Working Paper

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Diplomacy in the 21ˢᵗ Century

Working Paper #1

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Research on diplomacy in the 21st century requires an interdisciplinary approach: Historians will focus on the evolution of diplomacy, communication experts on the impact of new media, sociologists on diplomatic character traits, cultural scientists on competing notions of governance, and practitioners from Foreign Offices, IOs, NGOs etc. will direct their attention to aspects of everyday work. As a consequence, questions of theory as much as of practicality, efficiency, efficacy, and future legitimacy of governance make for a suite of inquiries into a wide range of aspects of diplomacy as it is shaped and practiced in today's rapidly changing inner-state and international environment. This working paper tries to reflect on some of the major ones of these aspects. It aims to look into global developments of diplomacy on the individual, instrumental, institutional, and international level of analysis, focusing on the post-millennial era; it hopes to tread an argumentatively persuasive path between the conflicting priorities of preserving and modernizing diplomatic practice in the 21st century.

In the past, once governments of states or heads of tribes acknowledged that there were other governments or tribes of at least comparable strength pursuing common or conflicting agendas, they needed agents to mediate interests, prepare for or avoid conflicts or wars, and negotiate the terms of peace afterwards. Such a description may still suffice to describe the core of what a diplomat's role is about today, and will as long as a plurality of state-like entities shape international society. Beyond that rough approximation, a wide range of qualities characterize "diplomacy." All the same, changes in the structures of international society have continuously necessitated adaptation of various elements of diplomacy; such has historically been the case and still is today. From the status of sanctity a messenger enjoyed to the two Vienna Conventions on diplomatic and consular relations, a fundamental necessity has remained the same: protect an emissary on his mission abroad from the wrath of possible enemies (most of the time his hosts). The need to safeguard a degree of legitimacy of diplomacy recognized by the parties concerned obviously remains intact as instruments and government institutions involved adapt. Today, diplomacy faces the challenges of modern phenomena such as greater public attention and involvement, new means of communication, and a greater number of international state and non-state actors, all necessary for the shaping of foreign policy.

Against this backdrop, efforts to define diplomacy adequately vary depending on the individual focus or theoretical perspective of the observer. "Mediation of estrangement" is one such definition. Others refer to diplomacy as a "translation of cultures." Laswell classifies diplomacy as "deeds," on par with "words," "money," and "weapons" as major policy instruments.[1] Diplomacy may be seen as a "toolbox" of policy, or an "instrument of knowledge and information production." It may be regarded as the "formative principle," or identified as "essence of decision."[2] For the sake of this first working paper, and as a point of departure into more specified explorations, this study confines itself to regarding diplomacy as a characteristically pragmatic approach to handling relations between states and other subjects acting in the international sphere, always (echoing the introductory observation of diplomacy's origins) with the aim of finding ways to arrive at peaceful dispute resolution.

The following **four theme clusters** are intended to give structure to the project and to introduce some trains of thought for conceptual clarification and theoretical embedding which might be pursued further: (1) Individual level: The Diplomat; (2) Instrumental level: Digitalized communication; (3) Institutional level: State-to-state diplomacy and transnational others; (4) Global level: "Successful" diplomacy in an environment of competing governances.

[1] Harold D. Laswell, *Politics. Who Gets What, When, How,* Cleveland/New York: Whittlesey house, McGraw-Hill book company 1936/1958.
[2] Graham T. Allison/Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Longman 1999.

1. Individual level: The Diplomat

While diplomats were originally persons close to and within the same social class as the rulers, nowadays they are bureaucrats who share certain qualifications with "rulers" but not necessarily similar upbringing. Yet, personality continues to play an indispensable role in certain aspects of the profession of a diplomat, mainly in the way they present themselves in communication and negotiation. These personal qualifications a diplomat needs in present-day and future international environments transcend what used to come with the training formerly acquired through class-bound education. "Charme", "persuasiveness", or "self-effacement", which may sound cliché yet are indispensable, are more a matter of individual character traits, at best presumably as a result of class-independent family education. Although the social inheritance of educational opportunities is an ever-present issue, moral standards and ethical orientation in today's secular societies are almost as much a matter of character and individualized upbringing as they are a matter of training. Thus, recruiting diplomats in the 21st century relies on carefully thought-out methods.

Also, conflicts may arise more easily over how the instructions given to a civil servant might override their ethic understanding of their society's values. Questions of conscience may affect carriers of knowledge inside bureaucracies or politics who are aware of the public's critical gaze. They may pertain to the right to "resist" a government (as it is possible, for example, under Article 20 of the German Basic Law) and may lead to individual diplomats turning into "whistleblowers" (or also, as in the past, spies). The selection of personnel possessing the necessary qualifications of a diplomat can no longer rely on the results of social upbringing in a more or less defined, confined, and suitable environment. It has to look beyond knowledge and cognitive and linguistic capabilities. It has to make an effort to screen candidates according to complicated criteria judging a candidate's personality: the difference from the selection of corporate executives or managers reflects

the focus of the profession. The help of experts is increasingly sought in the selection process. However, techniques of selection have to integrate the specific personality traits needed for a modern diplomat.

In addition, the particular biography of a person influences how they behave once they become a diplomat in a variety of ways. Linguistic challenges, for example, increase with a wider variety of personnel. "Digital natives" have ways of information gathering, information processing, and communication that derive from the adaptation of technologies that demand, in turn, the adaptation of the individual in ways that impact their professional behavior. New present-day understandings of gender roles and family life have at least a double impact. They shape the individual's way of communicating with their environment—when for example modern roles of men and women are concerned—and they reflect their society's values, such as with the case of equal gender partnerships. They thus themselves constitute "messages" to the outside world that may influence the view of a country elsewhere and influence communication with it.

While communication from government to government attains weight and importance through its official qualities, informal communication between individuals even on a high level may nevertheless be more efficient. Circumstances that lead to the decision to preference personal communication may include the intricacy and complexity of negotiations, the need for confidentiality, and/or the speed with which bureaucratic or political decisions may be arrived at. The discretion and informality diplomatic communication has acquired may have a strong influence on the directions they take and outcomes they reach. The development of modern communication technologies, from air traffic to internet, has enabled top diplomats, politicians, and heads of government and state to communicate personally and directly. Its value lying in informal, conversation-type personal exchange, it does not provide the same level of reliability as formal, written and documented communication, but it is

an aspect of diplomacy that depends greatly on the diplomatic individual.

Challenged by the new circumstances, including a wider range of personnel with varying qualifications, it is less certain that bureaucratic hierarchies are adequate for the task of assuring a rational selection of information, knowledge, and opinion from the bottom and bringing it to the level of powerful political decision-making. The other way around, decisions on their way from the top down will be adapted by the individuals involved to be practical on the operational level. Power, however, may at least partially or temporarily today reside outside of traditional hierarchies, and may even be distributed over many, often non-state actors; this tendency towards "network diplomacy" might even be regarded as a counter-reaction to "autocratization" and hierarchization, both of which curb power accumulation. Formulation of bottom-generated information or proposals and the method by which instructions are given to the operational diplomatic levels today take into account influences from outside diplomacy, government, or even the state. They lead to greater and faster coordination and polylateral[3] negotiating and decision-making but they also circumvent individuals and their influence and thus threaten the democratic principle of accountability of governmental action.

Topics for further studies and case studies: (1) Role and "personal qualifications" of the individual diplomat, (2) new types of diplomats (celebrity diplomats, digital diplomats, diplomatic after-lives), (3) impact of changed gender roles, family, (4) individually applied work techniques (notes, demarches, treaties, agreements, reports, consular work, protocol, confidentiality), (5) hierarchies and working structures, (6) accountability, ethics, whistleblowing/spying.

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[3] A term persuasively introduced in diplomacy research by Geoffrey Wiseman; see <http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/polylateralism/> (accessed 30 April, 2016).

2. Instrumental level: Digitalized communication

The advances of modern communication technologies have an almost direct impact on the way diplomacy is conducted in at least three major ways: (1) The increasing time burden on decision-making, (2) The need to distill rapidly incoming information responsibly, and (3) Integration of social media into diplomatic work.

(1) The speed of transmission of information from missions abroad to headquarters and vice versa as well as between foreign ministries and other government agencies (beginning with that of the head of government), of foreign ministries and the agencies of other states allows governments and their agencies only minimal time lag for considering a course of action between an event and the reaction it triggers. The consequence is an increasingly heavy burden on the actors at the top of hierarchies as well as where proposals for courses of action are formulated, both in the bureaucracy and in politics. This burden is quantifiable in terms of time consumed for consultation, electronically and by travel, level of responsibility for a widening range of issues reaching the top, and demand by the public. It also creates tension between the need to act speedily and the need to act responsibly on the basis of thought-through information, a tension enhanced by physical factors such as late-night conferences, long-distance plane rides, and simple overloaded agendas. A remedy to lighten the time burden on decision-making processes has not been found so far. The risk of wrong decisions taken not because of false interpretation of known facts, a risk that always comes with being human, but because of insufficient time to consider thoroughly facts and options, thus increases constantly.

(2) Secondly, information travels as fast, or faster, on routes other than diplomatic channels, enabling competing forces to act on their own, possibly faster than a government. Much less than in the past,

therefore, does diplomacy entail simply the gathering of information. Instead, the quality of diplomacy as a method of providing information increasingly corresponds to the sophistication with which crucial information is discerned and selected. The more this is handled by what formerly were information gatherers, mainly in the missions or on missions abroad, the easier it is for headquarters to edit information into reasoned arguments that support proposals for courses of action for the policymakers. At the same time, control over where information originates or ends up is not guaranteed—which might mean the end of discreteness. In effect, there is a danger that technological change is submitted to without sufficient scrutiny to determine how to harness the results that come with it in terms of greater amounts of—seemingly vital—information. Speed may seem to be of the essence, but the quality of information is too, and out of information asymmetry necessarily arises a conflict. If diplomacy is considered to be, among other things, "knowledge production,"[4] in reality it is more like the most simple knowledge distillation—in real time, because even here time is limited. This carries the risk of superficiality. The aim of knowledge distillation needs to be the rational and effective processing of information for policy proposals that enable the maker of foreign policy to take well-informed decisions. Modern digitalized diplomatic communication occurs with the desire to increase flexibility in order to respond to real time effects but in fact needs to balance between the practicality of speed and the importance of dependability and reliability. The objective needs to be dependability and reliability that enables those diplomats or politicians acting on the basis of information received, to trust in it—because they will not be able to scrutinize sources and examine the reliability of information provided to them. "Trust pro-

duction" therefore might be a better description of such diplomatic work. The risk of shallowness in the course of processing knowledge undermines the ability to produce such trust.

(3) Today the public's constant gaze upon matters of government and thus also on foreign policy and diplomacy results in comments, observations, demands, and conversations; social media may not initiate these, but it does transport them. Conversely, social media has in many ways become tools of diplomatic work as well. It does not, like government "propaganda" in the past, monologously function in one direction only, but rather "in a dialogue with foreign audiences"[5] as much as with national ones. Modern diplomats are unavoidably under pressure to make use of social media, and similarly are forced to make themselves accessible, and thus vulnerable, to the public ("naming and shaming"). This intercourse with traditional interlocutors and the public, or only interested parties, creates a vast network of linkages with known or unknown, influential or powerless actors, "celebrity diplomats (with their own observant and attentive public)," and spectators, subject to linguistic and formal constraints of the new media (e.g. short text messaging). Independent of its true added value for the conduct of modern diplomacy, social media impacts it in general and in very specific ways depending on issues concerned. Through its influence on the public, and instigated by sensationalism—often for commercial reasons—not different from traditional media but with greater impact, social media may even create pseudocrises which, despite the short timespans they occur over, still gobble up significant resources. This is one risk the employment of social media in diplomacy carries. Another, more profound one is the change it unavoidable forces upon the way, diplomats and the public think

[4] Iver B. Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats. Inside a European Foreign Ministry,* Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press 2012, p. 7.

[5] Jan Melissen, "The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice", in: Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy. Soft Power in International Relations*, Basingstoke/N New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005, p. 14.

about their work, and foreign policy in general. For one thing, it needs to be presentable, understandable. As it exists in a world where social media are an instrument of competition for the public's attention, foreign policy risks being formulated so that it is comprehensible—possibly to the detriment of its complexity, and possibly decision may be taken in certain ways precisely because that is how they may be comprehensible, and "sellable." This risk may affect various areas of foreign policy but may be most in cases such as crisis management. Here, after all, foreign policy measures may directly and quickly affect people's very lives.

The example of crisis management may be most starkly illustrating the risks that come with all three major areas of digitalized communication. The others, however, i.e. the impact of social media on the formulation and thinking of diplomacy and foreign policy, the danger to the trust deciders have in information provided to them, and the dangers inherent in the necessity to take decisions quickly and possibly with sufficient time for reflection, weigh at least as much. The diplomacy of the future will therefore have to work out ways to manage these risks well enough to make it possible to benefit from the advantages of digitalization without falling victim to its risks too easily.

Topics for further studies and case studies: (1) Use of communication technologies by diplomats and diplomatic institutions, (2) problems in public communications due to particular character of new media, (3) digitalization, the gaze of the public, social media, (4) specific social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia e.a. (5) public diplomacy, cultural work, (6) information protection, (7) selected examples of crisis management, (8) risk management.

3. Institutional level: State-to-state diplomacy and transnational others

One might hypothesize that diplomacy in the increasingly de-limited world acts within a confining framework of an international society made up of sovereign nation-states in name only. As a result of the effort to deal with the reality of fraying sovereignty on the one hand and the need to solve globally originated problems, many more or less "traditional" fora for conference diplomacy and more international and supranational organizations have been created; but many are institutions sui generis. The European Union is a prime example. It partially commands means usually available to nation states only, yet it is steered in all matters deemed of essential importance by its member states' intergovernmentally working institutions. This influences diplomacy among EU member states. With an EU "European External Action Service"—essentially another term for foreign service—working side by side with national foreign services and constituting a collective reserve of knowledge for foreign ministries, especially of smaller foreign services, member states cooperate, or resolve conflicts, in significantly different ways. This becomes clear if compared to, for example, methods employed between the USA and China. Eventually, the ultimately unfulfilled political and societal need for global governance has created diplomacy and diplomats that are hybrids of nation-state-oriented and supranationally-focused diplomacy and its agents, with the major task of integrating various "diplomacies".

Diplomacy today might be the agency of an extensive inter-societal discourse[6] (with the emphasis on "extensive") but that does not mean that it is an amicable conversation.[7] Be it hard power, coercion, soft power, institutional power, or symbolic power, governments or other actors interacting

[6] Adapting a thought by Michael Koch, „Wozu noch Diplomaten?" in: Enrico Brandt/Christian Buck (Hg.), *Auswärtiges Amt: Diplomatie als Beruf*, Opladen: Lecke + Budrich, 2002, p. 357.
[7] The statement "Diplomacy without war is like music without instruments" is attributed to King Friedrich II the Great of Prussia.

internationally find themselves obligated to justify their doings not only to their interlocutors or victims of their actions, but often also to their own public. Multiple publics might be reflected in "polarised domestic landscapes", moved by fear, ethical considerations, nationalist emotions, or other motives. Diplomacy is today an interlocutor to governments and their agencies in a much wider sense than in the past. It is also an interlocutor not only of its own government but observes and "acts" beyond the borders of its nation state.

Going further, however, many large segments of modern societies might hope that traditional nation states regain their former supreme status as sovereign actors, in reality the process of the de-limitation of the world, i.e. the dissolution of borders in the widest sense[8] continues at great speed. While states retain their formal status as the ultimate providers of legitimacy of international governance and security, its guardrails are breaking and open to actors such as other transnationally active government agencies, parliaments, transnational corporations, media, NGOs, civil societies, or organized crime striving to participate in unorganized ways in influencing or even shaping international society and nations. The interest that corporations (and not just traditional large enterprises but SMEs as much) have in shaping conditions in other states gives them influence on governments that want to attract investment and taxes and provide employment. It also allows them to influence governments (mostly their own) who may in turn bring other states to provide or prevent opportunities for internationally active corporations.

States may seem still to be separate entities and to pursue sovereign policies.[9] In

fact their policy-making depends on flows of activities that are hardly government-controlled and transcend their traditional limits. Their policies are reduced to administration of situations originating somewhere outside their sphere of influence. Political participation, which used to be limited to people of a given state, now occurs across borders, and not only in times of crisis or war. The discourse on foreign policy among elites and the public becomes delimited as well. This creates grey areas related in different degrees to foreign policy where foreign ministries can at best try to moderate and coordinate activities. They may become more responsive, but not necessarily more accountable. This has an impact on how diplomatic institutions are organized and structured; many more "faces" representing "diplomacy" to the outside world become necessary—special envoys, for example, from the traditional service, or internationally active "celebrity diplomats." In embassies, and increasingly in headquarters as well, a very practical problem of coherence of diplomatic work appears along with the increasing number of "attaches" from other agencies or non-governmental institutions (universities, think tanks, corporations) with inherently different priorities from diplomacy. Here, flexibility, necessary as it is, tends to become the enemy of expertise. Diplomatic institutions, confronted with such hardly controllable challenges, may on the other hand be tempted, instead of developing qualities of political involvement, to withdraw into technocratic operational modes producing results that are just "good enough." This risk of stripping away responsibility may drain the sources of diplomatic power—and may even become a "new normal" phenomenon.

Civil society may rarely be aware of the full dimension of the effects of globalization on markets and societies. In many cases though, its attention is drawn to phenomena arising out of globalization. These may offer attractive additions or threats to one's quality of life and affluence. Civil society

[8] "Borders" consisting of anything that impede or used to impede intercourse between societies in different states, such as transmission of information, travel, trade, and transnational threats such as crime or climate change.
[9] The misunderstanding that basically states are still what they used to be, is one of the reasons for today's movements of "anger" in many democracies where people demand to "take back control" from unidentifiable globally active forces and to return to a world „we inherited from our fathers" (German right-wing politician Alexander Gauland, 6 June 2016, see

<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/tv/anne-will-mit-alexander-gauland-entschuldigung-sie-haben-mich-reingelegt-a-1095993.html> (accessed 10 July 2016).

then formulates demands on foreign policy that put pressure on politicians to act in situations beyond their reach and command. It also forces diplomats to devise courses of action that promise solutions responding satisfactorily to civil society. Modern conference diplomacy is one outcome which puts to good use an ancient diplomatic strategy for avoiding conflict as long as possible–in the best case until a solution is found: Keep talking. At the same time, civil society, like corporations, increasingly tries to take things in its own hands, not (only) in the traditional way of voting or demonstrating, but by creating internationally active associations and transnationally organized publics - NGOs, NPOs - of which there are many more than there are conference formats or diplomatic international institutions. Created and working mono-thematically and often patterned after the way internationally active corporations work, with pressure achieved through modern media, these organizations sometimes manage to achieve objectives that traditional diplomacy fails to, at least over a short period of time. The success of the Paris conference on climate change in 2015 for example would not have been achieved (and the conference itself possibly would not have been held) without some NGOs adamantly lobbying governments and working with politicians and diplomats over time.

Yet, civil society also produces organizations and movements which do not pursue objectives that would help solve global problems, but which to the contrary, compound them. Presently the anti-Islamic movement "Pegida" in Germany is an example, but in most cases the question of whether a civil society movement is a positive or negative influence depends on the political point of view of the observer, as for example the dispute over the role of NGOs in China demonstrates. Even at the best of times demands of multiple and international publics often conflict, and obvious drawbacks, for example, the shortcomings of international communication in languages, are often not sufficiently mastered, or are impacted negatively by misunderstandings based in culture. Diplomacy,

adapting to this new reality, needs to mediate between pursuing its own objectives as part of a larger political framework and following and cooperating with, or impeding, civil society's particularistic concerns and activities. Therefore, coalition building becomes more and more essential to diplomacy, both at the internal and the external level and with it the ability to discern who in the vast world of non-state actors makes an appropriate partner. In the course of such efforts, confronted with more complex operational tasks and higher public expectations than ever before, diplomacy seems to come closer to "politics," and will correspondingly be treated by distrustful publics with resentment.

Topics for further studies and case studies: (1) Modern conference diplomacy, (2) United Nations, EU, globalized interdependence of diplomacy, selected international organizations, (3) diffusion of power as a threat to diplomatic coherence, diplomacy and agenda setting, (4) business and trade, civil society and NGOs, (5) international organized crime, terrorism, non-traditional challenges, (5) tourism, (6) specific actors such as the International Crisis Group (ICG), Greenpeace, Amnesty International e.a.

4. Global level: "Successful" diplomacy in an environment of competing governances

In the end, like all tools to governance, diplomacy seeks to be "successful." This success is derived from a given foreign policy and is measured by the significance of the objects achieved (or not). It may be imaginable that a foreign policy is successful despite diplomatic failures; the other way around however is hardly possible. Defining the criteria for diplomatic "success" in the future therefore also has to take into account what the success of future foreign policy depends on. While it is global governance that is theoretically needed to deal with the foreign policy challenges in a world where "order" is continuously redefined and established (or not) in novel ways, part of the public is still with tradition: it identifies with the nation-state and seeks its

protection. It expects successful foreign policy from its national governments, representation of its interests, and it takes it for granted that such representation of its interests might entail conflict with other nation-states. Foreign policy has to balance that paradox: the nation-state-oriented public's expectations and the necessities of safeguarding a nation's interests through its polylateral policy and diplomacy. Accordingly, questions arise about to what degree diplomacy is a "soft power" tool, which kind of "hard power" it needs at its back in the modernization process, and whether that is an essential factor in making the diplomacy of nation-states "successful."

This new environment for diplomacy has led to both matching and diverging efforts to deal with it. Thus, the question of whether modernization serves as a catalyst for either diplomatic homogenization or heterogenization remains unanswered. States learn from one another, most of the time in cooperation with the new international institutions. Their way of coping has been impacted by their own traditions as well. In the case of the USA its superpower role influences the conduct of its diplomacy differently than Europe. In Russia and China, party-led governance has given these countries' diplomacy their own specificities, for example through the primacy of ideology over pragmatism demanded by authoritarian party influence. This is not without effect: In many ways, diplomatic "modernization" is impeded by non-pluralistic polities. Other countries may have found ways to be efficient that are derived from their own cultural mindsets, and these would not be just "icing on the cake,"[10] but may make for successful diplomatic courses of action too. Generally, the "pragmatic rationalism"[11] characterizing diplomacy in the past will also be a principle in the future. Nonetheless, modern diplomacy has to deal with conflicting demands from within. At the same time, the social, cultural, and political changes of the 21st century require a flexible "management of expectations" which calls thinking in centralized and national terms into question. Diplomacy will have to juggle demands caused by inescapable international requirements and others put forward by a watchful public, which in itself is active beyond its country's borders. Bound by being part of a state's policy and the will of its makers, diplomacy will also have to manage activities by non-state actors which sometimes may afflict the very roots of a state's policy. Finally it will have to manage the use of modern technologies in ways that enhance the basis for rational decisions by policy-makers. Even with their lesser role in the world of the 21st century, and possibly lesser impact on the shaping of the international order, nation-states' diplomacy must, similar to foreign policy itself, pursue effective, efficient, and (legally as well as morally) legitimate strategies in the international environment. The question of whether a normative frame for diplomacy is even possible remains open.

Topics for further studies and case studies: (1) Delineation of foreign policy and diplomacy, defining "success" of diplomacy, (2) the use of hard/soft/symbolic power, war, (3) selected examples of effective/ineffective, efficient/inefficient, legitimate/illegitimate diplomatic measures, (4) pursuit of diplomatic long-term goals against the backdrop of day-to-day management efforts, (5) non-Western diplomacy (Russia, China, Japan, India).

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[10] Merje Kuus, "Symbolic power in diplomatic practice: Matters of style in Brussels", in: *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 50 (3) 2015, p. 368/9.
[11] John Robert Kelley, "The New Diplomacy: Evolution of a Revolution", in: *Diplomacy & Statecraft,* Vol. 21 (2010), p. 286.