Diplomatic Dealings with Politicians

ALEX SCEBERRAS TRIGONA
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta

OVERCOMING HURDLES IN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATION

THE SIMPLE THEORY OF LINEAR DIPLOMACY WOULD ASSUME THAT THE diplomat is selfless and carries out his master's bidding in conveying a message or makes representations to another country's diplomat or foreign minister. There was a time when nothing else but this was expected. Instructions were to be implemented faithfully without ever interposing any interpretation, nuance, or—woe betide the diplomat—any reservations. Above all, no initiative was to be taken without prior clearance.

The real picture was and still is of course much more complex. The diplomat is constrained by bias or filters, foreign and local, deviating, disturbing, and sometimes even distorting the diplomatic process, which if pressed in the extreme, would leave the diplomat with the sole option of resignation from the foreign service.

Moreover, and in contrast to the fully-fledged diplomatic relationship, when one political sovereign met another, when a diplomat dealt with a political sovereign he operated under a severe handicap in managing a profoundly asymmetrical relationship, a handicap which could be overcome with diplomatic tact.

Whilst the PMs/FMs could decide both on strategy as well as tactics, e.g. to soften their approach, deviate from the subject matter, introduce other matters to enlarge the scope of the discussion the diplomat had to stick to his remit within a much more restricted area of manoeuvre, namely within the instructions given within an established foreign policy.

While the PMs/FMs could decide that it would be unwise to press for results there and then, the diplomat who had been specifically instructed to bring back results had to find ways and means of achieving this end with only the slightest of exceptions tolerated. So the diplomat must learn how to dance with the wolves, by generating a sufficient degree of trust without having much or hardly anything to give in return.

Modern complexities such as track-two diplomacy[1] and public diplomacy[2] operate as an additional constraint on the ordinary diplomat not only in his dealings with foreign diplomats and politicians, but also with his own headquarter's diplomats and politicians.

FILTERS

Even in normal dealings between diplomats from different countries, a number of 'filters' tend to operate to distort the diplomatic flow. Whether these 'filters' are conscious or just stemming from the unconscious, formal or informal, willed or habitual is a highly debatable theme which will not be entered into here. From a pragmatic perspective, the most important point to be made here is whether they can be avoided before harm is done to the diplomatic process.

Let us start with the 'foreign filters' and take the case of a diplomat who has served for too long a period of time in a foreign country. He inevitably becomes tainted by some of the customs and even by the ways of thinking of that country's diplomats with whom he is dealing regularly. But it is when he starts seeing so much more sense in their position, which he sees through these newly-acquired 'foreign filters' rather than in his own country's position, so much so as to affect his own performance, that he starts posing a threat to the diplomatic flow and process as a whole.

Whether or not it can be justifiably held that the other country's position is more sensible than the position of our diplomat's country is another matter. This diplomat will be seen as having turned, become

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[1] 'Stepping Out of the Tracks: Cooperation Between Official Diplomats and Private Facilitators', paper presented by Andrea Strimling, at the International Studies Association Conference, San Diego, March 2006.

[2] 'The Disintermediation of Diplomatic Communication: Propaganda, Lobbying, and Public Diplomacy', Christopher Young, Rutgers University, Newark, Anthony Deos, University of Kent at Brussels, Geoffrey Allen Pigman, Bennington College; International Studies Association, San Diego, March 2006.

tainted or overinfluenced, or having got too close to or even succumbed to the other country's mindset to such an extent that he adopts that 'foreign filter' on his remit. He would thus not be able to implement his instructions faithfully, causing 'distribution losses' in the diplomatic grid if not diplomatic gridlock! Removing him from that posting would become essential.

If this were a case of 'going soft' or becoming overawed by the other country's achievements so much so as to defer more easily to their diplomats' persuasiveness, adopting the 'foreign filter' would come out easily in the wash of official inspections or internal auditing of our diplomat's performance.

If this were the case for our diplomat and perhaps also for some member/s of his family who had been so well looked after by the receiving state as to feel compelled to see more sense in their advocacy whilst keeping quiet about it, then inspections are of no avail and it is only the normal time limit of three years which can save the diplomatic flow, hopefully before any damage ensues.

If, instead of the other country's diplomat, it is the other country's politician or even the PM or FM himself who takes our diplomat under his wing, offering him more immediate 'access' than other diplomats enjoyed—a 'nugget' which our diplomat tries to sell back home as highly significant—then if it is decided to 'buy' this nugget and keep him there, there is a corresponding risk of our diplomat having to operate in an even more non-level playing field than where the normal asymmetries apply to diplomatic dealings with politicians.

While this narrative focused on a bilateral relationship, the same applies to a diplomatic posting with a multilateral organization. The persuasive nature of the plethora of international norms advocated by international secretariats and the experts at international organizations can so convince and 'turn' our diplomat that he himself would start advocating them with Headquarters and indeed with the politicians back home instead of (or more than) advancing his own country's interests at the International Organization. That a new posting follows should not be too surprising in this case.

The effects of these 'foreign filters' can be quite different and not necessarily as obtrusive and startling as suggested. Our diplomat could just go slow on some instructions, whether consciously or even unconsciously, when judging that their implementation would uselessly irritate

the sensitivities he (and only he!) has discovered in the receiving country or organization.

Or he could also additionally start expressing his own views on the subject matter, again, whether consciously or unconsciously, to retain his own credibility. Whether and when the receiving country or organization is in a position to distinguish which part of his representations is personal and which is official is another source of 'distribution losses' in the diplomatic grid, sometimes leading to grid lock.

FLOWS

The hierarchical structure of a foreign service determines the flow of instructions downwards whilst allowing for reporting on their implementation upwards. It allows less space and time for initiatives to flow upwards for comment and/or clearance. It allows even less space and time for initiatives to be taken in diplomatic exchanges.

However for a smaller group of diplomats who operate in the main area of focus of the Foreign Minister's agenda there is usually a greater flow of ideas between diplomat and politician.

In contrast to the distorting effects exerted on our diplomat posted abroad by the prevailing influences over there such as to 'turn' him to their side and see things through their 'foreign filters', 'distribution losses' can be generated from the very start of the diplomatic process, that is even before coming into contact with the receiving country, at Headquarters itself due to 'local filters'.

Local Filters

Let us consider the distorting effect of 'local filters' to the diplomatic process. An interesting perspective on this is from what Sir Harold Nicolson had termed as the seventh great virtue of the ideal diplomatist, loyalty, coming after truth, accuracy, calm, patience, good temper, and modesty. Loyalty however was not in the singular, 'The professional diplomatist is governed by several different, and at times conflicting, loyalties.'[3]

According to Nicholson, for the diplomat accredited to a foreign capital, these include:—

[3] Nicolson, Sir Harold. *Diplomacy*, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Edition. Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1988.

1. Loyalty to his own sovereign, government, minister and foreign office;
2. Loyalty to his own staff;
3. Loyalty, or a form of it, to the diplomatic body in the capital where he resides;
4. Loyalty to the sending state's citizens in the receiving state and to their commercial interests;
5. Loyalty to the sending state's commercial interests;
6. Loyalty, or a form of it, to the government to which he is accredited;
7. Loyalty, or a form of it, to the minister with whom he negotiates.

In order to overcome these occasionally conflicting loyalties Nicolson suggests the simple answer of 'loyalty above all to the government whom [the diplomat] serves'. This goes a long way to confirm a much older and similar expression from Renaissance Diplomacy by Ermolo Barbaro, the Venetian Ambassador to Rome in 1490, who called the first duty of an ambassador 'to do, say, advise and think whatever may best serve the preservation and aggrandizement of his own state'.[4] That this traditional belief is still dominant and upheld by the classical realist Hans Morgenthau is no surprise. In his essay, 'The Moral Blindness of Man'[5] he argues thus: 'What a man would not be allowed to do for himself, that is, on behalf of his own limited interests as the ends of his action, he is allowed and even obliged to do when his act would further the welfare the state and thus promote the common good.'

So, 'raison d'état' rules, OK. Or does it not? Michael Howard had argued perhaps too cleverly that individual ethics and state interests are not incompatible. They could be examined on a two dimensional field where one co-ordinate depicted individual ethics from 0 to +10 and from 0 to −10 whilst the other co-ordinate showed state interests. Thus, he explains, movement along either co-ordinate does not effect movement along the other co-ordinate. Moving toward a state's best interest does not mean moving away from individual ethics, any more than moving toward greater morality increases a state's ability to realize its interests.[6] The obvious faults here are first that this suggests that morally questionable

[4] Ermolo Barbaro quoted in Mattingly, Garrett. *Renaissance Diplomacy*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1962.

[5] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The Moral Blindness of Scientific Man'. *International Politics*, 4th Edition, Robert C. Art and Robert Jervis (eds), New York, HarperCollins, 1996.

[6] Howard Michael, 'Ethics and Power in International Policy', *International Affairs*, July 1977, p. 364.

behavior should be acceptable even when it contradicts state interests, and second that it leaves out the many other dimensions 'filters' constraining diplomatic behavior identified here.

The point then is not whether 'raison d'état' rules or not but whether we can generate a useful teaching tool from dissecting diplomatic behavior for lessons to be learned. This is why the local and foreign 'filters' identified here from amongst the myriad of filters or loyalties can be useful. This can be especially so if applied to the functions of the diplomat as listed in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961.[7]

Other loyalties potentially adding even more potential conflicts arise due to the diplomat's inherent 'local filters' including conscience,[8] ethics,[9] religion,[10] family, tribe, commercial[11] and cultural sensitivities.

If the above list had to be characterized as negative[12] 'local filters' as disturbing or even distorting the diplomatic process, there are in contrast two great positive 'local' factors earned from avoiding 'self-satisfaction' which is strongly advised by Nicolson as it could lead first to a loss of 'adaptability' and second to a decline in 'imagination'.

Thus 'adaptability' and 'imagination' are identified as what the diplomat can profitably resort to in his unequal and even asymmetrical relationship with the Politician.

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[7] www.un.int/usa/host_dip.htm.

[8] See Abba Eban, *Interest and Conscience in Modern Diplomacy*, Fourth Morgenthau Memorial Lecture on Morality and Foreign Policy, 1985.

[9] *Ethics and Diplomacy: Contradiction in Terms?* by Sir Michael Palliser on Wednesday, 24 May 2000.

[10] *The Role of Religion in Peacemaking**, State of the Art Paper, Kristian Berg Harpviken and Hanne Eggen Røislien, For the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 2005.

* This state of the art paper is written for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the project.

'Mapping the Terrain: The Role of Religion in Diplomacy and Peacemaking'. The main component of the project was a conference, under the same title, held in Oslo 7–9 February 2005. The authors are grateful for comments on an earlier draft from Trond Bakkevig and Stein Tønnesson.

[11] See Ethics and Commercial Diplomacy, Chapter 20 available at www.commercialdiplomacy.org/manuals/manual_busgov9.htm.

[12] Current negotiating strategy teaching at the Harvard Business School similarly seeks the ability to overcome six common mistakes, according to professor James K. Sebenius. 'Six Habits of Merely Effective Negotiators,' *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 79, no. 4, April 2001.

He cites De Callières[13] who had recommended:—

'It is essential that a negotiator should be able to divest himself of his own opinion in order to place himself in the position of the Prince with whom he is negotiating. He should be able, that is, to adopt the other's personality, and to enter into his views and inclinations. And he should thus say to himself—"If I were in the place of that Prince, endowed with equal power, governed by identical prejudices and passions, what effect would my own Representations make upon myself?"'

Although the treatise goes on to condone the judicious use of flattery and even bribery, it warns against trickery as prejudicial to the confidence that an envoy must inspire.

It might be useful to assess here the major diplomatic meeting immediately after the end of the Cold War from this perspective of a diplomat dealing with a politician on war and peace, if not on the 'New World Order'. US Ambassador April Glaspie met Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on the 23rd of July, 1990. Difficult as it is to discern which of the two versions[14] of that meeting as available is true, they are both relevant

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[13] '*On the manner of negotiation with Princes; on the uses of diplomacy; the choice of ministers and envoys; and the personal qualities necessary for success in missions abroad*' 1716 Treatise, François de Callières, University Press of America 1993. An over-modern introduction has entitled it as *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes: From Sovereigns to CEOs, Envoys to Executives* by François de Callières, Charles Handy.

[14] Two unofficial versions are available on the following two web pages, there are quotations here of the relevant words. There are significant differences between the two versions: www.whatreallyhappened.com/ARTICLE5/april.html.

Saddam Hussein—As you know, for years now I have made every effort to reach a settlement on our dispute with Kuwait. There is to be a meeting in two days; I am prepared to give negotiations only this one more brief chance (pause). When we (the Iraqis) meet (with the Kuwaitis) and we see there is hope, then nothing will happen. But if we are unable to find a solution, then it will be natural that Iraq will not accept death.

U.S. Ambassador Glaspie—What solutions would be acceptable? Saddam Hussein— If we could keep the whole of the Shatt al Arab—our strategic goal in our war with Iran—we will make concessions (to the Kuwaitis). But, if we are forced to choose between keeping half of the Shatt and the whole of Iraq (i.e., in Saddam's view, including Kuwait) then we will give up all of the Shatt to defend our claims on Kuwait to keep the whole of Iraq in the shape we wish it to be (pause). What is the United States' opinion on this?

U.S. Ambassador Glaspie—We have no opinion on your Arab–Arab conflicts, such as your dispute with Kuwait. Secretary (of State James) Baker has directed me to emphasize the instruction, first given to Iraq in the 1960s, that the Kuwait issue is not associated with America (Saddam smiles).

especially in the common parts. On 2 August 1990, four days later, Saddam amassed troops to invade and occupy Kuwait. Only time will tell whether and to what extent Ambassador Glaspie lured the President to believe that no reaction whatsoever would be forthcoming from the USA if he invaded Kuwait—the whole of Kuwait.

Multilateral diplomacy then saw the highest level of diplomatic exchanges since the end of the Cold War during the consequential eight weeks leading to the 8 November 2002, passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 offering Iraq 'a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations' that had been set out in several previous resolutions (Resolutions 660, 661, 678, 686, 687, 688, 707, 715, 986, and 1284), notably to provide 'an accurate full, final, and complete disclosure, as required by Resolution 687 (1991), of all aspects of its programs to develop weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles'.

UNSC 1441 threatened 'serious consequences' if these were not met and reasserted demands that UN weapons inspectors that were to report back to the UN Security Council after their inspection should have 'immediate, unconditional, and unrestricted access' to sites of their choosing, in order to ascertain compliance. Significantly, the Resolution stated that the UN Security Council shall 'remain seized of the matter'.

Nevertheless, strong diplomatic opposition to a Second Resolution was shown by a number of members at the Ministerial Council session of the UN Security Council. This was specially convened on 7 March 2003[15] as if to emphasize the political importance they were raising the diplomatic process up to from an ordinary meeting of the UNSC. This

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www.chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/glaspie.html, *The New York Times International*, Sunday, 23 September 1990.

Glaspie—I think I understand this. I have lived here for years. I admire your extraordinary efforts to rebuild your country. I know you need funds. We understand that and our opinion is that you should have the opportunity to rebuild your country. But we have no opinion on the Arab–Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait. I was in the American Embassy in Kuwait during the late 60s. The instruction we had during this period was that we should express no opinion on this issue and that the issue is not associated with America. James Baker has directed our official spokesmen to emphasize this instruction. We hope you can solve this problem using any suitable methods via Klibi or via President Mubarak. All that we hope is that these issues are solved quickly. With regard to all of this, can I ask you to see how the issue appears to us?

[15] 'Several Security Council members call for more inspections in Iraq', UN New Centre. www.un.org/apps/news/storyAr.asp?NewsID=6387&Cr=iraq&Cr1=inspect.

opposition was particularly evident by veto holding Foreign Ministers of France, Russia, and China.

They prevented the passage of the Second Resolution authorizing the use of force. The attempt of the United Kingdom and the United States to obtain a further Resolution legitimizing/authorizing the use of force failed. They withdrew the Second Resolution. Thus, the U.S.-led invasion began without the express approval of the United Nations Security Council, and most legal authorities regard it as a violation of the UN Charter.

Several countries protested. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in September 2004, 'From our point of view and the UN Charter point of view, it was illegal.' Proponents of the war claim that the invasion had implicit approval of the Security Council and was therefore not in violation of the UN Charter. Nevertheless, this position taken by the Bush administration and its supporters, has been and still is being disputed by numerous legal experts. According to most members of the Security Council, it is up to the council itself, and not individual members, to determine how the body's resolutions are to be enforced. Despite the discovery of some potential components of WMD manufacturing, no actual weapons of mass destruction were found.

At the limit of not reconciling his conflicting loyalties, the dissenting diplomat is left with no choice but to resign. Resignations could be either due to conscience, ethics, party political loyalties, or the better governance of the state? Or due to loyalties to 'higher' principles? And if the diplomat really wanted to put his boot in and not just get out of the irreconciliable situation, he could not only be acutely aware that a resignation was giving a political advantage to the other side, but willfully carry it out, admittedly at a high cost to career and family. The resignation letters[16] of three US diplomats in connection with the Iraq war make interesting reading and beckon further analysis of how these could not be contained and broke through the diplomatic net.

MICRO/MACRO

What has been considered up to now have been the micro aspects of diplomacy. The macro aspects of diplomatic dealings with politicians

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[16] www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=25342&printerfriendlyVers=1&.

will be examined here of which the major determinant is the power of ideas, unless one cynically goes for the Defense lobby as holding the trump card.

The subject of 'Diplomatic dealings with politicians' is of course not limited to diplomats dealing with politicians but, especially at the macro level of the paradigm setting of ideas, also of thinktank strategists and academics having diplomatic dealings with politicians. Which way the flow of influence went in particular moments in time in particular countries, between on the one hand intellectuals and experts, and politicians on the other, is a most interesting relationship begging to be analysed at greater depth.

Following the end of WWII in the US hardly any diplomat could be held to have had a determining effect on politicians.[17] In essence most of these used their models and equations to please their political masters—be it with theories of containment, deterrence, limited war or flexible response except perhaps for PNAC[18] in the mid 1990s, unless this is deemed to have been a fierce reiteration of the earlier position of the Department of Defense immediately after the end of the Cold War[19] by also introducing geopolitical specifics which were bizarrely followed to the letter by 'blinded' politicians in 2003.

Perhaps the most impressive case of internal diplomatic dealings with politicians although not directly at first was that of George Kennan. But even Kennan, who as a diplomat helped craft the strategy of containment with his famous long telegram from Moscow to Headquarters in 1945[20]

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[17] Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006.

[18] 'The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing.'— Letter from PNAC principals to President Bill Clinton, reprinted in the *Washington Times*, 27 January 1998.

[19] See also, 'The Generals' Diplomacy: U.S. Military Influence in the Treaty Process, 1992–2000', by Karl K. Schonberg in *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, Winter/Spring 2002.

[20] In February 1946 the US Moscow embassy got a question from the United States Treasury asking why the Soviets were not supporting the newly created World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In response, Kennan wrote his long telegram outlining his views of the Soviets, which arrived in Washington on 22 February 1946.

and by its publication anonymously as X's article 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct' in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947, saw his influence wane quickly after.

RAND staffers who were 'scientifically oriented' developed concepts such as game theory and organizational behavior to guide strategic thinking, which had carried little weight with President Eisenhower who had an aversion to abstract theorization. Even the Air Force at that time generally ignored the RAND staffers' suggestions, unless they justified requests for military budget increases. But intellectuals came into their own with President Kennedy who brought in the 'brain trust' (later the Kennedy School of Government) to manage the Cuban Missile crisis and later took America to war under President Lyndon Johnson.

There is hardly time here to examine to what extent 'graduated escalation' constituted the sound advice boasted of by academics in proferring it to the polticians during the Cuban Missile crisis and as re-interpreted afterwards. That the formula of 'graduated escalation' was applied again in Vietnam in starkly different circumstances is a telling lesson on the limits of analogy. Treating the Vietnam war as an 'applied social science experiment' is an appalling example of how correct academic thinking in one field does not easily travel to another and so can be grossly abused by politicians in practice.

That Kissinger sought to diminish the role of ideology so that President Nixon could better manage the great power relationships (by analogy with Kissinger's studies of 19th-century Europe) and extract himself from the Vietnam war, only came into its own when America had to recognize that it had no choice but to leave Indochina. This is also telling in delineating the limits of academic influence on politicians.

All this shows that scholars advising governments have been inevitably seduced by politics. Scholars in thinktanks like RAND and the Kennedy School of Government had found it difficult to criticize their benefactors and many of their theories served merely as justifications or as scapegoats. In contrast, today the strong and unified opposition by American political scientists to the Iraq war is remarkable both as a rejection by politicians

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Among its most remembered parts was that while Soviet power was 'impervious to the logic of reason', it was 'highly sensitive to the logic of force'.

of 'expert' advice as well as proving intellectuals to be wholly ineffectual in their diplomatic dealings with the wider political arena.

Didactic Exercises via Simulations of Diplomatic exchanges.

Simple Telephone games

A. Diplomatic instructions and or Politician's messages/signaling not being understood clearly enough or even misunderstood due to:
1. losses along the bureaucratic conveyor belt
2. 'filters' local and foreign
3. posturing and masking
4. red herrings and other distractions.

Advanced Telephone games

B. Diplomatic Exchanges between diplomats and diplomats, as well as those between diplomats and politicians, not being understood clearly enough or even misunderstood partially or entirely, especially when reported upon due to:
1. attention gaps
2. nuances
3. pre-set concepts and/or mental agendas
4. lack of understanding of wider context
5. lack of understanding of public diplomacy
6. ignorance of track two channel on related themes if not altogether on the very same themes
7. triumphalist reporting.