

THREE FACES OF DIPLOMACY

We Fail to Recognize What a Diplomat Really Is

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At no time before has there been such a need to clarify the purposes and meanings of American diplomacy. The survival of our nation, and of the broader civilization of which it is a part, depends in large measure upon the skills and arts of diplomacy—upon constant negotiation and communication both with the totalitarian world and with the rest of the free world. For a long time to come we must reassess the adequacy of the tools of our foreign policy, measuring them against the complex tasks which they must perform, and the great goals toward which they should be directed.

It has seemed to me that for some time our judgments about the effectiveness of American diplomacy have vacillated among three distinct, although inter-related, conceptions. These three images of diplomacy have simultaneously played upon our diplomacy in practice; from each of them have flowed criteria to govern the education and training of our professional diplomats. There has been a continuing tension among them, aggravated by stresses of the dangerous environment of world politics within which our foreign policy operates. Our failure clearly to distinguish these three “faces” of diplomacy, in recent times, may have caused considerable public uncertainty and anxiety about the conduct of our foreign policy. At times, the difficulty of portraying accurately for the broader American public these three faces, this trinity of functions, has created misunderstanding between the policymaker and the public upon which he ultimately depends. Our foreign policies on recent occasions have been gravely imperilled by this misunderstanding, and the caliber of our Foreign Service may well have been impaired.

Many of us probably tend to conceive of diplomacy in the classical sense, as a profession or art essentially concerned with negotiation—the art which seeks to reconcile differences with stranger or adversary or which protects or advances the inter-

ests of one's own nation by means of argument, conciliation and agreement. For this reason, the profession of diplomacy has been distinct from other instrumentalities of foreign policy. Since the primary task of the diplomat has been this search for agreement and settlement, he is different from the warrior or soldier. In more comfortable eras, when times of war were more easily separable from times of peace, war was the time of the warrior; peace, the time of the diplomat. When diplomacy failed or ceased, the warrior took over. Thus the diplomat was the messenger of peace.

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Diplomacy in the West, therefore, has been regarded as a defined occupation. The diplomats, classically, have been seen as members of an international profession, few in number, occupationally habituated to each other. At a time when an aristocratic Europe dominated world politics, they were recruited also from the same kind of cultivated social milieu, and partook of a common way of life. They seemed to speak a common language, and even to entertain the same cultural values. Regarding themselves as professionals, they understood each other; and amongst them developed a rigorous code of behavior within which to conduct their business. If the language of diplomacy often seemed to make a virtue of imprecision and circumlocution, there was nevertheless precision in imprecision. A common language of courteous imprecision could make possible precise understandings which might have been impossible for amateurs to achieve.

Perhaps much of our contemporary trouble in redefining the meaning of diplomacy results from the social and political revolutions of our own time. Diplomacy once was narrowly defined as “the art of negotiating with princes.” Today no such narrow and exclusive definition is possible. Traditional systems of politics have collapsed; technological developments in communications have enhanced the ability of nation-states to penetrate the core of for-

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eign political societies. The subject matter of negotiations has been enlarged, as has been the realm within which negotiation takes place. The traditional Western conception of diplomacy has been blurred, also, by the fact that, in an era of "no peace, no war," there now exists an intimate relation between military power and diplomacy. The distinction between warrior and diplomat, between statesman and diplomat, has become very greatly blurred.

Perhaps the chief reason for the blurring of the traditional meaning of diplomacy arises from the fact that we live in an age of popular sovereignty. Diplomacy once was regarded as the art of negotiation between sovereigns or their representatives; but what happens when the "people" are sovereign? The art of diplomacy then gives way to the art of "overseasmanship." Mass democracy, nationalism and revolution transform diplomacy into an all-embracing process of cultural relations: "Every man his own diplomat." Tourists, itinerant scholars, businessmen, poets, soil chemists and overseas housewives—all of them, when abroad, become diplomats.

In this connection, there has emerged a new concept of diplomacy itself. Let us call this "populist diplomacy." For in essence it asserts that the diplomatic profession should conform to, and should express, the egalitarian and democratic values of America. This concept of diplomacy has stressed the need for representation. In fact, it has often stretched the meaning of representation to suggest that diplomacy as a profession should accurately mirror the values of the national society itself. Not only should the diplomatic service exemplify, in its workings, the procedural values of American democracy—open diplomacy, public diplomacy, "truthful" diplomacy—it should also represent, with sociological accuracy, the egalitarian qualities of American society itself. Unless a sociological identity between a diplomat and his own national culture could be made to appear as the "mirror-image" of his nation, a prototype of the *homo Americanus*, a gulf would open between the foreign policy elite and the "man in the street" at home.

Expediency suggested this necessity, but it has not been expediency alone which has impressed upon many Americans the need for "representative" diplomacy. There has also been, at times, a deep popular demand that the diplomatic service should present abroad an undistorted and favorable image of the real America back home. In this was reflected an optimistic belief that, were a favorable image to get through to the broad masses of people abroad, it could impress upon them the unique genius of

American culture—its egalitarianism, friendliness, democratic unsophistication and optimism. This "image" of America might optimally work certain messianic purposes abroad, encouraging in the mind of the foreigner a faith in the kinds of democratic conditions which could bring forth this culture; minimally, it would dispel erroneous notions of what America was "really like."

This populist concept of diplomacy sharply contrasted with the concept of professional diplomacy which had evolved through centuries of Western practice. The European canons of diplomacy had stressed certain uniform, general criteria for the "character" of the diplomat, irrelevant to the unique national culture which he represented. This populist claim was particular and ideological. The Western profession of diplomacy had required certain homogeneous qualities: linguistic expertise, adherence to quite supra-national social customs, negotiatory precision, circumspection and politeness, and a cast of mind which, as Harold Nicolson once said, occupationally was trained to see politics and political issues in shades of grey rather than black and white. The "populist" diplomat, if selected for his cultural and ideological representativeness, might well be chosen whether he had these qualities or not.

The tension in American diplomacy between populist and professional criteria has posed certain troublesome issues. While it has considerably lessened in the past few years, it is by no means clear that the lessening itself has produced for us a more effective caste of diplomats. Until the second World War, the American Foreign Service, in a sociological sense, was quite unrepresentative of American "culture" as a whole. America was multi-ethnic and the Foreign Service was predominantly Protestant Anglo-Saxon. America was transcontinental and the Foreign Service was largely recruited from the Eastern seaboard; America was culturally "Main Street," the Foreign Service was cosmopolitan, urban and college-educated. In a nation which traditionally had little need for diplomatic skills, the old Foreign Service was often criticized both for its unrepresentativeness and for possessing the very cultural attributes which enabled it harmoniously to mesh with the broader international profession of which it was a part.

The sharp cutting edge of populism has been softened by time. The parochialisms in American life which gave rise to it are beginning to dry up; if once the American diplomat was suspected of

being un-American and "aristocratic," we should bear in mind that America's recent rise to great power has blunted the traditional populist animosity to European "culture"—an animus which initially came from a deep sense of isolation and inferiority. The sharp lines which once separated wealthy Eastern quasi-aristocracy from the broader public have been blurred by significant cultural changes, by a softening of class lines, since World War II. If the American diplomat was once suspected of "un-American intellectualism" we should remember the great increase in prestige of the "life of the mind"—partly a consequence of the persistent infusion of higher education into American life. Finally, and particularly, we should bear in mind that during the past two decades the "sociological" character of American diplomacy has been greatly altered by the numerical expansion of the Foreign Service and the rapid infusion of new cultural elements. The Service, after the 1947 reform and its recent Wristonization, mirrors American society more accurately than ever before.

A certain subtler price may have been exacted of our diplomacy precisely because of this sociological democratization. It well might be worth asking whether the new and more "egalitarian" modes of selection and examination have been accompanied by a lowering of intellectual standards and a diminishing of important subject-matter training. At the University of California, the most intellectually promising students in history and the social sciences rarely bother to take the Foreign Service examination. The Service as a career, I think, does not possess much intellectual appeal. If the quality of American professional diplomacy is to match or surpass that of our Cold War adversaries, we should attract the best students our colleges produce. Yet we might ask what enticements might be devised to overcome the reluctance of so many of them to go into the kind of career which diplomacy offers.

Surely there is no financial attractiveness in our academic way of life; yet one of its most attractive qualities lies in the immediate opportunity which the university gives to young scholars to quickly "become" what they want to become. From the outset, an academic career pulls young men into the very heart of the profession itself; at the outset they can teach, create, think and write. Can the diplomatic profession offer the same climate for creativeness at the early stages of a man's career? Possibly not; by its very nature the Foreign Service is a rungged ladder; the lower the rungs, the more routine the work; only in the higher levels do opportunities for important "challenges" come.

A final note on the "sociology" of diplomacy. It may be that we have paid a subtle price in order to augment the number of our Foreign Service officers and to open the career to broader strata of our society. We are now seeing a gradual "withering away" of the older, more "aristocratic," affluent and prestigious Foreign Service leadership: the professional diplomats who began their careers in the first years of the Rogers Act of the 1920's—the so-called Ivy League generation of diplomats like Joseph Grew and George Kennan. One should be careful not to be nostalgic about such matters, but let me point out one problem. Whatever the caliber and qualities of this older generation, the fact that they were recruited from more affluent and prestigious zones of American life gave to them greater personal resources for forceful dissent, for exercising greater independence of judgment than may be available now to younger diplomats who spring from modest, middle-class origins.

For most of our newer diplomats, the profession itself is a whole life; their success and advancement of necessity are totally involved in their bureaucratic career. Whatever benefits may have come about in our Foreign Service and diplomacy from its democratization, we should bear in mind the possible price paid to achieve them: the price of "company town" conformity. In older times when diplomacy could be both profession and avocation there were at least particular conditions which facilitated expressions of independent judgment. In Senator McCarthy's time, we recall that it was these older, conservative (if you like) Foreign Service officers, men of some private means, who most effectively stood up to the demands for ideological conformity and who, throughout that reign of terror, maintained standards of independent judgment which were to their everlasting credit.

Let me now turn to what might be called the "third face" of American diplomacy. I have mentioned the professional-traditionalist and populist images, but this one might be called, for want of a more appropriate word, the "other-directed" face of diplomacy. It is frequently evoked when we speak of the criteria for excellence and effectiveness of our diplomats today. While the professional-traditionalist image stressed the technical, negotiatory competence of the diplomat and while the "populist image" of the diplomat demanded that in some degree he reflect the national culture which he represents, this third image has demanded or suggested that the diplomat effectively and har-

moniously "integrate" into the foreign environment in which he happens to find himself.

The reasons for our heightened sensitivity to this third criterion of diplomacy are not hard to find. There are today more than twenty-five thousand civilian Americans engaged in overseas work which, either directly or indirectly, bears significantly upon our national purposes. In addition to them there are the growing number of Americans who every year travel abroad. Even if a very few of these Americans were engaged in work which arose from purposeful American foreign policies, it would still be true that the sheer mass of them creates, for the United States, a baffling "public relations" problem. The limitless variety of activities in which they participate brings them into continuous contact with nearly every aspect of life in the foreign cultures in which they live. What they try to do, how "what they do" is locally perceived and judged, reflect upon the larger context of American foreign policy. No one could any longer argue that our diplomats abroad should be sent merely for their technical competence alone, or for the accurate "images" of American life which they might embody.

Yet it is not merely the growing mass of overseas Americans which creates this problem for us. There has been a growing uncertainty in this country about the breadth and depth of the institutional and cultural context within which our "diplomacy" should take place, and a heightened awareness of the psychological and anthropological dimensions of human encounters. Finally, there has been a growing uncertainty about the broader purposes which should inform our diplomats. Each of these sensitivities has complicated our task of establishing "criteria" for effective diplomats and representatives abroad. Each of them has made us only more sensitive to the "public relations" aspect of encounters.

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These are problems of living in a pluralistic universe, where older canons of a universal culture seem, in our time, to have been swamped by successive waves of nationalist revolutions. But let me mention a crucial aspect of this problem of the "other-directed" diplomat: the problem of the broader purposes which should inform him.

Harlan Cleveland of Syracuse University has described the contemporary role of the overseas American as that of "institution-building." The task of "overseasmanship," to him, should be that of encouraging the development of political and economic institutions consonant with the values of our free

world. Nowhere is this task more important than in underdeveloped countries; there, the free Western world confronts the totalitarian world in a struggle for loyalty and control. In such a context, the diplomat finds the institutions of the local society to be changing—transient, plastic, possibly susceptible to directed change. Here he finds, too, others at work to force change in directions antithetical to Western values. Under these circumstances, should the diplomat be chosen for manipulative and managerial skills suitable to such vast, revolutionary tasks? In particular, should he not be able to do more effectively what his historical antagonist, the Communist diplomat, is seeking to do? And if this is the case, are the older conventions of diplomacy suited at all to such new enterprises?

What strikes me as perhaps most characteristic of this third image of diplomacy is the stress which many persons today have placed upon adaptiveness, and "other-directedness." These qualities, as David Riesman once pointed out in another context, may be valuable for some circumstances, but may not be valuable at all if they are cultivated at the expense of a certain inner autonomy of mind and character. An "other-directed" diplomacy, absorbed with "what other people are thinking," with environmental harmony, with being all things to all men, might paralyze an inner capacity for judgment and purposefulness essential to many forms of diplomatic work.

I have not sought to suggest any particular criteria which might be employed to strike a balance among these three conceptions of diplomacy. Yet I would hope that these remarks might be useful if only to suggest that no uniform criteria for the selection and training of our diplomats can be obtained. We are still, I think, suffering from the experiences of the McCarthy era, when attempts were made to put our overseas diplomats in a strait-jacket of ideological and behavioral conformity. Perhaps one danger of conformity which we face today, when the ideological pressures are off, is the danger of pedestrianism, the by-product of a system of diplomatic training and selection which—attempting to mould men into conceptual categories of effectiveness in a highly confused world—stresses artificial formulae at the expense of human diversity. The art of diplomacy cannot be forced into a mould determined by transient concerns; it can never be merely the science of administration, negotiation or messianic persuasion. And since it cannot conform to these things alone, neither should its practitioners.