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TIME FOR A NEW DIPLOMACY?

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This article reflects the impact of economic fallout and the coronavirus pandemic on diplomacy. The paper focuses on the current state of international relations, work of international organisations, and the tools of diplomacy. One of the aspects mentioned is digital diplomacy and how it will change the diplomacy we are used to.

Introduction

The history of diplomacy is usually dated back to the fourteenth century BC. In the earliest periods, special missions were being exchanged between ancient civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Later diplomacy changed and improved. A particularly important event that caused a change in medieval diplomacy and developments in international relations (IR) was the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. The treaty finally brought the Thirty Years' War to end and established a new system of IR based on its fundamental principles – a state's sovereignty, collective (European) security, the balance of power. In essence, it meant the birth of new rules of conduct among sovereign and "equal" states. This system survived for about three hundred years. Several key elements of diplomacy had been elaborated: resident ambassadors, secret negotiations, ceremonial duties and protocol, and professional approach to diplomacy.

In the nineteenth century, the concept of the balance of power in IR was reconstructed by Austrian chancellor Klemens von Metternich (who opposed the forces of liberalism and democratisation and defended the old

order) and was brought down by Bismarck's politics and the Franco-Prussian War (1871). European diplomacy turned into a cold-blooded game of power politics.¹

During the twentieth century, diplomacy and the world changed very quickly. A new type of diplomacy emerged after World War II. It consisted of bilateral or multilateral relationships, traditions of protocol and etiquette, and powerful international organisations as a forum for peaceful settlement of disputes and a deterrent to the waging of aggressive wars. This process opened doors for small and post-imperial states. The character of diplomatic interaction between old and new players at different levels was determined by international law as a defining part of the new world order.

Today there is a global international system with 193 member states in the UN. Global communication has become much easier and faster; humans have become more internationalised.

Digital Diplomacy

"My God, this is the end of diplomacy!" said Lord Palmerston, British prime minister

¹ H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster: New York 1994, pp. 17, 121.

and foreign secretary, after receiving the first telegraph message in the 1850s². On 04 February 1994, the first email between heads of government was sent. Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt and US President Bill Clinton couldn't have known how quickly communications would change in the near future. On that same day ten years later, Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook, which has rapidly become one of the biggest social networking sites in the world. On 21 March 2006, @jack (aka Jack Dorsey, Twitter's founder) sent the first tweet. These new platforms have become tools for digital, public, and Twitter diplomacy.

"Twitter and other social media tools are a way to abstract foreign policy from state-to-state interaction and instead 'pivot to the people,'" said Anne-Marie Slaughter, a former director of policy planning in the US State Department (2009–2011).³ These are artfully chosen words. Nowadays, when traditional diplomacy is under quarantine, the digital diplomatic realm is booming. Ministries of foreign affairs have turned to social media to communicate with stakeholders; governments have launched social media campaigns that feature their coronavirus-related activities. Digital tools have two big positive effects on real policy. They foster the exchange of ideas between policymakers and civil society. Diplomats and public servants' are using the internet to find, analyse, and manage relevant information, react to events, as well as communicate with colleagues and negotiate draft texts in electronic

format. Now all of these practical skills are important in daily diplomatic work, and there is no other way.



A new type of diplomacy emerged after World War II. It consisted of bilateral or multilateral relationships, traditions of protocol and etiquette, and powerful international organisations as a forum for peaceful settlement of disputes

The United States has cancelled at least two summits it planned to host in 2020, including the meeting of G7 foreign ministers that is now happening online. As the global crisis threatens to alter the world balance of power, NATO's top diplomats abandoned plans to meet in person; the European Union has scaled back its schedule; a major international conference on climate change in Scotland was called off, and many lower-level UN gatherings have been scrapped entirely.⁴ On 24 March 2020, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba made the first virtual visit by a foreign minister in Europe.⁵ Diplomacy at the United Nations, including in the UN Security Council, and elsewhere has now moved to phones, emails, and virtual meetings. With face-to-face meetings increasingly rare, diplomacy by teleconference and secure video has become the norm, offering easy

2 *Digital Diplomacy; E-diplomacy; Cyber Diplomacy*, DiploFoundation, 2019 [https://www.diplomacy.edu/e-diplomacy access: 19 April 2020].

3 A. Sandre, *Twitter for Diplomats: A Guide to the Fastest Growing Digital Diplomacy Tool*, DiploFoundation, 10 February 2013 [https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/twitter-diplomats-guide-fastest-growing-digital-diplomacy-tool access: 06 May 2020].

4 M. Lee, E. M. Lederer, *Global Diplomacy under the Gun in the Time of Coronavirus*, "The Associated Press", 04 April 2020 [https://apnews.com/d61a53d19d262c3cf604cec6f4e52fad access: 19 April 2020].

5 *Germany to Help to Ukrainians in Distant Countries to Return Home*, "Interfax-Ukraine", 04 April 2020 [https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/649624.html access: 22 April 2020].

outs for those unwilling or unable to engage in delicate or controversial negotiations.⁶

Particularly in the case of digital diplomacy, there are many questions regarding diplomatic protocol, etiquette, and data security of the exchange of information between parties. There are many examples of cyberattacks known for their influence on a country, especially on decision-making during elections. Virtual reality is an important part of national security. That is why platforms used in diplomatic work or online communications of a head of state or government must be protected. Effective organisation of multilateral summits and international conferences online requires not only high-tech platforms but also new methods of work.

Use of Pandemic in Diplomatic Endeavours

In the absence of in-person diplomatic discussions, some countries, such as Russia and China, seek to exploit the crisis to further weaken international institutions. Russia's disinformation is designed to sow distrust among the allies of the West. Russia drafted two UN General Assembly resolutions aimed not so much at defeating COVID-19, but more at weakening sanctions. Those attempts were blocked at the United Nations.⁷

China has been in the coronavirus disinformation game too. China's

diplomatic corps played the leading role in this campaign. "Wolf warrior' Chinese diplomats have sought to outdo each other by challenging narratives about COVID-19, while propagating disinformation about the origins of the virus," said Robin Niblett, director of Britain's Chatham House.⁸ But China's actions have done more harm than good. The Chinese diplomats used Twitter and Facebook (blocked in China) for this, and sometimes their publications were undiplomatic. In Venezuela, Chinese diplomats tweeted that the officials in Caracas should "put on a face-mask and shut up". That retort was in response to Venezuelans referring to COVID-19 as the "Chinese" or "Wuhan" virus.⁹

Analysts say the pandemic revealed China's willingness to expand its use of disinformation campaigns – previously focused on undermining pro-democracy voices in Taiwan and Hong Kong – to the wider world. As early as 2015, scholars from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies predicted that the People's Liberation Army would use Twitter to deliver propaganda to new audiences "to influence the global conversation about China".¹⁰ This and other similar cases give rise to questions about the role of diplomacy in a world where reality and the virtual sphere are combined. Political experts and data scientists are speaking about the importance of new topics on the diplomatic agenda and features of international negotiations in areas such as cross-border

6 Lee, Lederer, n4.

7 *Ukraine Blocks Another Russian Draft UN Resolution Aimed at Sanction Lift*, "UNIAN", 22 April 2020 [https://www.unian.info/politics/ukraine-blocks-another-russian-draft-un-resolution-aimed-at-sanction-lift-10969064.html access: 30 April 2020].

8 J. Dettmer, *China's 'Wolf Warrior' Diplomacy Prompts International Backlash*, "VOA News", 06 May 2020 [https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy-prompts-international-backlash access: 07 May 2020].

9 S. Bengali, A. Su, *Put on a Mask and Shut up: China's New 'Wolf Warriors' Spread Hoaxes and Attack a World of Critics*, "Los Angeles Times", 04 May 2020 [https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-05-04/wolf-warrior-diplomats-defend-china-handling-coronavirus access: 06 May 2020].


10 Ibid.

privacy, e-commerce, and international cybersecurity, to name a few. They call it “data diplomacy”.¹¹

The key will be the accuracy and reliability of the information, provided by combining all aspects of data diplomacy and science diplomacy. Any successful diplomatic mission will depend on it. The contemporary phase of globalisation, which has created an unprecedented era of technological change, has led to a revolution in communication, which requires diplomats to be cautious and fast thinkers.¹²

Information is received and sent faster than ever before. Human activities are generating large volumes of data with a big potential, especially for diplomats. Big data could benefit the fields and functions for which they are most relevant: information gathering and reporting; meeting the expectations of government service delivery (consular affairs); better understanding people’s perceptions and behaviour (communication, public diplomacy, and negotiation); tracking programmes and progress over time and space (trade and development); tracking developments over short timeframes (humanitarian affairs and emergency response); identifying new forms of evidence and accountability (international law).¹³ Countries and governments should invest in technical infrastructure, cyber protection systems, and training.

But some countries use data as a tool to influence and manage citizens’ behaviour, and try to spread it to other countries. They are using cyber force to gather intelligence, spread disinformation, or steal research. China sells large-scale surveillance in Africa and Asia. Russia uses troll armies and hacker collectives as a new face of Moscow’s international policy.¹⁴ Nowadays we see news about hacker attacks on pharmaceutical companies, medical research organisations, and universities that are working on COVID-19 vaccine development.¹⁵ This factor changes everything related to geopolitics and world economics, but it also sets a precedent for the future upgrade of international law and world organisations.



The key will be the accuracy and reliability of the information, provided by combining all aspects of data diplomacy and science diplomacy. Any successful diplomatic mission will depend on it

On the basis of this situation, diplomats should use diplomatic experience and negotiating skills to strengthen transatlantic digital policy dialogue, especially around 5G, artificial intelligence, future of the UN, and multilateral diplomacy.

11 B. R. Jacobson, K. E. Höne, J. Kurbalija, *Data Diplomacy: Updating Diplomacy to the Big Data Era*, DiploFoundation, February 2018, p. 4.

12 K. Mayer, *Open Science Diplomacy to Tackle the COVID-19 Pandemic*, S4D4C, 17 April 2020 [<https://www.s4d4c.eu/open-science-diplomacy-to-tackle-the-covid-19-pandemic/> access: 30 April 2020].

13 Jacobson et al., n11, p. 6.

14 C. Clüver Ashbrook, *From Digital Diplomacy to Data Diplomacy*, International Politics and Society, 14 January 2020 [<https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/global/article/show/from-digital-diplomacy-to-data-diplomacy-3993/> access: 05 May 2020].

15 S. Lyngaas, *State-linked Hacking Continues amid Race for Coronavirus Treatments, US and UK Agencies Warn*, “Cyberscoop”, 05 May 2020 [<https://www.cyberscoop.com/coronavirus-research-hacking-warning/> access: 06 May 2020].

Quarantine Diplomacy

In the last two years, economists and financiers have been talking about the approaching economic crisis and a global recession. But nobody could say what would be the reason behind it. The new coronavirus pandemic has become the cause. The world has changed dramatically in the three months since the last update of the *World Economic Outlook*. Countries are implementing necessary quarantines and social distancing practices to contain the pandemic, while the world has been put in a lockdown. April Fitch Ratings expects world GDP to contract by 3.9% in 2020, with contractions of 5.6% and 7% in the US and Eurozone, respectively.¹⁶ All these aspects of economic, social, and medical policy have also instantly changed diplomacy and foreign policy.



the leading place has been taken by medical diplomacy, which includes high-level negotiations between national leaders and international public health actors and their counterparts in the field, including host country officials, nongovernmental organisations, private sector companies, and the public

The global coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated that globalisation and human activity are not only about climate

change but also about the emergence of new deadly viruses. The lessons of the Ebola outbreak have not been learned by either leaders of states or international organisations. The level of health care continues to be inadequate, especially in developing countries. In this situation, the leading place has been taken by medical diplomacy, which includes high-level negotiations between national leaders and international public health actors and their counterparts in the field, including host country officials, nongovernmental organisations, private sector companies, and the public. The exchange of information on the treatment of the infected, as well as obtaining the necessary medical equipment and personal safety equipment, is an important part of diplomats' work nowadays.

A striking example of contemporary Ukrainian medical diplomacy was sending a team of Ukrainian doctors to Italy to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic and share experiences.¹⁷ Furthermore, Ukrainian planes "Mriya" and "Ruslan" owned by the state-run Antonov Airlines have been working with several countries and providing air transportation of the crucial personal protective equipment from Asia to Europe and other destinations. They include Canada, Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Kuwait, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, and the US.¹⁸ The importance of this cooperation with Ukraine during the pandemic has

16 *Coronavirus Impact: Research Highlights (Links to a Selection of Fitch Ratings' Coronavirus Content – Week Ending April 24, 2020)*, "Fitch Ratings", 24 April 2020 [<https://www.fitchratings.com/site/re/10119870> access: 27 April 2020].

17 *President Signed a Decree on the Assistance to Italy in Combating the Coronavirus Pandemic*, The Presidential Office of Ukraine, 03 April 2020 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-pidpisav-ukaz-pro-dopomogu-italiyi-v-borotbi-z-pan-60489> access: 29 April 2020].

18 C. Miller, *Trump Called Ukrainians "Terrible People". They Are Airlifting Tons of Lifesaving Medical Supplies to the US with the Biggest Cargo Planes in the World*, "BuzzFeed News", 17 April 2020 [<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/christopherm51/coronavirus-ukraine-biggest-plane-in-the-world> access: 20 April 2020].

been noted in his video speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.¹⁹

But not only Ukraine is using the time of crisis to gain political points on the international stage. Active medical diplomacy is used as a soft power in foreign policy by China, the USA, France, and Cuba. Each state has its own goals. China and the US continue to compete for world leadership, especially in Europe and in relation to the World Health Organization.

During March and April, China sent medics, masks, ventilators, and shipments of other precious protective equipment to the countries in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak. But all these actions were coupled with diplomatic request for foreign officials to praise China in public. Observers say China is embarking on “mask diplomacy” because it prefers to be seen fighting the virus around the world to suffering criticism as the country where the disease had begun. This campaign was a success in some countries, such as Serbia, Hungary, Cambodia, and others. But most leaders, experts, and medical professionals remain wary of China’s coronavirus data, and nobody has forgotten its missteps in the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak. They include suppressing early warnings and hiding information from its citizens and the rest of the world.²⁰

“China is carefully reshaping its image damaged by the outbreak, but the fact that the Chinese government delayed a timely response and led to an international crisis will make the mission almost impossible,” said Alfred Wu, associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.²¹

France and Germany make statements on the reform of WHO and try to manage the situation in the EU on their own. But in a situation prevailing in the world, the EU continues to balance between the US and China. French President Emmanuel Macron has questioned China’s virus response, telling the *Financial Times*, “There are clearly things that have happened that we don’t know about”. At that time Britain’s Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said it could not go back to “business as usual” with China.²²

As for Cuba, this country has still succeeded in playing a key role in the war against COVID-19. Havana has sent medical teams to 19 countries including Italy, Andorra, Angola, Jamaica, Mexico, and Venezuela – a total of about 900 doctors and nurses so far. The numbers are increasing. It is not a new story: For nearly 60 years, Cuba has been sending health care professionals around the world as part of a concerted campaign of medical diplomacy.²³

19 Ukraine Helps NATO Fight COVID-19, “Corona24.news”, 15 April 2020

[<https://www.corona24.news/c/2020/04/15/ukraine-helps-nato-fight-covid-19.html> access: 20 April 2020].

20 A. Ma, *China Is Attempting to Win Political Points from the Coronavirus with ‘Mask Diplomacy’ – But It Mostly Isn’t Working*, “Business Insider”, 18 April 2020 [<https://www.businessinsider.nl/analysis-china-coronavirus-political-points-mostly-not-working-2020-4/> access: 23 April 2020].

21 K. Zhai, H. Wu, *Virus Diplomacy: As Outbreak Goes Global, China Seeks to Reframe Narrative*, “Reuters”, 06 March 2020 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-diplomacy-an/virus-diplomacy-as-outbreak-goes-global-china-seeks-to-reframe-narrative-idUSKBN20T14C> access: 18 April 2020].

22 D. Kang, *China’s Diplomats Show Teeth in Defending Virus Response*, “The Associated Press”, 18 April 2020 [<https://apnews.com/11356a590ecee0572545b3ffb7de0d5b> access: 19 April 2020].

23 T. Fawthrop, *Cuba’s Improbable Medical Prowess in Asia*, “The Diplomat”, 24 April 2020 [<https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/cubas-improbable-medical-prowess-in-asia/> access: 26 April 2020].

Currently, global health programmes continue to ascend the political agenda in scale and influence. Countless new initiatives offer open data sources, collecting information from various sources: The Human Coronaviruses Data Initiative, for example, collects patented knowledge about the virus; Wikimedians pool all COVID-19-relevant information and resources in Wikidata; the Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering shares the collected data in Github; the OECD collects open data sources; the Virus Outbreak Data Network of the Go Fair Initiative develops standards and makes recommendations for infrastructures. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a major test for our science, economic, political, and international system, and humanity. The world must unite the existing initiatives and accelerate the exchange of needed information and support science diplomacy to help address the current crisis.

When the pandemic eases and some restrictions are removed, world leaders should discuss ways to live in a new world, ways of reforming WHO, and border crossing protocols.

Diplomats play an important role now and will be important in the future, as each country will strive to ensure security from future similar crises and to preserve the rights of its citizens to cross the borders of other states freely, in accordance with current international agreements. The new criteria for global health programmes will depend not only on qualified doctors and

experts but also on the international policies of the countries, which can be leaning towards protectionism. This is especially important for countries where international trade makes up a large share of the economy.

Conclusion

Global lockdown has expedited the digital transformation process of social life and the work of diplomacy and government. Theory is being put into practice, and this provides the framework that will determine our future. Health issues have become increasingly preeminent in the evolving global diplomacy agenda. More leaders are thinking about how to structure and utilise diplomacy and science in pursuit of global health goals.

Diplomacy is a conservative substance, which changes as societies develop. History suggests that changes in diplomacy always happen eventually, but it offers no guidance on how those will unfold or how long it will take. COVID-19 has prompted reactions similar to that of Lord Palmerston, but this is not the end of diplomacy. This is the time to adjust to a new reality.

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