

Project Paper

Project “Diplomacy in the 21st Century”
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)/
German Institute for
International and Security Affairs

Rudine Emrich

Report of the Workshop on “Diplomacy in the 21st Century”

On March 27, 2017

SWP Berlin

Project Paper
Project “Diplomacy in the 21st Century”
No 03
April 2017

The first workshop on “Diplomacy in the 21st Century” in September 2016 had aimed at identifying some major changes to the very nature of diplomacy; this second one tried to identify aspects of such changes which deserve future exploration. Participants had contributed ten working papers (“four-page-papers”) as a discussion basis.

To introduce the discussion, Mr. Stanzel outlined the overarching themes of the working papers structuring the sessions of the workshop provisionally into three overlapping categories: 1) Digitisation, 2) Emotion and 3) Governance. A fourth session was to explore the way forward for the “Diplomacy in the 21st Century” project.

First Session – Digitisation

The following papers were discussed: “*Adapting Diplomacy to the Digital Age*” by Corneliu Bjola, “*The Case for Critical Digital Diplomacy*” by Jan Melissen and Emilie V. de Keulenaar, “*The Human Dimension of 21st Century Diplomacy: Individual Perceptions of Change and Continuity within the German Federal Foreign Office*” by Alexandra Friede and “*Digitisation and Government Responsibility*” by Volker Stanzel.

Key Points - Corneliu Bjola:

How Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) can adapt their organisational culture in the age of digitisation can be understood with the help of Edgar Schein’s theory of organisational behaviour. This theory uses qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure various points of tension. Ministries of Foreign Affairs need to learn how to use digital tools and find out how to link this knowledge to digital diplomacy. While digital pioneers have the advantage of flexibility, other institutions such as MFAs adapt only slowly to their changing environment. Hence, an analysis of the ways in which organisations adapt to changing circumstances is crucial for a successful implementation of necessary tools which will allow for a more flexible and smooth adaptation process.

Key Points - Jan Melissen:

In order to understand the impact digitisation has on diplomacy it is necessary to explore the precise meaning of “digital”. Digitisation may be understood as either: 1) a tool, 2) a site, 3) a condition or 4) an environment. For each case, digitisation should appeal to the creative capacity of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs). For example, if used in an instrumental way, social media can enhance the political capacity of institutions.

Key Points - Alexandra Friede:

Alexandra Friede’s paper discusses the results of a questionnaire, which investigates perceptions of change within the German Foreign Service among retired diplomats. Striking-

ly, less than 10% of the retirees approached responded to the questionnaire. While the respondents noticed that technical advancements altered operating procedures, they felt that the character of diplomacy remained unchanged. Similarly, the notion that hierarchies are necessary for successful diplomacy persisted. When asked about their most meaningful successes and failures, respondents in general reported events typical for traditional diplomacy.

Key Points - Volker Stanzel:

Technological advancements have not only sped up the work pace of diplomats but also increased the amount of circulating information that needs to be analysed. The increase in information and the speed of work heighten the pressure to make prompt decisions and therefore may have a negative impact on judgments which are threatened to be replaced by facts. Instant decision-making may overshadow the diplomatic virtue of thoughtful assessment. Moreover, the growing need for transparency draws diplomacy into a public space in which digitisation might eventually undermine the purposes of diplomacy. The challenge therefore is to nourish a new “emancipated civic-mindedness”.

Discussion

What is Diplomacy?

Preliminary, the nature of diplomacy and who can engage in it was discussed in order to more precisely define the area studied within the scope of this project. The focus of the debate was about how much exclusive authority a state has to conduct diplomacy and to what degree alternative entities can have an impact as well.

On the one hand, diplomacy was assumed to constitute the processes of foreign policy making, which is why it can only be applied to officials representing the authority of the state. Consequently, diplomacy only takes place once a state actor is involved. The interaction between two non-state actors of failing states, for example, can only be defined as quasi-diplomacy. Merely having influence on foreign policy does not equal diplomacy. Furthermore, digitisation should only be seen as an influence on the environment in which decision-making is taking place rather than a change in the process of diplomacy itself. While digitisation causes the “blurring of realities”, it would be dangerous to also intermingle analytical models.

Conversely, diplomacy may be understood as all instruments and processes which actors use transnationally in order to pursue their interests regardless whether they are state or non-state actors. Ministries of Foreign Affairs tend to establish relations with local actors instead of established powers in countries with authoritarian or corrupt governments, with the intention to circumvent such governments. Here, state actors cannot be considered to hold authority prerogative anymore.

Discussants ultimately agreed that states are the „key actors” of diplomacy. This does not mean, however, the state is or strives to be in complete control. Some non-state actors

influence how states act transnationally, regarding the state as a tool or even as an enemy (e.g. corporations or the Taliban). Therefore, in order to devise new strategies for diplomacy it is crucial to understand the interactions between nongovernmental organisations and the state.

Moreover, states sometimes find it useful to outsource diplomatic tools to non-state actors. In some cases however, non-state actors' acquisition of state competences happens involuntarily. Even though non-state actors are increasingly included in the policy-making process, foreign policy "cannot be outsourced to anybody". As states cannot allow opinions and alleged facts to shape foreign policy, they need to be able to verify information sources.

In the same manner, in some cases of nonofficial diplomacy, e.g. health diplomacy or commercial diplomacy, the state is actually the minor actor. Although states exclusively retain the quality of authority, the definition of who can conduct diplomacy must be broadened and other actors need to be included. The question how and to what extent the state should and could take back control remains, however.

Whether it is the very nature of diplomacy or merely its tools that are changing thus turned out to be an important point of contention during the debate: Is diplomacy actually more at risk today than it ever was in the past?

Digitisation and Diplomacy

The debate on the three papers centred around the impact of digitisation on diplomacy:

While diplomacy in the traditional sense was characterised by the communication between different Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the once clear line between state and non-state actors nowadays becomes blurred because, among other things, digitisation allows the public to interfere in MFAs' work. It is therefore crucial that implementers additionally react to "the pressure from below" by putting emphasis on digital skills during their recruitment process. Young diplomats should be able to use digital algorithms to analyse information and to correctly interpret digital messages. In this regard, the question of who in the government should be the author of a new digital language should be explored further.

As the age of digitisation brings about a continuous confrontation with complex facts as well as a new environment in which diplomacy takes place, more pressure is put on the decision-making process. Because trust forms the foundation of diplomacy, a space in which individual diplomatic actors can make sound judgments before taking a decision needs to be created and sustained.

While some governments already make an effort to incorporate digital elements into their processes, they might not have exploited the full potential of digitisation yet. Apart from faster communication, digital diplomacy benefits from direct reach and real time communication. Besides, digitisation can make public diplomacy more efficient and reduce bureaucratic acts. In times of crises, the instantaneousness of digital diplomacy can have wide reaching assets. The Danish government is a good example for governments

making efforts to fully exhaust the possibilities of digitisation: Just recently it announced the creation of the position of a “Digital Ambassador”, commissioned to build better relations with technology companies that have developed the power to shape opinions.

In order for the state to catch up with the digital developments of the 21st century, governments find it imperative to launch initiatives for reform processes. Issues such as “fake news” are closely connected to digitisation and illustrate how salient the issue is: knowledge, expertise as well as the ability to explain complex issues do not have the same value in the digital world. A more agile adaptation to the digitisation process as well as an in depth exploration of the possibilities of digital diplomacy beyond Facebook and Twitter therefore may become necessary.

The legitimacy and access deficit of MFAs requires for greater collaboration, including with stakeholders who have new capacities and technologies. Data scientists entering MFAs are exemplary for the availability of copious amounts of data that need to be processed. Processing this raw information is vital to modern diplomacy.

However, the findings of Ms. Friede’s paper seem to indicate that there may be a lack of political consensus on the necessity for change in the diplomatic profession, at least in Germany. It may be of interest to find out whether the German attitude is unique and how it compares with that of young diplomats.

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that in a global comparison the Internet cannot be seen as a homogenous space. States such as China are establishing their own digital networks, so the Internet cannot be used as an agent for change across borders in its entirety. Therefore, the extent to which digital diplomacy opens up new avenues for a digital presence in such countries needs to be critically assessed. In addition there is the question how non-democratic countries make use of digitisation. The content of digital information originally being today assumed to be uncontrollable, states make efforts to control technologies and contents. At the same time, smaller or less developed countries have difficulties to compete with or prevail over big data companies such as Facebook.

Regarding the substantial rise in information that digitisation evoked, more studies should focus on the production as well as the reception of digital information. Cognitive science might be a useful tool to bolster our understanding in this regard.

Second Session - Emotion

The papers discussed during the second session included: “*Emotion, Identity and Social Media: Developing a New Awareness, Lens and Vocabulary for Diplomacy 21*” by Rhonda Zaharna, “*Autism in Foreign Policy*” by Hanns Maull and “*The Impact of the Digital Revolution on Foreign Ministries’ Duty of Care*” by Jan Melissen und Matthew Caesar-Gordon.

Key Points – Rhonda Zaharna:

Digital and social media have an impact on the public arena where diplomats act. Because emotions and identity are becoming defining features of the public arena, they will challenge the rationalism of state actors. Digital media have brought state and non-state actors into the same realm in which they are both trying to influence the public. Digital diplomacy involves state actors, non-state actors and publics and therefore opens up a new diplomatic space. This new diplomatic space is personalised and functions on the basis of “identity and storytelling”.

Key Points – Hanns Maull:

Whenever outer political demand and inner demands are conflicting, they have an influence on the outcomes of foreign policy. Especially when societies develop a large amount of interest groups, the state has increasing difficulties to distinguish between reason and emotion during the decision-making process. When foreign policy is built on “autistic realisations” of the outside world and creates an unrealistic image of the other side it eventually may become dysfunctional.

Key Points – Jan Melissen:

Thanks to evolving technical standards, citizens and domestic politics are gradually becoming the main concern of MFAs. Since 2011, MFAs are using open-source channels of communication as well as open-source or crowd-sourced data, especially in times of crises. The immediacy of the digital age has not only politicised consular diplomacy but has also fostered the involvement of citizens from spectators to actors. The digital age is triggering a renegotiation of government-citizen relations where citizens take on a more active role and governments use digital developments to mobilise citizens for their purposes.

Discussion

Emotion and Identity

Identity and emotion should not be equated. Globalisation has brought about various identity issues, which complicate political negotiations. Many momentous political decisions do not stem from irrationality but are rather related to a different rationality that is derived from a certain identity of members of the public with its own logic. Therefore, young diplomats should be trained to understand and correctly analyse identity issues.

The issue of emotion in politics is not a new one. Dealing with emotionalised issues is a fundamental part of the political process. However, the weakness of emotion is that it is not a sustainable basis for political dialogue. Conducting politics on the basis of interest constitutes a more sustainable condition. Accordingly, seeing foreign policy decision-making through a prism of identity instead of a prism of interest will impede effective decision-making because it pressures decision-making entities to side with like-minded

parties. However, the common aim should be to act for a shared international vision. The crucial task of diplomats in this process is to interpret the different visions of their counterparts.

Nevertheless, emotions have a profound impact on domestic political drivers of foreign policy. The public's high demand for transparency forces domestic constituencies to justify foreign policy decisions. The newly evolved emotional and digital dimensions of diplomacy might have a negative impact on long-term policy visions.

Ultimately, MFAs should see the public search for identity as an opportunity, which needs to be addressed and channelled into support for a foreign policy. Governments can mobilise their citizens to support decision making, while building transnational networks of cooperation and coalitions with other states to commonly tackle special issues.

Emotion and Technology

Technology can be seen as a new component to “storytelling” and arousing emotions as it enables audiences to function as actors or drivers. Emotionally charged news that are distributed through social media in times of crises can lead to emotional and exaggerated public and political reactions. The possible result is reputation damage which may cause MFAs to take premature action because of public pressure. In that sense, digitisation can have amplifying effects when unforeseen crises occur.

Since digitisation is amplifying storytelling, the question whether it would be sufficient to recruit new diplomats that are storytelling experts, or a new diplomacy is needed altogether needs to be explored further. The question whether the growing role of national identity can be seen as a chance rather than a disadvantage for the foreign service needs to be investigated. If it were deemed an advantage, foreign services would have to try to cater to new national identities, and, likewise, consider whether the problem of emotion might merely require for MFAs to “sell diplomacy better” or to reinvent an entirely “new” diplomacy.

While storytelling can be seen as a technique, diplomacy is a strategy. Diplomacy therefore is in need of the development of a new protocol which mainly focuses on building relations, on fostering recognition of identities, and on enabling their negotiation. Furthermore, it will be vital to integrate digital thinking into the diplomatic profession and to examine different diplomatic cultures in order to develop new skills. For instance, emotion seems to be part of Chinese diplomatic tradition. It is common Chinese diplomatic strategy to analyse public emotions and to address them with an expression of empathy. An examination might be useful whether it makes sense to integrate such skills into new diplomatic spheres in Western countries. At the same time, awareness for cultural specificities of diplomatic qualities should be combined with an understanding for the use of technology.

While digital crisis intervention can foster governments' status game and political capital, digital tools are sometimes used by authoritarian states to persecute their citizens or to

deny them consular services if they are part of the opposition. Awareness needs to be nurtured that digitisation empowers everyone, not just democratic institutions.

Third Session – Governance

The following papers were discussed during the third session: “*The Disintermediation Dilemma and its Impact on Diplomacy*” by Andrew Cooper, “*Diplomatic Actors Beyond Foreign Ministries*” by Christer Jönsson and “*Understanding Diplomacy in the 21st Century*” by Sascha Lohmann.

Key Points – Andrew Cooper:

Modern diplomacy is in an existential crisis. Recent political events show that a new disconnect between citizens and institutions is emerging. Challenges such as rising populism and Brexit have the ability to delegitimise democratic institutions. However, diplomacy needs the resources of the state in order to function. The traditional idea of ambassadors fulfilling state tasks therefore becomes threatened: “Disintermediation highlights the disconnect between the priorities as defined by a perception of a worldly elite and localistic public”.

Key Points – Christer Jönsson:

The 21st century has created new potential diplomatic actors in various dimensions: the supranational, subnational, transgovernmental and transnational dimension. The supranational level: Although EEAS and EU have not replaced national diplomacy, they have added another layer to traditional diplomacy. The subnational level: This dimension experiences for example the renaissance of the city as a locus of power where one can observe micro - or para-diplomacy between cities. The transgovernmental level: This dimension refers to interactions between governmental subunits across state boundaries. The transgovernmental level is a result of “vertical disintegration” and denotes that transnational relations are not handled exclusively by foreign ministries because departmental interests in foreign policy increase. The transnational level: Transnational actors are groups or even individuals who act internationally as service providers or stakeholder, yet are not controlled by governments (such as NGOs or CSOs). Altogether the dimensions create a hybrid diplomatic arena, which is gradually replacing the former “club-like” model of diplomacy.

Key Points – Sascha Lohmann:

On a content level, the paper tries to shed light on the benefits the use of economic instruments in lieu of military instruments can have, which has been under-researched so far. On a conceptual level, a bridge concept which acknowledges the authority of the state

and the agency of non-state actors in the decision-making process needs to be established in order to formulate recommendations that draw on all different kinds of diplomatic resources.

Discussion

Power and authority

In the age of globalisation, non-state actors may be a good addition to states because they offer more options for cooperation and make governments less dependent on the cooperation with certain states. Since some non-state actors act normatively transnationally, Ministries of Foreign Affairs should expand their framework beyond club-like multilateralism. However, cooperation can only be limited to certain policy areas (e.g. climate negotiations).

Some non-state actors can use their power to impact policies of other countries. However, here “power” can have a wide-range of meanings, e.g. money or emotions. It will be worthwhile to further explore what this means for official diplomacy.

Because states are composed of multiple levels, there are various actors on each level that have power and agency. Other diplomacy types such as parliamentary diplomacy, party diplomacy, or union diplomacy should therefore not be left out of the equation. Hence, it is important to investigate how to use, manage or marginalise these different kinds of diplomacy.

On the other hand, power should not be equated with authority. Following the principle of authority, only the state has the ability to conduct diplomacy. NGOs’ power is often found to be influential because they substitute for areas where states’ capacities do not suffice.

Governance

Today, international relations experience a conflict between states which want to adhere to the norms of the international rules-based system and others who want to change it. In this regard, the new task of diplomacy may well include facilitating a peaceful transition to a new world order. On a domestic level, governments have not sufficiently targeted the losers of globalisation, which led these to feel “dispensable”. This caused “a seismic change to diplomacy and politics”. Votes in recent elections in various Western countries increasingly go against the system of international relations as we know it.

In this context, although the role of inter-parliamentary unions may not be a very powerful one, it might be an inspiration and a facilitator for official diplomacy: It can help foster ratification following international agreements. A closer collaboration between diplomats and parliaments would also help to diminish the domestic diplomatic deficit of democracies.

All in all, MFAs need to be more agile and less centralised in order to effectively tackle fast-paced and complex transformations that are brought about by current political events. This might also affect long-term policy planning.

On EU level, several key concepts pose a challenge to traditional diplomacy: identity, legitimacy, emotion and European representation.

Legitimacy and Trust

Diplomacy of the 21st century is affected by the diminishment of legitimacy and trust which may even affect governance in general. This issue of legitimacy and trust is closely connected with the increasing lack of institutions' ability to be relevant to citizens. As non-state actors often enjoy greater recognition than the state, non-state actors gradually adopt many functions of the state.

Depending on the significance given to the state, this might be seen as a serious issue: While outsourcing of government functions might be acceptable to a certain extent, the role of the state is not supposed to be eroded completely.

However, there are various tendencies that might potentially reflect interesting trends for the foreign services to take into account. Urbanisation is one example. In recent years, it has, for instance, given rise to the phenomenon of city-diplomacy. Although the concept of city-diplomacy contradicts the principle of state-led diplomacy, the Foreign Service might still want to embrace cities that are engaging in diplomacy-like activities as they enjoy legitimacy. This might bear beneficial potential with regards to the work of MFAs as long as the activities of such cities do not run against general foreign policy goals.

Fourth Session – Discussion of the Way Forward

Participants identified those issues that they think would merit further and deeper research. That research should constitute the basis for a third workshop, provisionally foreseen for September 2017, that will draw conclusions to be presented semi-publicly by the end of 2017. During fall and early winter 2017, these conclusions should be given the shape of well-argued, precise, and, most importantly, future-oriented recommendations for governments occupied with the task of adapting their diplomatic instruments to the demands of crucial 21st century changes.

The deliverables of the project should be researched further in 2018 (and possibly later), depending on the availability of funding. This will be further explored in September 2017.

The research due during summer will aim at drafting single-author or joint „four-page-papers." This work needs a strategic “umbrella concept” laying out the parameters for the papers. Jan Melissen offered to draft a brief framework concept note, an “umbrella concept” comprising the objectives of future-orientedness and deliverability under a common theme, also having in mind the possibility of continued project work beyond 2017. This

paper, planned for May, may then be commented on and further developed via email exchange by participants before they commit themselves to further research.

Funding Sources

With regards to funding beyond 2017, participants will explore funding possibilities with foundations, amongst other funding sources. Here, funding cycles should be kept in mind.

Participants agreed to circulate a list with domestic funding opportunities amongst the group.

Access to the “Diplomacy in the 21st Century” Website

Since the English version of the project website cannot be found via the search engine bar on the SWP website, all future papers will be uploaded to scribd.com as well.