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Project Paper
Diplomacy in the 21st Century (2)

The changes wrought by communication technologies, globalization, and the changing international system hardly leave any area of human life untouched, and diplomacy is no exception. All of the changes may be overwhelming, but many do not have significance for diplomacy beyond improvement of technical functions. Of greater importance are those changes that may – or already do – impact the nature of diplomacy itself.

When British diplomat Harold Nicolson described the "new diplomacy" of his time in 1954, he identified the major characteristic making it "new" compared to former ages not to be commercial expansion or improved communication, but rather the application of "ideas and practices" (namely the "essentials of liberal democracy") governing the internal and external affairs of a country.[1] Such deeper, and possibly long-lasting changes in the very character of diplomacy are what participants of the international workshop at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in September 2016 have been exploring over the past months in ten working papers.

With consideration for the changes that reach deep into the core of what constitutes diplomacy, the analyses of the ten working papers may roughly be divided into three areas: *digitization, emotion,* and *governance*. Not only do these three areas overlap to differing degrees, but they are also intertwined in the way they stimulate diplomatic work. However, for the sake of structuring a discussion, these distinctive areas serve as convenient umbrellas under which to assemble analytical approaches to diplomacy's future evolution.

(1) Digitization

Digitization is the most commonly mentioned example of change in diplomacy. When considering digitization, it is necessary to clearly discern what is purely technical change and what cuts deeper. Communication by email is a technical improvement and nothing more. Social media platforms likewise offer improved means of communication, but the implications of these quickly evolving communications systems for diplomacy are broader and deeper than mere "technical improvements". As Alexandra Friede's survey among retired German diplomats shows, practitioners are well aware of the benefits of technical improvements in their work environment. At the same time, they generally tend to discount the greater influences these innovations may have on the character of their profession.

The predominance of this perspective could be proof of Corneliu Bjola's assumption that "senior diplomats" might not be sufficiently acquainted with digitization to grasp the real impact it has on their profession. In fact, software is always a translation of social notions. It cannot help but express the values and judgments of its developer. Once technical improvements in diplomatic work reach the level of automated decision making, it will inevitably create a new context for the resulting diplomatic interaction. Jan Melissen and Emillie V. de Keulenaar in their paper make recommendations for how governments

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[1] Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method*, quoted in Derek Drinkwater, *Sir Harold Nicolson and International Relations. The Practitioner as Theorist*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 103.

might manage the danger of not being able to fully grasp the importance of the new digitized environment for international relations and their actors. They point out that digitally "literate" communities such as NGOs or corporations even today illustrate how the management of data can result in the control of an informational environment. Digitization is a "meta-machine" that creates software that can shape how its users see the world. Diplomats (and politicians) therefore need not only to understand how their relationships with society and with professional interlocutors are systematised through digital technology; they also need to be able to develop their own software that suits their specific requirements.

Bjola identifies possible reactions foreign ministries may have to the "online migration of the public" that is currently taking place. This migration of people to using digital media leads to cultural clashes in diplomacy, forcing members of the profession to adapt in order to remain effective and efficient. Bjola builds on former professor at MIT Edgar Schein's theory of organizational behaviour to arrive at the question of whether digitization advances the practice of diplomacy or challenges its very fabric. He develops three scenarios for how diplomacy can react: use digitization as a tool, develop an advanced digitization culture, or add new objectives and methods to a foreign ministry's repertoire of digitization activities. Bjola's position is clear: If diplomacy as an organization wishes to accomplish its goals effectively and efficiently, it needs to opt for the latter.

In my own paper I focus on the need for responsible government arising as a consequence of digitisation. Adoption of digitisation's tools indiscriminately may undermine rather than strengthen the foundations of governance and risks disempowerering citizens in general. The speed of digitised communication, the amount of information to be processed, and the demands by the public that need to be met cannot be managed by the human mind, or by algorithms. As such, the temptation is to leave even the substance of such tasks to digital helpers. This threat can probably only be countered by the growth of emancipated civic-mindedness.

(2) Emotion

Emotions are an element of political discourse. That they impact governance on new paths, interdependent with new technologies, different channels of globalised communication, and different non-state actors, has become public knowledge at least since the United States Department of Defense commenced the Minerva Initiative in 2008 in order to study the dynamics of social movement mobilisation and emotional contagion. Rhonda Zaharna in her paper deals with the impact of digitisation and social media on the part of the public arena in which diplomats operate. Emotion and identity, which are becoming a defining feature of today's publics, challenge the inherent rationality of government. As a result, diplomatic spaces become enmeshed with public spaces. Fear and hope within the public bring a state's and a public's interests into reciprocal contact, thereby creating dynamics that impede the effectiveness of traditional diplomacy. Thus the environment of social

media enhances feelings of various intensely-felt identities that force personalisation on government activities.

One concrete area in which emotion and identity are newly relevant to diplomacy is governments' "duty to care". Jan Melissen and Matthew Caesar-Gordon examine the cases of citizens abroad who come into danger and expect help from their consular services. Melissen and Caesar-Gordon point out that because younger generations are comfortable with using social media, these platforms give rise to their own–fluid–communities. Thus on the one hand such communities constitute a resource for crisis management by consular offices and governments. On the other hand the data obtained through citizens by "crowd-sourcing information" may well be unreliable in the conservative sense (yet they might well be "good enough"). If citizens regard themselves as "digitally empowered contributors" rather than "victims or spectators" this may well open the path to a redefinition of the relationship between citizens and governments beyond the question of crisis management.

While Zaharna suggests it is possible to navigate the new public and diplomatic spaces, and Melissen/Caesar-Gordon make recommendations for how to manage these spaces in specific cases, Hanns Maull focuses on a different danger. In a wide-ranging analysis of several elements that may be the source of "foreign policy autism", Maull discovers emotionally charged politics as a reflection of citizens' reactions to the disruptive impact of globalization. An example of "foreign policy autism" would be a government constructing its "own images of the reality of international relations rationalising the results of their actions in terms of those perceptions as conclusive evidence that both justified and encouraged the initial decisions and policies". Whether a state tolerates behaviour that is clearly and consistently either too weak or too disruptive to adequately and sustainably realise the collective interests of that state and its people depends on the quality of governance. The state needs the ability to manage conflicting pressures from within and from external environments. Such expertise may make it easier to deal with foreign policy autism in democracies than in non-democratic societies, as the former have a greater ability to interact more responsibly with others.

(3) Governance

The global diffusion of power, mostly since the end of the Cold War, has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of international actors, state and non-state, small and large, and with a wide range of purposes. Interaction and connectivity continue to increase. This has grave, and as yet not fully understood consequences for the international order. Thus it also has consequences for the internal order of states and constitutes a challenge for governance. The question of how foreign policy is possible in the future in turn has a direct impact on diplomacy and its functioning. The stress exerted on governments today by popular backlashes against "hyper-globalisation" – a world order characterised by a high degree of complex interdependencies of state and non-state actors – is Andrew Cooper's

topic. It may well be argued that hyper-globalisation not only benefits large corporations, but also civil society, government, and therefore diplomacy. However, hyper-globalisation is stigmatised domestically as a force serving an all-controlling establishment. This is a problem in many societies but more so in societies of industrially advanced countries. But "disintermediation" of traditional diplomacy carries the risk of the profession becoming increasingly fragile – too fragile to function adequately. The task of government therefore is not to succumb to the temptation to join the forces stigmatising traditional establishment and traditional diplomacy, but to counter its increasingly debilitating image.

Christer Jönnsson goes beyond the realm of digital natives and their new role as interlocutors of governments. The number of actors in the traditional field of diplomacy demanding that diplomats become "complexity managers" has increased in many areas. For example:

- New trans-governmental actors such as the EEAS.
- Subnational entities such as cities or federal states that pursue cross-border activities, which one might call micro-diplomacy or para-diplomacy.
- Governmental sub-entities such as other ministries acting as diplomats, leading from territorial to functional differentiation of political authority, narrowing the transient national entities.
- Individuals and groups such as NGOs or corporations that are accepted as partners by international organisations such as the United Nations but at the same time fragment state authority.

Therefore in this new hyper-diplomatic arena diplomats must be more than ever orchestrators of interaction within all the new networks – not just for the sake of diplomacy but to mediate the authority of governments themselves.

The global role of corporations is an aspect often analyzed in regard to how business interests may intrude into policy-making, and into diplomacy as well. Sascha Lohmann in his paper argues that the not too infrequent use of economic exchange as a means of "coercive diplomacy" is undeservedly under-studied. Diplomacy often finds itself subordinated to the role of "financial warriors" who increasingly replace traditional warfare as a means of foreign policy. Therefore International Political Economy studies might well contribute significantly to "theorising the economic means of diplomacy".