

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND THE ICRC: SCOPE AND RELEVANCE FOR HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

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Policy recommendations

1. The main competitive advantages of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) lie in its multidisciplinary approach and in its capability to combine policy expertise, politics, operational expertise, and strong power to disseminate humanitarian values and to influence the way it is perceived by its stakeholders.
2. A comprehensive and well-defined digital diplomacy strategy can efficiently support the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy in a changing environment in which many of the ICRC's stakeholders are well versed in using digital diplomacy.
3. Digital diplomacy at the ICRC is not yet clearly defined. Some current practices take the form of digital diplomacy, but are not labelled as such. These practices are mainly driven by the Communications department, but there is scope for strengthening links with the Humanitarian Diplomacy division. These links need to be further exploited by concrete actions and through collaboration with relevant partners.
4. Digital diplomacy is not only about Twitter, Facebook, and other social media, transient tools that will likely disappear within the next 10 years. A comprehensive digital diplomacy strategy is not limited to the use of social media but includes knowledge management, information management, public diplomacy, external resources, and virtual representation components.
5. Digital diplomacy can serve humanitarian diplomacy as a tool that encourages the inclusion of non-state actors in the humanitarian agenda, whether for prevention, policy shaping, or implementation purposes. It can be used as a vector of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) dissemination, a communication vehicle to foster acceptance, and a tool to gather information and mobilise stakeholders in a timely manner.

The premise

In an increasingly fragmented world, there are more stakeholders for the ICRC to interact with and to influence in the frame of its humanitarian diplomacy. The ICRC needs to work in new ways to ensure its influence at operational,

strategic, and policy levels. The operational expertise of the ICRC is not enough anymore to ensure its voice is heard and that humanitarian issues are addressed at a global level. For this reason, more links need to be made between

the ICRC's operations in the field and its policy-making processes. Therefore, the role of its humanitarian diplomacy becomes more important than ever. The ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy consists of engaging with decision makers, policymakers, and non-state influencers to promote International Humanitarian Law (IHL), persuade them to act in the interests of people affected by conflicts and other situations of violence, increase their understanding and acceptance of ICRC's activities, facilitate access for its operations, and prevent misuse of humanitarian activities.

Does the traditional practice of humanitarian diplomacy by the ICRC fit with this fast-changing environment or does it need to adapt? In this context, can new digital technologies be a powerful tool to support and improve ICRC humanitarian diplomacy or are they rather a threat to its good conduct?

The key objective of this policy paper is to demonstrate that the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy is facing disruption in

general, and digital disruption in particular, and to better understand the role and scope of digital diplomacy and the risks and opportunities it represents for the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy.

This paper will briefly retrace the evolution from traditional to new diplomacy in general, and to digital diplomacy in particular. It will look at some diplomatic challenges raised by this new environment and how the ICRC is responding to them, using digital technologies for humanitarian diplomacy purposes. Finally, it will share some ideas on cyberspace approaches for humanitarian diplomacy purposes based on (1) the risks and opportunities brought by digital diplomacy, (2) what some of the ICRC's stakeholders are doing in this respect, and (3) relevant partners the ICRC could engage with to harness the possibilities offered by digital diplomacy.

Arenas of diplomacy: from 'club' to 'network' diplomacy

Heine defines the 'club' model as the traditional way of practicing diplomacy, where members of the 'club', mainly state diplomats and some business people, only speak to their peers in cabinets, conferences, and formal settings.¹ This exclusive model is highly hierarchical, implies a strong respect for protocols, and a low level of transparency.

In an environment where the dynamics of internal and external states drastically evolve due to the proliferation of non-state actors² as sources of influence and power and to the huge increase in the number of interactions between societies, traditional state structures are disrupted. And so is humanitarian diplomacy. States, as well as humanitarian diplomacy practitioners, adapt, some faster than others, to what Heine defines as the 'network' model.³

Network diplomacy is an inclusive model where diplomacy is no longer restricted to nation-states. Diplomacy becomes 'complexity management', where coalitions are

less formal, temporary, and comprise players of mixed nature (state, non-state, subnational, and regional powers).

Communications and information sharing between stakeholders are lateral, more open, and transparent, while happening in frames of still limited rules and standardised procedures. This model imposes accountability and consistency mainly, but not only, on decision makers, while increasing civic awareness, and allowing the democratisation of speech.

The practice of network diplomacy is facilitated by new digital technologies like social media or big data gathering and monitoring tools, in the sense that they allow a broader and a faster connection to and between players, while offering room for influence and mobilisation. These 'new methods and modes of conducting diplomacy with the help of the Internet and ICTs, and their impact on contemporary diplomatic practices'⁴ are called digital diplomacy.

Arenas of diplomacy: digital diplomacy to connect mobilise and influence

Whether it be the migration crises, the Syrian conflict, the financial system, climate change, or the fight for preserving or retaining natural resources, most challenges that the world faces today are of a global and an interlinked nature.

Discussions and negotiations on global matters are happening at every level, from grassroots to state governments, in an environment disrupted by digital technologies where the Internet and access to social media give the possibility for everybody⁵ to have a voice, to hear each other's

voices, and to influence and have an impact, albeit it supportive or damaging.⁶

In this expanding multistakeholder and digitally disrupted environment, the ability to connect with and mobilise the full range of interlocutors in a timely manner in order to pursue efficient persuasive actions based on evidence, is essential to ensure the success of humanitarian diplomacy. Equally essential are data gathering, data monitoring, knowledge management, and information sharing

within and without the organisation between humanitarian diplomacy practitioners.

In its capacity to connect, to mobilise, and to be a tool for influence, digital diplomacy must be seen as a supporting tool for humanitarian diplomacy practice.

The 2012 Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative⁷ is a good example of successful digital diplomacy action in its ability to connect with and mobilise multiple stakeholders to pursue an influential action for humanitarian purpose. Here, decision makers and policymakers have been influenced by the inclusion of non-state actors in the policy-making process. The initiative was launched by the UK government and fed through digital platforms (UK government's website, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr blog). Inputs given by communities were gathered from these digital platforms in order to co-create the UK government's diplomatic agenda that resulted in 2013 in a G8 Declaration, in UN Security Council resolution 2106 on conflict-related sexual violence, and in the UN General

Assembly Declaration of commitment to end sexual violence in conflicts.

States and humanitarian actors increasingly encourage the inclusion of non-state actors like communities as supporters of the humanitarian agenda, whether for prevention, policy shaping, or implementation purposes. The use of new digital technologies in general, and of social media in particular, is one way to facilitate such inclusion. An illustration is the UN Security Council resolution 2250,⁸ unanimously adopted in 2015, on the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes at local, regional, and national levels, by giving them a voice and including them in the prevention against the violent extremism agenda, with social media and the Internet as conducive tools. The UNDP's World We Want⁹ campaign created in 2015 to solicit input from civil society in general and beneficiaries in particular, on the successor to the millennium development goals and the priorities for the 2030 development agenda, is another example.

Arenas of diplomacy: an opportunity for ICRC humanitarian diplomacy

In the digital world, sources of power and influence are becoming more diffuse and decentralised. While increasing the level of complexity for decision makers and policymakers, the growing number of stakeholders engaged in the diplomatic arena represents an opportunity for humanitarian actors in general, and for the ICRC in particular, to practice humanitarian diplomacy at different levels, and thus enhance its persuasion power. A reinforcement of the ICRC's presence and engagement in cyberspace via the building of a strong digital diplomacy tactic that goes beyond the use of social media is one way to strengthen its humanitarian diplomacy strategy in an environment facing digital disruption.

The opportunities brought by digital diplomacy – such as expansion of influence, knowledge-sharing, the capacity to offer virtual proximity, and the possibility to connect,

interact, and crowdsource from all the stakeholders that compose the fast-changing and fast-growing networked diplomatic environment – were identified a decade ago by some countries that are today leaders in the domain. It is the case for the UK and the USA, but also for France and Russia, which are amongst the top-level digital diplomacy practitioners, according to a ranking made in 2016 by the Digital Diplomacy Review pursuant to an assessment of 1098 digital diplomacy assets used by 210 MFAs worldwide.^{10,11}

The ICRC has the capability to work on developing the full scope of digital diplomacy, by implementing concrete actions and collaborating with the right partners, so that its humanitarian diplomacy benefits from the whole potential of digital diplomacy.

Digital diplomacy: applications to ICRC humanitarian diplomacy

While no official definition has been given to digital diplomacy, if we look at how pioneering countries in the domain structure their digital diplomacy effort, it is agreed that digital diplomacy scope is broader than the use of and presence on social media.¹²

For instance, the USA¹³ has a dedicated digital diplomacy office of 40 full-time employees, over 150 full-time employees working on broader digital-diplomacy-related issues, a digital presence on over 600 platforms, and a

virtual Embassy in Iran.¹⁴ It structures its digital diplomacy in programmes or clusters that cover the broad scope of digital diplomacy.

If we adapt and apply this structure to the ICRC in the frame of its humanitarian diplomacy action, we could come up with the following clusters to define the scope of ICRC's digital diplomacy:

- **Knowledge management:** How can the ICRC gather, retain, share institutional knowledge on humanitarian

diplomacy, and optimize the use of internal data and experience collected at field and institutional levels, for humanitarian diplomacy purposes?

- **Information management:** How can the ICRC get access to, filter, and sort out external openly available information and data so that it can support a fact- and evidence-based humanitarian diplomacy approach and so that the ICRC gets a sense of the decision-making processes, the interests, and the opinions of its interlocutors. The ICRC Trends, Reputation, Analysis and Knowledge unit (TRAK)¹⁵ has recently conducted a twitter analysis related to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) that identified main influencers and topics of interest to position itself accordingly and exercise influence in a targeted manner. The survey also allowed the ICRC to measure its visibility during the WHS.
- **Public diplomacy:** With billions of people connected online, how can the ICRC maintain contact with ICRC's stakeholders? How can the ICRC target relevant groups and deliver tailor made messages? How can the ICRC determine who a key influencer is?^{16,17} How can it identify the main influencers on a given topic and persuade them? How can it communicate and mobilise in a timely manner?¹⁸ How can it measure its own influence and visibility on social media?^{19,20} Public diplomacy is a useful complement to the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy in the sense that it helps manage perceptions and improve the organisation's image. Stakeholders that the ICRC meets follow the digital presence of the organisation. Good public diplomacy management shows the positive impact of the ICRC's activities and complements face-to-face meetings by strengthening the ICRC's credibility.
- **External resources:** What mechanisms could be developed to capture and exploit external expertise to serve and improve the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy effort?

- **Virtual representation:** In contexts where access to beneficiaries is difficult, how can The ICRC still ensure virtual proximity? How can it engage virtually with interlocutors that are not willing to discuss face-to-face such as Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs)?

The Health Care in Danger campaign²¹ launched by the ICRC in 2011, is a great illustration of humanitarian diplomacy conducted at all levels (delegations, headquarters, stakeholders including weapon-bearers, UN, and public opinion), supported by a digital diplomacy effort. A public awareness campaign was settled and consisted of a dedicated website, a digital newsletter that supporters could subscribe to, a communication toolkit supporters could download from the website and use to promote the cause, and a worldwide broadcast of the campaign on the partners' websites and in their blogs. A 'community of concern' has been created around health experts, governments, weapon-bearers, civil society representatives, NGOs, and international organisations, to propose recommendations and practical measures to protect health-care services in war zones. Most of the discussions, debates, consultations, and follow up have been made through a dedicated Internet platform restricted to the community. The community also has the responsibility to support the implementation of these recommendations at national and local levels, and must ensure that their respective governments enhance domestic law in this regard. To support the community and the ICRC's delegations in promoting this campaign, publications, brochures, reports on incidents, campaign and audio visual materials, as well as online training have been made available online.²² This campaign resulted in the UN Security Council resolution 2286 on Health Care in Danger, adopted in May 2016.²³

Digital diplomacy: risks and challenges

Risks

Data protection and confidentiality: The digital environment creates a new space to do harm. Mishandling of data resulting in inappropriate release of information or cyber-attacks can put beneficiaries at risk and expose them to harmful repercussions from authoritarian regimes or from their own community. The ICRC needs to make guarantees to beneficiaries on these issues and ensure privacy, encryption, and anonymity of data.

Complexity: Monitoring and mediating the content conveyed by Internet and social media users is complex and risks of creating potentially negative perceptions of the ICRC are increased.

The 'echo chamber' effect: People connect on the Internet and engage on social media with people similar to them

and who are likely to share their views. This restricts people's views and the reality we are facing. The example of Brexit something nobody saw coming, is an illustration of this. In this context, the risk is that the ICRC's persuasion effort might not reach its targets.

Clarity and consistency: The variety of platforms where the ICRC is present and the rapidity with which messages have to be delivered on such platforms, increase the risk of not conveying clear and consistent messages. The credibility of the institution is at stake.

Loss of key information: The digital world offers cost- and time-effective ways to discuss and collaborate, but risks the loss of key information by not recording it.

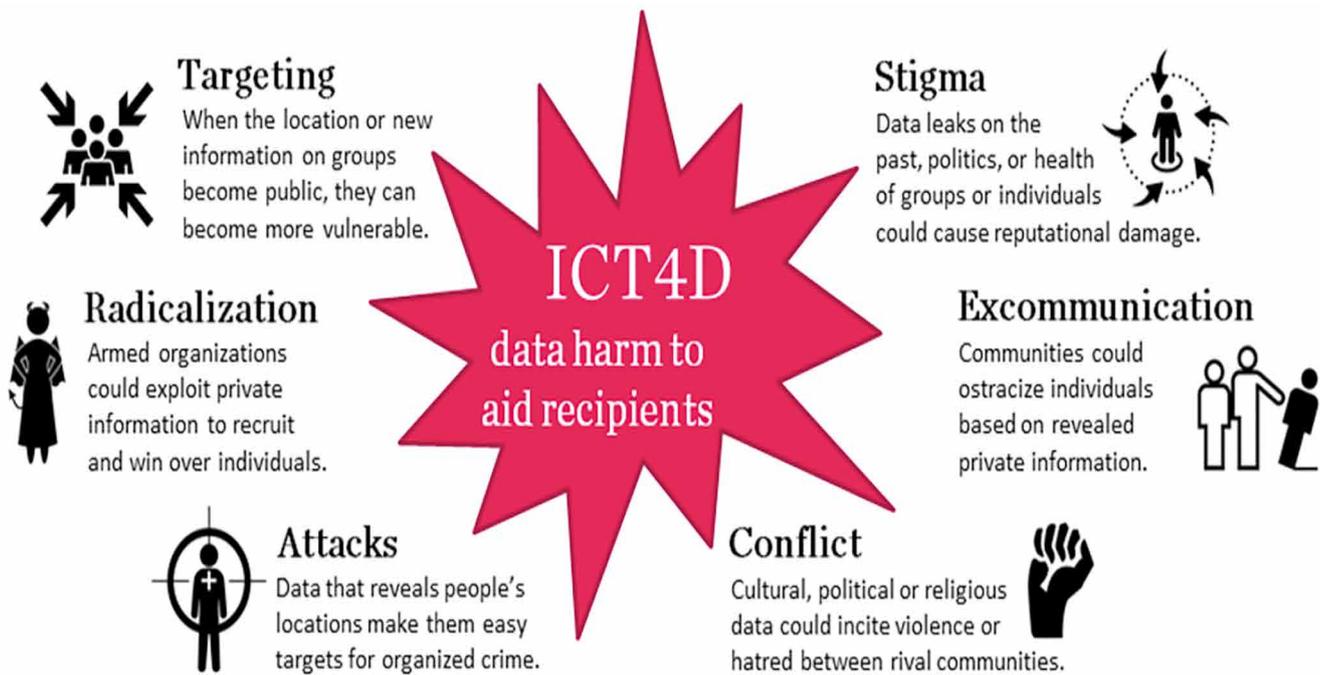


Figure 1. ICT4D. Data harm to aid recipients²⁴

Challenges

Build and maintain trust: Even though the informal nature of digital diplomacy simplifies access and first discussions with stakeholders by breaking the barriers of a physical meeting with heavy protocol, it is easier to build trust with physical proximity.

Complete control and monitoring of staff members' digital behaviour is unrealistic. Any inappropriate content released on the Internet or on social media can ruin years of humanitarian diplomacy efforts in minutes by damaging perception of the ICRC and putting its acceptance at stake in the field. It is crucial for all employees, beyond humanitarian diplomacy practitioners, to understand that their digital behaviour has an impact on the good conduct of the institution's humanitarian diplomacy. It is the responsibility of the institution to raise awareness and train employees on this matter. In other words: 'Representation is beyond profession. It is complete personality, and does not stop at 5.00 pm when leaving the office'.²⁵

Information and data gathering: To gather and mine internal and external data to identify trends and systemic issues in overwhelming flows is a challenge. Equally challenging is to combine these data with the ICRC's legal expertise in order to support an evidence-based humanitarian diplomacy approach.

In addition, relying on external information released on social media can be misleading, if people do not have the room to express their opinion freely because of tight control of the Internet by a government. The example of the Philippines during Typhoon Haiyan,²⁶ where communities feared to express their real concerns, illustrates this challenge.

Substantial content: Social media is not interested in neutrality and dialogue on IHL. Social media users mostly look for public statements, strong opinions, controversies, all of which are against the ICRC's fundamental principles.²⁷ The challenge is thus to find the right balance between expert messages and attractive messages. One example of this challenge being tackled is the work done by the ICRC on the format of its messages by creating short video clips²⁸ on IHL-related issues, or by the launch of a new Law and Policy blog which hosts webinars.²⁹

The darknet³⁰ is a part of cyberspace where the ICRC does not drive any humanitarian diplomacy action. That said, some non-state armed groups and groups like ISIS hold huge digital territory in the darknet allowing them to disseminate without control messages supporting attacks on civilians as a means of war, to recruit followers, and to wage psychological warfare based on fear. According to Jared Cohen, President of Jigsaw (formerly Google Ideas), Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and former advisor to the USA on digital diplomacy, the 'next prominent terrorist organisation will be more likely to have extensive digital operations than control physical ground'.³¹

The darknet is also used for private communication when public communication represents a threat for Internet users or when the Internet is shut down by a government. It can be used by political dissidents or unengaged members of society to maintain contact with the rest of the world.³²

How the ICRC will tackle this issue in its humanitarian diplomacy strategy remains an open question.

Digital diplomacy: relevance for ICRC stakeholders and possibilities for impactful influence

Figure 2 illustrates the multi-layered nature of the ICRC's scope of influence.

There are various layers and complexities to this scope of influence, including knock-on effects, such as influencing

lobbyists leading to influencing parliaments, or influencing private sector companies leading to influencing states, and which are due to the influence that stakeholders exert on each other.

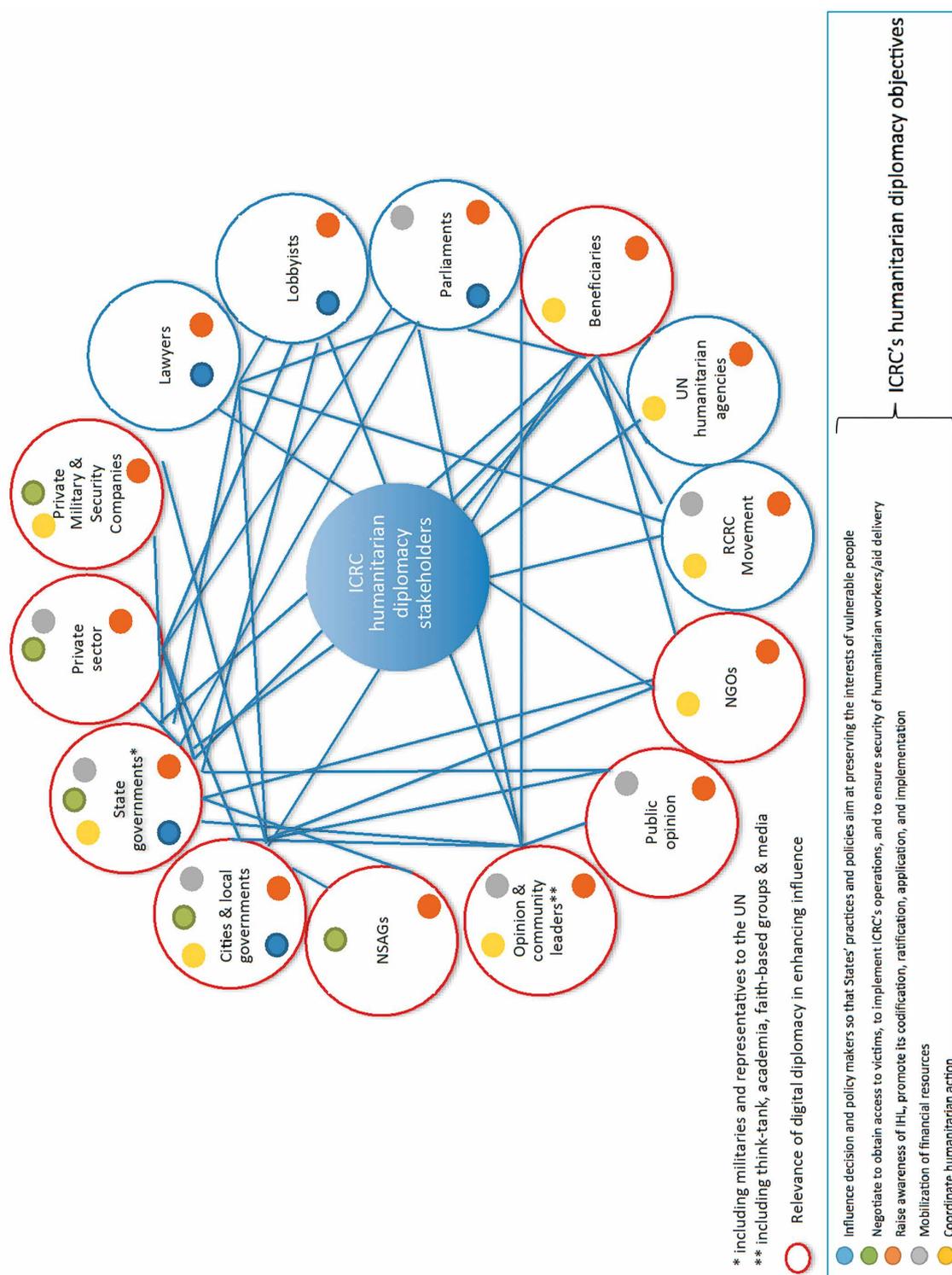


Figure 2. The multi-layered nature of the ICRC's scope of influence (author's own illustration)

Digital diplomacy: take-aways for the ICRC

Even though not yet entirely framed, developed, and implemented, digital diplomacy is not new for the ICRC. Some practices are already being implemented, mainly by the Communications department, but links between digital diplomacy and humanitarian diplomacy need to be further explored.

One of the main consequences of digital diplomacy for humanitarian diplomacy may be the change of thinking to move towards the 'de-institutionalisation' of diplomacy. The role of humanitarian diplomacy practitioners will be more about digital behaviour, knowledge, and information management; the capacity to capture external expertise; and the capability to connect with the humanitarian diplomatic community and its stakeholders on digital platforms,

rather than a formal status compliant with institutional processes. Internal buy-in at all levels of the institution to encourage staff to practice digital diplomacy is key for success. Equally crucial is training for practitioners, regular information sharing, and recording of successes and failures, as well as strong technical service provided by ICT, close data monitoring from TRAK, and support from other relevant internal units like Communications, Information Management, and Innovation.

Building up a digital diplomacy strategy to serve humanitarian diplomacy interests will take time. The ICRC will have to overcome its culture of non-acceptance of failure. It will have to accept that experimenting goes hand-in-hand with failure, and that it is okay to fail.

Implementation: current practices outside the ICRC

United Kingdom (UK)

In 2008, the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) started to recruit digital diplomats³³ and build in its digital strategy,³⁴ including social media guidelines, 'to see digital embedded in every element of foreign policy work, leading to a more effective, more open Foreign and

Commonwealth Office that can take full advantage of the networked world'.³⁵

Since then, the UK has become and has remained one of the top three most powerful countries in terms of digital diplomacy.

United States of America (USA)

An example from the USA has already been mentioned, but it is interesting to note that the US public communication and public affairs firm Rasky Baerlein conducted a survey in 2015 and 2016 alongside 202 Washington insiders to gauge the trends in current and anticipated Washington public affairs spending.

The results show that the three main anticipated trends over the next five years are about an increased use of

social media, digital/technology capabilities, and grassroots efforts.

The survey also indicates a more significant growth in spending on digital tools and public/media relations than traditional government relations in 2017. According to the Rasky Baerlein survey, '40% of Washington insiders will divert their public affairs spending away from traditional non-digital activities to fund digital advocacy areas'.³⁶

Internal Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

Amongst ICVA members, the scope of digital diplomacy is very much narrowed down to a presence on social media, mainly for humanitarian activism purposes rather than for diplomacy *per se*.

The ICVA has a website and a Twitter account, mainly used to broadcast information. It does not blog and does not have a Facebook account, but it does use digital tools to connect with online communities of experts, as well as for advocacy purposes.

Although very much recognising the growing importance of digital diplomacy and wanting to be more proactive in its development in the short term, the main questions for the ICVA centre on its capacity to measure the impact of digital diplomacy. What does it mean to follow someone on Twitter? What are people looking for when they follow the ICVA on Twitter? What is the effectiveness of digital diplomacy for humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy purposes? These are pending questions that need to be tackled prior to any framing of a digital diplomacy strategy.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Digital diplomacy is one of the components of the IFRC's social media strategy, particularly its public diplomacy. It is also part of its policy and knowledge sharing efforts with National Societies (NS). Its internal online platform, FedNet, ensures IFRC-wide messages and positions are shared among all members, so that they can speak with one voice when advocating with and on behalf of vulnerable people.

The main objectives of the IFRC's digital diplomacy is to leverage social media and digital platforms to (1) raise awareness of the Fundamental Principles, role, and mandate of the IFRC among external stakeholders in order to build trust, as well as to ensure support and access to the vulnerable people; (2) influence policymakers and other stakeholders and persuade them to act at all times in the best interests of vulnerable people; (3) disseminate key messages, guidelines, and tools among IFRC members, to ensure they speak with one voice across their global network, and (4) to empower NS to advocate with their respective stakeholders at national level. In this regard, the IFRC supports NS that are active on social media by sharing sample social media content related to specific advocacy issues via *Newswire*, a weekly *ad hoc* email communication update sent to NS. The NS can use this content on their respective social media platforms.

Médecins Sans Frontière (MSF)

MSF is composed of five autonomous operational centres. Although each centre has developed its own knowledge management project, mainly conducted through digital collaborative platforms, there is very little knowledge sharing between them. There is a thorough recognition of the necessity to capitalise on experience from practitioners. This is why MSF is a strategic partner of the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation.

Due to the short cycles of the projects/missions, it is very challenging to work on a consistent information-gathering

The scope of the IFRC's digital presence is broad: a blog, hosted on its website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Medium, Flickr. These platforms represent key spaces for the IFRC to engage its audiences around issues in which they can play a role and make a difference, as well as to change people's minds on and perspectives of humanitarian issues (e.g. changing the public narrative on migration). In this regard, policy and advocacy messages are adapted to specific audiences and platforms (e.g. in terms of tone of voice, language, use of rich audio visual materials). Depending on the topic and the objective (e.g. awareness raising, policy change, public positioning), the IFRC may target different and multiple audiences, varying from states and governments, to media, the general public, Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers, etc.

According to Giovanni Zambello, Senior Social Media Officer at the IFRC, digital technologies represent a powerful tool to strengthen public diplomacy efforts as they allow a direct access to any stakeholder present on social media or anyone who is following conversations on social media. Also, social media's speed and spread allow messages to be disseminated much faster and reach much further than was ever possible before with traditional diplomacy.

system. Information is gathered, analysed, and recorded according to the mission and the related needs at a specific time. MSF does not practice humanitarian diplomacy *per se*, and it focuses more on public advocacy and testimonies. Communications teams are in charge of these files. MSF's operations are using more and more digital communication in fragile contexts in order to gain acceptance, but it is too soon to talk about a digital diplomacy strategy.

Suggestions for digital diplomacy that is supportive of humanitarian diplomacy and partnerships

Darknet

When framing its digital diplomacy strategy, the ICRC might want to look at how to promote IHL on the darknet. How to disseminate the Red Cross Movement's humanitarian

principles on the darknet, for perception and acceptance purposes, is also to be taken into consideration.

Support to National Societies

While framing its digital diplomacy strategy, the ICRC might want to look at the options to support the NS in their digital diplomacy development beyond a presence on social media.

In the same way the ICRC supports and cooperates closely with the NS on Restoring Family Links activities, it may want to play a supporting role in digital diplomacy matters.

Training on digital diplomacy

The ICRC could consider integrating a module on humanitarian diplomacy and digital diplomacy rules and best practices in the Staff Integration Programme agenda, and

developing training through the Learning and Development Unit (LnD). LnD training should be opened to all IFRC and National Societies staff.

Additional institutional top risk

It is important to determine appropriate indicators to evaluate the ICRC's risk exposure in the digital environment, and the consequences for its humanitarian diplomacy

effort. The ICRC should understand and agree on its risk tolerance and risk mitigation when it comes to digital.

Building and leading of humanitarian diplomats' community

Creation of an ICRC Humanitarian Diplomacy digital platform for internal and external practitioners and stakeholders is recommended. The portal would serve as a communications vehicle, a branding tool, and an instrument to support the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy effort. It should be a two-way communication platform that could transform the nature of the ICRC's multilateral engagement through its potential to engage the broad humanitarian diplomacy community to create and maintain a network, mobilise stakeholders and raise their awareness with accurate communications materials, influence ICRC's stakeholders, train humanitarian diplomacy practitioners,

gather and retain internal and external data and information; and do all of this in a flexible and timely manner.

The proposed platform would enhance internal and external positioning of humanitarian diplomacy. It would contain three sections allowing the 'network to do the work'.³⁷ One section would be dedicated to internal ICRC humanitarian diplomacy practitioners, another would be dedicated to external practitioners and stakeholders, and the third would be an IHL Virtual Academy that would serve both the internal and the external public. The three sections are now looked at in more detail.

Why We Should Let the Network Do the Work

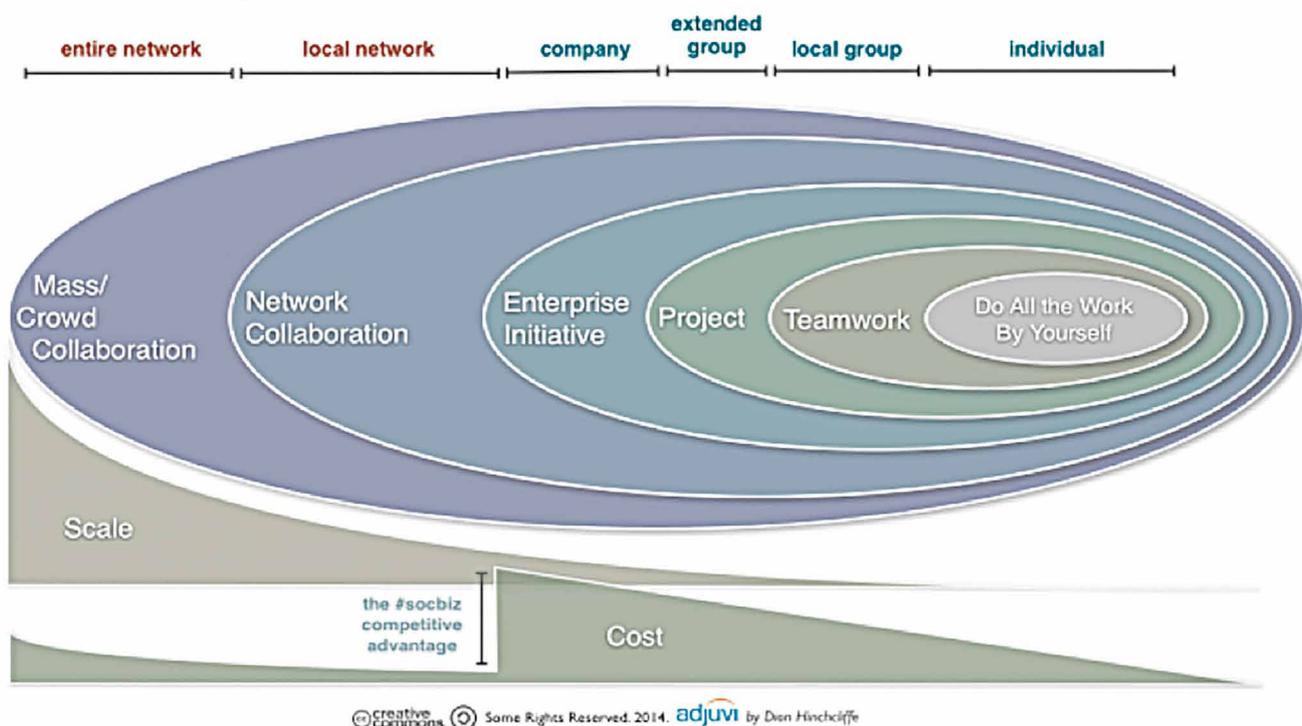


Figure 3. Why we should let the network do the work³⁸

Section 1: Internal networks

There is no humanitarian diplomat function as such at the ICRC. Humanitarian diplomacy is practiced at all levels, from staff in the field negotiating access to beneficiaries

and security at check points, to the ICRC President engaging with states and speaking to the UN tribune. Internal experience and data collected at all levels need to be harnessed

to support a humanitarian diplomacy effort based on facts, evidence, and experiences. Section 1 would be a proper knowledge management tool where such experience and data are recorded and centralised for use by ICRC humanitarian diplomacy practitioners. It would be an instrument that supports the integration of humanitarian diplomacy effort in the delegations. Section 1 would also aim at creating and maintaining a network between staff at headquarters and in the delegations. It would be a means to interact between ICRC humanitarian diplomacy practitioners so

Section 2: External networks

The external practitioners and stakeholders' section would aim at facilitating collaboration and online discussions on a given topic of interest for the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy conduct. This section would enhance the ICRC's capability to interact with its stakeholders and is inspired by what the Digital Diplomacy Coalition (DDC)³⁹ and the Humanitarian Practice Network⁴⁰ do in terms of inclusion

Section 3: IHL Virtual Academy

The IHL Virtual Academy would be kept separate from Sections 1 and 2 to preserve the branding of the ICRC and its pertinence in regards to the promotion of humanitarian law. At the same time, it would allow a two-way communication between both sections in order to reinforce a much-needed collaboration between the ICRC's IHL lawyers and humanitarian diplomacy practitioners. It would be a platform that draws on and exploits external expertise on IHL through discussions between experts, lawyers, and military planners. It would be a dissemination vector to promote IHL. It would propose virtual training to ICRC stakeholders, including non-state armed groups (NSAGs).

Partnering for implementation and impact measurement

The Humanitarian Diplomacy digital platform would support the creation, development, and maintenance of internal and external networks while developing a collaborative state of mind when it comes to humanitarian diplomacy. It could also be used as a soft power tool⁴³ to strengthen the ICRC's global leadership on humanitarian diplomacy matters and to promote the capacity of the institution to innovate, even in such a complex, subtle, and risky domain.

Implementation could be facilitated by partnering with the Geneva Internet Platform (GIP).⁴⁴ The GIP is a capacity building platform that mainly helps decision makers and policy-makers to understand the intersection between diplomacy and digital technologies, both as a topic for negotiations and/or as a tool for their activities. In this sense, they are advising policymakers, international organisations, and other influential actors who want to better connect through digital means with those they impact. In this regard, the GIP would have the capacity to support the ICRC in the development of a humanitarian diplomacy practitioners' online community.

that rules, best practices, and failures can be discussed in a dedicated forum, for instance. It would promote a transversal approach to the policy-shaping and decision-making processes when it comes to humanitarian-diplomacy-related issues. Experience and knowledge, including from practitioners leaving the ICRC, could be transmitted and be accessible to all current practitioners. This section would also offer training on humanitarian diplomacy and on how to engage in digital networks (rules and best practices) for current practitioners and humanitarian-diplomats-to-be.

of communities' input in policy shaping. Virtual representation of the ICRC would be made possible through this section to ensure digital proximity where physical proximity is prevented. For instance, when access to beneficiaries is difficult or when engaging with actors the ICRC cannot meet in face-to-face meetings.

In a time where the application of norms established by IHL are being less recognised and becoming less relevant to states, combatants, and civilians,⁴¹ it becomes more important than ever to use every resource available, including digital diplomacy and its proven impact on public opinion, to promote IHL.

Videos (and space for questions and answers) like the one released on Facebook made by Dr Helen Durham⁴² on why people should care about the Geneva Conventions, virtual reality and video games related to IHL like serious gaming tools, would have their space in this section.

How to leverage these collaborations to have an impact, and how to measure and monitor the impact at strategic, operational, and policy levels, are crucial questions that need to be further considered. The GIP would also be able to guide the ICRC in this regard. It could advise on digital risk management and impact measurement, foster an effective digital policy within the ICRC, as well as deliver digital diplomacy training to ICRC staff.

Discussions and workshops could also be organised with experts in the domain like the above mentioned Jared Cohen, or Scott Nolan Smith, Roos Kouwenhoven, Jed Shein, and Floris Winters, founders of the DDC.⁴⁵ The DDC is an international community of more than 4000 members that brings together the diplomatic, international affairs, academic, innovation, general public, and tech communities to leverage digital technologies for diplomacy. Inviting Dr Patrick Meier,⁴⁶ expert and consultant on humanitarian technology and innovation and author of the book *Digital Humanitarians*, would also add to discussions.

ICRC Humanitarian Diplomacy Platform

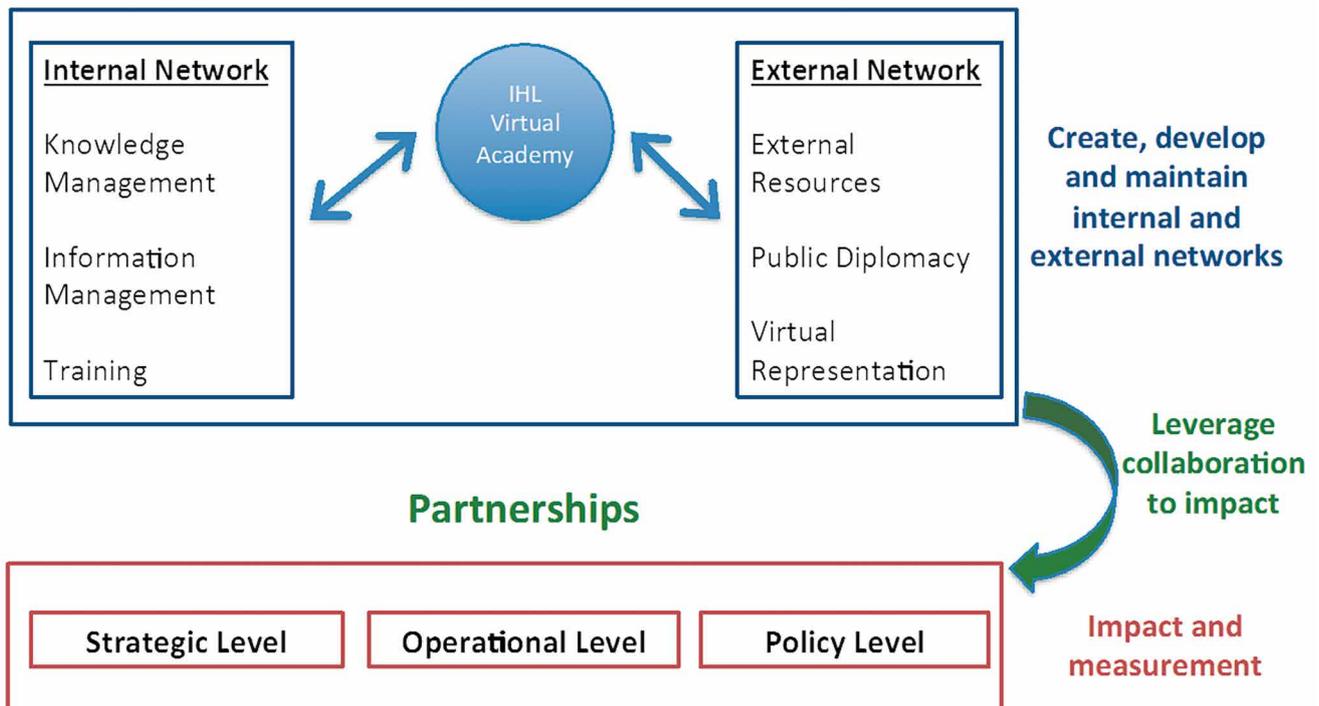


Figure 4. Mapping of a proposed ICRC Humanitarian Diplomacy Platform (author's own illustration)

Conclusion

Despite the remaining relevance of traditional club diplomacy, network diplomacy is a complementary model in which practices are partly supported by new information and communication technologies. Even though different in many ways, the two models meet in common objectives: mobilisation and persuasion.

Digital diplomacy, mainly but not only conducted through social media, will not become more important than traditional diplomacy, which seeks quiet ways of persuasion. Digital diplomacy, however, has a huge impact on public advocacy, multilateral engagement, and acceptance of the ICRC's role and mandate by its stakeholders. It has proven a useful support to humanitarian diplomacy as it brings the ICRC and its stakeholders closer to the situation on the ground, while providing an immediate real-time sense of a situation by getting access to open sources of information provided by states and people living and facing conflict or disaster. It is an inclusion tool that allows people to have a voice, including those not invited around the traditional negotiation table. It can be used as a vector of IHL dissemination, a communication vehicle to foster acceptance, and a tool to gather information and mobilise stakeholders in a timely manner.

However, the traditional quiet way to persuade remains the heart of the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy, and is not

about to disappear. Digital diplomacy has very little impact on bilateral diplomacy which aims to work on relationships one at a time in order to build trust, persuade decision makers to include humanitarian perspectives in their decisions, shape policies, and keep the door open to all parties to a conflict. While digital diplomacy continues to be developed to serve humanitarian purposes in many parts of the world, the role of traditional humanitarian diplomacy will become more important than ever in dealing with crises in places where insecurity and underdevelopment prevent ICRC stakeholders accessing digital tools, and thus limiting the option for digital diplomacy.

Practicing digital diplomacy is not without risk, and in a context of cyber warfare, confidentiality of data remains of utmost importance. In June 2016, NATO recognised cyberspace a warfare domain⁴⁷ and stated that cyber-attacks on one of its allies would be considered an act of war. How will the ICRC engage with states and other stakeholders on these issues? How can the ICRC respond in the case of cyber-attacks? Is IHL relevant when dealing with cyber-warfare-related threats, and if yes, is IHL as it currently stands, adapted to address these issues? A digital environment opens new arenas for engagement for the ICRC, and its humanitarian diplomacy strategy will have to adapt to address these challenges.

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- ⁴² Helen Durham (born in 1968), an international humanitarian lawyer, is the Director of International Law and Policy at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). She served as director of international law, strategy, planning and research at the Australian Red Cross, and has worked as the ICRC head of office in Sydney. She has a PhD in international humanitarian law and international criminal law, and is a senior fellow at Melbourne Law School.
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Appendix I: Research methodology

Primary and secondary sources have been used to write this paper. Data and information were gathered from academics and practitioners, which informed an appreciation of the topic on theoretical and practical levels.

Secondary data was gathered from the Internet, the [WWW Virtual Library on International Affairs resources](#), newspapers, and publications. They enabled a broad understanding of the topic and helped with identifying the key issues.

Based on these elements, a questionnaire was elaborated to collect primary data through the conduct of qualitative interviews. After designing a mapping of relevant stakeholders within and without the ICRC, humanitarian diplomacy and digital diplomacy practitioners were interviewed to determine the stakes related to the matter.

Appendix II: Interviewees

The author would like to thank the interviewees wholeheartedly for their time and support.

From the ICRC

- **ALDERSON Helen** – Director Financial Resources and Logistics – Former member of the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on the future of humanitarian action
- **BRUDERLEIN Claude** – Strategic Advisor to the President and Head of the project Humanitarian Negotiation Exchange
- **DACCORD Yves** – Director General
- **DALTON Clare** – Head of Humanitarian Diplomacy and Deputy Head of Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division
- **DURHAM Helen** – Director of Law and Policy
- **EL HAGE Ralph** – Regional Spokesperson/Public Relations for the Near & Middle East
- **FOURNIER Frédéric** – Head of Delegation Jordan – Former Deputy Head of Humanitarian Diplomacy Unit (2005–2007)
- **LINDSEY-CURTET Charlotte** – Director of Communication and Information Management
- **MARTIN Christophe** – Former Head of Multilateral Affairs Unit (2015–2016)
- **SLIM Hugo** – Head of Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division

External to the ICRC

- **BUZARD Nan** – Executive Director – International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- **GODEFROY Béatrice** – International Coordinator Operations Advocacy and Representation at Médecins Sans Frontière (MSF)
- **Dr KURBALIJA Jovan** – Head of the Geneva Internet Platform & Director of DiploFoundation
- **RONZI Flavio** – President of Italian Red Cross
- **ZAMBELLO Giovanni** – Senior Officer Social Media at the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)



Alice Maillot

Alice Maillot is a humanitarian practitioner and team leader at the ICRC Geneva headquarters, working on government relations to mobilise resources and reinforce policy dialogue with the ICRC's major donors and partners. Her professional life has included time as a parliamentary attaché in Paris, a special project with the Gulf and NAME region at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and time at the UN offices in New York and Geneva. With an academic background in international relations (IRIS, Harvard Kennedy School) and business (ESCE Paris), she has worked both in and with the private sector, as well as in different departments of the ICRC, including governance. Maillot is also a member of the ICRC Ombuds office, working on conflict prevention and resolution. She is passionate about humanitarian diplomacy and the ICRC, taking advantage of the digital tools of the modern era, including cutting edge communications and innovative online methods of setting and achieving diplomatic objectives. In her free time, Maillot serves on her local government board as County Commissioner while valuing the preservation of a healthy work-life balance, and enjoying time with her two children. More information: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/alice-maillot-0a8ba320/>

We look forward to your comments – please e-mail them to amaillot@icrc.org

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