

THE DECLINE OF DIPLOMACY

Have Traditional Methods Proved Unworkable in the Modern Era?

Josef Korbel

It is the contention of this article that general rules of diplomatic conduct have been neglected and to a dangerous extent even abandoned; that democracy is ill-equipped to face Soviet diplomacy effectively; and that democracy has failed to exploit new diplomatic opportunities among the nations of Latin America, Africa and Asia. In order to present this thesis more fully—and to defend it—three aspects of modern diplomacy are offered for consideration: one, its general rules; two, the relative strengths and weaknesses of a democracy's diplomatic methods vis-a-vis Soviet diplomatic methods; and three, the Western powers' diplomatic opportunities toward the non-Communist world.

It should be stated at the outset that I am not here concerned primarily with foreign policy but with one of its instruments, diplomacy. It goes without saying that even the best tools cannot produce quality goods from faulty materials, that no diplomacy can turn into success a poorly conceived foreign policy, just as inept or blundering diplomacy would make a shambles of the most attractive political idea.

Diplomacy has been in general defined as an activity—or, as the case may be, an absence of activity—which endeavors to foster national interests by peaceful means. Such an activity, studied and practiced in Western society for more than two thousand years, evolved certain basic rules, applicable to any circumstance and period, so that one might speak about a certain body of thoughts, about a theory of diplomacy. Common to all traditional diplomacy were certain values and procedures.

The tactful pursuit of instructions, for example, was considered a basic prerequisite of a successful mission. Honesty of presentation, even of a dishonest proposal, established a certain trust in the integrity of the negotiator. Patience helped to heal the scars of emotional eruptions. A thorough knowledge of the negotiated question and of the problems of the interested parties created an atmosphere of understanding. Good manners kept diplomats within the confines of decency and prevented them from giving rein to less refined expressions of private opinions, thus never allowing the main purpose of negotiations to be obscured by poor taste. Good

will, and the honest desire to reach an agreement, were taken for granted. That negotiations should ever be conducted in order *not* to solve a dispute was not even considered. In traditional diplomacy, no premature publicity to complex negotiations marred purposeful, impassionate exchange of views and the quiet search for solutions.

These and other principles of the technique of diplomacy grew out of a centuries-old tradition which resulted from numberless lessons drawn from successes as well as from failures. They were embodied in a code of diplomacy, unwritten though it was, and were practiced with satisfying results in the century preceding World War I. Though no attempt is made here to deny the validity of the conviction that new times demand new diplomatic avenues, neither should we assume the wisdom of the obliteration of these less spectacular methods, tested by generations of seasoned practitioners.

• The modern diplomatic world has trespassed much too frequently against these basic rules of diplomacy and one is compelled regretfully to add that the sin cannot be attributed exclusively to its Communist sector.

Decency has been all too often replaced by public insults. When, for example, Nicolas I of the Czarist Empire addressed Louis Napoleon, "Friend," instead of using the standard form, "Brother," the distinction brought a cold rebuff from Paris. Today, a head of one government may call the president of another a criminal and the only recourse to dignity in such episodes is to ignore such outbursts of vulgarity. However, the consequence of such outbursts is the destruction of the basic condition of diplomatic negotiations, namely mutual respect. Nor does it encourage a confidential exchange of views if a microphone is concealed in the office of an ambassador, or if a spy is discovered in a responsible position in the international organization.

It is equally lamentable if the demand for appropriate knowledge sinks to such a low point that an ambassador-designate does not know the name of the Prime Minister of the country to which he is to be accredited. Neither, may I suggest, does military achievement guarantee thorough acquaintance with the multitudinous problems of one's own country.

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It is not entirely facetious to express some regard for the meticulously dressed diplomats of the old school, for there seems to be some connection between shirt-sleeve diplomacy and taking off one's shoe and pounding the desk with it at an international conference. Perhaps the most depressing aspect of such calculated and unprecedented incidents is that it would not even occur to any participant in such an august assembly to leave the hall demonstratively. But, of course, if negotiations are conducted in order to confuse, to frighten, to conceal, to shock, rather than to reach an agreement, then one can expect anything but the most significant aspect of diplomacy, namely good will.

Last but certainly not least, one can view only with grave concern the practical implementation of Wilson's principle of "open covenants openly arrived at." This principle has itself been grossly misunderstood, but what is more disconcerting is that it has been replaced by a diplomacy of "open vulgarity openly unopposed." It is now crystal clear that one cannot expect a positive result from negotiations which are conducted under the scrutiny of thousands of eyes and ears in a world determined to turn any international negotiation into party politics, imbued with passion and the struggle for power.

Any real estate agent who planned a transfer of property would laugh at the suggestion of keeping his competitors publicly informed about the progress of his negotiations. However, in matters of paramount national interest the ludicrousness suddenly becomes a seriously uttered shibboleth of such nonsense as that "the taxpayer must know all." Of course, the taxpayer is entitled to be kept informed in a general way about the subject and the progress of international negotiations; he has the right to be acquainted with, and to approve of, all details of a settlement because he may have to pay its price not only with his own money but even with his own life. But it is a confusion of substance with formula if an ill-understood principle of democracy endangers the very purpose of negotiations, i.e., to maintain or strengthen the position of the citizen within the context of a collective national interest.

The hard and realistic fact is that where there is the good will to achieve the solution of a problem there is no insistence on public diplomacy; and where there is public diplomacy there is in all probability also an intent not to achieve settlement. When I had the privilege of participating at the Paris Peace Conference, in the summer of 1946, and presiding over the Economic Commission for the Balkan countries and Finland, many complex issues were debated publicly for days without any hope of an agreement. However, if at a private conversation with representatives of big powers, terms of a solution could be established, the Commission then sailed smoothly. If such a conversation confirmed a deep cleavage of opinion, the matter was

left for decision to the Foreign Ministers of the four big powers, but the Commission was at least spared repetitious speeches, recriminations, and bitterness.

There is without doubt a place for diplomacy by conference, or parliamentary diplomacy, as it is called, but if even the official and highest representative of parliamentary diplomacy, that great statesman, the late Dag Hammarskjold, called for giving the proper role to private diplomacy, as he did a short time before his tragic death, it is clear that we should give more consistent and determined consideration to this diplomatic procedure which is more conducive to the very purpose of diplomatic activities, the peaceful solution of international disputes.

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The same serious attention should be devoted to the question of summit and personal diplomacy. In the past, heads of state met on rare occasions only, and when they did it was to manifest to the world in a formal way a community of interests embodied in some kind of treaty or convention which had been carefully pre-negotiated. They would hardly meet to solve a conflict which diplomatic representatives or their foreign ministers had failed to settle. It is difficult to comprehend, after so many disappointing instances, the wisdom of the various appeals for President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev to meet and discuss problems which have defied solution at lower levels and even previous summit conferences.

Besides, there is such a thing as a law of diminishing returns applicable to diplomacy by summitry. According to one source (Elmer Plischke), Theodore Roosevelt was the first American President to travel abroad officially; Presidents Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover each made one such trip. World War II necessitated immediate decisions and Franklin D. Roosevelt's several journeys, and once the dam was opened there followed a flood of official visits by Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and now, it seems, also by President Kennedy, even though the apparent absence of dramatic war-time urgency would invite less spectacular and more quietly persistent peace efforts. On the other hand, while a visit by a head of state to Washington used to be a rarity, during President Eisenhower's administration, for example, no less than 109 heads of state or government made the pilgrimage to the capital—a fact which itself weakened the envisaged uniqueness of such a visit.

Similar misjudgments have been apparent in the belief in the effectiveness of personal diplomacy. When decisions were in the hands of individuals, when kings were their own foreign ministers, they could conceivably also be their own ambassadors; their personal qualities and skills could facilitate settlement of disputes. Personal charm could help

even if the head of state was limited to the role of constitutional monarch. But one hastens to add that even great charm is not able to reverse an unfavorable trend if there are not some other more substantial considerations to pave the way.

When President Kennedy paid a visit to France last spring, the Parisians, skeptical and critical as they are, commented loudly that "*Jacqueline était très jolie*," and the President of the U.S. wittily introduced himself as the husband of Mrs. Kennedy. Nevertheless, in spite of Parisian fascination with Jacqueline, President de Gaulle remained as adamant in regard to French political attitudes as he had been before the visit.

This leads us to a second aspect of our consideration. The expectation that the power of personal persuasion at top levels may change the course of Soviet foreign policy emanates from a misconception of its motivation, ideological background, and inherent methods. A vast amount of evidence points to the erroneous nature of such thinking. The brilliant German ambassador to Moscow during the Weimar Republic, Brockdorff-Rantzau, succumbed to this illusion in his dealings with Chicherin. President Benes of Czechoslovakia built the future of his country upon the crumbling foundation of Stalin's friendly posture. President Roosevelt cherished the thought that peace would be won if only he could convince Stalin of the sincerity of American intentions. In spite of profound disappointments in the past, voices continue to insist that the reasonable, even humane Nikita Khrushchev is open to arguments through personal contacts.

The environment of contemporary diplomacy in regard to the Soviet Union should be reiterated. Soviet diplomacy has renounced all of the basic attributes of the constructive conduct of international negotiations. If workable relations among nations depend on the sincerity of agreements and on at least a slight modicum of mutual confidence, the Soviet diplomacy has destroyed both, following Lenin's dictum that a "peace treaty is merely a piece of live maneuvering." If the policy of a democracy presupposes respect for and tolerance of other nations' attitudes, Communist ideology orders intolerance and disrespect. If personal integrity is a material quality of what might be called a code of diplomatic ethics, Communist leaders have imbued their representatives with a different principle—the principle that "Communist morality is the morality which serves [the proletariat's] struggle."

Since its inception in November 1917, the Soviet regime has advocated a policy of open diplomacy and published all secret treaties signed by the Czar. Since the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations, which, they admit themselves, they used as a most effective platform for Communist propaganda, down to the

last session of the United Nations General Assembly, they have insisted on public diplomacy. The advocacy of this principle did not prevent them from signing secret treaties with Nazi Germany and negotiating numerous agreements in secrecy. For instance, none of the treaties of alliance which Moscow signed with other Communist countries had been even mentioned publicly before their text became known on the day of signature. Nor do we have any way of knowing whether secret protocols have been attached to them.

Putting mass media to full and specific use in achieving certain political effect, the Soviet government has exploited adroitly the principle of freedom of expression so cherished by the democratic world. Khrushchev has granted extensive interviews to publicists in this country and for years his almost daily utterances, whether on a Party occasion, or an official statement, or just a remark at a reception, have been quoted in the press all over the United States. The reverse record is meager.

It is apparent that democracies are at a disadvantage with totalitarian regimes, that their diplomacy is not, nor can it be, as effective as Communist diplomacy which acts as it pleases, quickly or slowly, openly or secretly, bound by one consideration only—the effectiveness of its action. This is the price democracies pay at a conference table without being able to ask for any compensation. They are committed to certain ethics which they must preserve if they wish to remain faithful to themselves. The perennial dilemma of free men, of a free country's diplomacy, is how effectively to shield their fundamental value, freedom, from the relentless onslaught of totalitarianism without, in the process of that defense, destroying this very same value.

The difficulty of democratic diplomacy is not of recent date. More than two thousand years ago, Demosthenes pointedly warned the democracy of Athens of the same peril. He stated, "Ambassadors have no battleships at their disposal, or heavy infantry, or fortresses; their weapons are words and opportunities. In important transactions opportunities are fleeting; once they are missed they cannot be recovered. It is a greater offense to deprive a democracy of an opportunity than it would be thus to deprive an oligarchy or an autocracy. Under their system, action can be taken instantly and on the word of command; but with us, first the Council has to be notified and adopt a provisional resolution, and even then only when the heralds and the ambassadors have sent a note in writing. Then the Council has to convene the Assembly, but then only on a statutory date. Then the debater has to prove his case in face of an ignorant and often corrupt opposition; and even when this endless procedure has been completed, and a decision has been come to, even more time is wasted before the necessary financial resolution can be passed."

Most of Demosthenes' statement would serve as a current critique of the American political scene as it hamstringing its diplomatic arm. Think of the endless hearings before various committees of Congress, the debates before the Appropriations Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee, of opposition inspired by party politics; add to this the multitude of voices proclaiming foreign policy, from the legitimate voice of the President and Secretary of State to the less legitimate pronouncements of generals and the much misunderstood but frequent statements by Congressmen, and you have a picture of a truly vigorous, and obviously free, democracy—but also of a badly crippled, ineffective diplomacy.

When this scene is multiplied by scores in the company of other sovereign states, one must be really pleasantly surprised that chaos has not reached babylonian proportions and that coalition diplomacy has not quite reached the point of total ineffectiveness. Take, for example, the various councils of the fifteen NATO nations. Each has the right to be consulted about every move concerning the alliance, each has the right of veto, most of them have their own parliaments with their own committees, though perhaps none of them so prolific and inquisitive as their American brethren. How can one reasonably expect an effective performance of a coalition diplomacy in the Berlin crisis when Macmillan must keep a vigilant eye on Hugh Gaitskell; when de Gaulle dreams of the "grandeur of France" undisturbed by the reality of the pettiness of Western diplomacy; when Turkish "democracy" displays the repugnant spectacle of political vendetta; when Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt are engaged, under clouds of war, in a carefree contest of popularity.

We could never want this privilege abandoned, no more than the rest of our democratic privileges. However, we are examining, not the blessings of democracy, but the problems of coalition diplomacy in the face of totalitarian diplomacy which has no need to seek agreement among its members nor spontaneous support of its populace, which speaks with one powerful voice. The voice is harsh, like a wind sweeping across the desert. Against it is raised a cacophony of voices, without a conductor, each reading from a different score. Such is the product of a democratic alliance which, though engaged in the defense of its very existence, still insists on the preservation of the absurdity of the complete sovereignty of its members. A coalition diplomacy, so enamored of this insistence on the sovereign independence of its members and working, as Niebuhr put it, at "cross-purposes of freedom," may one day face the situation when the other party will cross out both its purpose and its freedom.

Some obstacles to an affirmative diplomacy cannot be removed as long as democracy remains democratic, and as long as it is engaged in a contest with

the diplomacy of an authoritarian state. But some unhelpful democratic practices are of our own making and their adjustment to the exigencies of our perilous times may not weaken but solidify democracy's posture. There is, for example, the institution of weekly presidential conferences, an *unicum* the democratic world over, at which professional journalistic excellence is measured by the degree of inquisitive and indiscreet questions. It is, of course, a sheer delight for students of international relations to be able to read the verbatim records of such conferences, but to the skillful analyst in Moscow such texts serve, in addition, as a precious indicator and guide for its own diplomatic strategy.

Nor is it easy, for example, to comprehend the usefulness of publicizing the differences between Paris, London and Washington as to whether and when to open negotiations with the Soviet Union on the Berlin crisis. Nor can one grasp the wisdom of those now frequent interviews, granted by diplomatic representatives whose prime virtue once was their ability to remain silent. One is impressed by the unparalleled quality of a newspaper which publishes "all the news that's fit to print," to the point that even officials of the Department of State sometimes learn for the first time from its pages certain "confidential" information on the state of world affairs. However, there are other quarters which can turn this privilege of democracy into an effective weapon of totalitarian diplomacy.

There is a close nexus between an effective diplomacy and a sense of responsibility on the part of mass media; but there may be even a closer connection between an effective diplomacy and discreet governmental officials. The greater is the latter, the more effective is the first, and vice versa.

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Certainly, the Soviets cannot be blamed for these and other shortcomings of our democracy and their ill effect on our diplomacy. These are rather the products of a political atmosphere for which our own mode of life is largely responsible. There is vast space for improvement which no Soviet move, no Soviet intrigue can prevent.

The same is perhaps true of the West's diplomatic tools toward the non-Communist world. Too frequently we are inclined to see a Communist hand in those disruptive events in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America which mar the West's constructive efforts. We must recognize that some of these efforts will continue to run into obstacles which even the most effective diplomacy cannot remove in the foreseeable future.

Until recently, world peace depended upon the position of a few big powers which had the power to impose their concerted will, if they wished to do it, on small countries and large colonial areas. It was not a just peace but it made the diplomats' work

much easier. Today, when the vast number of diplomatic contacts is illustrated by the presence of over one hundred independent states in the United Nations, the mechanism of old diplomacy must be discarded. The trouble is, however, that we have so far failed to replace it by new devices which would fit the current situation and demands. Powerful social currents sweep across continents and no diplomacy is capable of keeping abreast of them. Nationalism, with all its libertarian spirit, frequently produces destructive and irresponsible forces which no diplomatic skill can arrest. Anti-colonial frenzy, as understandable as it is, decries reason, and uncontrollable emotions prevail over arguments. Even the remarkable record of a phased withdrawal—voluntary or enforced—by the colonial powers from colonial territories gives little satisfaction to the impatient and passionate leaders who dream about transforming their nations overnight from the darkness of primitivism to the light of modern society. Such leaders inadvertently facilitate the work of somber forces which are ready to impose a colonial rule that in many aspects surpasses anything known to the history of colonialism. On the other hand, a tenacious insistence on old forms of colonial exploitation by some countries which prefer to ignore the irresistible march of nationalism makes a peaceful change much more difficult, if not impossible. In both cases, responsibility rests with those who wield power, and diplomacy itself is called upon to display its faculties in a rather limited capacity indeed.

Nevertheless, even in this situation of social upheavals, nationalist fervor, anti-colonial revolts, and shortsighted colonial tenacity, the diplomacy of the democratic West is offered some unprecedented opportunities.

It is in contacts with representatives of developing nations that the West can and should uphold the tested rules of diplomacy, good will, patience, integrity, trust and mutual respect. Judging from their performance at the United Nations and other international conferences, the new nations display these qualities of civility, certainly to a measurably greater extent than do the representatives of the nation of Pushkin, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Above anything else, Western diplomacy stands for a philosophy of freedom which the developing nations may not comprehend now, nor may their background allow them to adopt it. Over a long period of time, however, when the burdens of a colonial heritage will have been alleviated by good deeds, they will hopefully reciprocate with good faith and appreciate its value. The accumulated hatred from the past undoubtedly lies at the bottom of the existing mistrust, nay hostility, of some emerging nations toward the West. However, this does not fully explain the melancholic irony of the incongruity whereby nations striving for independence lend their support to those powers which deny

to others the very foundations of freedom. Such a policy weakens the resistance of the West to Communist pressures, a resistance which, in the final analysis, serves as a powerful shield to their own independent national development. Here a tactful, thoughtful, inconspicuous but resourceful diplomacy of the West is called upon to display itself.

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Meanwhile, what might be called economic diplomacy can smooth the path to political understanding. Now that a past economic exploitation has given way to a policy of economic aid, an entirely new diplomatic weapon has been developed which, if properly applied, can tip the scales in favor of the democratic West. Its success, however, depends on meeting several prerequisites. First, the giver or creditor must abandon the pretentious posture of a charismatic benefactor, sincerely viewing, instead, such economic assistance as a policy pursued in his own national interest. Second, this must be massive help, and third, it should therefore be a cooperative, thoroughly conceived undertaking of the whole democratic, highly prosperous West. Fourth, it should not be accompanied by demands or expectations of political alliance, nor by discrimination against those who have adopted, within the general framework of political independence, a system of directed economy.

The recipient country, on the other hand, must recognize the mutuality of interests in this policy of economic assistance and accept it as a vital contribution to its growth and not as a prize for its shrewd and unscrupulous maneuvering on the scene of the East-West struggle. Western diplomacy has suffered serious losses in posture and strategy through its anxiety to gain or keep the friendship of a recipient country against a Communist counter-proposal. If such a nation does not proceed in its dealings with the democratic West on the assumption of acting in its own national interest, but rather threatens to turn toward Communism, let it go, as George Kennan advised some time ago.

Similar new opportunities offer themselves to Western diplomacy in the area of information services, or—if you wish to use that ugly word—in propaganda. It is erroneously believed that it was Nazi Germany which first understood the efficacy of the mass media in diplomacy. The Soviet government and the Third International had used this weapon since their inception. The American government entered the field only since World War II and it is incomprehensible to see that the richest country in the world is today, for lack of funds, limping behind the Soviet Union in the use of this diplomatic tool.

Cultural exchange takes an equally important place in diplomacy. The political value of such a

program with the Soviet Union is still exposed to a test of time, though its cultural benefits *per se* appear obvious. However, cultural exchange with the non-Communist world is bound to harvest not only intellectual but also political fruit.

There is evidence from the past which supports this statement. The British and the French have had a long tradition of offering educational opportunities to the intelligentsia from their dependent territories. True, some of these students became radicals and even revolutionaries, leading the movement of liberation against their foreign rulers. However, as the national goal was achieved and a more balanced philosophical view allowed the memory of the past intellectual and cultural association to set in a proper perspective, most of the British-educated leaders turned into sincere friends of Great Britain, just as the French-educated leaders have not shed, in spite of painful experience, the unique heritage of the French culture.

Untainted by a colonial past, indeed, long recognized as a torchbearer of libertarian tradition, this country could surely make use of cultural and educational diplomacy with unparalleled effectiveness. We have barely scratched the surface of the formidable potential of such a program. Though the present Administration has committed itself to a major upgrading of the exchange program, speed and thorough planning are essential.

However, whether we use old or new tools of diplomacy, whether we use them in the service of combatting Soviet policy or gaining and maintaining friends, none will be effective if they are not wielded by a sturdy arm. Even if one thousand Talleyrands could conduct the diplomacy of the democracies of the West, and if they were, in addition, gifted with the persuasive words of an Odysseus, their efforts would be worthless unless they maneuvered from positions of power, resulting from a firm, courageous, purposeful and inventive foreign policy.

other voices

A NOTE ON THE PRESENT CRISIS

J. L. Hromádka

Ever since the end of the last World War we have been confronted with more and more newly arising problems indicating the depth of the contemporary crisis of humanity. Almost every year, the international situation was such that we expected either an approaching catastrophe or a new beginning of post-war reconstruction. And the crisis has been growing deeper and deeper and the beginning of the reintegration of mankind more difficult. The same situation is repeating itself in the present time. In many sections of the world a kind of war hysteria or a feeling of frustration makes a constructive step forward almost impossible. In a way only today, sixteen years after the war, has humanity come to realize what was hidden before the eyes of the majority of citizens: the catastrophe of the era 1914-1945 was a manifestation of a crisis of human history that we have only gradually been in a position to penetrate into its very nature and to understand

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fully the meaning of its consequences and repercussions.

In all probability the slow advance of what we call normalcy has been due to the fact that we have been unwilling to take seriously the depth of the human upheaval and the incapacity of the old society to face all the main problems with courage and wisdom. Only today many leading statesmen in Western and other countries are beginning to realize that all former ways and means of the international order have become inadequate and have been outdated by the changes and revolutionary transformations of the postwar era. All too long were the leading statesmen of the Western world under the illusion that the advance of the East European and Asian socialist reconstruction was of only temporary character and that sooner or later the Western society with its criteria, norms, political and cultural blueprint would in the end prove to be superior and the only real dynamic power of the new international order. Hence their unwillingness to look beyond purely political, diplomatic and military aspects of the contemporary tensions to think hard, to make new and courageous decisions, and to visualize the new world transcending all the habits, ways of life and thought, political and social forms of the liberal, democratic Western society.

We can hardly blame an average citizen of Western Europe or America for his lack of understand-