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WORKING PAPER

Re-Shaping Diplomacy

On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy

JORGE HEINE



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Jorge Heine

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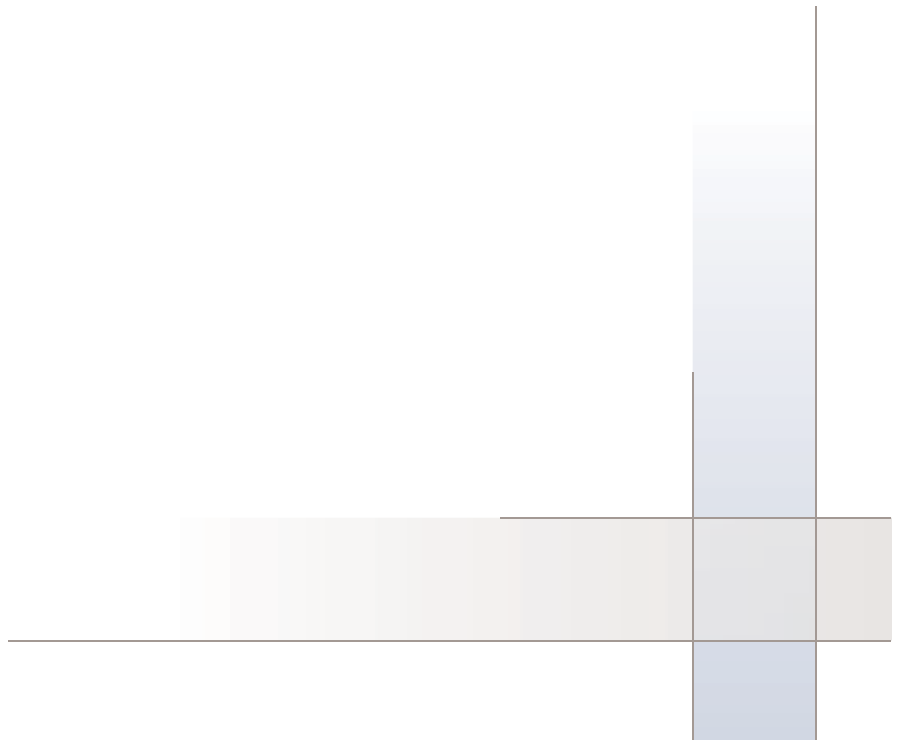
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Author Biography

Jorge Heine is Ambassador of Chile to India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and Vice-President of the International Political Science Association (IPSA). He was previously Ambassador to South Africa (1994-1999) as well as a cabinet minister and deputy minister in the Chilean government. A lawyer and political scientist, he holds a PhD in Political Science from Stanford University, has been a Visiting Fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford, and a Research Associate at The Wilson Center in Washington, DC. He has held postdoctoral fellowships from the Social Science Research Council and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and has been a consultant to the United Nations, the Ford Foundation, and Oxford Analytica. He is the author, co-author, or editor of eight books, including *The Last Cacique: Leadership and Politics in a Puerto Rican City* (Pittsburgh University Press, *Choice Magazine* Outstanding Academic Book of 1994), *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada* (Pittsburgh University Press, 1991), and (with Leslie Manigat) *Cross Currents and Cleavages: International Relations of the Contemporary Caribbean* (Holmes & Meier, 1988), and some 60 articles published in journals and symposium volumes. His opinion pieces have been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The International Herald Tribune*. He was the first ambassador to present credentials to President Nelson Mandela, and for two years in a row (1997 and 1998), Johannesburg's leading newspaper, *The Star*, selected him among the 100 most influential personalities in South Africa

Abstract

The traditional model of diplomacy, founded on the principles of national sovereignty and of statecraft, is becoming less relevant as a field of new, influential actors enter the international system. Diplomats must now engage a vastly larger number of players in host countries, as the age-old “club model” of diplomacy gives way to a less hierarchical “network model.” This paper calls for a new approach – one in which diplomats project their nation’s values and interests to the growing field of international players, focusing on a critical set of issue areas of special relevance to the mission. Although the environment in which diplomacy is practised has changed drastically, the adaptive behaviour of many diplomats and foreign ministries has not always kept pace with this new reality. This is part of the reason they are not fully able to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by increased international flows and interactions. Drawing on the author’s diplomatic experience in South Africa and India, it is argued that diplomats are no longer sheltered from the political realm; that they are more accessible by and have wider access to non-state actors; and that they must respond to the vast array of demands these new factors pose.

"Politics in the information age is about whose story wins."

- Joseph S. Nye

1. Introduction

What do diplomats do in a rapidly changing global environment?

On April 25, 1994, I arrived in Johannesburg at what was then still known as Jan Smuts International Airport, two days before the election of Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa. On the previous day, a Sunday, a bomb had exploded at the very same terminal I landed at, killing two people. I told myself how lucky I was that the Malaysian Airlines flight from Buenos Aires arrived on Mondays rather than on Sundays. Welcome to the new South Africa, I said. Perhaps those who warned me it was a mistake to accept a posting to an African country undergoing a violent transition, instead of a more comfortable European destination, had been right after all. ("South Africa? You are mad," a friend had told me. "Why not Bosnia? You'd be safer there.")

A few months later, a Government of National Unity was fully in place, Nelson Mandela was President, F.W. de Klerk Deputy President and Mangosuthu Buthelezi Home Affairs Minister, and the country was on a roll. Part of the South African transition, of course, had to do with "transformation," meaning putting new staff - black African, Indian, Coloured - in the ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) too was undergoing some major changes. These changes affected all structures of the ministry, but those divisions in charge of regions, like Latin America, of less than central concern to South African foreign policy took a bit longer to be restructured than others, and it was not always clear who was in charge of what.¹

Several colleagues of mine, very much in the traditional mould, who were trained to define their function rather narrowly as the art of negotiating agreements

¹ For a recent assessment of South African foreign policy, see Elisabeth Sidiropoulos, ed., *Apartheid Past, Renaissance Future: South Africa's Foreign Policy 1994-2004* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 2004). See also James Hamill and Donna Lee, "South African Diplomacy in the Post-Apartheid Era: An Emergent Middle Power?" *International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2001): 33-60.

between sovereign states and who found that for months on end there was no one in charge of Latin America at the MFA, were rather bewildered and frustrated. Eventually, some of them, in despair, left of their own volition. On my part, my foremost concern was not to negotiate any kind of agreement or to find out who my exact interlocutor at the MFA would be, but to educate myself about and contribute in a modest way to one of the emblematic processes of democratic change in the nineties. I went on to spend an extraordinarily stimulating five years there during the presidency of Nelson Mandela, in a period described by one of my colleagues as "the springtime of our lives," but also one in which much happened in the relationship between Chile and South Africa.²

This perhaps overlong personal vignette illustrates the perspective I bring to bear on the question of how diplomats deal with a quickly changing environment - one in which established procedures and norms do not always apply, domestic governmental structures are in flux, and the distinction between internal and foreign affairs is increasingly blurred.

This particular perspective is that of a professional political scientist from Latin America, who has had the opportunity to spend close to five years as ambassador in South Africa during its transition to democracy, and now two-and-a half years in India, at a time when that country is opening to the world - in the opinion of some, taking it by storm; in the expression of the local press, as part and parcel of "the global Indian takeover."³ I would like to think my foreign relations experience of key countries in the global South that are undergoing what can only be described as cataclysmic changes has given me a special window on the diplomatic practice of middle powers like Chile and how they can achieve their objectives in an

² For some reflections of one aspect of that, see Jorge Heine, "All the Truth but Only Some Justice? Dilemmas of Dealing with the Past in New Democracies," Sixth Oliver Tambo Lecture, Delhi University, March 22, 2005.

³ Thomas Friedman's worldwide bestseller, *The World Is Flat: A Short History of the Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Allen Lane 2005), is largely inspired by the Indian experience in the development of IT and IT-enabled services. On Indian foreign policy, see C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2003); Stephen Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001); and K. Shankar Bajpai, "India Engages with the World," The 11th Prem Bhatia Memorial Lecture, New Delhi, May 8, 2006. On the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, see Kishan S. Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, rev. and updated ed. (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2002).

increasingly competitive international system.⁴ Drawing on this experience and perspective, this paper advances some propositions as to how we can best further our understanding of the challenges faced today by diplomats in general, but especially by those from middle powers among the developing nations of the global South.⁵

2. From the “Club” to the “Network” Model of Diplomacy

"Globalization" has become a bit of a buzzword. My own preference is instead to use "globalism," defined as "a state of the world involving networks of interdependence at multicontinental distances."⁶ Globalization then is the process by which globalism becomes increasingly "thicker." In some ways, globalization itself is not particularly new. Most observers, however, would agree with the proposition that "globalism" today is "faster, cheaper, and deeper" than before, and that there is a qualitative, not just quantitative, difference, in the flows of goods, services, capital, images, data, and general information that today crisscross the planet, as well as in the effects of these flows on international governance and on governments themselves.

What are the implications of globalism for diplomacy and diplomatic practice?

⁴ For an analysis of how Chile coped with some key multilateral issues in the government of President Ricardo Lagos (2000-06), see Jorge Heine, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Latin American Multilateralism after 9/11," in Edward Newman, Ramesh Thakur, and John Tirman, eds, *Multilateralism under Challenge? Power, International Order and Structural Change* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2006). See also Herardo Muñoz, *Una guerra solitaria: La historia secreta de EEUU en Irak, la polémica en la ONU y el papel de Chile* (Santiago: Random House Mondadori, 2005). The literature on Chilean foreign policy is extensive, but see especially José Miguel Insulza, *Ensayos sobre política exterior de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Los Andes, 1998) and Alberto van Klaveren, "Inserción internacional," in Eugenio Lahera and Cristián Toloza, eds, *Chile en los Noventa* (Santiago: Dolmen, 1998).

⁵ The concept of "middle power" emerged in the nineteenth-century balance of power literature on Europe, alluding to countries that found themselves between the Big Powers and the small nations. It is often used today to refer to countries such as Canada or Australia. But there is also an extensive literature on Latin American "middle powers," originally encompassing Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, but to which most observers today would add Chile. See Raúl Bernal-Meza, *América Latina en el mundo: el pensamiento latinoamericano y la teoría de las relaciones internacionales* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 2006), 225-33.

⁶ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Introduction," in Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue, eds, *Governance in a Globalizing World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 2. I draw on Keohane and Nye's excellent essay to develop the theoretical framework for this paper. I am indebted to Robert O. Keohane, whose student I had the privilege to be at Stanford many years ago, for his extraordinarily penetrating insights into the changing nature of world politics.

Globalism poses a severe challenge to the nation-state, most dramatically expressed in the financial crises that have bedevilled countries - such as Russia, Brazil, Thailand, and Indonesia - as "hot money" suddenly flows out of (mostly) emerging markets, often as quickly as it has come, wreaking economic havoc and, in the process, affecting the stability of many other economies, including some far removed from the one originating the crisis.⁷ The challenge, however, is not only economic. In the political sphere, globalization, the increasing number of international interactions, and the rapidly diminishing cost of communications have led to a growing number of actors, both domestic and international - nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), private companies, churches, business associations, and the always critical "foreign policy community" - which are making their presence felt and adding layers of complexity to government decision making and legislation. In short, the model of an international system based purely on independent states has been replaced by one in which the nation-state is still a key component, but by no means the only one.

In the "club model" of diplomacy, diplomats meet only with government officials, among themselves, and with the occasional businessman or woman, and give an interview or speech here or there. By and large, however, they restrict themselves to fellow members of the club, with whom they also feel most comfortable, and focus their minds on "negotiating agreements between sovereign states."⁸

As can be seen in Figure 1, in the world of the twenty-first century, the "club model" of diplomacy has given way to a flatter, less hierarchical "network model,"⁹ in which diplomats engage a vastly larger number of players in the host country - including many who would never have thought of setting foot in the rarified atmosphere of the salons and private clubs the diplomats of yester- year used to

⁷ This became evident in Chile, which was affected quite strongly by the so-called Asian crisis, which originally erupted in 1997 in Thailand. Because Chile is so dependent on Asian markets for its exports, after growing at close to 7 per cent for much of the 1990s, it experienced its first negative growth in 16 years when GDP fell by 1.1 per cent in 1999. Ironically, a country like India, a close neighbour of Thailand, was essentially unaffected by the Asian crisis, which speaks volumes about how globalization works in today's world.

⁸ An even more restricted type was "boudoir diplomacy" - "personal diplomacy at its most intoxicating." See Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 31-32, on Sir James Harris, Earl of Malmesbury, and his dealings with Queen Catherine the Great of Russia.

⁹ See Keohane and Nye, "Introduction."

frequent. More and more, diplomacy is becoming "complexity management," to a degree earlier master practitioners like Cardinal Richelieu would not have imagined. Yet, although the environment in which diplomacy is exercised has changed drastically, there is a considerable "lag" between these changes and the adaptive behaviour of many diplomats, missions, and foreign ministries, which is part of the problem they face.

Figure 1: Club versus Network Diplomacy

	Number of players	Structure	Form	Transparency	Main Purpose
Club Diplomacy	Few	Hierarchical	Mostly written	Low	Sign agreements
Network Diplomacy	Many	Flatter	Written and oral	High	Increase bilateral flows

The advent of the network model has to do not only with increased democratization and the growing number of relevant actors for policy making - all of whom must be "kept in the loop" for "things to happen" - but also with the increased interpenetration of different societies.¹⁰ As significant a dimension of globalization as the economic is the social and cultural one. With modern communications and travel, societies can easily take up experiences from other countries and apply them in their own. Ideas travel fast in today's globalized world, but they do not do so by themselves - they need to be shepherded and guided, especially so in the case of small and middle powers.

Diplomats, in their "labour in exile," as Callières put it,¹¹ are ideally placed to communicate to their host societies the ideas, values, and significant social and cultural projects that are under way in their home countries. In so doing, they bridge the

¹⁰ The standard work on networks is Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (London: Blackwell, 1996), the first volume of a trilogy on "The Information Age."

¹¹ Monsieur de Callières, *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 65. This little gem of a book, originally published in 1716 by one of Louis XIV's best and sharpest ambassadors, remains to this day an excellent source of advice for diplomats and a good version of the "royal court model of diplomacy," which evolved seamlessly into the "club model" extant today. The title of this paper paraphrases the title of that book. For a commentary, see Maurice Keens-Soper, "Callières," in G.R. Berridge, Maurice Keens-Soper, and T.G. Otte, *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 106-24.

gap between them, which can often be quite wide, and thus lay the foundation for cooperation across a wide array of issues.

Commentators often consider this new environment in which diplomats operate in terms of "add-ons" to the traditional diplomatic functions of the old "club diplomacy." Far from being mere "add-ons" to the tried and true ways of practising the diplomatic craft, I argue that the changes brought about by globalism and the forces that are reshaping the international system require a radically new approach.

One would think that the increases in international trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, and the negotiation of many international treaties to facilitate these flows, would lead to a "golden age of diplomacy" in which the roles of foreign ministries and diplomats would be recognized as vitally important, and translated into increased budgetary allocations and other, more symbolic expressions. That this has largely *not* occurred (in fact, the opposite may be true) leads me to argue that many of the difficulties diplomats and foreign ministries more generally face these days are due to a lack of understanding of these imperatives of change, as the world makes the transition to a much more dynamic and less hierarchical "network diplomacy."

A traditional line of attack on the "diplomatic establishment" - and the elaborate structure of resident missions, consulates, pomp, protocol, and paraphernalia that goes with it - has been its supposed irrelevance in a world in which presidents and prime ministers meet at summits and instant communications are available.¹² What purpose is served, so the reasoning goes, by having diplomats stationed at great expense in distant lands, when deals and agreements could be struck over the phone or by teleconferencing and the text sent anywhere in the world in fractions of a second?¹³

¹² On summit diplomacy, see Jan Melissen, "Summit Diplomacy Coming of Age," *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy* 86 (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2003). Summit diplomacy has become especially widespread in Latin America; on one of their expressions, the Iberoamerican summits, see Raúl Sanhueza Carvajal, *Las cumbres iberoamericanas: comunidad de naciones o diplomacia clientelar?* (Santiago: FLACSO-Chile and Editorial Universitaria, 2003); and Francisco Rojas Aravena, *Las cumbres iberoamericanas: una mirada global* (Caracas: FLACSO-Chile and Nueva Sociedad, 2000).

¹³ Robert Wolfe, "Still Lying Abroad? On the Institution of the Resident Ambassador," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 9, no. 2 (July 1998): 23-54; and Paul Sharp, "Who Needs Diplomats? The Problem of Diplomatic Representation," in Christer Jonsson and Richard Langhorne, eds, *Diplomacy*, vol. 3 (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 58-78.

A second source of vulnerability has been the world's growing democratization and push for transparency. Whereas a few decades ago foreign policy and diplomacy were considered by many to be beyond the grasp of the mass public, this is no longer so. Television and 24-hour news channels have brought the world to one's living room, and citizens can see quite graphically the effects of their leaders' foreign policy decisions and how diplomats cope with them on the ground - even halfway across the world. That the electorate should therefore develop strong opinions on such matters is not surprising, and politicians must be ready to face the consequences. We are in a different world from the one in which the ordinary elector could be described as "ignorant, lazy and forgetful regarding the international commitments for which he has assumed responsibility."¹⁴

Transparency is also at play. The media and the public, quite legitimately, want to know what is happening "behind Embassy windows," at least in terms of how (and if) their interests are being served and furthered, and the demand for diplomatic accountability, something which would have astounded Callières, is very much with us. This expresses itself especially in the many belt-tightening exercises to which foreign ministries and their missions abroad are subjected. Diplomats are thus no longer sheltered from the political give-and-take, at least not as much as they were in the past, and they must respond to these new demands.

And if these "external" pressures often put foreign ministries and their missions abroad against the wall, much the same could be said about "internal" ones, meaning developments inside government. The considerable increase in international flows of goods, services, capital, people, images, and data across the world has meant that more and more ministries and government agencies are "getting into the act" with their own "Office of International Affairs," which conducts a parallel diplomacy of sorts. In some of the bigger countries, an Embassy might have more staff from other ministries than from the foreign - staff over which the head of mission often has little effective control. Often, these other ministries have more resources than the foreign ministry, and many of the more specialized functions, such as trade negotiations, are handled by non-diplomatic experts.

All of this is leading to a progressive "hollowing out" of traditional diplomatic duties, sometimes leaving the impression of diplomats as mere "coordinators" of

¹⁴ Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, 48.

the substantive activities of other agencies - hardly an enviable position, but one that conforms to such cutting remarks as those of Peter Ustinov, some years ago, that "a diplomat these days is nothing but a headwaiter who is allowed to sit down occasionally."

Yet, these pressures must be put in perspective.

With some 216 member countries in FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and 192 at the United Nations, nobody expects governments to have fully manned missions everywhere, and none does. Microstates, like some of the English-speaking Caribbean islands or those in the Pacific, have only a few missions, and in most countries the foreign ministry's budget is among the smallest of all ministries. In Chile, the hard-currency yearly budget is around US\$140 million for some 70 embassies, which comes out at around US\$2 million per embassy.¹⁵ For a country that this year is projected to export US\$55 billion and that has attracted on average some US\$5-6 billion a year in FDI over the past 15 years, this would not seem to be an extravagant amount of money. It amounts to less than 0.7 per cent of the fiscal budget and 0.1 per cent of GDP.

For all the talk about the inordinate sums foreign ministries spend abroad, with ever-increasing flows of international trade and FDI - when any given successful FDI project a foreign mission generates can mean, at one go, an investment worth ten times the ministry's total yearly budget - the notion that cutting spending at the foreign ministry from 0.7 per cent to 0.65 per cent of the fiscal budget is a productive exercise is doubtful, to put it mildly.

One reason foreign ministry budgets are under seemingly permanent attack¹⁶ is that they have not developed their constituencies or adapted to the new age of "network diplomacy." Ministries with much larger budgets - agriculture, health, education - have no such problem, for obvious reasons. Yet, in a world in which more and more jobs depend on international trade and FDI, it should not be too difficult for top foreign ministry authorities, and diplomats themselves, to be a bit more proactive

¹⁵ Actually less, since a not-insignificant amount of that is spent at headquarters on conferences and per diem and other expenses.

¹⁶ A recent issue of the *Financial Times* included a picturesque description of diplomats scrounging through their garbage cans to retrieve empty bottles of wine to document their dinner expenses.

in making clear to the informed public that international markets do not operate on autopilot, that opening markets for one's country's products is not done by an invisible hand, and that it is a tough competition out there to attract multinational corporations and to sign trade and tax agreements.

One obvious route is to generate direct links between missions and their home state's own regions and localities.¹⁷ This can show that diplomats on the ground actually help to generate jobs, something not always apparent to the average citizen. Headquarters will often not approve, as it will feel left "out of the loop," but it would do well to consider such a strategy as part of its outreach activities. It is certainly needed to counter the strange (and in many ways perverse) foreign ministry cost-cutting syndrome. This is where the ministry with one of the smallest budgets - whose policies often get the best public opinion ratings and which plays a key role in opening export markets and attracting FDI - finds itself permanently operating on a shoestring, closing missions and cutting to the bone of its core activities.

In fact, in today's world, diplomacy, far from becoming redundant, is more important than ever, since there is so much more at stake in international engagement. And the diplomat, as an intermediary between his or her country and the host country - as a "hinge" of sorts - is critically positioned to make the most of leveraging the opportunities that come his or her way or that are generated through his own wits. However, this demands a certain conception that is very different from the traditional view of diplomatic duties.

It requires understanding, above all, that it is no longer enough to count on the good will of the "Prince," as ambassadors of yesterday were, to get things done and to keep your job. In today's world, to be effective, diplomats must practise "network diplomacy." In other words, they must *build up extensive networks at home and abroad* to "deliver the goods." Being on good terms with the head of state or government (whom many diplomats today hardly know anyway), the foreign minister or the ministry bureaucracy is no longer sufficient. Yet, as one who has been associated with and has taught at diplomatic academies - especially, but not only, in Latin America

¹⁷ The Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently established a Division of Regional Coordination, whose responsibility is to promote closer links between each of Chile's thirteen Regions and various countries around the world, something in which the Chilean missions abroad are supposed to play a key role.

- for many years now, I know only too well that the skills required to build, to nurture, and to reach out to those extensive networks are hardly among the priorities in curricula filled with courses on international law, protocol, and similar subjects, which, however interesting in themselves, hardly speak to the main tasks at hand. Why?

3. The Nature of the Problem

The standard template of a diplomat provides the basis for what I have referred to as the "club model" of diplomacy. There are, naturally, the prescribed rituals, from the elaborate presentation of credentials, through the courtesy calls on ministers and colleagues, all the way to the farewell dinners. But I am not referring here to form, important as it is. I am thinking of the day- to-day behaviour in a job that, at least at the head-of-mission level, is to a large degree self-defined, which is part of its attractiveness but also part of its difficulty.¹⁸

This template, originally forged in the Italian city-states of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,¹⁹ was formalized subsequently largely by French and British diplomatic conceptions and practices. In a highly traditional profession - sometimes called the "second oldest in the world" - this template provides a ready- made, off-the-shelf manual for many diplomats from African, Asian, and Caribbean countries still in the first decades of independent nationhood and the initial stages of developing a foreign service.

It is no coincidence that even a revolutionary state like the former Soviet Union saw fit to translate and publish an edition of Sir Harold Nicolson's book on diplomacy and to distribute it to its legations and embassies. Many diplomatic conventions and customs are still very useful and will stay with us for years and decades to come. But the real question is not about rituals and procedures, important as they may be and in whose absence nothing much of substance could be accomplished. Rather,

¹⁸ For some recent Latin American perspectives on the diplomatic function, see Eduardo Jara Roncalli, *La función diplomática* (Santiago: RIL, 2002); and Ismael Moreno Pino, *La diplomacia: aspectos teóricos y prácticos de su ejercicio profesional* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001).

¹⁹ See Garrett Mattingly, "The First Resident Embassies: Medieval Italian Origins of Modern Diplomacy," *Speculum* 12, no. 4 (1937): 423-39. For sixteenth-century and early modern diplomacy, see his *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1964), 105-256.

it is, in today's post-Cold War world - when issues of human security are displacing more conventional ones of state security, when transnational politics and cross-border flows are as significant as state-to-state interactions or even more so - is it still useful to think of what diplomats do in the same old-fashioned way, though perhaps with a couple of "add-ons"?

Diplomats today are essentially tasked with helping their own countries navigate the perils of globalization.²⁰ To some degree, this is done by ministries of finance and of trade and industry, but it is also, and very significantly, undertaken by foreign ministries and their missions abroad. Now, the diplomat's traditional skills of dealing, mostly *in camera*, with a relatively small group of government officials and elite decision makers are quite different from those needed to engage, often in the open and under the glare of television lights, the many actors that have become relevant in international affairs today - from business associations to trade unions, from NGOs to think tanks, from political parties to farmers' groups, and, of course, the media. And, as can be seen from Figure 2, it is not only the vastly larger number of actors involved that adds complexity to the management of the new diplomacy, but also its much broader scope, and the many more policy levels it entails.²¹

Figure 2: Complexity Management in Network Diplomacy

Levels	Local, Domestic, National, Bilateral, Regional, Global
Scope	Broad array of public policy issues
Actors	Governments, Private Firms, MNCs, NGOs, Trade Unions

Yet - and herein lies a great paradox - many young diplomats from young countries today are being socialized into a certain way of practising diplomacy precisely at the time when it is becoming obsolete. Perversely, the standard diplomatic template becomes an aspirational goal for many foreign service trainees from the global

²⁰ For Latin American perspectives on how to cope with globalization, see Claudio Maggi and Dirk Messner, eds., *Gobernanza global: una mirada desde América Latina* (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 2002). On the strictly economic dimension of this coping, see Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Globalización y desarrollo* (Santiago: ECLAC, 2002).

²¹ I am indebted to Ramesh Thakur for this point.

South just when it is increasingly irrelevant. It is as if we were to put calligraphy and excellence in longhand writing at the very top of our high school priorities just when the IT revolution is hitting us. Elegant handwriting, as with many other expressions of human skill, has its place, but to put it front and centre among the things our youth should strive to master would strike most as a little *passé*. Much the same goes for the standard diplomatic template.

4. What Do Diplomats Do?

For Nicolson, the tasks of a diplomat are *to represent, to inform and to negotiate*. The three have been radically altered by the course of events, with the first two demanding more pro-active and discriminating stances, and the third somewhat receding in significance as more specialized officers take their seats at the negotiating tables.

The 1961 Vienna Convention, on the other hand, lists *representing, protecting, negotiating, ascertaining, and promoting* as among "the functions of a diplomatic mission." They all have a somewhat routine, bureaucratic tinge to them that seems far removed from the different pace we have acquired as a result of the Third Industrial Revolution, launched in 1980. Acknowledging these functions to be somewhat on the passive side, Kishan Rana provides an alternative list, which includes *promotion, outreach, feedback, management, and servicing*.²² In an age when high-quality "service to the public" is expected from government agencies, the latter cannot be ignored. "Household chores," to which "management" refers, are, naturally, another *sine qua non*.

Such functions, however, provide only a baseline. They are a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition for fulfilling the diplomat's duties in today's world. Even the words *promotion* (largely associated with commercial purposes) and *outreach* (implying, in its blandness, the periodical sending of Embassy newsletters to various "friends of the mission") fail to do justice to the centrality of the diplomatic task: the *projection* of one's country into the host nation.

It is all very well to say that diplomacy is "the art of negotiating agreements between states." With more than 200 independent nation-states, many agreements

²² See Kishan S. Rana, *Bilateral Diplomacy*, 2nd printing (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2006), 21.

are signed on a daily basis. But there is a limit to the number of agreements a country can sign. So, for diplomats, in many ways the most critical issue is the signing of agreements that are really worth it, with countries that have something to offer. Indeed, the real task is getting to the negotiations, let alone the signing. This takes some doing, and I am not sure that the traditional diplomatic toolkit has all the necessary instruments that small and middle powers need to get there.

In today's world, the only way this can be done is by *bridging the gap between home and host country* - that is, by attempting to bring the two societies closer. And for this, the development of extensive networks around key issue areas in both countries is critical. Otto von Bismarck's dictum that "diplomacy is the art of gaining friends abroad" remains valid. What has changed is that the sheer number of friends that need to be gained has increased exponentially. To an important degree, this means taking one's country's case to the public at large, to engage civil society - which leads us to the role of think tanks.

5. On Think Tanks and Program Material

It is one thing to promote exports or one's country as an investment destination; it is quite another to have a "story," and the moment diplomats limit themselves to the equivalent of used-car salespeople, they do a disservice to themselves and to their own countries.

And this is where research centres from "back home" come in.²³ Much has been written about NGOs and research centres as "independent diplomatic actors";²⁴ here, however, I am more interested in their role as "dependent diplomatic actors" - that is, in how they can be enlisted and deployed by diplomats. By definition, their business is to churn out information and analysis on the issues of the day. In doing so, they can become valuable allies of diplomats. By bringing relevant material and,

²³ See Shankari Sundararaman, "Research Centers as Diplomatic Actors" (paper delivered at the conference "Worlds Apart? Exploring the Interface between Governance and Diplomacy," CIGI and Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, Australian National University, Canberra, March 4-5, 2006).

²⁴ See Andrew F. Cooper and Brian Hocking, "Governments, Non-governmental Organizations and the Re-calibration of Diplomacy," *Global Society* 14, no. 3 (2000): 361-67; see also John English, Andrew F. Cooper and Ramesh Thakur, eds, *Enhancing Global Governance: Towards a New Diplomacy* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2002.)

whenever possible, some of the researchers and analysts who are "thinking one's country," as it were, diplomats can make a lot of difference in "bridging societal distances" - one of the cardinal objectives of diplomacy these days.

The Big Powers use many such instruments, from Voice of America to the BBC and the British Council, from the Alliance Française to the Goethe-Institut and the Cervantes Institute. High quality glossies like *Span*, distributed by US embassies, or *Asia-Pacific*, published by the Japanese Foreign Ministry, perform a similar role. Yet, most developing nations have nothing of the sort.

Yet, if much of this can be broadly construed as "outreach" or "public diplomacy," I am thinking of something else: relevant public policy experience.²⁵ Unlike the countries of the North, few countries in the developing world have sufficient resources for international cooperation programs, whether generous or miserly, to engage in what is sometimes referred to as "South-South cooperation." But what they do have is experience in many crucial public policy areas that can be valuable to other countries in the South - experience that, in some ways, is much more valuable than that of developed societies. The transfer of that experience, however, is by no means a mechanical or even straightforward process. It needs to be researched and systematized, findings backed up, and so on - all tasks for which research centres and think tanks are the natural foci. For those tasks, they could be deployed in a much more energetic and proactive fashion than most foreign ministries in the developing world are willing or ready to do.

In Chile, we still have a long way to go in this matter, but we have made some progress. In the early nineties, a decision was made to get Chile involved in Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). We realized early on that it could not be done without the backup of some research centre. So, in the mid-nineties, the Fundación Chilena del Pacífico was created, funded by both the public and the private sectors. This small but highly effective think tank has played a key role in Chile's Asia-Pacific policy. Chile joined APEC in 1994, the second Latin American country (after Mexico) to do so. The Fundación has provided some basic research and dissemination

²⁵ On "public" or "mass diplomacy," see Pierre C. Pahlavi, "Cyber-Diplomacy: A New Strategy of Influence" (paper presented at the Canadian Political Association General Meeting, Halifax, NS, May 30, 2003).

capabilities at which foreign ministries are not very good, and it played a key role in the November 2004 APEC Summit, which Chile hosted and which was the most significant international conference ever held in Santiago.

Today, Chile has more trade with Asia than with North America or Europe - 36 per cent of Chile's exports go to Asia. Three of Chile's top six export markets are in Asia (China, Japan, and South Korea). A free trade agreement with South Korea came in effect in 2004, another with China was signed in November of 2005, and I signed a preferential trade agreement with India in March 2006 - all of them "firsts" between a Latin American country and each of those Asian nations.²⁶

6. Diplomacy in Media-Driven Societies

References to the way modern communications affect diplomacy are not new. The invention of the telegraph and later of the telephone were watershed events that, effectively, brought the foreign mission much closer to headquarters and eliminated much of the leeway that diplomats had in the era when instructions came by post. Hans Morgenthau, in the chapter on diplomacy in his classic 1948 book *Politics Among Nations*, also comments on it extensively. Telex, radio, and newspapers, however, are one thing; the Internet and 24-hour news channels - of which there are 36 in India alone, in English, Hindi, and Tamil, among other languages - are something else again. The rise of media moguls and empires, considered by some to be much more influential than governments themselves (since in many ways they can make or break governments) is another expression of this.²⁷

Yet, it is important not to get stuck on the means of communications themselves and their strictly technological dimension, significant as it may be. The hundreds of television channels available in any one country and internationally, the thousands of AM, FM, short- and long-wave radio stations, the thousands of newspapers - India publishes some 7000 daily, with a circulation of some 78 million copies, in a business that is growing at 7-8 per cent a year with no signs of slowing down - the millions of web sites, and not least, the blogs, the latest fad in all this, all of these

²⁶ See Jorge Heine, "China, Chile and free trade agreements," *The Hindu*, November 22, 2005.

²⁷ Media barons have been around (*and* throwing their weight around) for a long time, as the case of William Randolph Hearst attests. What is new is to have media empires of world-wide reach.

effectively make us operate in real time, as it were, in one gigantic "Big Brother" reality show. But we must also realize that the communications revolution is driven by and needs "content," something to fill the newspaper columns and all that empty air. Yet, most diplomats from small and medium-sized powers do not know how to fill those needs.

Emblematic of the changing significance of communications for today's diplomacy was the strong, if ultimately unsuccessful, candidacy of UN Under Secretary General for Communications Shashi Tharoor for the position of UN Secretary General, which is to be filled by January 1, 2007. Tharoor ended up as the first runner up for the position in all the straw polls undertaken in the Security Council, yet only a few years it would have been considered preposterous for the communications person in any significant international organization to be considered for the top job. Such people were often second-rate journalists who got their jobs through political connections or sleek public relations specialists who were great at managing events and producing press releases, but who had nothing to say on substance. Yet Tharoor, an accomplished writer with a PhD in international relations who rose through the ranks to his present position, is precisely the sort of international civil servant who has made a brilliant career in multilateral diplomacy by understanding that, as important as *what* you are doing on the global scene is to *tell your story*. The many opinion pieces signed by Kofi Annan on various issues, from AIDS to the Football World Cup, that crowd the world's leading editorial pages are testimony to that understanding. The same goes for the Secretary General's sheer ten-year endurance, despite many concerted attacks from some powerful quarters, in which the media played a key role. But he gave as good as he got.

What made Tharoor such a strong candidate was not his 28-year experience at the UN - after a ten-year stint by the current incumbent, another career international civil servant, this might have been held (and was) against him. Nor was it Tharoor's strong managerial abilities, which he has shown on the ground in humanitarian relief actions in Bosnia and elsewhere. Rather, his strength was his capacity to communicate complex issues in an accessible fashion, orally, but especially in writing. This is not public relations. It is to understand that, in today's world, unless you take your case effectively and convincingly to the many constituencies on which you depend, you will not carry whatever issue you are battling for.

That kind of ability - as opposed to the arcane, convoluted, and stilted way of talking and writing that diplomats are often accused of indulging in - is one of the most critical virtues today's diplomats should develop. The notion that diplomats need deal only with a diminutive, elite segment of their host society, for which a facility for small talk and after-dinner conversation is more than enough, is quite wrong. Yet, it is widespread.

To be an effective communicator, the contemporary "network diplomat" needs both sufficient command of the subject matter at hand, be it nuclear policy or reproductive rights, and an ability to convey it in easily understandable language. This is the only way to make the case for one's country effectively and convincingly, not the diffident, *blasé* pose so many diplomats strike as part of their *dramatis persona*. And key instruments to help build the network the contemporary diplomat needs in the host society are, of course, the media, which not only help set up the network, but also, critically, assist its maintenance, refinement, and expansion.

If this is true within the host country, it is also valid for the home turf, where some of the most difficult battles - for resources, for priorities, for high-level visits - are waged. Here, too, and this is especially true for heads of mission, the ability to make one's case persuasively, not just to foreign ministry officials but also to parliamentarians, business leaders, political parties, and trade unionists, can be crucial for the success of any given initiative.²⁸

7. From Trained Observer to Proactive Initiator and Modern Orator

In his classic book, Nicolson refers to the change that took place at some point from the "orator" diplomat of the Greek city states to the "trained observer" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one who sent dispatches of necessary information to let the minister know what was going on in distant lands. In today's globalized world, the question of what diplomats do has in many ways become crucial, but the answer is somewhat different than it was in the first half of the twentieth century. Increasing international flows of all kinds, increasing numbers of interactions among

²⁸ On this, as well as a more general discussion of the role of the head of mission, see Kishan S. Rana, "The Domestic Dimension," in *The 21st Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to Chief Executive* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

nations, and far higher numbers of actors, including many NGOs, have changed the nature of diplomacy and raised the stakes in terms of the results of international engagement. If you get it right, as Singapore or, to a smaller degree, Chile has, you really are in business; if you get it wrong, as many Central and West African countries have, you are marginalized.

With today's communications revolution, many details and analyses of current events happening in the host country are available almost instantly at home headquarters, and there is no need to engage in the extensive reporting about them that was so popular in the diplomatic dispatches of yesteryear. The key, of course, is to identify the major developments that do need an informed opinion, as well as those of significance for the bilateral relationship.

In the traditional model of diplomacy, the functions of a diplomat are to represent, to inform, and to negotiate, with national sovereignty as the bedrock upon which the whole system rests. Its attitude is best summed up by Talleyrand's recommendation to all diplomats and heeded, in more ways than one, to this day: "*et surtout, pas trop de zèle.*" This model is, however, no longer relevant.

We need a new approach, one that responds to the imperatives of the age. The intense cultivation of a few key players, so characteristic of "club diplomacy," is being replaced by the development of "network diplomacy", a much more extensive set of contacts at home and abroad built around critical "issue areas" of special relevance to the mission. These issue areas ought to flow from what the head of mission identifies at the beginning of his or her tenure as the "central problem" of the bilateral relationship, which may overlap with, but not necessarily mirror, the goals defined in the head of mission's instructions. If properly tended to and nurtured, this network feeds on itself.

In this new model, which demands a radical change in the self-image diplomats have of themselves and their job, negotiation is still present, albeit in a diminished fashion, but the other functions are largely superseded by newer variants. For "representation," with its somewhat old-fashioned, slightly passive connotation (one represents by being rather than by doing), I would substitute "projection," by which I mean conveying what the diplomat's country is and entails to the host society and government. And for "information," I would use "analysis and influence" - that is, ways by which a diplomat can actually make a difference for the better in the host society, reflecting the increased interpenetration and interdependence of today's world.

In other words, the "trained observer," no longer suited to a 24/7 world of business process outsourcing and knowledge process offshoring, needs to become a "proactive initiator" and "modern orator." Twenty-first-century diplomats must actively engage the society in which they reside, not just the government to which they are accredited. They should look for ways to project their own nation upon the one they live in, and try to make a difference. They ought to reclaim the tradition of the orators of the Greek city-states and walk once again into the modern-day equivalent of the *agora* - the communications media - and speak out. This has its perils; given the motto of so many civil servants, "those who do nothing have nothing to fear," one can understand why it has not happened so far. Yet, it is the only way the world's second-oldest profession will be able to remain relevant in the twenty-first century. Above all, ladies and gentlemen, *plus de zèle!*

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