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Cyber-Diplomacy

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*Managing Foreign Policy in
the Twenty-first Century*

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EDITED BY

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2002

8° 238817

© McGill-Queen's University Press 2002
ISBN 0-7735-2398-7 (cloth)
ISBN 0-7735-2451-7 (paper)

Legal deposit fourth quarter 2002
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper that is 100% ancient forest free (100% post-consumer recycled), processed chlorine free.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Publication of this book has also been made possible by a grant from the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development.

McGill-Queen's University Press acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIIDP) for our publishing activities.

**National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Data**

Main entry under title:

Cyber-diplomacy: managing foreign policy in the twenty-first century

Includes index.

ISBN 0-7735-2398-7 (bound). — ISBN 0-7735-2451-7 (pbk.)

1. Canada — Foreign relations — 1945— I. Porter, Evan H. (Evan Harold), 1964—

FC602.C92 2002 327.71 C2002-900586-8

F1034.2.C69 2002

This book was typeset by Dynagram Inc.
in 10.5/13 Sabon.

To Harold Herbert Potter

Introduction

EVAN H. POTTER

Although Marshall McLuhan's global village has not entirely taken the place of the nation-state, today's villages are so thoroughly interconnected that the Westphalian world that gave rise to modern diplomacy is less and less recognizable.¹ Global mass communications and advances in new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are posing a fundamental challenge to the traditional conduct of international relations by dispersing authority to multiple terrains, increasing the activism of a global civil society, and driving the expansion of global finance and trade. If, as Canadian scholar Harold Innis observed a half century ago, "sudden extensions of communication are reflected in cultural disturbances," then we are facing a "cultural disturbance of global proportions," one that may rival the move from the oral tradition to printing.²

We stand on the threshold of an information revolution in which electronic forms of communication, largely immune to regulation, will be the primary means of communication. As reported in 1998 by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "hierarchy is giving way to networking", "openness is crowding out secrecy," and "ideas and capital move swiftly and unimpeded across a global network of governments, corporations, and non-governmental organizations."³ The advances in information technology will act as catalysts for the forces of both fragmentation and integration in the current international system.

The Internet appears tailor-made for global social movements. To test this assumption, Peter J. Smith and Elizabeth Smythe (chapter 2) examine the increased capacity of non-governmental organizations and transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) to use new information and communication technologies to resist multilateral trade and investment arrangements and to thereby challenge the often very secret process of diplomatic negotiations. They demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of the new communication technologies for social movements in two "campaigns of resistance," one against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and the other against the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle.

The central question raised by the authors is whether the growing presence of transnational social movements, facilitated by ICTs, indicates that these networks are becoming more effective. Like other researchers, Smith and Smythe conclude that if effectiveness implies the ability to have a much greater direct influence on policy direction, then the answer continues to be a qualified "not yet." The authors would agree with Leslie A. Pal "that information, communication, and mobilization can all increase without necessarily increasing the impact," especially if these social movements run up against tyrannical regimes that care nothing of public opinion.¹³ But this is not to say that the authors see no impact. Indeed, they point to the social movements' successful campaigns against the legitimacy of the whole trade negotiation process, citing public opinion data that show the public's concern with the impact that trade agreements have on the environment, social programs, and jobs. As well, some of the demands for transparency are being heard by governments. The authors note that while states have responded in a negative way to direct action by social movements, as demonstrated by the use of barricades and tear gas, countries such as Canada have also instituted elaborate consultation processes, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade establishing a consultation division and Canadian bureaucrats and parliamentarians holding hearings prior to the negotiation of any trade deal. While Smith and Smythe acknowledge that the impact of social movements is not easy to measure, they assert that the traditional focus on states as the primary actors of politics and international relations is no longer appropriate. That the meaning of politics, and by extension of diplomacy, is itself being recon-

sidered is no small achievement of the networked politics of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and TSMOs.

In chapter 3 Eyrann Gilboa argues that the so-called CNN effect, widely viewed as a harbinger of the decline of diplomacy, has been exaggerated. Although global television has certainly brought new actors into the foreign policy process, has focused the world's attention on particular crises, and has accelerated the pace of diplomatic communication, there is insufficient evidence to assert that it has stripped foreign policy decision makers of control. One of the problems, according to the author, is that the term CNN effect has never been adequately defined, being based on a limited number of case studies. The roots of the CNN effect, Gilboa writes, harken back to the Vietnam era and the commonly held view that that war was lost in the living rooms of America; the current variant originated in American government circles in the early 1990s in connection with demands to intervene militarily on humanitarian grounds in countries experiencing gross human rights violations (e.g., Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda).

Gilboa asserts that a credible answer to how CNN has affected contemporary diplomacy requires not only a careful look at the nature of global television and the major international events of the last decade, but also a close examination of how officials have coped with them. The chapter shows that even in the television age governments have been able to limit media coverage and control the degree to which sensitive information reaches the media and public. Despite the heightened transparency brought about by the emergence of global media, governments have still been able to engage in secret or semi-secret negotiations (what Gilboa refers to as "closed-door diplomacy") and media diplomacy in their attempts to resolve some of the most serious international crises of the last half century. For Gilboa, the major underlying condition that must exist for the media to be a dominant actor in the foreign policy process is governments' failure to exercise leadership and to articulate coherent approaches to foreign policy problems.

In chapter 4 Steven Livingston describes how we are fast moving into a "post-CNN effect" era of global transparency. The creation of smaller, lighter transmission equipment (e.g., satellite telephones

and satellite uplink equipment), the miniaturization of surveillance mechanisms (e.g., micro-air vehicles), the reduction of satellite transmission costs, and the introduction of commercial high-resolution remote-sensing satellites will together create unprecedented levels of global transparency in public (and private) affairs. Livingston avers that the host of new technologies, previously only available to governments, are leading to a new phase of global transparency. The chapter considers whether the diplomat's position of authority within his or her own government and on the world stage, resulting from privileged access to information, is slipping away because these new technologies will be in civilian hands. *— Kevin R. ...*

Livingston reports that such are the advances in technology on the civilian side that in 1990 the Sandia National Laboratories, using relatively imprecise ten-metre resolution SPOT satellite images, were able to detect the elements of the U.S. Army during the preparatory stage of the ground war in the Persian Gulf. Nine years later, an American satellite imaging company would launch the world's first one-metre resolution commercial satellite. Micro air vehicles, costing a few hundred dollars each, no more than six inches in length, height, or width, and weighing only a few ounces, will be able to provide reconnaissance and surveillance, battle-damage assessment, sensor placement, communications relay, and sensing of chemical, nuclear or biological hazards. Livingston believes that the lower cost of increasingly sophisticated equipment will mean that, unlike the situation today, where cost is a major factor in dictating international coverage, more images will be available from more remote locations. These images will be as likely to be found on an NGO website as on network news channels. A plethora of non-state actors armed with these new tools may also help governments in their efforts to control rogue states or prevent humanitarian crises. As Livingston writes, "The avalanche of information may ironically produce an effect similar to no information at all." Echoing the conclusions of Wolfe, he observes that the glut of information arising from this new level of transparency will in fact increase rather than lessen the need for diplomats, since there will be a strong need for credible and informed analysis from a national perspective.¹⁴

Andrew F. Cooper offers in chapter 5 two discrete case studies of the emergent use of new communication technologies to advance diplomatic objectives. Greenpeace's campaign against French nuclear

testing in the South Pacific shows how a resource-rich NGO skilfully used new and old communication technologies to generate world-wide publicity in order to force political mobilization around a single issue. In the absence of an effective counter-communications campaign by the French government, Greenpeace was able to frame the issue largely on its own terms. That is not to say, however, that Greenpeace was successful in preventing the French nuclear testing, just in raising international public opinion against France on this issue. Indeed, the case pits the use of information as a "weapon" by an NGO against a state's traditional reservoir of coercive power in the form of military intervention, which was what France used to board the Greenpeace vessels. The other case, in which the resident Spanish ambassador to Canada attempted to use the Internet as the centrepiece in a campaign of public diplomacy during the "fish war" between Spain and Canada in 1994-95, highlights the limitations of the new technology. Although the Spanish embassy's use of the Internet was on balance not very effective in influencing public opinion (especially in Canada) and Spain was widely viewed as having lost the public relations war with Canada, this case is nonetheless an example of one of the earliest uses of the Internet in a public diplomacy campaign during a crisis.

The central lesson that Cooper draws from the two case studies is that societal actors as well as states have the capacity to exploit new technology. This is especially the case with NGOs, which do not have the same concerns about security and confidentiality that states have. NGOs can use the "anarchy" of the Net to their advantage, while states must adapt uneasily and slowly to the ongoing changes. The other lesson is that the new technology is still very much a novelty and cannot compensate for the lack of an integrated communications strategy or a compelling message.

In chapter 6 Gordon Smith and Allen Sutherland contend that rather than drifting into irrelevance, the nation-state is responding to the new communications environment by reinventing itself. The "government of the information age," they predict, will have adapted to the growing number of transnational issues "through a dense web of relations among regulatory agencies, courts, line departments, and international bureaus throughout the world." The core building blocks of such a transgovernmental order remain the nation-state and with it the foreign ministries that will be tasked to

coordinate these relationships. Smith and Sutherland state that middle powers such as Canada will be well suited to the coming era of networked diplomacy.

The authors give a number of examples of how Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has worked to integrate information technologies into its strategies and operating procedures. With the end of the Cold War and the proliferation of new states, DFAIT found that micro-missions, made possible through ICTs, are an excellent way of extending Canada's presence and influence to new parts of the world. Whereas it once took weeks or even months to establish a new embassy, Canada can now establish "just in time and place" operational effectiveness within a few hours. DFAIT uses virtual teams to respond to diplomatic crises, and it is clear that major initiatives (e.g., the campaign to ban landmines, known as the Ottawa Process) require significant coordination with civil society, facilitated through ICTs. The authors remind us that ICTs are also important vehicles for government program delivery. Foreign ministries serve as Canada's public face and as access points for a growing number of citizens abroad, which means that consular services will have to be integrated with broader government electronic service delivery, such as website travel advisories. Finally, the authors emphasize that knowledge management, including innovative use of ICTs, must be cultivated at the organizational level to a far greater extent than is currently the case in many diplomatic organizations.

Following Smith and Sutherland's more general discussion of DFAIT, Evan H. Potter argues in chapter 7 that with the growing array of non-traditional security issues (drug trafficking, infectious diseases, terrorism) and the increasing availability of, access to, and speed of delivery of information (all of which are giving social movements new competencies and confidence), governments' ability to promote their views to foreign publics has become a central feature of diplomacy. Advances in ICTs offer an opportunity to re-define public diplomacy, to move it from the sidelines to the core of diplomacy. This chapter shows that Canada, as a middle power with limited military might but possessing an international reputation as a coalition builder, as a country with a highly educated population, and as a leader in the development of communication technology, is in an ideal position to redefine its public diplomacy.

Canada should be able to use the leverage of its know-how in the new technology to promote its intellectual leadership on a multiplicity of fronts and in so doing enhance its "soft power." However, as Potter explains, the paradox of Canadian diplomacy has been that despite these favourable conditions, Canadian interests are at risk of being drowned out "amid a cacophony of competing voices" in the international arena.

Potter writes that in the face of a decade's worth of declining Foreign Affairs' budgets, the new and old communication technologies' potential to advance Canada's interests to foreign audiences has not been fully exploited. For example, Ottawa, in contrast to its main competitors, has not identified international broadcasting as a key element in its public diplomacy approach. Potter is concerned that Canada is not taking full advantage of the opportunities to position itself in a networked world. Without a coordinated and adequately funded international information strategy, Canada risks having a declining national presence.

MAIN THEMES AND DEBATES

Six main themes run through this study. The first concerns the enabling power of information technologies, allowing individuals to interact and organize at unprecedented levels. Several authors reflect on how the very nature of the technology – its looseness and low cost – has allowed small organizations and individuals to achieve levels of influence that would have been unimaginable in the past. Cooper reminds us that almost three decades ago Canadian scholar James Eayrs predicted that technological advances in electronic communication and easy availability of information would allow "reasonably literate, fairly persistent, moderately affluent," and one assumes fairly average individuals to make their marks on history by setting up their own foreign ministries in their basements.¹⁵ And as Pal has noted in his portrait of the on-line human rights community of the late 1990s, one of the most popular human rights websites was the fruit of just one person's labours.¹⁶ Private citizens, then, can now use technology against the superior resources of government or business, to level the playing field. Ironically, what we see in one of Cooper's case studies is that the empowered individual in question is actually a government official – the Spanish ambassador to Canada – who takes it upon himself,

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diplomacy of the future. Coalition building with civil society actors has become an increasingly significant part of the diplomatic function. In this regard, new technology has made NGOs increasingly effective sources of information, highly useful in gauging international and domestic support for national policies.

stronger in the future / held

CONCLUSION

The rapid evolution of ICTs makes it difficult to predict the exact shape of the cultural revolution being brought about by the new information age. It is still unclear how mass communications and the new information technologies are affecting the balance of power between the state and other actors in the international system. The most extreme scenarios foresee unscrupulous individuals or groups holding governments and their societies hostage through information terrorism. At the other extreme is the view that ICTs will give governments unchecked powers of surveillance and control. This volume supports the view that some state capacities will be enhanced by ICTs, but that on balance the impact of the new information age will see a reduction in state authority as other non-state actors become more influential. Certainly, advances in ICTs are ensuring that the balance will shift, but the power of the state will not wither away quickly. A full transfer of authority away from the state is still generations away. The reason is largely self-evident: the nation-state quite simply retains an organizational capacity that continues to eclipse those of most non-governmental communities. *but in any case* Whatever the changes, they do not signal the end of diplomacy; *the professional diplomat will not fade into "delinquency."* ²⁴ For all the prognostications of the techno-evangelists and the post-modernists, governments' abilities to pursue policy objectives have not yet been deeply compromised by a hypermedia environment. A far more positive, yet realistic, tone concerning the role of the state pervades the writing of the contributors to this volume. The authors do not hear the death-knell of traditional diplomacy; what they see as passé is the pursuit of a diplomacy that self-consciously diminishes and underfunds its public face. Indeed, the chapters point out that diplomacy is remarkably resilient. What becomes clear is not that diplomacy is in decline, but that it has the ability to adapt – albeit slowly in the case of some foreign ministries – to the promises and challenges of the networked age.

The following are some concluding observations based on the findings in this volume:

- 1 Information technology and the rise of the mass media, while leveling the playing field, do not portend an inexorable decline in the utility of foreign ministries – quite the opposite in fact. The explosion of information increases the need for credible sources of information. Diplomatic missions therefore will continue to play a key role in turning information into knowledge for national decision makers.
- 2 The same technologies that are heralded as ushering a new age of transparency are the ones that can be used by the state to increase its own surveillance, reconnaissance, and communication needs.
- 3 It has been fashionable to point out that the new media led by the Internet and expanding global media organizations have radically changed the power equation between government and the media. What is less frequently pointed out is that governments lose control of the policy-making agenda to the media when they fail to exercise strong leadership and that media technology is rarely as powerful in the hands of journalists as it is in the hands of government officials and politicians.
- 4 The public diplomacy activities of foreign ministries have been characterized as either the propaganda arm of foreign ministries or relics of the Cold War. However, the end of the Cold War has allowed for a statecraft that accords greater importance to mission-oriented diplomacy that cuts across traditional cleavages in the international system. As a result, public diplomacy has become a more important instrument for dealing with post-Cold War challenges. Of all the public diplomacy tools, those affected most by the new technology are international broadcasting – radio, television, and the new media. Whereas in the post-war period these instruments were used to attempt to change ideological “mind space,” today there is a need to use these instruments for “peace broadcasting” in zones of conflict (e.g., former Yugoslavia) and, in light of the 11 September 2001 attack on the United States, for a coordinated and more intensive use of the international broadcasting arms of the American, British, German, and Canadian governments to help clarify and explain the West’s actions to the Islamic world.

↳ + state!

2 New Technologies and Networks of Resistance

ELIZABETH SMYTHE
AND PETER J. SMITH

While transnational political activity by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has long had an impact on world politics, it has only been in recent years that its importance has become undeniable. While figures vary, they all portray a veritable explosion in the numbers and activities of transnational NGOs and transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs). It is estimated that the number of international NGOs in the 1990s increased from 6,000 to 26,000.¹ Rare is the international issue that does not attract a transnational network of NGOs, TSMOs, and informal associations that organize and mobilize to express their point of view. Examples abound: the groups in sympathy with the Zapatista rebellion against the Mexican government; the forces aligned against the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); the International Campaign to Ban Landmines; and the transnational campaigns against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle, Washington, and elsewhere.

While serving different goals, these efforts had a number of commonalities. First, their ability to communicate, network, and interact on a transnational level was considerably enhanced by new communication technologies, particularly the Internet. For example, when the Mexican government responded to the peasant rebellion with repression, an amorphous network of NGOs used the Internet

to mobilize a worldwide protest, with the result that the Mexican government stayed the hand of repression. Second, the ensuing politics surrounding all these issues was contentious, particularly so vis-à-vis the campaigns against the NAFTA, the MAI, and WTO. These three represent transnational campaigns of opposition to the growing neo-liberal agenda of economic integration, continentally in the instance of the NAFTA, globally in the case of the MAI and WTO. The MAI and WTO campaigns are illustrative of the political opportunity given NGOs and social movements by neo-liberal trade and investment negotiations to challenge both domestic and global institutional economic agendas.²

Clearly, just as nation-states can network at a multilateral level, so can NGOs and TSMOs. The result is an institutional dialectic of domination and resistance at the transnational level. With the rise of a global information economy, we are witnessing not only the efforts of states and corporations to shape this economy according to neo-liberal ideology, but also the concurrent attempts of NGOs and TSMOs to resist the impact these trade and investment arrangements are having, or are anticipated to have, at the national and local levels.

This chapter examines the increased capacity of NGOs and TSMOs to resist multilateral trade and investment arrangements and thereby to challenge the privileged and often very secret process of diplomatic negotiations. In the first section, we will discuss how new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are allowing NGOs and social movements to organize and mobilize beyond the nation-state to create globalization from below. Like their corporate counterparts, NGOs and TSMOs are becoming networked organizations at a rate exceeding government bureaucracies, which have been slower to make use of these new technologies. In effect, the networked revolution, propelled by new forms of communications, is accelerating the formation of networked organizations and eroding the privileged place the vertically organized state once had in international relations. In the second section of this chapter, we will examine two campaigns of resistance, the MAI and the WTO, focusing on the role played by new technologies and their advantages and disadvantages for NGOs and TSMOs. Finally, we will examine the impact these campaigns have had at both the national and the international level. After all is said and done, have they made a difference?

