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Non-Western Diplomatic Cultures and the Future of Global Diplomacy¹

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Analysis Framework

With Western imperialism and colonialism, Western diplomatic culture has spread around the globe. It has almost fully permeated global diplomacy since the foundation of universally working international organizations after the end of the Second World War. Thus, European origins of global diplomatic culture are reflected in global diplomatic culture and negotiation style. Obviously the specific style of present-day global diplomacy has a significant impact on the substance of inter-state communication and its results.

The Western face of global diplomacy is thus a consequence of both its cultural roots and its century-long global dominance - arguably even in countries not colonized. Today the dissolution of global order makes global governance more difficult. At the same time the proliferation of state and non-state actors impacts global developments. So does technological change, mainly through digitisation. It will have to be seen if, and if so to what extent, and in what way global diplomacy (its institutions, practices, and content) may be impacted by different diplomatic cultures that have remained, have evolved, or are in the process of evolving. The more intense and stressed global diplomatic work becomes, the more different approaches to international and/or multi-lateral problem-solving become visible. The use of threats and coercion belongs here, but also the way diplomacy is conducted. How global public goods may be provided securely in the future thus may become reflected in all varieties of diplomatic encounters as well. Non-Western countries meanwhile have not only increased their countries' visibility through their own forms of public diplomacy; they also pursue a more

active diplomatic outreach to other non-Western peers.²

This paper proposes to discuss a framework to assess the implications of the global shifts for diplomacy in the 21st century in view of the impact of non-Western diplomatic cultures. To assess whether and how such non-Western diplomatic cultures, old or new, will shape and potentially alter today's diplomatic system, three types of insights are required:

- 1) Which elements of global diplomacy – its institutions, practices, and contents – are in the eyes of major non-Western powers still adequate to deal with the new challenges (as named above)? Which elements do they find necessary to replace?
- 2) How do these states' understandings of and preferences for the conduct of global diplomacy diverge from what we see as the status quo?
- 3) What particular use do major non-Western powers make of the major existing diplomatic instruments? How do they judge them?

There are three elements of global diplomacy: the dominant venues of diplomatic exchange with their customs of communication; the global diplomatic negotiation style; and the governance aspect of state-to-state exchange. Each aspect may be subject to change due to the influences mentioned above, and that change may reflect the attitude of non-Western cultures.

Venues of Diplomatic Exchange

A large number of organizations and fora that dominate today's multilateral diploma-

² See, for instance, Brigidi de Mello, Eduardo, »New Independent Foreign Policy, a Matter of Emphasis«, in: *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 3 (2014) 5, 2014, pp. 245-269; Zilla, Claudia, »Brazil's Foreign Policy under Lula«, *SWP Research Paper*, March 2017; Kemp Spies, Yolanda, »Middle Power Diplomacy« in: Costas M. Constantinou/Pauline Kerr/Paul Sharp (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, London: SAGE, 2016, pp. 281-293.

cy has arisen since the Second World War. While their membership and aims were meant universal, they also reflect the distribution of power at the time of these organizations' creation. That may mean privileged access (for instance permanent membership) or decision-making rights (a greater voting share or veto rights). The architecture of global financial governance is only one of many examples: Despite near-universal membership, the World Bank has always been headed by an American, and the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was always from Europe. The question here is how much the organisation of such fora of diplomatic work is regularly translating into substance.

Unsurprisingly, the imbalance in favour of some Western states has been a source of frustration for some non-Western countries. Discontent has further increased with the growing economic might of some such states. It is evidenced by decreasing support for Western initiatives, by recurring instances of institutional deadlock, and by non-Western attempts of counter-institutionalization. To give an example, Richard Gowan and Franziska Brantner have documented a substantial loss of support for European human rights initiatives: in only two decades, the EU has lost the support of about a quarter of UN member states on human rights votes inside the UN General Assembly.³ Institutional deadlock, as in the reform of the UN Security Council or the conclusion of the Doha Development Round, is frequent proof of how traditional global diplomatic institutions are inadequate to deal satisfactorily with the new challenges.⁴ However, when non-Western countries establish competitors to existing institutions (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are two prominent exam-

³ Gowan, Richard/Brantner, Franziska, »A Global Force for Human Rights? An Audit of European Power at the UN«, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, September 2008. The authors look at the period from 1990 to 2008.

⁴ Narlikar, Amrita »New Powers in the Club: The Challenges of Global Trade Governance«, in: *International Affairs*, 86 (2010) 3, 2010, pp. 717–728.

ples), the new institutions as a rule are copies of existing ones.⁵ The question therefore is whether the way Western diplomacy has evolved - leaving the question of power and its influence aside - still satisfies the needs on new non-Western actors.

Western diplomatic culture is not only reflected institutionally, it also comes in an informal shape. The traditional pattern of relations between - mainly - state actors does not suffice in order to accommodate the increasingly global interests of states. Therefore, over the past years many non-Western states have diversified their diplomatic portfolio. They now interact with non-state actors, such as large international corporations or NGOs of any kind. The same holds true in the state-to-state field: Under Lula da Silva, president of Brazil from 2003 to 2011, Brazil intensified its diplomatic outreach to the "South", to South America and Africa in particular, while downgrading the importance of its ties to America and the EU.⁶ This was reflected in Lula's travelling diplomacy - with visits paid to more African countries than his predecessors had visited together - and the opening (or reopening) of 17 diplomatic missions across the African continent.⁷ Non-Western rising powers have also strengthened ties among each other. The most remarkable example is the creation of BRICS: Since their first summit in 2009 (then called 'BRIC' since South Africa had not yet joined), interactions among BRICS countries have increased and diversified substantially. For 2017, 81 meetings have been scheduled, including summits,

⁵ For more examples of parallel and alternative structures promoted by China in particular see Heilmann, Sebastian/Rudolf, Moritz/Huotari, Mikko/Buckow, Johannes, »China's Shadow Foreign Policy: Parallel Structures Challenge the Established International Order«, *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, October 2014.

⁶ Zilla, Claudia, »Brazil's Foreign Policy under Lula«, *SWP Research Paper*, March 2017, here p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid*, here p. 16.

minister-level and senior official's meetings, as well as people-to-people exchanges.⁸

These developments raise several questions:

- What significance do non-Western powers assign to strong diplomatic ties with non-Western non-state and state actors as compared to their traditional range of interlocutors as part of their overall diplomatic activity?
- Into which relations do they currently invest the most when using their diplomatic instruments? Which relationships do they seek to strengthen further in the upcoming years?
- Are non-Western powers setting similar priorities in this regard as do Western states?
- Can we see the BRICS group as one that changes the parameters of diplomatic exchange in significant ways, or is it copying existing diplomatic work?
- In the next years, what relevance do non-Western powers assign to establishing alternative global institutions as compared to reforming existing ones?

Negotiation Style

The negotiation style that dominates in the global realm is imprinted by Western diplomatic thought. This is also visible in the negotiation style of global diplomacy. The question today, with the changes in communication in societies world-wide due to the digital revolution, is whether the traditional instrumental approach to negotiating is still adequate to the emotion-oriented global communication style increasingly prevalent.

At the same time, it may be worthwhile to analyse the impact of U.S. diplomatic style on other Western and non-Western diplomatic culture. The U.S.' status has furthered

the "Americanization"⁹ of global diplomacy. In engaging even among each other, Henrikson describes, many countries have come to adopt American methods of conducting diplomacy, including the intensive use of lobbying and advocacy techniques.¹⁰

Saying this, the growing power of non-Western states may already have imbued global diplomatic practices with their own cultural characteristics - and that may be happening while we watch. Three questions arise from this:

- How does the negotiation style of non-Western powers diverge from Western ones?
- Which elements (if any) of global diplomatic practice and negotiation style are disproportionately shaped in ways that are traditional, but inefficient today? Has U.S. diplomacy impacted diplomatic practices in significant ways, and are they still adequate?
- Are there any common elements of non-Western attempts to reshape global diplomatic culture and negotiation style?

Governance: How do States Interact with Each Other?

Western diplomacy has successfully established principles of multilateralism, guiding the international community into rules of joint problem-solving. That holds true a wide range of areas such as for crisis-management, for the establishment of rules for world-wide trade, for the issue of human rights. It is changing even seemingly well-established principles of the United Nations such as that of the non-interference in the internal affairs of other UN member states. More and more states pursue a policy of linkage – connecting concessions in various policy fields to states' behaviour in other areas. States today carry ideological conflicts into other policy fields by the use of coercive

⁸ See the meetings calendar for China's 2017 BRICS Chairmanship at <https://brics2017.org/English/China2017/BRICSCalendar/> (accessed on 18.09.17).

⁹ Henrikson, Alan K., »American Diplomacy«, in: Costas M. Constantinou/Pauline Kerr/Paul Sharp (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, London: SAGE, 2016, pp. 319-335.

¹⁰ Ibid.

diplomacy. Among these elements is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which seeks to condition state sovereignty – including diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state – on countries' domestic respect for human rights.

The conditions for a functioning global order may therefore be negatively impacted by resistance to such developments in modern diplomacy. What seems non-negotiable from the point of view of the United Nations and its principles in fact seems to differ starkly between individual states¹¹ with newer priorities.

Three more specific questions arise:

- What approaches to interacting formally in the new international environment, characterised by a multitude of state and non-state actors do major non-Western states pursue? How do these differ from traditional ones?
- What could a modern diplomacy for Western and non-Western states look like?
- What are the future norms of international society?

Conclusion

The past decade has evidenced tremendous changes in global society. That fact influences and changes traditional diplomacy as it has arisen in the West and spread internationally. The diplomatic arena where the future global order will have to be negotiated and where relations among states and non-state actors are recalibrated is fundamentally under stress. This paper is interested in the dissonance this may create – namely the dissonance between a diplomatic system that shows an overwhelming number of Western traits and a global order in which power is diffused, and where the exercise of

power has to cope with new governance, communication and technological problems. The paper hopes to begin assembling a framework that helps to systematically assess whether, to what extent, and in what way global diplomacy, its institutions, practices, and content, may change with the influence of non-Western diplomatic cultures. Better awareness of the changes and challenges ahead will help policy makers and diplomats wherever they craft adequate responses.

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¹¹ Cohen, Raymond »Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World«, Washington D.C.: US Institute of Peace Press, 1991; Burges, Sean W./Chagas Bastos, Fabrício H., »Latin American Diplomacy«, in: Costas M. Constantinou/Pauline Kerr/Paul Sharp (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, London: SAGE, 2016, pp. 372-384.