

The Nature and Dimensions of Diplomacy

By SMITH SIMPSON

ABSTRACT: Diplomacy is the art and science of international politics. It has also acquired a domestic political thrust. Possessing in modern times the dimension of organization, it faces the serious problem of how personal and creative political skills in foreign affairs can be married to bureaucratic procedures. If diplomacy is to be dynamic, capable of providing an effective alternative to war, organization must become its servant rather than its master. While generally viewed as the means of carrying out foreign policies, diplomacy generates resources needed for the formulation of sound policy, and its practitioners should therefore be fully utilized in the policy-forming process. At the same time, the resources of diplomacy must be considerably amplified in all its dimensions: intellectual and cultural, political, research and analysis, planning, education and training, and others which space limitations deny treatment here. We should develop and use the total human resources of our diplomatic establishment, including those of consular and junior personnel, in the pursuit of our international objectives, providing officers with an education and training commensurate to the demands placed upon them by modern diplomacy. For this purpose, the possibilities of a Foreign Service (Foreign Affairs) Academy deserve further consideration.

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WE Americans have either an exaggerated or too limited a view of diplomacy. We either expect too much of it and, when it fails, ridicule it as "mere talk" or we conceptualize it, as do many of our practitioners and scholars, in traditional, undynamic terms which miss not only its essential nature but also its modern dimensions. In both cases, the imagined process bears little relation to reality. Needed is an up-to-date definition which will characterize diplomacy as it is—a many-dimensional form of political action—and thereby draw sharp attention to both its potential and its limitations, to the resources which it should possess, and to those which ours, in fact, commands. In this way, we may come to use it more effectively as an alternative to war.

Diplomacy may be described as the process by which foreign policies are converted from rhetoric to realities, from pronouncements of principles to the everyday promotion of the national interest.¹ It is a quest, essentially, for influence or power. Gathering and dispensing information, reporting, and negotiating, along with other techniques, serve as means to this end.

The qualities and techniques of diplomacy constitute no mystique. They are evident in everyday relationships. They appear in a parent's firm but tactful handling of an obstreperous child (it is amazing how many statesmen sometimes behave like children), in a housewife's patient, ingenious extraction of the best

possible service from an idiosyncratic or surly maid (there are idiosyncratic and surly governments, too), and in a salesman's skill in overcoming resistance to his wares. They appear in the maneuvers of one university department to gain the upper hand over another in a disputed area of learning or sphere of interest (just as governments have spheres of interest). They are to be found in the persuasion of government officials and private-property owners by an architect-member of the President's committee to redesign Pennsylvania Avenue in the nation's capital. They are to be found in a lawyer's skillful use of psychology, learning, common sense, intuition, and experience in analyzing, understanding, and persuading a jury.

In the relationships of national governments, we call the use of such qualities and techniques "diplomacy." Use in that context involves as much personal skill as do difficult individual relationships, for the relations of governments are, in fact, the relations of people. The best diplomats, indeed—the Jules Jusserands and Dwight W. Morrows—surmount their official status and so command the host government's respect that, as individuals, they acquire an extraordinary influence. His personality, character, learning, and gifts—including the gift of intuition as to what to do, when, and how—greatly determine a diplomat's role and, thus, in no small measure, his government's capacity in world affairs.² This is not to say that training is not important. It is, and more will be said about this later.

¹ The national interest may, of course, be defined broadly, in terms of the general interest of the community of nations. The effort of the United States so to define its national interest has been a constructive contribution to the evolution of the community of nations, although our government's diplomatic actions are sometimes criticized at home and abroad as contrary to that community's general interest.

² At the same time, of course, the individual diplomat "in this dangerous, complex, interconnected world cannot undertake to make in his own discretion decisions of an import which he may be unable fully to understand."—Livingston Merchant, "New Techniques in Diplomacy," in E. A. Johnson (ed.), *The Dimensions of Diplomacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), p. 120.

THE INTELLECTUAL-CULTURAL DIMENSION

In international relationships, the diplomatic process acquires some formalities. It also acquires some limitations, demanding learning and ingenuity to surmount. For what he can say or do as an individual in his own society, he cannot always say or do in another—what, as an individual, not always as a government representative—and what he does decide is feasible is so subject to misunderstanding, because of cultural and psychological (not to add linguistic) differences, that he is obliged in speech and action to move with special care. At times, he must lay considerable groundwork for any move, often through social occasions. Because diplomacy is practiced with peoples of different backgrounds—even people in different stages of civilization—it possesses an intellectual and cultural dimension not present in our personal relationships in our native environment.³ This emphasizes the importance of education and training in diplomacy.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

Diplomacy possesses not only a trans-cultural but a political dimension.

³This transcultural dimension draws attention to the inadequacy of the concept of "management" which is seeking acceptance as a substitute for "diplomacy" in our lexicon of foreign affairs. One cannot "manage" foreigners, as one can subordinates in a business firm, government department, or secretariat of an international organization. Since one cannot "manage" them, one cannot "manage" the interacting relations which evolve from dealing with them. These are not infrequently subtle relations, influenced by factors of history and psychology, not to say national sensitivity, over which we have little or no control, and by conditions we cannot contrive into or out of existence. In this context, "management" is an irrelevant term although vitally important in a domestic context, as will be later indicated.

Being a governmental process, it is politically motivated and directed to political results. It is international politics.⁴ Thus, essentially, it is maneuver and motion. There are, indeed, occasions when diplomacy does best—just as in our personal relations we may do best—by silence and abstinence from action. In the years of the often precipitate John Foster Dulles, his subordinates sometimes longed to convey to him the admonition which they exchanged *sotto voce* among themselves: "Don't just *do* something: stand there!" But silence or inactivity because of lack of preparation for events is something else. It is not diplomacy. It is an abdication of diplomacy.

The cultural-intellectual and political dimensions, of course, interact with one another. One cannot assimilate the political processes of a people without assimilating their history and culture, psychology and, in many cases, their religions and family connections. This has been disastrously evident in Vietnam, but it is apparent every day around the world for those who have the means to see. As foreign writers subtly propagate the notion that Americans are modern Romans, stealthily building a global empire, the politically damaging results of this propagation require that our diplomatic representatives be prepared with maximum intellectual resources to cope with it. The traditional view of the diplomatic function of "representing" a nation becomes wholly inadequate in a situation which demands an activity at once more dynamic and more subtle, more active and more profound—far more outside the walls of embassy and consulate offices—than any which we have envisaged to date. The function becomes one of

⁴I am using "politics" in a broad sense which includes social and humanitarian objectives. Such objectives, when pursued by governments, become political objectives.

creating an intellectual-political climate abroad in which the objectives of our foreign policy can be achieved. This is no small task.

Diplomacy, therefore, is far from a bureaucratic process. From this, it follows that the diplomatic service is not simply a projection abroad of our domestic civil service. Both transcultural and political requirements set the diplomatic clearly apart from the domestic service.

Combined with the amount of time which a diplomat has spent abroad, these two dimensions make him a resource to be extensively drawn upon by his government, not only for information but for its interpretation, not only for advice on tactics—how to proceed once a decision is made in Washington—but also for advice in the course of that decision-making. This is only common sense. I would not suggest, however, that this enviable quality is always present in our government from its highest to its lowest levels. As simple and elementary as this suggestion may appear—as indeed much of what I have to say may appear—it is often neglected, leading to all sorts of unhappy experiences and even to complex results, as, again, we see very plainly in our Vietnam adventure.⁵

The politics of diplomacy involves not only ambassadors and senior officers but, properly utilized, junior officers as well. It involves not only diplomatic but consular officers at all levels. Indeed, if there is one facet of diplomacy that our diplomatic establishment needs to recognize and develop, it is the contribution of consular posts. This, I have found, can be so important that I am tempted to characterize it as a

dimension, not as a “facet” or a dimension. Space does not permit development of this idea, but as our administrators gaily close down consular posts on the ground that their passport, visa, and protection functions can be performed in distant embassies, I am struck by how little erudition and insight are reflected in these decisions.

Domestic aspect

The politics of diplomacy has acquired crucial domestic thrusts of responsibilities. One of these is pointed at the Washington bureaucracy. In getting that bureaucracy to respond to world developments adequately and promptly, the diplomat must become a bureaucrat of sorts, but a bureaucrat politically motivated and foreign-environment-conscious, many of whose end-results must be sought overseas. He is therefore quite a different breed from the ordinary civil servant.

With respect to his own department, every practitioner of diplomacy knows how much of his success overseas—and in Washington, when assigned there—depends upon his success in understanding the State Department, its peculiar, often rambling and chaotic, ways, and its personalities, and in enlisting their assistance by the very same processes which he employs abroad in enlisting the co-operation of foreign officials, albeit, in that case, in a foreign environment. Getting the action that he needs from his own headquarters is no mean feat.⁶

The same problems prevail with respect to all the other government agencies and departments which are today involved in foreign affairs, as most of them are. They must not only be reasoned with, stimulated, and enlisted in his own initiatives, but their own

⁵ Perhaps I should add that, because of our neglect of professional training, our diplomatic service is of very uneven quality. Some of our diplomats are not worth consulting *in extenso*.

⁶ For an interesting example of this, see William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 39–40.

moves must be co-ordinated, and their policy proposals integrated with the decisions of the President and Secretary of State. Rare is the diplomat who is imaginatively responsive to this thrust and capable of coping effectively with it. No diplomat is trained for it. This accounts for many of the weird things that we do both at home and abroad, to the wonder, disbelief, and, sometimes, grief of other countries, and to our own discredit. Need one do more than mention "Camelot"?⁷ or "Skybolt"?⁸

THE ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSION

The art of diplomacy has thus been overtaken by an organizational dimension. The process of understanding other governments and people, gathering and analyzing information and views, reporting, persuading, and acting has become an organized effort. Particularly is this so in our case, for we are a large nation, with interests as multiple

⁷ "Camelot" was the name given to a United States Army-sponsored research project for measuring and forecasting the causes of revolution and insurgency in underdeveloped areas. When its existence became public knowledge in Brazil and Chile in midsummer 1965, an international furor ensued. See Irving L. Horowitz (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1967).

⁸ "Skybolt" was an air-to-ground missile with a nuclear warhead, developed, up to a point, by the United States government, which agreed to provide it, when completed, to the British government, thereby solving the latter's problem of maintaining a strategic deterrent. On a cost-effectiveness basis, our Defense Department decided, late in 1962, to abandon "Skybolt," but the British were not properly notified and given a chance to work out an alternative quietly. The Pentagon's announcement was abrupt; a political crisis erupted in London; and the British government requested a conference, which was later held in Nassau, to ease it over the crisis. The incident demonstrated, again, the political repercussions of defense decisions and the need for close co-ordination of the Departments of Defense and State.

as our resources are vast, and therefore needing the most systematic mobilization possible of the people and facilities needed for the conduct of our far-ranging foreign affairs. The aggressive efforts of governments which proclaim an intention to frustrate and in the end bury us, as well as destroy the independence of other peoples, gives this dimension the importance of a peacetime mobilization for the diplomatic defense of the nation and of such other nations threatened by invasion or subversion as our resources enable us to assist.

Management and supervision

This situation and the responsibilities flowing from it cannot be met by either a puny organization, such as traditional diplomats prefer, or a large, ill-managed one. In this particular dimension, "management" is an appropriate term—the systematic, imaginative running of a large establishment by people who are themselves trained and creative in both diplomacy and management and therefore capable of ensuring conditions of service favorable to the art of international maneuver. Organization poses the risk of stifling an art, so that the basic challenge of this dimension is one of effecting the marriage of an art to management. I am convinced that this can be consummated, but, if it is to be successful, great research and creative effort are demanded. These we have not yet undertaken. The State Department has only scudded and shuddered before the wind of challenge in the confused fashion of a sailing vessel piloted by an inexperienced and bewildered skipper.

Organization means supervision. Supervision means the development of people. There is urgent need for this dynamic concept of the supervisory function, and for the training of supervisors and supervised alike to make that

concept prevalent in the diplomatic establishment. This would not only improve the general quality of our diplomacy, but would also help to solve many vexing problems which seem unrelated to so many of us. Among these are the morale of junior officers who want to be "where the action is," the cynicism of mid-career officers who have lost their hope of getting there, and the let-down feeling of all officers as they witness the dehumanized treatment of their seniors—prodded out to pasture while still in their prime, some of them possessing just that experience which can fuse initiative with discretion and action with adroitness and place persuasion in our parliamentary diplomacy on a higher level than indiscriminate arm-twisting. Management must devise techniques which enable a large organization to treat its personnel as human beings and to stimulate rather than suffocate their judgment and initiative.

No small part of our fumbling with this dimension derives from the refusal of diplomats to recognize its existence and to consider themselves as candidates for the performance of the management function. They feel that this function is not a part of their bargain. They contracted for a more glamorous role of "diplomat." Since they have occupied the strategic positions in the diplomatic establishment from which more modern concepts could be fed into the recruiting, examining, and training processes, their traditional conceptualization of diplomacy has been perpetuated. So the diplomatic establishment has no managers. It has only administrators, and these are drawn, not from diplomatic ranks generally, but from an outside reservoir of people claiming an interest, but rarely an experience, in the administrative techniques of large organizations—and none whatever with diplomacy to which such techniques should be fused.

From what reservoir are recruits to be drawn for managerial training—from the diplomats themselves? or from administrative personnel who have not the slightest background in diplomacy? There is always the possibility of educating the administrators in diplomacy, and in recent years this has been begun, not by any formal education and training, but by appointing them as ambassadors. That this leaves something to be desired in the depth and effectiveness of our diplomacy goes without saying. One hopes that the diplomats will come to see the advantage of managing their own affairs.⁹

DOMESTIC CLARIFICATION

Factors inherent in the evolution of democracy have created another dimension of diplomacy; what one might call the dimension of domestic clarification. It overlaps not only the political dimension but also the organizational, for only imaginative managers, familiar with the diplomatic process and its historical evolution, would know enough to see this dimension and to do something about it.

By "domestic clarification" I refer, of course, to diplomacy, which is my subject, not to foreign policy. With certain exceptions, like Vietnam, we have an abundant public clarification of our foreign policies. We have little or no clarification of our diplomacy or anybody else's, or even of diplomacy in general. What John Stuart Mill said of eloquence and poetry is applicable to policy and diplomacy—the one is heard, the other overheard. It has long been time to let a little more diplomacy be overheard.

⁹ Lest we focus so greatly on the State Department as to forget that it is but the nerve center of a far-flung establishment, let me emphasize that the need of effective management is as keenly felt in our posts abroad as in Washington.

The importance of this, I think, cannot be exaggerated. Diplomacy is our principal alternative to war. Upon it and its quality rest the lives of all of us. Yet, unlike civics, diplomacy is not taught in our high schools, and not much concerning it is taught in our institutions of higher learning. We induct into our diplomatic establishment itself men and women who do not have the foggiest idea of it. The general public, unfamiliar with its nature and techniques, its limitations and potentialities, is vulnerable to appeals that our government resort to force when diplomacy should suffice or escalate the use of force in situations susceptible only to a political solution.

Not only the nature and techniques, but also the substance of contemporary diplomacy needs to be overheard by the public. I am not pleading for "open diplomacy" so much as I am for greater ingenuity in conveying contemporary developments to our citizenry by other means than shouting from the roof-top. I am not an advocate of roof-top diplomacy. I think that we are ingenious enough to invent other ways of keeping our people better informed concerning something that affects them so vitally. If, for example, the State Department worked with the political science (or interdisciplinary faculty) groups of our colleges—and of our high schools—to stimulate the teaching of diplomacy, collaborating with them in the development of suitable teaching materials from contemporary situations, we would be much farther along in reconciling the demands of democracy with those of diplomacy, and in conferring upon the latter a prestige which it does not now enjoy because of prevalent ignorance.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Diplomacy has also acquired a dimension of research and analysis. As never

before, the diplomat must be served by the gathering and analysis of information on broader and deeper scales than he or his associates in any given office or post abroad can command. There are problems of communication and leisure—leisure to absorb the fruits of a headquarters' research and analysis. But I would like to focus here on two wholly neglected facets of this dimension: (1) research and analysis of diplomacy itself, its techniques and resources, the situations in which it can be effective, and those in which it cannot, and (2) maintenance of an inventory of the diplomatic resources which our government possesses, those in short supply, and those lacking altogether. "Know thyself" is a good motto for a diplomatic establishment. I often think of a remark that President Kennedy made to an associate early in 1962 after some disappointing experiences with the effective execution of our foreign policies. He ruefully observed: "To prepare for this Administration we had a task force on foreign policy—and a good one. But why did no one think of having one on the resources we need to carry out policies?" One thinks again of Vietnam. I am quite sure that had we stopped to inventory our diplomatic resources for rendering assistance to an inchoate nation in Southeast Asia and for preserving diplomatic (that is, political) control of that assistance, including its military segment, we would have backed off fast from massive intervention.

As a part of the inventory process, we should analyze our mistakes in foreign policy and diplomacy. Rarely has the State Department paused to look backward, and never searchingly and systematically, with all possible resources at its command, to ascertain why it failed in any situation or why things did not go as hoped. When the Navy loses a ship, it automatically

creates a board of inquiry to ascertain why. Subtler, of course, are lapses and losses in the diplomatic field, but the same need to inquire and learn is no less acute. It is time for the role of analysis to be applied to diplomacy through a Standing Review Committee of Research and Analysis or the Policy Planning Council staff.

Many other organizational and procedural problems await a similarly tough analysis. How, for example, are the lessons of failure and success which come from a Review Committee to be imparted to diplomatic officers, so that all may learn from the errors and successes of some? Even the simplest information needed for the discharge of immediate tasks encounters what I call a "transfer of experience" block. It is accentuated by the proclivity of all diplomatic establishments to rotate their officers from position to position, country to country, even continent to continent. In our case, organizational size is a factor, as is a leanness of staffing which makes rare indeed any overlapping of officers so that an incumbent can adequately brief—that is, transfer the benefits of his experience to—his successor. This problem is not insoluble, but it requires identification and analysis by imaginative people, adequately trained and furnished with sufficient funds to effect the needed reforms.

Planning has always been viewed by the State Department as related to the policy process. Common sense suggests that it is equally related to the diplomatic. Neither the Policy Planning Council staff nor the offices concerned with the administration of personnel have given hard, systematic thought to the development of the resources, human and other, needed to carry out policies. Diplomacy has lived from hand to mouth. It has lived "by guess and by

God." To make policy-decisions, to enter commitments (as we did in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization), and to decide important moves (as we did in Vietnam), without stopping to inventory our resources and to bring our diplomacy into equilibrium with our decisions, is the rankest folly.

Perhaps these two dimensions of research-analysis and planning should be viewed as coalescing in a "mobilization of resources" dimension. I would not quarrel with such a grouping.

SOME OTHER IMPORTANT DIMENSIONS

There are other important dimensions of diplomacy—economic, technological, scientific, social, nation-building (sometimes called development diplomacy), military, covert (entrusted to the Central Intelligence Agency), and international-organization (which has evolved one type of diplomacy termed "parliamentary" and another called "alliance" diplomacy). These demand diplomats with new areas of knowledge in their grasp and new skills at their command. We touch upon some of these dimensions in this volume. Others, for reasons of space, we have had to omit. In this synthesis, I have limited myself to those which, because they determine the general ability of the diplomatic establishment to function effectively with respect to all dimensions and to command adequate popular support, underlie all others. Without in any way derogating the importance of the others, these seem to me basic dimensions.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

One other basic dimension remains—education and training. This has emerged as one of the thorniest problems of modern diplomacy. In dealing with it suggestively, I would again point out that my angle is limited. I

do not speak of education and training with respect to "foreign affairs" or "foreign policy," although, obviously, diplomatic officers must be educated in these areas. I speak to the subject of this volume—and hence of education and training in diplomacy: its nature, its processes, and its techniques. The dimensions of diplomacy discussed here are so complex, and the challenges which they present to diplomatic officers are so great, that it seems obvious to me that only an educational and training institution focused on the needs of modern diplomats can possibly pack them into an educational and training program.

Nor can a private institution have access to the materials needed to educate and train officers in these dimensions, for many of these must be developed from the experience of our diplomatic establishment in the last quarter-century. I do not mean to imply that the past has no significant contribution to make to the education of diplomatic officers. It has. Not only does it provide needed perspectives, so that officers do not make fools of themselves in performing functions demanded by the intellectual-cultural dimension, but there is much to be gained from analysis of Talleyrand's performance at the Congress of Vienna, David Eugene Thompson's and Dwight W. Morrow's in Mexico City, Jules Jusserand's in Washington, and the like. Talleyrand's offers considerable illumination, for it reveals a set of techniques whereby a defeated government bereft of power—military and economic—can completely frustrate victorious governments. The lesson which it teaches is valuable, and one that we need to learn: that power is not simply economic and military power; it is also diplomatic skill.

The kind of intensive education and

and training which the complex dimensions of modern diplomacy require should be given to diplomatic officers at the outset of their careers, so as to make them as promptly useful as possible to their country. This would also strike at one of the sources of the morale problem of young officers. By thorough preparation at the outset, they could be entrusted with serious responsibilities earlier, and thus find themselves "where the action is."

It will be carefully noted that I do not suggest that there is a "profession of foreign affairs." But within the area of foreign affairs lie some professions. One of these could be diplomacy. The diplomatic process is clearly susceptible of professionalization. For the purpose, I visualize a Foreign Service (Foreign Affairs) Academy on a graduate level.

This does not mean that such an academy would be the whole answer to the modern requirements of diplomacy, nor, because of the political influence which might play upon it, a simple answer. But it certainly cannot be cavalierly dismissed as either unnecessary or impossible to achieve under proper conditions. More thought must be given to possible ways of setting it up—enabling it to draw upon the resources of existing institutions, rather than attempting an all-inclusive faculty of its own—and, above all, to developing teaching materials from the problems and experiences of diplomats which only a government academy could utilize.

It is important to note, also, that education and training must be meshed with need. When a SEATO commitment is made, an analysis and planning unit must automatically go into action to determine what kind of officers this commitment demands, what number of this type is on hand, and, thus, how many more must be educated and trained. The educational and training

facilities of the diplomatic establishment must then do what is necessary to produce this type in the number estimated to be needed to meet any crisis.

One must indeed speak of diplomacy in the context of foreign policy. But might I suggest that the reverse is also true—that one must speak of foreign policy and foreign commitments in terms of diplomacy? A policy is wise only insofar as our diplomacy can support it. Except in those situations

in which we calculate that we should bluff, a commitment is sound only if our diplomacy can make it viable.

It is time that we recognized that not only our enemies can undermine us: we can undermine ourselves. We can do this as readily by an inadequate diplomacy as by wrong policies. The first step toward achieving an adequate diplomacy is to conceptualize it. If this article provides some assistance in this direction, the writer will consider himself well rewarded.