

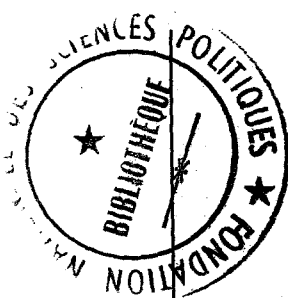


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# Modern Diplomacy

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R.P. Barston

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### Chapter 5

## Developing diplomatic practice

This chapter is concerned with analysing some of the main changes that have taken place in diplomatic practice. The areas covered include diplomatic style, personal diplomacy, blocs and groupings, and quiet diplomacy. The chapter will also consider the phenomenon of transitional diplomacy, the development of operating procedures in multilateral conference diplomacy, and changing forms of implementing international agreements. Underpinning much of the discussion in these individual areas are three themes - fragmentation and fluidity of contemporary state groupings; the growth of regionalism; and the intrusion or involvement of diplomacy in areas that previously would have been regarded as 'domestic' policy.

Corporate diplomacy  
Diplomatic style  
 11,30 diplomacy

The concept of diplomatic style is a useful means of thinking about the characteristic ways in which states and other actors approach and handle their external policy. This is not of course to say that every decision will necessarily reflect features of the diplomatic style. Within diplomatic style are included negotiating behaviour, preference for open or secret diplomacy, the kinds of envoys used, diplomatic language, preferred institutions and types of treaty instruments such as memoranda or treaties of friendship. For international institutions, diplomatic operating style reflects factors such as the impact of the ideas and style of the chief executive, the organisation's characteristic approach to problem solving, the conduct of negotiations and the types of agreements normally associated with the institution. Examples of 'trade mark' diplomatic styles are those of the UK (technical drafting/international institution roles),<sup>1</sup> France (diplomacy of 'distinctiveness', legality),<sup>2</sup> Norway (remote location mediation),<sup>3</sup> and Japan (international secretariat roles, technical diplomacy).<sup>4</sup>

To what extent have styles changed? The expansion of the state community has brought with it a greater richness and variety in diplomatic

particularly at head-of-state level. This trend has been reinforced by instability of governments, especially in Africa and the former Soviet Union. One effect of this, at the level of diplomatic officials, has been an increase in the number of military personnel holding diplomatic appointments.<sup>5</sup> Embassies themselves, as a result, can become places of exile (or monitoring exiles) and the classical functions impaired or not carried out at all. This, in fact, may reinforce a further noticeable development in diplomatic style, which is a tendency for developing countries to concentrate their foreign policy from the centre through personalised diplomacy rather than through their own foreign ministry and embassy channels, where these exist. This has important implications both for the process by which images and views about another party are formed, and the execution of policy. Embassies may not in fact be providing information or feedback that the usual explanation or models of diplomatic and foreign policy organisations suggest. Rather, the interface between actors may be short-circuited, the decision process truncated and decision making personalised around the office of head of state and key advisers or agencies, multinational corporate actors or international institutions in a national capital. As noted in Chapter 2, the foreign ministry, in some states, may rank third or fourth in the list of top five ministries behind the prime minister's department, treasury and the economic planning unit.

The general characteristics of the diplomatic style of some developing and smaller states, discussed above, contrast with more established regimes. The latter tend to have a plurality of bureaucratic interests, greater degrees of functional decentralisation and conventional feedback mechanisms. A further difference is that the main elements in the operating style of established states have become stabilised, and, to some extent, built in as standard operating procedures. Thus a number of features of the overall operating styles of the USA, apart from variability in personal style at the executive level, have greatly changed.

In US diplomatic style, the presidential special envoy has been used in a number of ways, as illustrated by General Marshall's mission to China or the roving envoy role of W. Averell Harriman, and is a distinctive feature of American style.<sup>6</sup> The special envoy becomes the additional 'eyes and ears' of the President, acting as a fact-finder or troubleshooter. For example, General Vernon Walters carried out extensive diplomatic missions for President Reagan, such as to Colombo during the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist crisis for talks with President Jayewardene.<sup>7</sup> Although the special envoy may provide the President with additional or competing assessments, as well as strengthen presidential control, the continued practice has been seen by some professional diplomatic service officers as an erosion of their areas of responsibility and influence. Other features of US style include the high use of memoranda of understanding and other informal instruments, working through ad hoc coalitions and a preference for broad, package-type solutions in negotiations.<sup>8</sup> Yet diplomatic styles do change, often with regime, through administrative changes, or personality

US operating style has tended to oscillate considerably towards the utility of multilateral institutional diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> Dissatisfaction with certain multilateral fora has resulted in US demands that international organisations get their house in order and increase their political and economic efficiency. There has also been preference for bilateral or coalition diplomacy, coupled with a general quest for workable, smaller-scale regional arrangements with like-minded parties such as in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); APEC, and the Asian 'clean technologies' agreement rather than Kyoto.

The neo-cons for example in the Bush administration had a major influence on US foreign policy style, in producing a strident, embattled ideology ('freedom', 'my watch'), and fractured, leaked debates on policy – what Blix called the problem of 'many voices'. The neo-con style, too, offered a pretence of diplomacy but more often a distaste for the diplomatic craft (Rumsfeld's infamous remark 'we are all speaking [on Iraq] from roughly the same script'), substantially divorced from the professional State Department diplomat. The style had a strong domestic interventionary element, with on-going critiques of foreign regimes (governance, transparency, electoral process), intervention in foreign domestic affairs, trans-Atlantic practice of manufactured 'orange' revolutions.<sup>10</sup>

### **Regime, representation and diplomatic style**

Of the other developments that have affected diplomatic styles, frequent changes of regime through a *coup d'état* or re-establishment of civilian or mixed regimes together with weak bureaucracies have been major factors that have prevented the emergence, with one or two exceptions, of any clear African styles. For example, post-apartheid South Africa, as part of the major changes to its style and international role, multilateralised its foreign policy as part of its changing style. Post-apartheid South Africa joined 45 multilateral organisations and became party to 68 multilateral treaties.<sup>11</sup>

The re-emergence of Islamic or religious-based regimes is also of note. An immediate effect, in the case of Libya, was on the staffing and styling of Libyan embassies, which subsequently became retitled 'People's Bureaux'. In the case of Iran, the public presentational aspects of Iranian policy changed dramatically after the fall of the Shah, especially in terms of language, the use of revolutionary communiqués and frequent insistence on the use of reservations in international conferences dealing with the Palestine problem. A further change associated with the Iranian regime is the dualist nature of Iranian foreign policy, comprising government-to-'people' diplomacy as well as traditional government-to-government diplomacy. 'People's diplomacy' has involved establishing direct links with Islamic groups and organisations in other Islamic and non-Islamic states, as vehicles for promoting Iranian interests, such as with Shia groups in Iraq and the provision of financial, military and other backing for Hezbollah

and Islamic Jihad in Lebanon. The Islamic component has also involved Iranian regime in international disputes, such as the *fatwa* on the writer Salman Rushdie.<sup>12</sup> Such regimes have a different sense of the nature of international society than liberal Western concepts.

Other categories of regimes that have had an impact on diplomatic style are authoritarian regimes, for example China or isolated maverick states such as North Korea, Burma and Belarus. The essentially closed nature of North Korea has limited and restricted normalisation. North Korean style is characterised particularly by the use of covert diplomacy, limited media communications and erratic shifts in policy.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of other factors influencing diplomatic style, the emergence of China as an economic and military power has had a number of important effects on diplomatic practice.<sup>14</sup> Chinese diplomatic style relies heavily on in-bound visits, rather than the leadership undertaking extensive international travel to conduct foreign policy, for linguistic, cultural and enhanced control reasons. Other unusual features of Chinese style include the use of domestic policy instruments, such as the timing and passage of internal legislation, as in the Taiwan dispute, or orchestrated urban violence, e.g. anti-Japanese rioting in the so-called 'text-book' dispute with Japan. These methods enable China in its regional diplomatic disputes to ratchet up pressure on opponents. Combined with periodic weapons testing, they add an element of uncertainty or frisson, intended otherwise, to China's foreign policy profile. In terms of economic diplomacy, Chinese embassies function at a low-key consulate level, with reliance instead being put on ad hoc high Party-level and Chinese business, city and port delegations for overseas visits to conduct city/port diplomacy, centring on rapid logistic expansion, accelerated information skill transfer arrangements, intelligence and market access. These methods are also used extensively by South Korea.

### **Diplomatic style: international institutions**

The concept of diplomatic style can also be applied to international institutions and other actors. As far as international institutions are concerned one of the major influences on operating style is that of the chief executive officer, who frequently may hold office for some considerable time.<sup>15</sup> The executive head will have wide-ranging influence on strategy, priorities and overall representation. The effect of change of chief executive can be seen, for example, in the case of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), following the resignation of Attali. His less flamboyant successor, Jacques de Larosière, former Managing Director of the IMF, abolished the merchant banking (privatisation) and development banking departments and created northern and southern geographical departments,<sup>16</sup> to reduce duplication and provide some emphasis on public sector banking.

A second element of institutional diplomatic style is the characteristic procedures for negotiation and problem solving. These might include the general use of inner, limited membership specialist working groups and intersessional correspondence groups (e.g. IMO); preparatory meetings and extensive 'definitional' legal reviews (e.g. Mediterranean Action Plan);<sup>17</sup> or financial 'rescue package' diplomacy conducted from the wings (e.g. IMF).

A third element of institutional style involves the characteristic framing of problems: the process by which the assessment or a course of action by decision-makers is shaped by the dominant set of ideas or concepts relating to a class of issues or problems. Within international organisations the 'approach' concepts held within those bodies that reflect the style tend to be fixed for some time and only periodically reviewed or changed e.g. 'sustainable development', 'transparency', 'trade liberalisation' and 'governance'. The types of treaty or informal instruments used are indicative of the characteristic way an institution handles problems. An international institution may have, for example, an operating preference for informal instruments such as UNEP action plans, codes and guidelines, which may be copied by other international fora to become part of a wider international idiom or practice.

## Diplomatic methods

### Personal diplomacy – the growing impact

By using personal or direct diplomacy through visits, correspondence and telephone conversations, heads of government and foreign ministers, envoys and other senior leaders establish contacts, promote their country's image or try and improve bilateral, official and other relations. Personal diplomacy through visits is also used frequently to put the seal of approval on a major project or agreement. Visits of this kind, whether they be ceremonial, psychological or have a substantive purpose, reflect the growing involvement in diplomacy of the head of state or government and a variety of key representatives of banks, corporations, regional institutions and other organisations.

In general, the growth of personal diplomacy has been brought about by changes in modern communications and the spread of regional collaboration outside Europe, in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and South-East Asia. Presidents or heads of government may communicate almost instantly by satellite with their counterparts overseas, telephone the leader of an opposition group or generally consult others directly seeking support. Communications extend the visual reach of a leader. In one well-known incident, President Johnson was monitoring Security Council proceedings on the Middle East and called Ambassador Arthur Goldberg to

telephone, informing him that his: 'statement to the Security Council is excellent but he looked down at his paper too much!'<sup>18</sup>

...conferencing now extends communication when other means of negotiation may be impossible. For example, the UK resorted to tele-conference links with the Palestinian leadership for a meeting 'Quartet' in London in order to get round the Israeli travel ban on Palestinian delegates.<sup>19</sup> In crises, direct communications may be a and perhaps the surest way of transmitting emergency information.

For example, US Secretary of State Colin Powell directly spoke by telephone to the French Foreign Minister to warn of a suspected terrorist attack to a scheduled Air France flight to the USA.<sup>20</sup> Visits, too, have become synonymous with the presentational aspects of foreign policy – declarations, profile, as well as problem-solving. In many instances visits, especially those to major powers, are undertaken with an eye on the domestic or electoral value in the home country.

Another important reason for the continued use of personal diplomacy is that it may facilitate political transition. For example, in the former Soviet Union, the setting of the state funerals of Soviet leaders was used as an opportunity for brief but important contacts between the new leadership and foreign politicians. The funeral of Yasir Arafat, for example, was used for a wide range of informal diplomatic contacts.<sup>21</sup>

Personal diplomacy plays an important part in alliance and other collaborative relations.<sup>22</sup> Regular, informal meetings have long been a feature of Anglo-American relations. French and British practice has differed in terms of methods used to develop relations with their former colonies. In contrast to Britain, for whom the Commonwealth has progressively declined, British African diplomacy (as well as elsewhere) has relied heavily on presidential and foreign ministerial visits to both francophone and non-francophone states. A frequent purpose of such visits is to reassure allies of continued support. For example, the 1984 African–French summit in Addis Ababa, attended by President Mitterrand and the French Foreign Minister, was preoccupied with the question of Chad and French policy vis-à-vis Libya.

The occasion also gave Mitterrand an opportunity to engage in some personal 'old'-style personal diplomacy, when he held private talks with President Mobutu aboard the latter's presidential yacht on the Congo.<sup>23</sup> The projection of national images and export promotion are the other major purposes of personal diplomacy. For example, at the end of 1984 the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, travelled 250,000 miles in 130 hours, principally for the formal signing of the Hong Kong agreement in Beijing with the People's Republic of China. The journey also took in meetings in Bahrain, Moscow, Delhi and Hong Kong, returning via Guam, Honolulu and Washington.<sup>24</sup> An economic mission was undertaken the following year to South-East Asia. It is not surprising that the political geography of heads of government sometimes becomes confused in these circumstances.

It is interesting to contrast the *pace of modern diplomacy* with that shortly after the Second World War. For example, P.C. Spender (Australia) and British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, travelled to the USA aboard the liner *Queen Mary* in September 1950. Bevin was travelling to the UN in New York, while Spender's mission was to gather support for a Pacific security pact. Spender sought to win the approval of the British Foreign Secretary, but at the end of a personal meeting recounts: 'I felt that when I left Bevin's stateroom that despite the warm personal hearing, I had again failed to penetrate the United Kingdom indifference, if not opposition to the idea'.<sup>25</sup> Within less than a decade shortly after that the first modern exponent of air travel in diplomacy, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, became one of the most travelled post-war Secretaries of State, covering some 560,000 miles and attending 50 conferences in little more than six years.<sup>26</sup>

### Summits and conferences

In post-war 1945 diplomacy, summit conferences have been used not only in an East-West context but also for a variety of other purposes by an increasing number of states and institutions. The demise of the East-West form and the general diversification in the form and use of summits from the 1960s have meant that the concept has lost much of its traditional meaning. In traditional diplomatic practice 'summit' conveyed a sense of high occasion and special purpose, as an encounter and a venue for possible decisions of major importance,<sup>27</sup> but it has now become a term in diplomatic vocabulary for relatively routine meetings at head-of-state or government level. The change is reflected in Japanese diplomatic practice. For example, at the 2004 Sea Island G-8 summit, a US-Japanese bilateral meeting at the margins was recorded by Japan as a bilateral summit meeting, although it was in fact a 40-minute working lunch.<sup>28</sup>

The term 'summit' has now been used for the regular annual heads-of-state or government meetings of the G-7/8, EU, ASEAN and APEC. It has also been adopted by some ad hoc UN global conferences, e.g. Copenhagen World Social Summit (1995), Johannesburg Environment Summit (2000). An example of a special occasion summit can be seen in the meeting of Western hemisphere leaders at Miami in 1994, for the Summit of the Americas, to agree plans for a future free trade area. The Summit had last met in 1967 at Punta de Este. The event was also used for diplomacy on a side issue, around the announcement by the USA, Canada and Mexico of their decision to admit Chile to NAFTA but not subsequently implemented. Since then the diplomatic practice of the Summit, which has continued to meet periodically, has altered from international trade agenda issues to focus on domestic economic items linked to democratic governance.<sup>29</sup> To improve co-ordination and implementation the Summit of the Americas has

set up the Summit of the Implementation Review Group (SIRG), confirming the now very wide usage of the term 'summit'.

Some further general comments may be made on the above developments. While it has been argued that the use of summits has widened in terms of action and content, an exception to this development is the decline and reduction in significance of US-Russian Federation summits. The lessening of the significance of US-Russian summits contrasts with the importance of the primary powers in previously managing East-West and global security. In the Cold War period, East-West relations were handled through four-power conferences (USA, UK, France and the Soviet Union), limited membership conferences on specific issues such as India-China in 1954, and bilateral personal visits or summits. US-Soviet bilateralism was a dominant feature of the classical period of détente from 1971 to 1976,<sup>30</sup> and 'revived' détente from 1985 to 1990. Some indication of the pluralism in diplomatic methods that were to feature after 1990 in the handling of East-West relations and broader international security were foreshadowed in the pan-European Helsinki Conference and 1990 Paris Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Summit.<sup>31</sup> Subsequently the increasing involvement of European institutions in domestic transition in the former Soviet Union and the blurring of security roles, institutional responsibility and concepts ('security pluralism') in Europe, was accentuated by a resurgence of conflicts on the European and Central Asian rimland of the Russian Federation.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the decline or reduced significance of primary-power summits as vehicles for international security after 1992,<sup>33</sup> the widening usage of summits for relatively routine matters raises questions about purpose and effectiveness. It can be argued that frequent or regularised meetings styled as 'summits' undermine the concept of summit as a vehicle for resolving (or not) at the highest level critical issues, after they have been explored and examined at other levels (e.g. foreign minister) to the greatest extent possible. The non-routine value of a high-level summit is best seen in the cases of emergency or unscheduled summits. The dramatic recall or reconvening of heads of government in the context of a crisis underlines the potential importance of summits as emergency or non-routine methods of last resort. An example of an emergency summit meeting was that reconvened by Egypt and Israel in 1995 in Cairo to try and resume the Israeli-Egyptian 'peace process' following attacks in the Gaza Strip.<sup>34</sup> Finally, we should note that in terms of diplomatic protocol, decisions to convene or not a scheduled summit conference are both sensitive matters and indicative of the state of relations between states.<sup>35</sup>

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