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Diplomacy in a Changing World

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We have witnessed, since the end of the Cold War, a dramatic shift in the way which international actors manage their diplomacy and foreign policy. Two key factors have fundamentally influenced the contemporary international relations. The cornerstone of these factors is the fast development of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and its impact on diplomacy practices. New ICTs have effectively threatened the official diplomats' central position in the conduct of foreign affairs, and they have undermined some of diplomats' principal functions as well. The new ICTs, especially global television channels and Internet, have replaced in many cases ambassadors as a main resource of foreign information.

The other face of the coin is the obvious emergence of new diplomatic actors, particularly Non-State Actors (NSAs) that become a principal part in new international relations. Thus, state actors are not today the only actors in world politics; as long as NSAs are increasingly playing many diplomatic functions beside nation-states, as we will see bellow.

I- Diplomacy and New ICTs

Diplomacy is now undergoing a major transformation in response to the recent development in ICTs that they not only play a great impact on diplomatic decision-making, but they produce some new forms of diplomacy as well.

A- Impact of New ICTs on Diplomacy

Diplomacy has always interacted well with progressive innovations in ICTs, despite the doubtful reaction of diplomats to any new invention, as reflected in the well-known words of the

former British Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston when he received in his desk the first telegraph in 1840s, he cried “my God, this is the end of diplomacy”.

The telegraph was the first step in this long way of innovations in ICTs¹; telegraph, and later, the telephone and the radio were regarded as the first generation of ICTs. The innovation of television, early generation of computer, and satellite were the starting point of second generation, whereas the symbol of the third information revolution is the internet, which is distinguished by a high speed of information exchange.

There is a great debate about the interaction between the new ICTs and diplomatic (and foreign policy as well) decision-making process. Two theses attempt to explain this matter, the so-called “CNN effect” and “Manufacturing Consent” theses.

a) “CNN Effect” Thesis

“CNN effect” thesis is based on assumption that the news can make policy², or at least shape the environment of political decision-making³. The major influence of new ICTs, especially TV channels, due to their wide coverage distinguished by these five following characteristics⁴:

1. It is broadcast around the clock 24 hours a day;
2. It is transmitted in real-time,
3. It is broadcast from every place in the world to every place;
4. It is headline dominated; and
5. It is live event-oriented.

¹ For the development of ICTs, see David Alberts and Daniel S. Papp, *The Information Age: An Anthology on its Impact and Consequences* (: University Press Pacific, 2004).

² Piers Robinson, “The CNN Effect: Can News Media Drive Foreign Policy”, *Review of International Studies* (1999), p.303.

³ As the former US secretary of state Colin Powell has observed that, “live television coverage does not change the policy, but it does create the environment in which the policy is made”, cited in, Timothy J. McNulty, “Television’s Impact on Executive Decision-Making and Diplomacy”, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 17 (1993), p.80.

⁴ Eytan Gilboa, “The Global News Networks and US Policymaking in Defense and Foreign Affairs”, Working Paper, Harvard University, The Joan Shorenstein Center (Spring 2002). http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Papers/Working_Papers/2002_6.pdf

One should note, however, that networks repeat recorded new programs throughout the day⁵.

The former US Secretary of State James Baker II wrote that “the terrible tragedy of Tiannamen was a classic example of a powerful new phenomenon; the ability of the global communication revolution to drive policy”⁶, in the same context the former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gali complained “CNN is the sixteenth member of Security Council”⁷. George Bush senior himself admitted during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, “I learn more from CNN than I do from CIA”⁸, this fact was confirmed by Richard Haass⁹, who complained that “he could see an event or speech live on CNN at 2:00 p.m., but he had to wait three hours or more before the CIA could deliver its own updated news and commentary to NSC office”¹⁰.

Today, the influence of television channels on international politics is not an exclusive western phenomenon. A plurality of information has emerged during the last years, thus western channels lost their monopoly on covering international information. Some observers have qualified The Arabic channel Aljazeera as an “Arab CNN”, while others have more precisely in description the significant current role of Aljazeera channel as “Aljazeera Effect” alike to “CNN effect”. Aljazeera channel has been a real competitor to western channels as BBC and CNN, since it has succeeded to break their news monopoly, so western decision makers, especially American ones, are taking it into their account. For instance US government regards Aljazeera channel as a resource of annoyance to American agenda particularly in the Arab world, moreover it has waged a hard campaign against this channel.

b) “Manufacturing Consent” Thesis

“Manufacturing consent” thesis argues that “the media does not create policy rather that news media is mobilized (manipulated even) into supporting government policy”¹¹.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James Baker II, *The Politics Diplomacy* (New York: GP Putnam’s Sons, 1995), p.103.

⁷ Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas G. Weiss, *The new Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder: Lynne Rinner, 1996), p.6.

⁸ Lewis A. Friedland, *Covering the World: International Television News Services* (New York: 20th Century Fund, 1992), pp.7-8.

⁹ The Chief White House Middle East Adviser for Bush senior during 1990-91 Gulf Crisis, and former member of US National Security Council.

¹⁰ L. McNulty, “Television’s Impact on Executive Decision-Making and Diplomacy”, op.cit.

¹¹ Robinson, “CNN Effect”, op.cit., p.301.

“Manufacturing consent” is based on Noam Chomsky’s ideas about media and propaganda¹². Chomsky argues that the media supports “established power” and is “responsive to need of government and major groups”. In this context Lance Bennett argues that “mass media news is indexed implicitly to the dynamics of government debate”¹³.

The thesis components rely on many undeniable arguments to defend their vision. These repeated evidences indicate that governments and other sponsors exercise a direct influence on international channels, and they have succeeded in many cases to involve them to propagandize on behalf of their own agendas.

The best way to resolve the contradiction between “CNN effect” and “manufacturing consent” theses, and the conflict between new ICTs and diplomacy, is to consider the first as a complementary means of the latter, as reflected in the same form of diplomacy, like “public diplomacy” and “virtual diplomacy”...

B- New ICTs and New Forms of Diplomacy

Many forms of diplomacy have appeared as a result of the incorporation of ICTs in diplomacy practices. This fact has shaped new trends and forms of diplomacy. Some observers have coined some words to capture the consequences of this interaction between diplomacy and ICTs, as "virtual diplomacy", "instant diplomacy", "real-time diplomacy" and so on.

Public diplomacy and virtual diplomacy are the two most exciting aspects of this interaction between diplomacy and ICTs.

a) Pubic Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is nearly as old as diplomacy itself, and all old empires had used some patterns of public diplomacy fitted with their historical era. Today it carries some new forms benefiting both from traditional media and new ICTs.

¹² See for example, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

¹³ W. Lance Bennett, Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States, *Journal of Communication*, 40(2), (Spring 1990), p.108.

Public diplomacy is based on using ICTs to support and serve official diplomatic goals. An adequate definition of public diplomacy is given by Hans Tuch, who defined it as “a government’s process of communicating with foreign public in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and practices”¹⁴. American Department of State, on its part, defines public diplomacy as “government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motions pictures, cultural exchange, radio and television”¹⁵.

Essential elements of public diplomacy can perhaps be defined, based on the above definitions, in the followings:

- Press and public affairs activities of governmental officials (President, ministries, diplomats, officials...);
- Informational and cultural activities organized by diplomatic missions abroad;
- Educational and cultural exchanges;
- International exchange of persons programs;
- International television and radio; and
- Government-sponsored activities of NGOs.

Public diplomacy differs from traditional/official diplomacy in some principal characteristics. Firstly, public diplomacy is transparent, open and widely disseminated, whereas official diplomacy; apart from occasional leaks, is opaque/secret. Secondly; public diplomacy is transmitted by government to other government. Third, official diplomacy is concerned with issues related to the behaviors and policy of governments, whereas public diplomacy is concerned with issues related to the attitudes and behaviors of publics¹⁶.

In summary, while traditional official diplomacy focuses on relationships between the representatives of states or international actors, public diplomacy is directed at foreign public in

¹⁴ Hans Tuch, *Communicating With the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p.3.

¹⁵ US Department of States, *Dictionary of International Relations Terms* (New York: 1987), p.85. Cited in “What’s Public Diplomacy”, is available at site web: www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm

¹⁶ See Wolf, C. Jr., & Rosen, B. (2005). “[Public diplomacy: Lessons from King and Mandela](#)”, *Policy Review* 133, Internet Edition, p.4. Available at web site: <http://www.policyreview.org/oct05/wolf.html>

foreign societies as a principal target, in order to influence their attitudes. In general, public diplomacy remains a key instrument of official foreign policy, to support its objectives, or at least, to reduce hostility to country. Perhaps, the best example in this context is the great efforts made by US government to improve and refurbish its image in the world, especially in Islamic societies.

It is important to distinguish between public diplomacy and some related terms as propaganda and “soft power”. Even if propaganda was originally a neutral term used to describe the dissemination of information in favor of certain cases, but because of its bad uses, especially in time of war, it has acquired a negative connotation. Today, this term means the efforts of government to influence people’s opinion by disseminating false and misleading information, in order to justify and support a policy.

Whereas, soft power is based on intangible and indirect influence foreign people, Joseph Nye defines soft power as “the ability to get that you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goal. It differs from hard power, the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will”¹⁷. R. Keohane and J. Nye state that “soft power can rest on appeal of one’s ideas or culture or the ability to set the agenda through standards and institutions that shape the references on others. It depends largely on the persuasiveness of the free information that an actor seeks to transmit”¹⁸. The essential elements of soft power, that concern us here, is its profiting from new ICTs to address to foreign people.

b)Virtual Diplomacy

In the beginning of studying the virtual diplomacy, I have to note, firstly, there is no standardized definition of this term, Secondly, the paucity of academic studies examining the new aspects of diplomacy. But in general, it useful to distinguish between narrow and broad definitions of virtual diplomacy. In the broad definition, virtual diplomacy signifies the integration of new ICTs, especially the internet, in diplomacy practices at all levels in order to facilitate the achievement of diplomacy goals. Whereas, in its narrow definition, virtual

¹⁷ Joseph Nye, “Propaganda isn’t the Way: Soft Power”, *The International Herald Tribune* 10, (January 2003). Available at site web: http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/opeds/2003/nye_soft_power_iht_011003.htm

¹⁸ Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, “Power and Interdependence in the Information Age”, *Foreign Affairs*, (September/October 1998), p.85.

diplomacy means the use of new ICTs, especially the internet, to perform the functions of diplomacy, i.e. presentation, information, negotiation, and communication...

The traditional functions of diplomacy have undergone a series of changes since the incorporation of ICTs in diplomatic practices. The US Institute of Peace relates virtual diplomacy to the role of ICTs in the conduct of foreign affairs, particularly their effects on international conflict management and resolution¹⁹. In fact this definition fits with the specific task of this Institute focused on resolution of international conflicts.

Key elements of virtual diplomacy based on the use of the internet in the following fields:

- Information gathering;
- Communication and negotiation;
- Virtual embassies and conferences, and
- Rising of new diplomatic actors

Information Gathering

The access to information is always a crucial concern of diplomats, who have, for a long time, monopolized on gathering and providing information about international affairs and foreign countries. But since the early generation of ICTs, diplomats abroad have lost the monopoly on outside information. Today, if any FAM (Foreign Affairs Ministry) needs a resolution adopted by UN, or a legal document of any international organization, or any information about an international event, it does not have to ask its diplomatic mission concerned to look for such resolution, legal document or information, and send them to the headquarters of FAM, but they can be found early and quickly in the web site of international organization or country concerned. Thus, diplomats have overlooked gathering and transmitting information, however, they are gradually concerning themselves more with new high-level diplomatic tasks.

Communication and Negotiation

Internet grants to diplomats to be in continuous contact with their counterparts in other countries, and it facilitates online bilateral and multilateral negotiations between international

¹⁹ See the page web of US Institute of Peace: www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/

actors (including NSAs as well). These online negotiations will undoubtedly help to resolve many mutual and collective disputes. This new form of negotiation by internet will certainly simplify classical bureaucratic procedures, and it will contribute to overreach some protocols do not adapt to new ICTs.

Ernst Sucharipa has summarized the main advantages of negotiating per internet in the following²⁰:

- Concentration on content and substance, no "emotional noise";
- Clarity, lucidity of formulation, less misunderstandings;
- Facilitates comparison of texts proposed;
- Transparency, easy to maintain record of proposals made and revisions added;
- Time factor: each delegation can work according to its rhythm, time difference can be turned into advantage;
- Easy and reliable method of establishing the final text;
- More than two parties can participate;
- Cost efficient.

Virtual Embassy

Virtual embassy becomes a buzzword within academic circles that interested in the impact of new ICTs on diplomacy. Can this virtual embassy replace the resident ambassador? It is difficult to answer with a decisive response, in harmony with my vision that considers new ICTs as complementary tools of diplomacy. One of the great motivations of virtual embassy relates to its low cost when we compare it with the cost of resident embassy which is too high, and virtual embassy reduces human resources at minimum as well.

Today, the visa application has been filled out, in some embassies, online and perhaps the payment will be also soon by credit card. Virtual embassy may be located at host country or

²⁰ Ernst Sucharipa, "21st Century Diplomacy", available at: http://campus.diplomacy.edu/lms/pool/BD%20materials/Sucharipa.htm#_ftn1

elsewhere, and perhaps it can be located in a hotel room as one researcher wrote²¹, as several countries did in the course of Bosnia conflict.

On the other hand, new ICTs have enabled the position of NSAs on international scene, so that they are playing an increasingly crucial role in making and conduct of virtual diplomacy as I noted in chapter (B).

II- Rising of New Diplomatic Actors

Classical diplomacy was characterized by two key features, the first is that nation-states were the predominant actor in international relations; the second is that FAMs were exclusive ministries that assumed the management of foreign affairs. This image of world politics has changed during the last decades. Today nation-states are not the only diplomatic actor on international scene, and FAMs and their agencies are not the exclusive representative of government at international level as well.

a) Dispersion of Classical Functions Of FAMs on other Ministries

The monopoly of FAMs over foreign affairs has been challenged by participation of other governmental departments and ministries in conduct of foreign affairs. This dispersion of FAMs' functions takes two aspects. The first is that all ministries take part in many fields of new international relations, for instance Interior ministry (Home Office) engages in issues of international terrorism, immigration and security; Finance Ministry (Treasury Department) leads negotiation with international monetary institutions like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); Ministry of Health coordinates the efforts to promote international health with its counterparts and World Health Organization (WHO); and Ministries of Commerce and Economy play a significant role in organizing of international economy and trade, and so on.

The second aspect appears in creation some ministries -besides FAMs- that have a specific geographic or sectorial competence. Concerning ministries that have a geographic competence, they specialize in a specific area as Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa...etc.

²¹ Gordon S. Smith, "Reinventing Diplomacy: A Virtual Necessity", Virtual Diplomacy (US Institute of Peace), Serie No.6 (February 2000). Available at site web: <http://www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/publications/reports/gsmithISA99.html>

Whereas ministries that have sectorial competence are engaged in some particular issues as foreign trade, external investment, and international immigration²²; So in the world of “complex interdependence”, we can not find any ministry does not interfere in foreign affairs.

Moreover, the wide competences granted to regional and local entities, especially in developed countries, have lead them to greater involvement in matters traditionally monopolized by central governments. Some sub-national entities begin to create their own external representative agencies abroad. The most exciting example has to be note here is the experience of German Länders that have opened their representative offices in Brussels in order to influence decision-making at the EU commission and EU related institutions. The same process can be observed for non-EU countries like Switzerland whose larger provinces also opened representative offices in Brussels even though Switzerland is not an EU member state²³.

The function of coordination between all diplomatic “state actors” becomes one of the key functions of FAMs, as a result of the increasing interference of “non-foreign” ministries and other sub-national entities in foreign affairs, their growing participation in formulation and conduct foreign policy, and the escape of some foreign matters from authority of FAMs.

b) Growing Participation of NSAs in World Politics

The traditional diplomacy as defined by Sir Harold Nicolson’s treatise²⁴ focuses on dominant role of nation-state in international relations as a principal actor on international scene. Since the emergence of “Westphalian system”, classical diplomacy based on international relations only between governments, “it was a world, in short, international affairs was the

²² Participation of “non-foreign” ministries in conduct of foreign affairs appears at two levels (functional and organizational). The functional participation of “non-foreign” ministries in international relations means allowing to them to manage some parts of foreign affairs, and create their own relations with their counterparts, and concerned international organizations. These external competences recognized to “non-foreign” ministries admit them to formulate and conduct their own foreign policy, sometimes independently from FAMs. The organizational level is a result of functional participation of these ministries, whereas they set up some directions, sectors, and services to assume their external competences.

²³ Raymond Saner and Lichia Yiu, “International Economic Diplomacy: Mutations in Post-modern Times”, *Clingendael, Institute Netherlands Institute of International Relations* (January 2003). Available at: http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2003/20030100_cli_paper_dip_issue84.pdf.

²⁴ Sir Harold Nicolson had defined classical diplomacy, in his treatise, *Diplomacy*, as “the management of international relations by negotiation, the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys”.

exclusive exercise of state actors, with little, if any, room of NSAs activities”²⁵. This international context was distinguished by the dominant of *Realpolitik* theory that gives a predominant and pivotal position of nation-state in international affairs.

However, the structure of International relations has undergone major transformations, since the end of World War II. This period has witnessed the rising of new diplomatic actors (governmental and non-governmental actors), and a dramatic development of ICTs. Gordon Smith has redefined diplomacy as “the art of advancing national interests through the sustained exchange of information among government, nations, and other groups...”²⁶. The key element to be noted in this new definition is the inclusion of other actors, and the prominence given to communication²⁷.

Thus the emergence of alternative diplomatic actors within or outside the states is one of the most important aspects of contemporary international relations. The diplomatic NSAs often act independently from the ministry of foreign affairs. This new phenomenon leads some scholars to call for redefining of diplomacy as we saw above. Jan Melissen suggests that “diplomacy is defined as the mechanism of representation, communication and negotiation through which states and other international actors conduct their business”²⁸. This Melissen’s definition contains nature of contemporary international relations and diplomacy distinguished by participation of various state and non-state actors.

NSAs have influenced the agenda of international politics, and they arrived in many cases to achieve their objectives. The best example which may be noted here is the International Campaign to Ban Antipersonnel Landmines which was launched by nongovernmental organizations in October of 1992. It is worth mentioning that the success of NGOs in their task was based on a good use of new ICTs, especially the Internet.

NSAs are today attempting to present themselves as principal and alternative defenders of marginal, persecuted, and oppressed individuals and groups, so we have witnessed in the last decades a great variety of issues concern the NSAs. The role of NSAs in diplomacy is not limited

²⁵ Todd Martin, "Virtual Diplomacy", op.cit.

²⁶ Gordon Smith, "Reinventing Diplomacy: A Virtual", op.cit.

²⁷ Todd Martin, "Virtual Diplomacy", op.cit.

²⁸ Jan Melissen, *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. XVI-XVII.

in exercise some forms of international diplomacy, but they are gradually playing a major influence on foreign policy decision makers as well. So, NSAs have been recognized by UN as a principal participant in World Summits organized by it, whether in the intergovernmental preparatory processes or in the summits themselves.

Does this proliferation of non-state actors undermine the authority of states in diplomacy? Some observers have seen this growing importance of NSAs as a direct challenge to states, hence they NSAs have triggered a serious decline of states not only in formulation and conduct of domestic public politics, but in international scene also. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye have coined successfully the term of “complex interdependence” on the basis of new transnational flows to explain contemporary developments in international relations.

In despite of disagreement between all approaches that have tried to tackle the relationship between states and NSAs in this field, it is necessary to note that NSAs should not neither replace nor conflict with nation-states, but on the contrary, the state-NSAs relationship is not necessarily a zero-sum game, but it should be a creative, cooperative and complementary relationship between the two sides. Today nation-states are no longer able to solve their problem only by themselves, and they can not deal with problems such as acid rain, nuclear contamination of atmosphere, climatological changes, shortage of food, poverty, overpopulation, and insufficient natural resources²⁹.

Conclusion

All that I have noted above require an urgent reform and reorganization of current diplomatic apparatus. Any reorganizing of FAMs has to take into account the increasing participation of new diplomatic actors whether various governmental departments or NSAs in international affairs. Many of new international issues (as human rights, environment issues, protection of victims of war, and so on) are escaping from exclusive control of FAMs, thus reform of FAMs should involve NSAs in diplomatic decision-making, as a principal part of new diplomatic relations. On the other hand, the recent global changes, especially in the field of ICTs,

²⁹ Muhittin Ataman, “The Impact of Non-state Actors on World Politics: a Challenge to Nation-states”, *ALTERNATIVES, Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, Number 1 (Spring 2003), available at: www.alternativesjournal.net/volume2/number1/ataman2.htm

have challenged the way in which foreign policy is formulated and conducted, so it is necessary to integrate perfectly, rationally, and effectively new ICTs, particularly the internet, at all levels of diplomacy practices.

In short, the best and short way to apply these conclusions is the training of diplomats to interact effectively with new diplomatic actors in the international scene, and to use the new ICTs well, especially the internet, in their daily diplomatic work.

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