern, but usually powerful.

- The analysts within **ruling political parties** provide inputs via ministers; some are appointed political advisers.
- The **opposition parties** are consulted in democracies, since decision on major issues requires political consensus to be workable. They have blocking power, which may be powerful in some situations, but they usually cannot initiate a new line of action.<sup>13</sup>
- **Business** has become more powerful than ever, on economic and even political issues. Businessmen fund the political process, sometimes obtain key appointments, and sustain informal linkages with political leaders. In an increasing number

<sup>13</sup> The German political foundations are unique, funded by the government; every recognized federal level political party has one, such as the Adenauer Foundation for the CDU, Ebert Foundation for the SPD, and so on. Funding is on the basis of a complex and fixed formula, so that a government in power can only fix the total allocation, not its distribution to each. These foundations have offices in major countries around the world, acting in part as the implementing agencies for German technical cooperation; they also collect a great deal of ground level information for their party headquarters.

of countries these links are institutionalized through advisory committees and the like. Business and industry associations sometimes play a special role.<sup>14</sup>

- The **media** are especially effective in blocking new initiative through premature publicity. They also influence the direction and shape of policy.
- **NGOs, advocacy organizations** are not always as influential as they would like to be, but we witness their growing influence in most states. **Thinktanks** and **academics**, plus scholars, who form the **international affairs community**, are important in an increasing number of states. They raise awareness, and team up with media specialists and commentators. MFAs should establish a regular mechanism for dialogue with this key constituency.
- **Public opinion** exerts, at best, indirect influence. Political leaders pay more attention to them close to election time, but policy is usually not guided by what the pollsters say. Limitations in gauging the mood of the publics also reduce the impact of opinion polls.

A political perception of what publics may not accept, which is highly subjective and depends on the leaders of the time, sometimes prevents countries from taking sensitive decisions, especially in situations of conflict resolution. Robert Putnam's "two-level game" theory provides a framework for considering the role of the publics, at home and abroad.<sup>15</sup>

## **Crisis Management**

Large foreign ministries consider it axiomatic that a dedicated policy-planning unit should provide inputs to the decision process,

<sup>14</sup> Rana, "Building Relations Through Multi-Dialogue Formats: Trends in Bilateral Diplomacy," *Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations*, Kuala Lumpur, Vol. 10, No. 1 December 2008.

<sup>15</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-level\\_game\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-level_game_theory) [accessed on August 25, 2010.]

preparing long and medium-term plans. This partly competes with the day-to-day tasks of line territorial divisions; tension may exist between the two kinds of entities. This leads some foreign ministries to question the value of policy planning units. The issue is not that planning is not useful, but that it has to be organized in a manner that is effective. Some MFAs use the planning technique to develop alternate scenarios and to question conventional wisdom. But as noted above, research units are almost always of utility.

Crisis management is a staple of foreign ministries, and a sound method for this is essential. The key characteristics of crisis are: a **threat to high priority goals; limited time; surprise.**

Brecher, Wilkenfeld and Moser analyzed 278 crisis situations that occurred between 1929 and 1979.<sup>16</sup> They define the key elements of crisis as, first, a threat to basic values and a finite time for response and, second, high probability of military hostilities.

This empirical analysis produced broad conclusions:

- In crisis, the actors opted for smaller rather than larger decision units.
- The higher the level of superpower involvement, the greater the chance that the head of government took on the role of the main communicator.
- Negotiation and nonviolent means were used by the older states. The more authoritarian the state, the greater the tendency to violence triggered by the crisis.
- Democracies tended to use both small and large decision units. Authoritarian regimes opted for small units, often of one to four persons.
- Democratic and authoritarian states make foreign policy in different ways.
- We often tend to think that other systems work in the same way as ours, which may not be a valid assumption.

<sup>16</sup> Brecher, Wilkenfeld and Moser, *Crisis in the 20th Century*, (Oxford University, Oxford, 1988).

How should one prepare for crisis? Considerable literature exists on crisis management, especially in relation to the corporate world. Crisis in international affairs has been studied mainly via analysis of major events, not in the sense of producing guidelines on which to act. One might cull from all this the following points:

1. A “crisis portfolio” is one of the simplest devices to anticipate possible situations and think the unthinkable. One should prepare such portfolios for the organization as a whole, and for its subunits, that is for the MFA and for the nation on external affairs issues, as well as for embassies.
2. Literature speaks of different stages of crisis: “pre-dormal,” acute, chronic, and resolution. Theorists also try and identify organizations that are “crisis-prone” and those that are “crisis-prepared.” That in turn leads to generic prescriptions on feasible actions to combat crisis.
3. An Australian scholar has offered a practical way to look at major crisis, especially the post-9/11 threat of terrorism.<sup>17</sup> The first essential is a capacity to *foil* terrorist attacks; the second is *fast recovery* after an attack; the third is an ability to *protect* key infrastructure. His basic premise is that we cannot achieve 100 percent protection from attack, but the capacity for rapid recovery, safeguarding vital services, such as power and water supply, food deliveries is crucial.

Scenario planning is another technique for anticipating the way issues may develop, to optimize one’s decision process. Major foreign ministries use this very actively, but it is far from universal in application. MFAs would benefit from sharing experiences; what inhibits this is the country-specific nature of the scenario scripts that MFAs develop and their reluctance to share such material.

<sup>17</sup> This was advanced at Kenya’s 15th biennial conference of ambassadors held in Mombasa in late July 2009 by Prof. Sam Makinda, of Murdoch University, Australia.

## Risk Management

Another way of looking at crisis is to reduce the risk that the MFA and its agencies face. In the corporate world, risk analysis and “de-risking” are growing services, handled by specialists.

Risk is defined as: “the combination of the probability of an event and its consequence” (Institute of Risk Management, London, 2002).<sup>18</sup> For an organization, the key elements are: “. . . uncertainty of outcome, whether positive opportunity or negative threat of actions and events. It is the combination of likelihood and impact, including perceived importance.”

Risk management involves anticipating the unfavorable consequences of risk, that is, the threats to one's objectives, or to the smooth running of operations. In managing risk one has to consider probability, as also the opportunity cost of the de-risking actions. One can see this activity as anticipation of crisis or as a form of “proactive crisis management.”

Good risk management enables a diplomatic system to:

- make better-informed decisions
- allocate resources effectively
- suffer fewer surprises
- protect and enhance reputation
- safeguard people and assets
- run smoother operations
- take advantage of new opportunities

One method of managing risk is to establish a taxonomy, identifying all the risk that the organization might face, then work out the probability or potential for that risk to emerge, and finally, outline the measures that can be taken to mitigate that risk, and who would take these actions.

It is possible to set this out in the form of a table, which resembles to some extent the “crisis portfolios” that can be prepared as a

<sup>18</sup> See: [www.theirm.org/](http://www.theirm.org/) [accessed on May 4, 2010].

first step to good crisis management. The big difference, of course, is that a risk management matrix goes very much beyond simple identification of potential crises or risks, and takes the next essential step of planning the measures that would be taken to counter the risk. (Annex II). Scenario analysis also ties in closely with risk identification, since it looks at different kinds of situations that might arise.

## **Knowledge Management**

The management of information is important for foreign ministries. A good institutional memory is a feature of the best diplomatic systems. Ingredients:

- The **archives system**: some depend on centralized archives, while others handle this on a department or division basis. If centralized archives are slow or inefficient, units tend to keep their own papers, leading to duplication and potential chaos. Information technology is supposed to obviate such problems, but effectiveness varies in application.

Writing about the Indian diplomatic system in *India: Emerging Power* (Brookings, Washington DC, 2002), Stephen Cohen noted that during negotiations with the United States the Indian side always managed to collate better all previous information on the issue, compared with the US State Department team. Cohen indirectly complimented the special procedure in the Ministry of External Affairs for handling papers bearing the highest security classification. This “NGO Section,” run by personnel of nondiplomatic rank, is a highly efficient, noncomputerized resource, with a fearsome reputation for not overlooking or misplacing any paper it handles.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Here the acronym NGO refers possibly to “not to go to office,” meaning that the papers were not to go to the usual sections of the ministry where papers bearing lower levels of classification were filed.



- Any diplomatic episode should produce a short **analysis of lessons learnt**. Rather few foreign ministries systematically collate such information.
- The information that people carry with them (“**embedded memory**”) is an amalgam of personal experience and knowledge of situations. It is possible to develop IT applications that keep track of such experience and craft skills. One method is to build a database that covers the detailed work experience of each official, so that when needed that can be located and marshaled for the task in hand.<sup>20</sup>

One simple way to capture accumulated knowledge is through writing **handing over notes**, each time an official ends an assignment. A large number of diplomatic systems require envoys to write these to “brief” their successors; it is useful for the foreign ministry to establish a template and prescribe a minimum length for such notes.<sup>21</sup> It is equally useful for officials serving at headquarters or at other locations in the home country to write such handing over notes (Chapter 15).

- An intranet facilitates compilation of best practices. The British Foreign & Commonwealth Office urges its missions to narrate cases when diplomatic intervention helped to change the mind of a foreign government or produce a desired outcome. Such internal compilations act as a spur to action and encourage mutual learning.

<sup>20</sup> A simple device is to capture in a database all the work experience of individual officials, such as conferences attended, missions undertaken and so on.. The US armed forces are said to do this with much efficiency, but the method is not universal in foreign ministries.

<sup>21</sup> By tradition, an envoy vacates his post before the arrival of the successor, so that such handover does not take place in the country of assignment, which further enhances the value of such documents. In 17 years of heading an embassy or consulate, the average length of notes I received at six locations was about eight or nine pages; I left behind notes of an average length of about 100 pages, simply because there was so much to be transmitted. Scanning through a set of such notes, written by several predecessors, gives a panoramic view of bilateral relations and is invaluable for the new envoy.

- In our age of information overload, **synthesis of pertinent information** is a key strength. IT and communications technology permit a great deal of automation. Some countries are inhibited from implementing computerized networks (“intranets”) owing to fears over the security of such systems (China, India).

Managing and distributing information is a special priority for foreign ministries, one of its core top management tasks, not always recognized. It is vital for MFAs to have a deliberate policy for the management of knowledge.

## **Final Thoughts**

Each country’s cultural system shapes and nuances its decision process; being guided by the experience of other countries may produce misleading conclusions. But some common trends exist.

- Even in authoritarian states, the decision process is tending to become more plural, accommodating different actors.
- Domestic publics are involved on major issues as never before, even in closed regimes. They are much more visible and vocal, especially on key issues that affect their lives, including relations with neighbors and with great powers.
- Thinktanks, academic scholars, and media analysts are active as they grow in numbers and skill; far from blocking this, MFAs should help in the emergence of a balanced and articulate foreign affairs community, which contributes to the foreign policy process in myriad ways.

Until recent times it was customary in some countries to speak of a national consensus on major foreign policy issues. We have noted that this has changed. This complicates the decision process.

Professional diplomats need to understand other decision systems to determine whether and how they can influence that process in their favor. When a process is highly fractured or tangled

(like the US system), or if it is highly secretive and unfathomable (as in China), this may be near impossible—though they still try! An authoritarian system, or a fairly open system, may offer better prospects for calculated intervention. Action at the “ripe moment” is productive.<sup>22</sup>

## Points for Reflection

1. Familiarity with one's own system lulls one into thinking that others use similar methods; in crisis it may be dangerous for one to assume that others act in the same way as oneself. Broad analysis of decision process helps to overcome such mindsets and to understand other systems.
2. The broader the inputs into policy, the better the result. It is the MFA that has to reach out to other contributors, overcoming its institutional reserve and old mindsets of autonomous functioning.
3. In all countries the role of individuals and leaders in decision making remains powerful, even in the countries that pride themselves on their institutions and systems. Can this be measured in some way, for better predictability?

## Annex I

### Decision Making: Theory and Application

Decision theory provides insights that can be applied in practical situations.

Decision is defined as “the act of choosing among available alternatives about which uncertainty exists.”<sup>23</sup> The Greek historian Thucydides, in his classic work *Peloponnesian War* described the

<sup>22</sup> This notion of a “ripe moment” was first advanced by the sixteenth century Italian diplomat-historian Guicciardini,

<sup>23</sup> James E. Dougherty and Robert L Pfaltzgraff Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations*, (Harper & Row, New York, 1990)

factors that lead leaders to decide not only the conscious, logical reasons and the rational perception of the systemic environment, but also the psychological forces of fear, honor, and interest.

Graham Allison offers three models of decision.<sup>24</sup>

1. **The Rational Actor Model:** (Morgenthau, Kahn) In this classic model the decision is perceived as based on analysis of the objectives, the options, and the likely consequences of each. In the real world, rationality may not exist or may be heavily conditioned by subjective factors.
2. **The Organization Process Model:** (Herbert Simon) The decision comes not from choice but is the outcome of independent inputs from several large organizations, only partly coordinated by the government. The choice may fall on the first acceptable alternative, trying to avoid uncertainty and risk. The organization units may reach their own compromise, so that options not acceptable to any of them are excluded before presentation to the top decision-makers; overcentralized systems will produce narrow options.<sup>25</sup> This underscores the need for leaders to be in command of their systems, and have their own independent advisers, so as to widen the alternatives offered to them.
3. **The Bureaucratic Politics Model:** (Max Weber) The decision process produces intense competition, bargaining among bureaucratic units. There may be no consistent strategic master plan; the outcome depends on the relative skill of bargaining of the concerned agents. This is often close to reality.

John D Steinbruner in his “cybernetics theory” has argued that governments do not apply analytical logic. Like a tennis player choosing a stroke to play, they eliminate variety and consider a few variables. Action is based less on analysis than on experience,

<sup>24</sup> Graham T Allison, *Essence of Decision*, (Little and Brown, Boston, 1970).

<sup>25</sup> This point is attributed to Alexander George, *The Case for Multiple Advocacy*, Stanford University, Stanford, 1972).

producing an intuitive approach. We are conditioned to act in certain ways.

Another key element is that we tend to ascribe our reasoning and ways of thinking to others and make assumptions based on this. This underscores the importance of understanding the intercultural factors.

Volatility of events and the need to react rapidly are also factors to be taken into account. Some leaders rush with solutions; a few mature ones wait and permit some problems to resolve themselves.<sup>26</sup>

## Annex II

### Embassy Risks

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<i>What risk?</i>	<i>Likelihood</i>	<i>Mitigating action</i>	<i>Who to act?</i>
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#### **I. Problem within Mission**

- 1.1 Fire or accident affecting the mission or its personnel
- 1.2 [Other kinds of risk can be identified].

#### **II. Host Country Problems**

- 2.1 Natural calamity such as earthquake, flood, etc.
- 2.2

#### **III. Bilateral Issues**

- 3.1 A political crisis in bilateral relations

#### **IV. Home Country Issues**

- 4.1 Armed clash or conflict with a neighboring country

#### **V. International Issues**

- 5.1 A major act of terrorism in a third country
- 

<sup>26</sup> Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao (1991–1996) had a penchant for letting issues resolve themselves. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1980–1996) followed a similar approach.

## **Annex III**

### **Decision Analysis Matrix**

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1. THE ISSUE	Present context Background The concerned Parties Its importance: internal, external, and for the home country	We analyze here the main contours of the issue. A SWOT approach can be helpful to summarize the key issues.
2. STAKEHOLDERS AND AFFECTED	Who are they, what are their interests? Their offensive and defensive interests Possible evolution in these interests	Consider the full range of the parties affected, the obvious and the less visible. That leads to good understanding of the clash and convergence of interests that are at the root of the issue.
3. EVOLUTION OF THE ISSUE	Possible scenarios, their impact Prognosis: short, medium and long term	This is a prospective analysis, looking to the different possibilities.
4. POSSIBLE DECISION	Decision options, merits and demerits Who are the decision-makers? Their interests, and possible biases Domestic and external influences	Consider the decision-makers, the elements that affect them, and those that influence them, at home and abroad (including the extent to which the home country might affect a decision).
5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HOME COUNTRY	The bilateral relationship Impact on home interests	Examine the home dimension of the issue, including
6. WIDER CONSEQUENCES	Regional and global implications, and how it may affect other states Possible long-term consequences	The way it may affect other countries as well as regional and global relationships.

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# 9 Improving Performance, Delivering Value

## Chapter Overview

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Performance management (PerM) is a new priority in most foreign ministries, with three principal aims: improvement in efficiency, better human resource (HR) management, and public accountability. Why should PerM concern foreign ministries? Like any public organization, the foreign ministry should be concerned with its value proposition: what utility does it deliver to stakeholders? The application of corporate thinking has produced much experimentation; but no MFA has come up with a performance measurement method that is demonstrably the best. This creates an excess of experimentation, leading to its own problems.

All public agencies confront demands for improving their **effectiveness**, which in turn should lead to higher **efficiency**. The principles of management of the business world broadly apply to all

organizations; the foreign ministry is no exception. Some of its work can be easily measured—such as the delivery of routine consular services, its response to inquiries from the public for information and the like. Yet, the MFA mostly deals with intangibles—the management of relations with foreign countries, problem solving, and advancing national interests in complex external situations where results emerge after time. Thus MFAs are mainly assessed in an indirect and subjective fashion. One solution: examine “outcomes” rather than “output.” That begs the question, how to assess outcomes?

The principles of good management are imperative in foreign ministries, considering the complexity of external objectives, the multiplicity of instruments, and the implementation options that are available. Performance management works in three areas:

- A. The efficiency of embassies and the MFA’s headquarters organization
- B. Good management of the diplomatic service as a human resource
- C. The MFA’s public diplomacy, especially the accounting to publics

The best PerM aims at raising performance, not at censure or evaluation for its own sake. But PerM carries a risk, in engendering false expectations, as we see below.

The notion that public services are accountable to citizens gained explicit recognition only in recent times. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is credited with demanding public accountability from government departments. That set of good governance concepts have partly breached the traditional walls of confidentiality and distance from the publics. Many foreign ministries now articulate their public role through their *mission statements* (which also set out the policy objectives); others do the same via *citizen charters* that tell the public what to expect from the ministry, and the embassies and consulates.

Performance management has become a hot-button issue since about 2000, and countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have



climbed onto this bandwagon.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, the notion of measuring performance is still in its infancy.

## **Efficiency**

Embassies and consulates are geographically isolated from home, upholding national administrative systems in varied environments, including places where shortages or hazard is endemic. Despite the communications revolution, the mission resembles a ship at sea, commanded by its envoy-captain; s/he faces isolation, challenged to fulfill the set tasks in a local environment in the country of assignment that varies greatly from one place to another.

Situations of mismanagement, breakdown in relations among the team and financial scams, are more frequent within embassies than warranted by public service averages. This is grossly understudied, as such episodes are handled out of public sight.

### **Inspections of Missions**

The method of periodic inspection of embassies by senior and experienced “inspectors” emerged many decades ago, as the first on-spot oversight technique, which was typically handled in large diplomatic services through a permanent unit at the MFA. They send a team to each embassy at intervals of three to five years. Elaborate procedures support this method. The small services carry out ad hoc inspections, and at lesser frequency. Main elements:

- Inspections have moved from enforcement of regulations to oversight of performance and evaluation of resources

<sup>1</sup> An example: during a two-week visit to Botswana in April–May 2010 to advise at a meeting of Botswana’s envoys in Gaborone, the author learnt that the advanced method of “balanced scorecards” is being applied throughout the country’s public affairs system. Kenya is similarly engaged with applying performance improvement standards in its own way.

needed, especially the staff. Sometimes the aim is to cut staff, which is a shortsighted, or truncated, use of the method; inspections should be used for other purposes as well.

- In the best systems the inspectors assist missions to perform better, going beyond evaluation. Ideally, the inspection report should be shown to the ambassador, and his comments incorporated in it (some systems communicate only the negative comments, and elicit explanations).
- Inspections are distinct from the financial audit that is customary in all public administration systems.

*Examples:* **US:** A large team headed by an inspector general handles the work; very unusually, some parts of reports are posted on the State Department's website;<sup>2</sup> the full text (minus sensitive material) may be provided under the Freedom of Information Act.

**Germany:** Six months prior to the inspection, the embassy concerned begins to send to this unit all its outbound correspondence and reportage, which is analyzed to determine the quality and responsiveness to different stakeholders. Each home-based staff member gets a detailed questionnaire to be filled out and handed over to the inspectors on arrival; it is used for individual interviews, on the promise that the inspectors will destroy this before they leave. The aim: full understanding of interpersonal relations in the embassy. **India:** It sends senior officials of the administration division on inspection missions on an ad hoc basis; in 2006 it decided to create a permanent inspectorate, but then held back. **Brazil, China, Egypt, France, and Russia** are among many countries with permanent inspectorates.

### New Methods for Missions

Several new PerM methods have developed in different countries in the past 30 years.

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.google.co.in/search?q=embassy+inspection+reports&btnGNS=Search+state.gov&oi=navquery\\_searchbox&sa=X&as\\_sitesearch=state.gov&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3Aen-US%3Aofficial&hs=SFx](http://www.google.co.in/search?q=embassy+inspection+reports&btnGNS=Search+state.gov&oi=navquery_searchbox&sa=X&as_sitesearch=state.gov&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3Aen-US%3Aofficial&hs=SFx) [Accessed on February 13, 2010.]

**Annual Plans** set out work programs and objectives for embassies (some MFAs collate these to produce regional action plans).<sup>3</sup>

Features:

- They prioritize activities, sustain focus on goals; it is amazing how easily initiatives are forgotten after time.
- Resources may be tied in; some MFAs delegate enhanced authority to missions over their budget spending (the good MFAs ensure that embassies have small discretionary funds for promotional work).
- Some require quantified targets, others use descriptive milestones.
- The United States calls these "Mission Strategic Plans" with special focus on resources. The United Kingdom leaves it to embassies to set own goals in conformity with the "Public Performance Targets" set in London.
- Tunisia uses a matrix format for embassy reports on the annual plan, with copies of reports sent to the President's Office.

**Ambassador's Instructions:** Every French ambassador proceeding on a new assignment receives detailed written instructions, prepared in consultation with other branches of government; within six months he must come back with an implementation plan, requesting resources as needed. Shorter annual plans are also established. Germany borrowed this method in 2000, but limited it to the Foreign Office. Japan has long used a similar instruction format; in 2003 (as part of sweeping reforms) it introduced reciprocal planning action by embassies.

Common features in both: periodic evaluation by the MFA; linking human and material resources to goals; sometimes tying in incentive payments (countries have had mixed experience with

<sup>3</sup> I stumbled upon this method on my own in 1977, as a young envoy in Algiers, developing a three-page, bullet point "annual plan" and carrying out an evaluation at the year-end; this caught the attention of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 1980, as narrated in *Inside Diplomacy*, p.81–2.

this). The key to success is thorough implementation. Without self-examination, these become pro forma exercises.

**Performance contracts:** In Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, and some others, heads of units and ambassadors sign annual contracts that set out objectives, with incentives and penalties built into the system. A problem: at lower levels it is hard to articulate for each official targets that are sufficiently detailed and realistic for measuring achievements. Related to this is the **Balanced Scorecard Method**, which comes from **Key Performance Indicators**, identifying specific tasks; attached to it are targets and outcomes, to determine whether results meet expectations.

#### Other Methods

**Australia** and **New Zealand** use similar systems, which evidently work well. They implement close dialogue between missions and the MFA in both elaborating the targets and for monitoring the actual work. Some countries are satisfied with annual reports on plan execution from embassies, but the better systems mandate reports at intervals of six months or less. Another key element is the coordination between the MFA's administrative units and the territorial departments, which does not always happen; it is the latter that have the best overview of the mission's substantive work.

#### **UK's Board of Management**

In 2007 the British FCO had a 12-member Board of Management, headed by the permanent undersecretary, that includes five directors-general, three directors, the heads of Trade UK and Invest UK, plus, very unusually, two private industry CEOs (the heads of the health insurance company BUPA and the financial services provider KPMG). It met every month, and also held informal meetings each Tuesday; it had five subcommittees (including finance, human resources, and

*(Continued)*

investments) that brought in a wider range of officials, each headed by a board member.

A separate “Leadership Forum” exists, composed of 18 senior ambassadors (with one or two mid-level envoys also included, in rotation), which connects “virtually” with the Board through circulation of papers via the intranet, and face-to-face meetings every six months; the goal is to bring embassies into the management process.

In 2006–07 the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit carried out an “FCO Capability Review” as part of a government-wide effort to assess the leadership, strategy, and delivery of each government department.

## **Performance Management for Human Resources**

Equitable, transparent methods are essential to get the best from the MFA’s only resource, its people. PerM developed in the corporate environment applies directly to this sector, with limited modification. The cultural ethos of countries often makes some methods less acceptable than others.

Incentive payments are built into some PerM systems. For instance, in Singapore, outstanding performance can get an official bonus payment equal to six months’ salary; while this goes to very few, payments of between one month’s to three months’ wages are fairly common.<sup>4</sup> Some countries have tried to implement “revenue neutral systems,” that is, reward for some is balanced against penalties levied on others; that creates more ill will than motivation for hard work.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In Singapore the top officials draw annual salaries (indexed to corporate rates) in the region of US\$600,000 to \$1.2 m, so that such bonus payment is sizable.

<sup>5</sup> That has been the Swiss experience with the result that bonus payment becomes a routine. Canada too initially had mixed results from its bonus payment system.

- **Annual evaluations:** The best systems set goals for officials, demand self-evaluation, appraise the results at two higher levels. Some variations: assessment by peer groups (Japan); assessment by those officials that the official concerned supervises (China, South Korea).
- **Promotion procedure:** written examinations, interviews, assessment by special boards that look beyond the annual reports (Mexico). Some require those seeking promotions to apply (Australia); applicants not promoted for several years must quit (United States).
- **Equity and Grievance redress:** overseas assignments vary greatly in living conditions; balanced rotation between comfortable and hard posts is essential. Many MFAs have moved to a “bidding” system to match horses for courses. A fair redress procedure is imperative.<sup>6</sup>

Career planning is an MFA responsibility (though some leave this to individual officials), to produce service personnel with the needed expertise. Identification of “high flyers” is another objective of good systems, exposing them to work that contributes to growth. Those un-promoted for long become a drag; MFAs seldom have leeway to carry misfits, surplus personnel. Early retirement—with golden handshakes—is one option.<sup>7</sup>

Examples of career management: **Singapore** annually evaluates its officials with 5 to 20 years of service under a “current estimated potential” formula (borrowed from Shell); this estimates the level they would reach in their late 40s. The result, not communicated to the individual, determines their career path. The

<sup>6</sup> As might be imagined, the German Foreign Office has one of the best systems, headed by a ranking counselor, handling an elaborate mechanism, who also gets to meet the foreign minister once a quarter, to raise with him the hard cases.

<sup>7</sup> Providing an exit option is the reverse side of promotions by merit, and is especially needed in foreign ministries that practice early selection and grooming of those that Singapore calls individuals with “helicopter potential.” Without exit procedures acceptable to the individuals concerned, the foreign ministry would end up carrying a load of disgruntled individuals.

goal is early, planned identification of the best talent, in this tough, elite-driven system. The **UK** drastically cut the staff in its HR department in 2005, and now leaves it to each official to plan his/her career, but provides clear guidelines. MFAs should make liberal provision for mid-career training and academic sabbaticals, focused on the development of the professional skills that the MFA has prioritized.<sup>8</sup>

## **Performance Management and Governance**

A new trend is for MFAs to report to their publics on their performance in very concrete ways. This is part of enhanced government accountability. It also opens up, a little, the working of the MFA to citizens, who understand a little better the manner of operation of the diplomatic system and the external goals of the country.

In most countries, departments of the government are expected to report on their work; one standard method is an annual report that each ministry presents to parliament. In Denmark, the foreign ministry produces an "efficiency report." The US State Department's performance report is very detailed and even provides color-coded summaries to assess its work. Typically, MFAs present their performance at three cascading levels, though the nomenclature varies:

1. The strategic objectives.
2. The several policy targets or goals set under each objective.
3. The several different outcome or performance achievements under each goal.

<sup>8</sup> The United States selects a score of officials for fully sponsored residential MA programs in economics. In 2005 the United Kingdom started sponsoring officials for a distance learning MBA. Singapore liberally offers scholarships to officials for selected programs of higher studies, with the official required to sign a bond to remain in the service on return, for a specified period. (Singapore has a major problem of early voluntary exits from the foreign service, as officials leave for greener pastures.)

Some examples, easily accessible from the relevant websites:

- The British Foreign & Commonwealth Office, a pioneer, has eight specific departmental strategic objectives and the lead role in pursuing an additional interdepartmental objective, called a “public service agreement.” A number of indicators are used to measure progress and each indicator has specified data sources fed into the indicators. The narrative is succinct and clear.
- Australia gives its performance accounting through its annual report, listing: “outcomes” (just three major goals were listed for 2003, and that economy of objectives has persisted with the report of 2009–10); “outputs”; and “effectiveness indicators and quality and quantity indicators.”
- The United States produces an annual “Performance and Accountability Report,” also at three levels: “strategic goals”; “results and outcomes”; and “actual performance. The detail provided is overwhelming, lucid, and even color-coded (from “below” to “above” target).
- In 2006 France was to shift to quantified reports to the National Assembly under its recent Fiscal Law, applicable to all public expenditure. But results have been modest.
- In 2008 the Indian External Affairs Ministry presented an “Outcome Budget” for the first time; it gives a relatively sketchy picture of real outcomes, but the method is perhaps to improve over time. Singapore has shown interest in this same concept though it does not currently publish even an annual report.

MFAs draft such reports carefully to ensure that the information does not become a weapon in the hands of domestic critics and political opponents. This often limits the value of the exercise.

Most developing countries are still at the stage of narrative annual reports that provide some statistical data, but few report on performance. The German Foreign Office publishes many reports and is progressively transparent, but publishes nothing resembling an annual report or a performance narrative.



Other examples: New Zealand uses a performance-oriented system comparable to that of Australia. It has also assisted Thailand in developing a similar network that covers all Thai ministries. One unusual feature in the Thai system is that all government agencies are required to have a unit in charge of "change management." In Latin America and in Africa some experimental introduction of PerM-based systems is underway (e.g. Botswana, Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Tunisia, Zambia).

## Measurement and Criteria

Even with foreign ministries reporting on performance, it is difficult to measure effectiveness or efficiency, much less compare one with another. MFAs work behind closed doors, so that only subjective assessment is possible. Some indicators offer insight.

1. *Headquarters-Mission Ratio*: In 1999, France had 2,400 staff at the Quai d'Orsay, and 4,850 home-based staff abroad, that is, a ratio of 1 to 2. Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, and the United Kingdom have ratios of 1 to 1 or lower, that is, "lean" missions, resulting from budget cuts, and intelligent management ("localization" of jobs formerly handled by home staff). Empirical observation: a ratio of 1 to 2 or lower permits good MFA supervision of the external network. A high ratio signals insufficiency of home personnel (e.g. India at 1 to 3, now coming down by promoting nondiplomatic support staff to the junior diplomatic rank of desk officers).
2. *Teeth-to-Tail Ratio*: The ratio of diplomats, in relation to the support staff, is revealing; an excess of the latter suggests inefficiency.<sup>9</sup> Australia, New Zealand, as also Cuba and Singapore,

<sup>9</sup> India falls into this category, with an excess of home-based, nondiplomatic support staff. Some African countries give diplomatic rank to all support staff, which adds to cost. Given today's emphasis on economic promotion, public diplomacy, and consular tasks, it is possible to rely much more on locally engaged staff than was customary in the past.

have slim missions. Unusually, the United Kingdom runs a few consulates without a single home official.

3. *Average Mission Size*: If we assume that the tasks handled by different country embassies are similar, a comparison of average size is revealing. China, Germany, United States, among others, favor large embassies.
4. *Home-Local Ratio*: Use of locally engaged staff is another indicator. Australia, Canada, Singapore, and the United Kingdom excel, investing in their training. A global shift toward non-confidential, low diplomacy favors this.

In 2004 Deloitte carried out an analysis of the budgets of about a score of Western MFAs, to assess their delivery of services.<sup>10</sup> Elaborate calculation of functional coverage (i.e. whether they handled export promotion, FDI mobilization, and aid management work) was used to give comparable statistics. It showed that large MFAs are generally cost-effective, since they cost as much, in proportionate terms, as ones half their size. These calculations also provided a per capita cost of operating the foreign ministry, but that revealed nothing of either the effectiveness or the efficiency of the system. Analysis of budgets, without considering the effectiveness of systems, or the quality of diplomacy, has little value.

## **The Downside of Performance Management**

In his farewell dispatch from Rome in 2006, the United Kingdom's envoy, Sir Ivor Roberts, wrote:

Can it be that in wading through the plethora of business plans, capability reviews, skills audits, zero-based reviews and other excrescences of the management age, we have indeed forgotten what diplomacy is all about?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See the 2004 Annual Report of the Danish Foreign Ministry.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in a BBC Radio report of October 16, 2009. The report lamented the demise of this particular form of diplomatic reportage, a demise hastened by

Mechanical application of PerM is dangerous, producing paper plans, empty of content. Or it misdirects attention to paper compliance. This trend is visible in a few countries, also marked by a use of management jargon, not backed by action. Other problems:

An excess of PerM (i.e. constant tinkering and change) produces user fatigue. One consequence: form-filling procedures become overwhelming. In 2002 the German Foreign Office introduced a "costing" method, on the advice of a management consultant; it provided a rough cost of different activities, which is fine for a lawyer, but in diplomacy the time devoted to an activity is not always in proportion to its importance, and in any event such calculations are of little value.<sup>12</sup> In 2005 this system was abandoned. Canada is a country where officials informally speak of reform-fatigue.

Some countries have implemented "lean staffing," based on efficiency studies and transfer of tasks to headquarters, to a point where embassies have no reserve power for new or discretionary activity (this is the case, to some extent, with Australia, New Zealand). An embassy needs some reserve capacity, given the nature of fieldwork, to handle new opportunities. A blue ribbon panel set up by the Lowy Institute reported in a published document titled "Australia's Diplomatic Deficit" (2009): "Australia's network of overseas diplomatic missions . . . is overstretched and hollowed out." This is a consequence of reform.

When the MFA becomes too large (e.g. when total staff at a headquarters is much larger than the total staff in embassies, that is, a ratio of 1 to 1 or less, as in the case of China or Thailand), situations of micromanagement *may* arise. Singapore also has a relatively large headquarters, but this seems justified; it makes extensive use of "nonresident ambassadors" and some Ministry staff service such as "virtual" embassies.

the alleged embarrassment caused through the publication of such dispatches under right to information regulations.

<sup>12</sup> Consular assistance to those in distress is a case in point; visiting a jailed compatriot or organizing the repatriation of the last remains of someone deceased may take up a lot of time, but these are essential consular tasks.

Excessive concentration on the measurable may cause the system to lose focus on intangible diplomatic activities that are sometimes even more vital than those listed. Some foreign ministry officials say: “If it cannot be measured, it should not be done.” That means little in relation to many diplomacy tasks, which are important, but not directly measurable.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes lip service to PerM justifies generous incentive payments to high-ranking personnel (allegedly in a few African states).

PerM must not lead to complexity for its own sake, nor generate too much experimentation. Sophisticated methods may produce an illusion of good result, but inhibit real advancement. They may encourage embassies to understate goals—to minimize subsequent accountability—or they may engender risk aversion. Risk, handled with judgment, and gain, are two sides of the same coin.

Late-starters have the advantage of learning from the errors and successes of others, provided they carry out smart benchmarking. PerM methods are applied less frequently to units of the MFA headquarters; this is an area that begs for attention.

## **Final Thoughts**

PerM will gain in importance as more countries try to optimize their systems, and as higher standards of accountability are applied. We remain at a stage of experimentation. Exchange of experiences among foreign ministries is a good way of gaining better insight, to identify the “transportable” ideas.

When PerM is undertaken, it is vital to set out the objectives and methods with due deliberation. Further:

1. It is a continuous activity, in application and follow-through; frequent alteration is counterproductive.

<sup>13</sup> This comment came at an internal foreign ministry meeting; the location is not named for reasons of confidentiality.

2. The foreign ministry deals mainly in intangibles; the methods used in other ministries with large budgets and physical delivery of development activities are not easily applicable to the MFA.<sup>14</sup>
3. Raising the average level of performance should be the principal object, concentrating on the weak links. The best in the system will almost always find their way to high performance.
4. Implemented well, PerM will identify the deviations and the misdeeds of rogue elements, but its goal should be performance enhancement and not censure. Deterring malfeasance is a side objective.
5. It is an effective instrument for domestic public diplomacy, which can mobilize support for the country's diplomatic system.
6. All PerM systems have imperfections; measurement of output and outcomes is also flawed. By plunging in, one gains experience.

PerM helps in domestic outreach as an instrument of public diplomacy. It reveals the foreign ministry's responsiveness to home stakeholders. It is here, despite imperfection, that PerM delivers outstanding value.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. The use of PerM does not guarantee improved performance. The spirit in which any system is implemented is as important as the system itself.
2. Simple straightforward methods work best. Pilot studies are one way of anticipating the new problems that the innovation may bring.

<sup>14</sup> In some countries, PerM methods are applied in the entire system of government, without making allowance for the different kind of work handled by an MFA, which leads to needless complications. Sometimes the impetus for such across-the-board reform comes from the World Bank and the IMF.

3. The reluctance of some diplomatic systems to look at the experience of others, and to share their own data, is difficult to explain.

## **Annex I**

### **Embassy Inspection Norms: A Suggested Template**

#### 1. Overall Performance

- Effectiveness of the Mission in projecting national interests.
- Contribution to building strong relations in the country of assignment.
- Ambassador's leadership qualities and Mission's teamwork.
- Use of innovative methods in problem solving.
- Effectiveness of coverage of all the provinces and regions of the country, without excessive concentration on particular areas.
- Professionalism of the Mission in handling itself in the local context.
- Contribution to the home country image.

#### 2. Political

- Range, depth and quality of connections with the official partners, esp. the MFA, the Office of the Head of State/ Government, and principal ministries.
- Quality of connections with the parliamentary institutions.
- Identification of areas for new agreements and cooperation protocols, and effective pursuit of ongoing negotiations.
- Mission's role in the good implementation of existing agreements.
- Contacts with different political groups, in terms of quality of contacts, discretion exercised and effectiveness.

- Connections with thinktanks, and institutions contributing to relationships, and shaping policy.
- Contacts with nonofficial agencies like friendship associations, NGOs and other local stakeholders.
- Quality of assistance given to incoming visitors, VIPs and others.

### 3. Economic

- Trade promotion work, and contribution to exports.
- Investment promotion & technology work, and the results achieved.
- Contacts with business associations and other economic groups.
- Relations with companies and individuals involved in bilateral economic relations.
- Contacts with and support to own business representatives and business visitors.
- Responses to commercial queries, and quality and timeliness of the Mission Commercial Note.
- Contribution to tourism promotion, & contacts with travel industry.
- Use of innovative methods in promotion work.

### 4. Media, Culture, & Other Sectors

- Relationships with the media, at different levels—editors, journalists, specialist writers.
- Contribution to building a positive image for the country and generating positive publicity.
- Cultural promotion work, contacts with the leading agencies and individuals.
- Help to own artistes and cultural personalities visiting the country.
- Effectiveness in using the education facilities offered, including scholarships, placements for own scholars, and contacts with the academic community.

- Quality of relations with own students in the country, and attitude towards them in dealing with problems.
- Quality and range of information provided on the embassy website, and responsiveness to public comments.
- Use of opportunities for education promotion, in either or both directions.
- Contacts with the S&T community, and development of linkages in this arena.

#### 5. Consular Work & Diaspora Affairs

- Quality of consular services delivered, in terms of visa issue and other services to local and own nationals; same-day delivery of visas, and visa assistance to businessmen. The quality of consular protection offered is also important.
- Nature and quality of emergency assistance, and whether rapid visa service is provided.
- Quality and timeliness of passport services to own nationals.
- Relationships with own ethnic community.
- Handling of problem areas, like help to imprisoned nationals, those in need of repatriation and other special problems.

#### 6. Reportage

- Quality, range and precision of substantive reportage, and proportion of such reportage in relation to administrative correspondence.
- Quality of special dispatches, and involvement of all Mission officials in the reportage function.
- Responsiveness to queries from Headquarters, and requests for special reports.
- Quality of periodic reports, and standard briefing notes.
- Quality and depth of the Handing Over Notes, by the Head of Mission and the other officials.



7. Human Resources

- Performance of officials, on an individual and collective basis.
- Morale within the Mission, among the home-based officials.
- Responsiveness to problems facing Mission officials.
- Effort made by the Head of Mission and his deputy to guide young officials, and act as mentors to them.
- Quality and work performance of local officials, and if all their potential is exploited.

8. Representation

- Effective use of representation grant and quality of hospitality offered, striking a balance between excess and too little, aimed at results.
- Range of coverage of local contacts through the Grant, or whether funds are used for "self-entertainment," or with too narrow a focus of coverage.
- How recently was the Mission's principal contact list updated?

9. Administration

- Maintenance of effective security.
- Discipline within the Mission.
- Enforcement of regulations, especially in areas where Mission officials are beneficiaries.
- Enforcement of set policies in sensitive areas like local schooling, use of staff cars, renting and furnishing of residences, acquisition of property.
- Overall image of Mission in terms of punctuality, cleanliness of official premises, and efficient service to visitors.
- Handling of sensitive documents and confidential information.
- Effectiveness of IT and modern communications management.

10. Financial Audit

- Enforcement of financial regulations, quality of accounts and timely submission to home authorities.
- Extent to which the letter and intent of regulations is upheld.
- Overall financial integrity.

# 10 Information and Communications Technology in Diplomacy

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Foreign ministries are typically conservative, headed by senior diplomats and political leaders who are seldom comparable to business leaders, or heads of academic institutions, in their awareness of innovation and technological change. That partly explains why foreign ministries in many countries lag behind in the application of information and communications technology (ICT), even in countries that are at the cutting edge of the technology revolution.<sup>1</sup> Some small country foreign ministries are trend leaders in the application of information and communication technology

<sup>1</sup> India is a classic example, where the problem is compounded by old regulations that privilege state enterprises for ICT assignments, even when such entities are overburdened and unresponsive. China and Japan too have seen

(ICT); consider Austria that shifted to paperless archives in the late 1990s; Latvia whose MFA won a prize in 2003 for the best website;<sup>2</sup> and Canada, which implemented a seamless communications network with its overseas embassies around the same time.<sup>3</sup>

For developing countries, the rapidity of the ICT revolution has widened the gap between the ICT-savvy and those struggling to cope with the new environment. The high cost of ICT equipment and software is a deterrent, but the unseen “opportunity cost” of not applying ICT is usually far higher.

Most foreign ministries and other agencies dealing with external issues are still scratching at the surface of the vast possibilities that ICT offers in the operation of diplomacy and the management of foreign affairs. There exists considerable potential for better use of what is called “Web 2.0,” as also for mutual learning (see below). Some examples bear this out:

1. A Nordic country, Denmark, has shown the way a foreign ministry can play its “coordinator” and “networking” roles at home.

The Danish Foreign Ministry created a geographically dispersed “Virtual Working Group” to address all Security Council-related questions concerning Sudan. “The working group is composed of representatives from all relevant units, including the MFA’s Africa Department and the Security Policy Department as well as the

some reluctance to fully apply ICT in their foreign ministries. See Rana, *Asian Diplomacy*, (2007).

<sup>2</sup> This annual prize was awarded by DiploFoundation in 2003, choosing this as the best foreign ministry website. Those awards have not continued after 2004.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, since the late 1990s, phone calls about consular services to Canadian overseas missions outside office hours are automatically routed to a call center in Ottawa (after the usual filtering out of routine inquiries about office hours and visa fees), where trained staff direct those facing genuine emergencies to duty officers at the city concerned, to deal with urgent consular and other problems. Many Western foreign ministries now use this method.

Embassies in Washington and Cairo (which covers Sudan), the UN Mission in New York and the Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU in Brussels. The working group works on a virtual level using emails and videoconferencing, as well as making use of a shared archive on the MFA Intranet.”<sup>4</sup>

2. Denmark has also adopted what it calls the “Five Commandments of E-Management,”<sup>5</sup> which states that an MFA manager
  - is a role model for your staff with regard to using IT
  - use[s] the Intranet daily for sharing knowledge and communicating
  - seek[s] out best practice for using IT
  - is responsible for ensuring that . . . staff have the necessary IT competences
  - is familiar with the content of the MFA’s E-Government Strategy and contributes wherever possible to realizing its goals
  
3. Canada International (the neat, short name for the “Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade”) initiated a public diplomacy network in 2005, encouraging students and scholars to write on selected international themes, to examine policy options, and to offer suggestions to the government. The essays are posted on the Ministry’s website (after screening, which is handled by a peer group of scholars, with minimal involvement by officials from the ministry). The goal is to make citizens aware of the complexity of international issues, encourage informed discussion, and involve a wide community of supporters for the country’s foreign policy. Several other countries have studied this experience to apply it in their own systems.

<sup>4</sup> Efficiency Enhancement Strategy of the Denmark Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 2006, p.21.

<sup>5</sup> Source: a Danish Foreign Ministry document.

4. With its vast network of consular posts in the United States (with 52 in 2010, and growing), Mexico has a place on its Foreign Ministry intranet where best consular practice experiences are shared among all its posts, to foster mutual learning.

In each case cited above, ICT permits work methods that would not have been feasible without the current revolution in information and communications technology. That revolution continues, which makes it essential for agencies to remain alert to new developments, and see how these can be applied to their work. Understanding technology in a practical, pragmatic manner is a requirement for all who work in today's activities. One instance is the social networking sites, which have wide reach and near-instant impact; these have become powerful weapons in contemporary public diplomacy, including dealing with crisis situations as we see below.

## **Main Application**

We might view ICT application in terms of stages at which it has been applied and see where countries stand in this process.

1. The first stage was the use of computers, on a standalone basis, or networked in "local area networks" (LANs). Most computers are internet-connected. A good number of MFAs are at this stage even now, which does not at all address the potential benefit of ICT that is available.
2. The next stage is the establishment of a ministry-wide network (also called a "WAN"); often this is integrated with the system that covers all ministries. While this had become the norm in many European countries by the mid-1990s, some countries still hesitate to implement this, owing to concerns over the security of such a network in a sensitive institution like the foreign ministry.

3. The third stage is to widen this network to cover embassies abroad, creating an "intranet" or a "virtual private network," or other form of internet-based communication protocols. Many small countries do not use this for reasons of cost and availability of technical manpower. China, India, and Japan have hesitated to use this method owing to serious concerns over security.
4. The computers used for confidential communications are separated from general use machines and are not used for accessing the internet. Elaborate methods are devised to improve security, including use of smart cards for access.
5. In relation to the above, a more advanced method is to blend into the computer network videoconferencing and centralized maintenance of archives that are accessible from remote locations.<sup>6</sup> High-speed data links and automated encryption are also features of such systems.
6. Another stage in the application of this process is to take it mobile, and empower the diplomat and the negotiator to operate from any environment or location; geography and location no longer matter in retaining two-way contact in almost all situations. Diplomats operate out of hotel rooms and in disaster locations, using laptops, "Blackberrys," and satellite phone-based instant communications.<sup>7</sup> In January 2006, the US secretary of state called these its "virtual presence" posts, to be set up anywhere as needed.<sup>8</sup>
7. We may also speak of a higher stage of esoteric application, where the foreign ministry enthusiastically embraces the "virtual" medium. It may move to virtual embassies and even "second life" formats (which are internet-based virtual worlds in which people take on assumed roles or "avatars"),

<sup>6</sup> Of course, when archives are placed online, the security threat also rises. That is the tradeoff between networking systems and the risk of cyber-snooping.

<sup>7</sup> See DiploFoundation publication.

<sup>8</sup> Speech by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Georgetown University, Washington DC, January 16, 2006.

though the true value of such innovations is not clear to many as yet. One simple application is to combine the “non-resident ambassador” (i.e. an envoy who stays in the home country and travels occasionally to the assignment country), with the virtual embassy. That should work well, in taking full advantage of ICT and its ability to overcome geography. Use of social media sites like Twitter and Facebook is another of the new instruments.

On a graph, one may plot countries at the level they find themselves. A concern for many is cost, availability of human resources, and the fact that the hardware and the software usually become obsolete in three years or less. Further, the maintenance cost of advanced systems is often equal to the original investment cost over this short lifetime. This inhibits many small states from moving too far down the ICT road.

In the 1980s the emergence of the fax machine ended the era of the telex and the teleprinter; today’s youth has never heard of the telex, and cannot comprehend how it governed embassy communications in its heyday! But technology has its paradoxes—the demise of the fax has long been predicted; text scanning that permits instant transmission of book length electronic files at almost zero cost. Yet the fax, with its simplicity, refuses to die, remaining a staple as much in embassies as in companies!

One key differentiator is between MFAs that use the *intranet* or a comprehensive dedicated communications system and those that only use the plain-vanilla *internet*. The former are at least a generation ahead in the things they can do, exchanging confidential messages, operating their own data portals, and overcoming geography by weaving the overseas embassies closely with the foreign ministry, and the rest of the government communication system. The intranet produces a new quality of systemic integration for the diplomatic system.

The danger? A battle continues between hackers who attempt to break into secure networks and those that protect these with their firewalls. A bigger danger for the foreign ministry network is



the agencies of the major powers that invest huge resources into snooping on such communications. The “echelon” network of the secretive US “National Security Agency” is one example; the United Kingdom has its “Government Communications Headquarters” (GCHQ). Foreign ministries respond with their own communication protocols and other protective devices, besides the firewalls mentioned above. But at the end of the day, only a small portion of the typical MFAs communications involves real issues of national security that demand major secrecy. Risk is inherent in virtually all forms of distance communication.<sup>9</sup>

### **“Crowd-sourcing” as a marketing technique**

An innovative method developed by some companies selling consumer products and services is to use website visitors to develop new ideas for the company or its products. This is done by running competitions, where users are invited to offer their own marketing ideas. Firstly, this engages them in close analysis of the product, thus transforming them as marketing agents; second, they often come up with attractive approaches that are available to the company for its future marketing campaigns.<sup>10</sup>

It should be possible for an embassy, in its outreach for cultural or public diplomacy, or even economic promotion to borrow and adapt such ideas, and one assumes that some do attempt this. This belongs to the broad category of “new” ICT applications. A crisis information collection method described below is an instance of such use of multiple, voluntary information sources.

<sup>9</sup> A number of small countries do not even bother to use cipher codes for their diplomatic communications.

<sup>10</sup> (*BusinessWorld*, Kolkata, April 20, 2009)

## Other Uses

For diplomatic establishments, ICT offers many advantages:

- Even the US President tunes in to CNN and other international news networks for breaking news—diplomatic networks are nowhere as fast in coverage of such instant news. But the BBC, CNN, and TV5 do not tell any country the way a particular international development might affect their interests. Nor does the analysis in *The Economist* or *Le Monde* tell the foreign ministry what opportunity is offered by a new external situation. The resident embassy remains the MFA's prime source for sharp analysis and policy advice. But hard news now comes from elsewhere.
- Communication with publics is transformed. Websites of foreign ministries draw huge readership for information and analysis of international developments, travel advice, foreign country, and embassy or consulate information, and the like. Public diplomacy as it takes place now could not be conducted without the ICT revolution.<sup>11</sup> China is a heavy user of the internet for outreach to its domestic public on external policy issues. It runs web forum discussions for registered users, making careful assessment of the feedback it receives on the way the country's foreign policy is perceived at home. In the context of the country's single party, authoritarian rule, this is an important means for publics to let off steam and communicate their views.
- Publicity activities aimed at the media are also transformed. Some foreign ministries carry out their briefings for the

<sup>11</sup> The Thailand Foreign Ministry website offers a method for its citizens going abroad to register as a safety precaution in these hazardous times of terrorist threat and concerns over natural disasters. Such methods provide reassurance to travelers and their families. Within hours of the bomb attacks in London on July 7, 2005, it had on its homepage phone, fax, and email contacts for its embassies for Thai citizens wanting to check on possible casualties among their UK visitors who might have been caught up in the affected transportation system attacks.

media (e.g. France, Japan), through their official spokesmen, via the internet on fixed days of the week, while on other days the spokesman appears in person as in the traditional way. The result: the journalist specializing on that country is based in his home country, but can quiz the spokesman with the same ease as the journalist based in that capital.

- Cultural, educational and other information can reach vast audiences, again transforming the reach of embassies and cultural centers. This promotes soft power.
- The same applies to economic diplomacy. Some countries use “B2B” (business-to-business) portals for business outreach overseas; Canada holds “virtual trade exhibitions” through its combined foreign and trade ministry. The method of the “virtual trade delegation” awaits exploitation.<sup>12</sup>
- In crisis, diplomats equipped with laptops and satellite phones connection can set up temporary offices in key places where embassies or consulates do not exist. After the December 2004 Asian Tsunami, several Western countries used similar methods to provide urgent disaster and consular relief (see Chapter 10).
- NGOs have become providers of vital data to national governments on major crises (in Africa and elsewhere), again because ICT enables them to get realtime information from their relief teams on the ground, on situations as they evolve. They are often ahead of diplomatic networks. At the UN in New York, a network has been operational for some years, providing Security Council members with information on crisis situations in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This can take the form of sustained and focused “matchmaking” between home and foreign enterprises, conducted by industry and business associations of pairs of countries. Of course, that misses out on building personal contacts, and gaining firsthand impressions of the foreign country, but it can supplement the time-consuming and expensive method of sending out business delegations.

<sup>13</sup> See Global Policy Forum: [www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/ngo-working-group-on-the-security-council/40406.html#meeting](http://www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/ngo-working-group-on-the-security-council/40406.html#meeting) [accessed on November 10, 2010.]

- Human resource management is transformed with the use of ICT. For instance, assignments are posted online and “bids” invited from those due for reassignment. This adds to transparency. The same holds good for any changes in rules that are being contemplated—these are posted online to invite comment. These are two of many ways technology helps in good management. It also adds to transparency.

The other major change wrought by ICT is that the pace of developments is more frenetic, and response times are much reduced. With all others reacting fast to developments as they occur, few members of foreign ministries can afford the luxury of treating their jobs as nine-to-five employment. Running the MFA is now a 24×7 affair. That adds to demands on its personnel, and the skill sets they need, especially communication ability and quick thinking. Every single diplomat needs a modicum of media skills and needs to be trained. Crisis centers, duty officers, and mobile phones that must be switched on all the time are now a basic professional requirement.<sup>14</sup>

## **Web 2.0**

Many believe influencing foreign policy in a democratic country demands reaching out to public opinion; that is a fundamental premise of public diplomacy. A scholar writes: “Whereas Web 1.0 was used primarily as a source of information, Web 2.0 has transformed the use of cyberspace into a forum for interaction and engagement.”<sup>15</sup> This interaction takes several forms:

- A savvy user of ICT no longer depends on CNN or its equivalents for news; s/he gets instant information via RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds on a mobile phone or blackberry; the user determines the kinds of news that s/he wishes to

<sup>14</sup> All Chinese diplomats consider themselves on 24-hour duty, and accessible on mobiles, as one of them narrated during a confidential interview.

<sup>15</sup> This comment comes from an unpublished lecture text used by Liz Galvez, from a course, “Public Diplomacy,” offered by DiploFoundation.

receive. When the United States and its coalition partners unleashed their attack on Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi permanent representative was at a dinner, oblivious of this development; he had to be summoned by his staff to attend an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council. Such situations are now unlikely.

- As authoritarian regimes have learnt, any event across the globe can be recorded on a mobile phone, with video clips or photos instantly uploaded onto You Tube, Facebook, or direct to the 24-hour news channels. MFAs and governments have to react to news in ways and at speeds that were unimaginable even a decade ago.
- During natural disaster or a man-made crisis, social networking sites are often the most efficient means of reaching large numbers of people. MFA officials have to be competent at using these instruments, and learn from the methods used by others. During the civil unrest in Kenya following the 2007 presidential election, Kenyan activists developed the “Ushahidi” network, as a “crowd-sourcing” method of locating centers of unrest (the Swahili word means “testimony”).<sup>16</sup> This method was used after the Haiti earthquake to locate the remote village communities that had been badly affected.
- Leaders run their own blogs, where they or their staffs keep in touch with publics. Such communication is more personal and probably exercises greater influence than other earlier forms of contact. Ambassadors and other diplomats also run their own blogs, but the straitjacket of what they can and cannot say blocks them from a large following, save in crisis situations.
- In 2006, a Dutch diplomat, Jan Pronk, while serving as the UN envoy to Darfur, wrote a blog after one of his visits there, with unflattering descriptions of Sudanese personalities. Though aimed at his Western audience, the blowback from local personalities in Sudan and Darfur was such that he lost credibility and had to end his assignment.

<sup>16</sup> See: [www.ushahidi.com/](http://www.ushahidi.com/) [accessed on July 7, 2010].

- India's Shashi Tharoor, appointed junior minister in the Ministry of External Affairs in mid-2009, built up a huge following of 600,000 on Twitter, but ran into trouble with his party leaders over his penchant for frank comment. A paradox: the inverse ratio between his public credibility and popularity with own senior leaders.<sup>17</sup>

Foreign ministries are nibbling at using Web 2.0.<sup>18</sup> One recent conference concluded: "Web 2.0 platforms are tools for engagement with the general public and not a Public Diplomacy strategy in themselves."<sup>19</sup> New styles of communication are needed, and it is far from clear whether official agencies have the suppleness or freedom to reach out to their audience. One might think of governments using unattributed subsidiaries, using strictly nonofficial syntax to reach out to domestic and foreign publics, but that seems to lie in the future.<sup>20</sup> For now, this medium is under trial by diplomats, and we will perhaps see a period of experimentation before new modes take shape.

### US Experience

A US State Department official told a conference in September 2010 that right up to the time of the 1998 attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they had moved slowly in embracing new communication

(Continued)

<sup>17</sup> Shashi Tharoor quit his position as a minister of state following a controversy on an unrelated issue, but remains one of the most articulate members of the Congress Party.

<sup>18</sup> See Jovan Kurbalija, *Quick Diplomatic Response: A Day in the Life of an E-Diplomat*, (DiploFoundation, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Wilton Park conference report, "Public Diplomacy: Moving from Policy to Practice," June 7-9, 2010. [www.wiltonpark.org.uk/resources/en/pdf/22290903/22291297/wp1034-report](http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/resources/en/pdf/22290903/22291297/wp1034-report) [accessed November 26, 2010].

<sup>20</sup> For instance, the UK Foreign Office encourages its envoys to run their own blogs. Barring crisis, such blogs are too bland for most netizens, and attract slim readership.

technology. Even in the mid-1990s, the State Department's email system moved at glacial pace. That is now transformed.

They now use the wiki method in a compendium called "Diplopedia."<sup>21</sup> This includes a "deskpedia" that has been compiled via open wiki contributions as a one-stop portal to help desk officers with their tasks; how to write different kinds of reports; the techniques of handling visiting commercial delegations; issues affecting locally engaged staff; "smart leadership" for deputy chiefs of missions; over a period of three years, 3,500 contributors have written 12,000 articles and suggestions covering a range of such wiki topics. A "sounding board" serves as a kind of watercooler forum, where suggestions are thrown up; out of 8,000, dozens have been implemented. While all these are part of the closed network, the Department's open network offers virtual internships, where selected interns undertake projects without traveling to Washington DC. Similarly, the "virtual presence posts" rely on the social media for their outreach.<sup>22</sup> Mexico uses its private network to share experiences relating to its intensive consular diplomacy, while others use similar platforms for disseminating best practices.

One thing is clear: the use of such interactive communication demands commitment to public access and a desire to listen to interlocutors, not simply swamp them with one's messages. It is far from clear that foreign ministries welcome such two-way exchanges. And without that, the contemporary ICT method simply becomes a sterile medium, drawing tepid public response.

<sup>21</sup> A 2010 Rice University article analyzing five years of usage of this wiki method is at [www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2010-05/ru-das052010.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2010-05/ru-das052010.php) [accessed on October 7, 2010.]

<sup>22</sup> These are described as posts having "a website and diplomats in nearby embassies or consulates may use travel, public outreach programs, media events, or online web chats to create a "virtual" presence that is quite real to local populations." See: [www.state.gov/m/irm/ediplomacy/c23840.htm](http://www.state.gov/m/irm/ediplomacy/c23840.htm)

It is possible to use ICT for multilateral negotiations, especially in the early stages of identifying the common or agreed elements, and for trying out different ideas. Of course, hard discussion of key issues is possible only in direct, face-to-face contact. While some work has been done in this, much more experimentation and trials are needed.

Do social media techniques enhance the power of political activists working for democracy? Superficially, the response is often affirmative, in enabling activists to mobilize supporters and get their message and images out to an interconnected world. But as an article in *Foreign Policy* noted, savvy authoritarian regimes also exploit these same methods for their repressive deeds.<sup>23</sup> In 2007–09, neither Myanmar nor Iran has seen harsh regimes crumble, even when their misdeeds have instantly been circulated across the globe. But ICT does provide the world with instant testimony and puts such regimes under the world gaze.

A foreign ministry practitioner of public diplomacy recently said that postings via social media by officials “adds texture and context to stories that would otherwise come out as drab press releases . . . press release by the office would often be ignored by the media but a short, well written blog giving a firsthand account, along with a photo or two can make all the difference, particularly if it reveals real people talking on the ground about real projects to real diplomats with names, photos, and profiles.”<sup>24</sup>

## **The “Dangers” of ICT**

ICT works on the implicit principle that information is a commodity and not a source of power. The one who succeeds in the ICT age is not the one who controls information but knows how to use it to best effect. For traditional organizations this requires a mindset shift, and not all countries and agencies are willing to do this.

<sup>23</sup> *Foreign Policy*, May–June 2010, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> An official’s comment in an Indian Foreign Service internet group, August 2010.



Situations persist where officials at different levels tightly control information; this may give short-term advantage, but produces inefficiency plus damage to the organization.

ICT demands smooth flow of information in all the relevant forms, from top to bottom, from the bottom to the top, as also laterally. Some examples:

- A draft of a document need not travel up the hierarchy, say from the desk officer to the immediate supervisor, then to the head of division, and finally to the permanent secretary (if he is to decide upon and send the message that has been drafted). It can go direct from the desk officer to the permanent secretary, with the others in between offering their suggestions for change. But to handle this well demands discipline and a high sense of responsibility for the junior staff—otherwise the system reverts to the old form and the value of ICT application is lost. In 2003 the German Foreign Office changed the internal system of sending drafts of documents from hierarchical to lateral, as described above. Other advanced users of ICT have done the same, but some MFAs are loathe to experiment in this manner.
- Communication becomes flatter, and hierarchies are less important than before; the seniors get to know their juniors and even evaluate them informally. This too has been the experience of many, but not all, countries. In companies, ICT has also led to thinning out of middle management ranks, and this has taken place in MFAs up to a point. Canada and the United Kingdom are examples (see Chapter 5).
- It becomes possible to reduce the “distance” between embassies and the MFA, and geography matters less than before. As noted in Chapters 6 and 7, Austria, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom have seen this and have given greater responsibility to their embassies, even to the point of treating embassies as parts of the territorial divisions. This has far-reaching implications. Other countries

also using advanced ICT have not done this. This needs further examination.

Most organizations that have made full use of ICT believe that mindset changes are essential to derive full benefit. One should be open to the new ideas that ICT brings.

ICT is a tool, not a magic bullet. It does not substitute for policy change, or needed reform of an organization, if that is an objective requirement. One may visualize good application of ICT as a “force multiplier,” enabling the institution to improve its delivery capacity, plus enhance its effectiveness.

## **ICT and Training**

Diplomats are dispersed in different places; at any point in time half or more of the personnel are overseas. Even while mid-career and senior level training has gained in salience, so has the direct and indirect cost of flying in officials from their global locations for training. This makes e-learning a good, partial alternative to in situ training. [A demonstration of e-learning can be seen at the website of DiploFoundation: [www.diplomacy.edu](http://www.diplomacy.edu)]

ICT-based e-learning is ideal for MFAs, because of other factors. First, e-learning with strong faculty participation works best with small classes. That is precisely the situation for MFAs; they do not need mass distance learning methods. Second, rapid changes in the profession, especially in the skill sets needed, require much more mid-career and senior level training than used to be the norm in diplomatic services in the past. Third, the element of mutual learning is strong in e-learning, which is ideal for diplomatic services where peer-emulation is highly important. That too is a strong point of e-learning.

The size of a diplomatic service is not a factor in applying e-learning methods, though one has to invest in a good “learning management system” if the MFA wants to run its own courses, or

it needs to tie up with others and use a regional learning center formula.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. How might foreign ministries share mutual experience with the use of ICT? Can regional groups do this?
2. What is the barrier to wider use of e-learning, if we accept that distance learning is a viable option for foreign ministries?
3. What aspects of Web 2.0 are most useful for foreign ministries in a practical way? What is an effective method for using this medium?

# 11 The New Consular Diplomacy

## Chapter Overview

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Consulates predate resident embassies, as we know them.<sup>1</sup> The very first modern consulates were established in the Levant in the sixteenth century, primarily to facilitate trade exchanges between states, principalities, kingdoms and cities. They came into existence initially at the initiative of foreign business communities based at the ports, who elected one of their own to deal with the local authorities on matters of common interests.<sup>2</sup> That grew into

<sup>1</sup> Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, compiled in the third century bc India, tells us that political emissaries exchanged between kingdoms often resided in foreign courts. See L. N. Rangarajan, *The Arthashastra*, edited, translated and rearranged, (Penguin, New Delhi, 1992), pp. 575–9.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4, "Consuls" in the new book by G. R. Berridge, the 4th edition of his classic *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*.

mandates given to these consuls, “to protect their commercial interests in a foreign country and those of their nationals that were trading or traveling there.”<sup>3</sup> By 1852, Britain had 49 consular posts, mainly in the Levant.<sup>4</sup>

The role of facilitating and protecting the citizens of the home country traveling abroad grew over time. When the system of visas was formalized during the nineteenth century, as authorization for foreign nationals to travel to the issuing state, the issue of this document was added to foreign ministry functions. In most countries, it is the home agencies—the interior ministry or an equivalent—that authorizes visas; consulates and embassies act as facilitators, issuing these.

## What Is Consular Diplomacy?

The work handled by consulates falls into two broad categories:

First, it covers the “consular” tasks proper, that is, protection to the nationals and corporate bodies of one’s own country, and travel facilitation for the nationals of the receiving state and third country nationals, with visas. Visa issue is a sovereign right; the state is not answerable to anyone regarding the persons it may exclude from travel to its home territory.<sup>5</sup> Consular work also includes providing protection and assistance to home nationals who face distress in foreign countries, including those who lose their passports or are

<sup>3</sup> G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, 2nd Edition, (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2003). This description of the origin of consuls comes from G. R. Berridge, *Diplomacy*.

<sup>4</sup> G. R. Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the present: A study in the evolution of the resident embassy* (Martinus Nijhoff: Leiden, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> The only recourse for a country that finds its citizens excluded from travel to a particular country, or subjected to unreasonable restrictions, is to apply reciprocity. For instance, in the mid-1980s, when Kurt Waldheim, Austria’s President and former UN secretary general was found to have had a Nazi past, the United States publicly announced his exclusion from the United States. As for reciprocity, after the United States introduced fingerprinting for all foreign nationals, Brazil introduced the same provision for all US nationals coming to its country.

arrested in the receiving country; consular officials visit prisoners and help their own citizens in distress in other ways. They also provide notary and other legal document services. Looking after one's skilled and semiskilled workers working on contract in foreign countries and providing a kind of loco parentis service to one's students in overseas locations are recent additions to consular-related tasks, sometimes handled by labor attaches and education attaches; in a small embassy or consulate this is part of normal consular work.

Consulates also work on another track, replicating most embassy work, such as pursuit of commercial, economic, media, cultural, and scientific relations; they also report on developments in these sectors to the home country. In doing this they partly resemble embassies. They may also maintain "political" contact with the local administration, that is, with the provincial, regional, or city administration, to which they are accredited; but they do not, in the normal course, deal directly with the central or federal government of the country. Infrequently, when diplomatic relations have not been established, but consulates exist, they perform quasi-diplomatic functions, by keeping the two countries in contact.<sup>6</sup> When countries break off diplomatic relations following a crisis, they may choose to retain consular ties; this may provide low-key contact plus travel facilitation.

Consulates are normally subsidiary to embassies, in hierarchy and in operation, acting as sub-embassies.<sup>7</sup> Typically, an embassy supervises the consulates located in that country, though this is a matter of internal arrangement for the sending country. It is customary for a consulate, as a subsidiary office, to endorse to the embassy copies of all its substantive reports, so that the embassy can take an integrated view of the issues raised and advise the home authorities

<sup>6</sup> For instance, India recognized the state of Israel in the early 1950s, but opted not to establish diplomatic relations, out of sympathy to the Palestinian cause; Israel established a consulate at Mumbai (India did not reciprocate), which kept indirect contact with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. Full diplomatic relations were established in 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the 54 countries belonging to the Commonwealth designate these entities as "deputy high commissions" and "assistant high commissions". South Africa, a full member of the Commonwealth, refuses to use or recognize this designation on the ground that it is not specified in VCCR.

of the full picture when needed.<sup>8</sup> When an embassy exists, consulates are located in cities other than the capital. But if no resident embassy exists, a state may choose to maintain a consulate in the capital; in practice this is rare. In contrast, countries that do not maintain official representation in a foreign capital may appoint an honorary consul to fly the flag and provide minimal services; the appointee may be a national of that country, or a long-term resident national from the appointing country or a third state. These honorary offices are based in the capital and/or in other cities, subject to approval by the receiving state. For the sending country, honorary consuls offer an almost zero-cost option for minimal representation.<sup>9</sup>

### **Consular Affairs and Sovereignty**

Consular activity takes place at the margins of the encounter between sovereign states, in relation to natural persons, when the citizens of one country fall under the jurisdiction of another, in the course of travel or work; it also covers their corporate entities, including shipping services. It is this duality of jurisdiction that accounts for some of the complexity. We see this clearly on matters such as extradition of persons located within the jurisdiction of one country who are charged with criminal actions in another country. Even when bilateral or multilateral extradition treaties exist, actual extradition can take place only when a series of legal requirements

*(Continued)*

<sup>8</sup> Until the Crimean War, the large number of British consulates in the Ottoman Empire sent all their reports through the Embassy in Istanbul. Under the pressure of wartime work, in 1852, they started sending reports directly to London. (Source: GR Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the present: A study in the evolution of the resident embassy*, Martinus Nijhoff: Leiden, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Some countries make intensive use of honorary consuls, among them Austria, Italy, Malta, Norway, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. Singapore and Malta invite these honoraries to the appointing country, once in a few years, to brief them on developments and to thank them for the essentially unpaid work they undertake.

are met, as per the laws of both the countries concerned.<sup>10</sup> (A similar situation of competing jurisdiction comes into play in relation to family law as it applies to marriages between citizens of two different countries; situations of divorce and custody of minor children are usually handled as issues affecting individuals, not interstate issues.)

Consular diplomacy is the “citizen service” end of diplomacy. It deals directly with ordinary people, not the privileged entities such as the ministries, official agencies of foreign governments, or people holding high appointments. Globalization, and the era of relatively cheap air travel, plus expansion in economic exchanges, has added greatly to overseas movement of people, for leisure and business. That adds to the growing salience of consular work.

We may today look at consular tasks from a public service management, normative perspective. When performed well it entails:

- Customer orientation, where citizens, one’s own and those from foreign states, are treated as the customers.
- An attitude of respect for citizens, regardless of status; plus friendliness toward all those seeking consular services.
- A problem-solving attitude: a significant number of consular services seekers face difficulty, be it over travel documents, or other problems, including imprisonment, while they are in foreign countries.
- Efficient delivery of services, including legalization and notarization of papers, adds to the positive image of the country.

Offsetting some of the above is the fact that explosive growth in travel means that consular offices have to distinguish between

<sup>10</sup> The United States, as a superpower, has made its own contribution to international law illegality with its “rendition” doctrine, in the name of a “war” against terror; its allies have not covered themselves in glory in collaborating with such actions, unmindful of their own human rights principles.



those that *want* services from those that *need* services. As one European consul general based at Amsterdam told a conference in 2007, consulates tend to lose sympathy for travelers who run short of funds or face problems mainly because they did not bother to plan ahead or take out travel insurance; consulates have to give higher priority to those confronting hardships that could not be anticipated, or emergencies.<sup>11</sup>

Among members of regional groups, visas are not required for travel, for example, among EU member states.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, between countries that share close relations, visas are waived for travel and residence in the other country for short duration; this is often the subject of visa exemption agreements. Thus the majority of Western countries share such facilities.<sup>13</sup> Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has permitted free travel to and from the CIS states, though migrants seeking work are subject to a permit system. Elsewhere, the current preoccupation with preventing terrorist attacks is modifying such concessions. In January 2009 the United States announced that citizens of countries that do not require US visas—there are about 40 of them—would now need to send notification to their immigration authorities prior to US travel; this reintroduces a form of travel control. Some countries offer limited concessions, on a reciprocal basis, exempting persons holding diplomatic or official passports for official or routine travel.

The Schengen Visa of the EU is an expression of European unification and the dismantling of border controls among 25 countries (plus Norway and Switzerland) that have accepted this formula (2011). It has greatly reduced travel costs for non-Europeans

<sup>11</sup> As an example, please see the UK Embassy's website in France: <http://ukin-france.fco.gov.uk/en/help-for-british-nationals/when-things-go-wrong/>

<sup>12</sup> Caricom is ahead of many other regional organizations in that it has a common passport format, though one is told that this has not worked as well in practice as intended.

<sup>13</sup> Visa exemption agreements are one form of cooperation among states, giving important benefit to citizens. Some developing states saw that similar agreements they had signed 20 or 30 years ago with Western countries were terminated owing to the pressure of illegal migration.

traveling to this region, since a single visa gives access to all the Schengen states. We frequently overlook the fact that one feature of the global visa system is its rising cost, thanks to all the new control measures that have been introduced in the wake of global terrorism threats and the menace of illegal migration.<sup>14</sup>

Some other special arrangements are: regional groups that issue a common passport that is automatically valid for travel to any member country; the six OECS states have a joint passport. The EU now offers to citizens of member states the right to seek consular protection and some services from the consulate of any member country, if a person facing difficulty in a foreign country does not find a home country resident mission at that location.<sup>15</sup>

## **Who Handles This Work?**

Who handles consular diplomacy? Up to World War II, leading Western powers ran separate consular services, which were distinct from the diplomatic service; today such entities are extinct.<sup>16</sup> Consular work is treated mainly as one of the branches of diplomatic work, with the difference that until about a decade ago it was not given much importance compared with political or economic work, and was regarded as a career dead end. That has now partly changed.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to rising costs and the determination of finance authorities in rich countries to charge fees that cover the real costs of visa issue, visa fees now range from \$40 to \$120 per person, making this a real burden in overseas travel; developing countries invoke reciprocity in charging similar fees for visits to their countries.

<sup>15</sup> Such arrangements are also worked out by states on a bilateral basis.

<sup>16</sup> The US State Department operates five "cones" or subspecialties, of which one is consular work; officials are not generally transferred between these cones. Australia also runs its consular service separately from the diplomatic service.

<sup>17</sup> Many observers feel that despite the higher profile of consular tasks, it is still undervalued in many foreign ministries.

Work integration reached a point where Japan now demands that all members of its executive branch must spend at least one year at consular work, so as to understand its relevance and importance.<sup>18</sup> This is also customary in other countries where all officials are expected to rotate in handling different kinds of functional tasks.

As with other diplomacy activities, we have to distinguish between consular tasks undertaken in the home country and by embassies and consulates abroad.

**At home**, the first is the formulation of policy relating to the foreigners who visit and work in the country, setting out the visas and work permits that they must seek, including the handling of foreign students. This leads to the delivery of these policies, the visa issue regulations, the registration of foreigners, the identity documents given to those on long stay, and the like. This is handled by home agencies, with inputs from the foreign ministry, and others concerned such as the tourism and investment promotion bodies and the other agencies that want to attract foreign nationals. Related tasks:

- The issue of passports: in most countries a special agency or a branch of the interior ministry handles this; in some countries the MFA is responsible.
- Consular network oversight: this is handled mainly by the foreign ministry, via its consular affairs department, to ensure that the consular services are delivered by the overseas posts to required standards and in uniform fashion.
- Issuing travel advisories: with the spread of mass travel, and volatility of international crisis, this has become a major activity for MFAs, to monitor the situation in foreign

<sup>18</sup> In unique fashion, the Gaimusho has three service branches" the executive level (who man the top posts), the specialists (recruited on the basis of their language and area competence, now allowed 20 percent of the ambassadorial posts), and the support staff.

countries in terms of safety and security and to post cautionary advisories on websites and via call centers. Such inquiries account for a high percentage of traffic to foreign ministry websites.

- Some countries now invite citizens traveling abroad to register with the MFA as a precaution.
- Diaspora policy: this has emerged as an important activity; some countries have a separate ministry or department for this purpose, while others handle this from within the MFA (see Chapter 5).
- Emergency response to external crisis affecting home citizens has become a new concern, mainly coordinated by the foreign ministry.

**Embassies and consulates** are the delivery agents of many consular services described above, including the issue of visas, handling this together with the other diplomacy tasks. Their work includes the following:

- Policy advice: from the field, they are expected to provide reports on issues as these develop and offer suggestions on the actions recommended at a national level.
- Contact with citizens and the diaspora: regular contact with compatriots residing abroad, and now increasingly with noncitizens who have ties of kinship and blood, is more important than ever before. For an embassy this is a mainstream task, personally engaging the ambassador and his team.
- Registration of citizens: residents abroad are routinely urged to register with the nearest consular office, and rather few of them do so. In the wake of natural and man-made crisis of recent years, this has become more important than before.
- Emergency assistance: this is delivered to individuals, groups, and to entire overseas communities, depending on the nature of problems encountered. In emergency

situations, this demands imaginative and quick responses, as we see below.

Because consular work deals with citizens, its efficient handling makes a major contribution to the image of the embassy, the foreign ministry, and the country. This adds to the *strategic* importance of consular work, as a device for addressing home publics—and the diaspora—and winning their trust. For foreign ministries this revalorizes consular work in an entirely new manner.

## Other Features

Some essential aspects of consular work are the following:

- The 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) provides the master matrix of consular work; the VCCR is a cousin to the more famous 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR). Consular officials enjoy immunities and privileges that are relatively restricted, in comparison with their diplomatic counterparts, and are more closely tied to their consular functions.
- When states establish diplomatic relations, they automatically also enter into consular relations. But the reverse is not true as noted above; if diplomatic relations are broken—as during outbreak of war between a pair of countries—consular relations do not automatically end, unless a declaration is made to this effect.
- Embassies are entitled to exercise consular functions under the provisions of VCCR; in the reverse direction, consulates may not engage in political work, unless so agreed between a pair of countries, as noted above.
- Consular posts exist at four levels: consulates general, consulates, vice consulates, and consular agencies. The title of the person heading each of these corresponds to these levels; consular agencies are now fairly rare.

If a country has more than one consulate in a foreign country, the embassy at that location must supervise these sub-offices, and ensure that they are kept abreast of developments in the bilateral relationship. It is customary for the ambassador and his team to hold periodic coordination meetings with the staff of consulates.<sup>19</sup>

## **Links with Diplomatic Work**

Consular work fits in with diplomatic work in several ways; when handled efficiently, it strengthens the other diplomatic functions and produces synergy. This is best illustrated with examples.

- Foreign nationals seeking visas tend to belong to two main categories: tourists and businessmen. A consular section that is seen as helpful and efficient creates a positive impression among tourists and the travel agencies that represent them; this makes good business sense. That applies even more powerfully to businessmen, who often need visas in a hurry. Establishing a system of “rapid issue” of visas (usually on extra payment) improves services and is seen as user-friendly. Another key action is establishing a 24×7 helpline (which can be run from the foreign ministry, servicing all diplomatic missions; Canada pioneered this, and the practice is in wide use in the West); these operators are able to determine genuine emergency cases and direct applicants to those at the consular posts that will provide the needed help, outside working hours and on weekends.

<sup>19</sup> In my experience at two places where consular work was vital, San Francisco and Germany (the one as consul general and the other as ambassador), I found that holding such conferences every 3 to 6 months is an effective way of harmonizing diplomatic work. It also leads to mutual learning and use of best practices.

- Within an embassy or consulate, sharing information on visas issued, especially to businessmen, with the commercial section gives the latter a good sense of the trend of economic exchanges and a means to establish connections with these enterprises. This simple arrangement is all too often overlooked.
- With increasing migration and study abroad by students, many foreign applicants for consular services are former compatriots making familial visits or relatives of compatriots traveling to the home country for similar purposes. Efficient handling of these services is a means of connecting with one's diaspora. This helps political diplomacy.
- In terms of a country's image, often the place of first contact is the visa office. Making that experience pleasant and efficient is now part of the doctrine of good consular services and country image management. Consular work is a significant contributor to public diplomacy also because its interlocutors are at local levels, outside the capital, and it thus has a good feel for grassroot connections and responses.

Where a pair of countries have a major stake in the mutual relationship, a network of consulates and honorary consuls reinforce and deepen the contacts they have each established with different stakeholders, official and nonofficial. It underscores the point that often the relations that provide value subsist not only the capital (with its weight of official agencies, protocol formalities plus many embassies competing for access); in the interior of the country easier, more informal ways of work are often the norm, and contacts are easier.<sup>20</sup> In large federal countries consulates act as a force multiplier in diplomacy.

<sup>20</sup> This point is also made by Mexican diplomats attending my distance learning courses, on how much easier it is for one of their 52 consulates to reach out to a congressman in his home district, compared with the access problems in Washington DC.

## Typical Consulates

As in the case of embassies, a consulate may vary in size: a small one may have a single consular rank official (a vice consul or consular agent), perhaps one or two other home-based staff, and a similar number of local staff; the largest may have a score or more people, while the United Kingdom has over 100 in Hong Kong.

Another classification method may be to examine the work they handle. Those located in major diaspora centers, tourist destinations, ports and the like may be preoccupied with strictly consular tasks; this is perhaps true of major tourist destinations. On the other hand, the foreign consulates in Shanghai or Guangzhou, even if these are big centers for Chinese visa applicants, or frequented by many visitors from the home country, work also as sub-embassies, pursuing economic, cultural, and political relations. “Talent spotting” is a special task, that is, identifying officials at the province or city level, who are likely to become national figures—they are hosted on visits to the home country, to indirectly influence their attitude toward the country concerned.

Mexico has perhaps the world’s richest experience of consular work, thanks to its unique situation vis-à-vis the United States, with 32 million of Mexican ancestry who live in the United States, and around seven million “undocumented” workers<sup>21</sup>; Mexico has 52 consulates in the United States (2010). In the process of managing relations with dozens of local administrations, Mexico has accumulated rich experience in dealing with a range of consular and human issues and has devised techniques that are worthy of close study. One of the techniques is the issue of an ID card by the consulates, for “undocumented” nationals; taking advantage of the plurality

*(Continued)*

<sup>21</sup> This estimate comes from the Pew Hispanic Center (2008), which also puts the Mexican-born population in the United States at 11.5 percent.



of the United States system, consulates have managed to convince local authorities to accept these for opening bank accounts and obtaining driving licenses, which gives needed local documentation to the “undocumented.” Other methods involve diaspora outreach.<sup>22</sup> But strong engagement also carries a danger; some speak of Mexico’s “consularization of diplomacy,” where this set of issues so dominate the foreign ministry that it distracts from other diplomatic activities.

## Recent Trends

As with other branches of diplomacy, consular work is undergoing evolution. The following are some current trends:

1. A good number of countries have introduced lean staffing, in particular, greater use of locally engaged staff; by rule of thumb, local staff cost barely 25 percent of home-based staff, and in addition offer inbuilt advantages such as familiarity with local conditions and languages. That has to be balanced against the need for confidentiality and loyalty to the home country.<sup>23</sup> Much of economic, cultural, and other promotional work is now seen as “low diplomacy,” involving little that is truly confidential; this has accelerated the use of local staff; some countries use home staff only in the higher ranks of consulates. Yet, few countries have gone as far as the United Kingdom, which has even converted some of its consulates in Europe into units fully manned by local staff, with no home-based staff; one example is Milan.

<sup>22</sup> Some of this information comes from the dozens of Mexican diplomats that have attended distance learning courses I have run at DiploFoundation.

<sup>23</sup> A compromise method, used by many countries, is to employ as local staff at embassies and consulates those from one’s diaspora, including undocumented home citizens. If done in excess, that produces its own problems.

2. Countries are shifting to outsourcing initial examination and processing of visa applications, including interviews with visa applicants.<sup>24</sup> But the final decision on visas, including the checking of applications against the home country's "suspect index," remains a home-staff function, handled strictly within the consular section.<sup>25</sup> Such outsourcing has eliminated unsightly long queues outside embassy offices; some have segregated their consular wings to locations away from the main chancery offices.
3. Another trend is for consulates to take consular services to the users. This is done through mobile teams that travel through major cities and towns in their area of jurisdiction on a cycle that is announced in advance through the media, websites, and diaspora associations. Sometimes services are provided through the internet, supplemented by roving officials through "virtual consulates."
4. Diaspora organizations are often mobilized for assistance; they may help with the mobile services mentioned above. Such involvement of overseas communities is a feature of contemporary diplomacy that goes beyond consular work. India, Israel, and Mexico are among the countries that have pursued this outreach method.
5. Many countries now accept visa and passport applications through the internet. This adds transparency to the process, when applicants are able to track their applications; it also reduces the potential for corruption in countries where this is a problem. The biggest gain is in terms of higher processing efficiency; the US Ambassador at New Delhi claimed in a speech in January 2009 that using the internet had enabled the United States to reduce the wait for interviews (for the 800,000 Indians who annually apply to visit the United States) from six months to two weeks.

<sup>24</sup> Such interviews are now mandatory in an increasing number of countries, in attempts to reduce visa fraud and potential illegal migrants.

<sup>25</sup> Suspect indexes are lists of foreigners who have abused visa privileges in the past or are known or suspected to have engaged in illegal activity.

6. Emergency services are more important than ever before, partly as a result of expanded travel, which is a feature of our interconnected world, and partly because of new threats, from terrorism to global pandemics. Major events, be they the 9/11 attacks in the United States in 2001, or the SARS epidemic crisis of 2003, have produced a sense of vulnerability without really discouraging overseas travel.
7. Most Western countries now charge for emergency services, a practice that has come into vogue in the past ten years or so. A typical UK embassy declares on its website that a statutory charge of Euros 145 is levied, adding: "This is not charged in the case of accident, serious illness, death, or arrest but is charged for the majority of other consular help." Denmark charges on an hourly basis. This method has not spread to all countries, but that is only a matter of time.

A small secret: Western foreign ministries may say that the visa and other consular charges levied are designed to ensure that cost is covered; this leads to frequent, upward revision of charges. Of course, that may depend on how cost is defined, and what elements of headquarters and consulate costs are included. In the case of many countries, these fees have become a significant source of revenue.<sup>26</sup> Some countries react to this with reciprocal action, by raising visa fees for the citizens of the other country.

### **Demography and Migration**

Trends in demography portend the emergence of migration as a critical issue in the years ahead. The key elements are a global fall in birth rates (faster in rich countries and more

*(Continued)*

<sup>26</sup> One might think that such revenues might help the foreign ministry, and a portion might even be used to improve the consulates. While practices may vary, in India all revenues go directly into the national exchequer, and the finance ministry is impervious to any request from the foreign ministry to use a portion of these funds for its consular work.

gradual in the poor states) and rising life expectancy. The world average birth rate per woman was 4.3 in the 1970s; the current figure is 2.6; in the OECD states the average is 1.6, that is, well below 2.1, the rate essential to maintain a stable population. At the same time, life expectancy continues to grow, which means that in the rich states, the proportion of working age people who are available to support the aged has fallen sharply; inexorably, this situation will worsen. In Japan, three people today work against each that is a pensioner; by 2050, this ratio will fall to just 1.5 workers.<sup>27</sup> This creates a strong pull force for import of labor, legal or illegal. We may count on international labor movement, authorized and undocumented, emerging as a major consular and political issue in the years ahead. One hears of moves to raise the migration issue at important international gatherings.

### **Best Practice Examples**

The Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004, created a unique crisis in the coastal tourism centers of Thailand, in that thousands of foreign tourists were stranded without money, tickets, or documentation, some of them in borrowed clothes, when beachfront hotels were wiped out. Within 48 hours, a smooth operation was in place. From Pattaya and other coastal airports, the Thai authorities flew these stranded tourists out to Bangkok, simply handing out boarding passes, demanding no tickets or payment. At Bangkok airport the affected embassies set up counters with fully networked communications; individuals were photographed, with home addresses and passport or ID numbers compiled, flashed to the home authorities for verification, and emergency travel papers

<sup>27</sup> *The Economist*, special report on "Aging Populations", June 27, 2009.

issued on the spot. Thai Air flew them out at no cost to the airport it served nearest to their home countries and the embassies took care of the onward flights. It was a remarkable demonstration of technology-driven emergency help.<sup>28</sup>

Before the start of the US-led coalition attack on Iraq in 1991, following Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the Indian embassy in Baghdad was faced with a consular crisis when tens of thousands of workers fled from Kuwait, most without travel documents (that were typically held by the employers, as per Gulf practice), and little or no money. A resourceful ambassador, K. N. Bakshi, cut off from regular communications owing to the embargos placed on Iraq, doled them out small sums of money—carefully receipted—and when numbers became unmanageable, obtained the help of Indian community volunteers to process them. In a matter of days, New Delhi had put in place an emergency airlift from the nearest open airport, Damascus. The envoy and his team mobilized a fleet of buses to take the workers on the 900 km road journey to Amman, Jordan. In a few months over 172,000 workers were repatriated home, without needing much help from either UNHCR or the international community.<sup>29</sup>

A less dramatic example of outstanding services comes from Mexico, with its 50+ consulates in the United States, dealing with the travails of millions of migrant Mexicans in the United States, a sizable number undocumented, working in that country for many years. Mexico has pioneered consular techniques that range from help from its local community, networking relations with the local authorities to handle problems before they mushroom, and delivering services to the diaspora at their towns of residence. Mexico uses its intranet for sharing information on experiences and best practices among its consular posts.

<sup>28</sup> DNA analysis and other technological aids were harnessed in the grim task of identifying the hundreds of bodies of foreign tourists, with several Scandinavian countries flying in specialized teams that worked for several weeks at this in Thailand.

<sup>29</sup> Ambassador K. N. Bakshi has been modest about his work, speaking of this only to the classes we taught at the Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi, during 1997–2007. He merited a national award for what he did.

Thailand has obtained ISO 9000 certification<sup>30</sup> for the quality of its consular services. This is a neat idea, not only because such a standard shows to your stakeholders the importance you give to this sector, but it also pushes staff to keep up efficiency, as the ISO method involves periodic review and recertification.

Several countries provide for online registration for citizens that travel abroad, as a safety net to track those that may face hazard or crisis in an emergency. Online travel advisories and safety guidance is widely available on many foreign ministry websites. Some feel that legislation requiring travelers to take out health and emergency insurance would help in cutting down on demands for services from consulates.

## **The Future**

How might consular work evolve in the future? One can visualize much greater application of informatics and technology. Travel documents with biometric information are beginning to appear, and will be standard in passports in the near future, that is, with digitized fingerprints, perhaps even iris-scans, incorporated into documents. That will make fraud more difficult. It is likely that processing applications of different kinds will shift to back-offices in the home country. Another possible change may involve better prioritization of work, enabling officials in consulates and other consular offices to focus on the difficult problems and leave smaller issues to other service providers, including the outsourcing agencies. We should also see much greater recourse to locally engaged staff, standing in for home-based officials; this dramatically reduces cost and works for all manner of nonsensitive work.

What will not change is the human element, the continuing need for officials on the ground to deal with humanitarian cases, in individual or group crisis situations, and to help those faced with

<sup>30</sup> This is an internationally recognized quality of production and service standard, applied mainly in the business world, slowly creeping into public services.

imprisonment abroad or family tragedy. We may see more situations of health crisis, including pandemics, which will also impact on the conditions under which international travel takes place, also adding to consular issues. It is possible that the EU practice of pooling of service delivery at places where smaller EU countries are not represented is also a pointer to regional cooperation in consular work. Other organizations, such as Caricom, have attempted to emulate such sharing of services.

Consular work will not slip back into a black hole as in the past, for the simple reason that expanding travel, and the salience of crisis-related issues, would keep it at the forefront of public attention.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. Why is it that for all the good things foreign ministries now say about consular work, spending a large part of one's career in this field is not a recipe for career advancement?
2. How should consular affairs be integrated into mainstream diplomacy? What are the advantages?
3. Why do all countries not produce citizen charters or public documents that set out the services that consular posts are mandated to provide?

# 12 Protocol in International Affairs

## Chapter Overview

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Protocol is defined as:

Rules of diplomatic procedure, notably those designed to accord to the representatives of sovereign states and others, as well as different classes of officers within them, the treatment in all official dealings to which their recognized status entitles them. Public occasions present the most testing times for such rules, and it is for this reason that a state's chief of protocol has in the past sometimes been known as its "master of ceremonies."<sup>1</sup>

Protocol is a lubricant of international relations, much as engine oil in a motor, reducing friction and enabling the machine to function

<sup>1</sup> G. R. Berridge, and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, 2nd edn (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2004), p.217.



with smooth efficiency. Extending the analogy a bit further, protocol also protects the diplomatic machine; it comes in different quality grades. When used in the right grade and mix of additives, it ensures long life for the machine, that is, the diplomatic process.

In international affairs, protocol facilitates the intercultural encounter, laying down a near-uniform code of conduct and norms that each participant willingly accepts, even while within a broad frame, individual countries retain their particular styles, even idiosyncrasies. Protocol is predicated on equal treatment for all those that are of comparable status; yet it allows for uniqueness. It leaves room for special gestures, and even creativity, as we see below. Countries are free to practice their own styles, on the condition of a common minimum standard, plus an assurance that foreign official entities coming into contact receive similar treatment.

Protocol originated as rules of royal courts, of which foreign envoys were members. The Vienna Regulations of 1815 laid down, among other things, the order of precedence of ambassadors, ending the unseemly tussles between rival and competing envoys to gain higher court positions to curry favor with kings and princes.<sup>2</sup> The date of credential presentation then became the determinant of precedence, save in the case of the Papal Nuncio, in Catholic states that had special concordat arrangements with the Vatican.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by the laying down of ranks of different kinds of envoys (these ranks are now archaic, like the “minister plenipotentiary” that headed diplomatic missions before World War II, as a kind of junior envoy; ambassadors were rare in those days).

It would be an error to see protocol as composed of rigid rules. The 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR) lays down principles that states are obliged to uphold, but within that framework, states are free to develop their own methods, as suiting their circumstances. Example: the status of ambassadors in the

<sup>2</sup> In a notable incident in London in the eighteenth century, during a clash between two envoys attempting to get their coaches ahead of each other, one was killed; that was before precedence followed clear rules.

<sup>3</sup> For non-Catholic and non-Western states this appears as an act of Western egocentrism, though harmless itself.

local warrant of precedence in each country varies a little, as per the local tradition; but they always enjoy high status. For instance, in the Philippines, foreign envoys rank above cabinet ministers of the home government, which is not the case in most states.

## Etiquette

Etiquette is wider in scope than protocol and applies to all walks of life. It may be defined as “good,” “correct,” or “appropriate” behavior, in virtually any setting, whether in the family, or in corporate or social settings. The noted American doyen of etiquette, Emily Post, said: “Etiquette gives people blueprints to deal with in times of stress.”<sup>4</sup> In December 1941, Winston Churchill was asked in the House of Commons why the declaration of war that Britain had issued against Japan after the latter’s attack on Pearl Harbor was so politely worded; Churchill replied: “When you are going to smash and defeat someone, it does not cost much to be polite.”

Etiquette is akin to protocol, and much of protocol involves etiquette.<sup>5</sup> The key difference: protocol in its strict sense refers to encounters between the representatives of states, though the term now describes many other kinds of situations as well. A good practitioner of protocol knows well the content of etiquette and would be loathe to be caught at anything other than proper etiquette. Etiquette is practiced, and needed, by almost everyone,

<sup>4</sup> Emily Post’s first book on etiquette was published in 1922; it has been updated since by her children and grandchildren. Her great grandson wrote *Essential Manners for Men* in 2003, which made it to bestseller lists. She used to say: “Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others”. That elevates etiquette from a question of which fork to use to intercultural communication.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. G. R. Berridge made a telling point to me that relates to etiquette. President Obama on his first visit to 10 Downing Street in 2009 shook hands with a humble policeman standing at the door. Unheard of! The policeman then reflexively put out his hand to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who was following immediately after the US president, but Brown ignored it—and the policeman had hastily to withdraw it. The moment was filmed by TV and shown repeatedly afterward.

from the schoolboy to the person eating in a restaurant, or even talking with members of his own family. Social etiquette is taught in finishing schools, and in many other settings. Business houses, varied institutions, and organizations have their own codes of etiquette, which they often label as their protocol.

## Protocol Content

For government officials, protocol is centered on norms of good behavior, but it also operates on the basis of some rules. In a practical sense, protocol functions as follows:

- The protocol department in foreign ministries—which exists in virtually every MFA—lays down the broad protocol regulations in each country. These cover the handling of foreign ambassadors and their staff, as well as the general regulations in the country that are to be followed by other ministries and official agencies, and by that country's provincial authorities (who usually have their own protocol units).
- It establishes precedence among the envoys in a particular capital. Ambassadors and high commissioners are ranked on the basis of the date on which they presented credentials; if more than one participated in that ceremony on a particular day (this is increasingly the case, since most countries find it practical to have several envoys undertake this ceremony in rapid sequence on a set day, for the convenience of the head of state), they take precedence in the order of presentation. Among acting heads of missions, called “chargé d'affaires,” the same principle of date of assumption of function determines precedence; however a chargé d'affaires *en pied* (that is to say, a permanent chargé, if a country has for some reason decided not to send an ambassador) outranks the temporary, chargé d'affaires ad interim.
- The protocol unit maintains the diplomatic list (i.e. the listing of all the diplomat rank officials in the embassies, which also gives the precedence among the heads of mission); this is

usually updated at least once a year, and is a public document available to all who need to contact diplomatic missions.<sup>6</sup> It also ensures that only the ranks recognized by the 1961 Vienna Convention are used. In 2003, India attempted to appoint an Indian citizen, a permanent US resident, as an “ambassador” representing non-resident Indians (NRIs). The US State Department turned this down; it rejected a subsequent move to name him as “special adviser” to our ambassador, arguing that this rank does not exist in the Vienna Convention. He was later made an honorific ambassador at the Indian mission to the UN. The government that came to power in 2005 ended this arrangement.<sup>7</sup> Unlike a bilateral embassy, a permanent mission to an international organization often has several representatives possessing ambassador rank.<sup>8</sup>

- Protocol lays down the flag flying privileges of the foreign envoys; by custom, ambassadors fly their national flags at their residence (called “the embassy” by strict definition), and their office (called “the chancery” in old terminology), as also on their cars. Increasingly, in most Western capitals envoys fly car flags only at important official functions. Concern over security is also modifying some customs, including a preference by some not to use special diplomatic number plates on cars.<sup>9</sup>
- The protocol department also handles the privileges of the diplomatic corps, including the immunities they enjoy. While

<sup>6</sup> It is also sometimes available on the foreign ministry website.

<sup>7</sup> This episode was a rare event, and showed how short-term political calculations in such appointments are not tolerated by the diplomatic system, which retains old and formal values.

<sup>8</sup> In permanent missions the head carries the title of “permanent representative”, which does not figure in the 1961 Convention, which is altogether silent on multilateral missions.

<sup>9</sup> Car number plates for the diplomatic corps can be unique. In France and some Francophone states, the head of mission’s car carries the words “CMD” to distinguish it from the vehicles of diplomats of other rank. Elsewhere such cars are identified by the final set of numbers, with “1” reserved for the envoy’s car. In Mauritius, right up to the early 1990s, the ambassador’s car bore only the name of the country—but then they shifted to the usual norm of “CD” number plates for all.

the envoy and his immediate family enjoy complete immunity, from civil and criminal prosecution, the trend is for countries not to insist on immunity in every circumstance. Increasingly, in Western countries foreign diplomats are expected to pay traffic fines, and those that do not pay have their record of accumulated traffic tickets written up in the local media.<sup>10</sup> Major traffic accidents pose a special kind of problem; one formula is for the official guilty of a major accident to leave the country and pay financial compensation as considered reasonable.<sup>11</sup> It is left to the envoy's home country to determine whether to prosecute the diplomat, or the diplomat's dependant, if a fatality has occurred.

- The protocol unit interfaces with the diplomatic corps, which is the collective body of foreign envoys resident in that country, as well as the envoys accredited to the country but residing outside it (i.e. the ones that are "concurrently accredited"). The "dean" or "doyen," usually the longest serving foreign envoy in that country, leads the diplomatic corps.<sup>12</sup>
- There is a long list of other things that the word "protocol" may cover, not all of which apply to diplomatic protocol:
  - Modes of written communication
  - Personal etiquette
  - Intercultural behavior
  - Table plans and seating arrangements
  - Giving and receiving gifts
  - Corporate protocol

<sup>10</sup> However, one has not heard of Western diplomats posted in other countries volunteering to pay local fines.

<sup>11</sup> This usually involves delicate negotiations, almost always handled with discretion by both sides.

<sup>12</sup> In countries with large Roman Catholic populations, which tend to have special "concordat" or treaty relations with the Vatican, the papal nuncio automatically serves as the dean of the diplomatic corps. In capitals with large diplomatic corps, the longest serving envoys from different regions usually assist the dean. Serving as a dean is both an honor and a burden, and sometimes an ambassador from a small country may decline the responsibility, in which case the deanship passes to the next ranking envoy.

Each of these entails particular rules and procedures, much of which is country-specific. For instance, in monarchies, procedures are especially rigid, and may cover forms in which high dignitaries exchange official presents; envoys are seen as attached to the royal court (as they are accredited to the head of state). Elsewhere, simple, practical arrangements prevail. Similarly, rules determine the seating of high dignitaries at a formal banquet or dinner, ranking them according to their precedence; this takes into account the shape of the dining table, the placement of the host and the principal guest, and other arcane but essential detail; these rules allow some flexibility.<sup>13</sup>

## **Diplomatic Protocol**

Some other features of diplomatic protocol are:

1. “State protocol” covers mainly the way heads of state and heads of government are treated, the manner in which their visits are organized, and their communication with one another. Protocol units in the office of these high dignitaries often handle this; they also handle the ceremonial at the head of state’s residence, including the formal ceremony for an envoy to present credentials.<sup>14</sup> The MFA’s protocol department works in close harmony with the head of state’s protocol unit, where such special units exist.
2. Ministries that are in frequent contact with foreign dignitaries, plus the armed forces and other official agencies, often

<sup>13</sup> See *Satow’s Guide to Diplomacy*, 6th edn (2009) which gives examples of table seating plans. Indira Gandhi, as prime minister (1966–77; 1980–84) frequently altered seating arrangements for the top section at official functions, and might say: “These two will have nothing to say to each other”; or she would change placements to suit the language convenience of foreign guests.

<sup>14</sup> In many countries, this ceremony still retains its traditional character, with guards of honor, full formal attire, and a strictly laid down procedure. This is the one occasion when the envoy is at the very center of attention, and reminds him of his/her awesome potential responsibility as “ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary.”

have their own protocol units, usually taking the lead from the MFA's unit.

3. Flexibility is one new element in the way protocol is applied in our times. It is possible to be creative and innovative, and at the same time ensure fair treatment in dealings with foreign states. Example: at the funeral of Emperor Hirohito in 1989, Japan wanted to give high precedence to US President Ronald Reagan who came to Tokyo for the funeral; going by the standard formula of date of assumption of office, he would have ranked below at least a dozen other presidents. Someone then hit upon the ingenious idea of ranking the dignitaries on the basis of the countries that the late Emperor had visited—that instantly placed the United States at the top of the list. Another instance of flexibility: during working visits and multilateral conferences, especially during regional summits, heads of state and government treat each other as equals (e.g. the French president and the prime minister of the United Kingdom or the German chancellor, both of whom technically rank lower).<sup>15</sup> They meet without any fanfare.
4. Protocol procedures may be deliberately put aside, to signal relationships that are close and exceptional; thus protocol becomes a vehicle for diplomatic signals. Some protocol gestures are ambiguous, so as to convey subtle messages, like “diplomatic illness,” when a leader may feign an illness to avoid a meeting.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> As narrated in *Inside Diplomacy* (2000) pp. 240–1, at the Cancun summit in 1981, at the hotel where all the leaders were lodged, the day before the meeting opened leaders spent much of the day in one-to-one meetings, to discuss both the summit issues and bilateral matters. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi liked to have leaders call on her, though she also went to the suites of other leaders for such meetings when needed. Organizing her encounter with President Mitterrand, I caught up with his entourage in the hotel lobby, and the French President decided spontaneously that he would call on the Indian PM.

<sup>16</sup> See Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World*, (US Institute of Peace, Washington DC, 1991, 1997, revised edition). This book provides a comprehensive survey of the art of diplomatic signals.

5. Intercultural communication is implicit in diplomacy. Standardized protocol helps to smooth these encounters between the varying customs and practices, but despite the existence of agreed norms, some differences remain in the ceremonials and the conventions of countries. It is the special task of resident embassies to warn their government of the expectations of the host country, and to ensure that the home dignitary is not taken by surprise. Example: when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited the Philippines in September 1981, the Indian side was told that a speech was expected at the state banquet, but our envoy did not say that President Marcos was in the habit of making extempore, witty after-dinner remarks, rather than heavy formal speeches. At the banquet the host followed his custom. Indira Gandhi had no choice but to abandon her prepared speech and respond in similar fashion. The next morning the Indian PM attended a lunch hosted by Imelda Marcos; we had been told “some ladies” would attend. It turned out to be a mega-event at the Manila Convention Center, attended by some 600 elegant Filipinas in their distinctive formal costume. When Imelda Marcos went to the podium and read out an elaborate, tightly researched speech commencing with the historical contacts between the two countries in centuries past, Indira Gandhi raised an eyebrow at her information adviser—also her principal speech-writer—we had prepared nothing at all! She then delivered another fine extempore address! Happily, she took this incident with a smile. The moral: every detail of a state visit must be closely examined and then crosschecked.
6. State funerals are a unique protocol event, where a foreign ministry must handle, at almost no notice and often in a high pressure situation, anywhere from a dozen to several score of incoming heads of state and government, besides countless ministers, who almost invariably fly in on their special aircraft, for short visits of a few hours, or a day or two. Of course, visiting dignitaries and their protocol staffs make allowance for the special circumstances, but basic standards



of protocol and meticulous arrangements have to be maintained. Leaders often use such visits for their own bilateral discussion with other visiting heads, again on an informal and flexible basis, in what is called "funeral diplomacy."

7. Most countries have a "protocol handbook," issued by the foreign ministry's protocol department. It lays down the key procedures in that country and helps embassies as well as entities within the country to understand the basics. Countries may also have their own internal guidebooks on other protocol-related matters (such as state, official, and working visits abroad by their own heads of state and government), which are intended to help their embassies in preparing foreign visits by their dignitaries.
8. An adjunct protocol document is the "warrant (or table) of precedence," laying down the ranking of high personalities of that country, including the envoys accredited to it. The home or interior ministry usually prepares this, as it primarily deals with the home dignitaries.

A key dimension of protocol is reciprocity; within uniformity, countries make exceptions on the basis of how the other country treated the home state. For instance, if one country imposes travel restrictions on the envoy and diplomats of a country in times of poor relations, that country usually retaliates by applying similar restrictions on the diplomats of that country. This was particularly true during the Cold War, in terms of the treatment meted out to Western and Eastern diplomats in one another's capitals.<sup>17</sup> The same principle is applied today in the tax treatment for diplomats. While VCDR stipulates that envoys are exempt from all taxes, many countries argue that the application of VAT (and/or airport tax) is an exception, and a matter of local custom and/or

<sup>17</sup> Foreign diplomats were restricted to a radius of 20 km from the center of Beijing; the three exceptions were the airport, the Ming Tombs, and the Great Wall. Several European states and India imposed matching limits on travel by Chinese diplomats in their own capitals. During the Cold War such travel restrictions were customary in the Soviet bloc countries, usually reciprocated by the West.

reciprocity.<sup>18</sup> We particularly see this in the way the United States and European countries deal with other nations.<sup>19</sup>

## **Practical Issues**

Basic tenets of diplomacy apply to protocol work, namely to remain cool under pressure, think on one's feet, always maintain a high standard of personal courtesy and a smiling face. A helpful, problem-solving attitude in interpersonal contacts pays dividends. A protocol official, regardless of rank, is perceived as an authoritative and responsible representative of the country concerned; any lapse in his/her behavior will be seen as deliberate. Therefore if an official behaves with ill humor, the recipient will take offense, treating that as a deliberate snub. Further:

- Protocol work involves mastery of detail, lots of "petty" detail, which nevertheless becomes important, the more so when high state personalities are involved—as the Germans say, "the devil is in the detail." Example: when two high dignitaries meet, their moves have to be so precisely orchestrated that neither has to wait for the other, be it at a banquet, or a public function. Over a decade ago, Morocco's King Hassan kept Queen Elizabeth waiting for 15 minutes during her state visit to Rabat; in 2007 President Putin treated the US secretaries of state and the defense in similar fashion in Moscow. These are calculated political signals.
- One should anticipate every conceivable possibility, including things that might go wrong, and figure out a way to deal with this. This entails contingency planning, and careful

<sup>18</sup> VCDR permits the levy of service charges on foreign diplomatic missions, but not taxes. This means that an "airport tax" may not be levied on foreign diplomats, but an "airport user fee" may be applied; in practice this is a gray area.

<sup>19</sup> The United States often takes the position that its domestic law takes precedence over international obligations. That is part of a much wider issue of how this country deals with the rest of the world.

thought. Example: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was invited as chief guest to the March 1992 celebrations marking the proclamation of Mauritius as a republic.<sup>20</sup> Preparing for the visit, as high commissioner, I received the unusual instructions directly by PM's staff to the effect that while the travel plan was for the PM to depart at the end of Day 3, directly after the state banquet on the country's first republic day, he might opt to stay that night, and depart on the following afternoon; I was told that a decision on this would only be taken on that final official day, and this should not be communicated to the host government. I told New Delhi interlocutors that one would have to take the risk of interpreting that on the ground. On return to Mauritius, I disclosed this "unofficially" to Prime Minister Jugnauth, who immediately responded that they would be delighted to host our PM for one more night, and would make standby arrangements. In the event, the Indian PM opted to stay back and had a completely relaxed morning at his beachfront resort hotel, with no activity at all, besides a stroll on the beach and genuine free time.

- Typically, the program for a state visit is planned, literally, on a minute-to-minute basis. Travel times from one program venue to another need precise calculation, not by rough estimate, but taking into account ground conditions and the possible availability of facilities from the local host, such as motorcycle outriders.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Mauritius gained independence in 1963, but, unusually for an African state, it had chosen to retain the British Queen as head of state, until that date.

<sup>21</sup> As a newly arrived consul general in San Francisco in late 1986, I made a big error in going on the advice of local Indian hosts on travel time from one location to another, in organizing a full day program for our visiting external affairs minister, which involved visits to several public functions, high tech plants and meal engagements. Despite the help of a dozen of the superefficient California Highway Patrol (CHiPs) motorcycle outriders, leaving the hotel at 10.00 that morning, we did not return until well past midnight; the minister did not lose his cool, and insisted on personally thanking each of his motorcycle escorts before entering his hotel.

- Having a standard protocol procedure permits countries to make exceptions and use these as signals of special honor. This applies especially to arrival and departure ceremonials and the ranks at which a visitor is received, the accommodation offered, the form and nature of official hospitality, and the like. These are decisions of policy, invariably taken at high levels. Example: On his 2008 official visit to the United States, Pope Benedict was received at the airport by President Bush, in a clear gesture aimed in part at the Catholics in the United States; the standard formula in Washington DC is for the chief of protocol to meet heads of state and government at the airport, who are then offered a ceremonial welcome the next day at the White House.
- Some problems relating to immunities are hard to resolve. One example is the “congestion charge” levied on vehicles in central London about a decade ago; the US Embassy (plus others including Japan, Germany, and Russia) has steadfastly refused to pay, arguing that this is a “tax,” and diplomatic missions are exempt from local taxation. The British FCO, claiming this is a user fee, has not found a way out of that as yet.

### **Some Incidents**

1. A chief of protocol confronted with carrying out the complex arrangements for a state funeral had his team search urgently for the papers relating to the previous occasion when such an event had been held. He was mortified to find that the file, when located, contained only a single piece of paper—clearly the main papers were stored elsewhere. He abandoned the search, and went on to handle his task unguided by past experience. But when the job was done, he narrated all his experiences in a long note that might serve as a reference point for the future. But unless that note is stored, or indexed, using IT technology,

*(Continued)*

there is no certitude that his successor, making his own feverish search for past precedents, would manage to find that document! These are the hazards of building memories.

2. During a visit to India by the president of a major European country, the minister accompanying that dignitary felt that he had not been treated with due honor; when the visiting president went to lay a wreath at the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi, his motorcade took off without this minister—he had been admiring the pictures in the gallery leading to the point of exit, and he was not guided by the escort officials to get into his car in good time. Another incident during that same visit added to the problems. On return home, that minister decided to retaliate by opposing cooperation with India on the issues under his charge, to the point where this became a matter of bilateral concern.<sup>22</sup> It took over a year of patient cultivation of this dignitary and his senior officials by the envoy to rebuild friendship. Protocol lapses can produce consequences that affect interstate relations.
3. Protocol customs vary enormously from one country to another. In Germany, the chancellor's new year reception for the diplomatic corps in Bonn (in 1992–95) was entirely a stand-up affair and quite tiring. First the ambassadors were lined up in a corridor outside the main salon of the official residence for over 30 minutes, in strict order of seniority, based on the date of presentation of credentials. They then entered the salon, one-by-one, to greet the chancellor, which took well over half an hour, and, finally, there were speeches by the chancellor and by the dean of the diplomatic corps, the papal nuncio, with nary a chair in sight.

<sup>22</sup> The local foreign ministry understood well the irrational nature of their minister's anger, but left it to the envoy and his team to rebuild friendship with the minister.

## **Visits Abroad**

Visits, incoming and outbound, are a major test of protocol. Those involving the heads of state and government are the most important, while some of the following also applies to visits by foreign ministers, the speaker of the parliament, and other ministers.

Broad classification of these is: state visits, official visits, and working or informal visits (which can include stopover visits, where a dignitary spends a few hours, in transit).<sup>23</sup> Each has its rituals and near-standard content, and yet on each occasion, the visit is engineered for its own circumstances and needs. A few general points:

- Ceremonial is implicit in high visits, demanding precision and flair, the more so with full state visits.
- The key object of any visit is to improve and further develop relations between states. The convenience and preferences of the guest are the first consideration. Exceptions are made to standard protocol, as required.<sup>24</sup>
- It is customary to send advance parties to work out details for major visits, including the full program, logistics, security, and a myriad of detail that is involved. For the embassy, which gets immersed in the arrangements long in advance, an incoming visit becomes a test of its capabilities and takes precedence over all other work.

<sup>23</sup> Some countries, notably monarchies like Japan and the United Kingdom, but also Switzerland, annually accept only two or three incoming state visits by foreign heads of state, where full ceremonial procedures are applied. Other high-level visits are handled with reduced ceremonials. In the strict terms, visits by heads of government are not "state" visits, though this distinction is not always applied.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, in New Delhi a visit to the "samadhi" (funeral memorial) of Mahatma Gandhi is a fixture for visiting dignitaries; when the Saudi King visited Delhi, Indian officials were advised that this posed problems for the visitor in terms of his position as the "Custodian" of the holiest Islamic places of Mecca and Medina. This item was quietly dropped from the program.

- No detail is too small to be mastered.
- The program of visits by the dignitary, in the capital and in the other towns and regions being visited takes into account the guest's wishes, the suitability of the places chosen, likely hazards involved (including the public impact, if any).
- The spouse of the visiting dignitary also requires a program, again reflecting care and suitability. Some countries, the United States among them, have a tradition of the spouse playing a quasi-political role, making independent overseas visits.
- Media representatives are a key element, one's own and those accompanying the dignitary—a major visitor may bring two or three planeloads; special media centers have to be established and the public impact of each event in the program assessed in advance.
- Business delegations and public figures accompanying the dignitary have become a *sine qua non* today, adding to the advance planning requirement.
- One must be ready to deal with the unexpected, be it a demand from the spouse of the visiting head for a program change, a program blocked due to difficulties in negotiations, which may prompt the visiting head to delay or cancel an agreed activity. The escort officer needs instant communications access to senior officials to report the problem and take instructions. Equally, in an emergency, the official has to be ready to act independently, as needed, while at the same time reporting to home officials. A sense of humor is a great asset.

If the visit is for a regional or global summit, the preparation follows a different trajectory, centered on the conference that is at the heart of the visit. The demands on the host agency are multiplied manifold; such events may take a year of planning by a dedicated task force. If the dignitary is to attend an international conference at New York, or Brussels, or Geneva, there may be no host as such, though the country where the event is held has the responsibility for the basics of protocol, security, and the like. At such events it is one's own mission that takes on the complex "host agency" role,

making hotel and transport arrangements and all the logistics—which for a bilateral visit are the responsibility of the host country.

A successful visit adds value to the bilateral relationship, or to the conference event being attended, and leaves behind a trace that endures for many years. Any major lapse also produces long-term consequences, as many professionals may recall.

## **Final Thoughts**

Protocol is a core task at the foreign ministry and one of its most visible activities. In small MFAs it sometimes assumes a larger importance than it deserves, and this can lead other government ministries to treat it as the main MFA task. That tends to minimize the value of the other foreign ministry functions. This is an observable phenomenon at some places.

Officials assigned to protocol tasks, especially the chief of protocol, work in proximity to the country's leaders and ministers. High quality performance is essential; errors are all too visible and seldom tolerated. All diplomats need to learn the essentials of protocol and the art of detail management.

Simplification of protocol ceremonial is visible in many countries, but resistance to change comes from some, who consider this as an erosion of older values. Western countries, and some others, have eliminated elaborate arrival ceremonies at airports, replacing these with honor guards and national anthems at the presidential palace or some other central location, just before the start of the substantive program.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, departure ceremonials are

<sup>25</sup> India made this shift in 1982, during the time I served on Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's staff. Several practice sessions of the arrival ceremony were held at the presidential residence ("Rashtrapati Bhawan") and even after that she waited some months to make up her mind. That saved the prime minister and her ministers and high officials a trip to the airport for the welcome; the departure ceremony was dropped altogether. China has also carried out similar simplification. Elsewhere it is a mixed picture.



curtailed, or even dropped. Host country leaders no longer appear at airports to greet counterparts in most Western states; in contrast, this remains the custom in much of Africa. At the same time, short informal visits are widely prevalent in Africa and the Arab world. Overall, we are likely to see a progressive shift to lesser ceremony and greater focus on substantive programs. But the core system of diplomatic protocol remains the bedrock, anchoring the manner in which states deal with one another.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. The current trend is for simplification of protocol. Is this likely to produce new protocol formulas?
2. Is the notion of absolute immunity for the envoy and his immediate staff viable in times of public accountability, or is it an essential precondition for diplomacy?
3. Can we envisage any moves to amend the 1961 Vienna Convention? What might amendment involve?

# Part III

## **Craft Skills**



# 13 Professional Attributes

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Some of the most memorable writing by Harold Nicolson, a doyen of the diplomatic discourse of the mid-twentieth century, is about the personal qualities of the professional diplomat. Of many traits, ranging from intelligence to loyalty, modesty, and the rest, integrity rated highest in his eyes. Any experienced professional will confirm that this particular quality is indeed vital. If diplomacy is all about communication today with an expanding range of official and nonofficial interlocutors—then credibility is the bedrock on which successful advocacy is founded. And credibility hinges on integrity.

Why should integrity matter so much? Some reasons are obvious. Envoys assigned abroad, assisted by their embassy teams, possess wide *latent* authority to act autonomously as representatives of their states; their conduct is seen as committing their countries in myriad ways. Instant global communication has done little to change this, even while new ways are available to verify the

envoy's actions and demarches. With an increase in the span of the envoy's dialogue, in reaching out to varied interlocutors, he or she has to carry conviction with all of them. In dealings with officials in the receiving state, institutional affiliation facilitates advocacy, but credibility is always an uphill battle. In contrast, nonofficials are sometimes new partners in such discourse, often not accustomed to dealing with diplomats. The foreign representative has to build trust with them and that hinges on how they perceive his/her integrity.

## Qualities

Let us examine the personal qualities, and the skills, that professional diplomats need.

Integrity is the one quality that stands out above all the others; standing out above the others, it incorporates dedication to the tasks assigned, steadfastness in advancing national interests, placing these higher than one's own agenda, plus honesty, and a willingness to do the right thing. Zeal, balanced with good judgment, is no less desirable, notwithstanding Talleyrand's oft-quoted nostrum to the contrary.<sup>1</sup> Public service involves risk taking, carried out on the basis of cool calculation of the opportunities available, and the advantage to be gained. No less crucial are people skills, a sense of humor, and the empathy that enables the individual to cultivate others, and work across cultures with natural ease. And as Nicolson told us, other qualities of the good individual, intelligence, modesty, and patience, among others, are of course to be taken for granted.

What about the exceptional situation when an official does not agree with the instructions he or she receives, or is in total disagreement with the policy of the home government? In the former

<sup>1</sup> Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838), the great French diplomat is remembered for his wit and role at the 1814 Congress of Vienna. He described a key feature of diplomacy with the remark: "And above all, never too much zeal!"

case, avenues are open to request reconsideration of instructions and for conveying that official's recommendations. But beyond a point, the official has to comply, or request reassignment, or, in extreme cases, resign from the post.<sup>2</sup> Such instances are rare, but do occur from time to time in different diplomatic services. Much more common is the dilemma for the official serving abroad, or at home, to express views that are contrary to the country's policy or established worldview. Honest expression of one's viewpoint, especially for the official assigned abroad, is a matter of both duty and personal integrity. This applies with special force when the official is reporting on the situation in the country of assignment or its response to a demarche made by the official. Any "shading" of the latter, to make the news more palatable at home, can snowball into gross distortion, if other envoys also opt to do the same, to make their reports more appealing to home interlocutors. Iraqi diplomats attending training programs in New Delhi in 2004-05 narrated how difficult it was under the Saddam Hussein regime to report home anything other than what the government wanted to hear.

A personal, subjective list of work habits and associated skills includes the following:

- i. Many tasks associated with this profession, at all levels, are "discretionary," depending on self-motivation. This applies to information collection and the reading that one undertakes, as a preliminary to researching any subject. For instance, the resourceful official can track down annual reports of the World Bank and IMF on the target country, or access "online" the academic journals that carry quality analysis on countries, regions, and special subjects. The internet has vastly expanded the horizon of such discretionary work and given play to innovation. But optimal use (for

<sup>2</sup> In a 35-year career, I faced barely two or three instances of explicit rejection of my recommendations and orders to comply with the government's instructions; interestingly, the two cases that linger in memory involved cooperation with our intelligence agencies.

- instance to carry out effective “data mining,” or simultaneously consult multiple users on a document using modern communications options) demands mastery of this new technique through formal training or personal application.<sup>3</sup>
- ii. Even for junior officials, there is little in diplomatic work that is of a routine nature. International affairs do not follow set patterns. Except in some particular “servicing” jobs, like consular affairs, or the administrative affairs, repetitive tasks are few.<sup>4</sup> In a service unit like protocol affairs, one needs mastery of detail and flexibility to deal with the unexpected. Experience shows that a “can-do” attitude is a common characteristic of diplomats who derive personal satisfaction from the profession and this usually helps them to deliver results.
  - iii. Linked with the above two is another dominant feature of diplomacy in this age of rapid change—a need for the official to have a broad spectrum of interests. The founder of one of the world’s most successful software enterprises, Infosys Technologies, N. R. Narayana Murthy, calls this a “broad bandwidth” quality. When applied to diplomacy, this unusual term means a need for a wide range of interests and capabilities, plus a capacity to absorb new ideas; to be a quick learner. The range of issues encountered in contemporary foreign affairs is vast. While the diplomat cannot master every subject, he should be able to absorb the essential core of different subjects and to use this knowledge to make “interconnections” with other themes and issues. We see this most clearly in multilateral diplomacy, but bilateral work too throws up a need to constantly learn new subjects and integrate these into managing relationships.
  - iv. With this goes the human quality of being able to relate to other individuals across cultures. A diplomat has to be a

<sup>3</sup> The DiploFoundation, based at Malta and Geneva, is one of the few specialists in this area, offering a variety of such distance learning courses.

<sup>4</sup> But even consular or administrative work in foreign ministries and embassies abroad offers much variety, and throws up unique situations.

“people person,” interested in making new connections, cultivating individuals in different walks of life. This cannot be faked over time and hinges on genuine interest. That holds good for the bilateral and the multilateral diplomat, who must both consort with different kinds of partners. One should enjoy the company of others and develop genuine interest in different subjects and disciplines.

- v. Is our diplomat a generalist or a specialist? That is an endless debate. His broad range of interests must be grounded in one or more specialties of his own. A single prescription cannot apply to all diplomatic services, but the formula that has worked for most good systems is to blend the individual’s specialization with generalist skills. A young diplomat should begin with an “assigned” foreign language that he is required to learn, which morphs into area expertise in a region or country. As the career advances, the official adds to this other functional skills or special knowledge, for example on security and disarmament affairs, or environmental issues, or on legal issues relevant to his own country, or multilateral economic diplomacy. The range is vast. In this manner, by mid-career the official would have typically absorbed three of four special skills, making him a kind of “generalist–multi-specialist.” Taken collectively, within the foreign ministry a range of expertise is thus built up, spread across the hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> The MFA’s professionalism, and credibility with domestic partners, hinges on the quality, range, and depth of its expertise.
- vi. One discipline that all diplomatists should master is economics, because it impacts upon much of contemporary relationships among nations. Today, an understanding of basic economics, and the interplay between the economic interests of one’s own country with the external world, is indispensable for the foreign ministry official, the more so in handling bilateral work.

<sup>5</sup> Management of all these specialties is the task of career management in the HR division or the personnel administration.



Does this make the diplomat a paragon? Perhaps. In one very distinct sense the diplomat belongs to elites—he or she has been chosen from among hundreds of applicants.<sup>6</sup> This tends to produce higher expectations than may be the norm in other professions.

### **The Generalist versus Specialist Debate**

Almost every major diplomatic service has known a swinging pendulum like contestation of views between those that favor geographical and functional specialization and those that argue for the generalized craft skills. For instance, until the 1950s and even later, major European services had specialized subbranches that handled Arab affairs, China, Japan, Soviet affairs, plus consular and information branches. The Chinese Foreign Ministry was among the last to abandon the practice of specialists spending an entire career working on Burma or in Indo-China, often ending their career as fluent linguists and ambassadors to these countries.

Today, the US Foreign Service, the world's largest diplomatic service, is virtually the only entity that continues with the practice of subspecialties or "cones" (political, economic, culture and education, public affairs, and consular) where officials spend an entire career, seldom transferring from one to another specialty. The rest have swung to the view that at the apex, they need senior officials and envoys who see the external relationships as an integral whole, where each specialized functional area serves also a larger, interconnected purpose. The same diversity of experience applies to the range of language and area skills that these officials need. Paradoxically, the increasing specialized nature of subjects

*(Continued)*

<sup>6</sup> In virtually every country, the ones selected by the diplomatic service are from a large catchment, the proportion varying from one in ten or twenty, to one among hundreds, or even thousands—as, say, in the case of India or China.

creates the need for “generalist-specialists” who master the art of connecting the specialists.

Further,

1. Most foreign ministries do not treat multilateral diplomacy as a specialized branch of the profession; the bulk of the ambassadors in New York and Geneva have a background in both bilateral and multilateral work, usually much more of the former.
2. It is not practical for small diplomatic services to ensure that all their officials have specialized skills that are used mainly in their expertise areas. But it is an even greater error to use that as an argument for dropping the requirement that all diplomats must master at least two foreign languages.
3. Functional specialization is today even more important than language and area skills.

## **Desk Officers**

Long apprenticeship is a feature of this profession, a stark contrast with many other jobs in the government, where a young official with barely three or four years of experience, when working in the home administration, might typically find himself in a standalone charge, working in relative autonomy.<sup>7</sup> In a diplomatic service, a newly recruited official, if assigned abroad after the induction training customary in that foreign ministry, might be a third or second secretary, ranking rather low in the embassy hierarchy, unless he is in a very small embassy, where he may be the only diplomat besides his ambassador; that would give him/her

<sup>7</sup> This contrast between home officials and those working in foreign ministries is especially stark in developing countries where the former often has substantial responsibilities for socioeconomic development tasks, producing high job satisfaction.

broad experience, including the opportunity to act as the *chargé d'affaires*, when his ambassador is away. At the foreign ministry, the young official is similarly rather low on the totem pole, with limited autonomy. In the normal course, for the diplomat, independent charge, as a head of mission or as a consul general comes after 15 or 20 years of service, at the least. Similarly, at the foreign ministry, leadership of a section or division similarly comes after relatively long service.

What then is the attraction that the diplomatic service offers? The goal is the prize, at the later stage of the career, the opportunity to play a leading role in helping to shape and to execute the country's foreign policy. In this situation, it becomes vital to understand the tasks of the young diplomat and to sketch a realistic picture of the tasks at this stage of the official's career.

In every foreign ministry, the official at the lowest level of the pyramid is the "desk officer." He or she is the operational foundation supporting the entire structure. The smooth running of the diplomacy machinery hinges on their professional competence, motivation, and training. Is this recognized in all foreign ministries? Sadly, it is not; this is one of the pivots determining the efficiency of the system. This is not a matter of empty words, but is borne out by experience and study of different systems.

The desk officer has to master several requirements:

- a) **Gain real insight** into the country or region handled (or the functional work charge). In an age of "information overload" this role involves mastering voluminous data, identifying the relevant information, plus *master analysis that leads to real assessment*. The aim: to become an "insider" on the target country or functional task.
- b) **Master ecopolitical assessments:** Bilateral relationships today involve almost as much of economics as politics, and the same applies to the international multilateral dialogue. Regardless of whether trade and investment promotion work is handled in another ministry, the desk officer must have intimate knowledge of all the economic issues in play

and link these with other themes in the dialogue, in accordance with the concept of “integrated” diplomacy. He must understand the interconnections.

- c) **Absorb the reports and special dispatches** received from own Missions in the countries or region under charge, relating these to the data garnered from other sources, blended with understanding of the national policy toward those countries or region. The desk officer must relate particular bits of information to the wider picture, to gain deeper insights. Brainstorming and other meetings at the division and department level are of real value in this collective effort.
- d) Preparing **records of discussion** is a standard responsibility, sometimes involving high-level meetings of importance. All MFAs should have their own guidelines on the writing of such notes, placing a high premium on accuracy and brevity; the aim in such documents is to capture the “key words” in conversations (See Chapter 17).
- e) Foreign ministries run on **notes, analysis, and recommendations that guide policy formulation as well as policy execution**. In some systems, it is at the bottom of the pyramid that new initiatives emerge; for instance, in China, Germany, and Japan, it is the section or division (that is, a subunit of a larger department) that is the initiator of policy choice. In most situations, the desk officer has a potential to contribute to policy formulation; the extent to which this is harnessed is also a marker of the good system. Add to this the normal responsibilities that go with any foreign ministry assignment, the **drafting of letters, messages, speeches, answers to parliament questions, and other notes and documents** that form the staple of the diplomatic profession. A “nonroutine” approach in handling this work, plus mastery over the skills of draftsmanship, is essential.
- f) The MFA’s coordination role, within the government, gives the desk officer a special responsibility for **constant liaison with counterparts in other ministries and agencies** that are

directly involved in the functional area covered by him. This interface involves discretion and balance, and demands regular supervision by senior officials of one's own unit (see below).

- g) Learn to be a **team player**, subsuming the ego and working with others. Good systems make flexible use of task forces, often composed of officials belonging to different units.
- h) **Responsibility to the public at large** and to non-state agencies has grown. Often this is set out in the MFA's "public charter" or its "mission objectives." The nature and volume of tasks this entails depends on the job. For example, an official in the consular or protocol department may have more frequent dealings with the public than one handling corporate services. For the MFA as a whole, the domestic task is to keep citizens informed of international developments that affect them. This is the face of foreign affairs "democratization," that is, a new external-domestic paradigm that also leads to domestic public diplomacy.
- i) The **foreign diplomatic missions at headquarters** connected with one's charge are another responsibility. Again, an approach based on understanding and helpfulness goes a long way in performing this task well, and in producing contacts and relationships that also help in the optimal performance of the other duties. This should be based on effective projection of the standpoint of one's own country and building credibility as an *interlocuteur valable*.

The above list is not exhaustive; one would find many other tasks that go with particular assignments. For all the jobs that the desk-officer performs at headquarters, an attitude of curiosity, of performing more than "routine" tasks, provides a viable mental framework. At an embassy or a consulate, the same range of tasks applies, *mutatis mutandis*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Please see Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador* (2005) especially Chapter 3 (pp. 64–95) for an exhaustive narration of the modern diplomatic mission's tasks.

## **MFA's New Responsibilities**

Let us consider the evolving responsibilities for the foreign ministry in relation to bilateral and multilateral work.

**First**, as we noted elsewhere, the MFA is no longer the “gate-keeper” of external relations and must graduate to the role of the coordinator of external relationships, involved on all policy issues, while leaving the detailed management to the functional ministries. In practice, another ministry will come to the MFA for advice only if it believes that the MFA adds value to its own activity. For instance, an industry ministry that deals with mobilizing foreign investments—FDI—will welcome the MFA if it is convinced that the apparatus of missions abroad is of real help in this task, and that this effectively helps with FDI inflow. Or, an environment ministry concerned with global climate issues will accept the counsel of the MFA on the best way to approach a neighboring country for a new bilateral agreement if it feels that its own concerns will find due place in the issues pursued during a major bilateral summit meeting. This engages the MFA in delicate internal networking, to win acceptance on merit, rather than through formal diktat. For instance, the British FCO virtually reinvented itself after the Falklands War of 1982, when UK political opinion had perceived it as being out of touch with reality, by establishing sound networking ties. It is a good example of a foreign ministry that has mastered the coordination role.<sup>9</sup> Now, in 2010, under

<sup>9</sup> The Indian Ministry of External Affairs, like many others, is often in turf battles with other ministries, especially those handling economic work. One particular division head dealing with sensitive relations with neighboring countries was recently able to establish an excellent two-way partnership with the Commerce Ministry and other agencies by demonstrating to them that the diplomatic apparatus understood their concerns, and working together they could produce a better outcome than through independent action.

a strong push by the new Conservative government, the British Foreign Office is rededicating itself to economic diplomacy.

**Second**, the MFA should reach out to the nonstate actors, including organizations of “civil society” that are engaged in external relationships. These are the think tanks and research institutes, academia, the media, associations of business and industry, as well as professional bodies that play a role abroad. This also includes NGOs and groups engaged in “track two diplomacy” Some MFAs have formal mechanisms of contact, where a two-way sharing of information becomes a necessity. Some, like the reputed World Council of Churches and Catholic Relief Services, have played a determining role on the conclusion of an international treaty on land mines; in Latin America similar church bodies have often been instrumental in resolving internal civil war, working with other peace groups. This involves mindset changes for officials.

**Third**, teamwork within the MFA demands that all officials, top to bottom, are *au fait* with policy goals and apply uniform principles; the same holds good for the embassy. This hinges on effective internal communication, both upward and downward. For example, volatility of international developments makes it essential that there is a mechanism for rapid daily review among the top management.<sup>10</sup> Yet, there are many MFAs where this is either absent or handled episodically. In countries where the “power distance” between top officials and the staff is high, this is especially difficult.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> An excellent book by John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (Chapman, London, 1992), gives an evocative description of what he calls the “march of the mandarins”, the daily gathering for the 10.30 am meeting chaired by the permanent undersecretary.

<sup>11</sup> This term comes from Prof. Geert Hofstede, author of *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, (2004), and other works. See: [www.geert-hofstede.com/](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/) [accessed on June 25, 2010.]

**Fourth**, working partnership with one's own Missions is no less crucial. It is argued in this book that a new empowerment of embassies is taking place now as "comanagers of relationships."<sup>12</sup> It is essential for MFAs to understand this and use the situation profitably. What is relatively new is that the embassy too should be brought into the policy process, relying on modern communications as the single best resource on all issues concerning the country of assignment. We thus move the missions abroad from simple policy advice to participation in policy dynamics. The foreign ministries that resist such ideas lose out in full exploitation of their own diplomatic machinery.

**Fifth**, in its human resource policy, the MFA should use modern techniques of career planning, evaluation of individuals, motivation, and promotion policy, to optimize its use of available talent. Without this, it is impossible to ensure optimal utilization of the talent that resides within the organization. One key problem is the handling of the misfits. Some countries have experimented from time to time with the "golden handshake" and other early voluntary retirement schemes. A few use the formula of placing officials on an enforced leave of sorts, "awaiting assignment," when no job placement is possible.<sup>13</sup> Management of staff is one of the MFA's vital tasks.

**Sixth**, MFAs' internal management methods need continual updating. This entails corporate techniques where applicable

<sup>12</sup> Rather few scholars have written about this important change that has taken place in the way foreign ministries and their embassies work with one another.

<sup>13</sup> Turkey uses this formula extensively because there are too few jobs at the MFA for very senior officials who return from ambassadorial assignments abroad. One excellent formula is to send them to academic institutions, with the title of "ambassador-in-residence," as per the practice that the United States developed. Customarily, the MFA continues to pay the salary for the official and the costs of maintaining him or her at the academic institution. However, it is vital to avoid an impression that the ones so assigned are MFA "rejects"!



and monitoring what others do in like situations.<sup>14</sup> We have already covered the need for expanded exchanges among foreign ministries on their techniques and methods. A sound method of performance management is essential, suited to the ethos and the civil service norms of the country.

**Seventh**, the issue of “good governance” is posed more sharply than before, confronting all the agencies of government, including the foreign ministry. This is at two levels. The first is the concept of a citizen’s charter that many countries apply to all organs of the government, reflecting the individual’s right to efficient and timely service and the responsive attitude that should be adopted by all officials. Second, there is the wider concept that a good external policy serving the interests of the citizens of the country is a “public good”; this is as important as a safe water supply system or a good judiciary. MFAs have the responsibility of thinking this through and articulating to domestic constituencies the ways in which foreign policy and the diplomatic system actually serve and advance the national interest. Rather few foreign ministries regard their activities through the optic of good governance as yet. Doing so would automatically give primacy to citizen interests.

## **Final Thoughts: Career Growth**

The early stage of the career of the diplomat is an apprenticeship for larger responsibilities, as noted above. The years spent at headquarters give insights into one’s own system; usually the work demands are heavy; serving abroad, save in exceptional situations of personal hazard or during exceptional assignments, the official

<sup>14</sup> With the exception of EU countries that have brought MFA administration within the ambit of their permanent consultation mechanism, there is no information if special units exist to maintain a permanent search for best practices.

has time to reflect and engage in discretionary activity of his choice. In virtually all services, officials have to rotate between headquarters and missions abroad, and this career blend is a key feature, giving the official exposure to the field situation and to the home establishment.<sup>15</sup> Such rotation also helps to overcome a professional hazard—failing to consider the perspective of officials at the other location.

Unlike in most other careers, the work and living conditions vary so greatly between different overseas locations for MFA officials that it is virtually impossible to offer equitable career options to all of them. One basic challenge: how to motivate officials to serve in a place such as Pyongyang or Rangoon/Naypyidaw, when others of their cohort are in New York and Paris. The increasing threat of personal safety and family security at a growing number of locations further complicates the human resource management challenge. This is met through different measures that are used by most MFAs. First,

- a) Fair rotation, balancing “hard” and “soft” living conditions as well as the professional attractiveness of different kinds of overseas assignments is essential. Unfortunately, this comes up against a need to cultivate specialization and a similar need to send the best people to handle the most demanding jobs. Every diplomatic establishment gropes for its answer to this conundrum.
- b) Opportunities to serve in other ministries and agencies should be seized as a means of widening experience and gaining better understanding of the governmental system, rather than as “exile” from one’s own system and colleagues. Such lateral transfer, for instance to an economic ministry, can become the basis for developing a further functional

<sup>15</sup> Unusually, right up to the end of the 1960s, the Dutch Foreign Ministry in effect had two career channels, one composed of officials who only served at the Ministry, and the other with officials who exclusively served in missions abroad. Most MFAs require officials to rotate, even if some individuals prefer for personal reasons to serve in the home capital for long periods.

specialization that adds to one's skill base. It also widens one's contacts.

- c) The other option to consider is the sabbatical or opportunity for academic study, raising the level of qualifications through a yearlong course or attendance at a short-term executive program or the like. Careful discretion in selecting the program is essential to ascertain that it is relevant to one's career path or objectives. Unfortunately, there is an abundance of short training courses that add little to skills or knowledge.
- d) In a typical career, choices come up at different stages, for which there can be no standard prescription. It is best for the official to take a long and measured view of career choices. The safe option is not always the best one, as those who have chosen hard or unusual assignments would attest!
- e) In most services the fast track to high advancement lies in long service at headquarters. That is where the official gets the chance to serve in the offices of high personalities and is noticed. The downside is that he or she misses out on assignments abroad and the opportunity to gain in overseas experience.
- f) Web 2.0 social media gives new encouragement to young officials to use internal networks to discuss professional issues and flag problems they confront, overcoming hierarchy and bureaucratic rigidity. They do this through dedicated networks of the foreign ministry, and when these do not exist, through group email exchanges.

For Western foreign ministries that have a large intake at mid-career levels, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, a new problem has arisen, which has affected the character of their services. Those that entered in their youth, and expect to stay on till their retirement age, do not fit well with those that see their job in short-term perspective, and with that reflect different personal values and goals. How should these foreign services handle the mobility of those that aim at short service and ensure optimal motivation for the different streams of personnel? As more countries shift to blending their executive staff with

those that join the ministry laterally, at mid-career levels, this issue will be etched in sharper focus. In particular, hard issues will come up in relation to the blending of the “long career” and the “short career” executives, for higher promotion, and for appointment as envoys.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. Does professionalization equate with specialization, or is it that higher up the career ladder, the diplomat needs generalist skills?
2. Will bringing in specialists at mid-career levels help foreign ministries to improve their relations with functional ministries?
3. Diplomatic services are beginning to lose their lifelong career character through mid-career entrants and others no longer wishing to serve out till retirement. What impact might that have on the ethos and values of the service?

# 14 The Spoken Art and Advocacy

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This chapter focuses on the spoken form that is central to advocacy, which lies at the heart of diplomatic practice in the field. The next chapter looks at the written dimension.

Is diplomacy mainly a spoken or a written art? Today, many would assert that advocacy is much more a verbal craft. This is contrary to what Harold Nicolson sometimes suggested; today, not all diplomatic discourse can or should lead to written agreements. For instance, most right-handers take their first step with their right foot; in much the same way, diplomatic discourse,

whether a demarche or some other act of advocacy, tends to start with the spoken word, and *may* end up in written form. In practice, of course, both remain important. Rather than debate whether the one is more important than the other, we might think in terms of walking on two legs.

For the professional, especially the one working in an embassy abroad, the spoken form dominates. Faced with a growing plurality of interlocutors, the envoy and the members of his embassy team find themselves engaged in outreach to multiple constituencies and networks, essentially through the spoken word, via their dialogue, advocacy, and persuasion.

## **Starting Point**

Communication is not a science to be mastered with easy formulas that apply in all situations. One of the first rules is that the rules should be broken as necessary! It is learnt through the application of fairly simple methods, covering the basics. Beyond that, the skill and one's own mastery over it develops through observation and practice, that is, developing techniques adapted to one's needs and personality. There is no one universal method that works for all, but some principles are relevant.

- Clarity of thought and purpose is the first requisite. Before one communicates, either in writing or verbally, one must have a clear idea of the message to be conveyed and how one wants to structure the message. To simply dive into a topic without a game plan is a recipe for confusion and a wasted opportunity.
- Mastering the facts is a prerequisite, and this may call for study, research, and careful analysis. All this comes under the head of advance preparation, and in the case of verbal communication, it is useful to write out and rehearse the basic points in one's message.

- Winston Churchill was a master of the spoken word for nearly six decades of public life. He used language in a manner that came across as simple, spontaneous, and powerful. But he invariably spent days and weeks in preparing, polishing, and rehearsing his seemingly off-the-cuff remarks. He used to say that words and their use was the only skill he possessed!
- As nonnatives of the English language, most of us have our own accents that often identify us by country, or region, or place of origin (Peter Sellers, as an actor and mimic, had mastered several subtypes of Indian accents, besides the accents of many other nationalities!). English is today an international communications language and is hardly the property of any one county or people. The BBC implicitly accepted this some years back when it abandoned “Queen’s English” as its universal norm. Whatever our accent, it is essential to speak with clarity and to be understood. Without comprehension, verbal communication is wasted; if the listener misunderstands, it can be a potential disaster in diplomacy. We usually know some that speak at such speed that they leave listeners behind! It is far better to speak slowly than to be misunderstood. And it pays to check once in a while that the listener is on board.
- One essential facet of communication is the ability to listen, with patience and understanding, in a way that flatters the other person and enables that person to express the full meaning of what that person intends. Some of us have a tendency to interrupt others, jumping in with our remarks before the other person has finished speaking. This happens in dialogue with those with a limited command over international languages, or with those who speak softly and slowly. That leads to bad communication.

Basic training should be given to diplomats, via courses in communication skills. One also learns through practice; apprenticeship works better when juxtaposed with practical training.

## **Diplomatic Channels**

One dimension of interstate exchanges does not get the attention it deserves. A government usually has at its disposal two parallel communication channels in dealing with foreign states: its own envoy in the other capital and the foreign envoy in one's own capital. Both are available to convey messages, for advocacy, and to obtain clarification. This is comparable to a "double entry book-keeping" system, as pointed out by the Maltese scholar and former foreign minister, Alex Sceberras Trigona.<sup>1</sup>

By custom and convenience, the foreign ministry's primary choice is its own envoy; it is almost always better to have this envoy deliver a message, or obtain information, or a clarification—that way one deals directly with the principals in the other country, rather than depend on a foreign intermediary. Yet, as experience shows, the foreign envoy is a second, auxiliary channel. In particular situations, be it for confirmation of information or for checking something about the partner country, that foreign envoy's intimate knowledge of his home country becomes vital, making him the priority channel. One may sometimes wish to cross check some information provided by one's envoy, and of course this has to be handled with much discretion, so as not to make this act of cross checking obvious.

In a recent instance a foreign minister was keen to visit an overseas capital, after his country had been involved in an international controversy—perhaps he wanted to convey an impression of normalcy. The country to be visited suggested that a later date might be better, but his envoy in that foreign capital overrode that advice and, accordingly, a formal proposal was advanced. The receiving country turned this down, and this information leaked to the press, causing embarrassment to that minister. If the ministry had called in the envoy of that foreign country for advice, the reasoning behind a deferment might have been better understood, avoiding

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Trigona has developed this concept in his teaching and writing, some of it carried out at DiploFoundation.



subsequent problems. The moral: the double check system does merit better use, for tally and confirmation.

There is one special situation where the foreign envoy is the preferred channel: when the home foreign ministry delivers a protest to the foreign state, or any other kind of warning message—one might almost say the foreign emissary is the better carrier of bad news! Further, the more serious the issue, the higher the level at which the message is delivered to this foreign ambassador. Parallel action may be taken in the foreign capital as well, via one's envoy, but displeasure is best expressed when the foreign ambassador is publicly summoned and then told off.

Functional ministries sometimes apply a different method. Often, they are not too familiar with their own country's envoy overseas, or enjoy a relatively better relationship with the foreign envoy; in such situations they may find it easier to deal with the latter. What they do not grasp is that their own envoy will usually be more effective, since he usually has access to the foreign decision makers. On the other hand, if a functional ministry is making a special demand, be it for aid or technical help, or for setting up a visit program for their minister to that country, the foreign envoy may be in a good position to help. Consequently, it happens in practice that in some developing countries one's own envoy is not kept informed, and the foreign ministry may also be left out of the information loop. These are situations of poor coordination, that is less than "whole of government" functioning, which undermine effective diplomacy.

Two examples, from real life, illustrate the above. *One*, a functional agency had an urgent lobbying problem; it wanted a foreign government's support on a technical issue that was to come up for a vote in an international organization in a third country. On a Saturday morning they had learnt that this vote would take place the following Monday in Washington DC. The permanent secretary heading the agency had the imagination to phone his country's envoy in the concerned capital (whom he did not know personally); the latter used his contacts to track down a key official at home that very day and obtained the needed assurance that this country would cast a favorable vote. The foreign envoy could not

have produced such a speedy result. *Two*, representatives of functional ministries posted at embassies abroad serve their own home masters, and may not always follow diplomatic niceties, especially involving travel abroad by dignitaries from their ministries. In most countries such high-level visits involve an internal approval process, often by the head of government. Sometimes, discussions are initiated with the foreign country even before such clearances are obtained, and that becomes a display of uncoordinated external action. Defence attaches at embassies are sometimes involved in jumping the gun, making soundings for visits from home that do not materialize.

## **Demarches**

A “demarche” is a generic term, referring to the act of taking up an issue with another government; it mainly refers to political diplomacy, though the subject taken up may belong to some other field as well. It may relate to bilateral affairs, or to an issue that concerns the home government, or some other international or third country subject. Usually the demarche is made to the MFA of the receiving country, but it may also be made to another ministry or to the office of the head of government. One would not include here issues taken up with parliamentarians or with nonofficial entities.

A demarche may be made on instructions from the home government; if the issue is important, the ambassador or other official may leave behind with the official of the receiving country an “aide-memoire” which summarizes the demarche that is usually made verbally. Such a document is not signed (official letterhead paper is also not used); it is simply handed over to ensure that an exact summary of the verbal demarche is available to the recipient. Where issues relating to the foreign policy of the home government are involved, the demarche is almost always made on specific instructions from home.

On a bilateral issue—and very occasionally in relation to other issues as well—the envoy may make a demarche on his own initiative. In all cases, the action must be immediately and faithfully

reported back home. Envoys always enjoy a zone of autonomous action, as long as they exercise sound judgment. Envoys are expected to be proactive in advancing their country interests, provided the risk-to-gain calculation is made with cool calculation.<sup>2</sup>

The level at which the demarche is made, and the timing is usually left to the discretion of the envoy. Some countries routinely instruct envoys to "make this demarche immediately and at the highest level." That is usually impractical. The highest level in the MFA is the foreign minister, and below that, the permanent head of the ministry. One would quickly lose local credibility if all manner of issues were raised at such high levels. In an increasing number of countries it is nearly impossible for an ambassador to meet the foreign minister on a bilateral issue.<sup>3</sup>

- Some MFAs are driven from the top, and in such places it is important to make the demarche at a high level to ensure visibility for the views conveyed, but one cannot abuse the patience of high officials with issues of a secondary nature. One learns this from experience and observation.
- In well-organized MFAs, actions are often initiated from the bottom upward. At such places the middle or junior level official plays a key role (e.g. China, Germany, Japan), sometimes setting the frame of reference within which the demarche is received.<sup>4</sup>
- It makes sense to build credibility with high personalities. Often it is possible to convey a simple matter in a phone

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the core arguments presented in Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to Chief Executive*, (2005).

<sup>3</sup> In an increasing number of countries, it is rare for the envoy to meet the foreign minister for a substantive meeting, though social functions may provide opportunity for quick conversation. With intensification of the diplomatic process the world over, even the newly appointed ambassador may even have to wait for a long while for a first formal call on this minister, after presenting credentials. A major European envoy told the author in mid-2010 that in New Delhi the Ministry of External Affairs had sent a note affirming that on account of preoccupation, the minister would not be able to receive foreign envoys!

<sup>4</sup> This was my experience in Germany (1992–1995).

conversation with a senior official. When to demand a meeting becomes a matter of judgment for the envoy; the same logic applies down the line to other officials of the embassy in their regular contacts with counterparts.

- Sometimes it is useful to wait for an opportune moment, either to combine the demarche with some other issue or meeting opportunity. This hinges on the time-criticality of the issue. Usually an envoy has some discretion in such timing.
- Social entertainment gives opportunity to raise issues, and sometimes makes it possible to speak in a way that even gives some “deniability,” that is to be able to say later that you were only trying out an idea, or speaking informally.

Making a demarche is both a craft and an art mastered through practice. It is one of the key skills of the profession.

## **Intercultural Management**

Verbal communication skill is a combination of many disciplines—including intercultural understanding. For any person engaged in international activity, be it in business, or in civil society activities, or as a professional diplomat, ability to understand others involves cultural skills, in a very practical way. Since each of these actors addresses a listener or an audience, usually belonging to a different cultural ethos, the reception of one’s message is part of the act of communication. So while one works on the techniques of delivery and style, it is the reaction that one evokes that is the key element in that process.

A banker or a salesman depends on his audience in much the same way as the teacher or the diplomat, each is judged by the recipient of the message. This is what “credibility” is all about. And winning credibility becomes that much harder when it is combined with a need to bridge cultural differences.

Intrinsically, intercultural communication is not different from communication in one’s home context. It is just that the risks of

misunderstanding are magnified, and one needs to be especially sensitive to the reaction, which may take the shape of indirect signals. A "yes" may mean no more than a polite: "I have heard you." And a shake of the head from side to side may even signify assent!

While intercultural communication is a whole big subject area to learn and understand, for the purpose of verbal skills, we should remember the need to listen and to understand; empathy also helps.

## **Advocacy**

Advocacy is a craft skill, where observed experience and the circumstances of the given situation are part of one's store of accumulated wisdom. A few suggested approaches are narrated below, together with some real life anecdotes.

A key question: when making a demarche, is it possible to locate a congruence of interest for the other side, to reinforce the request or narrative that one presents, or to find a solution to a complex issue? Often, potential congruence lies below the surface, and it takes a skilled practitioner to locate it. If the set of arguments you present to the other side has elements that appeal to their self-interest, the case becomes so much more attractive. Example: The United Kingdom's negotiations with China on the future of Hong Kong that stretched out over several years before the July 1997 formal handover of this British colony to China, under an agreement that created a "Special Autonomous Region," under Beijing's ingenious "one country, two systems" formula that Deng Xiaoping had originally proposed to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1984; this involved the two sides in locating congruence of interests, even while they had completely different starting points.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Article 5 of Hong Kong's Basic Law provides that this arrangement is to endure for 50 years, that is, 2047; this is also an instance of postponing a final arrangement into the future, on the premise, presumably, that by the time such a deadline arrives, events will probably have taken care of themselves.

Advocacy is helped by the principle of reciprocity. If the help or understanding you seek in a foreign capital can be linked, in a reasonable way, with some past action where you helped the other side, a moral case is built for returning the favor, even if no such condition was initially stipulated. This works provided the other side has some latitude in the action it may take. Example: in the early 1950s, soon after Independence, India gave away choice tracts of land in New Delhi, some even in huge lots of 10 and 5 hectares, to foreign embassies, at the peppercorn rent of one rupee per year, valid for 100 years; no demand for reciprocity was even mentioned at the time.<sup>6</sup> A few countries understood well a moral obligation; in Tokyo, Japan sold at a low price a valuable site for the envoy's residence. In Germany (the lessee in New Delhi of five hectares of land for its chancery and residence), in 1992–95 the Indian Ambassador invoked the reciprocity principle to request a good site at Berlin, after that country's unification and its decision to shift the capital to Berlin. The German Foreign Office was sympathetic, but pleaded inability, also gently pointing out that no reciprocity condition existed. In the event, around 1997, in the midst of intense competition among many countries vying for choice locations, a senior official offered the Indian ambassador a premier site on Tiergartenstrasse, which the latter snapped up. In fact, that particular site had many suitors, more than ready to pay the asking price and more, but someone had understood the moral obligation.<sup>7</sup>

Reciprocity may not normally work on issues where core interests of a foreign partner are at stake. In the example recounted above, the moral is simple: when making a gesture of accommodation to a foreign country, it is common sense to make a reciprocity condition explicit, telling the partner that when the time comes,

<sup>6</sup> The how and why of this extraordinary largess lies buried in the unopened Indian archives, but it is known that the decision was taken personally by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

<sup>7</sup> I was the envoy that set the ball rolling with a "reciprocity demand" in 1992–1995; it was my very able successor Satinder Lambah who pushed the case to an effective conclusion in 1997, through his persuasive style. It is for Ambassador Lambah to narrate the full story of that smart deal.

you may seek a return favor. Handled with tact, such action strengthens mutual confidence.

Sometimes, it is possible to enlist other constituents in the country of assignment to support one's advocacy, aimed at the foreign government. They would usually be entities and individuals that have a legitimate reason to support the demarche, but potential lobbyists of this kind may be found in diverse fields. For instance, if an economic issue is under consideration in a foreign country, it would be legitimate for a business chamber, or an industry association, or major enterprises in that country to intervene. Discretion is essential in mobilizing such support, because, if overdone, the effort may easily backfire—if for instance the policy makers find themselves to be under too much pressure. In Washington DC and Brussels professional lobbyists are available in profusion, but elsewhere too, such lobbyist professionals, or those lending services on a part-time basis are beginning to emerge. This too is one of the changes in the way diplomacy is conducted.<sup>8</sup>

## **Mechanics of Persuasion**

How does the envoy's credibility affect persuasion? The demarche made by an ambassador is an official act and is universally understood as an expression of the viewpoint of the government that s/he represents. Some envoys and diplomats are more effective than others; credibility is one differentiator. Credibility comes into play in several ways.

First, we noted above the levels at which demarches might be made. The well-connected envoy may opt to lodge a parallel demarche at the office of the head of government, if the issue is vital and/or urgent. But when the issue is less vital, it may be just

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes such informal lobbyists are politicians or fixers, and one naturally has to be wary in using them. On a visit to Beijing some years ago I was told that even in China it is now possible to locate individuals who might be able to provide connections to policy makers (in China this is called *guangxi*).

as well to deal with the department or division head concerned in the MFA. The envoy may even leave it to the political counselor to deal with the issue at his level in the MFA or another ministry. The receiving side always appreciates an envoy who does not abuse access. And it pays to keep the host foreign ministry informed, even if it is not a principal actor.

Second, the receptivity of that demarche is affected by credibility. On the bulk of international affairs issues, global or bilateral, the recipient of the demarche has very limited personal discretion in accepting or rejecting that demarche. The policy of the host country generally determines his reaction, allowing little leeway. But on some issues, especially of the bilateral genre, the receiving interlocutor *may* have a zone of limited discretion (See "Benefit of Doubt," Chapter 7). Here the believability of the envoy, and/or his persuasive skill, comes into play. Put another way, an interlocutor *may* be inclined to tilt in favor of the envoy and take a small risk, if trust exists, based on past experience. It is only the resident envoy who can build *and* sustain that kind of trust. No amount of technology can replace such personal equations.

Third, credibility is no less vital in the reporting tasks of the envoy, where s/he has to narrate to home authorities an authentic picture of the country of assignment and its viewpoint. Such feedback to the home authorities is also a form of persuasion. This can be a delicate task if the envoy brings a perspective that runs counter to the assessment at home, and may consequently not be very welcome; in such situations it is easy to brand one's envoy as acting as a spokesman for the other side. Rare is the envoy who has not encountered occasional sniping allegations in situations of political complexity, though usually not to his face. Personal credibility again provides a context against which such unwelcome allegations can be judged.

A scholar makes an interesting point about diplomacy and personal relationships, underscoring the above.

Diplomacy institutionalizes personal familiarity. That diplomats are personally known to a host state's officials, and vice versa, enables each to make informed judgments about



the other. It may be difficult to judge when a state is lying, but it is easier to assess when an individual known to you is being deceptive. Moreover, a diplomat's reputation can be an enormous asset during negotiations, a kind of social capital.<sup>9</sup>

## Public Speaking

As diplomacy becomes more "public" and involves dialogue with non-state actors, public speaking becomes an essential skill, as much for junior diplomats as for ambassadors. Again, this is an art, which is based on technique. It improves with experience, but the basic skills are straightforward.

- Simply reading out a prepared speech often produces a bored reaction from the audience, unless the event is of major importance, and a prepared text is the norm that is expected at the event. An extempore speech almost always finds the audience more receptive. (Perhaps there is a sense of expectancy over what the speaker may say next!) Such speeches in fact call for a great deal of preparation, and it is feasible to use a set of points or keywords written out on cards, as an aid to memory. A compromise is to use a prepared text but to break away from it from time to time, engaging the audience in eye contact and through it getting their feedback as well.
- Memorizing a speech text and delivering it without notes is feasible for one who has such ability as well as extensive practice. Without this, one may fall into disaster, like an Indian envoy who, in 2004, publicly misquoted a poem authored by the prime minister and was corrected by the PM, who was present!
- It is essential to ascertain in advance the time allotted for the speech, and to stick to this, through rehearsal and self-control.

<sup>9</sup> Lora Anne Viola, *Talking States: A Theory of Diplomacy* (2004). harrisschool.uchicago.edu/programs/beyond/workshops/pisp\_archive.asp [accessed on February 20, 2011]

This would seem obvious but it is sometimes neglected even by experienced practitioners.

- It pays to anticipate the interests of the audience and to cater to this as feasible in the speech, or at least to respond to their interests. Humor is a wonderful ally, used well, ideally with a light touch.
- A question-and-answer session at the end of the speech is the norm at all but the most formal functions. Treating the questioner with respect, avoiding a patronizing tone, and speaking with brevity are among the standard guidelines for such interaction.

How does new diplomacy, in particular the use of blogs and “tweets” by diplomats square with public speaking? Both are public, with the sizable difference that the one engages anonymous audiences, who may come back with their digital comments through the internet, while the other takes place face to face. Each has its merits, but it would be self-defeating to focus exclusively on the one, in lieu of the other.

## **Press Encounters**

In a world that is globalized and interconnected, all diplomats have to anticipate that, whatever their rank, they may suddenly be catapulted into a situation of facing the press and the TV, for one’s “15 minutes of fame.” The professional diplomat needs to hone this skill as much as the art of public speaking.

Some may disagree, but in a democracy the basic relationship between the government establishment and the media is adversarial, or at least one of “tension,” where it is the job of the media to “catch” or “expose” those in power. Bad news sells itself. Good news is seldom of interest to the media, unless it is packaged in a manner that makes an appealing story. The official needs to understand that the media have their own perspective, and a professional responsibility that should command respect, not just in words but in practice as well.

Preparation for a press conference begins with an anticipation of the issues that will interest the media, plus a clear "brief," the essence of what one has to state. If this brief is unclear, the encounter with the press can lead to disaster. Even experienced politicians practice with mock sessions where hard questions are put to them. Their staff compiles a briefing book that covers likely questions and possible answers. But one has to be ready for the unexpected as well. Other essentials:

- A friendly, relaxed attitude is best.
- One may pause to think, but excessive hesitation is bad.
- One should keep statements brief and concise. One should anticipate the way one's own side of the story can be captured in a "sound bite" that will be picked up by the media, and cut out excessive verbiage.
- Sticking to one's brief is essential. It is the job of the media to catch the spokesperson off guard and to say something that is sensational and often indiscreet.
- A skill that comes with practice and effort is to answer the question one wants to answer, which may not be the one actually asked. It also means avoiding the verbal traps or even the context that a question may impose, and to respond in the context of one's own standpoint. At the same time, if carried too far this method becomes unproductive.
- It is vital to convey a friendly spirit, not to take personal offence at the questioner, or to respond in a manner that is combative or aggressive, which is a frequent failing, especially if one is not sure of what to say. Nor should one patronize the questioner.
- "No comment," "I have no information on that point," or "I will need to check further on that" are perfectly valid responses, if one is pushed beyond one's brief, or genuinely does not have the information that is sought. A spokesperson is not expected to have all answers.

The language in which a question is put is akin to a box, covering the matter of interest to the questioner. In handling this, one has to

think and act outside that box, in effect using the question to say what one wishes to say on that particular subject. A simple way to practice such “outside-the-box” responses is to eschew the language of the question, and to reply in one’s own words. Of course there can be situations where it is suitable to use the questioner’s language, but practicing as described above helps to develop good response skills.

A master at this game, former spokesman of the US State Department, James Rubin, offered the following advice to the spokesman: “Talk about results. If you don’t have results, talk about policy. If you don’t have policy, talk facts. If you don’t have facts, talk process. You always have process.”<sup>10</sup>

## **TV Interviews**

Much of what is stated above applies to TV interviews, but there are differences as well. Until one has seen oneself in a recorded interview, it is hard to visualize the extent to which “the TV box” produces its own distortions. It magnifies any facial expression or gesture—a simple act of scratching one’s face looks ugly when the camera is locked onto you. In particular, eye movements produce exaggerated impact, as if one is shifty or avoiding an answer. Some other points:

- It is usually best to maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Looking into the camera is not generally a good method—this is different in the case of the TV statement, where one addresses the unseen TV audience through the camera.
- The voice is a revealing instrument, and on the TV and radio, one has the choice of signaling or supplementing one’s message to the audience with voice modulation. But this is to be done with care, avoiding a theatrical effect.

<sup>10</sup> James Rubin was the Official Spokesman at the US State Department for several years in 1992–2000, and made this comment in an article in *The Financial Times*, May 26, 2001.

- It is useful to know in advance one's likely audience and to pitch the responses to the level of their interest.

One learning method is to watch the TV critically, to analyze the style of news presenters and others, to identify good and bad methods. Some of them evoke empathy, while others may seem stiff or boring. One can then pick some presentation ideas that seem to work and decide on a style that suits one's own personality.

## **Practical Advice**

Communication skills grow with practice. There is seldom one single way of getting one's point across in a speech or a press conference, but some methods are more effective than others. The advice offered below is a general guide, to be developed as suited to the individual's talent.

1. Who is the audience? What is the level of sophistication of the arguments that should be used, as also the level of information that should be supplied? An erroneous judgment on this may weaken the message. One easy mistake is to give too much information. Place your message in a context that appeals to the audience.
2. Ask yourself: what do I want to say? This will help to shape the message. In a short speech it is best to stick to two or three points. In a longer speech the arguments can be developed in some detail, but it helps the audience if the speaker sets out his goals and presents them in a format that helps them to recall the essence of the message. Remember, the audience does not have the full written text! (One should not distribute the full text before the speech is completed, since this acts as a distraction).
3. Avoid clichés or phrases that are stereotyped. A short sentence is better than one full of clauses and conditions. A

direct, affirmative statement is better than one that is couched in negative terms. And even when dealing with sensitive issues, one must not appear defensive or lacking in self-confidence.

4. Give a concrete example where this illustrates the point you are making, offering something that is likely to interest the audience. Using a good quotation at the right place is also a good way of holding the attention of the audience.
5. Avoid abbreviations or acronyms that your audience may not understand (example: "FTA," "MOU," "NAM"). Make a conscious effort to drop typical home terms when speaking before a foreign audience that may not be familiar with your syntax.
6. Stick to the time that is allotted. This makes life easier for the organizers and pleases the audience.
7. Voice modulation, change of pace, and use of appealing language are among the methods that good speakers use to hold the attention of their audience. One good way of improving one's own technique is to study other good speakers and borrow some of their methods. Eventually one should aim to develop one's own style, but that comes with practice and experience.
8. Learn to think on your feet, to respond to changing mood among the audience, and to points made by other speakers.
9. Treat a questioner with respect and seriousness, even if the point made is repetitive or insubstantial. Use it to make the points you want to convey, avoiding verbal traps or the logic of the questioner.

Gaining a reputation as a good speaker, one who is credible is a cherished goal in a profession where much depends on speaking skills, whether before a large audience or in small group conversation. This is more important than eloquence! What counts is not so much one's accent or range of vocabulary, but a manner that is pleasant, personable, and persuasive.

## **Points for Reflection**

1. Building personal networks of useful contacts is vital for professional diplomats. Often, investment made in relationships in the early stages of one's career bears fruit in later years, since one often encounters the same set of actors.
2. Credibility hinges on personal relations, and this is one factor that ensures the limits of "virtual diplomacy." Might this change in the future?
3. Public speaking skills develop through practice. This makes it essential that young officials are given full opportunity to develop their talent.

# 15 Writing Skills

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We consider here the written craft of diplomacy, the other leg of the spoken-written duality of this profession. There was a time when the written art seemed to dominate, as we noted in the previous chapter.

The drafting of documents—whether in the form of a statement in parliament by a foreign minister, or a joint declaration between two countries, or a resolution at a multilateral conference, or an internal submission—is a craft skill. It is learnt through teaching and mentorship; it improves with practice and experience. It is predicated on a mastery over language and an ability to find the correct word or phrase that is appropriate to a particular situation. Given that most international negotiations are conducted in English—even in the EU this language has gained ground after EU



expansion to 25 and then 27 members, much to French chagrin—mastery over this language is essential in any diplomatic service.

A good document, such as an analysis or a policy recommendation, is an instrument of internal advocacy. The arguments have to be marshaled in such a way that they make an impact, in a precise and comprehensive way, leading to the proposed conclusion or course of action. At different times, good drafting may include one or more of the following objectives; a few of these are mutually contradictory and appropriate only in special situations:

- To express an idea or concept in the clearest way possible.
- To win support for the viewpoint expressed.
- To obscure one's position when it is inconvenient to speak directly.
- To use a phrase or words that bridge different viewpoints, in effect finding a way either to harmonize or to cover up differences.
- To convey the core of one's own ideas in a manner that is less objectionable to the other side than a bald or direct statement.
- To introduce vague or indirect language to weaken or circumvent a statement emanating from someone that is objectionable from one's own perspective.
- Use ambiguity in a calculated way, either to obfuscate a complex issue or find a middle way between divergent perspectives.

A draft text may undergo multiple revisions by the author and by others. A reviewed text usually gets better, because the original author may not have seen its defects, or fully considered improvements; on the other hand, the text may also suffer in the process, losing clarity. One should put aside ego in the process of redrafting or editing a text.

It was the seventeenth century French author and mathematician, Blaise Pascal, who coined the phrase: "I did not have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one." Language that is flowery, or excessively complex, is less powerful than simple, direct

text. Standard drafting advice in the British Foreign Office is that one should first leave out all the adverbs, and then eliminate the adjectives; what remains is a clean text!

In an age of information overload, when 24×7 news networks offer fast breaking news, and serious journals furnish a huge range of analysis, is diplomatic reportage devalued? Several aspects of this question need to be addressed. *First*, diplomatic reports no longer need to cover hard news or developments that are in the public domain; other sources are faster. *Second*, published analysis seldom covers issues from the perspective that is of interest to one's foreign ministry and home government. *Third*, forward-looking analysis, which attempts to anticipate developments, is the strong point of diplomatic analysis. Of course, there is no certainty that one will be right in the prognosis offered—but it is the duty of the diplomat to offer the best assessment of how a situation is likely to develop. *Fourth*, honesty is vital. If one tailors one's reports to match what one imagines the authorities at home wish to hear, one will be derelict in one's professional obligation. A foreign ministry that encourages candor will receive it; one that discourages messages contrary to its worldview will receive slanted analysis, leading to gross misjudgment for itself, down the road.<sup>1</sup>

What does the foreign ministry require of its officials, especially those assigned abroad in embassies? *First*, it needs sound, objective analysis. *Second*, it needs good anticipation of events. If an election is to take place in a neighboring country or in a major power, it needs a prediction on the likely outcome—with an indication of probability. *Third*, It should be alerted on the emergence of new personalities as potential new leaders in foreign countries. In the late 1980s, the United Kingdom received a good “heads up” on the emergence of Gorbachev as a possible future leader, at a time when he was still in the second echelon; as a consequence, London was one of the first to invite him on a visit, and this made

<sup>1</sup> Every foreign ministry has undergone this experience. On the manner in which India needlessly contested and lost a UN Security Council election against Japan in 1996 (when slanted reportage played a key role), see Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, pp. 89–90.

some difference in the United Kingdom's links with him. It also ensured for the United Kingdom a position of effectiveness in world affairs. Similarly, India invited Hu Jintao many years ago under its distinguished visitor program, before his emergence as a national leader. *Fourth*, no foreign ministry likes being surprised, least of all in relation to an adverse development. Envoys are paid to anticipate problems in bilateral and international relations. This especially applies to visits by foreign leaders; with good contacts, the envoy usually should be able to get a handle on the issues that the visitor will raise during a bilateral visit. Similarly, one must identify the initiatives that others may launch at regional and global summits. It is often, but not always, possible to get a hint of such actions, through the network of contacts that the effective envoy and his team should have developed in the country of assignment. As customary in this profession, the principle of reciprocity applies: a favor received creates the obligation to return the same, when the shoe is on the other foot.

## Creative Ambiguity and Code Words

*Code words* are phrases or words that have become endowed with special meaning, through frequent usage or circumstance. They usually convey meaning that goes beyond the literal language; the special meaning attached to these comes from usage. Such practice is common to many professions; in international affairs, knowing and mastering such code words is a practical art.

Examples: *international community*—in practice this refers to Western countries' views of events, sometimes the permanent members of the UN Security Council (P-5). If the members of the African Union (consisting of 53 countries) or the G-77 (about 130+ states) put forward a demand, editorial writers are unlikely to refer to them by this term. *Engagement*: attempts to carry out dialogue or exchanges in noncontroversial areas with a problem country; or making an effort to overcome differences through initiatives covering cooperative actions in areas of mutual interest. *Confidence building measures* may be included in a policy of

engagement; they cover measures that are taken by a pair of states to overcome a *trust deficit*, through step-by-step actions, undertaken on matters of mutual interest. “*Democratization of the international system*” is a phrase used by powers that would like to play a greater role in world affairs than they actually do, in practice; this expression is to be found in statements that come from Russia and India, for instance. In the same way, *multipolarity* is a term used by these states, and by China, which signals antipathy to the position of the United States as the sole superpower.<sup>2</sup> *Polycentrism* is the term used by France, with a similar aim.

Deliberate vagueness in language is a device used in documents to bridge over differences of substance; it is left to the parties concerned to interpret such decisions as it suits them. This produces temporary agreement and may postpone the real problem. We examine ambiguity more closely in the next chapter, in relation to UNSC resolution 242, which dealt with the consequences of the 1967 Arab-Israel War.

## Diplomatic Reports

Each foreign ministry develops its own style; one cannot lay down a universal template for good writing. A few observations are offered:

- The in-depth, single theme dispatch used to be the forte of good diplomatic systems before the ICT revolution and the spread of the internet. The old form survives in a few systems, as a valuable vehicle for sustained analysis. It is at its most effective when it directly addresses issues relevant to the home country and presents a forward-looking analysis.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In these days when some commentators speak of “G-2” we should not be surprised that this term is not so frequent now in Chinese statements.

<sup>3</sup> The United Kingdom was one of the master practitioners of such dispatches, as I recall from the 1960s when some dispatch reprints—on light blue paper—were shared with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in a practice that withered away in later years.

- Periodic reports have long been a staple of diplomatic systems. The principal one up to the 1970s or so was the “monthly political report,” written with care as an analysis of events, often personally approved by the ambassador, and sent out through the diplomatic bag in multiple copies, on the basis of a distribution list worked out for each originating embassy, for headquarters and for other overseas missions. A parallel document was the annual political report, and its cousin, an annual survey of the functioning of the mission. These are today replaced in most systems by a variety of reports, different in each system, mainly weekly, or fortnightly.
- Cipher telegrams from embassies are usually distributed widely within the foreign ministry and the government system, on the basis of a set of standard templates. Senior officials must scan scores each day; the head of government’s office receives hundreds.<sup>4</sup> In such an overload, an ambassador sending terse, precise messages commands attention, and often builds a solid reputation. The cipher telegram is a powerful, but double-edged weapon—it can badly hurt the originator if irresponsible, or overused, or badly crafted. As noted earlier, it is now being overtaken by point-to-point confidential message, sent via intranets, which are often not distributed as widely as cipher messages.<sup>5</sup>
- Speaking points must be terse and tailored to the requirements of the senior personality for whom they are prepared. Some leaders depend on these, while others disdain their use.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> During the one year I served on Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s staff (1981– 1982), all the telegram copies meant for the PM (except those in two specified categories) came to me for screening, and I saw the volume of paper involved.

<sup>5</sup> The situation varies between countries; in some the old form cipher telegrams remain dominant, while in others that have made an early shift to intranets, the person-to-person confidential message is gaining ground. In informal comment, some Western foreign ministry officials remark that the senior echelons do not now always have a panoramic view of current developments, because some information does not reach them. One should add that some small countries’ MFAs do not use cipher telegrams.

<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1966–1977; 1980–1984) had no use for speaking points; with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (1984–1989), they were *de rigeur*.

- Briefing notes are needed in great diversity and profusion and almost invariably at very short notice. Computers are a great help. The MFA official involved must ensure that one's own embassies are fully kept in the picture, sending them full sets of the briefing papers prepared at headquarters (see Chapter 6; some Western countries have even transferred to embassies the task of preparing briefing notes, supplemented by the foreign ministry territorial departments, as needed).
- Drafting of speeches is a special art; one must adapt to the style used by a particular leader. We examine this below. The internet offers much opportunity for picking up ideas, but one *must* avoid plagiarism, which is easy to detect, and can produce huge embarrassment.<sup>7</sup>
- Any document that will be made public demands great care, whether it is a reply to a parliament question, an official statement by the government, or a press note. With "freedom of information" on the march, in most democracies any official document will generally end up in the public domain. Points of fact need careful checking, as also any quotation or reference. When a document goes through multiple drafts, it is vital to date or number the drafts, to avoid confusing a draft with a final or subsequently amended text.
- Internal papers that lead to important decisions need exceptional care, because they will influence the choice of action. Balance and judgment are among its special ingredients. In some countries the tradition is to offer a single option to high personalities, but the more common system is to set out a range of choices for decision.
- Handing over notes are of much utility in the diplomatic service, especially when an ambassador ends his assignment, but a few foreign ministries do not use these. (Annex II). A special UK tradition was the "farewell dispatch" in which an envoy often gave expression to his/her final thoughts,

<sup>7</sup> In several countries, leaders have been embarrassed by such facile plagiarism by their speechwriters.

sometimes in a provocative or humorous manner. This tradition came to an end in 2007 after an embarrassing leak.<sup>8</sup>

## Examples

A few samples illustrate the manner in which problem issues are handled. This may cover differing viewpoints, finding a compromise, or bridging differences with jugglery.

**One.** When the Shanghai Communiqué was drafted in February 1972, at the end of President Nixon's first visit to China, the differences between the two sides were so vast that the traditional method of a joint document setting out points of commonality was impossible. Instead, another device was used: "the US side stated . . ." and "the Chinese side stated . . ." This enabled both countries to narrate their views, without deviation, and to focus on the limited number of things that could be mutually agreed.

**Two.** Another problem to be bridged on that visit was Taiwan. China was—and remains—loathe to renounce its right to use force to "liberate" what it regards as its own territory. Beijing saw the US forces in Taiwan and in the Taiwan Straits as a violation of its sovereignty. But the United States could not accept words that implied that it would abandon Taiwan. After long effort the words found were:

The US "reaffirms its interest in the peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. *With this prospect in mind* [emphasis added], it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of US forces and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations in Taiwan as tension in the area diminishes."

<sup>8</sup> BBC news report of October 16, 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/8307273.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/politics/8307273.stm) [accessed on July 22, 2010].

The formula made it clear that US actions were contingent on a peaceful environment in the Taiwan Straits, making a unilateral statement in a bilateral document that the Chinese could accept, without having to make a direct statement of their own on future actions.<sup>9</sup>

**Three.** The prime ministers of India and Pakistan met at Sharm El Sheikh on the margins of the NAM summit, and issued a brief joint statement on July 16, 2009. Besides making a detailed reference to terrorism attacks in Mumbai and the resolve of the two countries to share information on future terrorist threats, the statement declared: “Prime Minister Gilani mentioned that Pakistan has some information on threats in Balochistan and other areas.” This unilateral statement created a furor in India, on the grounds that it was the first mention of Balochistan in a bilateral statement and indirectly gave credence to Pakistan’s allegations against India about this. But Indian officials insisted that the statement simply noted that the Pakistan side had raised this issue; one senior official later conceded that the joint statement might have been “better drafted.” Another interpretation: while Pakistan indirectly aired its allegations (in quaint syntax), it also stood exposed, as it has never provided credible proof; further, the dissidents in Balochistan struggling for autonomy also gave the lie to Islamabad’s allegations.

## Speech Drafting

Rather few diplomatic training academies run courses on speech drafting, though this craft skill is greatly in demand. A few broad observations:

- Clarity of language and of structure is vital. The great speech-makers use simple and direct language, employing idiom to

<sup>9</sup> Source: John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide* (Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 1997).



connect with their audience. Remember, listeners usually do not have the text of your speech (even when texts are given out, this happens at the end of the speech). It is important to tell people what you are going to cover, in a straightforward structure that is easy to grasp.

- The draftsman should familiarize himself with the style of the person for whom a speech is being drafted. For instance, Indira Gandhi used a style that her chief speechwriter, H. Y. Sharda Prasad, called “linear”—each sentence moved forward, without making a link with something that had been said earlier. That made her speeches relatively “dense,” though she favored simple language.
- Writing a draft for a conference speech involves gaining close familiarity with the subject, and on that basis focusing on the new or relatively novel things that are to be presented on that occasion. While the internet helps, as noted earlier, it has to be used with caution, to avoid even inadvertent plagiarism, which is very easy to catch.
- In our age of sound bites, finding a catchy phrase is a sure way to gain visibility and media attention. This must come naturally, without appearing “forced” or artificial.

## Diplomatic Documents

Diplomatic documents are in a special category, in that they either go to another government or the document becomes part of public record. Typical documents:

- A formal diplomatic note, *note verbale*, sent to one or more governments, customarily written in the third person, with formal salutations at the beginning and end.
- An *aide mèmóire* handed over to one or more governments, ranking lower in hierarchy than the formal note.
- A *bout du papier*, or non-paper, lacking in formal status but nevertheless handed over to another government.

- The text of an *agreement*, or a *protocol*; an “*exchange of letters*” may be annexed to either of these. While these are formal documents, an informal document may take the shape of a *memorandum of understanding*.
- A *joint communiqué* or *declaration* between governments, usually issued at the end of a formal high-level visit.
- A *press communiqué*, issued either by one government on its own, or jointly with one or more countries.
- A *resolution* containing the decision by a conference; this usually follows a customary format, with a preambular section followed by an operational section.

The note verbale is a special remnant of the past. There was a time when all official communication between embassies and the agencies of the host government, especially the foreign ministry, took place through these “third person” notes, which by custom begin with the words: “The embassy of xx presents its compliments to the esteemed ministry of yy and has the honor to state . . . ” The ending of such notes also involved a set formula: “The embassy of xx avails of this opportunity to present to the ministry of yy the assurances of its high consideration.”

By tradition, the notes verbale are addressed to the institution, whether a ministry or an embassy, not to individuals by name or designation. In many large ministries it takes a day or two for such missives to reach the division or section that deals with the matter raised; consequently it became customary to send a copy of such a note directly by name to the official concerned.

It has been a short step for some to abandon the old device, which is not functionally efficient. Many diplomatic systems now communicate with other governments through normal letters, and more recently via email. The note verbale is still used for special communications, for instance when a formal record is essential, say during the course of an “exchange of letters,” which may serve as a codicil to a written agreement. In contrast, a fair number of small states still seem wedded to the old form.

## **Press Releases**

An alternative to organizing a press conference is to issue a press release. This document can be straightforward, setting out one's narrative, but it also involves a specific writing technique. The media have their own interests; one must give them details that are likely to grab their attention and encourage them to write a story. A nonbureaucratic style is essential. That applies to its structure: one should start with the main news item, followed by less important details. The key points are who, what, when, how, and why.

One should avoid minor details, and personal observations, sticking to the news. Emotion has no place in a press release. It should be objective, giving facts in a direct manner. It needs to be placed in a time framework; thus words "today" or "next week" are acceptable and "soon" or "recently" are not. Press releases should contain the contact details of the originator in case more information is needed.

Press releases are a functional way of communication between diplomats and the public. They save time and are very accurate in the information they are providing. There is no possibility for misspelling or for quoting wrong names, since everything provided is supposed to be guaranteed in substance and content. Editors get dozens of press releases each day, so it is good if the same form of writing is maintained; this helps it in terms of quick recognition by the editors. These days, press releases should be placed on the web pages as well, usually linked under the "Press Room."

## **Practical Issues**

In identifying the basics of writing skills we should keep in mind the distinction between internal papers and the documents made public. The documents that are **internal** to the foreign ministry and embassies include analytical notes; dispatches, policy recommendations; discussion briefs; "speaking points"; cipher telegrams; periodic or other kinds of reports; and records of discussion.

The **public** documents include speeches, joint communiqués, press statements, parliamentary replies, and the like. The requirements for each category are distinct, and often even divergent.

### Document Elements

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Internal document</i>	<i>Public document</i>
Brevity	Essential; a short document commands attention better than a long one.	May be discursive or substitute length for content, to meet context needs.
Precision	Vital, clarity needed for policy-makers.	Depends on circumstance; sometimes vague language required, that is, deliberate ambiguity.
Credibility	Essential	Contents of document should be believable.
Truthfulness	Required	Must not be untruthful, but may economize on facts.
Completeness	Mandatory	Depends on circumstance.
Language	Should be effective	Should meet standards of public communication, that is a nonbureaucratic and simple style

Drafting responses to parliament questions is an art. The goal is to be truthful, but not disclose anything that might embarrass the government or provoke a subsequent question.<sup>10</sup> That also applies to other statements that officials draft for use in parliament by ministers, because these, like all public documents, undergo close scrutiny by the media; in addition, anything said or “tabled” in parliament involves issues of privilege, which is a minefield, calling for special attention to detail and accuracy.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Some say that an ideal answer to a three-part parliament question would state: “Yes, sir; No, sir; Does not arise.”

<sup>11</sup> I learnt this lesson the hard way in 1974 as a middle rank official when an attachment sent to the Lok Sabha (the Indian lower house) on behalf of the

## Points for Reflection

1. Are the formalities of diplomatic communication worth preservation in the ICT age? Are modalities and formats already under evolution?
2. Are the craft skills of good writing likely to survive in an age of SMS texting and simplification of writing? Or is it that different genres will coexist, in the same way that print journals, with their emphasis on good style, have survived two decades of internet usage.
3. Foreign ministries need to work out new norms for Web 2.0 communication; this is a work in progress, and it would be useful for ministries to exchange experiences.

## Annex I

### Handing Over Note Template

In *Bilateral Diplomacy* (2002) I wrote:

Another end of assignment document that is mandatory in most diplomatic systems is the “handing over note” which the HOM addresses to his successor, usually following a prescribed format (though there are many foreign services which do not use a standard format, and suffer in consequence). Given the fact that unlike other professions, diplomacy does not permit a physical handover from one ambassador to another, much less a period of “understudy”

external affairs minister was in fact an earlier draft and not the final document. An alert opposition MP caught this oversight, but had the grace to write to the Speaker and not claim breach of privilege. Hauled before the minister, the unflappable Sardar Swaran Singh, I admitted error; rather than reprimand the foreign secretary and me, he dictated to his stenographer a simple reply to the Speaker, that this was a clerical error, and that the correct document was now enclosed. The lesson: always date drafts and, of course, be graceful to those who make an honest error!

or overlap, this is the principal means for institutional memory transmission to the new envoy. In fact, comprehensive handing over notes should be obligatory for diplomats at other levels (and for MFA officials as well.) An ideal note should convey information on local institutions, personalities, and processes, plus all the special features of the assignment and country. It should also give confidential assessments of local interlocutors of importance, plus of fellow envoys from other countries . . . as also pen sketches of the officials in the mission, home-based and local staff. An ideal note would be consulted by the successor for the first several months of his assignment, to refresh memory and to compare his own first experiences with the advice of the predecessor.

A good Handing Note covers a wide spectrum, describing the local institutions, personalities, regions, and cities in the country covered, the full range of outreach partners ranging from politicians, officials to the ethnic communities, plus all the issues that feature in relations with that country. Not to be left out are the home agencies, state and non-state, with whom the embassy is engaged.

A good Note is of enormous value to the successor. When several are seen together they provide a splendid perspective of the evolution of the bilateral relationship. The few countries that do not use this system (e.g. Australia, and most of the Scandinavians) perhaps do this out of ignorance.

In Iran every envoy returns home at the end of assignment (direct postings are not their custom); at their Institute of Archives and Research (part of the MFA), he gets a workstation and two months to write his final impressions. Informally called "the dispatch that was not written," this document, averaging 50 to 70 pages in length, captures his accumulated knowledge.

A good Note may run to 80 to 100 pages. The object is not to reproduce information available from published sources (a bibliography of good source material on the target country should be

included); the aim is to furnish information not available anywhere else. In my view, the Note should cover the following:

1. **The assignment country:** recent past, current scene, and future prospects looking to a time horizon of five years. [Must be based on the envoy's own assessment, not lifted from other sources.]
2. **The bilateral relationship:** the current watermark in political, economic, cultural, S&T, education, and media relations, including the recent exchanges of major visits, pending invitations, agreements in the pipeline, and the level of economic and other exchanges. [One may attach some documents that narrate the activities of the embassy—such as the most recent “annual action plan,” but the Note should be self-contained, capturing essential information.]
3. **State institution interlocutors:** the foreign ministry, the offices of the heads of state and government, the key partner ministries and agencies, the parliament. Also the regions and cities where contacts have been sustained, and their key agencies, with a short and candid description, of the key persons. [Examples: the investment promotion agency, its manner of functioning, weaknesses, nature of links, personalities; a media organ, its profile, attitude towards the home country, important staff. Writing about the national chamber of commerce, one need not give information on the organization, which can be obtained elsewhere; rather one should convey one's own impression, its partners in the home country, plus the ongoing and planned cooperation activities.]
4. **Non-state partners:** chambers of commerce, business and industry associations and businessmen with whom the embassy has been in contact; the media; academia, science and technology agencies; think tanks, civil society organizations. [Also with profiles of the key players.]
5. **Home partners:** Here the focus should be on the principal official agencies (in brief), plus the non-state agencies with which cooperative relations have been sustained, together

with short profiles of key players. [Often the embassy has a full picture of these home relations that surpasses what is known to the MFA.]

6. **Key dossiers:** Including the major issues resolved in the past three years, the issues that remain open, and those that should be tackled in the coming years; this would cover the entire gamut of the relationship, in the political, economic, and the soft power areas, consular affairs and the like; plus information on other government and promotional offices in the target country and relations with them, and brief profiles of the major individuals.
7. **The diaspora:** its size, distribution, its key associations and leaders, the issues, the ethnic media, and the quality of the embassy's relations with them; issues relating to students from home in the assignment country.
8. **Diplomatic Corps:** the dean and the regional deans, the quality of exchanges within the Corps, its key players (with profiles), the regional and other groups.
9. **Embassy team:** short pen sketches, nondiplomatic staff, local staff. Matters relating to consulates and honorary consuls, if any.
10. **Administration issues:** matters relating to property, staff cars, and other administration issues; inspection and audit issues.



# 16 Drafting Resolutions

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The drafting of resolutions—and indeed the drafting of any formal text that incorporates the decisions taken at a multilateral or bilateral meeting—involves both an understanding of substantive issues and language skills, besides, of course, negotiating ability. We focus here on the language skills that help in learning this craft; the substantive issues will vary from case to case, but the skill needed to use and manipulate the language is a constant.

### Basics

Resolutions are the staple mode through which decisions are expressed at the UN and at some of its agencies. They have special characteristics:

- The entire resolution is one single (very) long sentence. That means that there is only one full stop in the resolution, at the very end of the final paragraph. All other paragraphs end with a semicolon.
- It usually has two parts, the *preambular* and the *operational*.
- Each paragraph of the preamble part begins with a participle, such as: “Recalling . . . ”; “Taking into account . . . ”; “Noting. . . . ”
- Each paragraph of the operational section begins with a verb in present active tense: “Requests . . . ”; “Decides . . . ”; “Recommends . . . ”; “Urges . . . ”; “Further decides . . . ”; “Requires . . . ”; etc.

## Preamble and Substantive Sections

Resolutions are “sponsored” by country delegations that are interested in the subject, and usually have one or more lead sponsor and cosponsors. Sometimes the drafts are prepared by the secretariat, which offers these informally to interested delegations. Several mutually competing drafts may be tabled by different delegations, and these are taken up on the basis of the rules of procedure. Mastery of such rules is one of the core skills of multilateral diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> If acceptable to the sponsors, other delegations may join in as resolution cosponsors; in rare cases, if a draft runs into heavy opposition, cosponsors may also withdraw their support.

The preamble clauses explain the purpose of the resolution and state the main reasons for action set out in the substantive portion. They may refer to previous UN resolutions and relevant precedents

<sup>1</sup> During a conference or a committee meeting, a device used by delegations to cut through debate and gain the floor almost instantly is to raise a “point of order.” By definition, this implies that someone else has violated the rules of procedure, and one is raising an objection to that; in practice, the device is used to speak urgently on the issue in debate, cutting through the list of speakers. Raising such points of order is also an effective conference skill, when it is used with discretion.

of international law. They may also refer to the factual situations, or might include well-intentioned appeals to good sense or the humanitarian instincts of members, or include reference to the UN Charter, International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions, or other international documents. Preamble clauses begin with “participles,” which are generally placed in italics, followed by a comma.

The operative clauses provide the action recommendations, or they may state a favorable or unfavorable opinion regarding a situation. These clauses may request action by member states, or by the UN Secretary General, or by other bodies or agencies. These actions can be vague, such as a denunciation of a certain situation or a general call for negotiations; they could be specific, such as a call for a cease-fire, or may lay down a set of sanctions. They might lay down a timeline. Operative clauses are numbered and begin with an active verb, in the present tense. Usually substantive paragraphs are more contested than the preambular section. Much of the active debate on controversial resolutions is on this part of the document.

Any member of the conference or committee may propose one or more amendments to a resolution. If the resolution sponsors accept these, the resolution stands amended, but if they are not acceptable to some or all the sponsors, a discussion and a vote usually follow. Amendments are unacceptable when they change the intent of the resolution, but there is no hard and fast rule on this. Amendments may include adding a word or a phrase, or deleting a word or phrase, or adding or deleting whole sections. The order in which proposed amendments are taken up depends on the rules, as interpreted by the chair; this also involves the application of conference tactics.

One might think that the most important part of the resolution is the operational segment, since it deals with actions. That is partly true, but the preamble is far from unimportant, in that it sets the stage for the actions that are proposed in the latter section. For instance, in the case of the famous Resolution 242 of the UN Security Council covering the consequences of the 1967 Arab-Israel

War, it is the preamble that stipulates the principle of nonacquisition of territory by force; for the Palestine and Arab protagonists that is the element that underscores Israel's obligation to vacate all the occupied territories. In that same resolution, in the substantive part, the word "the" was dropped from the phrase "occupied territories"; Israel has interpreted that to justify its position that not *all* territories are to be vacated.<sup>2</sup> This is a classic instance of "constructive ambiguity" that we discuss below.

A feature of many resolutions is that they may be repetitive or appear badly drafted. That is a consequence of joint or committee drafting, often under time pressure, with inadequate attention to detail. One encounters this situation with some UN General Assembly resolutions. In contrast, Security Council (SC) resolutions undergo extensive scrutiny, and are usually tightly drafted. With the exception of SC decisions, which are binding on all UN members, other UN resolutions have a recommendatory character only.

## **Language**

The skill of drafting involves the use of language to attain one's objectives. Each word carries its direct meaning as well as implicit subtle nuance. Phrases and "code words" carry deeper embedded meaning that is contextual, which could be specific to a situation in time and space. Using and manipulating these is the essential skill of draftsmanship, where one must work with others in a multilateral setting, to win consensus support for the text one wants. In the relatively few cases when the resolution is taken to a vote, one attempts to garner maximum support for the text that one prefers, either as the original draft or as amendments to a text

<sup>2</sup> The shaky foundations of such verbal gymnastics become clear when we see the French language version of Resolution 242, where the definite article is very much present, because that language does not permit dropping it, as was done with the English text.

proposed by someone else. Text manipulation is a fine art in multilateral diplomacy (Exercise I).

The UN General Assembly is one place where it is customary to vote on resolutions; in most international and regional conferences, and at the WTO, texts are primarily accepted by consensus, and instances of voting on a final text or declaration are few (at such bodies, countries that strongly object to a particular text usually enter their reservation or reservations through a statement made after the text is adopted by the general body).

## Deconstructing a Resolution

If we analyze the content of a resolution's text we find several elements that form its core, and each of these can be modified to suit a particular purpose.

- A. *Time element*: For instance, if a notion of slow evolution to self-rule is to be expressed, in the phrase "progressively achieve self-rule," the first word might be replaced by "gradually." We can identify a hierarchy of words that move from fast to slow action, in respect of the time element, and dilute action. We might come up with the following words and phrases:

urgently  
immediately  
rapidly  
in a time-bound manner  
progressively  
continually  
as soon as feasible  
in stages  
in a phased manner  
gradually  
when feasible

depending on circumstances  
in accordance with established procedures  
in keeping with well-recognized principles  
at an appropriate time  
eventually

One can add almost endlessly to such a list, since languages offer many options, and one might even coin one's own phrases.

- B. *Conditionality*: Another way in which an operative paragraph can be diluted is by adding conditional clauses, as for instance in paragraph 4 in our exercise, that speaks of the Iraqi provisional administration “without prejudice to its further evolution”—the intent here being to allow for future changes in this provisional administration. Other typical conditioning phrases are: “as feasible”; “to the extent possible”; “provided other conditions are fulfilled.” Such conditions may be specified in different ways. (Exercise II)
- C. *Action Imperative*: The verb with which the operative paragraph begins can indicate a range of action imperatives, from decisiveness to vagueness. In paragraph 5 the word “affirms” can be replaced by a weaker word (which could be “suggests” or “recalls”) or a stronger word (which might be “requires”), to suit one's needs. This too is one of the key ways of manipulating the text. (See Exercise III)
- D. *Combining Clauses*: Different elements can be linked in preambular or operational sections of a resolution, to suit one's needs. Such connections are based on logic as well as on the direction that one wants to give to the document; or wants one set of actions to be made contingent on another set of issues. The range of options available is vast.

## Creative Ambiguity

One may ask, is not diplomacy all about precision? Not always, since there are instances when *imprecision* is the practical way

of getting agreement. No form of words can cover all future eventualities, so that language that does not tie down every point of detail also provides flexibility. We call this *creative ambiguity*. Typically, the method is used during negotiations to paper over differences, to obtain an agreement despite divergences in viewpoint; of course the unresolved issues usually emerge later on to create new complications. Or one may believe that vagueness may resolve itself in the future; the Anglo-Irish Good Friday Peace Agreement of April 1998 uses vagueness over the final status of Northern Ireland, subject to stated principles, leaving it open to a future settlement.

Deliberate vagueness in language is a device used in documents to bridge over differences of substance; it is left to the parties concerned to interpret such decisions as it suits them. This produces temporary agreement and may postpone the real problem. As noted above, UNSC Resolution 242 is a classic and the subject of many commentaries.<sup>3</sup> (Exercise VI)

Besides deliberate vagueness, the language of a decision may leave room for interpretation, because no form of words can cover all future eventualities. From the perspective of sponsors of the proposed action, imprecision leaves room for dealing with multiple future eventualities. For instance, UNSC Resolution 1441 of 2002, used in a way to set the stage, even if contrived, for the attack on Iraq by the United States and its partners, charged Iraq with being in "material breach" of past decisions of the Security Council (see the text below). This phrase comes from UK-US legal terminology and implies "significant violation," but it does not set a measurable standard or level. This matter then becomes a matter of political interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1387642/United-Nations-Resolution-242](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1387642/United-Nations-Resolution-242) [accessed on September 8, 2010.]; and [www.milestone-documents.com/documents/view/un-security-council-resolution-242/](http://www.milestone-documents.com/documents/view/un-security-council-resolution-242/) [accessed on September 8, 2010.] Also see: Maurice Ostroff,

"The six-day war and resolution 242."

<http://maurice-ostroff.tripod.com/id127.html> (Accessed April 24, 2009)

Many other references can be located on the internet.

Take the example cited above (UNSC Resolution 1441 of November 8, 2002):

1. *Decides*, that Iraq has been and remains in material breach of its obligations under relevant resolutions, including resolution 687 (1991) in particular through Iraq's failure to cooperate with the United Nations inspectors and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and to complete the actions required under paragraphs 8 to 13 of resolution 687 (1991);
2. *Decides*, while acknowledging paragraph 1 above, to afford Iraq, by this resolution a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations under the relevant resolutions of the Council, and accordingly decides to set up an enhanced inspection regime with the aim of bringing to full and verified completion the disarmament process established by resolution 687 (1991) and subsequent resolution of the Council;

When taking recourse to ambiguity, one would do well to recall the advice of Singapore's legendary diplomatic negotiator Tommy Koh: "Use constructive ambiguity as a last resort. Why? Because it does not really settle the problem. It only postpones the disagreement to another day."<sup>4</sup>

## **Exercises**

### **Exercise I**

A particular text can be manipulated in an endless number of ways, to suit one's wishes. This can be seen through an example. UN Security Council Resolution 1511 of October 16, 2003 on Iraq said:

3. *Supports* the Governing Council's efforts to mobilize the people of Iraq, including by the appointment of a cabinet of

<sup>4</sup> Tommy Koh, "The Practice of Negotiations," pp. 114–5.



- ministers and a preparatory constitutional committee to lead a process in which the Iraqi people will progressively take control of their own affairs;
4. *Determines* that the Governing Council and its ministers are the principal bodies of the Iraqi interim administration, which, without prejudice to its further evolution, embodies the sovereignty of the State of Iraq during the transitional period until an internationally recognized, representative government is established and assumes the responsibilities of the Authority;
  5. *Affirms* that the administration of Iraq will be progressively undertaken by the evolving structures of the Iraqi interim administration;
  6. *Calls upon* the Authority, in this context, to return governing responsibilities and authorities to the people of Iraq as soon as practicable and *requests* the Authority, in cooperation as appropriate with the Governing Council and the Secretary-General, to report to the Council on the progress being made;

We can manipulate the above text to make it *stronger*, *weaker*, or more *conditional*, to see how the process of drafting operates.

## Exercise II

### Adding Conditions

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>as far as practical</i>	does not clarify who will decide	
<i>subject to . . .</i>	makes the action contingent on something else	

**Exercise III**

**Action imperative**

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Requires		
Demands		
Suggests		
Recommends		
Requests		

**Exercise IV**

One may try and identify the instances of imprecise language that one has encountered in resolutions and in the final statements of conferences, to build up such a compendium of deliberate ambiguity.

**Imprecise Language (Creative Ambiguity)**

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Comment</i>

## Points for Reflection

1. Given that multilateral (and regional) conferences take place all over the world, all diplomats need sound grounding in negotiation and drafting skills.
2. Ambiguity is virtually unavoidable in diplomacy, because all issues cannot be tied down in open, clear language; in fact flexibility is often vital to deal with future eventualities. Precision is needed in choosing the right words, matching the objectives of clarity or ambiguity.
3. Regardless of one's country of origin and its linguistic heritage, the professional diplomat has to master the English language.

## Annex 1

Text of UNSC Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967

The Security Council

Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,

*Emphasizing* the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security,

*Emphasizing further* that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

*Affirms* that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the

area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

*Affirms further* the necessity:

For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;

For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;

For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones;

*Requests* the Secretary General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

*Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

# 17 Records of Discussion

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A basic skill of professional diplomats is an ability to write accurate, well-focused records of discussion or minutes. They may cover any meeting or conversation, usually a dialogue between “principals,” when one high dignitary or senior official meets another. By tradition such dialogue is not recorded electronically—though this is very easy today. Perhaps this old practice has persisted, to preserve flexibility or even “deniability”; the alternative would be to place each bilateral discussion “on record,” making it impossible to explore new ideas or options that are the very stuff of diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Young diplomats cut their teeth by preparing such records, and the skill is honed throughout their career.

Records of discussion are prepared in many professions other than diplomacy. In courts of law a verbatim record is customary. In the business world, and in many other fields, accurate records are

<sup>1</sup> By tradition, diplomatic conversations are not cited in official exchanges, which preserves their informal character. Major powers routinely record telephone exchanges between leaders, and such “phone logs” may be available to the public under policies of opening up official records.

required that cover important conversations. In diplomacy these are a staple; when leaders meet, high officials take on the role of record keepers. For instance, when Henry Kissinger met Premier Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in Beijing during his path-breaking visit of 1971, every member of his delegation took notes, and they worked immediately after the meetings, late into the night, to reconstruct a comprehensive record of these historic discussions.<sup>2</sup>

## **Basics**

The junior diplomats or others who accompany the principals usually record a bilateral conversation between two representatives of governments in one of several ways:

1. A **chronological record** is where each substantive part of the discussion is captured in the exact sequence in which it took place. This is used for meetings of high importance where it is essential to place each set of words in its precise context. Naturally, such records tend to be long. In the case of a very important meeting, it may take the shape of a near-verbatim record; it represents the best way the record keepers have captured the exact words used and the sequence of the conversation.
2. A **thematic record**, where all important points are grouped together, regardless of the sequence in which the conversation took place. It is a summarized record, always shorter than the chronological one, ideal for working discussions. This is the format most frequently used.
3. An **action point summary**, which concentrates only on the substantive points on which action is to be taken. This is highly summarized and brief.

<sup>2</sup> The full story of the lead-up to, and planning of, the three-day visit of July 9–11, 1971, is at: [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/) [accessed on September 7, 2010.] The full transcripts of the conversations are at Documents 34, 35, 36, and 38.

Regardless of the type of record prepared, some elements are common to any good record.

- A. Precision is at the heart of diplomacy. In a discussion record it entails noting the exact phrase used by each interlocutor on the main points made—we may call this the “key words”. How do we identify them? Through a blend of common sense and experience. For instance, if a visiting ambassador tells the head of a foreign ministry department that he has come to take “*an initial sounding*” on a certain matter, the desk-officer keeping the record at the foreign ministry is in peril if s/he writes it down as “the ambassador proposed . . . ” or that “the ambassador wanted. . . .” One should develop the skill of identifying and noting with precision the key words used by each side; the thematic or the summary record, too, must reproduce these phrases.
- B. Editorial comment should not be blended in with a record of discussion. If one wants to make an observation of one’s own, it must come at the end of the record of discussion, or be placed in parentheses, so that there is no room for confusing the actual conversation recorded and the comments made on that.
- C. The points that reflect actions proposed by either side, or suggestions that require action, are equally vital to note with accuracy; errors in these can lead to misunderstanding. It may be useful to summarize these in a cover note.
- D. The note-taker should not get involved in the substantive discussion, unless a principal puts a direct question; accurate note keeping becomes difficult if one is also a participant.
- E. A record must be honest, because accuracy is central to diplomacy. If even a nuance in a conversation is misreported, it can lead to serious consequence, either by itself or when a number of small errors in reporting are taken together. This happens typically when a number of emissaries are sent out to mobilize support for an election at an international

institution or to solicit backing on an issue vital to the country. If one reports a noncommittal response as sympathetic, or modifies it in some way that will make that response more palatable at home, the inaccuracy can produce serious misjudgment of the global response, as documented cases have shown.

As with most diplomatic skills, record keeping is learnt through practice. Guidelines point the way, but the skill can only be honed by doing this work. The key is to continually make a conscious effort to improve, and learn from errors.

### **Practical Issues**

When an envoy makes a demarche, or reports on a conversation when the host country has summoned him, the record of discussion forms the basis of his urgent report to his government, by cipher communication or its modern internet-based equivalent. The full record of discussion serves as an essential adjunct.

A frequent failing is to exaggerate one's own role in such diplomatic exchanges. In its worst form, this may involve adding to the record something one did not say, but wishes subsequently that one had. How does this happen? The principal may simply amend the draft record, to bring in either subtle or blatant change. Such issues come up in many diplomatic services and may eventually undermine the reputation of the principal. Such dishonesty carries a price in the shape of distorting subsequent actions by the foreign ministry that may be based on the envoy's report.

A less manipulative form of distortion is to focus excessively on what one said, even at the cost of minimizing or downplaying the interlocutor's responses. This is self-destructive because home authorities easily see through such actions, first because they do not need a detailed narration of what their own envoy has been instructed or expected to say, and second, because they are much more interested in the responses of the other side.



If an envoy practices such embellishment of diplomatic conversations, or other manipulation, he runs the risk of undermining his own reputation and credibility; we noted in an earlier chapter that personal credibility is at the heart of the practitioner's professional competence. One may sometimes forget, but the process of inter-government exchange provides for a second, alternative, level for official exchanges, in the shape of conversations at the home foreign ministry with the envoy of the sending country, which in an earlier chapter was likened to the "double entry bookkeeping system."

Distorting of conversation records can also take place at home, by strong-willed but shortsighted principals, mainly on issues of minor importance, sometimes just because someone wishes to project himself in a particular way.<sup>3</sup> Such actions can sometimes undermine the country's diplomacy.

### **Points for Reflection**

1. A good record of discussion is a simple but real test of professionalism, is it not?
2. How does a system guard against manipulation of records by principals, or their aides attempting to improve their sides' argument?
3. In these busy times, are full records less needed than in the past?

### **Annex 1**

#### The British Foreign Office's Ten Rules for Record Takers

A 1995 UK FCO note set out ten rules for record takers. These are summarized below:

<sup>3</sup> Those who have spent years in a foreign ministry are sometimes familiar with such cases. Old friendships may preclude one from narrating details.

1. Know the purpose of the record. Sometimes one simply needs to note the action arising out of a meeting.
2. Decide the form. If an FCO minister is meeting a foreign counterpart, almost every point made may constitute a statement of policy.
3. Know the background. One should recognize the names, understand the references to previous events, know the meaning of abbreviations, and know something of the standpoint of each participant. It is better to show ignorance rather than submit a record that does not make sense.
4. Concentrate. Treat every part of the discussion as potentially important.
5. Do not intervene in the discussion.
6. Take detailed notes during the meeting. One method is to wait till each speaker pauses and then jot down a summary.
7. Edit your notes carefully. Introductory and valedictory courtesies need not be recorded. Established positions of one's own side do not need detailed exposition. Reorder the material if necessary. Occasionally it may be appropriate to add descriptive material that captures the mood, or tone of voice, but be careful not to overdo this.
8. Ensure that the format is correct.
9. Submit the draft promptly, preferably within 24 hours, to the chairman of the meeting.
10. Make sure that the follow-up action is completed.

# 18 Representational Entertainment

## Chapter Overview

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Diplomats assigned to embassies and consulates abroad are traditionally given funds to enable them to offer social entertainment to local personalities, official and nonofficial, as also to members of the diplomatic corps. This is integral to their representational role, providing the wherewithal to build contacts and network with those who are important to their outreach and promotional activities. This tradition is as old as the resident embassy, though a century ago European countries paid rather little to their envoys, and it was assumed that envoys and their staff would utilize their own funds to live well abroad. Today we sometimes find ourselves in the reverse of that situation, as explained below.

### Why Entertain?

This facility is provided to ambassadors and their diplomatic grade staff, usually as a monthly allowance. In addition, special

grants are provided for major events, including the traditional annual national day reception, or for the receptions to be organized for special events such as incoming visits by high personalities from home. In some countries the full amount of the “representation grant” (RG) is given to the ambassador who then decides on its allocation to the diplomats on his/her team. That can become a source of local friction within the embassy, and may give the ambassador power that may sometime be misused. In contrast, in a majority of countries specific sums of money are assigned to officials at each level in the embassy. On rare occasions an ambassador may request his colleagues to pool some or all their monthly grant for a special embassy project; many envoys would consider that to be undesirable and best avoided.

In absolute size, these representation funds do not amount to much; they might account for a tiny portion of the embassy budget. Why should we then bother about this? One reason is that optimal functioning of the embassy depends partly on well-organized outreach. Another reason is that in our age of openness and public accountability, the media and those connected with the international affairs community pay considerable attention to how embassies entertain and socialize. It is part of the champagne and caviar image of diplomacy.

Some embassies invest large funds in this activity, especially in the major capitals, with Western powers easily outspending developing country counterparts. The envoys of France or Japan or the United Kingdom are given exceptionally large funds to project an image of glamour; they host glittering events that become the talk of the town. Ambassadors want their cultivation targets to feel that the embassy is the place to come.<sup>1</sup> This helps them to move ahead in the competition for access to the powerful, which is a fact of life in every capital, large or small.<sup>2</sup> Typically, these envoys are

<sup>1</sup> Representational entertainment brings out the relevance of the classic notion that the “embassy” refers to the envoy’s residence; the office is the “chancery”.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Gotlieb, former Canadian envoy to the United States has written eloquently on this competition for access; see: *I’ll be with you in a Minute*

also provided with specialized staff, including chefs and gardeners, to maintain the embassy residence to the requisite standard, and to host such entertainment. For instance, the British envoy to Tokyo typically has had a staff of six or seven, including two highly trained chefs. Japanese envoys in important capitals have at least two chefs at their residence, one for Japanese cuisine and the other a specialist in Western dishes. The envoy representing a developing country has a hard time coping with this, though he, too, has some cards to play, as we see below.

National day receptions are in a special category, now held increasingly at hotels, unless the envoy lives in a grand residence with the requisite infrastructure and room to host hundreds of guests.<sup>3</sup> Are such receptions really useful? This is debatable, except that they are viewed as indispensable by a certain segment of any capital's glitterati, which cherish their social value. The reception is one way for an envoy to reciprocate many accumulated social obligations, but in major capitals that may have around 140 or more resident embassies, attending these becomes a heavy drag on fellow ambassadors; few senior officials of the receiving country and other local heavyweights tend to attend such functions. Australia has responded by holding its national day functions outside the capital in many places, rotating the event to different provincial and regional cities; or they do not hold the reception and instead donate a sum of money to a local good cause.<sup>4</sup> A trend begun some years ago by Europeans is to get paid sponsorship from major home business enterprises looking for brand visibility,

*Mr. Ambassador: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington* (London, Routledge, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, until about 15 years ago, it was exceptional for Indian embassies to host such reception at any place other than the residence or the chancery, mainly because the special grant provided for the Republic Day was much too inadequate to hold the reception in a hotel. That has now changed with more liberal funding.

<sup>4</sup> Australia and India share a national day, January 26. In the old days it was customary to go to the Australians for a good drink, since Indian national days are alcohol-free, and then to the Indians for their varied, and usually generous, cuisine, or vice versa!

reducing the burden on the public exchequer—such “commercialization” has so far been anathema to most non-Western countries.

Social entertainment by officials assigned to permanent missions at the multilateral diplomacy locations, especially in New York and Geneva, is closely tied to the cycle of conferences and events that take place there. Diplomats assigned to these posts need intensive contacts with one another, given the fact that they are each other’s permanent negotiation partners. They also need sound friendships with officials of the secretariat of the organization concerned, and with others connected with the issues on their agenda, including journalists, scholars, and other non-state actors such as NGO representatives. Unlike diplomats at bilateral posts, they seldom work with extensive networks, and have a lesser need to continually widen contacts. Much of their entertaining takes the form of working lunches, in small groups, for close conversation. But large receptions are also a frequent medium. As at bilateral posts, the aim is: build mutual trust, using hospitality as a platform for good working relations.

## **Using the Representation Grant**

The manner of utilization of these funds affects the functioning of the mission. Some basics:

- It is official money, given to help build local contacts that advance home country objectives in the place of assignment. It is not for one’s own entertainment or for hanging out with buddies. One is free to spend one’s own money for that purpose, that is, for personal entertainment. In practice, this is a frequent point of misuse.
- The official is accountable for the funds spent—the ambassador inspects the entertainment register of each official and customarily the funds are released only after they are spent.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Good diplomatic systems have elaborate rules concerning use of unspent funds (including funds relating to periods of leave, etc.).

In the good systems copies of the ambassador's register go to the foreign ministry for scrutiny. In those embassies where this grant is routinely paid out each month, together with the salary and allowances, one may be sure that the principle of accountability is not being applied.

- In an effective mission, the funds are used in a targeted manner. Usually the targets flow from one's work tasks, but some additional targets can be developed. For instance the embassy may decide to cultivate the media or some other constituency on a team basis, and assign cultivation targets to several or all officials. It is entirely in order for the ambassador or his deputy to discuss with fellow officials the manner in which entertainment should be organized.
- Typically, each diplomat entertains those directly connected with his work. Some are more effective and persuasive in reaching out to the right contacts, while others may take a path of least effort, and stick with the obvious and even routine contacts.<sup>6</sup>
- A young diplomat, often a language trainee, assigned to an embassy as a third or second secretary, may wonder as to the "targets" s/he might pursue. Besides local personalities encountered at the assigned work tasks, one cannot go wrong in cultivating someone from the media, especially an individual not well known to the embassy. Such new contacts are always welcome to the mission—no one can have too many media friends! In some ways a young officer finds it easier to pursue those of his age or work group. Young officials may gain deeper informal insights than what might be available to senior officers, whose contacts are often on their guard. Inexperience is not always a disadvantage!
- The location of entertainment varies; often it is convenient to offer a working lunch in a restaurant—this is especially

<sup>6</sup> I have known a science counselor who, thanks to the simple charm of his wife and himself, managed to cultivate the top echelon of the science community in that country, including in his ambit some from nearby cities as well. He taught the important lesson that knowing the right kind of wines was less important than sincerity and personal credibility.

true of the multilateral capitals, as noted above. But one must remember that the diplomat is provided with an official residence with the intention that it will be used for entertainment. It is expected that the home will provide the best atmosphere for such entertainment, especially for more informal and leisurely dinners and evening gatherings.

- The type of entertainment will vary for each purpose and target group. But some general principles apply. A reception is useful to meet a large number of people, or to return a large number of accumulated “obligations” at one go. But the host almost never gets to speak to anyone in depth at his/her own reception! On the other hand, a small dinner is best for relaxed conversation, provided the group chosen is interesting and compatible. How to do this? One learns from common sense and experience; observing others is always a good guide.
- Entertaining visiting delegations from home is an essential activity for embassies, and with a multiplication in bilateral diplomacy the world over, much of the official funds are used up in this manner.<sup>7</sup> This is unavoidable, but such activity should not be the only entertainment offered by the embassy.<sup>8</sup> While entertaining personalities from the receiving country, one must make sure that besides the obviously important political and business leaders, embassies do not overlook the leading personalities from other walks of life, especially the media, academia, scientists, and other public figures. Sometimes an exclusive social function for a visiting delegation may provide an occasion to discuss some issues with the visitors; this also represents a method of building

<sup>7</sup> A Japanese ambassador once told me that one reason he could not entertain fellow envoys as much as he wished was the large number of visiting delegations from home, who expected a traditional banquet at the residence as a matter of course.

<sup>8</sup> Entertaining visitors from home is essential, both as good public relations, and because one learns much from such visitors, that is, their activities in that country. The key is to balance this with other entertainment obligations.



relations with important home personalities, that is, a form of domestic outreach for the embassy.<sup>9</sup>

The effective embassy treats use of these funds as a matter for internal discussion, working out a plan, of course without rigidity, also allowing for an individual's personal choice. In the opposite case, representation entertainment is left to the discretion of the official concerned, with no clear objective.

A recent trend is for officials to sharply cut back on entertainment at home, either because their spouses are not with them much of the time because of their own work obligations in the case of two-income couples or because the spouse is not willing to act as unpaid hostess. With changing times and social customs, the old notion that the diplomat's spouse was expected to put in a great deal of hard effort for the sake of the diplomat's career no longer holds good. This affects more than representation entertainment; compared with a solitary diplomat, a husband-wife team is always more effective in networking and building personal relations, so vital in this profession. A solution that some Western foreign ministries have devised is to pay the spouse that accompanies the diplomat to an overseas assignment. Canada pays such an allowance. The United Kingdom appoints the envoy's spouse as the manager of the residence, duly paid for the work undertaken. Very few developing countries have accepted this notion, and this affects the quality of the social entertainment these officials offer. The effort that they might put in to supervise the embassy residence can also be compromised. Foreign ministries should think hard about this problem, which is bound to get worse with time.

## **Practical Advice**

The following observations have been compiled on the basis of experience and observation plus discussion with colleagues.

<sup>9</sup> For instance an ambassador or the deputy may need to invite visiting journalists from home to such working meals, given the sensitivity of this set of actors.

- a. Too many embassies end up using the bulk of their RG in entertaining the same group of local personalities, including the diaspora.<sup>10</sup> The ambassador may find that the same individuals figure on the entertainment registers of each official. One must make an effort to reach out to new faces, and, in particular, to move out into the mainstream community, not just remain confined within a limited circle of friends. Excessive focus on the diaspora is an especially serious issue for a number of developing countries.<sup>11</sup>
- b. Diplomats need to maintain quality in their entertainment, without going to extremes. For instance, an official from South Asia may offer lentil *dal* and chicken curry, to save money, but after a while he will get a reputation for cheapness. It is an open secret that in some embassies officials claim RG expenses beyond what they spend, economizing by offering the cheapest foods. One should not join that club! That is not a plea for extravagance, which is pointless and unproductive; one needs a good balance between the two extremes.
- c. People come to a diplomat's parties if they find them novel, enjoyable, or useful. That hinges not just on the food and drink provided, but also on whether the guests have fun, or find that the host puts together congenial groups. This skill is learnt with time, but the young diplomat needs to observe others to absorb the positive and the negative lessons.<sup>12</sup>
- d. How might a vegetarian teetotaler handle social entertainment, especially as a host? Assuming that changing one's

<sup>10</sup> This point was made forcefully at a closed door meeting in early 2009, attended by the author, where about 20 representatives belonging to a well-established organization stated this in respect of Indian embassies.

<sup>11</sup> This has become an issue in India, and business associations have observed that Indian embassy officials sometimes concentrate excessively on overseas Indians in their contact networks.

<sup>12</sup> An old image seared in memory is of the wife of a British envoy, who after dinner would shuffle her guests like a deck of cards, breaking up conversation clusters with the remark: "Come along here, you have talked long enough in that group"; it worked rather well!

profession is not a feasible option (hardly a serious proposition!), one needs to ask if one's choices have to be imposed on others. It is possible, in theory, to offer entertainment where a pure vegetarian meal with nothing stronger than fruit juice is offered to the invitees, but that will probably guarantee very dull parties and not all guests will come back again and again.<sup>13</sup> It makes sense to compromise and also respect local customs and expectations, to the extent that one feels comfortable. Finally, this is for individual judgment.

- e. How much time, and how much of the RG, should one spend in entertaining colleagues from other embassies? It depends on the country and its context. At some places of hardship or special danger, the diplomatic corps is one's refuge; and one is forced to work closely with other embassies. But at most bilateral posts, embassies that concentrate mainly on fellow diplomats are underutilizing their outreach potential, and are also not performing as well as they might.
- f. Can one innovate? This is possible, with care and sound advice. For instance, at many places there exist "lunch clubs" and similar groups of compatible professional diplomats. One needs to carefully locate these and try and join, as feasible. One might even set up one's own group, if the local circumstances are right. But one must proceed in this with caution, especially taking the advice of one's own head of mission and other senior colleagues.
- g. Some embassies maintain a collective database of all the persons contacted by different officials via their entertainment allowance, and through other forms of contact; this is of obvious utility, especially if it is combined with short personality

<sup>13</sup> Between the two, vegetarian cuisine and alcohol-free drinks, it is the latter that is the harder burden to bear for most guests. In the few countries that impose prohibition that extends to the diplomatic corps, ingenious arrangements and brewing methods are devised to access alcohol. In a perverse fashion, it also adds to the fun element within the diplomatic corps. In Saudi Arabia, a particular Western embassy became famous for its annual import of three or four "pianos" from Lebanon, a place well known for its repackaging of alcohol in tins of "fruit juice" in a code well understood by the cognoscenti.

notes. For the embassy, the guest list must not become a dead document that is carried over, unchanged, from year to year. It should reflect expanding, dynamic contacts. It must be continually updated.

- h. The easiest innovation is in terms of the kind of entertainment offered; depending on circumstance, one can add some activity to a standard dinner, be it music or a dance performance, or a game that draws in the guests.<sup>14</sup> Work is important, but entertainment is also about letting people have fun, enjoying themselves. That, too, is sound use of these funds.

The smartest envoys work out a mechanism for reaching out to key policy makers of the host country. If they are persistent—and lucky—they may get to join small circles of local individuals that meet regularly, at dinner circles and the like. The spouse has a key role gaining entry or in holding groups together. One envoy says: “. . . the social life in Washington is very useful because it provides a common field in which people can meet, get to know each other, and actually do business. Parties are a continuation of business by other means. . . . The number of transactions or contacts that are made at night, or informally, is astonishing. The most popular receptions in Washington, the ones which really draw, are those given by the media. That’s because the media’s so powerful. But you can walk into a media reception of some TV program that’s congratulating itself on its birthday, and you may have 20 or 30 senators, you’ll find half the Cabinet. You know, you may be having one devil of a problem and you may see just the person . . . ”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In Germany (1992–1995) my wife and I befriended a Scottish couple living in Cologne, who ran a “single malt circle”, importing uncut, straight-from-the-cask malt whiskeys that ran to 50 and 55 degrees of absolute alcohol. We sometimes had their help in organizing pre-dinner “tasting” competitions. At other times we featured local Indian classical dancers. The object was to lift the event out of the ordinary and offer something new to guests. Our reward was German corporate CEOs who drove into Bonn from places as far as 150 kms to join these gatherings.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Conversation with Allen Gotlieb’, January 26, 1989, <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Gotlieb/gotlieb-con3.html>

How much time should one spend with colleagues in the diplomatic corps, as against cultivating officials and non officials of the host country? This varies from one capital to another, depending on local circumstances, the size of the diplomatic corps, and how easy or difficult it is to make local contacts. As a general rule, the diplomatic process has become increasingly bilateral, and the time available for the diplomatic corps has declined. But it would be a serious error to neglect the corps in any capital on the ground that one has no time for one's fellow diplomats. There is always much to be learnt from professional exchanges, because the corps has always been a brotherhood and a source for information and even informal advice.<sup>16</sup>

## **Teamwork**

Teamwork is also essential for good entertainment, especially when the host is one's senior colleague. At the ambassador's reception, the junior diplomat is always on duty, to look after other guests, converse with guests that appear not to know anyone, and generally to help the host. That is to be done even without being asked. In a similar fashion, at a big dinner, the envoy may invite a couple of his embassy colleagues, again to help as virtual co-hosts. But if at a dinner one has ten guests and six are embassy colleagues, that is not proper use of the RG!

Male diplomats benefit hugely from having a spouse to help out with their representational entertainment. The spouse, especially for the male official, is a vital ally in representational entertainment. The spouse provides the right ambience at social events and plays a large role in looking after guests. The spouse often has contacts that are different from those of the official, in range and quality, as is the experience of professionals who have served at

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Sharp and Geoffrey Wiseman, eds *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*, (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2007).

different posts.<sup>17</sup> The female diplomat has a harder task, since even if her spouse is with her at her overseas post, he is unlikely to do the work of a housewife; yet, the male spouse can be invaluable in contact building at social entertainment. Lady ambassadors are sometimes moved to say how much they wish they had a wife to help out in running the residence!

### **Points for Reflection**

1. Diplomatic entertainment constantly strives for a balance between intensive cultivation of a select few and outreach to a large catchment of potential friends.
2. Different regional groups tend to have their own style of representation activities. This might be a fit subject for a comparative study.
3. It makes good sense to provide envoys and embassies with small pockets of funds for local discretionary activity, for contact building, and winning allies. Some systems do this; the method deserves wide emulation.

<sup>17</sup> Starting with my first ambassadorship in Algeria, this has been my experience at six assignments as a head of mission or post (i.e. consulate general); without Mimi's help, it would have been impossible to build many of the friendships that became vital at each place.

# 19 Training Exercises

## Chapter Overview

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The market for exercises used in diplomatic training is too small to attract commercial producers of such material; unlike business schools, the foreign ministry training institutes do not have a density of throughput that might justify large-scale production of such material. At the annual meetings of the deans of foreign service institutes and diplomatic academies, held annually under the sponsorship of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and Washington's Georgetown University, participants from developing countries sometimes lament that such material is not widely available, on a sharing or an exchange basis among these institutions. This is one clear area in which more effective cooperation would be to the advantage of such institutions.

Some of the exercises that such training institutions utilize are country-specific and not easy to share, except among close allies, or within the framework of a strong regional cooperation mechanism. This would include "war games" and scenario planning exercises, which tend to be elaborate and reveal something of the

threat perceptions of the countries concerned.<sup>1</sup> That may also apply to case studies that are best developed through the use of a foreign ministry's archival material.

Some exercises developed by the author, which have been used at training programs in different countries, are given below in the hope that others will find these useful.

### Exercise I: Role Play

These exercises set out a rough scene, with an outline of several roles for the participants; it is left to their imagination to flesh out the roles and to play out these roles in a realistic manner. The roles will be given out at the start of the day, providing time to think these through and for each team to work out a strategy. What participants get from such an exercise depends on what they put into it, so it is important to think through the scene, and imagine what they would do with the assigned role. Please note also that **the aim is a win-win solution**, if possible, or to temporize, by holding over the issue for further dialogue.

FTA Negotiations: Your Embassy is conducting a preliminary discussion at the Ministry of Economics of *Newland*, following a visit by the *Newland* Prime Minister to your capital, when the leaders of the two countries agreed to establish a "free trade agreement." This proposal has run into a roadblock over the fact that *Newland* wants to impose a 40 percent "value added" clause, which means that only products made of components imported into your country, where the value addition is less than 40 percent, will not qualify for duty-free import. That will hurt your interests. The only carrot you can offer is that you have just decided to agree to include

<sup>1</sup> The author had a recent opportunity to join the faculty team for one such exercise conducted at a major defense institution, and saw first hand how much effort goes into detailing the exercise and the degree to which this reveals the mindsets of the organizers.



services into this agreement (converting the proposed FTA into a “comprehensive economic partnership agreement”); you plan to spring this pleasant surprise during these talks.

*Roles: Embassy:* counselor (economic); deputy director of your Commerce Ministry; first secretary (political). *Newland:* director, Economics Ministry; first secretary, Newland Embassy in your country; desk officer, Newland Foreign Ministry.

**Consular Problem:** About 150 persons who entered *Nextland* illegally are being held in two detention centers; they are suspected to be citizens of your country, but this is not confirmed as they have destroyed their travel and identity documents (as happens frequently in such cases); these persons claim political asylum, but are in fact “economic refugees” searching for a better life in *Nextland*. Your country cannot accept them as its responsibility without verification of the name and identity of each person, though the presumption that they are from your country is strong. For wider political reasons, you want to cooperate, but on terms that meet your stand. An official from your Home Ministry is visiting to help with these discussions. This issue has received local publicity, and a local NGO is also attending the discussions, to ensure that the rights of the refugees are not violated.

*Roles: Embassy:* deputy chief of mission; director, Home Ministry; first secretary (consular). *Nextland:* director, Foreign Ministry; director, Home Ministry; Representative of a local NGO.

## **Exercise II: Bilateral Diplomacy Scenarios**

These scenarios set out a task that can be executed jointly, with teams of four or five either working in parallel on the five exercises or taking up the same exercise in separate teams.

1. *Political*: Your Embassy, located in Canada, has been the target of media criticism over HR issues at home (now being tackled domestically through remedial measures). A local NGO, Universal Rights Watch, has mobilized a campaign in the Canadian Parliament urging that two new bilateral agreements under negotiation (a free trade agreement and civil aviation services expansion; both vital for your country) be put on hold. Your ambassador has asked the **Political Section to prepare an urgent plan to be implemented over 6 months to deal with this situation**. You do not have any additional budget for new expenses; your plan should consider all available options for dealing with this problem.
2. *Economic*: Your embassy in London has been asked by Headquarters to prepare a program to mobilize investments from the United Kingdom to the home country. Last year the inflow of FDI from the United Kingdom was £60 million, representing some 18 percent of the total FDI into the country; total FDI inflow has been rising, but the share of the United Kingdom has been stagnant. A small amount of £5,000 has been allocated (a small sum is chosen to get the team to focus on creative ideas, which do not cost much or involve “free rides”). Please prepare a **program to be implemented over the next 6 months**. Prioritize your actions. Your aim is to get hard results, and a big bang for the buck. You want to use all available local allies in the action proposed.
3. *Culture and Image*: Your country is to hold a monthlong cultural festival that is to take place in October 2007 (the predetermined program includes a major exhibition of paintings; a visit by a dance and music troupe to Delhi and two other cities; a film week; and visits by several eminent public personalities). The embassy team has been asked to propose a series of **support activities** that would take advantage of this festival to improve the home country’s image in India. An indirect objective is to improve business exchanges and the

inflow of tourists from India. Please **prepare a program, before, during, and after the cultural festival that meets the above objectives.** Your brief is to USE the cultural festival, NOT to plan that festival.

4. *Consular and Education:* Your embassy located in Rome is facing two interconnected problems. First, a rising number of illegal migrants are coming to Italy from your country and claiming political asylum. Second, some of the students from your home country have become politicized and are suspected of radical political activities (both in Italy and vis-à-vis home politics), besides staying on illegally. Italy is a major education partner; you have to improve outreach to the students, while persuading the local authorities to handle the illegal migrants issue with sensitivity. Prepare **an action plan to deal with this subject over the next 6 months.** No extra funds have been provided, and you have to use existing embassy manpower and resources.
5. *Bilateral Ties:* Your embassy is in Cairo and has been asked to propose activities (other than visits by Heads and ministers) that would meaningfully build better bilateral relations and deepen the level of contacts between Egypt and your country, after a relative period of normal but static level of mutual exchanges. The goal is to set the stage for your PM's visit the next year, and to provide the platform for stronger mutually beneficial activities, covering all sectors. You are not required to plan the PM's visit, but should **outline the actions that would profit from this to take the relationship to a higher level.**

### Exercise III: Crisis Management

This exercise has been used at the Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi, by the author, working jointly with Ambassador Kamal N Bakshi. Typically, the crisis scene for Days II and III is given to the teams only after a particular day's task has been completed.

## The Crisis: Day I

In this simulation exercise we imagine that the Homeland Embassy in Nextville, which is the capital of *Nextland*, is faced with an urgent crisis. A group of 70 refugees who are citizens of Farland (a very friendly neighbor of *Nextland*), yesterday pushed their way past local security guards and entered our Embassy, demanding either political asylum in Homeland or facilities to go to another country, to escape political persecution in their own homeland. This group includes 22 women and 14 children, aged between 2 and 16 years. They have entered our chancery building and have physically occupied some of the rooms, and refuse to leave.

The Homeland Embassy is surrounded by a heavy concentration of *Nextland* security forces, who have brought in armored personnel carriers close to the entry points of our premises. They permit entry or exit even by our own embassy personnel only after prolonged checks, on the pretext that they must verify identities, and prevent the escape of the Farland “criminals.” Foreign journalists and TV crews are also camped at our gates, since this is being presented as a major humanitarian drama, and some foreign networks have been showing live scenes. Inevitably, the Farland refugees have exploited this, and three of the women have started a hunger strike, and have been walking around the embassy garden, in view of the journalists, chanting slogans on their “right” to refuge.

## Background

Because of severe crisis and failures of governance in Farland, the foreign embassies in Nextville have witnessed three similar instances in recent months, all of which were resolved after long negotiations involving the countries concerned, the authorities of *Nextland*, the UNHCR, some activist NGOs, and some Western countries that eventually agreed to take these refugees on a “temporary basis,” but the numbers involved were much smaller. One result was an announcement by the government of *Nextland* that

they would not permit such “so-called refugees” to leave under the kind of deals negotiated in the past and would insist on their return to Farland. The announcement of this policy was severely attacked in the international media, who have also been very critical of the repressive internal policies of Farland.

## The Issues

Your team is at the Homeland Foreign Ministry, and you have been asked to produce an action plan for handling the crisis. Your guidelines are as follows:

- The embassy has become an innocent target in this incident. Homeland enjoys good relations with *Nextland*, and does not want this crisis to threaten these ties.
- It cannot permit *Nextland* authorities to enter the premises to remove the refugees, since that violates diplomatic immunity, and is also politically unacceptable to the Homeland public opinion, which is very sympathetic to the plight of these refugees.
- Homeland has no objection to the refugees going to a third country, provided the UNHCR or some other reputed agency handles this. So far negotiations in Nextville to get the authorities to permit the refugees to leave safely for another destination have been futile; they have been told that they will “never” permit such departure. Homeland risks a prolonged confrontation.
- Both the international media and Homeland domestic media have urged us to take some action to solve the issue and have begun to demand that Homeland must take some initiative.

Please produce an action plan of four or five points, setting out the steps that you recommend for handling this crisis as seen from the MFA.

*[The above scenario covers Day 1; material covering Days 2 and 3, and supplementary material, is provided on the website that accompanies this book.]*

## Exercise IV: Bilateral Negotiation Simulation

A noted expert on commercial diplomacy, Professor Geza Fekete-kuty, has developed this exercise. He has been a senior member of the US Trade Representative's team, is a noted expert on WTO affairs, and runs a fine Master's program.<sup>2</sup> It is offered here with his permission, incorporating a minor change made by the author.

One attraction of this exercise is that it is conducted in pairs, with one person playing the role of the negotiator from Newland and the other from *Utopia*. It can thus be used for any number of participants. A key feature is that compromise on the four issues in play is possible only if the negotiators communicate with one another, to bring alive the concerns and the interests of each side, rather than assume that each side knows what the other wants. Geza and I have used it in different settings over about three years and it has always been a success.

### Exercise outline

This exercise simulates a negotiation for a "Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement" (CEPA) between Newland and *Utopia*, focused on the first phase, when typically difficult issues have to be tackled.

Given below are the common facts, known to both sides. In addition, each participant will get "Confidential Instructions" that sets out the negotiating brief. At the end of the exercise we should analyze the result, to see how an optimum result might have been achieved if we studied the **(1) interests**, **(2) constraints**, and **(3) priorities** of each; one should do this for oneself and for the other side.

<sup>2</sup> Geza Fekete-kuty's training programs are available at the website of the Institute of Trade and Commercial Diplomacy [www.commercialdiplomacy.org/]. He played a remarkable role in the development of WTO processes in the area of services and has done pioneering work in commercial diplomacy.

## Background

*Utopia* is a large developed country, while *Newland* is an advanced developing country, one-tenth the size of *Utopia*. An extensive economic relationship exists between them. A large number of people from *Newland* have migrated to *Utopia*, and this country also depends heavily on its exports to *Utopia*. Many citizens of *Utopia* visit *Newland* and this tourism is a major source of income for *Newland*.

Both countries have problems of unemployment. *Utopia*, the richer partner, has lost a number of jobs, and some of its industries are using nonunionized foreign workers. Consequently *Utopia* has reduced the number of short-term work permits; further, because of terrorism, it has tightened its visa procedures.

## Issues

Four sticking points affect the CEPA; both sides are keen that before the President of *Newland* visits *Utopia* in 4 weeks' time, a framework FTA agreement should be signed. This puts pressure on the negotiation teams. The issues are as follows:

- *Utopia* wants its **banks**, technologically advanced and enjoying a strong global competitive position, to gain access to *Newland*. These banks apply IT and have a strong ATM machines network, at home and in other countries. These banks want access to *Newland* and have good political connections. *Newland* has hinted that liberalizing its restrictions on the entry of foreign banks is currently nonnegotiable; its domestic banks fear foreign competition. Its Finance Ministry also resents the inclusion of banking issues in the CEPA, which is its turf. But over time *Newland* wants to modernize its banks.
- A second problem is over the demand from *Newland* for more **short-term work visas** and improved visa procedures from *Utopia*; it has many graduates looking for jobs abroad. New-

land wants *Utopia* to accept them, both for the remittances that they would send home, and to reduce social discontent. Moreover, *Utopia's* restrictions on business visas have hurt Newland enterprises and the powerful commercial lobbies.

- The third issue concerns **labor standards**. As the richer partner, *Utopia* insists that Newland must not gain economic advantage through its lower wages and ineffective application of international ILO conventions. *Newland* disputes this, arguing that it has implanted all the standards it has signed; the few it has not yet signed cannot be used as a political lever, as it plans to sign these in the future.
- The final issue concerns **civil aviation**. *Newland* is asking for what are called 5th and 6th “freedom rights,” to extend its current air services beyond *Utopia*, to fly to other countries; it also needs help to improve its airline, but is touchy about taking help from others. *Utopia* is happy to see an expansion in air services between the two countries and wants to get its foot in the door, by helping the Newland airline, and thereby opening the door to future business relations with it.

The task of the negotiators is to try and reconcile these different interests and objectives, using the above information and the Confidential Brief.

*Please prepare a list of four or five points that will constitute your negotiation strategy, before you commence the actual negotiations. You are given 15 minutes for this task.*

*The negotiation should be completed in about 40 minutes. Thereafter, each team reports on the outcome to the full group; in practice, about 30 to 50 percent of the pairs of negotiating counterparts manage to find effective solutions, while sticking to their Confidential Brief. [The text of the two Confidential Briefs, and some other supplementary material, is provided on the website that accompanies this book.]*



# 20 Concluding Observations

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When in 1995 the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) morphed into the “World Trade Organization,” following the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of negotiations, a new concept gained currency. This was the notion that developing countries needed external help for “capacity building” to prepare their trade ministries and the officials handling the multitrack negotiations, to handle the multiple new issues that entered the global economic dialogue. Advanced country WTO members gave extensive commitments to help developing states to build capacity, and special programs were put into effect in consequence.

In some respects the international affairs environment that now exists exhibits similar characteristics of multilayered complexity, which includes the radical transformation that has taken place

after the end of the Cold War, the globalization of diplomacy, and the emergence of new power centers, some of which are labeled “emerging.” Unlike the WTO, no specific international commitments exist for countries to help one another to cope with these new external policy demands. Yet, foreign ministries have a real need to build up their organizational and human capacity to handle simultaneously bilateral, regional, and global negotiations along multiple vectors, and to handle their external relationships in a complex environment. Even large and experienced countries such as India confront questions over their foreign policy “software”;<sup>1</sup> the challenge is even sharper for medium and small states. What we see often are rather modest actions, in lieu of sustained effort at building up the capacity of states to handle their enhanced diplomatic challenges.

This connects with the subject of “diplomatic capacity,” that is, how capable a foreign ministry is to handle multitrack dialogue with multiple partners. This touches on the ability of the lower and middle levels of the ministry to handle these different dossiers and furnish all the needed services, including carrying out parallel conversations with the domestic stakeholders, official and nonofficial. No less vital is the capacity of the top management of the ministry to oversee and provide leadership, as well as engage in negotiations with foreign partners, as we see below.

By its very nature, the foreign ministry is a sensitive institution; it is not easy for states to invite external aid to improve their diplomacy capacity. When this is attempted, it is often easier for a small state to approach a multilateral institution than a bilateral partner, though examples can be found for both kinds of actions.<sup>2</sup> For the great part, countries are left to their own devices to reinforce human capacity, mainly by expanding staff and improving their

<sup>1</sup> This phrase has been coined by Daniel Markey, in his essay “Developing India’s Foreign Policy ‘Software’”, *Asia Policy*, July 2009, Washington DC, pp. 73–96.

<sup>2</sup> The author had the privilege of serving for 6 months as a Commonwealth Adviser at the Namibia Foreign Ministry in 2000–2001, and was given full access to the Ministry and its officials.

training methods, plus deploying additional material resources within the limits of their financial capacity.

Let us revisit the several issues with which Chapter 1 ended, and see how much change is underway in the activities highlighted there. Implicit in the notion of globalized diplomacy is a capacity to observe others and a paradigm of benefiting from the experience of others.

## **Mutual Learning**

Knowledge management is today one of the core requirements in any organization; it has gradually dawned on foreign ministries that they can use a spectrum of methods, old and new, to capture the embedded knowledge that their own personnel possess. Some of these are borrowed from the corporate world, while other ideas come from public service management. Yet, ministries often do not ask their personnel to join in a search for viable and innovative methods.

One innovative example is the “Diplowiki” used by the US State Department (Chapter 10).<sup>3</sup> Other foreign ministries are beginning to use their equivalents, similarly providing an internet-based forum for their staff to share information, identify best practices, and engage in mutual learning. The internet facilitates such mutual exchanges. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs, which in 2011 was working to establish its own intranet, has seen young officials take the initiative, commencing in 2008, to establish a group-mail forum to exchange information on professional issues; that has been an effective demonstration of how technology-savvy young activists are capable of finding their own solutions.

The wiki method is ideal for foreign ministries, in that it is collaborative and serves as a platform for focused action. On many

<sup>3</sup> “Diplopedia a success at the US Department of State” (author not mentioned), a 2010 Rice University article analyzing five years of usage of this wiki method at: [www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2010-05/ru-das052010.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2010-05/ru-das052010.php) [accessed on October 7, 2010.]

issues such as organizing visits of incoming or outgoing business delegations, reaching out to local stakeholders, and handling cultural cooperation, it connects like-minded officials, and provides a kind of checklist of good ideas for someone seeking guidance. Best of all, it is constantly updated, and is centered on the working ethos of one's own institutions.

The next step is collaboration among foreign ministries to share experience and for mutual learning. For instance, Caricom has a forum for the foreign ministers of member states, and foreign policy coordination is one of the regional institution's objectives. It is but a small step to set up a regular dialogue on management issues. This is also feasible at other regional bodies that have moved to advanced cooperation, be it ASEAN or the Gulf Cooperation Council.

### **Stronger Professionalism**

The training methods recommended in this collection apply equally to career and non-career envoys. One of the areas of focus is stronger professionalism. Given that most foreign ministries are under domestic pressure to justify their role, and their budgets, this also helps to reinforce domestic legitimacy.<sup>4</sup>

In coming years, career officials will face stronger questioning over the value they deliver, and will need to undertake several measures to meet this. One is domestic outreach, of the kind many foreign ministries now implement. For instance, commencing in early 2010, the Public Diplomacy Division of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has sent out retired envoys to dozens of universities, to speak on foreign policy themes, including ways in which citizens connect with external issues. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The author had an opportunity to attend a consultation meeting organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat in early 2009, at which the representatives of a number of foreign ministries spoke of the questioning they faced from their finance ministries over their budget allocations. The same information was gained from visits to some African foreign ministries in that year.

<sup>5</sup> Under this program, the author spoke at Rajasthan University in Jaipur in

Another method is interchange of officials between the foreign ministry and other ministries and official agencies, through both "in" and "out" placements. In African foreign ministries, this is either unknown or in its infancy. At the other end of the spectrum, in many European countries vigorous interchanges are the custom, encompassing even NGOs and business associations, and individual business enterprises. Besides "opening up" the foreign ministry, such actions also lead to a stronger professional identity.

### **Appointment of Envoys**

Some of the course participants I have encountered at distance-learning programs, belonging to foreign ministries from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, are despondent that political appointments are a fact of life for them; career diplomats have to reconcile themselves to the rather few opportunities for ambassadorships. Competent diplomats, with over 25 years of experience, sometimes serve out multiple appointments as deputy chiefs of missions because of this misguided practice. Of course, this practice exists in a few Western countries as well, notably the United States, but in that country, political appointments are effectively capped at about 25 to 30 percent.<sup>6</sup>

In mid-2009, I was invited to Kenya's biennial conference of ambassadors; operating from ignorance, compounded by innocence, I told the gathering that just as one would seldom appoint businessmen as university vice-chancellors and rectors, or teachers as high court judges, it was equally erroneous to treat envoy appointments as an open field for diplomacy amateurs, even if some such appointments were justified on grounds of the public service experience of the individual concerned. The 50-plus envoys attending the conference, about two-thirds of them political

October 2010, and had spoken the previous month at a girls' high school in Jodhpur. At both places, the questions from the several hundred that attended exceeded the time allotted for the function.

<sup>6</sup> See Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador*, (2005) pp.47–52.

appointees, were not amused, though the top personalities of that foreign ministry supported this call for greater professionalization. In April 2010 I received a further invitation from the Kenya Foreign Ministry to join a training program for a batch of 25 newly appointed envoys, divided this time in a roughly half-and-half split between career and non-career appointees. Most of the latter were unexpectedly receptive to the offered opportunity to learn about the *métier*.<sup>7</sup> An October 2009 visit to Buenos Aires, at the invitation of the Foreign Ministry's association of professional diplomats, offered a like experience; I was told that their system permits the appointment of up to 25 non-career envoys, of course, always to the choicest locations; it seemed I was invited to articulate the case against political appointments, at a time when some apprehended that such appointments might even go up.<sup>8</sup>

Will things change? Perhaps this can happen, if what appears to be a worldwide trend in favor of professionalization of diplomatic services moves forward.

## **Multi-Owner Diplomacy**

Accepting that there is a legitimate role for other "owners" of the country's foreign policy and diplomacy is one of the hardest lessons for traditional foreign ministries, especially those in the developing world. It has been observed that small countries and transition states have often been more agile and adaptable, perhaps because entrenched or "legacy" systems are not so strong there.

Foreign ministries have much to gain from bringing in outside talent to advise and brainstorm with officials. They offer different perspectives and provide connections that may not be part of the ministry's existing network. One direct method is to create

<sup>7</sup> A bonus was the stated desire of many of these envoys to join distance-learning courses offered by DiploFoundation.

<sup>8</sup> Argentine diplomats especially resent this intrusion of political appointees against the background that their continental exemplar, Brazil, has a law that prohibits the appointment of anyone other than professionals as envoys abroad.

advisory groups, either blended or belonging to the categories that need to connect with the ministry. A simple example is a business advisory group of the kind that finance or trade ministries tend to have. Sometimes we find that while the ministry has excellent contacts with business and industry associations, these are of an ad hoc nature and not organized into consultative groups; resorting to the latter provides stronger continuity and depth to the existing links.<sup>9</sup> It is even more useful to have a mechanism for sustained dialogue with think tanks and scholars, who often feel alienated by the official system. Establishing a consultation forum with NGOs and representatives of civil society is of equal importance as part of the foreign ministry's domestic outreach, yet this remains a bridge too far in most developing states.

Substitutes can be found for opening up the diplomatic machine to outside advice. When countries use Track Two dialogue processes, they bring in such nonofficial expertise into close connection with the foreign ministry.<sup>10</sup> The same is true when countries appoint leading personalities from different walks of life as "nonresident ambassadors," but unfortunately that method is used essentially by small states such as Malta and Singapore, and is relatively unknown even among most other small states. Another way of harvesting ideas from nonofficials is to commission thinktanks and academics to write analyses focused on countries and regions and offer policy suggestions. Business consultants are also used, especially those with experience of public affairs

<sup>9</sup> This is true of India, where the Ministry of External Affairs enjoys strong cooperation with the three prime business agencies known well by their acronyms, Assocham, CII, and FICCI. But they do not meet as a periodic and collective discussion forum.

<sup>10</sup> Such Track Two groups have a varied character. Some are "eminent person groups," composed of businessmen, academics, scientists, cultural and media figures and others from public life, charged by two governments, or by regional groups, to come up with practical ideas for deepening and improving relations among the states concerned. Other such groups engage in confidence building discussions among countries that have strained relations; when such groups act on their own, sometimes even without the knowledge of the governments concerned, they belong to what is called a "Track Three" process.

management, but the market is too small for any such consultant to develop expertise in the operation of foreign ministries; the few that are actually used tend to work on narrow themes such as human resource management and the application of cutting edge ideas on performance management. An increasing number of foreign ministries are now engaged with diverse partners in such open processes.

In whatever shape the engagement as described above is implemented, working with these nonofficial actors brings into the foreign ministry new ideas and options. It also serves, more obviously, to extend the ministry's connections with key stakeholders.

### **Training as Central Focus**

The 2010 annual meeting of the "International Forum on Diplomatic Training" (IFDT), described in Chapter 1, was held in Malta at the end of September. Training institutions from 40 countries were represented, close to the typical average at such meetings, but well under the number of countries where diplomatic training institutions exist.

More and more countries are investing in training; the range of courses they offer is expanding, and some are developing programs at regional levels. Many countries want to reach out to neighbors and others, and offer to them their own training programs. Senior level training is a special priority, including programs for envoys. This is a sea change compared with even the recent past. In regions such as the Caribbean, regional training options that can be used by a number of neighboring states are under active exploration.

A related change is in the recruitment process; small diplomatic services that carried out ad hoc entry once every two or three years are moving to annual recruitment, even if the number taken in is small, as suited to their total numbers. More and more foreign ministries have worked out special procedures of their own, separated from the recruitment into other branches of the public service. Elsewhere, ministries are in dialogue with home agencies to



implement such differentiated processes. They are driven by realization of the distinct professional skill sets that they require.

## Human Resource Optimization

Several obstacles block improvements in human resource management. Senior officials sometimes oppose change, arguing that things worked very well in the past when they were young cadets; they also question the application of corporate management measures. In some countries, far from taking the lead, foreign ministries have to be pushed into implementing the changes that have been carried out in the other branches of the public service. International institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, and the regional development banks, are frequently the change harbingers in those institutions, given their strong clout over development funding. We see this especially in relation to the spread of performance management methods.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, other foreign ministries are pursuing innovative ideas in managing their human resources; they are the trend leaders.

Young people are today both aware and adaptable to a degree that is astonishing. They embrace new ideas and are very fast learners. Foreign ministries would do well to place greater trust in them and to give them latitude to find their own ways of doing things. General George Patton was right when he said it is far better to tell people what you want done, rather than tell them what to do; often they will astound you with the solutions they produce. The experiment tried out by the British Foreign Office in 1999–2000, of letting their young officials take the lead in producing a blueprint for reform, is an object lesson.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In Botswana, India, and Kenya, for instance, foreign ministries have been pushed into accepting new methods first introduced in the domestic public services.

<sup>12</sup> See John Dickie, *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works*, (Tauris, London, 2004); Dickie was given special access to write about the reform process that led to the Foreign Office document *Insight 2010*, which remains unpublished.

## Intensifying the Diplomatic Process

Effective management of bilateral relationships is one of the key tasks of diplomacy. Some good practice examples bear this out. India's Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Aspen India, in what amounts to a close partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs, has established "strategic dialogue" arrangements in several countries, including the United States, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Israel, France, and China; it "covers all aspects of the relationship."<sup>13</sup> The participants include businessmen, former diplomats, journalists, and other public figures; officials from the two countries concerned attend as observers. This method privileges influential nonofficial personalities into joining what amounts to a structured, confidential brainstorming arrangement. A few other countries use similar methods.

British ambassadors are now allowed to use "corporate mentors" to act as personal advisers and de facto trainers, for a limited number of hours, usually at the start of a new assignment, to help them tackle the leadership and other management challenges at their overseas assignments. This mirrors a corporate practice and is again a unique measure in this profession, in implicit recognition of the fact that a head of a diplomatic mission faces a kind of loneliness of command and needs a kind of support that is not available within the traditional system. Former British envoys that have used the method speak of its effectiveness.

A third method, now used by an array of foreign ministries, is to appoint "special emissaries" and "ambassadors," based at home and tasked with special projects. For instance, the Kenya Foreign Ministry has a serving official named as an ambassador responsible for cooperation in the Great Lakes region, of which Kenya is part. India uses retired envoys for such tasks, such as a special emissary for West Asian affairs. Sweden has had a serving official serve as an envoy overseeing conventional weapon disarmament.

<sup>13</sup> Described by Tarun Das, "Strategic Dialogue: Track II Diplomacy," Rana and Chatterjee, eds, *Economic Diplomacy: India's Experience*, (Jaipur, India: CUTS, 2011), pp.189-95.

The net effect of such appointments is a “thematic” tasking of the diplomatic machinery, to overcome the limitations of conventional structure within the ministry.

Implicit in these approaches is improvement in the management capacity in the government, especially in the foreign ministry, to pursue sustained action that targets the priority countries. What is this capacity, and how might it be developed? It demands first of all a sufficiency of supervisory executive staff at the foreign ministry, in relation to embassies, permanent missions, and consulates abroad. (This was examined in Chapter 9.) Equally, this capacity hinges on the structure of senior management in the ministry, and the kind of delegation of top supervisory functions that is implemented. The organizational arrangements at the apex of the foreign ministry are a critical factor, especially the span of control and the work priorities of the top permanent executives.

France, the United Kingdom and many other countries have a single top executive at the foreign ministry, who seldom travels abroad, or personally handles negotiations with foreign partners. He handles two key tasks: that of principal adviser to the foreign minister, and as the chief executive supervising the diplomatic system. Within that frame, other tasks are delegated. The United States takes another tack, with several under secretaries of state handling different assignments; Germany has two state secretaries at the top. By contrast, when the top official personally handles major negotiations, and/or travels abroad frequently, other negotiation tasks suffer, important bilateral relations lose focus, and supervision of the organization takes a back seat. In other words, the capacity of the ministry to engage simultaneously in multiple, important negotiations and adroitly manage different, complex relationships suffers.

This notion of a country's international policy management capacity is a new one, and it deserves attention. It especially requires the officials at the apex and the ministersto work out adequate deployment of senior officials, and empower them to handle the different vectors of that country's engagement in a unified and holistic fashion. It is a challenging task.

## Diplomacy as Good Governance

A litmus test of foreign policy efficacy for any state is to gauge how well it mobilizes all the talent and resources in its diplomatic machine to deliver the best value to its citizens. This is as much a public good as clean air and safe water. Seen this way, we might evaluate foreign policy performance in comparative terms. Hopefully, this might add a sharper edge to efforts to improve the country's external policy delivery.

Good governance also means that foreign ministries ought to become more citizen-centric, reassessing their actions in terms of the value they provide to citizens—again a normal way of judging a health ministry or the education system. One practical consequence would be to shift consular work from the penumbra of periphery it today occupies in most countries, to a subject of strategic importance for the foreign ministry. Another consequence would be to upgrade even further the importance of public diplomacy. Take the example of the ministry's website: in how many countries does the top management consider and study, much less periodically monitor, this principal vehicle for the ministry's outreach to its own citizens and to the publics of the world at large?

Can we think of creating an "index of international governance"? In an earlier book, *Asian Diplomacy* (2007), which analyzed and compared the foreign ministries of five Asian countries, I suggested a template for developing a method for measuring the effectiveness of foreign ministries.<sup>14</sup> Taking a leaf from other global indices that compare the performance of countries in terms of economic freedom or level of corruption, one could develop such an index that covers external relations. One could also make such a comparison more inclusive by including in it an assessment of the value that each country delivers to its own citizens, and to the global community; we would want to include in it not just the foreign ministry but also the country's full system of international policy delivery. We should also want to see in that an assessment

<sup>14</sup> Rana, *Asian Diplomacy: The Foreign Ministries of China, India, Japan, Singapore and Thailand*, (2007), pp. 220–2.

of the country's international commitment, including the extent to which it acts as a responsible global citizen, upholding international law and acting with a sense of responsibility to the world community. At a time when a Sudan-born billionaire, Mo Ibrahim, has sponsored a generous prize that rewards good governance in Africa, surely this is an idea that merits a sponsor, or at least debate that might give practical shape to such an index of "international governance."<sup>15</sup>

A final point. The World Bank and others have put forward the notion of "fragile states," countries facing severe shortages of resources, located at the periphery of the globalization process, often unable to derive any benefit from it. One estimate is that in the middle of the decade of 2000, their number grew from 17 to 26 in three years to 35 or more.<sup>16</sup> One may ask: can these states use the international system to help themselves? Can they use proactive, smart diplomacy to improve their situation? Should they be helped to make optimal use of their external contacts, and if so, how? This is a line of action that merits serious attention.

<sup>15</sup> Mo Ibrahim Prize, see: [www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en](http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en) [accessed on November 29, 2010.]

<sup>16</sup> Vinod Thomas of the World Bank has led the team that has made this estimate. Wikipedia estimates the number at between 35 and 50, depending on the criteria applied.

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